

Myth Aestheticization

Ileyha Dagalp



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

To Berkan.

Doctoral dissertation in business administration, Department of Business Administration, School of Business, Economics and Law at University of Gothenburg, 13 May, 2022

Department of Business Administration
School of Business, Economics and Law
University of Gothenburg
PO Box 610
405 30 Göteborg
Sweden
www.fek.handels.gu.se

© Ileyha Dagalp

ISBN: 978-91-88623-26-3

Printed in Sweden by
Stema, 2022

List of papers

This dissertation is based on the following papers:

Paper I

Dagalp, I., & Hartmann B. J. (2021). From ‘Aesthetic’ to Aestheticization: A Multi-Layered Cultural Approach. *Consumption Markets & Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2021.1935900>

Paper II

Dagalp, I. (2022). From Brand Aesthetics to Brand Myth Aestheticisation. Submitted to *Journal of Marketing Management*.

Paper III

Dagalp, I. (2022). Aestheticising the Viking Myth: Consumer Aesthetic Work in Viking Re-enactment. Submitted to *Journal of Business Research*.

Paper IV

Dagalp, I., Brunk, H. K., & Hartmann, B. J. (2020). The aestheticization of past-themed consumption. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 48, 509—511.

Paper V

Dagalp, I., & Södergren, J. (2022). Advertising Aesthetics. Revised and resubmitted to *Journal of Advertising*.

Abstract

This compilation thesis theorizes the process of myth aestheticization for marketing and consumption. A concept of myth aestheticization springs from a simple yet complex idea: What if something is not “aesthetic” in and by itself, but it is made “aesthetic”? In this thesis, I refine previous theorization on myth-making by arguing that aestheticization entails a process that typically (re-)produces myths into something beautiful and/or sublime by brands and consumers. In that aestheticization, there is a symbiosis between myth and consumption/brand activity. Following Böhme (1993; 2003; 2013) and Holt (2003; 2004; 2006), this thesis conceptualizes myth aestheticization and expands aesthetic work by investigating the different domains of it and contributes to the refined understanding of myth-making.

To explore myth aestheticization, this thesis brings together a variety of empirical contexts – brand experience design executives, amateur hobbyists of historical re-enactments, and retro appreciators – to illustrate how these producers and consumers incorporate myth aestheticization, thereby (re-)producing myths in consumer society. Considered alongside one another, these empirical contexts offer a vital complement to discussions of myth-making emergent in these aesthetic-related market activities. The findings show the ways through which myths are (re-)produced as being beautiful and/or sublime ideals through three major processes: cultivation, staging, and circulation. The myth aestheticization process helps to explain how discourses are promulgated through material and bodily actions through which enchantment can be produced by means of aesthetic work. Taken together, the studies illustrate how consumer cultural actors aestheticize myths in ways that reflect cultural tensions and enable economic profitability. The ideological aim of myth aestheticization is to make both the myth and the brand/product/place that carries the aestheticized myth enchanting.

This understanding of myth aestheticization holds important implications for understanding key processes in consumer culture on the level of brands as well as consumers, for marketing practitioners, and for future research.

Keywords: aestheticization, myth-making, enchantment, aesthetic work, past-themed consumption, cultural branding, aesthetics

Acknowledgments

This thesis is a result of various encounters with several people, places, and situations where I learn to dance to a chaotic rhythm or simply breathe a sigh of relief. Luckily, I was never totally alone.

First of all, I would like to express my intense gratitude towards my supportive team of supervisors. Ben, when I was lost you gave me a compass! Thank you for your constant sharing of energy, for letting me grow academically and find my voice. I am deeply grateful for your endless support and genuine interest in my work. I have learnt so much from you. Cecilia, I greatly thank you for supporting me and for your valuable suggestions.

Then, of course, I would like to deliver my thanks to those who guided me in both the critical stages and the moments of luxury of my Ph.D. journey. Special thanks go to Dannie Kjeldgaard, Frank Lindberg, and Lars Pynt Andersen for thorough readings of my messy drafts and for valuable suggestions. Colleagues, from J2 to J9, thank you for the camaraderie! Also, huge thanks go in particular to Emma, Kajsa and Stefan for their generous support!

I would also like to express my gratitude to the faculty and participants of the Consumer Culture Theory Canon of Classics doctoral courses in Odense and in METU, Ankara, and to Hanna Pico Larsen for hosting me, and to participants of the Nordic Consumer Culture Seminar in Copenhagen. It was a huge inspiration and help. Thanks to all of my informants for their time, support, and information.

We all know how extremely stressful the last year of PhD already is. I would like to deliver a note of support to other international PhD students in Sweden who were faced with sudden changes to the New Aliens Act and the resulting burden in the final stages of their own PhD journeys. This effectively creates an insurmountable barrier for foreign PhD students. I want to note here how very much it distressed us, leading us to fill our time with worrisome thoughts and extra weight on our shoulders. Thank you, friends, for the collective meetings, plans, and acts to raise this issue.

I reserve these lines to my parents and brother, Yasemin and Oktay! It is always just a relief to talking to you!! Thank you, Alper, for the lovely times we had. And Berkan, “Let’s ride, let’s take a moonlight drive. We’re on a tightrope ride into the sun. Come on, let’s fly.” It would not truly be a journey without you.

ileyha, Gothenburg, March 2022

Content

List of papers.....	5
Abstract.....	6
Acknowledgments	7
Content.....	8
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1. Setting the Scene.....	1
1.2. Problematization	5
1.3. Purpose and Research Question.....	11
1.4. Overview of the Thesis	12
Chapter 2: Theoretical Considerations.....	17
2.1. Marketization and the Cultural Sphere.....	17
2.2. An Account of Aestheticization.....	20
2.2.1. Arts and Marketing	22
2.2.2. Aesthetic Work	25
2.2.3. Consumption of Aestheticized Objects and Meanings.....	26
2.3. An Account of Myth-making.....	28
2.4. The Aesthetic in This Thesis	32
2.5. Towards Myth Aestheticization.....	37
Chapter 3: Research Design	45
3.1. Selecting the Research Contexts.....	45
3.1.1. Brand Experience Design as Myth Aestheticization	46
3.1.2. Past-themed Consumption as Myth Aestheticization.....	49
3.2. Research Approach and Empirical Material.....	51
3.2.1. Researching Aestheticization.....	52
3.2.2. Patchwork Ethnography as a Methodological Framework	53
3.2.3. Collection of Empirical Material	55
3.2.3.1. Studying Myth Aestheticization through the Volvo Brand Concept Store	55
3.2.3.2. Studying Myth Aestheticization through Viking Re-enactment	56
3.3. Analysis of Empirical Material and Ethical Issues	58

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion	63
4.1. Myth Aestheticization Process.....	66
4.1.1. Cultivation Process.....	70
4.1.1.1. Adjacency	71
4.1.1.2. Distancing	71
4.1.2. Staging Process	72
4.1.2.1. (In)scripting	73
4.1.2.2. (In)visibility	74
4.1.2.3. (In)variance.....	75
4.1.3. Circulation Process.....	76
4.1.3.1. Mimicking.....	77
4.1.3.2. Idling	77
4.1.3.3. Bonding	78
4.2. Aesthetic Work	79
4.2.1. Brand-Driven Aesthetic Work	81
4.2.2. Consumption-Driven Aesthetic Work.....	82
4.3. Ideological Aim of Myth Aestheticization	83
4.4. Conceptualizing Myth Aestheticization	86
4.5. Implications and Contributions.....	87
4.5.1. Refining Myth-making through Myth Aestheticization	87
4.5.2. The Operation of Consumer Culture through Myth Aestheticization.....	89
4.5.3. Advancing a Producer Perspective for CCT Inspired Marketing Studies.....	91
4.5.4. Implications for Understanding the Production of Enchantment	92
4.5.5. Implications for Marketing Practitioners.....	93
4.5.6. Educational Implications	95
4.5.7. Future Research Opportunities	95
Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks.....	98
References.....	99
Papers.....	113

Chapter 1: Introduction

“subversive of extended servicescapes
provided river rafters to consumer
in frenzied bursts of splashy fresh air flow
and flickering lulls of languid campfire meals,
a sheltered taste of raw bewilderment
subsidized by guides, sharpened by pros,
the plays is a bedlam set aflame,
a DIY and -to-yourself conclave
of mad becomings dancing in the dust,
of synesthetic in-to-body trips,
an artscape of smart tesserae incarnate,
reweaving time and space to suit new sense.
festivity and ferity suffuse
this handmade golgotha cum golgonooza.” (Sherry & Kozinets, 2022, p. 91)

This compilation thesis sets out to explore the process of myth aestheticization for marketing theory and practice. This preamble is a meta reflection on the papers, where I explain some of the more extensive ideas and thoughts that are not explicitly discussed in standalone papers.

1.1. Setting the Scene

Aesthetic issues are central to consumer culture and a cornerstone for many marketing and consumption practices (Holbrook & Zirlin, 1985; Goulding, 2002). As such, marketing practices most often revolve around finding a way to style offerings through sensory and design elements to look pretty, distinct, and engaging. On the other hand, consumers individually or collectively relate to aestheticized objects and experiences in a range of ways from having visceral reactions to enacting intellectualized discernment (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2017). They also desire and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of commercial objects and services, for instance, when they engage in self-authentication (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). To put it differently, aesthetic issues profoundly matter to both consumers and marketers; thus, they are involved in the circulation of cultural meanings in a consumer society.

Slater (1997) suggests that a consumer society indicates a social arrangement where markets mediate the relationship between lived experiences – that is, meaningful ways of life – and the symbolic and material resources (e.g., brands) on which they depend. On that note, consumer culture is understood as “the ideological infrastructure that undergirds what and how people consume” (Holt, 2002, p. 80). Interrelatedly, in this domain, researchers have become interested in questions over the last decade such as: “How do such ideologies take material form in consumer goods and services, how do markets become legitimate objects of consumer desire?” (Arnould, Press, Salminen, & Tillotson, 2019, p. 110).

Myths in this thesis, understood as culturally bound narrative structures (Stern, 1995), are closely tied to prevailing ideologies in a consumer culture – again, a term used to describe the permeation of consumption in society, and hence in marketing practice. In their purest form, myths are a way of organizing different perceptions of reality (Levy, 1981), albeit by masking the more challenging truths and messier realities (Barthes, 1972), helping people to understand the world and its ideals (Holt, 2003). Here myths become consumer cultural resources for individuals when they negotiate and manage various marketplace tensions between their lived experiences and forms of ideologies (e.g., consumption, commercial, political) (Thompson, 2004; Schmitt, Brakus & Biraglia, 2021). In other words, myths provide a powerful sense of structure for consumer cultural actors. Accordingly, producers of this ideological infrastructure make use of mythic content to create resources for consumers so that they achieve their ideals that partly build on myths. Marketers thus tap into narrative forms of myths and shape them as materials when they communicate and develop their marketing activities to be relevant to the target audience. For instance, when a brand creates or retools the myth, consumers rely on it to make sense of their experiences as they consume the market offerings. Simultaneously, other cultural producers also seek to adapt or contest the myth. Consequently, myths are (re)produced. In other words, myths are in a state of constant reproduction as various actors devise a range of techniques and strategies that epitomize the myth within the consumer cultural arena. The result of this is that myths, which are heavily tied to ideologies, are constantly being translated in various forms among such negotiations (see Paper 1 and Paper 5 for more discussion).

At the same time, objects, products, brands, or experiences need to create allure to be desired in a consumer society. For instance, they should stir people to contemplate the beautiful or the sublime, or even mere cuteness, in one way or another; they need to be enticing to work in this infrastructure. In this way, this ideological infrastructure is partly about how entities and experiences are appealing and interesting but partly also about storied forms of myths. As such, we have increasingly witnessed various actors’ activities

that tap into cultural ingredients while creating commercial stories, which are often coupled with the spectacular effects, feel, and look of commercial offers. Many branding efforts consult agencies specializing in experience design and attending to special effects to convey brand stories – not to mention expansion to create a virtual world or metaverse. Considering branding, Douglas Holt (2004) analyzed how brands may become champions of an ideology that resonates with people; he explained several ways that brand practitioners may handle cultural tensions. Those creative interventions most often revolve around recycling the subcultures and communication codes belonging to them that are believed to have healing power over cultural disruptions. One central part of such brand mythologizing belongs to a “charismatic aesthetic” –also referred to as “an original communication code that is organic to the populist world”. In this way, the aestheticization of a brand-myth is viewed as equal to subcultural co-optation to fulfil authentication (Thompson & Kumar, 2022).

We also witnessed how markets embed mythological tensions into aestheticized marketplace activities when market actors are attentive to aesthetic styles in their marketing operations. One prominent example is the recent rebranding of the Nordic. “New” Nordic has increasingly been adopted by several market actors in many sectors and has been extremely widespread within the culinary, tourism, cultural branding, and experience economy (Sandbye, 2016). As scholars have previously pointed out, this myth market embeds a few cultural tensions, such as balancing egalitarian inclusiveness with refined cuisine culture; ethnocentrism with multiculturalism; modern Nordic aesthetics with Viking imagery (Andersen et al., 2019). Nordic brands, as previous studies acknowledge, play around with an aestheticized version of the ideas of democracy and egalitarianism. The market actors are attentive to how Nordicism is felt, staged, and narrated, overall aestheticized. In the abundance of such aestheticization of commercial and consumer activities, hence staging the “compelling” myth, the markets that are embedded in this ideological infrastructure become an aestheticized version of themselves. That is, such compelling myths are used by the producers to create a particular aestheticized “regime” in which ideological tensions are wrapped in a market appeal. Then this market aesthetic ensemble further embeds ideological tensions. Likewise, in another macro analysis of the German retro market, we see how various actors contribute to the creation of an actual market around “iron curtain” aesthetics, which scholars have acknowledged as the marketization of myths. Such marketization transforms ideological tensions into commercially mediated enchanted moments belonging to the specific past. In this marketization process, brand actors work to leverage brand meanings by designing retro-inspired brand stores and simultaneously creating an enclave for consumers and creating nostalgic encounters through staged atmospheres (Brunk et al., 2018). Here, the myths

related to the nation's past – which, in this case, are partly celebrated and contested around their aesthetics – result in the animation of the storied form of myths through an aesthetic form (e.g., retro style) and reproductions of sites to stage and offer consumption experiences (e.g., GDR inspired hotels).

What these contexts offer us is a story about how aestheticization matters to a consumer culture and consumer cultural actors such as consumers and marketers in marketizing the myths. Aestheticization is thus a consumer cultural phenomenon where the myths related to the past or future are (re-) produced, celebrated, and/or contested. In that marketization, there are so many brand and consumer experiences that stage and perform the aestheticization of the myths. Such aestheticized experiences are frequently generated in and through rationally constituted practices and technologies within a particular socio-cultural context.

From the above reasoning, two constructs spark my interest: myth-making and aestheticization. I see aestheticization as being bound up with myth-making beyond offering refined versions of the objects, places, experiences, and markets. Such aesthetics, permeating marketing and consumer practices in a consumer society, correspondingly result in developing the term myth-making to denote the harnessing of myths for commercial purposes. Scholars have recently examined this theoretical construct from various angles (see Tillotson & Martin, 2014). In his well-acknowledged works on brands and branding, Holt (2003; 2004) argues that myths need to be palpable to be believable. Although myths are expressed in words, they are also partly told through and manifested in and through non-textual forms such as films, video games, comics, architecture, design – these can be seen as individual arts (see Paper 5 for details).

Elsewhere, the coining of the term aesthetic economy indicates an enhanced focus on sensory appeals, innovation, and creativity. Böhme (1993; 1995; 2003; 2013) points out how the current commercial and consumer activities highlight aesthetic consideration and sensory engineering as a central focus. Indeed, such aesthetic considerations are part and parcel of how a consumer society operates. If we see consumer culture as an ideological infrastructure, for this to work, there needs to be a cultural pleasure emanating from consumption experiences. At this point, we often see brands offering sublime or beautiful experiences by transforming the original aesthetic codes of the subculture and the myths around it into something experienceable through the senses, material characteristics, and discursive characteristics, which provide the spectator with cultural pleasure. The myth hence is able to amplify such experiences through the imaginations that they evoke (Kuldova, 2017). From that orientation, I offer a look at the intersection of aestheticization and myth-making.

To sum up, we know that cultural myths are diffused across the market and become marketplace myths (Holt, 2004; Thompson & Tian, 2008); while

actors produce a specific aesthetic attribute for their offerings, they essentially construct an appearance for the marketplace myths. As more and more actors incorporate these “particular market aesthetics,” they become an appeal of the compelling market myths. These experiences are partly created through sensory elements; it can be sound, the play of subdued light, powerful smells, a haptic association manifested in product packaging, or nice-looking logos, advertising, and atmosphere. In other words, myths do not exist as tales that are only shared orally or through text as a communication material, but they are also materialized and embedded, understood in non-verbal ways. This is where the question of staging and performing the myth comes forth. In short, myths are in constant translation and reproduction when actors mobilize mythic content not only through discursive characteristics such as rhetoric strategies and narratives, but also through sensory elements and material characteristics. Myth-making efforts incorporate aesthetic issues in one way or another, and this incorporation has been ongoing and is a key principle in marketing. However, we do not really understand it conceptually yet. This intersection of aestheticization and myth-making serves as an entry point for the thesis.

