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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that marketing scholars should be paying a lot more attention to the rhetorical form which the economic historian Philip Mirowski - following the novelist David Foster Wallace - calls *murketing*. Combining philosophical, historical, economic and fictional resources, the paper first produces a synthetic account of what *murketing* is. Blurring calculated dishonesty with impassioned sincerity, *murketing* operationalises a double-truth dialectic which treats consumers as both subjects and objects within the process of their own persuasion. In order to indicate how *murketing* works, the paper then considers recent examples from *murketing* practice where allusions are made which are both cynical *and* gnostic, both conceited *and* intimate, and both earnest *and* ironic. The paper closes by indicating how its account of the theory and practice of *murketing* might inform the future study, consumption and regulation of advertising and marketing communications.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

> The secret of success is sincerity.
> If you can fake that, you've got it made.
>
> -- *Not Just* Groucho Marx (O'Toole, 2012)

For Aristotle, rhetoric was the craft - or technique - of producing persuasive arguments (1984a). In as much as we would be wrong to automatically characterise a person as a skilled musician by virtue of their having struck a single piano key, we would be similarly mistaken, on Aristotle's account, to speak of someone who once persuaded somebody of something as a skilled rhetorician. For just as the pianist demonstrates their technical excellence - or ineptitude - through the activity of piano-playing, the rhetorician's competence is assessed by the means of the evidence provided by their performance and its audience effects. "For one swallow", as he puts it in his *Nicomachean Ethics,* "does not make a summer" (1984b: 1735). In all crafts, as far as Aristotle accounts for them, gradual improvement - let alone eventual mastery - is much more a product of involved practice than it is of disinterested learning.

To say that rhetoric is a craft or technique, in the Aristotelian sense, is to say that it is a speech act which cannot only concern epistemologists. This is not to say that rhetoricians do not make knowledge claims: they demonstrably do. It is rather to recognise that the way in which they do so is principally animated by the end of persuasiveness, rather than the requirement for correspondence. In the case of those interested in making adequate knowledge claims, it suffices that their language be clear, correct and indubitable. The ways in which orators make knowledge claims, by contrast, reveals more about the nature of their craft than it does about the object(s) of which they speak (see Heidegger, 2003: 5-44). While persuasion might result from the orator's mastery of a craft, pedagogical demonstration necessarily results from the teacher's possession of knowledge.

If there is a characteristic which sets rhetoric apart from other crafts, it is in its production of practical anthropological effects – political-economic effects included – out of language itself. To recognise this characteristic as a defining feature of language, rather than as one of its lamentable deficiencies, is one of the many points on which Aristotle broke with his teacher Plato. Whereas the master raised many critical questions about whether sophistry (1997a, 1997b) and poetry (1997c: 998-1052), *should* produce practical effects which might follow more from the sophistication of their language than from the essence of their objects, the student set himself to the task of considering *how* rhetoricians have persuaded their audiences into dispositions and actions.

The singularly practical importance of rhetorical skill, Aristotle claims, comes to the fore in public situations where logical guarantees for the rightness of particular courses of action cannot be given while persuasive arguments nevertheless might (see Cassin, 2000; Gasché, 2017). Hence the importance which Hannah Arendt (1954: 43-44) places on diametrically opposing rhetoric's argumentative egalitarianism to the coercion, violence and obedience which she held to have been characteristic of authoritarian speech situations (see also Wurfat, 2015). With Aristotle, Arendt encourages us to appreciate rhetoric as a characteristic of public life which, against Plato, she also believes to be desirable, at best, and preferable, at least.

While Aristotle places special emphasis on the importance of rhetorical skill in the production of legal arguments, his account of the craft of persuasion has also played a crucial role within

economic, commercial, marketing and advertising practice (e.g. Hirschman, 1977; McCloskey, 1985, 2006; McQuarrie and Mick, 1996; O' Shaughnessy and O' Shaughnessy, 2004; Pocock, 1985). David Tonks (2002) claims marketing itself can be understood as a rhetorical practice. This isn't to authorise marketing's continued encroachment upon the philosophical vocation of producing concepts (see Deleuze and Guattari, 2009: 146, see also Lecercle, 1996: 44 and Žižek, 2004: 183-187) but to constrain marketing within the strictures of rhetoric and persuasion. Rhetoric, in this sense, is not a craft which is necessarily anti-philosophical but one which is essentially non-philosophical, a-philosophical, even. In what follows we will consider how a particular form of marketing – *murketing* – persuades its audience(s) by simultaneously appealing to and breaking with sincerity.

Marketing scholarship has long treated the humanities as a credible conceptual and empirical resource (e.g. Belk et al., 1989; Bradshaw and Brown, 2018; Eid, 1999; Fitchett, 2002; Hirschman, 1986; Jack, 2004; Pollay, 1986; Stern, 1988; Stern, 1990; Stokes, 1998). This tradition also enriches our understanding of the rhetoric of *murketing*. The phenomenon has not received much of our attention to date and this paper redresses this imbalance by introducing *murketing* as the product of a brief encounter between the work of an economic historian – Philip Mirowski - and a literary text – David Foster Wallace's *Mr Squishy*. It then elaborates upon Leo Strauss's account of double interpretation and Lionel Trilling's account of duplicitous self-presentation insofar as these bear upon the task of describing *murketing*. This interrelated elaboration is warranted by the fact that Mirowski suggests Strauss while Wallace scholarship foregrounds Trilling. The paper then elaborates upon its conceptualisation of *murketing* through recent examples and closes with implications for the future study, consumption and regulation of advertising and marketing communications.

WHAT IS MURKETING?

