

*Saggi*

## Is the Buying Experience an Aesthetic Experience?

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**Abstracts**

Da alcuni anni è cambiato il modo di intendere e di “fare estetica”. Dopo essersi concentrata esclusivamente sull’arte e, al massimo, sul paesaggio, l’estetica ha iniziato a dialogare con altre discipline: filosofia della mente, antropologia, psicologia, economia. In questo articolo, viene affrontato un nuovo rapporto, quello tra estetica e marketing, alla luce degli elementi che ne motivano la sua possibile strutturazione. Per un verso, il marketing si rivela un interessante terreno di verifica e applicazione delle categorie estetiche. Per altro verso, l’estetica, per secoli legata alla categoria del “disinteresse”, trova nel marketing un campo d’analisi inedito e tradizionalmente considerato a essa antitetico.

The way of understanding and “doing” aesthetics has recently changed. Once focused exclusively on the arts and, at most, on landscape, aesthetics has begun to dialogue with other disciplines: philosophy of mind, anthropology, psychology, economics. This paper intends to explore a new relationship between aesthetics and marketing, in the light of those elements which motivate its possible organization. On the one hand, marketing proves to be an interesting field through which aesthetic categories can be verified and applied. On the other, aesthetics, which has been for centuries linked to the category of “disinterestedness”, finds in marketing a field of analysis which is new and traditionally considered antithetical to it.

**Keywords**

Aesthetic experience – Creativity – Marketing Aesthetics – Profit

### *Introduction*

The premise, both theoretical and empirical, for a discourse on the relationship between aesthetics and profit coincides with a fact: the process of aestheticization of the world and life. Within this process, there is also space for the relationship we will discuss below, which, however must be placed within a more general framework.

Meanwhile, the aestheticization of life means that every dimension of existence<sup>1</sup>, from the corporeal to the domestic, from the private to the political, is lived and analyzed from an aesthetic point of view. Beauty leaves the traditional perimeter of art to connote experience in general. This unstoppable process, in the first instance, can be the object of a double interpretation, which we could define as negative and positive. A useful distinction to clarify the difference between the two interpretations is linked to the different connotations that can be attributed to beauty in contemporary society: function/fiction or quality.

In the first case, the unquenchable need for beauty tends to be configured as a superstructure produced by the new social models of behavior, oriented towards self-acceptance of oneself by the other members of the community. Being beautiful be-

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<sup>1</sup> On the relationship between aestheticization and Everyday Aesthetics, cfr. G. MATTEUCCI, *Everyday Aesthetics and aestheticization: reflectivity in perception*, in *Studi di estetica*, XLV(1), 207-227; E. DI STEFANO, *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana*, Carocci, Roma 2017; G.L. IANNILLI, *L'estetico e il quotidiano. Design, Everyday Aesthetics, Esperienza*, Mimesis, Milano 2019.

comes functional to the recognition that the individual receives from others. In the second case, instead, beauty would present itself as an element not yet functional, but optional compared to other attributes, other qualities, experienced as a conscious choice and not as a passive imposition of a society that tends to overestimate beauty and underestimate other dimensions. Beauty as an option, as well as representing a conscious choice, refers, precisely because of the awareness it manifests, to an “interior” and essential dimension, as opposed, therefore, to the exterior of appearance. At this level of analysis, aesthetics and ethics tend to cross, since inner beauty represents the positivity of principles, the genuineness of behaviors, the authenticity and goodness of inter-subjective relationships. Widespread aestheticization, therefore, can be understood as a general process oriented towards the generalized exaltation of beauty over everything else. But, on the other hand, it can be declined as the desirable tendency towards a renewed and modern coincidence between aesthetics and ethics.

The first version of widespread aestheticization goes in a direction opposite to that of a re-evaluation of “beauty” in intersubjective relations, in social and community relations. This negative declension puts aside the ethical dimension of existence, since, privileging only the superficial formal level, it denies deeper and more meaningful experiences. The affirmation of an aesthetic society in which action was oriented by an extreme, vulgar, unproductive and disruptive sensitivity hides serious risks. Historically and conceptually, the dimension of sensitivity has always been opposed to that of rationality, and indeed the different stages of human history seem to be marked by the different outcomes to which the constant conflict between

these two levels has led. Society today, undoubtedly “aesthetic”, seems to relaunch this opposition, opting for the aesthetic level and for the building of social models on an aesthetic basis only.