1.2. Problematization

This thesis argues that aestheticization is a central issue in contemporary (western) consumer cultures, a foundational process through which consumer cultures operate. In this operation, myths are translated and reproduced. Aesthetics here is fundamentally understood as sensual perception (as will be discussed in more detail in section 2.4), and in a consumer society, it pertains to a set of marketing and consumption performances related to sensory experiences and material characteristics of marketing offerings. I examine aestheticization based on the above definition of the concept of aesthetics because it gives an opportunity to understand how contemporary aesthetic practices operate beyond the “art world” and how brand and consumer activities are central in the “experience economy” (see also Pine & Gilmore, 1999). I believe that understanding “the aesthetic” requires attending to both cultural theory and philosophical approaches.

To me, the concept of aestheticization denotes the process in which something is intentionally stylized, formed, and objectified; subsequently, it performs aesthetic ideals based on affective associations with that form. From this understanding, aestheticization considers staging and circulating aesthetic ideals and bringing additional meanings into play as the circulation happens in a consumer society. As such, it relates to how objects or events are organized to achieve expressive power (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). Previous accounts of aestheticization (Welsch, 1996; Featherstone, 2007) posited that this process makes the most mundane forms of consumption

expressive and playful. Although this formulation still mostly holds true, aestheticization also involves “worlding” (Thrift, 2012), that is, specific regimes of visibility. In this way, aestheticization is viewed as a particular kind of marketization that has implications, for example, for the formation of geographical knowledge by shaping culture and place (Andehn et al., 2019). Such worlding has moved on from a focus on producing objects to a focus on producing spaces. As noted by Thrift, “the business enterprise no longer aims to create its object but the world within which the object exists.” (Thrift, 2008, p. 130). Based on that consideration, Baumgarten’s formulation of the field of aesthetics as the science of how things are known via the senses chiefly involves this examination of aestheticization. The resulting consumption is part of what managerial literature portrays as an “experience economy” (Rifkin, 2000), where entertainment, information, technology and lifestyle products, and services mesh with consumer identity projects. The construction of these worlds through the cultivation of somatic attention requires the intervention of consumers and marketers. Marketers, for instance, are increasingly striving to enter into an individualized relationship with consumers. In this way, aestheticization can be seen as worlds in which the passions of consumers become central (Thrift, 2008).

How does a consumer culture operate? Previous studies have shown that consumer culture operates through signs, images, and meanings. Levy (1959) introduces the symbolic aspects of consumption, focused on uncovering the structures of symbolic meaning. Later, McCracken (1986) discusses the meaning transfer model, suggesting that meanings are derived and diffused from sociocultural environments so that cultural meanings flow from producers to consumers with the help of marketing actors, such as designers, producers, advertisers, and consumers’ collective and individual efforts. The meaning transfer model renders goods as tangible forms of meanings that are taken from the abstract world of symbols. This perspective sees consumer culture as operating through the exchange of symbols, although, in McCracken’s view, this exchange is more producer-driven than consumption-driven. The role of consumers is then limited only to understanding the meaning-generation process.

Another explanation of how consumer culture operates comes from Holt (1995). His idea is that consumer culture operates through practices. Here, consuming is conceived as a type of social action where people relate to objects of consumption in various ways. From this perspective, brands are viewed as cultural forms. What does it mean to talk about brands as cultural forms? Simply put, a cultural form is a way of interpreting and organizing the world. Songs, folktales, and movies are cultural forms because they encapsulate ideas about the way people should live, look, and think. To talk about brands as cultural forms is to acknowledge that branding is a specific form of communication, which tells stories and storied forms of myths, in the

context of products and services, addresses people as consumers, and promises to fulfil unmet desires. From this perspective, branding is a specific symbolic form, a particular way of talking about and seeing the world. Hence, a cultural approach to marketing reaches beyond the managerial techniques and involves recognizing the broader constellation of understandings (Arnould et al., 2019).

Acknowledging that both meanings and practices are involved in the operation of consumer culture, I offer aestheticization as one way through which consumer culture operates. The perspective I put forward in this thesis considers aesthetic issues as binding meanings to materials visible in social performances. The performance dimension is related to the embodied and sensual relationship between producers and the material environment. As Deighton (1992) suggests, it incorporates the aspects of an audience, a reference standard, and a framing. It then involves various actors such as marketers who script and provide the props and stage for consumers to enact roles and consumers who perform identity projects (Peñaloza, 2000; Maclaran & Brown, 2005; Borghini et al., 2009). It is plausible to foreground highly sensorial experiences in this operation, which are primarily generated in and through technologies rationally constituted within a specific sociocultural context (Hancock, 2005). Following Deighton's argument that "marketing reveals itself as an intrinsically dramatist discipline" (1992, p. 362), in this way, aestheticization captures how producers incorporate textual and textural features to produce a dramatic tone that strikes a chord for prevailing ideologies to achieve expressive power.

From a myth-making point of view – that is, harnessing myths for various purposes – aestheticization is capable of reorganizing the collective meaning systems understood as mythologies. For example, Baker and colleagues (2004) demonstrate how advertising material, as aesthetic objects, can contribute to the development of collective memory and how value was ascribed from the past. Beverland and colleagues (2020) analyze how branding can craft national identity by triggering a sense of we-ness through the aesthetics of brands. Andersen and his colleagues (2019) dive into the Nordic myth market to analyze how brand actors tap into Nordic values in developing branding strategies. In other words, while myths undergird aestheticization, the aesthetic manifestations, in turn, contribute to such collectively held stories.

Subsequently, aestheticization can be understood as a multi-layered phenomenon that happens on many levels and involves a variety of actors in consumer culture (details can be seen in Paper 1). We know from past research focusing on taste regimes, retro consumption, and spectacular retailing that aesthetics matters for both marketers and consumers (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Brunk et al., 2018). These aestheticization processes not only result in aesthetic experiences but also reactivate countercultural ethos and

the recreation of myth markets around aesthetics. For example, symbolic resources around subcultures and their collective performances are reframed in the process of aestheticization (Goulding & Saren, 2009; Kates, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). At the same time, aestheticized myths can result in the creation of markets. For instance, research has shown how the market for retro brands is shaped by the underlying political dissent between capitalism and socialism (Brunk et al., 2018). But on the surface, the market actors engage in retro aesthetic style in various creative ways. Hence a specific retro market emerges through the political ideology negotiations of commercial myth-makers and consumers seeking to revitalize national identity through consumption. Today, the East German retro market celebrates and aestheticizes the ideals related to this mythic past through brands, stores, and various consumption experiences. These are examples of studies that capture how consumers are encouraged to enjoy aesthetic experiences through consumption, while producers incorporate aesthetics in their commercial endeavours in creative ways that are acceptable to markets; thus, market actors re-engage with certain concepts (Reckwitz, 2017).

The terminology of myth aestheticization springs from a simple yet complex idea: What if something is not “aesthetic” in and by itself, but it is made “aesthetic”? I would like to refine the argument that aestheticization entails a process that typically translates and (re-)produces myths into beautiful, sublime ideals. Accordingly, I propose myth aestheticization as an overall term to denote the process of transforming and reproducing myths as aesthetic ideals for brands and consumers. For instance, when we look at the Volvo studio, a brand concept store where the Volvo brand designs brand-myth experience, we see that brand executives create an immersive, interactive, multisensorial concept store environment, for example with interactive LED installations mimicking the nation’s natural landscape, subdued lights, and VR technologies to produce immersion and enchantment; at the fundamental level, this is done to foster brand mythologization; such installations are performed as storyscapes where the brand is endowed with legitimacy. These elements are further staged to create a particular version of Swedishness that occupies the set of forward-looking myths. ‘Swedishness’ in this case is produced as a profoundly aesthetic and therefore atmospheric phenomenon. Brand actors intend to make the Volvo brand discernible, refined, totally aesthetic, to address the mythic tensions that arose from a need to promote brand identity through national myths. At the same time, this is one of the brand performances in the Nordic myth market which aestheticizes the particular myth of progressive Sweden and idealizes the Swedish lifestyle by giving these storied forms of myths an aesthetic cover and appeal. Likewise, in carefully organized store atmosphere, IKEA gives potential visitors an experience of national design and material imaginaries,

objectifying, constructing, reproducing, and disseminating the myth of Swedish exceptionalism – used as a signifier for Sweden’s high level of social values and norms worldwide – through one-way directional fixed path design which likens the IKEA store to a museum, a form of an archive rather than a warehouse (Lindqvist, 2009). In other words, it becomes certain forms that articulate with resonant values and ideologies (Murphy, 2013). In this case, Swedishness in design, manifested in the objects, often draws on associations centred on a concept of “care” (see Paper 2).

Elsewhere, the brand actors of Harley Davidson, by tapping into the U.S. veteran market, manifest a rebel image through a rebellious spirited multisensory experience design, the growl of an engine, and the sense of the open road winding across America. Consumers of the Harley Davidson brand enjoy this aura of the sublime through embodied outlaw biker aesthetics, the sensory experience and material characteristics of the biker ethos, and a version of the biker-from-hell myth, objectifying and reinforcing part of a rebellion. The sinister figure of the outlaw biker contributes to a myth that they effectively commodify. Hence, the branding and consumption of Harley-Davidson render the specific outlaw myth as a sublime experience by taking cultural pleasure, albeit at a safe distance, in the sublime splendour of the biker’s power of intimidation (Kuldova, 2017). These are some empirical examples of how myths are accommodated, performed, and reproduced in aestheticization. Myths are animated aesthetically.

Consumer cultural actors in this way create and recreate the myth through institutional bodies such as advertising, branding, the creative sectors, and executions such as brand experience design, motion design, and cinematographic advertising production. If markets can be understood as myth markets, and if myths play such an important role for marketers and consumers alike, then how do these actors contribute to the aestheticization of myths? Besides speech and text, one way of performing myths is by staging them, which will be at the centre of my thesis.

The myth-making function in consumer culture has been transposed to the realm of consumption experiences. Myth-makers interweave visual, aural, sonic, dramatic, and literary elements to express mythical concepts that comprise experiences. My interest lies in how myths serve as components in the meaningfulness conveyed through sensory techniques and (re-)produced by brands and consumers. Accordingly, my aim with this thesis is to understand how myths are (re-)produced through aestheticization. Accordingly, the focus is on myth aestheticization. In other words, I am interested in how myths are animated and translated in and through aestheticization. The animation here refers to the works of consumers and producers in bringing cultural meanings and memories to life. The term animation denotes movement and illusion as well, in the contrasts between myth and reality and their references to past and future that consumers and

producers invoke and enact when consuming and producing the aesthetic manifestations (Peñaloza, 2001). In other words, through aestheticization, consumers and producers animate the myths, bringing them to life as mythical and imagined, yet very experienceable.

While scholars analyze many marketing communication materials when assessing mythic stories, the previous understanding of how myths that are animated through aestheticized experiences accommodate the aesthetic version of themselves falls short. Previous studies have mainly considered visuals when talking about aesthetics and myths. In these studies, aesthetic formations of myth have been devalued to the meaning representations that serve to understand consumer culture. Accordingly, my aim in this thesis is to offer a more inclusive approach to aesthetics that goes beyond the mere visual but also includes non-verbal communications and the role of spatial and material atmospheres and textures, alongside language. This thesis, therefore, contributes to understanding aestheticization beyond visual representations and dives into its other potentialities when it comes to an aesthetic animation of myths. Such manifestations (e.g., experienceable formats, glamorous material, and sensory qualities of consumption objects and experiences) have a role in translating culturally resonant stories that often result in value-laden renditions related to those myths (e.g., retro, goth, punk, beautiful, or sublime).

To wrap up, culturally informed consumption and marketing literature informs us about different actors and their strategies and motivations, and hence their involvement in a consumer culture. Studies that revolve around tasteful, immersive, experiential, and aesthetic consumption hint at consumer cultural aestheticization processes (see Paper 1 for details). In the marketing domain, we see that brands aestheticize identities, while in consumer studies, we witness those subcultures playing around with the aestheticized manifestations of cultural meanings (e.g., practices from rural culture are preserved by the consumers; the sublime experience of the biker ethos is performed around branded subculture), and markets bestowed with authenticity, craft, and artisanal versions of consumption practices. In these aesthetically permeated practices, we observe that market actors play a significant role in determining the aesthetic worth and standard of aestheticized practices (Arsel & Bean, 2013), and that consumers relate to aestheticized objects in a range of ways, from having visceral reactions (Joy & Sherry, 2003) to enacting intellectualized discernment in building taste regimes, as for example in the case of craft beer (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2017).

1.3. Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and conceptualize the aestheticization of myth; that is, how myths are (re-)produced as an idealized version of something beautiful and/or something sublime. Let me explain two key terms here. Firstly, by (re-)production, I mean a form of production that emerges when we are giving myths form and shape. In order to exist, myths need to be (re-)produced. What I want to stress by (re-)production is the process of making myths experienceable by incorporating expressive moments of creativity. In that way, aestheticizing a myth means producing it, but slightly changing it along the way. Hence (re-)production denotes a transformation that goes on during production. Secondly, “the beautiful” and “the sublime” are two distinct aesthetic categories. Hence, I would like to explain how I view the beautiful and the sublime in this thesis. The beautiful is most commonly understood in terms of harmony and attraction, at least from the perspective of classical definitions (Gaut & Lopes, 2013). In architecture, for example, we can talk about functional beauty, that is, in its functionality for our own good. I thus keep my definition similar to that of functional beauty. The sublime, on the other hand, entices us to move with it, yet the subject enjoys the magnitude of participating in the sublime, while at the same time being reminded of the vulnerability, that the subject has. Accordingly, these different categories are used to denote various forms of idealized versions of myths, whether it beautified, or sublimified. My emphasis in this thesis, however, is not on an existential quality of beauty or the sublime, but the process of rendering something (here a myth) into something beautiful and/or sublime, an idealized version of itself.

Thus, myth aestheticization denotes the process through which mythic content is reproduced through sensory qualities and material characteristics by brands and consumers, most often understood as beautiful and/or sublime. To achieve the purpose of the thesis, it is necessary to explore the conceptual relationship between aestheticization and myth-making and how it works in consumer society through various domains, such as marketing, advertising, and consumption. It is vital to understand the interrelationship between aestheticization and myth-making, since consumption and marketing activities both reproduce and are also shaped by myths and aesthetic treatments (Levy, 1981; Stern, 1995; Holt, 2003; 2004; 2006; Holt & Cameron, 2010), but how this works through aestheticization has hitherto been under-explored.

This thesis then looks at the relatively dynamic nature of aestheticization that operates beyond the art world. In other words, I look at the involvement of social actors – brand experience design executives, amateur hobbyists of historical re-enactments, retro appreciators – who are involved in the aestheticization of myth, along with the experiences, objects, and places that

serve as the backbone to an understanding of myth aestheticization. I follow a processual perspective in formulating the research question. In doing so, I explain how myths get translated and reproduced in such aestheticization. The research question that accompanies the aim of this thesis is:

How are myths (re-)produced as something beautiful and/or sublime by brands and consumers?

Tackling this purpose and asking this research question is relevant for the following reasons. First, in theoretical terms, this thesis refines previous theorizations on myth-making. It shows the processes of myth aestheticization by focusing on aesthetic work that explains the way in which myths are translated into and (re-)produced through aestheticized market manifestations.

Correspondingly, this thesis answers the recent calls for studying aestheticization in consumer culture in order to understand how consumer cultural actors form and operate in specific symbolic universes (Rokka, 2021); and the role of consumer cultural actors in crafting, shaping, and reproducing the aesthetics of storied forms of myths (Thompson & Tian, 2008) as market manifestations.

Second, in empirical terms, this thesis approaches the production side of aestheticization and investigates different domains of aesthetic work and its ideological endpoints. It expands the concept of aesthetic work to the contemporary presence of artistic work in consumption, service and design practices, including by marketers, architects, and hobbyists. This thesis further expands previous literature on aesthetic consumption and marketing by investigating the conceptual and contextual processes of aestheticization in marketing offerings and the co-constitutive relationship between aesthetics and myth-making. Consequently, brands, consumers, subcultures, and nations are the actors in creating aestheticized manifestations of the myths. It is then plausible to investigate how these consumer cultural actors, such as marketers and consumers, interact with the narrative forms of myths through the process of aestheticization.

Third, the thesis shows how aesthetic theory brings new tools for the communication of mythical content that is capable of capturing audience attention and can be used for advertising practitioners. In particular, the social aesthetics will be increasingly important in the coming years.

1.4. Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is designed as a compilation thesis, consisting of an introductory text and five standalone papers. Together, the papers contribute to exploring the processes of myth aestheticization in marketing. The papers differ in

terms of methods, contexts, and research questions, yet all serve to explore the main argumentation of this thesis. In all of the papers, the aestheticization process and its relation to myth-making are foregrounded through a variety of actors. They investigate how aestheticization works on a conceptual level (Paper 1, Paper 5), how it works from a brand perspective (Paper 2), how it works from a consumer perspective (Paper 3), how it undergirds consumer appreciation of objects as an enchanted rendition of a past (Paper 4), and how aesthetics in the advertising domain reinvigorates the future of advertising as an institutionalized body of aesthetic consumer society (Paper 5) (see Figure 1).