Irony and the Free Murketeers

According to the economic historian Philip Mirowski, consumers are miscast as autonomous maximisers of marginal utility *and* as epiphenomenal residues of false consciousness. JK Galbraith's revelation of the dependency effect, within which consumption comes to be analysed as a function of supply *and* demand (1998; see also Galbraith 1967, *c.f.* Mirowski, 2013: 139), helped dethrone the sovereign *homo oeconomicus* of classical liberal economics (see also Brown, 2015; Crouch, 2011; Davies, 2014; Davies and McGoey 2012; Davies and Dunne, 2016; Foucault, 2008, 2007). This revolution failed to install a new sovereign, however, since "no one in their right mind would willingly concede that they were a hapless dupe of remote powerful economic interests" (Mirowski, 2013: 139-140; see also Graeber, 2011; Fine 2013). Subsequent theorists, analysts and negotiators of consumer agency, Mirowski proposes, sought rather to produce a more plausible and palatable alternative to the false needs hypothesis on consumer agency. So what happened when those compelled, for a mixture of intellectual and political reasons, to predicate market phenomena upon liberal subjectivity, "carefully read and absorbed their leftist critics" (p. 140)? Mirowski suggests that:

> far from rejecting them outright, they openly use their ideas to render the process of persuasion both more unconscious and more effective[1]. Neoliberals have pioneered the signal innovation of importing the double-truth character of their project into the everyday lives of the common man. The modern hidden persuaders have gladly

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[1] Mirowski here acknowledges the contribution of Walker (2008) insofar as the neologism's creation is concerned.

nurtured the conviction of the average person that he is more clever than those who seek to manipulate him in order to render him all the more open to that manipulation (*ibid.*).

We'll elaborate upon this "double truth character" of persuasion shortly. For now, it is important to acknowledge that Mirowski deploys the term *murketing* to name the rhetorical craft through which market liberalism and marketing savvy intermingle in demonstrably complicated though not necessarily contradictory ways. While this terminological inauguration emerges out of a prolonged dialogue with Hayekian political economy particularly and neo-liberal anthropology more generally (see also Caldwell, 2005; Mirowski, 2007; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009, Tadajewski et al., 2014; van Horn 2015), it is to the late American novelist, short-story writer, essayist and journalist David Foster Wallace that Mirowski attributes both *murketing*'s technology and its phenomenology. Before quoting at length from *Mister Squishy* - a short story staged within a market research firm which dramatizes the iterative interplay between subjective testimony and objective data – Mirowski is uncharacteristically reverent. "As usual, David Foster Wallace put it best" (Mirowski, 2013: 140), he writes. And then he provides the following definition of *murketing*:

> a tongue-in-cheek pseudo-behind-the-scenes Story designed to appeal to urban or younger consumers' self-imagined savvy about marketing tactics and objective data and to flatter their sense that in this age of metastatic spin and trend and the complete commercialization of every last thing in their world they were unprecedentedly ad-savvy and discerning and canny and well-nigh impossible to manipulate (Wallace, 2004: 61; *c.f.* Mirowski, 2013: 140).

Contemporary *murketing*, it follows, holds earnestness at arm's length: not so much in contempt as in abeyance. Public expressions of honesty, if ever there were such things, have, for the murketeer, always-already had their day. This is not a capitulation to dishonesty. It is rather the contextualisation of the contemporary marketer's calculated double-bluff which anticipates the iteration of an average consumer's responses, the firm's playful wink to the spectator, the advertisement's own revelation of an underlying strategic intention alongside – sometimes even on behalf of - the audience. And it is also the marketer's skilful turning of the Brechtian gesture's emancipatory ambition against itself, a gesture made none the less effective for its having been made unbeknownst. To break the fourth wall by acknowledging that the consumer, too, knows only all too well what is going on, in the way of *murketing*, is not to overcome alienation, Mirowski claims, but to exacerbate it. It is to tell the sort of in-joke within which demystification itself, rather than the fetishism upon which it acts, is the very butt of the gag.

As to the phenomenology of *murketing*, Mirowski suggests "the topic deserves a tome unto itself" (*ibid.:* 141). Although his is not that tome, he provides two examples of what such a tome would analyse: *snapprenticeship*, aka. 'unprimitive accumulation' (Mirowski, 2013: 141-144, see also Marazzi, 2010 and Ross, 2011) and *buycotting,* aka. 'ethical consumerism' (Mirowski, 2013: 144-148, see also Yates, 2011, Richey and Ponte, 2011). Whereas in snapprenticeship, the agent seeks "to bypass the market altogether" (Mirowski, 2013: 145) while unintentionally extending "hierarchical control and capitalist appropriation" (*ibid.*: 143), in buycotting, "participants are enticed to believe that it is possible to mitigate some of the worst aspects of market organization by paying an "ethical premium"" (*ibid.*: 145). To these two examples we might rightly protest that there is a lot more to ethical consumption than the payment of an ethical premium (e.g. Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013; Chatzidakis et al., 2012;

Chatzidakis et al, 2007). Nevertheless, they reveal *murketing* phenomena to be categorically distinct from situations within which lies (e.g. Wheeler, 1976), nonsense (Wheen, 2004), or even bullshit (e.g. Frankfurt, 2009; Ball, 2017) prevail. Within *murketing* rhetoric - much like the situation within which Mirowski sees *murketing* itself defined (i.e. a work of fiction) - the verifiability of claims gives ground to the plausibility of stories (see also Booth, 1974a, 1974b, 2009, 2010; Brown, 2005; Godin, 2012). This is not to give up on veracity as such but to pursue conviction along predominantly rhetorical means.

In endorsing Wallace's definition of *murketing*, Mirowski leans more upon literary and performance theory than political economy (e.g. Schudson, 1986; Ewen, 2001; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Hodgson, 2003; Thaler and Sunstein, 2008; Akerloff and Shiller, 2015) or even the *psy*-sciences (e.g. Cialdini, 2001; Dichter, 2002; Packard, 2007; Samuel, 2010; Tadajewski, 2006; Rose and Abi-Rached, 2013). *Murketing*, on Mirowski's telling, exonerates neither the axioms of utilitarianism nor the suspicions of Machiavellianism. Its rhetoric rather appeals to the consumer much in the way that authors of what Mark McGurl calls the program era (2009) appeal to their readers: by making a subtle issue of the relentless interplay between the text which is produced and the context out of which it was produced. Mirowski's erudition sets an example as to how marketing rhetoric might be analysed. Let's now survey the plotlines of the story of *murketing*'s emergence.

Irony and the Double-Truth Dialectic

Mirowski doesn't say that his genuflection to Wallace is also indebted to the political philosopher Leo Strauss. Perhaps it isn't. But here's Strauss providing grounds for us to believe why it might be:

> There is hardly anyone among you, I believe, who has not seen that a contemporary novelist with a reasonable degree of competence tells us much more about modern society than volumes of social science analysis. I don't question that social science analyses are very important, but still, if you want to get a broad view and a deep view you read a novel rather than social science (2001: 7).