However, considering beauty as a priority element, as a parameter of choice and evaluation, entails dangers, most of all that linked to senseless discrimination. In contemporary society «si ce n'est pas beau, il faut que ça le soit. La beauté règne. De toute manière elle est devenue un impératif: sois beau ou, du moins, épargne-nous ta laideur»<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to avoid noting an ever-increasing affirmation, in life and in contemporary lifestyle, of beauty, pleasure and its derivations. The immediate consequence of this is the tendency towards a general aestheticization of experiences.

«Il est temps de reconnaître que nous sommes entrés dans un autre monde de l'expérience esthétique et un autre monde de l'art – celui où l'expérience esthétique tend à colorer la totalité des expériences, où les vécus sont tenus de se présenter sur le mode de la beauté [...]»<sup>3</sup>.

This extreme pervasiveness of the process of aestheticization is the final result of a path that in the history of humanity, according to Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, has been divided into four great eras, the last of which is characterized by the «capitalisme artiste» (or «créatif transesthétique») <sup>4</sup>. It is a capitalism that is characterized «par le poids grandissant des marchés de

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Y. MICHAUD, *L'art à l'état gazeux. Essai sur le triomphe de l'esthétique*, Stock, Paris 2003, Introduction.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> G. LIPOVETSKY - J. SERROY, *L'esthétisation du monde. Vivre à l'âge du capitalisme artiste*, Gallimard, Paris 2013.

la sensibilité et du ‘*design process*’, par un travail systématique de stylisation des biens et des lieux marchands, d’intégration généralisée de l’art, du ‘look’ et de l’affect dans l’univers consumériste»<sup>5</sup>.

As has been said, artistic capitalism is characteristic of the fourth era of the aestheticization of the world. In the first («ar-tialisation rituelle»), which lasted for millennia and was characteristic of primitive societies, aesthetic consumption has an essentially ritual purpose. In the second («esthétisation aristocratique»), which stretches from the end of the Middle Ages to the 18th century, emerge the first forms of

«modernité esthétique avec l’avènement du statut d’artiste détaché de celui de l’artisan, avec l’idée due pouvoir créateur de l’artiste-génie signant ses œuvres, avec l’unification des arts particuliers dans le concept unitaire d’art dans son sens moderne [...]»<sup>6</sup>.

In this period, moreover, in the life of the court one begins to pay attention to good manners, elegance, grace, refinement, fashion, style. Since the Renaissance, aesthetic values have acquired a new dignity and social value at all levels, so much so that, according to Lipovetsky and Serroy, an early form of «société esthétique» emerges right at the heart of the aristocratic societies of the Ancien Régime. The third age («esthétisation moderne du monde») coincides with the Western modern age, and therefore with the period from the 18th to the 19th century. In this age, art claims its sovereignty and autonomy from the world of money. At the same time, it constitutes an «art com-

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<sup>5</sup> Ivi, *Introduction*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

mercial» which, instead, is oriented towards the search for profit and immediate success. Moreover, in this age different processes are triggered: the museum is born, aesthetics replaces religion and ethics, artists take sides against tradition and conventions, the artistic avant-gardes cultivate the ambition to transform living conditions in order to build a new society.

«L'esthétisation proper à l'âge moderne a ainsi emprunté deux grandes voies. D'un côté, l'esthétisme radical de l'art pur, de l'art pour l'art, d'œuvres affranchies de toutes fins utilitaires, n'ayant d'autres fins qu'elles-mêmes. De l'autre, et à l'exact oppose, les projets d'un art révolutionnaire "pour le peuple", un art utile se faisant sentir dans les moindres détails de la vie quotidienne et orienté vers le bien-être du plus grand nombre»<sup>7</sup>.