To understand the relationship between myth-making and aestheticization, I first dug into the literature on consumer culture that revolves around tasteful, immersive, experiential consumption and branding. From these studies, I traced the implicit arguments that would serve to map aestheticization as a consumer cultural process. For instance, at the consumer level, I discerned that subculture plays around with the aestheticized manifestations of cultural meanings, such as practices from rural culture being preserved by consumers (e.g., Belk & Costa, 1998), or how the sublime experience of the biker ethos is performed around branded subculture (e.g., Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The studies around brand experience design point out how brands aestheticize identities and myths at the brand level. While these studies explain how myths are one of the fundamental units of operation in organizing consumption and marketing, there are so many questions left unanswered if we only consider the aesthetic dimension of this operation. For example, how can we understand the increasing aestheticization efforts in consumer culture that attend to myth (re-)production? What is the role of technological and ideological structures in engaging in highly aesthetically informed consumption experiences? To answer those questions, I chose two distinct domains and perspectives involved in myth aestheticization: brand-driven and consumer-driven aesthetic work.

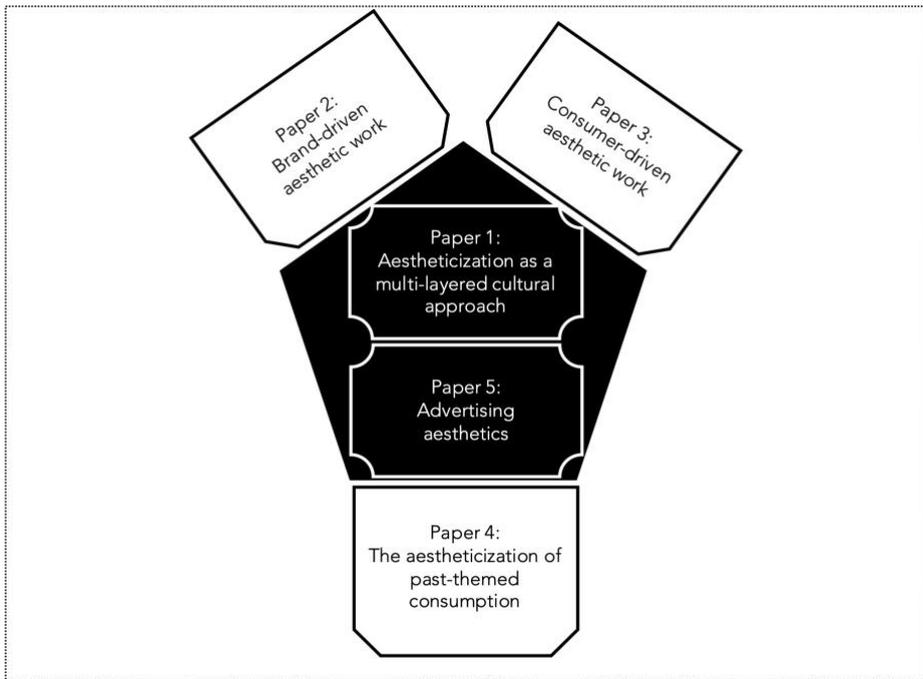


Figure 1: Overview of the thesis

Accordingly, I looked at one of the influential and noteworthy brand actors in Sweden, the Volvo brand. I studied how the branding team aestheticize their offerings, how they tap into aesthetic ideals related to the nation, how they interweave sensory elements and mythic content to produce the aesthetic manifestation of their brand-building efforts, and how producers perform aestheticization. Elsewhere, I studied Viking age re-enactors to investigate how these consumers animate the Viking nostalgia around a particular aesthetic strategy. These empirical contexts helped me to study how myths about past and future are translated and (re-)produced within these marketplace activities. Lastly, I turned back to advertising studies to suggest how these studies have worked with and conceptualized the aesthetic and what are the potential areas for development, for example, in terms of the creative execution of social issues that would serve for practitioners to re-evaluate the established meanings in advertising operations amid changing cultural values. Two things spark my interest in looking at the aesthetic dimension of advertising studies. First, the advertising domain is highly influential when a brand creates a myth, since advertising plays a role in making certain ideologies seem natural. Second, the future directions towards advertising practices resonate with the aesthetic I would like to mobilize in the work of this thesis.

Paper 1, “From ‘aesthetic’ to aestheticization: a multi-layered cultural approach”, is a conceptual paper that shifts the focus of “the aesthetic”

toward the processes that it renders. Accordingly, the paper foregrounds aestheticization processes by looking at consumer research literature that touches upon a variety of forms of aestheticization. It offers a conceptual discussion of consumer-cultural aestheticization. Paper 1 is co-authored with Benjamin J. Hartmann and has been published in the *Journal of Consumption Markets & Culture*.

Paper 2, “From Brand Aesthetics to Brand Myth Aestheticisation”, presents a process of brand-myth aestheticization and unveils how brand actors infuse commercial myths into aesthetic manifestations through three practices: amplifying the ownable, dramatizing the transferable, and tuning the dwellable. This kind of commercial myth-making can transform acute cultural anxieties into aesthetic experiences. Further, it can be seen as a symptom of an aesthetic economy considering the display of emotions and glamorous experiences. This paper is single-authored and has been submitted to the *Journal of Marketing Management*.

Paper 3, “Aestheticising the Viking Myth: Consumer Aesthetic Work in Viking Re-enactment”, foregrounds the role of aesthetics in past-themed consumption, concerning its power in animating the imagined past to build common culture. The specific focus is on the aesthetics of re-enactment, which is influential in reproducing the marketplace mythologies related to Vikings. Accordingly, the paper demonstrates how re-enactment aesthetics contributes to reconstructing the imagined past in past-themed consumption. The findings suggest three aesthetic works that allow an upgrading of the myths of Vikings: excavation, curation, and alignment. The branding implication is then presented to consider the aesthetic strategies for communicating the myths. This paper is single-authored and has been submitted to the *Journal of Business Research*.

Paper 4, “The aestheticization of past-themed consumption”, examines the aestheticization of the “past” by looking at two different contexts that share a theoretical context of the past in consumption and branding. It foregrounds the past aesthetics as a tool for creating enchantment in consumer culture. This paper is co-authored with Katja H. Brunk and Benjamin J. Hartmann and has been published in *Advances of Consumer Research*.

Paper 5, “Advertising Aesthetics”, is conceptual and provides a thematic outline of the research on the domain of advertising aesthetics; it formulates the seven common themes when it comes to conceptualizing aesthetics for advertising. From a myth-making perspective, advertisements are one of the most powerful tools for a brand when creating a myth, as Holt indicates (2003). The paper considers meaningful connections between advertising and ideas from the arts, especially aesthetic theory, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the *Journal of Advertising*. As such, a systematic review of 114 articles published in the journal engages with many conversations that we think will be relevant for advertising theory and practice in the future.

Besides making a renewed connection between advertising and aesthetics, thus synthesizing previous research, a considerable part of the paper is forward-looking and dedicated to directions for future research. The paper is co-authored with Jonatan Södergren and has been submitted to the *Journal of Advertising* for a special issue on Reimagining Advertising Research: 50 Years and Beyond, which is under second-round review at the time I write this thesis preamble.

The remainder of this introductory text is structured as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical contextualization and elaborates on how aestheticization is depicted from different perspectives. After presenting the tenets of the aesthetics and myth-making perspectives, I delineate the role of aestheticization in myth animation. The chapter concludes with a summary. Chapter 3 is on methodology. I present, explain, and discuss my motivations for selecting different contexts in which to study the research issues identified and introduce an overview of the research approach and empirical material. The ethical considerations of this research are elaborated on here. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the analysis of the empirical dataset. Chapter 4 presents the findings and a discussion of the five papers regarding shared research purposes. I discuss how aestheticization is conceptually linked to larger processes of enchantment, authentication, and emplacement as part of marketization processes. I present the conceptual model of myth aestheticization derived from the collective findings. Subsequently, I discuss the implications and contributions of this thesis regarding consumer culture, marketization, marketing, and future research avenues. The five papers are attached as an appendix.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Considerations

In order to understand myth aestheticization from a theoretical point of view, it is necessary to consider consumer cultural perspectives that deal with aestheticization. This is because the myth aestheticization processes I explore and illustrate in this thesis deal explicitly with a commercial producer perspective (Paper 1; Paper 2; Paper 4; Paper 5) and a consumer perspective (Paper 1; Paper 3; Paper 4). Accordingly, in the first part of this section, I highlight the contextual development of perspectives related to marketization and aestheticization. Later, I focus on ways of theorizing aesthetics in marketing and consumption. This navigation helps us understand why aesthetics is so important in understanding consumer culture. Following this, I explain the concept of myth-making. Altogether, these sub-sections can be read as a literature review on aesthetics and myths in marketing theory and practice.

The following sub-sections therefore give an overview of the critical ideas circulating around aesthetic thought and the definition and operationalization of aesthetics in consumer society and hence in marketing practice. This mapping of diverse thoughts onto philosophical aesthetics informs the theoretical approach of this study. Following this, I explain the aesthetic economy and the role of multiple modes of marketing (e.g., advertising, branding) in producing this economy. This part considers it within a consumer society, stressing how aestheticization may generate an atmosphere in such a way as to encourage and facilitate the consumption and reproduction of myths. Such a focus also considers materialities and atmospheres of selling spaces and the working people besides the objects, concepts, and consumer experiences. The chapter ends with a summary of the conceptual framework of this thesis. Altogether, this section argues that aesthetics is central to consumer society and is operationalized to generate allure; for instance, brand aesthetics is viewed as essential for communicating storied forms of myths; likewise, consumption aesthetics is another manifestation of myth-making through, for example, embedding, playing, and reinventing symbolic resources throughout consumption performance. This section pays attention to these phenomena.

2.1. Marketization and the Cultural Sphere

To set the current aim of the thesis in its broader context, I delineate the development of perspectives related to aestheticization and marketization. Marketization connotes the expansion of the market into the lifeworld and the commodification of the social context to achieve the goals demanded by financial markets (Tadajewski, 2020). The central role that aesthetics plays in

creating meaning for marketing is a symptom of the commercialization of the lifeworld and the marketization of the cultural sphere, as previously acknowledged by cultural thinkers and scholars. As such, a range of writers such as Featherstone (2007), Adorno (2013), Lash and Urry (1994), Thrift (2008; 2012), Benjamin (1969), Böhme (1993; 2003), and more recently Ngai (2012; 2020) point out that a key feature of capitalist economies is the increasing role that aestheticization plays in the production, circulation, and consumption of goods and services.

When Wolfgang Iser wrote about aestheticization in 1996, he reported this boom as a process of surface aestheticization leading to a deep-seated one. Likewise, drawing on the legacy of the Frankfurt School, Adorno (2013) and Marcuse (1978) challenge the celebration of aestheticization. On this celebratory side, for Featherstone (1997), the aestheticization of the mundane brings about a positive outcome of a consumer society: socio-cultural aestheticization is taken to represent a celebration of human creativity. While Adorno considers the commodification of culture, Benjamin extends this concept to the culturalization of the commodity through its investment with symbolic meaning and through the aestheticization of consumption (Roberts, 2003). For instance, he argued that capitalism is as busy enchanting the world as disenchanting it. Elsewhere, Ngai (2012) attends closely to the language we use to speak about our aesthetic experiences; her work considers aesthetic forms and judgments under the conditions of late capitalism. Furthermore, Böhme (2003) and Thrift (2008; 2012) foreground contemporary environments that are crowded with signs calling for our attention.

The above perspectives differ in terms of how the commodification of culture and the culturalization of commodities serves to nurture feeling-based aesthetic judgments through the making of atmosphere and how consumers take recourse to aesthetic categories when they make feeling-based aesthetic judgments about commodities and advertisements. The following section attends to this shift – that is, from the commodification of culture to the culturalization of the commodity – and delves into the aesthetic economy based upon the work of Böhme (1993; 2003; 2013).

Böhme (1993; 2003; 2013), after Horkheimer and Adorno, who established the critique of aesthetic production in relation to the economy, exclusively focusing on artistic production and reception, re-evaluated this relationship and suggested a new value category, namely staging value. Staging value refers to the sensory values that products stage through their presence, or, in other words, through the atmosphere they create. The concept of staging value follows Baudrillard's idea about sign value – the value of a good within the system of objects (1993). Sign value matters in understanding how commodities are made desirable along with exchange value. Staging value then considers the aesthetic qualities of the commodity in the context of exchange and use (Böhme, 2001, p. 72). Accordingly, the concept of staging

value is central to the symbolism of consumption, culturally mediated needs, and desires. This staging value of commodities engenders an atmosphere. In advertising practice, for example, commodities are shown as contributing to the atmosphere of the mood of some scenes of living. The sensory and aesthetic atmosphere is at the heart of our experience of a place or a thing.

This value category contributes to exchange value by giving a commodity an appearance that is staged and, in that way, aestheticized. Consequently, a broad range of practices that include visual, spatial, and performative elements are directed towards the creation of value. Aesthetic economy as a term can be explained as articulating how the current commercial and consumer activities foreground aesthetic considerations and sensory engineering (Böhme, 1995; Reckwitz, 2017). Aesthetic economy is different from the term cultural industry. Cultural industry denotes the impact of the economy on the production and reception of art, whereas aesthetic economy looks at the impact of aesthetics on the economy (Böhme, 2016; Adorno, 2013), considering commodities, advertising, and even the production of goods. The role of marketing in this infrastructure is to produce an experienceable manifestation, thereby producing enchantment (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019).

In recent years, scholars have linked the enhanced focus on intensification of sensory appeals, innovation, and creativity to a more profound cultural transformation and development of capitalist forces (Böhme, 2016; Reckwitz, 2017). Aesthetic economy then covers some of the most prominent sectors, such as leisure, entertainment, arts, and heritage (e.g., festivals, galleries, museums, theme parks), lifestyle industries, corporate images, and shopping centers, most predominantly in branding endeavors. The aesthetic economy here considers an economy where aestheticization takes precedence over scientific management (Reckwitz, 2017).

Interrelatedly, Böhme developed the concept of aesthetic work that “designates the totality of those activities which aim to give an appearance to things and people, cities, and landscapes, to endow them with an aura, to lend them an atmosphere, or to generate an atmosphere in ensembles” (2003, p. 72). This concept considers art worlds, yet also extends to the contemporary presence of artistic work in service and design practices. Accordingly, it includes, for instance, architects, marketers, music producers, hobbyists, or people merely decorating spaces.

Atmospheres which are the product of aesthetic work are inherent in any discussion related to aesthetic capitalism (Böhme, 2016; Reckwitz, 2017). After all, atmospheres are part of the aestheticization of society that makes aesthetics a part of economic capitalism. Here we can think about shopping malls, workplace design, architecture, and even political events and protests under such aesthetics. Both Böhme (2016) and Reckwitz (2017) argue that the current societal developments constitute a move towards aesthetic

capitalism. For instance, Reckwitz (2017) argues that novelty and innovation undergird aestheticization, and creativity becomes a kernel for an aesthetic regime of the new, emphasizing the aestheticization of the social. In other words, he considers “creativity dispositif” to restructure society. When we look at marketing practices, it is most often cultural ingredients and aesthetics of the local or the region that become rich symbolic resources for reinventing fields of production and consumption; consequently, a pool of symbolic resources is reworked to become fresh creations (Andersen, 2019).

To sum up, aesthetic economy is about the ubiquity of the aestheticization of experienceable and focuses on aesthetic labour and the production of staging value. Within this economy, aesthetics then becomes a powerful tool to produce feelings and moods. Consumer cultural actors make use of the aesthetic. It relies on myth-makers being able to locate themselves within and generate marketable forms of sensibility that sit with consumers’ desires. Following the call of Biehl-Massal (2013) to use “aesthetics” as complementary to visual semiotic analysis, this thesis puts the spotlight on the strategic and creative works of consumer cultural actors (aesthetic work), material and bodily presences that incorporate aestheticization. Aesthetics, from this perspective, is not separate from function, meaning that the quest for aesthetic experiences drives the search to stage desirable identity projects through consumption. Consequently, this perspective views aesthetic work and its production through the creation of display as central to the aesthetic economy. What follows next is an account of aestheticization in marketing and consumption literature.

2.2. An Account of Aestheticization

The present, according to Sianne Ngai, is “totally aestheticized” (2012, p. 9). Elsewhere, Wolfgang Iser condemns the way “more and more elements of reality are being aesthetically mantled, and reality as a whole is coming to count increasingly as an aesthetic construction to us” (1996, p. 1). Even though the aesthetic is all but absorbed in the commercial, and while previous literature in the marketing and consumption domains (e.g., past-themed consumption, branded subcultures, spectacular retailing) (see Paper 1 for more discussion) implicitly or explicitly argues about the factors that undergird aestheticization, yet various routes to accomplish aestheticization have rarely been singled out as the primary concern in marketing studies. Consequently, little is known about aestheticization and its implications for myth-making. The question is, how are myths animated and (re-)produced through aestheticization?

Previous studies in the culturally informed marketing domain, for instance, have shown that commercial and non-commercial myth-makers celebrate and aestheticize the ideals (e.g., those related to nation or region) and ideologies

that foster connections between different temporal and spatial dimensions (Brunk et al., 2018; Oyedele & Minor, 2012; Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008). Such aestheticization emerges when the nature of cultural values is changing, particularly in rapidly developing economies such as East and Southeast Asia, which appear to be adopting Western symbolism at a rapid rate (e.g., Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008). For instance, Cayla and Eckhardt (2008) investigated how brand managers create regional Asian brands and new mythologies about the Asian region partly through the aesthetics of the branding. Likewise, East German retro brands are shaped by the underlying political dissent between capitalism and socialism, and a specific retro market is emerging based on political ideology and the negotiations of consumer cultural actors who seek to revitalize a national ideology (Brunk et al., 2018). Institutional bodies such as advertising play a role in reflecting a romanticized view of middle-ground politics (Oyadele & Minor, 2012) when they highlight the global market through the overwhelming display of Western aesthetic attributes (e.g., Western music, Western-style design, furnishings, images of Western cities, architecture). These studies reveal that brand actors' creative executions foster new connections, such as transnational, national, and local geographic knowledge (Andehn et al., 2019). For instance, Asia as an imaginary space and a new identity myth for Asian consumers is created by marketers. Today such markets celebrate and aestheticize the ideals related to the mythic past or future. In other words, these studies point to how consumers are encouraged to enjoy aesthetic experiences and consumption, and producers incorporate aesthetics in their commercial endeavours in new and innovative ways that are acceptable to markets; thus, market actors re-engage with certain concepts (Reckwitz, 2017; Böhme, 2013).