This apparent slur against the social sciences was made in the context of an introduction to political philosophy which Strauss made by means of a close reading of Plato's *Symposium*. It is also made at an historical juncture in which the chilling prospect of nuclear apocalypse loomed large. In reaching back to Platonism in general, Strauss found a persuasive alternative to the intellectually aristocratic claims of the (social) sciences and of fiction. And in reaching back to *Symposium* in particular, Strauss bears witness to philosophy's beating of poetry at its own dramatic game. Poets and orators aren't alone in the production of beautiful speeches, despite everything Socrates says throughout *Symposium* to the contrary[2].

The situation depicted in the *Symposium* also provided Strauss with an alternative to the climate of cynicism which he thought to have been sanctioned – albeit unintentionally - by the liberal democratic axiom that everybody should have their say. Strauss knew that philosophy had no answer to common sense which would meet with popular appeal. He recognised, as Plato did, that philosophy's opportunity to settle its scores with science and poetry would never be democratically sanctioned, that philosophers would never be held in high popular regard. This

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[2] Whereas Plato has Socrates *eject* some poets from the *Republic,* in *Symposium* (1997d; see Burnyeat, 1998) he has Socrates *seduce* all around him, Aristophanes included, to a poetically philosophical to love. While *Republic* bears witness to the political act of censorship, *Symposium* represents the ethical act of disputation.

is precisely why there are no strangers or anonymous guests present at the *Symposium*. Everybody who speaks there, no matter how drunk they are, is already known to have something to say that might be worth listening to. They all are, that is to say, all already friends.

And so, if the discussion which transpires in the *Symposium* strikes particular readers as ridiculous, that is only because they are not among its presumed audience. The participants in the *Symposium*'s dialogue listen to each other and not to strangers: they already know something of the character – the *ethos* – of each of the speakers. And that is why they take turns to listen, as well as to drink. The listeners already know, that is, that the speakers assembled are the sorts of persons they'll allow themselves to listen to, even if what ends up getting said turns out to be incoherent or even wrong. For being wrong, in the *Symposium*'s situation, is everybody's right. This is a friendly gathering, not a political assembly. It is a qualitatively different speech situation to one which would formalise the right of everybody to speak prior to the establishment of consensus. Discussions between friends and lovers are not at all like that: consensus is not in the nature of matters of the heart. And this is a large part of the reason why Strauss presented a close reading of the *Symposium* as the best possible introduction to political philosophy today: we who carefully listen in to it still have much to hear. And those who wouldn't listen shouldn't speak.

The Socratic strategy of writing nothing in order to gain intimacy with one's opponents struck most of Plato's successors as more foolish than fearless. Subsequent philosophers instead hedged their bets upon the paradoxical authority of anonymity, upon the convenient alibi of aliases, upon the gesture filled production of esoteric writing, and upon many other devices besides. And it is this penultimate strategy of esoteric writing which Strauss ultimately wanted to draw our attention to. Philosophers, Strauss believed, do not write for everybody: they write instead only for people who know both what to pick up on and how to pick up on it. For Strauss, it will never be enough for contemporary readers of Plato - or of any other serious writer - to cherry pick phrases and aphorisms to then subsequently grant them the status of disciplinary or canonical dogma. As he had already platitudinously put it: "thoughtless men are careless readers, and only thoughtful men are careful readers" (1941: 491). And so the erudite reader, for whom the philosopher writes, and to whom Strauss provides his advice, either already knows or else will eventually come to know all of this to be the case. All others will succumb to liberal perspectivism, from which the refuge of paradigm incommensurability draws its cultural legitimacy. And that's no way to read anything carefully.

So the authorial deployment of knowing devices - especially the knowing device of irony - towards philosophical ends, takes on a crucial role within Straussian textual interpretation. Within this hermeneutical framework, ironic speech and writing isn't simply comprehended as an aesthetically predisposed device. Irony also needs to be seen, it follows from Strauss, as one political strategy amongst others, an authorial anticipation of and response to the then prevalent modes of public persecution and public ridicule. Irony evokes socio-historical subtext, in other words. The public philosopher writes and speaks esoterically – that is to say non-literally – largely because s/he is mindful of the inevitability of being misinterpreted. The public philosopher is nevertheless hopeful that while enemies and charlatans will fall for textual bluffs, the presumed audience will know how to read the clues though which the author's intended meaning is produced and disseminated. And long before Strauss, as Strauss himself shows, Plato already knew this. Hence he cast Socrates not as a narrator but as a character. So the Socratic deployment of irony isn't to be understood, Strauss suggests, as the annihilation of meaning perpetrated by a mock-ignoramus. It is better appreciated as part of the Platonic textual pursuit of meaning by non-literal means.

Behind the many Socratic and dialogical feints and dummies, then, there is Plato who, in writing the *Symposium,* for Strauss, wanted to settle philosophy's scores with poetry and science, by staging a discussion about friendship which required the absence of enemies and idiots in order that it might successfully transpire. It is in the *Symposium,* Strauss sought to show, where Plato not only staged the battle between poetry and philosophy but also settled it in favour of the latter.

So yes, Strauss says with Mirowski: fiction better imagines social reality than the social sciences. But yet it is the contemplative life, he agrees with Aristotle, which is best. Mirowski's account of *murketing*'s double-truth character, then, is neither Orwellian nor Latin-Averroist (Mirowski, 2013: 68). It instead draws approvingly upon Strauss's own insistence that "all philosophers…must take into account the political situation of philosophy, that is, what can be said and what must be kept under wraps" (Smith, 2009: 18, *c.f.* Mirowski, 2013: 68). Mirowski translates Strauss's account of exoteric writing's requirement of careful reading from political philosophy into political economy. What was, for Strauss, a practical requirement to communicate clandestinely under threat of persecution becomes, in Mirowski's rendition, an interpretive principle through which Hayek and his neo-liberal acolytes should now be read. Rather than being on the hunt for lies and hypocrisy, the double-truth dialectic's hermeneutics encourages us to connect what is written to what is meant, to see this pair as continuous rather than oppositional. And this is a way of thinking about communication which, Mirowski contends, has descended the post-war Swiss peaks and infiltrated everyday consciousness. We're all Straussians now.