At the end of the third age, there is the fourth, our age, the «transaesthétisme», built on the logic of commercialisation and individualisation. According to Lipovetsky and Serroy, this era, in which a generalized commercial strategy of aestheticization of the world dominates, involves the spheres of production, consumption, aspirations, lifestyles, our relationship with our body and our view of the world.

«Le régime hyperindividualiste de consommation qui se déploie est moins statutaire qu'expérientiel, hédoniste, émotionnel, autrement dit esthétique: l'important désormais est de ressentir, de vivre des moments de plaisir, de découverte ou d'évasion, non d'être conforme à des codes de représentation sociale»<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

It is precisely these new conditions that create the conditions for a reshaping of the relationship between aesthetics and profit, between aesthetics and economics. This relationship, moreover, finds in advertising and marketing one of its most fruitful spheres of application. Although advertising has had a direct relationship with the world of art (for example, Manet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, etc.) since the second half of the nineteenth century, in the last few decades it has been recognized not only as an activity with artistic qualities, but also as the mirror of a hedonistic and consumerist society.

### 1. *The Fundamentals of a New Relationship*

One of the main characteristics of aesthetics, understood as a philosophical discipline, is represented by its ability to re-orient its attention, opening up to new objects of analysis. This happens both as a consequence of the trends, in terms of the relationship with others and with the world, that emerge from the ever-changing articulation and complexity of contemporary societies, and by virtue of an increasingly close dialogue with other disciplines. This is possible because aesthetics has proved to possess a sort of “chameleonic” capacity, thanks to which it succeeds in renewing itself, in its tools and objectives, and in reviving its own tradition. The openness to different and, sometimes, distant disciplines also comes to fruition in the face of a theoretical-practical dimension generally considered to be the opposite of the aesthetic one: economics.

The relationship between the world of consumption, marketing and profit and the world of aesthetics is a new and “unexpected” relationship. Traditionally, this relationship has been

presented in the form of a dangerous relationship, to be avoided, and in terms of the opposition and impossibility of any form of communication. Aesthetics, from Kant on, has been structured around the concept of *disinterestedness*, far, therefore, from the sphere of *profit* and from those relational forms oriented towards the achievement of a practical-economic goal. Aesthetics has traditionally been the specific field of aesthetic pleasure completely separate from practical interest and utility, as well as from profit. How could it have happened, then, that the age-old opposition between the aesthetic and economic dimensions has turned into a winning collaboration? This was possible because the characteristics of aesthetics (disinterestedness) and those of economics (interest and profit) have changed so much as to allow them to engage in original and unprecedented dialogue.

In fact, if we start from the assumption that beauty, in the world of art, has been relegated to a secondary and, indeed, almost irrelevant category, while at the same time assuming a position of absolute importance in the world of everyday life, aesthetics, as the theory of beauty, inevitably finds itself having to follow in its tracks. These paths, which in fact end up touching all areas of contemporary human experience, accompany aesthetics onto the shores of marketing. If marketing, in order to produce effective results, must use the “aesthetic lever” and to be able to do so must inevitably make use of creativity, aesthetics cannot but deal with it. The aesthetic categories traditionally applied to art end up being applied to the economics, and in particular to marketing.

«Aesthetics is everywhere. The importance of aesthetics is no longer applicable only to the arts. A large proportion of aesthetics research in consumer psychology has focused on



advertising and product design, especially for product categories where aesthetics has traditionally served as a central product feature»<sup>9</sup>.

Vanessa M. Patrick and Laura A. Peracchio, in the editorial note presenting a monographic issue of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* dedicated to the theme “Aesthetics in Consumer Psychology”, argue that aesthetics is essential in consumer psychology. Both the form (design) and the aesthetics of products and services are now recognized as two determining factors for the success of marketing and, consequently, sales:

«In a marketplace where consumers often take product quality and competitive pricing for granted, aesthetics has become an important criterion by which consumers evaluate and differentiate between product and service offerings to make purchasing decisions»<sup>10</sup>.