The following section presents how we can discern the various aestheticization processes in this interaction. It is analogous to Holbrook and Zirlin's (1985) work where they characterize the artistic-aesthetic communication process from three standpoints: the creative activity of the artists, the work of art, and the reception of art by the public; in this section, I aim to touch upon the various aspects of aestheticization considering the aesthetic issues in the production, organization, and consumption of the aesthetic and the corresponding implications for myth-making. In other words, this multiplicity of meaning and usage of the term through the diverse theories in marketing results in differentiated understandings of aestheticization processes. Such aspects can be seen found elsewhere as artification, creativity dispositif, and atmospheric production, as well as meaning navigations which have an impact on the aestheticization of myths.

2.2.1. Arts and Marketing

One understanding of aestheticization considers the production of artistic output, and hence analyzes aestheticization as blurring the distinction between (high) art and (low) culture (Featherstone, 2007). The common understanding of this phenomenon in the marketing domain is “artification”, also known as the intersection of art and consumption (e.g., Szmigin, 2006) and branding (e.g., Borghini et al., 2013). Artification can be understood in two ways; it can mean the transformation of non-art objects into art objects, which denotes the gradual acquisition of the status of art. Secondly, it can be understood as the modification of non-art objects by art. The main assumption behind artification is the belief in the superior value of art and artworks. This focus looks at the intersection between arts and marketing (Schroeder, 2005; 2006).

Applied to marketing and consumption contexts, artification refers to the strategy of linking a brand, for instance, to the world of art and to artists, through the presence of artworks, the organization of arts events, museum inspired techniques, and the display of art works in the form of commodities (Vukadin et al., 2016). Such works usually put the artists and their artistic outputs forward to as a way of analyzing commercial products. For instance, Borghini and colleagues (2013) juxtapose street art and advertising practices and analyze the implications of the rhetorical practices generated by street artists for creating more effective, contemporary, and socially sensitive advertising. Agencies can borrow the patterns of practices and the communication codes elaborated by street artists to nurture creative processes and stimulate future campaigns. Cuny and colleagues (2020), for instance, noted that brands crave creativity from artist-brands collaborations concerning product design, package, logo, and communications, and at the same time, consumers’ brand evaluations are inspired by artists and artworks. For instance, fashion designers have become more important in orchestrating the entire system of luxury consumption (Dion & Arnould, 2011). Taking a subject focused perspective – here it refers to consumers – on aesthetic experience, Joy and Sherry (2003) introduced the term embodied imagination, and Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) introduced consumers as aesthetic subjects to denote a state of being in which consumers revealing their true inner selves can be seen as one type of authenticating act (Arnould & Price, 2000). From this perspective, aesthetic experiences have nothing to do with the issue of whether objects are aesthetic, although the contexts were limited to art-related consumption. It has been suggested that this approach may have the most explanatory power to examine aesthetics in consumer experiences. The perspective foregrounds the experiential realm which, in consumer research, deals with the aesthetic experience (Joy & Sherry, 2003). First, the experiential realm, such as pleasure, fantasies, and fun aspects were

highlighted; later, a strong sensory response became a focus for this type of research (Joy & Sherry, 2003). However, no definitive features of aesthetic experiences have been identified (Charters, 2006).

From this perspective, aesthetic experiences emanate from the realm of “art” and the “art world”. The definition given by Blackburn (2016) is mostly used to define aesthetics as “the study of the feelings, concepts and judgements arising from our appreciation of the arts or of the wider class of objects considering moving, or beautiful, or sublime’ (Blackburn, 2016, p. 8). This definition serves as a relevant entry point for such an analysis, because it has echoes in one of the first marketing papers on consumer aesthetics which suggests that it is the “presence or absence of beauty” which is claimed as the core of aesthetics (Levy & Czepiel, 1974, p. 387). Such an interpretive frame for approaching a “wider class of object” is deemed helpful in understanding the aestheticization process on the level of meaning (Dagalp & Hartmann, 2021; Bode, 2010), although aesthetics should not be confined only to the category of beautiful or the aspect of visual (see Paper 5 for more discussion).

Artification as a process is attentive mainly to the visual dimension of aesthetics in consumer society, and hence has a strong relationship to current myth-making efforts in commercial realms, most often seen in luxury marketing (Joy, 2022). Additionally, like works of art, such branding practices pose an aura of authenticity which surrounds the original work, endowing it with qualities of uniqueness, distance, and otherness (Brown et al., 2003; Dion & Arnould, 2011). From a myth-making perspective, artful branding can be auratic (Benjamin, 2002; Heilbrunn, 1999; Björkman, 2002) and fosters brand mythology around “charisma” of the product or of the founder, some sort of exceptional quality, a soft power giving birth to an authoritative voice (Weber, 1996 in Dion & Arnould, 2011).

In terms of the production of the aesthetic, previous literature has also pointed out the importance of atmospheres and managerial attempts to harness the aesthetics, as such marketing becomes one of the prominent areas where atmospheres have been consciously produced (e.g., Kotler, 1973; Biehl-Missal & Saren, 2012). As a symptom of this development, in the marketing domain, Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999) coined the term experience economy, focusing on creating a memorable experience in the business sphere. They argue that businesses must create memorable experiences which become the very product that is marketed and consumed. The assumption is that there is an increased dramatization of every sphere, from car sales to museums and politics, and an increase in the creative class.

Elsewhere Schmitt and his colleagues (1995) define marketing aesthetics as “a company’s visual (and otherwise aesthetic) output in the form of packaging, logos, trade names, business cards, company uniforms, buildings, advertisements, and other corporate elements that have the potential of

providing aesthetic gratification” (1995, p. 83). Following this, Schmitt and Simonson (1997) elaborate on a range of techniques and practices aimed at generating particular aestheticized relationships between consumers and commercial offerings. This is achieved, for instance, through the use of images, sounds, smells, and textures that, in turn, give an opportunity to impose aesthetic themes on the brands to “express corporate and brand characteristics” (1997, p. 124). This perspective foregrounds an appropriate site of managerial intervention and manipulation, as has emerged as a legitimate realm for commercial endeavours. The focus here is to diminish the aesthetic to a series of variables (discursively knowable and materially quantifiable entities) subject to manipulation. This managerial realm considers generating very particular aestheticized identities for brands.

However, the implication of this trend is beyond the managerial realm; such an imperative of experience, sensory management, in short, an aesthetic economy, also attends to channelling the working subjects (e.g., hobbyists, service providers) into finding creative ways of producing allure. Commonly, one crucial part of marketing practices revolves around finding a way to style offerings through sensory and design elements to look pretty, distinct, and engaging, and around presenting and communicating them in exciting and favourable settings.

To summarize, giving products an aesthetic appeal is essential for managerial actors, particularly when introducing a “new meaning” to the market. When a “newness” is introduced to the market through aesthetic manifestations, other market players incorporate and reinforce similar aesthetic standards. This has been the case, for instance, for the electric vehicle market. Brands such as Tesla, Polestar, and even Harley Davidson follow similar sound designs, mimicking the engine’s sound but in a distinct way, with similar shapes that distinguish the design of branded products from the rest of the market. These actors collectively attend to creating the future meanings of the automotive market by forming a marketplace myth of electrification. These marketing designs then also build up similar aesthetics that increasingly foster the look of the electrified vehicle market, as in the case of the low pitched noise of the electric motorcycle, analogous to the feeling of switching on a video game. When these aesthetic treatments become more and more similar, they also reinforce a specific aesthetic regime for the market. In market aesthetics, an aesthetic aims to refer to particular standards for judging things (Becker, 1978) or even reaches the points of collective understanding of “aesthetic excellence”. In turn, as more and more actors incorporate these “particular market aesthetics” and activate these immersive experiences, they become an appeal to the compelling market myths. There exists implicit evidence of a process. These experiences are partly created through aesthetics; it can be sound, the play of subdued light, powerful smells, a haptic association manifested in product packaging,

or minimal logos, advertising, and atmosphere. In other words, myths do not exist as tales that are only shared orally or through text as communication material, but they are also aestheticized and understood in non-verbal ways.

2.2.2. Aesthetic Work

When we look at myth aestheticization, aesthetic work is central. Aesthetic work describes, from Böhme's (2013) point of view, the efforts that actors are involved in and that they perform with the intention of giving things, surroundings, and people certain qualities that set them apart as something special with a power of appeal. Reckwitz (2017) recently foregrounded creativity dispositif as what makes the establishment of aesthetic novelty in society. Creativity dispositif denotes a particular constellation of sociality composed of producers, audiences, things, and elements that manage attention. From that angle, Reckwitz (2017, p. 15) defined the process of aestheticization as being how "the segment of aesthetic episodes and aesthetically oriented or permeated practices expand within society in general, at the expense of exclusively non-aesthetic practices." The decisive factor for the aesthetic is not related to whether the object being perceived appears beautiful or ugly, whether the experience is harmonious or dissonant, or whether the attitude is introverted or joyful. The aesthetic he considers is a background element, of which the creativity dispositif is one particular form "that territorialized the floating process of aesthetic" (Reckwitz, 2017, p. 12). Accordingly, the creative dispositif "reorients the aesthetic (sense perception) towards the new while simultaneously orienting the regime of the new towards the aesthetic" (Reckwitz, 2017, p. 12). His definition then constitutes the intersection of aestheticization and the social regime of novelty.

Such aestheticization hence foregrounds the creative activity. Aesthetic work includes producers, material presences, and aesthetic codes in producing, for instance, atmosphere (Böhme, 1993; Reckwitz, 2017; Thrift, 2008). The body is seen as the locus of meaning making processes in organizing the creativity. In the consumption domain, carefully designed marketing environments are amenable to that approach. For instance, Biehl-Massal and Saren (2012) analyzed the atmosphere in Starbucks, where they foregrounded the visual dimensions, colours, and logos that give the brand a presence. In other words, such images have an impact on people via their materiality and presence, hence going beyond the mere signs or corporate symbols.

Recent marketing studies point to the inclusion of material and sensory elements, spaces and interactions that suggest an organization around the aesthetic. Such works look at organizational artefacts for their capacity to create meaning and sensory and aesthetic experiences (Strati, 1999; Carr & Hancock, 2003; Taylor & Hansen, 2005). These studies have called for new

approaches to analyzing how the meaning of organizational artefacts, and particularly of their imagery, is created and disseminated. On that note, Biehl-Massal (2012) points out that imagery is imbued with aesthetic meaning and can be expected to create an atmosphere which influences people on an emotional level beyond mere rational understanding. Such a perspective foregrounds aesthetics as complementary to visual analysis, acknowledging that visual encounters are more than manifestations of meaning. Accordingly, one of the aesthetic concepts, namely “atmosphere”, is employed as complementary to visual analysis. Artefacts are thus seen not only as a system of signification but primarily as vehicles of aesthetic experiences as they create atmospheres. And in turn, atmospheres have an impact on consumers at bodily and emotional levels. Gagliardi (1996, p. 575) says artefacts “influence our perception of reality, to the point of subtly shaping beliefs, norms, and cultural values.” Such a perspective emphasizes aesthetics in terms of sensory perception (Biehl-Massal & Saren, 2012).

From a myth-making point of view, such aestheticization facilitates the emplacement of myths. The notion of aesthetic work is directly linked to the marketing studies. For instance, the Nike town retail experience with multi-sensory simulations helps to reinforce brand meanings as imaginable for consumers (Peñaloza, 1998). Aesthetic work is no longer concerned with the production of commodities but with their staging of people, or a corporate image. What literature alludes to is the managerial intervention and manipulation of regimes of meaning and action. In other words, an aesthetic experience is frequently generated in and through rationally constituted practices and technologies within a particular socio-cultural context (Hancock, 2005).

2.2.3. Consumption of Aestheticized Objects and Meanings

Aestheticization is also achieved by collectively navigating objects’ meaning and status (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry 1989; McCracken, 1986; 1988; Merkel, 2006). This perspective focuses on the meaning potentials of object-subject relations arising from their aesthetic value (Baker et al., 2004). Consumer research scholars concerned with consumer culture have investigated the role of objects (e.g., Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001) and examined the relationship between objects and meaning (e.g., McCracken, 1986; Mick & Oswald, 2006). Therefore, this approach is amenable to the interpretivist perspective as people can find objects aesthetically valuable since they evoke the autobiographical past or symbols of collective struggles (Brunk et al., 2018; Dagalp et al., 2020). However, whether the perspective is communal or personal, the collectors view the objects as connections to other temporalities such as ‘the past’ (see, e.g., Belk, 1991). Similarly, consumers produce art from found objects, such as discarded Budweiser beer bottle tops, which are

used in artistic creations sold at juried art shows. In addition, promotional materials are found in a plethora of museums, renowned venues for sacralizing material objects (Belk et al., 1991; Merkel, 2006). Consumers make these decisions as they interact with the material artefacts of society and its cultural institutions (e.g., advertising). As a result of this constructive nature of aestheticization, meanings and memories are made dynamic (Brunk et al., 2018; Thompson & Tian, 2008; Kates, 2002; Baker et al., 2004). For instance, Baker and colleagues analyzed how mass-produced material objects can reach aesthetic status through metamorphosis.

The central premise of this stream is that the ‘aesthetic’ value and meaning of objects can change over time (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989; McCracken, 1986; 1988). And consumer cultural institutions (e.g., advertising) can contribute to the development of collective memory and transform the objects into aesthetic objects from dull, stigmatized, and despicable to collectible, significant, and hip (e.g., old beer cans become collectors’ items, food becomes significant). Such aestheticization also stresses the importance of contextual factors such as market legitimation vis-a-vis object design (Wilner & Huff, 2017). For instance, Merkel (2006), in her analysis of changing meanings in East German consumer culture, suggests that “Ostalgia” is embedded in a discursive field and such symbols of the system, that were initially associated with terms like command economy, have become encapsulated by new generations’ use of design, brands, and slogans of the products in the expression of their everyday aesthetics. In other words, she explained the shift of interpretation from stigma to cult.

Drawing on eclectic theoretical sources, I understand that aestheticization may be thought of as a system that embrace (1) sensual, (2) conceptual, and (3) contextual dimensions similar to what Folkmann (2018) conceptualizes when he looks at the aesthetics of design culture. Such elements appear when something (e.g., a brand, a place, a consumption object, or an experience) is aestheticized. This way of looking at aestheticization unpacks how aesthetics is influential in creating the meaning of the practices of objects, but also in the wider implication of the circulation of the aesthetic on a cultural level. Consequently, in this thesis, I argue that aestheticization is a consumer cultural process, involving various actors, such as consumers, marketers, designers, and supra-firm actors (e.g., NGOs, activists, states) and their diverse activities. The basic premise of aestheticization is transforming the nonaesthetic (objects, places, concepts) into the aesthetic. While there seem to be various layers of aestheticization, these actors perform towards an ideological end. Next, I will zoom into the literature dealing with myth-making in a consumer cultural research domain.

2.3. An Account of Myth-making

The idea that marketers and consumers engage with the production of myth aestheticization is central in this thesis. From the perspective of an aesthetic economy, we see various actors such as marketers, expert agencies, consumers, NGOs, and even state actors who work to create appealing forms and memorable experiences around the aestheticized offerings. These offerings are most often coupled with the desire of achieving meaningful experiences. It is then plausible to connect such works with the myth-making efforts of these actors. As Thompson and Tian (2008, p. 296) put it, commercial myth-making refers “to the efforts of advertisers, brand strategists, tourist promoters, and other marketing agents to situate their goods and services in culturally resonant stories that consumers can use to resolve salient contradictions in their lives (Holt, 2004) and to construct their personal and communal identities in desired ways (Thompson, 2004)”. These market actors attend and compete in myth markets. By attending a myth market, commercial myth-makers evoke updated versions of cultural myths or new mythic ideals that hail from multiple cultural myths through this process. As noted by Holt (2003, n.p.), when “an ideology loses its relevance, people lose faith in its tenets. Experimentation ensues, historical ingredients are reworked, and society finally arrives at a new consensus”. For instance, in her study of cattle trade shows, Peñaloza (2000) examines how marketers forge links between images and mythic narratives with their products and services, and in doing so marketers contribute to culture’s very production. Accordingly, myths that typically give a backdrop to the meaning-making practices of consumer cultural actors provide culturally resonant stories for commercial myth-makers to craft objects, concepts, and experiences around these resonant, believable stories with the desire to become relevant to their target audience.