MURKETING AND SINCERITY

Liberty / Honesty

Kenneth Burke (1941) was formalising the master tropes of rhetoric around the same time that the double truth dialectic was finding theoretical expression in the hermeneutical work of Leo Strauss and practical expression in the formation of the Mont Pelerin Society. Less than a decade later, in *The Liberal Imagination* Lionel Trilling also had cause to reflect upon many of the same issues. "The first thing to say about" that work, according to the intellectual historian Louis Menand, is that it is "a cold war book" (2008a: vii). By surveying how literature and society overlap, Menand asserts, Trilling's classic collection of essays, first published in 1950, both made "literary criticism matter to people who were not literary critics" and "changed the role of literature in American intellectual life" (*ibid.*). The book evoked the paradox between literary efforts to express a philosophy of liberalism, on the one hand, and attempts to realise such ideas within political practice, on the other. It didn't seek to dissipate this paradox but to deepen the complexity of its reader's relation to it. Trilling believed that "liberalism" as such:

> is concerned with the emotions above all else, as proof of which the word happiness stands at the very center of its thought, but in its effort to establish the emotions, or certain among them, in some sort of freedom, liberalism somehow tends to deny them in their full possibility (2008: xviii-xix).

Trilling pitted the humanities and the (social) sciences against one another insofar as their relative capacity to both convey happiness to its audiences and to cajole its audiences into happiness was concerned. *The Liberal Imagination* did not reject the proposals of "Hayekian

free marketers" (Menand, 2008a: ix), or of any other post-War political ideologues. Nor did it affirm the value of such ideological projects, or any of their then plausible alternatives. The book rather consisted of a series of case studies in how liberal idealism rarely stands the test of political-economic reality. And it gave its readers the impression that such a discontinuity hasn't just empirically been the case but that it necessarily is the case. Politics and literature, for Trilling, stem from identical roots in that both draw upon implicit theories of human *pathos* in order to achieve their respective ends. The political task of putting *pathos* to work, of course, is qualitatively distinct from the literary craft through which *pathos* is produced, schematised and idealised. And so to Trilling's mind political practice, from the Ancient Greeks onwards:

> unconsciously limits its view of the world to what it can deal with, and it unconsciously tends to develop theories and principles, particularly in relation to the nature of the human mind, that justify its limitation (2008: xix).

Much the same could surely be said of *murketing*'s power to persuade, relative to that of the novelist. The reality principle, that is to say, makes itself known within the coordination of human affairs – political or commercial - in ways that it need constrain novelists. Whereas fantastical utopianism is warranted within the literary imagination (Elias, 2009), the political economic imagination is honour bound to take its bearings from Max Weber's theatrically evocative treading of already well-worn boards (Weber, 1946) in earnest. The Freudian undertones of these sentiments are by no means coincidental. For Trilling, any post-War liberal reconstruction project had to embrace the compelling insights into the human condition emerging out of the human sciences in general and from psychoanalysis in particular. And yet, he nevertheless insisted to proponents of "an anthropological perspective" upon the coordination of human affairs that "literature has a unique relevance" (2008: xxi). So literature - not politics, the social sciences (or *murketing*, by implication) - "is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity and difficulty" (*ibid.*)".

Trilling, like Mirowski and Strauss, was the practitioner of a doubly hard sell: that of seeking to persuade his self of the very argument he was presenting to his assumed audiences. Literature (particularly tragic literature), he argued in both directions, matters to politics (and commerce) because of its perennial insights concerning the human condition and despite the misappropriations to which these have been and will continue to be subjected. While literature's potential has been repeatedly annihilated within various moments of liberalism's would-be political realisation, literature remains politically instructive within its absolute potentiality, that is, in the perennial *mis*-application of its evocations. It is probably on account of such convoluted formulations that, on more than one occasion, Menand categorised Trilling's thinking not as paradoxical but as dialectical (Menand, 2008a: xii, 2008b). To be realistic by demanding the possible, Trilling might have said, is to recognise literature's characteristic status as a politically imaginative resource.

Honesty / Hypocrisy

Trilling himself went on to have trouble accepting *The Liberal Imagination*'s earnest appeal to literature's existential priority. In *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), he makes an implicit case against apologies for literature's redemptive, palliative or pedagogical primacy such as his own. Erudition may well enhance our capacity for sounding honesty's depths but, as Trilling went on to realise, public success has rarely been predicated upon studious solemnity. Such success, in fact, is much more likely hindered by heartfelt earnestness than it is helped by it.

Individuals capable of persuasively appearing to their publics as solemn souls, by unfortunate contrast, frequently benefit from an instrumentally calculated mode of literary engagement. If one of erudition's principle functions was to teach readers how to appear in public, rather than how to be in private, we'd be well advised to question its political value. And so it was for Trilling. *Sincerity and Authenticity*, as Menand put it, was his late teacher's "last major work" (Menand, 2008b), a dialectical thinker's characteristically ambivalent recollection of, and characteristically intellectualised response to, his experience of the 1968 Columbia University campus uprisings (*ibid.*).

Lionel Trilling was no Herbert Marcuse. Nevertheless, he actively mediated between the students and the administration throughout the widely analysed period of turmoil, the consequences of which have been rigorously criticised (e.g. Wolters, 2013; Booth, 1974), fictionalised (e.g. Bradbury, 2000; Lodge 2008) and sociologised (e.g. Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006; Habermas, 1986). Trilling publicly remonstrated against the disproportionate use of police violence throughout the period of discord. He did so in good faith, it seems, only to return to his office after the campus troubles to encounter graffiti - co-authored by actual and/or would-be victims on whose behalf he had taken the risk to speak – which singled him out as a pig (Menand, 2008b). Irritated by this stain on his furniture, mindful of this smear upon his character and fearful of the slur by implication this made upon the academy (as distinct from the police, the state and the market), Trilling took up intellectual arms in the library, later delivering his broadside from the podium. His intention throughout the lecture series upon which the book was based, Menand suggests, was to call out an evident paradox in order for the sake of facilitating a renewed period of honest and collective reflection about and within a critical historical moment.