The aesthetic element has become so important that, according to the authors, consumers very often base their consumer choices and purchases on aesthetic values rather than on functional values: it is an emotional response and perceived beauty that immediately orient them, rather than a cognitive response, which comes later and which concerns the function and quality of the product. Marketing, advertising, but also design are showing signs of looking carefully at a sort of «aesthetic functionalism», to be understood as

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<sup>9</sup> V.M. PATRICK - A. PERACCHIO, *Editorial Note: “Curating” the JCP Special Issue on Aesthetics in Consumer Psychology: An Introduction to the Aesthetics Issue*, in *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 20 (4), 2010, 393-397, here 394.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, 393.

«a cluster of criteria about its value as an activity around meeting needs in fitting ways that improve practical life, adding things of beauty, of aesthetic value, to everyday lives, and creating built environments that aid the good life»<sup>11</sup>.

If, therefore, marketing tries to respond to the needs that emerge in contemporary society (needs that are mainly of an «aesthetic» nature), the relationship between marketing and aesthetics inevitably becomes closer, deeper and richer in interesting solicitations if it is addressed using link-categories that, while being characteristics of aesthetic studies, are completely central to the success of a marketing choice (creativity and image).

The questions that involve into question aesthetics, therefore, are obviously significant. Of equal significance is the fact that a strategic discipline such as marketing has oriented its research towards a dimension, that of aesthetics, considered to have an exclusively philosophical relevance. Of course, aesthetics remains a philosophical discipline that, however, has in itself the characteristics of multi-disciplinarity or, rather, of trans-disciplinarity. This explains the fact that in the world of marketing the following kinds of questions have arisen: does aesthetic judgement have a decisive influence on the decision-making process of the consumer<sup>12</sup>? Is the consumer experience first and foremost an aesthetic experience? Does this type of aesthetic experience develop on one level or on several levels? And again:

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<sup>11</sup> J. PETTS, *Function and Flourishing: Good Design and Aesthetics Lives*, in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 53 (2), 2019, 1-18, here 11.

<sup>12</sup> For the relationship between perceptual and cognitive dimensions and aesthetic judgment, cfr. F. DESIDERI, *All'origine dell'estetico*, Carocci, Roma 2018.

«Are there individual differences in response to aesthetics? Do consumers have an aesthetic identity? Consumers have an ethnic or sexual identity, an identity based on the region of the country they are from and their social class. [...] Do consumers possess an “aesthetic schema” used to evaluate aesthetics? Are some aspects of such an aesthetic schema, perhaps the visual component, more fully developed? Do consumers possess less developed aesthetic schemas for the other senses such as touch or smell? How do such aesthetic schemas develop? What affective responses accompany aesthetic experiences? What are the emotions implicated in aesthetic experiences? Are dark-side emotions, such as guilt, involved in “indulging in aesthetics”? How do metacognitive concepts such as creativity, imagination, and intuition cohere with aesthetic theory? [...] Are there cross-cultural differences in response to aesthetics? Are there cross-cultural aesthetic universals?»<sup>13</sup>.

If this is the case, first of all, aesthetics and marketing seem to have interesting reasons for dialogue: the theoretical categories of aesthetics and marketing techniques share a common ground in which creativity, taste, beauty, perceptive effectiveness and pleasure coexist.

Speaking of creativity, Andreas Reckwitz says it has two meanings. First of all, creativity refers to the continuous production of something «dynamically new», favoring «the new over the old, divergence over the standard, otherness over sameness»<sup>14</sup>. Secondly, continues Reckwitz, the *topos* of creativity is immediately traced back to the figure of the artist and to the world of art and aesthetics. From this point of view, creativity goes beyond simple technical innovation and has to do with the

<sup>13</sup> PATRICK - PERACCHIO, *Editorial Note*, 396.

<sup>14</sup> A. RECKWITZ, *The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New* (2012), Polity Press, Cambridge 2017, 2.

ability to make an object able to activate sensory, sensual and affective processes. Creativity, then, in the contemporary world and in the dynamics of the market becomes a central element on which to build the success of a brand and a product.