Knowing that myths here have been centrally constructed to with an understanding of the relationship between marketing and culture, culturally informed marketing studies have extensively investigated the processes and practices through which consumption activities, objects, and brands become channels for marketplace myths (Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; Giesler, 2008; Holt, 2004; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Kozinets, 2001; McCracken, 2005; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Thompson & Tian, 2008; Zhao & Belk, 2008). One perspective explains how cultural contradictions are at the heart of marketing strategies that build brand myths (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron, 2010). Another stream considers consumer perspectives to shape brand meanings (Arsel & Thompson, 2011; Diamond et al., 2009; Kristensen et al., 2011). The last stream looks at the macro-cultural construction of brand meanings (Giesler, 2012; Brunk et al., 2018; Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). These commercial perspectives focus on the actor and its efforts at

articulating the myths, to be interpreted by consumers in their turn. Hence, commercial myth-making is the effort to appropriate myths to disseminate ideologies (Crockett & Davis, 2016). While cultural branding and myth-making have become constructs that have gained extensive attention in branding and consumer research, there have been limited empirical studies on the processes of myth-making (Tillotson & Martin, 2014). Particularly, far less is known about commercial myth-making (Crockett & Davis, 2016). Often, myths are infused in consumption through experienceable formats. Therefore, it becomes important to explore aestheticization on a variety of different levels that explicitly foreground such processes.

One way to create compelling stories is by making the stories experienceable through oral or written accounts of myths. However, storied forms of myths do not necessarily only become experienceable through text and speech. Video games are one example where the storied form of myths can become experienceable other than through written forms, even when written forms are incorporated in the play. They are, however, not the main elements. For instance, in *God of War*, players can take on the role of mythic figures through graphics, sounds, music, and moving images. While players have control, they dwell in emotionally charged and sublime encounters, albeit at a distance, during the game, which inhibit the character's emotional worlds. Or think about *hygge*, the Danish form of coziness, which has resulted in the successful commercial staging of a particular lifestyle (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). It turns out that the lifestyle trend offers a path to authentic Danish contentment or a way of "self-exoticization" (Munch, 2017). After all, sensory appeals are becoming ever more prominent in consumer culture (Postrel, 2003). For instance, in the recent work of Canniford, Riach, and Hill (2018), the senses represented a political phenomenon capable of encoding assemblages with meaning, power, and resistance. As they are intentionally formed, such experiences also involve the experiencing of storied forms of myth. These are some empirical examples of how myths are reproduced in non-verbal ways.

Besides such commercially driven myth-making, the literature acknowledged myth-making from a consumer perspective. Marketplace myths here are commonly conceptualized as cultural resources that attract consumers to the consumption of an activity or brand. These marketplace myths are both culturally and commercially imposed on consumers. However, this does not mean that consumers do not recreate such myths. Instead, the involvement of consumers is essential for reproducing myths in consumer culture and for myths to continue to exist. Thus, previous research suggests that consumers are often drawn to a consumption activity or a brand by marketplace myths (Thompson, 2004). At the same time, new marketplace mythologies are formed when consumers articulate power discourses in a simultaneous process of resistance and subordination (Thompson, 2004). For

instance, devoted Star Trek fans collectively celebrate the utopian ideals of Star Trek. Likewise, Harley Davidson bikers associate themselves with the brand's core meanings of rugged individualism through sublime experiences (Kuldova, 2017). These people mythologize other market participants to negotiate and manage various marketplace tensions. Consumers here attend to myth-making in their desire to accomplish authentication, as Arnould & Price (2000) argue for the techniques that individuals use to cope with the salient contradictions as such individuals actively and creatively carve out their identities. From that perspective, authenticating acts – those self-referential behaviours and authoritative performances – including cultural traditions and rituals, are prevalent consumer mechanisms for constructing the narratives of self-identity and relationship to community. These authenticating acts and authoritative performances can be read as consumers' active engagement in reproducing myth. For example, creative consumption can provide the foundation for authenticating acts. Or, as Arnould & Price (2000) point out, invocations of imagined traditions, e.g., village making, can be an example of authoritative performances that also lead to the redefinition of the past in the interest of creating a shared present. Eventually, such consumer mechanism couple with the myth-making efforts we see in the consumption domain.

The idea of the myth market is central to my argument. Since myths are so pervasive in a consumer culture and so central for marketing activities and for consumers, previous research has suggested that brands, consumers, and subcultures feed into myth markets. Then, brands compete in mass-mediated myth markets. Holt defines a myth market as “an implicit national conversation in which a wide variety of cultural products compete to provide the most compelling myth” (2003, p. 44). A myth market includes various actors that constantly seek out mythical constructs to mine innovative styles, meanings, and ideals (Holt, 2002; Arsel & Thompson, 2011). In other words, consumer cultural actors attend to a myth market when they offer stories. And the success of the commercial activities depends on delivering the most compelling story rather than the most compelling products or services. Many cultural products compete to provide the most compelling myth within a myth market. Consumers valorize myths; correspondingly, commercial actors do not only market a product, but they are also marketing myths. For instance, Thompson and Tian (2008) found that magazines in the American South essentially compete in a myth market, where they are crafting myths about what it means to be a Southern American: either more redneck or more progressive. Scholars have also mapped how brand actors in Nordic countries are tapping into symbolic resources in very diverse ways in the Nordic context, with an increasing trend towards labelling the works as “New” (Andersen et al., 2019). Yet overall, they evoke a set of Nordic values emanating from an imagined past of the Viking and Norse legacy and the

myth of the Nordic natural and social utopia (Andersen et al., 2019). Commercial myth-makers such as magazine editors in the American South or the brand managers and advertising team of Volvo's "Made by Sweden" campaign creatively find ways to bring the myths alive. Such examples can be understood as marketplace activities where a particular myth is being reproduced through aesthetic work.

While actors work on creating specific aesthetic effects and designs for their offerings, they essentially produce manifestations for specific myths to be consumed. From previous literature we know that cultural myths are diffused across the market and become marketplace myths (Holt, 2004; Thompson & Tian, 2008). An alternative implication here would seem to be that myths are animated through sensory and material manifestations and enter the realm of experience, which can be seen as a product of aesthetic work (Böhme, 2003). However, in marketing and consumption research, the literature on aesthetics has primarily ignored myth-making as the focal concern, and the literature on cultural branding and myth-making has not acknowledged the material and sensory part of aestheticization. Consequently, the lack of attention to these domains will be main contribution of this compilation thesis. Accordingly, this thesis zooms into the different domains of consumer cultural actors to give insights into the processes of myth aestheticization.

To sum up, I discern from previous research that myths typically give a backdrop to the meaning-making practices of consumer cultural actors that include consumers, marketers, cultural producers, and political actors such as states. One way to create compelling stories is by making the stories experienceable through oral or written accounts of myths. However, storied forms of myths do not necessarily only become experienceable through text and speech. Myths, most importantly, need to be animated in order to exist. In other words, they need to be constantly reproduced and performed in consumer culture. The contemporary presence of myths that are not purely about text and language is an outcome of the aesthetic works of such actors. Hence, myths attend to marketing activities through the aestheticization process resulting in enchantment.

So far, I have explained the idea that myths are important for consumer culture and revisited the argument that they need to be animated to be relevant to society. I have also suggested that myth undergird aestheticization, and that this co-constitutive relationship results in the reproduction of myths. What we do not know, however, is how myths are translated through the process of aestheticization. In this thesis, I explore the way in which myths are animated and translated into something beautiful and/or sublime by brands and consumers.

2.4. The Aesthetic in This Thesis

This section explains how I view “the aesthetic” in this thesis. When formulating this thesis project, one claim was aesthetic experiences and judgments are increasingly formed in consumer culture. That thought is in line with the way my readings suggest that the present is totally aestheticized (Ngai, 2012; Reckwitz, 2017). Hence, I believe that understanding the aesthetic requires attending to both cultural theory and philosophical approaches. Cultural theory serves to understand the production-consumption dynamics of (aesthetic) meaning. The philosophical grounding of the term allows us to understand the mechanisms, among them judgment, experience, and category, connected to aesthetic theory (see Paper 5 for more discussion on philosophical aesthetics). In this section, I dig into some thoughts on aesthetics and the related concepts.

A common definition of aesthetics in consumer research is “the study of the feelings, concepts, and judgments arising from our appreciation of the arts or of the wider class of objects considered moving, or beautiful, or sublime” (Blackburn, 1994, p. 8; Charters, 2006; Levy & Czepiel, 1974). As such, one of the first marketing papers on consumer aesthetics suggests that it is the “presence or absence of beauty” (Levy & Czepiel, 1974). Following this, the literature focuses on aesthetics as the experience of objects, and it provides the consumer with an element of beauty, or what is emotionally and/or spiritually moving (Charters, 2006). From this definition, the aesthetic realm typically has to do with beauty and the emergent feelings people get from appreciating art or art-like objects. This definition echoes the common understanding and operationalization of aesthetics in the marketing field. It is concerned with aesthetic judgments and categories such as the beautiful, the sublime, or the tasteful. Here, language and semiotics are used to understand such judgments.

Although the marketing domain often equates aesthetics with beauty, this definition is somewhat limited. Aesthetics may be ugly or even disturbing (Tzanelli & Yar, 2021), or, as Postrel (2003) noted, aesthetics may employ novelty, allusion, or humour rather than beauty. Accordingly, aesthetics as such does not dictate to any category, yet value-laden aesthetics spills over into mainstream culture as people outside their subcultures adopt purely aesthetic elements, usually in sanitized forms (Postrel, 2003). Aesthetics is not a synonym for pretty or refined. After all, the marketing field has been expanded, and we can talk about other aesthetic categories such as ugliness, cuteness, interesting, primitive, cottage-core, retro, or Swedish aesthetics (see Paper 5).

In this thesis, I set up the early definition of aesthetics to incorporate the enplaced nature of myth-making efforts. This definition is concerned with “aesthesis”, that is, the sensual perception of reality, and foregrounds the

aesthetic presence and atmosphere of an artwork. The word aesthetics is derived from the Greek word *aisthetikos*, meaning pertaining to sense perception, and the term was first introduced in the late 1700s by German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten to emphasize the experience of art as a field of knowledge in which content is communicated in a sensory form, as opposed to strict reasoning or logic; he considered that aesthetic experiences should not be collapsed into science and reason. To put it another way, aesthetic experiences foreground sensory apprehension, and sensuous and corporeal perceptions (Joy & Sherry, 2003).

On that note, Postrel (2003, p. 6, italics added) writes:

‘Aesthetics is the way we communicate through the senses. It is the art of creating reactions without words through the look and feel of people, places, and things. Hence, aesthetics differs from entertainment that requires cognitive engagement with narrative, wordplay, or complex, intellectual allusion. While the sound of poetry is arguably aesthetic, the meaning is not. Spectacular special effects and beautiful movie stars enhance box-office success in foreign markets because they offer universal aesthetic pleasure; clever dialogue, which is cognitive and culture-bound, doesn’t travel as well. *Aesthetics may complement storytelling but is not itself narrative.* Aesthetics shows rather than tells delights rather than instructs. The effects are immediate, perceptual, and emotional.’

Understanding how the impact of aesthetics complements storytelling becomes crucial in unpacking the process of myth aestheticization when we consider the increasing attention towards design issues in consumer society. For instance, mythic content used by brands may amplify the consumption experience of the sublime through the imaginary that they evoke. Here we need to visit the idea of myths being ambiguous and emplaced (Brown et al., 2013). This ambiguity factor explains why some myths are more prevalent for consumers and are integral to understanding outstanding branding and consumer meaning-making, as well as myth appeal more generally. Accordingly, geography is significant because myths tend to be animated in certain locations and settings. In other words, myth-making most often requires “geo-temporal” characteristics to be performative. The literature on consumer culture theories has pointed out that powerful myths are emplaced (Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008; Ustuner & Thompson, 2012; Kozinets, 2001). It follows that the myths are found in geographically and temporally circumscribed contexts. Allowing consumers to see what they want to see enables them to be what they want to be (Diamond et al., 2009).

Seeing aesthetics from this perspective further opens up the possibility of dealing with the broader range of aesthetic manifestations, including the

realm of marketing (Böhme, 1993; Biehl-Massal, 2013). Hence, a more open account of aesthetics makes it possible to think about non-art objects as generating the same kinds of aesthetic and non-rational pleasures as art objects do; for instance, an atmosphere imbued with minimalist aesthetic elements, white spaces, or local colours can evoke the feeling of Swedishness in a very condensed way, which is the case in the Volvo brand mythologization. In such brand efforts I recognize that an atmosphere that is at least partly “staged” through the intentional efforts of brand actors, such as through the arrangement of lights and the use of branded materials. Hence, what animates myths relates very much to the staging of them through the aesthetic work of consumer cultural actors.

In a consumer culture, such work also incorporates commercial signs and symbols such as brands, logos, and concept store designs. Encountering such commercial objects or embodied experiences informs our understandings and thus our judgments. One example of such aesthetic inspired marketing practice is seen when branding actors render originality a central ingredient in the production of such effects. For instance, BMW has worked with visual designers and the composer Hans Zimmer to create an immersive audio-visual experience that is inspired by monolithic design philosophy – a holistic approach to the interior and exterior design of the product. Such animations interpret the electric spirit as sensory work with art and technology. The lines of the product become futuristic, which, combined with movement, form, and light, turns it into a spatial experience. Sensory appeals are even more intensifying. From this perspective, aesthetics is immersive; this may result in tasteful rendition, and its social connotations are not given but negotiable.

At the same time, most branding activities work to create beautiful appearances. But from an aesthetic perspective, how we can understand these categories of beautiful and sublime? Beauty, alongside art and taste, is one of the main subjects of aesthetics and is central to aesthetic experiences. Beauty in philosophical accounts was regarded as harmony (De Clercq, 2013) and a source of pleasure. In other words, an object is considered beautiful if perceiving it is accompanied by aesthetic pleasure. For Plato, beauty is the rudimentary definition of aesthetically pleasing. Objects that are typically regarded as beautiful include landscapes, sunsets, humans, and works of art. In other words, beauty is a positive aesthetic category that contrasts with ugliness as its negative counterpart. Kant argues that experiencing beauty is a doubly reflective process. To him, by exercising our powers of judgment (imagination and understanding) over the spatial and temporal form of the object and through the feeling of pleasure, we acknowledge the beauty of an object. Beauty, in consumer and marketing research, is a ubiquitous topic of study (see Paper 5 for more discussion).

In addition to beauty, aesthetic theory emphasizes the sublime as an essential aesthetic category. Sublime, in the ordinary use of language, means

noble and morally positive. However, the meaning used by literary theorists and aestheticians differs from the meaning associated with the sublime and sublime phenomena (Holmqvist & Pluciennik, 2002). In Edmond Burke's theory of the sublime, it is defined as the aesthetics of situations in which some elements are felt either as painful or as threatening but from a position of a safe distance. Kant refers to the sublime in nature when he refers to the "wide ocean disturbed by a storm, the starry heavens, mountain peaks rising to great heights, and deep chasms with raging torrents" (in Gaut & Lopes, 2000, p. 51). Accordingly, we experience the sublime when reflecting upon extremely powerful objects and phenomena that are capable of exciting fear. He argues that nature might make us recognize our physical impotence and simultaneously reveal our power of resistance. Lyotard uses this category as a tool to describe an abstract painting (a form of art ignored by Kant), associating it with a notion of nostalgia and allusiveness. Lyotard, in his analysis of new artistic currents which either come back to old artistic formulas or blend them with the modernist tradition (Holmqvist & Pluciennik, 2002), condemns the arts for not having the beautiful as their main concern anymore, but something which has to do with the sublime. The sublime bears emotional associations: it can evoke what is spiritual without referring to what is visible. The sublime experience is an encounter of the subject with something beyond her/his imagination. The sublime, from these accounts, can be understood as a mode of power and ideology (Kuldova, 2007). In order for an ideology to be effective, a certain cynical distance from this ideology is necessary, a distance that makes us fall for it, a distance not unlike the one necessary for the sublime experience. The distance thus appears fundamental to an experience of pleasure, particularly to the sublime experience.

How does the "sublime" work? The imagination amplifies the feeling of threat and thus our sublime experience (Kuldova, 2007). In a recent treatise on ideology in consumption, the scholars suggest that the consumption ideology involves the sublimation of consumption (Schmitt et al., 2022). Sublimation refers to turning ordinary urges into more cultural and consumable forms. In the context of consumer research, that process turns objects of consumption (products and/or brands) into sublime objects by ascribing a personality to brands, anthropomorphizing products and brands, and stylizing ads as art. As noted by Schmitt and colleagues, "when consumers turn products and brands into sublime objects of desire, they create ideological fantasies about the desire to consume" (Schmitt et al. 2022, p. 6). The sublimation of consumption, on this account, seems to be dealing with the ideological end of the aestheticization of myth, that is, enchantment.

However, aestheticization does not only consider rendering something as beautiful or sublime, as the classical definition of aesthetics suggests. As such, aestheticization can also take its energy from minor aesthetic categories

such as cuteness, zaniness, and ugliness (Ngai, 2012). Recently, cultural theorist Sianne Ngai argued that aesthetic experience has been transformed by the hyper commodified, information-saturated, and performance-driven conditions of late capitalism. To Ngai, “to aestheticize something is not necessarily to ‘idealize’ or even revere it” (2012, p.3). Instead she proposes the zany, the cute, and the interesting as minor aesthetic categories within the aestheticized society.

Cuteness, as the aestheticization of powerlessness, whereby its epitome is “an undifferentiated blob of soft doughy matter” (Ngai, 2012, p. 64), is described as “a ‘soft’ aesthetic emerging from the sphere of mass culture as opposed to high art and explicitly about the appeal of powerlessness as opposed to power” (ibid., p. 58). Unlike the sublime, cuteness erases the distance and the feeling of “awe” into an affection for the cute (“awww!”). Cuteness serves for “what Hannah Arendt calls the ‘modern enchantment with small things’” (in Ngai, 2012, p. 3). Cuteness has previously been studied in marketing and consumer research focusing on anthropomorphism (e.g., brand mascots).