The earliest usage of the term sincerity, in French and then later in English, Trilling pronounced, originally "derived from the Latin word *sincerus* and first meant exactly what the Latin word means in its literal use – clean, or sound, or pure" (1972: 12). Dutifully tending to the business of etymological preliminaries incumbent upon anyone who would presume to lecture upon such a topic (p. ix), Trilling proceeded to note that the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s dating of the earliest French usage to 1549 is contradicted by Paul Robert's *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française,* which states 1475 to have been the earliest use of *sincére* and 1237 to have been the earliest use of *sincérité* (*ibid.*)[3]. At the beginning of the sixteenth century – and this is the hinge around which so much of *Sincerity and Authenticity's* argument pivots - amidst the "decisive increase in the rate of social mobility, most especially in England but also in France" (*ibid.*: 15), sincerity's usage undertook an important shift in emphasis, slowly withdrawing from the physical characterisation of the objectively inanimate and gradually buttressing moral and subjective idioms. Sincerity, that is, became an important means of characterising ourselves, and each other, though it demonstrably was not always so.

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[3] Trilling also mentions "an old and merely fanciful etymology, *sine cera,* without wax" (12-13), which would, if creditable, require us to date sincerity's origin it back even earlier, since *cera*, is known to have existed as wax before 1237. This discredited attribution, Trilling continues, "serves to remind us that the word in its early use referred primarily not to persons but to things, both material and immaterial" (*ibid.*). It is very tempting to say something, concerning this non-connection, about the role played by wax within Rene Descartes's meditative pursuit of certainty and indubitability and to speculate as to how they might have been undertaken without wax, that is, sincerely. Since there is no such connection between the word sincerity and the status of being without wax in fact, however, I will resist the temptation to elaborate in this regard. So should you.

It is on the basis of sincerity's radical shift in semantic emphasis, Trilling continues, that we should understand the culturally prolonged "captivation" with what political historians now describe as the Machiavellian moment (Pocock, 2016). This observation enables Trilling to account for the Elizabethan age's dramatists' exploitations of the notorious Florentine's "false presentation of the self" (1972: 13) political prerogative for theatrical effect (see also Skinner, 2014). So too, through this altering sense of sincerity's referents, Trilling also invited his audience to understand the considerable level of public antipathy towards a "conception of the villain [that] survived well into the Victorian era" (Trilling, 1972: 14), that is, "the hypocrite-villain, the conscious dissembler" (*ibid.*: 16). And it is also with regard to sincerity's gradually discovered moral inflection, to offer a third of Trilling's many examples, that he related the plain speaking imperative which he, following Karl Marx, deemed characteristic of Northern Europe's urbanisation and industrialisation processes to the emergence of the genre within which authors cast themselves as characters within their own true stories: the autobiographical treatise. This aggregates to Trilling's persistent contention that the deployment of sincerity became morally determined for reasons which were historical-sociological first and ideological-linguistic only afterwards.

The paradox which was principally at stake, then as now, was the perennial discontinuity between words and deeds, that seemingly never to be exorcised spectre of hypocrisy. And the concept of sincerity provided Trilling with the keys to the crypt. Trilling suspected that the iconic student movement's most outspoken members weren't nearly as concerned with the mundane challenges of doing politics as they were with experiencing the heroic "gratifications of *being political*" (*c.f.* Menand, 2008b). And so *Sincerity and Authenticity* should, according to Menand, continue to be appreciated as Trilling's concerted effort to put a biographically instantiated discrepancy between what people say they believe, on the one hand, and what people actually do, on the other, into a wider socio-historical context.

Hypocrisy / Incredulity

If we are to credit Lionel Trilling with revealing the origins and rise of sincerity as a rhetorical means – and I believe that we should – then we could also credit Jean-François Lyotard with diagnosing sincerity's terminal demise and aftermath – though I'll shortly provide reasons to oppose this decision. But why might we believe that sincerity has had its day? Why, that is to say, have so many of us today become predisposed to scoff at the efforts of Stanley Cavell (2002) – or, earlier and even more earnestly, of Immanuel Kant (1996) – to so conscientiously trace empirical utterances back to moral dispositions? Let's ask one of Trilling's seminal argument's most appreciative revisionists, Roy Magill Jr.

Although he doesn't engage with *The Postmodern Condition* (Lyotard, 1979)*,* Magill Jr. does credit 'postmodernism' (2012: 181-184; see also Brown, 1993; 1997; 2006; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Firat and Dholakia, 2006), the consequences of which the closing passages of *Sincerity and Authenticity* itself had already provisionally confronted, with having achieved something of a decisive separation, within the perspectives of authors and audiences alike, between the linguistic content of an utterance and the looming presence of any authorial intention(s). Call it the death of the author (Barthes, 1977), call it the intentional fallacy (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1946), call it the erosion of the subject (Foucault, 2004: 421-422), or call it the ends of man (Derrida, 1969), it all amounts to the same thing in this connection: the abandonment of the idea that the one who said it, whatever *it* is, is morally obliged to have meant it. Whereas Trilling's book could not observe the historical consequences of this

reduction of the author to a matter of subtext, at least not with the benefit of sufficient hindsight, Magill Jr's has.

Consider the example of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Confessions,* according to Magill Jr echoing Trilling, "go furthest in promoting the ideal of sincerity as the highest moral goal" (2012: 84). Consider, in particular, how differently he must have sounded to his intended audience compared to how he sounds to us. Whereas the rhetorical intention of his confession that he went in for more than his fair share of guilt addled masturbation was to persuade his contemporaries to trust him, we who would still read *The Confessions* today are prepared to encounter it on its own terms, as it were: exorcised, that is, from the murky spectre of its author, self-loathingly onanistic or otherwise (Derrida, 1976: 141-164). Not only is this a plausible means of engaging with the text, it seems to have become an advisable, even predominant, hermeneutical strategy. The prevalent epistemological hygiene test, since *Sincerity and Authenticity*, is much less a business of determining whether – and if so why - one should believe the author, or not, and much more that of ascertaining whether - and if so why - whatever has been said can be deemed analytically consistent, or not. The riddle of authorial sincerity, throughout this recent twist, seems to have become very much beside the point, if not completely irrelevant. We're all dissemblers now, it would appear, regardless of whether we're consciously so or not.