For a long time, the interest of companies has remained limited to the production of goods capable of satisfying the needs of the consumer. For some years now, however, there has been a progressive and increasingly satisfactory expansion of the quality of the *performance* required. The consumer has become much more demanding and expresses, with the purchase and choice of specific consumer goods, the desire to live intense and engaging experiences. Consequently, the proper and objective characteristics of the product are prerequisites, since what is decisive is the establishment of an *emotional context* within which to place the consumer. Advertisements, brands, places of entertainment, exhibition spaces, large stations, airports, shopping malls, the main streets of each city become, in this way, sources of emotional energy that is transmitted to consumers. Consumers thus become protagonists of *multiple aesthetic experiences*.

«Importantly, previous research has established that aesthetics has a ubiquitous and powerful influence on consumers via the design of goods and services, and consumers make many product and brand decisions on the basis of aesthetics. Indeed, the importance of visual aesthetics for consumer preferences and satisfaction appears to be increasing for an ever-wider selection of products, and product design is often the most important determinant of sales success. Therefore, it is not surprising that marketers go to great lengths to

design products that appeal to consumers' aesthetic sensibilities»<sup>15</sup>.

Advertising campaigns aimed at positioning a product on the market are the result of complex planning in which imagination and creativity, traditionally attributed to the artist, are essential. These categories have gone beyond the boundaries of the artistic experience (but one could also say that it is the artistic experience that has surpassed its boundaries), going on to characterize other areas, such as advertising and marketing.

Advertising and marketing are the means by which a product or a brand is launched and promoted, and by which an attempt is made to induce people to buy and consume. There is therefore a wise interweaving between intelligence and creativity, which we could call «creative intelligence». By creative intelligence we mean a strong ability to imagine, hypothesize and solve situations in which the tools already possessed and in use are now inadequate. In the field of marketing, by creative intelligence we can probably mean the ability to design a campaign to promote the product and the brand which is effective, seductive, winning on the market, winning by the reason of its difference from the others: «Una comunicazione che non contenga nulla di creativo, resta ordinaria, e quindi riproponibile da chiunque altro e sostituibile con qualsiasi altra, all'infinito»<sup>16</sup>.

Creativity, Scibilia reminds us, in the cases of advertising and marketing, despite being delimited by its commercial applications, maintains links with artistic creativity. There is however

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<sup>15</sup> V.M. PATRICK - H. HAGTVEDT, *Aesthetic Incongruity Resolution*, in *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48 (2), 2011, 393-402, here 394.

<sup>16</sup> S. SCIBILIA, *Creatività. Cliente-Agenzia andata e ritorno*, Lupetti, Milano 2004, 75.

a difference of no mean importance which regards the degree of liberty which the creative advertiser and the artist have. In the first case, there is a predetermination of both the meaning of the message and the recipient; in the second case, however, the freedom is almost absolute, circumscribed exclusively by the tools that the artist can use. In this regard, Jacques Séguéla has pointed out that through copy strategy (i.e. a document describing the strategies hypothesized by the advertising agency to achieve certain objectives) a sort of euthanasia of creativity is carried out. It would be forced and resized by the stringent requirements of marketing, which risks reducing communication to a mere technique: to create you need to have your hands free. Copy strategy has put the cuffs on creativity<sup>17</sup>.

Artistic language and advertising language use similar tools, such as metaphors, polysemies, allegories. However, there is an important difference: the first illuminates and interprets the real, while the second tends to attract the attention of the reader and the listener without any interpretative function of the real<sup>18</sup>.

Attracting the consumer's attention is obviously the first and decisive step in orienting consumer purchasing behavior. At this initial level, everything is based on dialectic satisfaction/delusion. According to Albert O. Hirschman, anyone who, before engaging in an activity – including purchasing and consumption – plans to do it having expectations that reality can confirm or deny. The correspondence between expectation and empirical «verification» very often fails, given the frequency

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> M. CORTI, *Principi della comunicazione letteraria*, Bompiani, Milano 1980, 120.

with which expectations exceed reality. It seems that advertising and marketing, as Hirschman would say, have taken the theme of consumer «disappointment»<sup>19</sup> seriously, since the mechanism that comes into play in the experience of consumption (from design to execution) is now studied and broken down into all its parts in order to reduce the gap between expectation and disappointment, between desire and realization.