Another aesthetic category of the interesting is defined by Ngai as “that of ascribing value to that which seems to differ, in a yet-to-be-conceptualized way, from a general expectation or norm whose exact concept may itself be missing at the moment of judgment” (p. 112). The characteristic thing about the interesting is its lack of distinguishing characteristics. The interesting links seemingly heterogeneous agencies together, thus facilitating the circulation of ideas, objects, and signs. In addition, if something sparks our interest, it is often because it challenges the assumptions of common sense. The aesthetic category of the interesting also points to how a work can still be perceived as somewhat “good” even when it is largely “bad” (Brown, McDonagh & Shultz, 2013). It is a judgment that realizes itself through novelty (Reckwitz, 2017).

Zany, on the other hand, evokes the performance of affective labour, and most often, zaniness revolves around a spectator’s experience of a zany character. More precisely, the zany refers to the person “charged with the affective task of activating our sense of humor by being, as it were, a character” (Ngai, 2017, p. 9). A zany character creates laughter, simultaneously giving the impression of needing to work hard to make us laugh, and failure is a focal part of this aesthetic. These three aesthetic categories are bound to speech, and not only to specific subjective capacities for feeling and acting but also specific ways of relating to other subjects and the larger social arrangements.

To sum up, the operation of aesthetic judgment is bound up with concepts and sensual matter; and as an initial point for understanding aesthetic experiences (Folkmann & Jensen, 2017). However, there are more categories than just the beautiful and the sublime, as Ngai presents. Aesthetic judgments

are culturally produced, for instance, when design objects are staged. In terms of sensual matter, the objects, spaces, and materials are designed to stage the experience of the object which overall informs our aesthetic judgment. How are aesthetic experiences framed and staged by marketers and consumers? Böhme's theory is helpful here.

Unlike Kantian thinking, Böhme (1993; 1995; 2003; 2006; 2008; 2010) mobilizes the concept of atmosphere to explain the contemporary aesthetic practice that operates outside the traditional art contexts. Such aesthetics foregrounds the impact of sensual qualities and ecological and sensory dimensions, recovering the concept from Kantian artistic connotations. On that note, Böhme points out that the old aesthetic is a judgmental one that is not concerned so much with experience. This is of particular importance because of the increased use of aesthetic practices and manifestations within consumer society (Welsch, 1996; Featherstone, 1997). In consumer research, this implies experience as the apprehension of something via the sensorial corporeal, emphasizing the importance of embodiment (Joy & Sherry, 2003). Accordingly, atmospheres, auras, symbols, images, and icons are produced by capitalism, which is capable of drawing and reproducing aesthetic experiences. After all, in some of the CCT inspired works, atmospheres are employed as local manifestations of cultural themes (Maclaran & Brown, 2005; Bradford & Sherry, 2015).

Applying the concept of atmosphere to any visual artefacts goes beyond the signs and considers the effect they have via the atmosphere they create and the moods which are induced in the perceiver. On that note, Böhme (1993, p. 124) suggests that melancholy scenes in paintings are not just signs for this scene, but they produce the scene itself. Böhme (1995) then argues against the dominant position of semiotics in aesthetic theory, arguing that semiotics must consider visual images as an ensemble of signs. In the first instance, any artefacts have their own presence and atmosphere. And again, a picture has a relatively autonomous presence and "appears" to people and touches their feelings. The implication of this perspective is that the impression rather than the expression of visual arrangements needs to be the focal point of a theoretical framework.

2.5. Towards Myth Aestheticization

The starting point of the thesis is that the present is aestheticized (Ngai, 2012; Reckwitz, 2017). As such, aesthetic categories in a consumer society, where we are confronted with spectacular displays of the aesthetic, affect to the way we make aesthetic judgments (Ngai, 2012). Atmospheres are the outcome of aesthetic work (Böhme, 2013). Drawing on these accounts, the aim of this study is to explore how myths are aestheticized; that is, how myths are (re-)produced in such aesthetic work, resulting in aestheticized meanings in

consumption experiences. I propose myth aestheticization as an overall term to denote the process of reproducing a myth that is rendered as being aesthetic.

The conceptual framework of this thesis aims to account for the conceptual relationship between the logic of aestheticization at sensorial, conceptual, and contextual levels, and myth-making efforts in consumer society (Folkmann, 2018). The basic premise of this chapter is aestheticization – a process of harnessing the aesthetic in a particular way to operate a consumer culture. In aestheticization, myths are translated and reproduced.

My overview suggests that aestheticization remains highly pertinent in research on the consumer culture today. After all, the consumer culture is a marketing-oriented one. That can be simplified as “marketing via culture”; thus, a considerable volume of work is devoted to elucidating the relationship between culture and consumption from various points of view. Scholars who subscribe to consumer culture perspectives analyze consumers, subcultures, marketers, and other actors to understand how culture undergirds consumption and marketing activities. These studies show that consumers individually or collectively derive cultural meanings from consumption objects and experiences. Marketers, advertising agencies, branding consultants, and other cultural producers seek resonant stories to promote their commercial products or services. People in the creative sectors are increasingly present in marketing activities. They are integral to the constitution of the aesthetic experience and its symbolic meaning (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2006; Wallendorf, 1980), alongside the marketers. We also see non-commercial actors, such as NGOs, activists, and even states, promoting meanings and providing infrastructures to foster particular ideologies. From this body of literature, I discern that myth-making means producing the meanings and appeals of events, regions taking into consideration the disruptions, collective guilts, which become marketable offerings such as objects, experiences, and devotional consumption practices. After all, aesthetic practices can take on a variety of forms as consumer objects which, as CCT ethnographic papers have shown, are able to produce all kinds of affective allegiances (Fernandez & Lastovicke, 2011).

In consumer culture, marketing practices, spaces, and material relations are navigated to produce allure, which may result in value-laden aesthetic forms as styles. As detailed in the previous section, consumer culture is seen as an ideological infrastructure; marketers are essentially one of the producers that perform in consumer culture, and they are operating in myth markets. Any element that instrumentalizes myths can thus be seen as ideological. Hence, myth-making can be seen as an ideological infrastructure. From this angle, it is possible to read Apple aesthetics as a form of minimal/modernist aesthetic; the “beauty” of Apple can be said to be hidden in its easiness, but at the same time, it relates to contemporary politics. In social life, the marketing efforts in

terms of making life more user-friendly for citizens are targeted by policy markets and vested commercial interests as vague efforts to centralize control or limit freedom. Apple, furthermore, not only with its products but also with the architecture of its headquarters, creates myths of insiders. This is a form of objectification of affect, informed by the work of Ngai (2012): clean lines and bright colours can be viewed as an aesthetics of convenience.

The framework in this thesis postulates aestheticization as one of the essential processes for the marketization of myths in an aesthetic economy. Recently Tadajewski (2020) defined marketization as the promotion of market ideologies and the expansion of the market into areas traditionally beyond its purview. Accordingly, marketization can be viewed as the spread of a “market” ideology. A prop for marketization can be almost anything, from an object to a place, from a feeling to a practice (Tadajewski, 2020). Hence, marketization encompasses almost all social spheres and constitutes a “dominant mode of the production of culture” (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007, p. 146; Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016). On another note, Thrift (2008, p. 9) points out that “what seems certain is that many of the objects and environments that capitalism produces have to demonstrate the calculated sincerity of allure if people are to be attracted to them: they need to manifest a particular style which generates enchantment without supernaturalism.” Taking this to its extreme, he argues that capitalism is seeking to create new worlds for subjects. In such endeavours, glamour works as a means of capturing attention “through the qualities of focus and clarity, the development of more intelligent objects, the power of tactile surfaces, and the use of unproductive, even excessive space”. Thrift argues, for instance, that brand stores serve not only as the idea of consumerism, but that they are prototypes for worlding. The aesthetics of such brand stores is designed to produce allure, down to and including materials of all kinds.

Analogous to that, it has been acknowledged in marketing theory that marketization is continuously taking on new forms (Andehn et al., 2019), where the commodities are being captured and where they need to manifest certain styles (Thrift, 2008). After all, as Thrift (2008, p. 9) comments, “economies must be engaging: they must generate or scoop up interests and then aggregate and amplify them in order to produce value, and that must involve producing various mechanisms of fascination.” Aestheticization hence serves and therefore conceptually is linked to the broader process of marketization as it generates new “intangible,” “alluring,” and “enchanting” values. In consumer culture, the objects and environments then produce ‘the calculated sincerity of allure’, partly by playing with the myths. Accordingly, myths amplify aesthetic experiences and thus perform themselves in aestheticization.

Most of the research in this domain has employed a social constructionist paradigm. For instance, Hirschman and Thompson (1997) focus on what kind

of strategies consumers use to interpret media. Phillips and colleagues' (2014) analysis foregrounds the creative processes in visual brand identity. Here, the research attends to how art directors use, assemble, and select visual elements to construct campaigns and examines how art directors also trust their own aesthetic judgments (Holt, 1997). Hence, this interpretivist strand informs the constructive nature of meaning-making by delineating how those interpretations have accounted for the cultural codes embodied in the media image. For instance, the advertising aesthetics communicates a shared mythology (i.e., dreams of reality) and consumers derive meaning from this allegorical system. The key assumption that the interpretivist stance makes is that marketing makes itself meaningful within the larger ideological realm constructed by the mass media (i.e., myths, celebrities, genres, and aesthetic standards for production values). Subscribing to such a constructivist perspective, language (verbal) and semiotics (visual) are used to understand such judgments. Accordingly, most studies in the marketing domain have understood aesthetics as pictorial, approaching aesthetics from a visual perspective (Chang, 2013; Scott, 1994). In this aestheticization, research often reflects on the dynamic and interactive process between marketing, cultural values, politics, and consumers. For example, Baker and colleagues (2004) demonstrate how advertising can contribute to the development of collective memory among black consumers in the U.S., who desire an experience that affords an escape from everyday life; the aesthetics caters to consumer "satisfaction" by developing an emotional bond, a self-identity, and an expressiveness (Park et al., 2013). In these novel and creative experiences, consumers can be viewed as aesthetic subjects – that is, the subject is constituted aesthetically in the consumption of objects that have an aesthetic appeal (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008; Gazley et al., 2011, Kim & Lee, 2017). Following the idea that consumers seek enjoyment and pleasure in their lives, aesthetic design can increase emotional responses (Wu & Hsu, 2018). The premise of these studies is that marketers package aesthetic designs to generate purchase intentions among various consumers (Giese et al., 2014). At the same time, aesthetic objects can enhance organization within a network of creative producers by linking people through the senses and emotions (Endrissat et al., 2016).

Elsewhere, studies imply that aesthetics is capable of communicating symbolic dimensions when they refer to aesthetics as forms of idealized sense of "quality and conditions", such as nostalgia aesthetics or Middle Easternness (Buschgens et al., 2019; Hamilton & Wagner, 2014). In these studies, we get a sense of a set of processes following "producing the aesthetic," such as product development processes focusing on innovation and creativity, when creative professionals negotiate and coordinate creativity or autonomy in producing the "aesthetics" (Endrissat et al., 2016).

Despite the widespread use of the term “aesthetic product”, the concept is subject to criticism. The first problem is that the approach is essentialist; that is, the aesthetic focus is on the product, rather than the consumer’s experience. This focus leads to complex philosophical arguments about the nature of an aesthetic product, which have never been fully resolved. The second problem centres on the idea of aesthetic and quasi-aesthetic products; the consumer perspective on aesthetics suggests that the distinction between the two is arbitrary and irrelevant. Consumers appreciate the “aesthetics” as they desire novel and creative experiences to escape from everyday life (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008). While these studies focus on mental and essentialist understanding of aesthetics, they hint at cultural dimensions, that is, how a product resonates with consumers and helps communicate social values.

Both aesthetic treatment and thus visual language are ways of communicating a myth, since it becomes a persuasive tool when narrating desires and dreams. Furthermore, in culturally informed marketing studies, visual analysis is a popular method of investigating cultural meanings in aesthetic objects and visual materials. As such, semiotic perspectives, for instance, are useful in developing meanings from the researcher’s perspective, meaning that this approach is heavily dependent on the skill of the investigator and based on subjective interpretation. The semiotic perspective is, however, limited to helping us understand how people interpret a sign or text. Ethnographic and phenomenological approaches here are viewed as more accurate ways of serving this aim (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). Hence, the previous literature examining consumer, commercial, and market myths focuses on visual methods for analyzing the mythic narratives on aesthetic objects or aesthetic elements. Considering that aestheticization happens on many levels and involves a variety of actors in consumer culture, myths need to be animated through discursive communication but also through textures. For instance, brands most often translate myths, given the distinctive and compelling aesthetics of branded environments (Brei & Tadajewski, 2015; Borghini et al., 2009; Holt, 2004). Built architecture naturally operates in a spatial context; hence, it is more plausible to investigate the concept of atmosphere.

Atmosphere as an aesthetic concept has received relatively less consideration in analyzing consumption experiences. Atmosphere is acknowledged as a spatially extended quality of feelings (Benjamin, 1968; Böhme, 1993). The concept foregrounds the bodily presence in relation to persons and things in spaces (Böhme, 1993). This concept is relevant in illuminating some of the current marketing debate in relation to emotional responses, for instance, in carefully designed marketing environments (Biehl-Massal & Saren, 2012); as Böhme notes, “atmospheres are involved in wherever something is being staged, wherever design is a factor” (2013, p.

2). Arising from similar thoughts, Thrift (2008) defined “worlds” as the results of the intertwining of aesthetics and public intimacy, as spaces formed by capitalism. From this perspective, visual cues are received not only as ensembles of signs but also have an impact via the mood they create (Biehl-Massahl & Saren, 2012), while semiotic approaches are traditionally used as means of interpretation.

Leaning towards an aesthetic perspective, Böhme (1993; 1995; 2003; 2013) identifies the design of atmosphere as a process of creating a scenography analogous to the theatre. A variety of techniques like lighting, materiality, and so on are employed to engender a climate geared towards a sensory experience. Hence, aestheticization includes a performance that creates a certain sensory and aesthetic effect. The question would then be, how does myth aestheticization emerge through the collective navigation of aestheticization on those different levels?

In the classical marketing domain, the research on atmospheres commonly considers atmosphere as either a phenomenon of the environment (e.g., stimulus) or the mind (e.g., psychological variable) and largely ignores social aspects of such environments (e.g., the presence of consumers or worker subjectivities). Such dualistic conceptions then raise a number of questions about the nature of atmosphere as the object of investigation. Böhme (1993) emphasizes the non-dualistic understanding as acknowledging the atmosphere as the “in between”, where environmental qualities and states are related. In other words, it is possible to approach atmosphere “from the side of reception aesthetics and from the side of production aesthetics” (Böhme, 2013, p. 2). Atmospheres can be circumvented with certain practices such as stage design. The stage design “provides the atmospheric background to the action, to attune the spectators to the theatrical performance and to provide the actors with a sounding board for what they present” (Böhme, 2013, p. 3). Hence, atmospheres – seen as sensory attributes that are created by things, persons, and their constellations – can be actively manufactured.

This view of aesthetics is central in the experience economy (see also Pine & Gilmore, 1999), where the trend has been increasingly related to the efforts to target consumers’ senses. In the marketing domain, for instance, a few studies exemplify this perspective. For example, Biehl-Massahl (2013), in her analysis of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, suggests that the semiotic approach to image analysis needs to be accompanied by aesthetic analysis. Hence, she suggests examining “the aesthetic impact of images as sensually stimulating atmospheres, rather than merely representational systems” (p. 365). Elsewhere, Biehl-Massahl and Saren (2012) analyze the atmosphere in Starbucks, where they foreground the visual dimensions, colours, and logos that give the brand a presence. In other words, such images have an impact on people via their materiality and presence, hence going beyond the mere signs or corporate symbols. Accordingly, while the previous accounts on

marketing aesthetics understood aesthetics as sign expression and approached it from a semiotic perspective, they overlooked the atmospheric qualities. One part of this thesis relates to how storied forms of myths are translated through the aesthetic work of commercial artists.

The experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) emphasizes an intensified aestheticizing of space where consumption is themed, maintained, and regulated to avoid sensory and semiotic ambiguity. This implies the idea that consumer cultural producers can set the conditions in marketer-controlled environments. How can we investigate myth aestheticization from the perspective of brands and consumers? From an aesthetic point of view, Böhme established mood and attunement as conditions for any perception that gives a special tune or colour (Friberg, 2019). Tuning is understood as not merely sensuous but also intellectual, as mood signifies a tuning of elements. Attunement – viewed as felt orientation – is grounded in thrownness, which stems from the idea that we have been thrown into the world. Mood and attunement, which are central to the characterization of perception, are particularly related to the receptive side of the atmosphere. Yet consumer cultural actors also produce an atmosphere by participating in it. Routines do this implicitly as well (e.g., how we believe we should appear and how the places we share should be maintained and organized for common use). Lights, sound, and decor are important to mood (Highmore, 2013). Any mood calibrates the world and with calibration, we perform our social values. It is how ideology and alienation are performed and felt (Highmore, 2013). As an aesthetic concept, the notion of the atmosphere is particularly helpful to understand the staging and emplacement of myth. Along with the narratives, producers, spaces, and objects are elements that create a mode of “captivation” (Thrift, 2008). Consequently, this thesis acknowledges spatial and material atmosphere and textures in enabling meaningful engagements (De la Fuente, 2019).