Sincerity, for Magill Jr., was always a ruse, always a bluff, always a distraction. His book is a polemic which doesn't so much dance on sincerity's grave as tell the story of why it has been long dead. And, edging more towards acceptance than lament, it advises us to move on, paying our respects, perhaps, but also encouraging us to repress all hope of resurrection. Much like sincerity's initial entry into the moral idiom had for Trilling, this subsequent denigration of the value which we attribute to authorial sincerity, since the time of *Sincerity and Authenticity,* has had significant effects upon how we speak and write as well as upon how we listen and read. For not only do we today express a heightened degree of incredulity towards grand narratives, as Lyotard had it: audiences and authors today have also become accustomed, Magill Jr. suggests, to treating the sincere gesture itself – as with so much else - with implicit distrust and ironic ambivalence, if not outright hostility. This might even be a culturally conditioned defence mechanism. The postmodern condition's legacy, beyond the academy, is not that we no longer distinguish between morality and immorality but that we no longer believe that utterances are the most reliable material with which to make such distinctions.

MURKETING AND THE NEW SINCERITY

Back now to Mirowski's exemplary phenomenologist of *murketing*: David Foster Wallace. According to one of his best regarded essays (1993) and Adam Kelly's influential series of commentaries upon its place within his work (Kelly, 2010, 2015, 2017; see also Dunne, 2018; Konstantinou, 2016, Hering, 2016; Michaelson, 2016; Parker, 2016; Styhre, 2016), it might be premature to culturally euthanize sincerity. In an interview which accompanied his demonstration that the injunction to just 'act naturally' has become impossible to obey, Wallace bluntly asserted that: "fiction's about what it is to be a fucking human being" (McCaffery, 1993). Opposing the stylised disaffection which characterised the work of some of his contemporaries – Bret Easton Ellis's in particular - Wallace suggested that novelists should do more than merely "dramatize how dark and stupid everything is" (*ibid*). Wallace did not think that cynicism, scepticism, irony, meta-reflexivity, authorial disavowal, sensationalism and satire either could or even should have had their day. But he did believe that readers are entitled to expect more from fiction than mere entertainment, however edgy. And so he says:

We all suffer alone in the real world; true empathy's impossible. But if a piece of fiction can allow us imaginatively to identify with a character's pain, we might then also more easily conceive of others identifying with our own. This is nourishing, redemptive; we become less alone inside. It might just be that simple (*ibid.*).

By advocating such a view of fiction's extra-aesthetic responsibilities, Wallace knew he'd sound both whiny and old-fashioned, particularly to a generation of readers long grown weary of literary morality tales. And yet he thought it better "to risk disapproval" than to wallow with his literary peers in the stylisation of solipsism. We're not very far away from Trilling and Strauss's aristocratic sense of literature's extra-literary functions here. And we're also now rounding out our account for why Mirowski knew the pedigree – Straussian or otherwise - of outsourcing the recognition of *murketing*'s technology, as well as the provisional articulation of its phenomenology, to a novelist.

Wallace probably didn't believe that the metaphysical affliction of anthropological solitude could be overcome through linguistic means: he had much more than a passing interest in Wittgenstein, after all (see Max, 2012). But he probably did believe that fiction both could and should help its readers help themselves feel less alone. So if Wallace's work does make a plea for a new sincerity, it does so not by proposing an antithesis to irony but rather by provoking a sublation of sincerity's demise both with and through irony. His advocacy of a new sincerity does not oblige its advocates to oppose irony because it complicated authorial intent: it does not oblige them to oppose irony at all, in fact. Instead, to endorse the new sincerity is to advocate the deliberate incorporation of irony's capacity for complicating authorial intent into the craft of literary production. Unlike those for whom the stylisation of disaffected loneliness is an aesthetic end in itself – cynical apologetics, in other words - Wallace wanted irony to be incorporated into cultural production not so that authorial intent could be eliminated but so that it could be revealed through necessarily more complicated means.

The old sincerity's near fatal injury was a generally perceived rupture between what is said and what is meant. The new sincerity, by contrast, stylises this rupture, not in order to cringe at its discharge but rather to seek to do what can be done, if anything, in the way of healing. The earlier scars will remain visible, of course, for there is no value in nostalgia for the good old times when authorial intent and audience interpretation were perfectly aligned. Irony's cultural generalisation requires practitioners and advocates of the new sincerity not to work in a non-ironic or anti-ironic manner, but rather to deploy ironic devices towards sincere ends. This is much easier said, in cultural theory, than done, in cultural practice. Hence the earlier point made with McGurl: contemporary audiences as such are interpellated not so much by the text, nor by the context, but rather by just so many subtle gestures towards their interplay.

Wallace made no apologies for placing such demands upon his audience. Rather than being obliged to make their literal meaning immediately transparent to all readers in the first instance, Wallace believed that fiction writers are entitled – obliged, indeed - to put their readers to work. This doesn't mean 'Finneganizing' everything, as he so knowingly put it (Max, 2009). But it also doesn't mean authorial self-exoneration or self-abdication. What it does mean is that the proponents of the new sincerity cannot hope to address all audiences, let alone set out to convince them.

MURKETING'S NEWLY SINCERE DOUBLE TRUTH

…is both Cynical and Gnostic

The death knells of sincerity, if they have tolled, rung in the triumph of hermeneutical suspicion. The Kantian axiom *Aude Sapere!,* through which modern subjects are encouraged to question almost everything, may have unwittingly become the audacious affliction to end up believing almost nothing. Sincerity, in this telling, has become another casualty of the self-regarding savvy through which we each do what we can to avoid appearing gullible, only to end up becoming cynical (Sloterdijk, 1987; see also Žižek, 1989, 1991). And it is in a widely shared recognition of this seemingly self-contradictory position, within which subjects both know the folly of acting in a particular way *and yet* act that way anyway, that psychoanalytic approaches to consumer research have recently undergone a renaissance (Berger, 2016; Cluley and Dunne, 2012, Cluley and Desmond, 2015; Fleming and Spicer, 2006; Roberts, 2015; Zwick and Bradshaw, 2016). Subjective resistance *and* behavioural obedience have come to be seen as compatible.