What is certain is that the entire process of designing and implementing an advertising campaign must necessarily seduce and attract. The degree of seduction and effectiveness is, as we have seen, indissolubly linked to the creative dimension, a dimension to which the new marketing has attributed an extraordinary importance. It is in fact, in recent years, that a new approach of (and to) marketing has been established that we can consider as having started from two new formulas: *marketing aesthetics* and *lateral marketing*.

## 2. *Marketing Aesthetics and Lateral Marketing*

In recent years, marketing has made increasing use of the tools and results of experimental disciplines such as psychology (neuromarketing and consumer psychology) and sociology (consumer sociology), whose research has revealed an important fact for aesthetic studies<sup>20</sup>: the experience of consumption is increasingly linked to emotional dynamics. The consumer, then, will no longer be considered exclusively a target, but as an individual

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<sup>19</sup> A.O. HIRSCHMAN, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interests and Public Action*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (N.J.) 1982, 9 and following.

<sup>20</sup> For the relationship between aesthetics, phenomenology and neuroaesthetics, cfr. E. FRANZINI, *Phenomenology and Neuroaesthetics*, in *Aisthesis*, VIII (1), 2015, 135-145.

who acts on the basis of cognitive and, even more importantly, emotional processes.

«En el caso de las artes aplicadas como el diseño de productos – electrodomésticos, muebles, automóviles, ropa –, la publicidad o la decoración de establecimientos, identificar la importancia que posee la estética como factor generador de valor resulta más evidentes en las decisiones de consumo, tales como la calidad o el precio. Esto se debe a que la estética es percibida siguiendo criterios emocionales y personales, tale como la interpretación, la apreciación personal, el placer, las sensaciones o los sentimientos que genera el producto o el entorno de consumo»<sup>21</sup>.

The passage from the analysis of custodian behaviour to that of the customer mind confirms the fact that the experience of consumption can have the characteristics of an aesthetic experience. On the basis of these new results of research in the field of consumer analysis, we have come to talk about marketing aesthetics<sup>22</sup>, emotional marketing<sup>23</sup> and experiential marketing<sup>24</sup>.

*Marketing Aesthetics. The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity and Image* was published in 1997. Although there are those

<sup>21</sup> R. SÁNCHEZ FERNÁNDEZ - M. ÁNGELES INIESTA BONILLO, *La estética y la diversión como factores generadores de valor en la experiencia de consumo en servicios*, in *Innovar: Revista de ciencias administrativas y sociales*, 19 (34), 2009, 7-24, here 12.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. B. SCHMITT - A. SIMONSON, *Marketing Aesthetics. The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity and Image*, The Free Press, New York 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. M. GOBÉ, *Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People*, Allworth Press, New York 2001; F. GALLUCCI, *Marketing emozionale*, Egea, Milano 2005; M. BARBERIS, *Marketing emozionale. Strategie di comunicazione nel mercato della new generation*, Casini, Roma 2006.

<sup>24</sup> W. BATAT, *Experiential Marketing: Consumer Behavior, Customer Experience and The 7Es*, Routledge, London 2019.



who have identified several «shortcomings» in this research<sup>25</sup>, the book by Schmitt and Simonson, perhaps for the first time, has created a strong link between the conceptual structures of aesthetics and marketing strategies. For the first time, a direct relationship was established between aesthetics and marketing, or rather, between the aesthetic dimension and commercial advertising communication.

This work presents itself with the aim of offering «clear guidelines for harnessing a company's total aesthetic output – it's 'look and feel' – to provide a vital competitive advantage»<sup>26</sup>. To achieve this goal, according to the authors, a company should develop a strategy based on a multiplicity of «sensory experiences», able to reinforce the positive impression that the customer has had in his or her relationship with a product or a brand or an organization, to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty, to make something absolutely irresistible. The objectives of a marketing strategy of this type rely first and foremost on the sensory dimension, thus regaining the historical definition, that of Baumgarten, to put it simply, of “aesthetics” as *scientia cognitionis sensitivae*.