So far, I have revisited the marketing and consumption literature by focusing on immersive, experiential, playful, and aestheticized experiences, and the literature on myth-making, to build a co-constitutive relationship between these two constructs. This reading of various domains and streams has helped me to unpack the conceptual relationship between these two primary constructs. In terms of the commercial realm, the previous work of Schmitt and Simonson (1997), which defines marketing aesthetics around the two tenets of corporate and brand expression, and customer impression, needs to be refined to include a cultural dimension. Accordingly, I offer an alternative account of such managerial operations of aesthetics by expanding the process of myth aestheticization, which goes beyond managerial control. Here, it becomes plausible to think about atmospheric production in myth-making instead of corporate expression. Subsequently, customer impressions are then extended by considering performing aestheticization through myths.

Accordingly, the basic premise of this section is that myths are capable of amplifying the aesthetic experience through the imaginary that they evoke. Hence, the ability to transform something into something beautiful, sublime, cute, zany, or interesting – in short, aestheticization – results in the production and consumption of enchantment.

Chapter 3: Research Design

I use a variety of empirical contexts and types of empirical material to explore and illustrate the process of the aestheticization of myths in consumer society. In the following, I present, discuss, and reflect on the methodological choices of the thesis. This chapter can be read as a reflection on the methodological considerations as a whole, since the individual papers detail the methodological decisions in their respective contexts. This section begins with the selection of the research contexts. I then offer an overview of my research approach and empirical material. Following the analysis and interpretation of my empirical material, I describe the ethical considerations involved in this thesis, I describe the analysis and interpretation of my empirical material.

3.1. Selecting the Research Contexts

This thesis attends to one of the ubiquitous processes in consumer culture, namely the aestheticization of myths. Aestheticization denotes the harnessing of the aesthetic so as to provide a preferred regime of meaning. In that way, aestheticization can be understood as one type of myth-making. That is, myths undergird the performance of aestheticization resulting in the (re-)production of myths. Accordingly, the focus is on myth aestheticization – that is, the aesthetic mediation and (re-)production of storied forms of myths – to explain how aestheticization is one way of operating consumer culture. As such, the primary constructs of the thesis are “myths” and “aesthetics”. Hence, the empirical context(s) require these aspects to be particularly pertinent (Arnould et al., 2006). In understanding the process of myth aestheticization, I looked at the dimensions of aestheticization and the meaning-making strategies of consumer cultural actors. I also coupled this perspective with aesthetic elements, atmospheres, and material and textual characteristics of these experiences and performances. Hence this coupling enhances the understanding of aestheticization as relational, meaning that it is calculated and includes ongoing performances in consumer culture. I introduce myth-making as the theoretical context in which to study aestheticization.

To speak about a dominant mode of aestheticization in a consumer society, we need to understand the role of myths in the aestheticization process. As my aim is to examine this process of myth aestheticization, I bring together a variety of empirical contexts and actors – brand experience design executives, amateur hobbyists of historical re-enactments, and retro appreciators, who can be understood as actors with diverse motivations within the context of the aesthetic economy (Böhme 2013; Roberts, 2003).

However, they differ in terms of temporal, spatial, and commercial orientations, which together illustrate the spectrum of myth aestheticization in a consumer culture. In the following, I present the selection of Viking historical re-enactment and the Volvo brand flagship store as empirical versions of these theoretical constructs to facilitate insights into exploring the myth aestheticization process. The Volvo brand flagship store is a contemporary, future-oriented, place-based set of meanings, and Viking re-enactment is a past-oriented place-based set of meanings. Such variations on temporalities altogether facilitate insight into the fine-grained understanding of myth aestheticization. In other words, this thesis explores the reproduction of mythical content into being aesthetic in commercial and consumer-cultural aesthetically permeated instances.

3.1.1. Brand Experience Design as Myth Aestheticization

In terms of its relationship to commercial myth-making, I examine how brand experience design executives contribute to producing an atmosphere in a brand flagship store seeking to revitalize brand myths. This context adheres to Douglas Holt's cultural branding model, introducing the commercial aesthetic work of brand actors in translating the cultural myth of the Swedish utopia into the experienceable brand myth manifestation. The focus is on the design process of this commercial place and its stable form of emplacement enables me to understand such aestheticization.

Flagship stores have been extensively studied before (Borghini et al., 2009; Sherry, 1998; Kozinets et al., 2002; Brown et al., 2018; Hollenbeck et al., 2008; Dion & Arnould, 2011) to theoretically illustrate how cultural meanings and memories are created, revised, and recycled through consumption of the place and the brand. Two points sparked my motivation to study myth aestheticization in such brand flagship store design. First of all, brand stores have been studied to illustrate how the brand experience is co-constructed in and through those places. They deliver symbols and myths through space and materials in various ways (e.g., Borghini et al., 2009; Diamond et al., 2009; Dion & Arnould, 2011). Therefore, they constitute a valuable platform to understand how myths come alive as a distinct brand look and experience. As Dion and Arnould (2011) point out, such stores involve framing and sustaining the narrative. Second, while commercial myth-making is well studied in the marketing literature, previous studies have not yet documented how such brand-driven processes translate myths into brand aesthetics. In other words, they do not detail the processes by which myths are accomplished as they acquire specific aesthetics.

To do this, I chose to focus on Volvo Studio because the organization of the studio prescribes the formation of a set of mythological elements related to a nation in aesthetic forms (see pictures 1, 2, 3). The Swedish landscape is

important part of the myth aestheticization. Volvo Studio is a brand concept store developed by the retail brand experience team and first implemented in Stockholm in 2017. When I decided to write a thesis on aestheticization in marketing, I found out that Volvo brand managers had been designing a brand experience store and had worked on rebranding, as well as other marketing channels (e.g., advertising). The Volvo brand incorporates Swedish imagery in the studio experience and utilizes well-known cultural symbols in the studio environment. This case is an exemplary case of the ongoing efforts of Swedish brand actors in disseminating stories, images, and associations that portray Sweden as a modern, progressive, and open-minded country (Molander et al., 2019). Nordic countries have a rich pool to draw upon, dating back to 13th century. Brand actors may also draw on material dimensions such as climate, landscape, landmarks, and specific experiences, Volvo being a noteworthy example here. Selecting this research context, therefore, brings rich insights into myths and aesthetics. In other words, the design of the Volvo Studio helps facilitate insights into how myths get manifested and (re-)produced through aestheticization.



Picture 1: Volvo brand concept store, Stockholm



*Picture 2: Volvo brand concept store, interactive and controlled RGBW LED lighting.
Picture 3: Volvo brand concept store, Northern lights.*

3.1.2. Past-themed Consumption as Myth Aestheticization

To complement the commercial aspects of myth-making, I study myth aestheticization in past-themed production and consumption from consumer perspective. Consumer understanding of past events is often framed by nostalgia, which most often results in sanitized and romanticized versions of history. The contexts of historical re-enactment and retro consumption serve to investigate the role of aesthetics in past-themed consumption and production, and hence aesthetic work in reimagining the past (e.g., Viking re-enactors) and the consumption of past through aesthetic consumption (e.g., retro appreciators). Historical re-enactment is viewed as an educational and entertainment activity where amateur hobbyists and enthusiasts follow particular rules to recreate specific aspects of a historical event or period. In the consumption literature, the American Civil War, Mountain Man Rendezvous, and stock shows are the primary examples of historical and mythological re-enactment performances (Belk & Costa, 1998; Chronis et al., 2012).

Two points here spark the motivation to study myth aestheticization in such past-themed performances. First, the educational and entertainment aspects of re-enactment performances resonate with the definition of myth-making (Thompson & Tian, 2008). These types of consumers are defined among the other commercial myth-makers (e.g., tourist promoters, marketing agents) who redefine the culturally resonant stories in their temporally and spatially bound activities. Therefore, this context carries valuable insights into understanding the animation process of myths through aestheticization. Previous literature on past-themed consumption focuses on the symbolic aspects of remaking culture, whereas the present study foregrounds the aesthetic dimension, and hence illuminates the materiality of such myth-making.

Second, re-enactors also transform themselves and museum artefacts into aestheticized encounters. Analogous to the marketers' efforts to situate their offerings as palpable mythic narratives, individuals use these collectively shared interpretative and performative resources to understand their social world and accommodate their identity works, thereby recreating myths as experienceable forms. By doing that, consumers retell, reproduce, and interpret marketplace mythologies; they can therefore be regarded as myth-makers (Thompson, 2004). However, we have little insight into how consumers work with the myths while they materialize and participate in broader myth-making processes. Hence these are the people who produce myths by aestheticizing them.

To explore this, I focus on Viking re-enactment because Viking re-enactment is an organized activity that focuses on developing and presenting the reconstructed lifestyle and the culture of the Vikings (see pictures 3, 4, 5

on the following pages). The central figures for the camp performance are the blacksmith, the jeweler, the potter, the weaver, among others. Nature and natural ingredients are the main concerns for Viking re-enactors. The history of re-enactment in Nordic countries started in 1977 – also the year of the first Star Wars movie – as a re-enactment of Icelandic horse cavalry and battling. The network of Viking re-enactment is diverse, involving re-enactors and museums. Re-enactors perform mock battles, crafting, food cooking, and storytelling. The well-known camps are Moesgaard and RIBE in Denmark, and Foteviken in Sweden. The hobby of re-enactment is actualized in the camp areas, which are mostly within open air museums. Selecting this research context, therefore, brings rich insights into myths and aesthetics. In other words, focusing on Viking re-enactment helps facilitate insights into how myths get manifested and animated in camp atmospheres and practices.



Picture 4: Viking Age Re-enactment Encampment, Ribe



Picture 5: Market stall and the blacksmith, Ribe

Picture 6: The weaver's yarn, Ribe

3.2. Research Approach and Empirical Material

To explain how I carried out this research, I need to delineate and discuss the nature and characteristics of aestheticization. While I have offered an overview above, I focus on and explain the ontology and epistemological implications of investigating aestheticization in this thesis.

3.2.1. Researching Aestheticization

The process of consumer cultural aestheticization denotes that “the aesthetic” is not a fixed category (Paper 1), but rather a social construction. I see the aesthetic dimensions of objects and experiences as themselves being aestheticized regimes of meaning. This way of looking at aestheticization is interpretive, following Hancock’s suggestion to “investigate the aesthetic configuration of materiality” as a way of conducting analysis that does not demote the aesthetic to a purely intellectual level. I investigated the processes of myth aestheticization by adopting an aesthetically sensitive method of analysis following Biehl-Missal (2013).

However, this way of looking means not simply demoting aesthetic experience to a purely intellectual level but keeping a degree of material and sensory engagement in aestheticization performances. In doing so, such an approach to aestheticization may enrich “one of the ways in which organizations are able to produce and perpetuate preferred regimes of meaning through the material dimension of their operations” (Hancock, 2005). This designed nature of the aesthetic experience is a symptom of the web of intentionalities. In other words, aesthetic experiences are mostly generated in and through technologies that are rationally constituted within a specific sociocultural context (Hancock, 2005). As hitherto acknowledged, myths are one of the fundamental meaning-making constructs in establishing meaning systems in marketing practices; consequently, it is valuable to discover how mythic content is mobilized in the aestheticization of products, places, and consumption experiences and how aestheticization and myth-making can be understood as co-constitutive forces. Hence, processes and forces rather than aesthetic objects and social constructs come to the fore.

Accordingly, this thesis, with such issues in mind, attempts to reclaim the importance of understanding not only how aesthetics can provide an epistemological window on marketing practices but, equally, how that window can itself be designed and assembled so as to provide a very particular vista (Hancock, 2005). As Gagliardi (1996) noted, artefacts are landscaped in such a way as to generate a specifically aestheticized regime of the meaning of pathos. Central to this account, following Hancock (2005), such artefacts are semiotically encoded in a uniquely aesthetic sense through this landscaping process to radiate desirable regimes of meanings.

Hancock (2005, p. 39) defines this aesthetic production of meanings:

“Rather it looks to consider and expose the ways in which even the most enchantingly aestheticized of environments needs to be understood as deeply enmeshed within structured regimes of meaning—that is, the aesthetic production of meanings that are capable of serving the ideological requirements of the organization...

as well as actually meaning something of significance to the people with whom the organization seeks to communicate. Such meanings must therefore be able to mediate aesthetically between the object domain of such artefacts and the subjective domains of organizational leaders, designers, and the like, and of employees, consumers, and other ‘stakeholders’.”

Such an approach to the purposeful aestheticization, as Gagliardi (1996) describes it, has implications for the methodological approach employed mainly for visuals. Such an approach extends semiotics towards an aesthetically sensitive version (Biehl-Massal, 2013; Hancock, 2005).

I investigate aestheticization vis-à-vis myth-making, considering the production of atmosphere and the materialization of brands in the form of brand names, logos, events, and spaces. At the same time, I investigate the role of aesthetic work in consumer cultural myth-making in the context of past-themed consumption. This view includes the materialities of the artefacts, and bodily presences, which have been excluded from the previous semiotic analysis on myths. At the same time, I listened and asked questions of producers when they talked about the aesthetic qualities of their experiences. These are part of patchwork ethnography of understanding aestheticization, rather than a study of visuals as such.

3.2.2. Patchwork Ethnography as a Methodological Framework

To explore the process of myth aestheticization, I investigate various domains where the consumption and production of mythic content come forth and animated in the aesthetic economy. Hence, the empirical material employed in the work of this thesis is based upon a multi-sited, multiple-method inquiry recently referred to as patchwork ethnography. Patchwork ethnography concerns ethnographic processes and protocols designed around short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data (Gunel et al., 2020; Hughes & Walter 2020). It explicitly attends to how research epistemologies cope with intimate, personal, political, or material concerns. Accordingly, this methodological and theoretical approach acknowledges the necessity to combine “home” and “field,” and all the more so in the face of the pandemic that changed empirical fieldwork.

As such, patchwork ethnography demands a reconsideration of traditional fieldwork under neoliberal labour conditions and expectations of work-life balance, including Covid-19. The motivation for reconsidering such traditional fieldwork stems from the belief that we might never return to “normal,” suggesting that long-term field engagement could become an impossibility. Following this slightly modified approach considering the practical conditions of ethnographic fieldwork, the methodological

framework of my thesis project, which covers several data collection occasions and types, constitutes patchwork ethnography. My research follows an ethnographic orientation that combines a range of qualitative methods, including interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of archival and documentation data (e.g., websites) about market offerings (e.g., advertising materials, brochures) and consumer stories (e.g., blog posts). Patchwork ethnography problematizes the “following” (of, e.g., persons, objects, and events) and allows us to make sense of “unfollowed” fields (Van Duijin, 2020).

While I had initially been puzzled by the patchwork of data I had collected throughout my fieldwork, I found a way to investigate the different constructions and how they can shed light on the whole by juxtaposing them. In line with the purpose of the thesis, the context of my research is twofold: (1) brand experience design production and (2) past-themed experience production. For the first context, I began to collect empirical data by interviewing Volvo managers in Gothenburg and went on to conduct ethnographic research by visiting the Volvo Studio in Stockholm. The last visit was held in March 2020, and was interrupted by the travel restrictions due to the pandemic. The purpose of the visit included contacting the studio staff and conducting field interviews with studio visitors. The plan for the second round of data gathering was to conduct further visits to the studio during March-May 2020. For the second context, I studied the Viking markets, where re-enactors define themselves through Viking age living history experiences and gather to practise the pre-modern way of life. I made my first field trip to the International Viking Market, Ribe, Denmark in 2019. Initially, I conducted a few in-depth interviews with re-enactors and a four-day field observation at the campsite, together with unrecorded field interviews. The plan for the second round of data gathering was to attend more markets around Sweden and Denmark to finish the empirical data gathering for this study during the spring-summer term of 2020.

When it comes to the possible alternative data collection scenarios to minimize the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were a couple of other routes to follow. However, in the late-mid stage of my Ph.D. process, I realized that these possible other data collection methods could not be directly substituted for my data methodology. I thought of those other possibilities only as a supportive data pool to enrich my theorization. However, I summarize those possibilities below. For the Volvo Studio, I had a plan to collect more data from visitors’ perspectives to capture their understanding of the brand and the studio. However, the first attempt at being in the field was interrupted, and I was not able to reach a satisfactory number of participants during this time. Instead, I contacted the studio manager and gathered contact information from some visitors as a possible alternative. For the Viking events, I planned to attend a couple of events around the Nordic

countries to finish my observations and interviews on site. Due to the pandemic, all events were cancelled over two summers – which is the peak period for these types of medieval events. Instead, I focused on more netnographic data collection, from some Facebook groups where re-enactors share their projects and reactions toward the Viking past, and from video diaries by participants in small, closed events.

3.2.3. Collection of Empirical Material

Over a two-year period, I collected diverse empirical material focusing on two empirical contexts. I thus obtained empirical data from multiple sources. Table 1 summarizes the types, forms, and specifications of the materials. The collection of diverse empirical materials is detailed below in the respective research contexts: the Volvo flagship store and the Viking re-enactment. In addition to these two empirical research sites, I made use of a set of consumer data that was collected in the context of past-themed consumption, Emmy scooter. This particular set of consumer data is part of the empirical database of Paper 4. Two reasons sparked my interest in including this empirical set. First, this formerly unattractive and uncool East German scooter called Simson Schwalbe has now been reinvented as an urban hipsterian lifestyle brand exclusively used and associated with the scooter-sharing company Emmy. Hence, this particular focus was in-line with the first theme that emerged from my conceptual paper. I was simply curious to test out the ideas. Secondly, the use of these particular consumer data set was practical during Covid-19. In the following, I present and discuss the collection of the empirical dataset for this thesis.