But the alleged compatibility between believing one thing and doing another isn't just a matter for psychoanalysts. Both Gorgias and Protagoras sold their wares on the understanding that rhetoric dares to speaks in the places from which logic withdraws. As both Barbara Cassin (2000) and Michael Billig (1996, see also Antaki and Condor, 2014) have shown, rhetorical analysis sheds important light upon psychoanalysis's relentless attempts to wrench coherence from the apparently incoherent. The exposition of contradiction is a matter for the logician. The practical resolution of perceived contradiction, by contrast, forms a large part of craft of the free murketeer. It is no coincidence that Mirowski's analysis acknowledges the role and significance of cognitive dissonance theory.

Whether it be in the calculated deployment of irony (Stern, 1990; Frank and Weiland, 1997; Brown, 2005), the recuperation of marketing strategies into modes of resistance (Klein, 2010; Kozinets, 2002; Heath et al., 2017) or the simulated re-appropriation of the linguistic and aesthetic means of communicative production (Higgins and Tadajewski, 2002), contemporary consumers have long been required to play or be played, especially when the game of persuasion is called out (Hackley, 2003). Calling out the game of persuasion, indeed, has become just another way of playing it. And so if you're not yet paranoid, it's only because you've not been paying enough attention to the game. They are indeed out to get you, regardless of what you think! We both know this all too well and yet act as if we didn't. And we seem to have persuaded ourselves of the need to no longer transcend *murketing*'s double truth dialectic.

…is both Conceited and Intimate

Rather than seeking to sincerely inform its audience as to the facts of the matter, *murketing* frequently choreographs a flirtation like situation. Roland Barthes was more than aware of this kind of strategy when he wrote of literary seduction (1975; see also Baudrillard, 1990). A little bit of slap and tickle then (Brown, 2004). The intended audience knows how to play along with no small amount of intrigue as to where it all might lead, winking and rib-elbowing along. *Murketing* does not tell it like it is because it knows that persuasion is best done indirectly. What it does, instead, is confide, through tongue in cheek, banter and other such subtle gestures (ten Bos, 2011, 2005; see also Schmidt 2012), about how we're all now past sincerity, about how only a fool would continue to expect words alone to say all there is to be said. And that's the allusive mode of the new sincerity. That's the irony which makes earnestness possible. It is an interaction predicated upon a shared but unsaid acceptance of how nothing essential, within such a context, can ever be told like it is. The innuendo – the knowingly unsaid – is

precisely where the truth resides. To call the game out is to stop playing the game. This is precisely why the game should never be called out. We're not far from the *Symposium* here.

A nuanced sense of intimacy develops between those who have correctly decoded the signs, not despite the allusiveness but because of them. This is a sense of intimacy not unlike that established through the sharing of a joke which the majority cannot indulge in, the in-joke which works because others are not in on it. Or at least that's the allure. *Murketing* frequently affects the likeness of no longer expecting, of no longer even caring, about being regarded with sincerity. This is how it establishes a clandestine mode of unspoken intimacy. In order for the new sincerity to persuade – its interpellation has to be hearkened rather than heard. Perfect information is the economic myth: disingenuous persuasion is the *murketing* reality. And, if you do get caught saying what you really mean, you can always ~~just~~ say it's <u>just</u> a joke. Earnestness can always take cover under irony. Intimacy can always give way to conceitedness. There's no way of telling for sure any more. That's the basis on which we communicate within a world where *murketing* has taken hold.

To those not impressed by the implicit or explicit conceit, it's always possible to say it's just a joke. And with those who manage to get the unspoken message – that it really *isn't* a joke after all - an unspoken and unbreakable bond is established. Here's Angel Nagel, whose work indicates the growing chasm between mimetic dissemination and personal responsibility (2017a, see also Miles, 2014, 2010 and Persuit, 2013), on how the 'only joking' refrain has taken hold online:

> The standard online shtick for politically serious members of the alt-right has been to flirt with Nazism but then to laugh at anyone who took these gestures at face value (2017b).

Pepsi *probably* sought to establish this unspoken sense of intimacy by alluding to #BlackLivesMatter in a recent campaign[4]. And Coca-Cola also *probably* tried to commoditise global anti-Trump sentiment when they re-ran their #Americaisbeautiful campaign[5]. To master the rhetoric of *murketing* is to know how to negotiate the turbulent space between conceitedness and intimacy. It is to know how to formulate sufficiently ambiguous signals, rather than vulgarly unambiguous messages. Both Pepsi and Coke set out to do this recently. Coke did it better.

…is both Earnest and Ironic

On the 14th of September 2017, the billionaire Alan Sugar announced to the House of Lords that contemporary gambling advertising was both "too clever" and "too alluring". He made particular reference to an ongoing bet365 advertising campaign, within which an often de-capitated and gravity disobeying Ray Winstone espouses his *responsible* way of gambling. Sugar was careful to disassociate the character played by the talking head from the man himself, partially for fear of being "thumped". He nevertheless lambasted its pretence to responsible

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[4] See: https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/pepsi-advert-pulled-kendall-jenner-protest-video-cancelled-removed-a7668986.html

[5] See: http://uk.businessinsider.com/coke-pre-game-america-the-beautiful-super-bowl-ad-has-aired-before-2017-2

gambling as "Pathetic. Absolutely pathetic". He also criticised present advertising legislation for being "weak and inadequate".[6] Let's call this an earnest response to a perceived problem.

Back in 2014, the Responsible Gambling Trust operating as Gamble Aware also took issue with "Ray's" (head's) claims to gambling responsibly. Their attack, in contradistinction to Sugar's, was much less overtly sincere. It's hard not to think of satire, of subvertisement, and of detournement (Debord, 1984; Lasn, 2001) when you watch it[7]. Whereas the billionaire made a critical issue of the claim towards responsible gambling itself, unveiling its inherent silliness as if this weren't already apparent, Gamble Aware went instead along the rhetorical strategy of *reduction ad absurdum*: what would the world be like were Ray to have in fact been speaking the truth? We all know the 'I gamble responsibly' phrase is pathetic, as Sugar put it: little more than a calculated attempt to pre-empt regulation. So let's take it seriously rather than seeing through it. Hence "Debt 365" and all the rest of it. What else could responsible gambling truly mean?, the ironic response to a perceived problem asks on our behalf.

bet365, for its part, has been able to incorporate and perhaps has even had the foresight to anticipate both forms of criticism. Leaving the empirical question of what gambling responsibly actually means to the presiding regulatory body, the underlying meaning of Ray Winstone's claim – performed almost as a threat made on behalf of "bet365", that he gambles "responsibly", provokes all sorts of pedantic epistemological gymnastics, not least of all:

1. What sort of subject worries about whether the character Ray Winstone, affected by the actor Ray Winstone, for a fee paid to him by the legal entity bet365, gambles "responsibly"?