This new type of marketing explicitly refers to what has distinguished the aesthetic research of the origins and that which has gone back to identifying that of contemporary aesthetics, namely the *sensory experience*<sup>27</sup>. Schmitt and Simonson, therefore, intend to emphasize all those perceptive elements that characterize the specific experience through which a product, through

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<sup>25</sup> T. HARDY, *Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity, and Image* by Bernd Schmitt and Alex Simonson, in *Design Issues*, 15 (1), 1999, 81-82.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. SCHMITT - SIMONSON, *Marketing Aesthetics*.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, 15.

the consumer, becomes an act of consumption. A perspective of this type of analysis attributes considerable importance to the communicative impact of a product or service and proves to be a useful tool for understanding its dynamics «e anche per comprendere quelle che sono le attuali tendenze del mercato verso la cosiddetta sensibilizzazione»<sup>28</sup>. *Sensitise*. It is quite clear that the aesthetic dimension is then increasingly configured as a completely central dimension in the new marketing domain, so central as to be identified as a new attribute, by virtue of which one can speak of marketing aesthetics.

The “sensitization” towards which current market trends are oriented is to be understood as

«una caratteristica emergente dello studio dell’identità delle marche. Attraverso la sensibilizzazione, vale a dire la possibilità di guardare, sentire, annusare, ascoltare non solo in senso acustico, una marca, si produce maggiore attenzione verso la stessa»<sup>29</sup>.

It is important to underline how the “aesthetics” of the new marketing is linked to the attention it pays to the sensorial dimension and to the understanding connected to it, realized, that is, through the senses. In this way, the experience of knowledge of a product and its consumption is considered an aesthetic experience. Aesthetics, therefore,

«è in grado di produrre nuove opportunità e, come conseguenza della maggiore attenzione che il *marketing* manifesta verso gli aspetti estetici, produce in noi una più approfondita *esperienza* del consumo»<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> M. FERRARESI, *Pubblicità e comunicazione*, Carocci, Roma 2002, 181.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ivi*, 185.

By virtue of these further considerations, *marketing aesthetics* is defined as *experiential marketing*.

As we have seen, therefore, marketing aesthetics refers to a vast range of elements, largely attributable to sensory experience. An approach, on the other hand, centred on themes specifically linked to creativity is that of so-called *lateral marketing*, which takes up the concept developed by Edward De Bono of «lateral thinking» and applies it to marketing. According to De Bono, lateral thinking, which differs from vertical (logical) thinking, refers to a new approach, which aims not only to find a solution to individual problems, but presents itself as a way to provide new interpretations of reality. Lateral thinking is elastic, variable, mobile and dynamic, it is «a set of processes destined to the use of information in such a way that generates creative ideas through a perspicacious restructuring of concepts stored in mind»<sup>31</sup>.

It does not rely, as vertical thought does, on consequentality and coherence, but it also draws on arbitrariness and randomness, even though it does not leave the tracks of the «method» but, at the same time, it is not a true and proper method. The difference between lateral and vertical thought lies in the fact that, in the second case, logic guides thought, while, in the first, it serves it<sup>32</sup>.

In summary, the «fundamental themes» of lateral thinking are summarized by De Bono as follows: 1. limits of vertical thinking as a method of searching for new ideas; 2. use of lateral procedures for the acquisition of new ideas; 3. creation of

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<sup>31</sup> Cfr. E. DE BONO, *Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step*, Harper & Row, New York 1970, Preface.

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. DE BONO, *Lateral Thinking*.

new ideas that are simple, valid and practical, as the objective of lateral thinking. The summary of De Bono's proposal helps us to better understand the application of these theses to marketing, carried out by Philip Kotler and Fernando Trias De Bes.

