Before leaving the topic of ideology in marketing, I want to mention one other source, in addition to ideologies of media communication, and ideologies of space. Marketing is itself a source of ideology, through its conventional axioms, concepts, and values, conveyed via mainstream text books and courses. The reason this is relevant here is that, before trying to engage with strategies for putting contextual marketing into practice, some myths about marketing need to be exposed. Many of the problems with marketing implementation arise because of misconceptions about what it is and what it can accomplish, and the major source of these misconceptions is marketing itself. Business schools are especially culpable in cleaving to a formulaic notion of marketing that suits the commodification of higher education and seems to fit with a wider neo-liberal agenda, but fails to articulate the particularities of practice. The educational route to a marketing career entails a good deal of learning that has to be unlearned once practice is encountered.

Marketing has become closely identified with particular ways of conceptualizing and talking about markets and management. Getting past the loose terminology around what marketing is and what it can do is a difficult task of organizational politics for anyone who wants to engage in contextual marketing. The fault for the cardboard cut-out version of marketing that dominates discourses about the subject, lies
squarely with marketing itself. There is a set of popular ideas and conventions for talking and thinking about marketing, and these have been reproduced and reified in taught courses, academic research programmes, text books, and consultancy. Marketing has a set of normative axioms rather than scientific principles, and these tend to be placed beyond question since managerial marketing studies, generally, lacks a sense of critical self-analysis. Marketing discourse is known for its how-to, can-do tone, its relentlessly positive spin and its narcissistic blind spot toward its own intellectual contradictions. The marketing concept dictates that satisfying consumer needs and wants is the be-all and end-all of marketing, and the Marketing Mix lists the demand management tools available to marketers for carrying this out. Marketing that departs from these tenets doesn’t really fit the stereotypical mould. Yet, as I’ve tried to illustrate with many examples, much of the most interesting marketing innovation springs from creative cultural leadership, and not from a mechanistic process of organized need satisfaction. What is more, in practice few marketing professionals enjoy control over the Mix elements of price, product design, distribution channel, and promotion. These are often dictated by other departments, by available resources, or by competitive conditions. Marketing practitioners seldom enjoy the status of directors of the mise-en-scéne. In many cases they are set dressers or prop managers. The ideological concept of market orientation implies a co-ordinated, cross-organizational effort, but marketing tasks are often broken down by functional barriers or practical considerations. In any case, the idea of need satisfaction itself is an ideological tool of legitimation for marketing. Marketing’s overall purpose, obviously, is not to satisfy needs and wants, but to create them.

Consumption drives economic development and growth, and marketing serves growth not by pandering to consumer whim, but by framing consumption choices within an overarching culture of consumption. To be sure, there is a utilitarian element to marketing, and customers like to feel