2. This character, responsible gambler or not, is setting prices. So what is it: a buyer or a seller?

    a. If it is a buyer, it is an insider trader committing a criminal offence right in front of our eyes.
    b. If it is a seller, its claim to gamble responsibly is a boast that the game it is trying to convince us to play is rigged against us. Surely that will only persuade the audience *not* to gamble with bet365 and as such defeats contradicts its sole reason for being

3. If the character is neither an insider trader making an ill-advised confession, nor a scornful corporate ally mocking its consumers, perhaps it is comparable to a martyr: a figure who gambles responsibly, on our behalf, so that we don't have to. Behold the spectre of gambling responsibility being presented not as a model to aspire towards but rather as a model of gambling from which we're encouraged to deny. "Ray" gambles responsibly, thereby paying for all of the sins of us essentially irresponsible gamblers.

We can easily rule out all of the above, of course, once we recall what we all already know, namely, that the statement isn't supposed to be taken seriously in the first place. bet365, whatever it is, obviously already knows this too. And that's the conceit: that's the open secret which we're all now invited to participate in by the murketeer. That, also, is precisely how intimacy is established through contemporary *murketing*. One of the world's most famous

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[6] YouTube has it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYkLXA1xnLM

[7] YouTube has it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyiLEW5WAYk

Donald Trump impersonators[8] and one of Britain's more inventive subvertisers *both* struggle to get ahead of this rhetorical strategy. Murketeers know both that and how their opponents are going to try to play them. The hidden dissuaders are going to have to up their game: they're rank outsiders at the moment.

DISCUSSION

The rhetoric of the new sincerity is more than a linguistic subtlety or a rhetorical nicety: it harbours crucial political-economic dimensions, not least of all in our dealings with distributed and aggregated agents in general and with corporations in particular. Should scholars of marketing rhetoric follow the fetishization of the commodity insofar as it is the semiotics of the brand to which the consumer often primarily relates? Or should we instead see through the rhetorical epiphenomena in order to gaze directly upon the forces and relations of production which are the consumer's interpretation of the brand's very conditions of possibility?

The answer now - just as it was for Jean Baudrillard, for Wolfgang Fritz Haug and for Stuart Hall - is that we should endeavour to both. For the free murketeer, on the one hand, sincerity seems to have become strategic aesthetics: a matter of persuasive performance. For Mirowski's Wallace, on the other hand, sincerity predicates just so much corporatized subterfuge. We should call it a feature of this predicament, rather than a failing, that there seems to be no logical, epistemological or normative grounds upon which either side of this argument can bring the other over, or even be externally judged to have made the most compelling case. And yet we've all got our opinions.

As a potential means of responding to this critical impasse, this paper has attempted to use the term *murketing* in an entirely descriptive manner, just as we might describe any other craft. The ambition throughout, to be clear, hasn't been to oppose this mode of persuasion but to describe it. For now, it remains instead incumbent upon marketing scholars in general, and scholars of marketing rhetoric in particular, to acknowledge *murketing* as a skilful deployment of the new sincerity, so that we might better come to terms with the craft's nature, function and trajectory. The paper has therefore put *murketing*'s emergence into a longer historical, cultural and political-economic context and delineated some of its challenging though not quite contradictory enunciative characteristics. It has also provided some provisional hermeneutical guidance as to how *murketing* practice might be studied empirically within further studies, by means of example.

Not only does the rhetoric of the new sincerity provide marketing scholars with one possible means of overcoming the false opposition between commodity fetishism and labour process theory, between aesthetics and legal theory and between semiotics and political economy, as well as a few interpretive clues for subsequent work, it also makes an implicit case for evidence based policy intervention. The current debate over the regulation of gambling advertising bears more than a passing resemblance to an earlier debate over film censorship. Then, between the affectedness of earnest moralism, on the one hand, and the disaffectedness of libertarian permissiveness, on the other, emerged the recognition that while suggestiveness and vulnerability are moral issues, their regulation is a matter for empiricism. So it should be here. The regulation of *murketing* should take its bearings from the specificities of *murketing*'s double-truth dialectic and of the individual's awareness of this. Policy intervention should be predicated much more upon how audiences receive rhetoric – whether sincere, ironic or newly

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[8] Alan Sugar hosts the UK's version of TV Show *The Apprentice*

sincere - and much less upon how murketers, regulators and critics believe they receive it. This doesn't only apply to the regulation of gambling *murketing* but to any attempt at regulating *murketing* as such.

I've left the last few words for criticism. Although he opposes much of what Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Social Studies of Finance (SSF) practitioners have had to say about markets and economics, Mirowski's account of how contemporary consumers participate within their own persuasion endorses the spirit of Bruno Latour's influential critique of contemporary criticism's hermeneutics of suspicion (2004). The main upshot here is that it simply shouldn't matter to scholars of marketing rhetoric whether Mirowski (or Klein, or Packard, or Chomsky, or Stanley, or Bernays, or whoever) like or loathe prevalent modes of persuasion. We should rather concern ourselves with the plausibility, or otherwise, of the accounts of rhetoric's manifestation which such work provides. Following Latour, we might say that the critique of marketing rhetoric hasn't even had the chance to run out of steam. We'd need an adequate transport infrastructure before any energy expenditure assessment can become viable: we don't even have that yet. Contemporary analysis and critique of marketing rhetoric must not consist in complaining about the fact *that* marketing is rhetorical (on which see Schuster, 2016). We should rather delineate *how* persuasion occurs today. Under the heading of *murketing*, we seem to have become wilful participants in our own manipulation. We'd all do well to think a bit more about that.

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