The theses of Kotler and Trias De Bes present themselves as an integration to the paradigm of De Bono and present themselves not as claim to be not a substitute model for traditional marketing, but as a complementary element, also because the two strategies move within different territories: one acts where the other is not active, a fact, however, which does not exclude the simultaneous application of the two approaches. The authors are not interested in creating a scale of values or priorities. Their aim is to highlight the potentials of a different approach to marketing. Lateral marketing, just like lateral thinking, differs from vertical marketing because it does not operate in a pre-defined market and does not move in a logical and sequential way. It

«restructures the existing information and goes from the concrete to the global through less selective thinking, but rather more exploratory, probabilistic, provocative, and creative thinking»<sup>33</sup>.

The authors point out with analytic precision many differences between the two marketing strategies, which however can be traced to a single factor: *creativity*. The specificity of lateral thinking and, therefore, of lateral marketing lies in the use of the right hemisphere of our brain, the creative and intuitive one, the one capable of elaborating new and brilliant ideas.

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<sup>33</sup> P. KOTLER - F. TRIAS DE BES, *Lateral Marketing: New Technique for Finding Breakthrough Ideas*, John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken (N.J.) 2003, 75.

The application of De Bono's theses to marketing follows three steps: 1) you select a *focus*; 2) you operate a *lateral displacement* to generate a *stimulus*; 3) you create a *connection*. The second step is the one that specifically differentiates lateral marketing from vertical marketing. The *lateral displacement* is exactly what is prohibited in a logical, coherent and sequential process. It is, in fact, an interruption, a sudden steering away from the path that was being traced. Unexpected deviations of this kind are the right stimulus for the mental process to proceed by movements until it reaches a logical connection. Creativity produces these unexpected deviations that, in turn, provoke a temporary disorientation, an apparent void of sense that, however, thanks to repositioning, creates an association and, therefore, a new idea. Kotler and Trias de Bes propose an example. The starting point is the «flower» (*focus*). A possible *lateral displacement* related to the fact that «flowers die» could be «flowers that never die». An idea of this kind, which comes after a lateral displacement, seems meaningless, but, at the same time, represents a challenge for the mind, a *stimulus*. To reach, however, a logical association, it is necessary to make another shift: it is necessary to make sure that the concept of «flower» can correspond to the idea that it «never dies». But under what conditions can a flower not wither? When it is made of fabric or plastic. So, from the focus on «flower» we come to a new concept, a new idea, that of «artificial flower»: the association has been established and the gap has been eliminated<sup>34</sup>.

Beyond the technical and practical effectiveness of this marketing strategy, it is interesting, however, to see once again how a central element in the creation of works of art is rediscovered,

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. KOTLER - F. TRIAS DE BES, *Lateral Marketing*, 100 onwards.

re-evaluated and used in the field of marketing and advertising, both as a «style of thought» and as a real practical realization. From the point of view of aesthetics, we have a further proof of the fact that the internal devices of the marketing world are an interesting level of analysis, a field in which to verify and deepen more general dynamics that, however, in marketing find their own singular specification. The links that exist between image and brand, between sensitivity and market response, between reception and interpretation or, again, between creativity and needs, suggest the possibility of transversal analysis, which can make use of specific tools of both aesthetics and marketing, in order to better understand some characteristics dynamics of contemporary societies.

Even the case of «lateral marketing» makes it clear that the relationship between aesthetics and marketing is deep and very productive.

In conclusion, on the one hand, aesthetic reflection has the ability to strengthen the dialogue with a discipline such as marketing which, having among its objectives that of producing a specific type of aesthetic experience, cannot be excluded from theoretical reflection on it. Aesthetics, to some extent, also finds in marketing a proof and a confirmation of the analysis of the process of widespread aestheticization that has characterized its path in recent decades. From this point of view, the experience that the consumer has through his relationship with the brand seems to be addressed from a perspective of *aesthetics of reception* (due to the recent semiotic analysis of the brand) or *aesthetics of the relationship* (due to the relational properties of the brand).

On the other hand, marketing, by opening up to dialogue with aesthetics, can benefit from a long theoretical tradition, the

philosophical one, which has had at its core those elements that are now central to new marketing, reaching a greater degree of awareness about its developments and its possibilities.