3.2.3.1. Studying Myth Aestheticization through the Volvo Brand Concept Store

I studied the Volvo brand for over one year to study the myth aestheticization process as driven by brand actors. Within that time frame, I collected a diverse set of data in the form of ethnographic, netnographic, and interview materials. After establishing initial contact with Volvo Brand Experience Design Manager, I visited Volvo HQ several times to collect interview materials with managers involved in designing the Volvo brand concept store, called Volvo Studio. Subsequently, I did a couple of Volvo Studio Stockholm visits to get in touch with studio managers and personnel and capture observational data. I organized a total of three field trip sessions. The initial visit was held in Jan 2019, and the final visit was done at the beginning of March 2020, just before the pandemic.

In total, I conducted 18 interviews with managers, visitors, and studio staff (see Table 1 for details). The interviews were designed to capture the intentionality of designers in the context of brand experience design and how they felt they contributed to the production. In this empirical context, I

fundamentally studied how brand actors build their brand narratives, in particular through store elements. Hence, I based my empirical study on observations in-store, on webpages, and in expert interviews. The questions varied depending on the persons interviewed – for example if it was a manager or a member of the studio staff. I let the professionals react freely during the interviews. The questions revolved around how they accomplished the design of the studio and how they performed brand experience in the studio. In most of the interviews, I let them unfold as informal conversations. The interviews conducted in English were transcribed verbatim. All interviewees voluntarily agreed to take part in the interview process and have been anonymized. Photographs were taken with the permission of the studio manager.

Observations were conducted at Volvo Studio. During the observations, I studied what actors do and how they interact with each other in the studio environment. The observations allowed me to talk informally with studio staff and visitors. During these contacts, I sometimes asked for permission to tape-record the conversation, which then turned more into an interview, but sometimes I just took notes during or right after the conversation. The observations were later typed into a field diary. During the observations, I took photos and videos, which helped me to document and recall the observational moments (Penaloza & Cayla 2006). In total, 187 photos were taken.

Following the interviews and observations, I also collected archival material, such as brand magazines, press releases, and reports about the brand, the concept store, advertisements and consumer comments on social media, and other materials displayed in the studio environment. These materials helped me, for example, to understand how the brand actors narrate Volvo brand aestheticization beyond the brand concept store.

3.2.3.2. Studying Myth Aestheticization through Viking Re-enactment

During the initial stages of the study, I looked for museums around the Nordic countries to meet the people who do re-enactment and to recruit them for the interviews. At the same time, I collected museum materials (e.g., volunteer booklets about re-enactment). I decided to attend a couple of Viking markets, and RIBE International Viking Market was one. I chose RIBE Market for two reasons. First, it is a highly popular Viking re-enactment site among re-enactors, and the Viking Market is international, meaning that the language is English.

I did an informal phone interview with a member of the museum personnel who worked as a dramaturgist. This initial interview helped me navigate the scope of this research project and was an entry point to recruiting people who do re-enactment to share their thoughts with me. I approached a couple and conducted interviews before attending the Viking market. Later I did

snowballing and a purposive sample of individuals who had performed as re-enactors at Ribe Viking Market and other Viking camps at various points. I visited the Viking Market in 2019 for four days. During the observations, I took extensive memos, both textual and visual, about the camp atmosphere, activities, and conversations with re-enactors.

In total, I conducted 18 interviews with re-enactors. The interviews were designed to elicit a sense of how re-enactors felt, staged, and narrated Vikingness and how they felt they contributed to its reproduction. The questions varied depending on the persons interviewed – for example, whether it was a craft re-enactor or a battle re-enactor. The questions revolved around how they accomplish the design of the equipment, clothing, and camping area, and how they work. I let most of the interviews unfold as informal conversations. The interviews conducted in English were transcribed verbatim. All interviewees voluntarily agreed to take part in the interview process and have been anonymized. Moreover, I collected 16 video diaries from a re-enactor during Covid restrictions as a complementary to interviews.

I conducted observations at the RIBE market. I also observed and talked to re-enactors at Christmas markets when they set up a stall offering mead. During observations, I studied what actors do and how they interact with each other and with visitors in the camping area. The observations allowed me to talk informally with re-enactors while they were performing. During these contacts, I sometimes asked for permission to tape-record the conversation, which then turned more into an interview, while sometimes I just took notes during or right after the conversation. I later typed the observations into a diary. During the observations, I took photos and videos, which helped me to document and recall the observational moments (Penaloza & Cayla, 2006). In total, 445 photos and 18 videos were taken.

Following these interviews and observations, I also collected archival materials, such as re-enactor guidebooks offered by museums, museum webpages, Facebook group posts where re-enactors discuss their projects and ask for advice, a number of websites that sell Viking jewellery and Viking re-enactment equipment, blog posts, and websites of Viking themed brands. In the meantime, I was interested in marketplace manifestations of Viking imaginaries which result in a set of documentary data involving various sources, brands, and events. Most importantly, the World-Tree Project image collection helped me to mapping “The Vikings” in several branding efforts.

In addition to these various material bases for my two empirical contexts, I analyzed nine consumer interviews which were not collected by me. These materials are used with the permission of one of my co-authors’ master’s student, who kindly provided me with the interview data. This consumer material forms part of the material basis for Paper 4.

Empirical Material			
Paper	Type	Form	Specifications
Paper 1	Conceptual paper that uses literature only and no empirical material.		
	Interview	Managerial interviews	•10 interviews with managerial team (ranging between 40 and 90 minutes)
	Ethnographic	Visitor Interviews Observations	•8 visitor interviews •10 observational sessions recorded by writing field notes and taking 187 photographs. •Informal chat with studio staff and visitors during observational sessions.
Paper 2	Document	Brand Magazines Webpages Advertisements	•29 Advertising Commercials •103 brand narratives from company websites and EDIT magazine issues, 73 Swedish newspaper articles on Volvo brand •Consumer statements in online forums •105 Volvo Studio images by content producers •Webpages of lifestyle brands presented at studio
	Interview	Reenactor Interviews	•10 re-enactor interviews (recorded) •8 re-enactor interviews (unrecorded)
Paper 3	Ethnographic	Observation	•Participation in a four-day International Viking Market, Ribe •10 pages of field notes in bullet points •Vikings Museum Visit, Stockholm •1 day observation of Tough Vikings Obstacle Race, Gothenburg •Informal Chat with 30 persons at RIBE camping site •16 video-dairies •445 images and 18 videos from a Viking festival
	Netnographic Investigations	Re-enactors' statements, photographs, and videos	•10 months of specific attention to aestheticizing acts •5 Viking heritage museum webpages •+30 Facebook groups and 10.83 GB of netnographic material •Over 100 photographs and video recordings
	Document	Pop-cultural Material	•TV productions and books (e.g., Vikings, HBO Nordic, Norse Mythology)
Paper 4	Interview	Consumer Interviews Re-enactor Interviews	•Re-enactor interview materials (shared with Paper 3) •9 consumer Interviews
Paper 5	Thematic review that uses 114 articles only and no empirical material.		

Table 1: Overview of empirical material by papers

3.3. Analysis of Empirical Material and Ethical Issues

I transcribed all interviews and observations into Word documents. I started to code the transcribed interviews and notes into themes in chronological order as I gathered the material. I revised the changing direction in my questions as I developed the material, based on the issues I would like to know more about. Overall, the analysis procedure of this thesis follows the extensive guidelines recommended by Spiggle (1994): categorization,

abstraction, comparison, depersonalization, iteration, and refutation. As she suggested, I reduced, sorted, and reconstituted data through analytical operations as I continued to collect more. Initial coding focuses on the content of the myths. As the project developed in scope, my interest evolved into exploring the aesthetic dimension of myth manifestations. For instance, in the Viking context, I focused on how re-enactors negotiate and animate myths related to Vikings through their re-enactment performances. Hence, those performances included clothing, battling, showing, and so on. I treat them as empirical evidence of myth aestheticization. I also searched for material and sensory qualities in these performances and how they reinforce the myths. For the Volvo context, the research focuses on each concrete act in the Volvo Studio, its intention, and its effects, through the expert interviews and ethnographic observations. I explored the physical manifestation of the brand in which the immaterial and material features are displayed, consumed, exhibited, and performed. The data collection for both contexts included non-participant observation (Stewart, 1998), long interviews (McCracken, 1988), informal conversations (Lofland & Lofland, 1995), and visual ethnography (Pink, 2006). The study of cultural artefacts in the form of documents supplemented insights obtained from the field research. For the Viking context, I employed netnographic observations (Kozinets, 2015) on various pages, Facebook groups on re-enactment, and blogs I found that were relevant and publicly available, which helped me to dig into the dynamics of the re-enactment strategy.

In the Volvo case, specific attention is also given to the various parts of the concept store that were singled out through the interviews. Yanow's (2004) analytical concepts for analyzing space data and studio space are used. The analytical concepts concern "design vocabulary" (i.e., shape, weight, mass, and material); "design gestures" (i.e., elements that contrast align with surrounding spaces); "design proxemics" (i.e., the social and personal spaces); and "décor" (i.e., furniture, dress codes, and hairstyles). Analyzing the "aesthetic code" in the physical place reveals both the symbolic and material presence of spatial aesthetics. As such, the study embraces an analysis of what physical places and artefacts articulate, display, and hide. I inductively coded images using Nvivo12 software to articulate aesthetic codes in the studio space and the materials adopted by the brand, such as colours, sizes, materials, and design proxemics.

Collecting data from the field has not always been easy. There have been some challenges I would need to respond to in a redesign of the study. For the Viking context, recruiting interviewees is one of them. When I introduced myself as a researcher from a business school, I got mixed reactions. This way of introducing myself sparked long and curious conversations about the relationship between the research field and business (marketing). Later I explained myself as a researcher who would like to understand the people

behind the market. In this way, I was able to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the interviewees. Considering the ethnographic approach, I sometimes had difficulty recording the conversations with both re-enactors and studio visitors. Then I took notes and memos, which formed the textual observational materials, right after the interviews.

This thesis project uses various empirical materials collected through interviews, netnographic and participant observations, and document study. In the following, I present ethical considerations concerning data collection, analysis, interpretation, and the presentation of the results. Ethical concerns during the research process focus on privacy, informed consent, and potential harm (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Firstly, the research topic does not involve anything that can be considered sensitive; however, I was careful to comply with research ethics throughout data collection. In the following, I detail how I observed ethical considerations throughout the collection of different empirical materials.

This research project included a range of interviews with consumer cultural actors in two domains: managerial interviews and consumer interviews. For both domains, I provided detailed descriptions of the nature of the research topic, purpose, procedure, and how the material would be used for academic purposes (e.g., in conference presentations, research articles, and dissertation writing). These descriptions are communicated both in a written form (consent form) and orally before each interview session. The interviewees were given the option to opt out at any stage of the research project. I offered participants anonymity and a pseudonym; although none of the consumer interviewees were concerned about this, I present the data using pseudonyms. For the interviews, I recruited the participants voluntarily. I made sure that they understood the scope of my study, the procedure and length of the conversation, and their rights to opt out. After the initial questions and explanations about the research, I followed what they said to me. Two managers wanted to see the transcript materials for the Volvo project if I was going to use their voices. I provided the quotes I intended to use.

When it comes to netnographic observations, ethical considerations are more complicated (Kozinets, 2002; 2010). Kozinets suggests four aspects regarding the ethics of netnographic research. These include whether the online communities are public or private, informed consent, avoiding potential harm, and the representation of empirical material. The groups and pages from Facebook I was involved in were public, meaning that there is no registration needed, and material can be publicly found. Following Eysenbach and Till (2001), informed consent is not needed if the research involves only passive observation and analysis of posting and communication, as long as the material is made anonymous in the research process. My aim in collecting unobtrusive and observational non-participant

netnographic material was twofold: (1) to become familiar with the re-enactment culture, dynamics, and scene; and (2) to recruit interviewees.

The data collection also included observational sessions for both empirical contexts. For the Volvo concept store visit, I obtained permission from the brand concept store manager before arranging my travel. I told the manager the scope of my research and my reasons for requesting to be present and conduct observational sessions in the store environment, and the dates I wanted to do observational sessions. For the Viking camp, I approached the museum management through email, following up with a phone conversation prior to arranging my trip. The discussion revolved around their possible help with my research project and how I would carry out ethnographic observations to comply with their rules. The main concern here was about ‘the authenticity of the camp atmosphere’, which gave me the first clue as to where to look later during the research. After the discussion, they put me in contact with some of the re-enactors interested in talking to me before my visit. This helped me because I myself did not have any previous experience of Viking re-enactment or Viking mythology. During observations at the campsite, I approached the service providers before entering the camp area and introduced myself, my research, and my purpose. I only carried out observations during public hours even though some reenactors I talked to invited me to stay afterwards.

Video diaries enable research to be conducted without the physical presence of the researcher (Nash & Moore, 2018). There are additional ethical challenges associated with the use of participant-produced video diaries in terms of confidentiality (Harvey, 2011). The ethical issues here include considerations regarding informed consent, protection of human participants, and permission to access and use online data for research purposes. Right after the Covid-19 restrictions, the majority of gatherings were cancelled. However, there were some small gatherings within the government rules. Hence, I wanted to invite interviewees to produce video diaries to produce their own stories about their experiences. I recruited diary respondents on a voluntary opt-in basis after the interviews. I provided respondents with procedures and consent forms exclusively for the diary. I provided a detailed explanation and guidelines on what they could show visually and talked about their on-site experiences. Although a couple of re-enactors initially agreed to participate in the video diary round, only one re-enactor provided the materials to me with the consent.

Related to document study, I obtained documents that are publicly available. The Volvo brand study included newspapers, company magazines, webpage data, and commercials available on YouTube. No sensitive data, such as financial, accounting, or marketing/sales data, was collected or used.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This thesis explores the process of myth aestheticization. More precisely, it explores the aestheticization of myths as a process. I understand aestheticization as a process in which something is intentionally stylized, formed, and objectified; subsequently, it performs ideals based on affective associations with that form. From this understanding, aestheticization considers aesthetic issues in binding meanings to materials. Thus, aesthetics concerns not only a “look” but is also attentive to spatial and material atmospheres known as textures. I would like to emphasize that my focus is on the process of myth aestheticization rather than focusing on something as being aesthetic. From that perspective, I would like to refine the argument that aestheticization entails a process that typically translates myths into ideals of the beautiful and/or the sublime. Accordingly, I propose myth aestheticization as an overall term to denote the process of (re-)producing myths as aesthetic ideals by brands and consumers. Subsequently, this thesis investigates diverse domains of consumer cultural actors to conceptualize this process. To accomplish this aim, I bring together various empirical contexts – brand flagship stores, historical re-enactment, retro branding, consumer cultural actors, brand experience design executives, amateur hobbyists of historical re-enactments, and retro appreciators – to illustrate how brands and consumers engage in myth aestheticization.

Accordingly, this thesis focuses on diverse illustrative contexts that serve to understand aestheticization as a consumer cultural process and how it can be seen as a part of the ongoing myth-making efforts that we see in our consumer society. While two of my papers are conceptual papers, the empirical papers deal with the empirical context of what can be described as Nordic consumer culture. Therefore, the different empirical contexts, as well as the different conceptual contexts of the conceptual papers, are used to showcase the spectrum of myth aestheticization in this thesis. For instance, the aestheticization of the Volvo brand animates future-oriented mythic content related to Swedishness into a set of aesthetic ideals through the aestheticization of brand manifestation. Accordingly, a particular version of Swedishness is reproduced as a profoundly atmospheric phenomenon. In contrast, past-oriented aestheticization in the Viking re-enactment scene showed how consumers’ aesthetic engagements with Viking remains mobilize a common culture through a nostalgic directive. Here nostalgia is experienced through the textures binding meaning with materials. These empirical studies show that the mythic content is made accessible, bodily and architectonically, beyond its symbolic operation.

Paper 1 sets out from the idea of reconceptualizing the aestheticization processes that happen in consumer culture by studying previous literature that

deals with “the aesthetic”, particularly in the domain of consumer culture theoretics. This is where I map out different contexts and streams of literature where the aestheticization takes place. This paper lays the contextual groundwork on aestheticization by essentially proposing and anchoring the argument that aestheticization includes different observational layers. Paper 1 is thus a necessary platform for the other papers. Accordingly, this paper reviewed the previous stream of studies on consumption and marketing that incorporated aestheticization. Therefore, the conceptualization here includes the mapping out of levels and processes of aesthetically permeated phenomena in consumption, brands, and markets in consumer culture. Paper 1 builds purely on existing literature that has not singled out aestheticization as a primary object of analysis.

Later, in Papers 2, 3, and 4, I focus on aestheticization, incorporating the myth perspective. Here, specific attention is given to the empirical investigation of processes derived from the first paper. Accordingly, Paper 2 looks at the brand-driven aestheticization process to understand the (re)production of national myths through the existence of the concept store. This paper empirically details the process of brand animation revealed in Paper 1. It shows brand-driven aestheticization vis-à-vis brand mythologizing. Hence the main research questions are “How do brand actors translate brand myths into an aesthetic?” And subsequently, “How are myths reproduced through brand aestheticization?” Specifically, this study identifies brand-driven aesthetic work in brand mythologizing.

In Paper 3, I delved into the Viking re-enactment scene and investigated the core consumer group in this past-themed consumption. Paper 3 is an empirical investigation of the consumer process I conceptualized in Paper 1. The consumer perspective focuses on how myths related to the Viking past are animated partly through aesthetic work. Paper 3 asks how consumers’ aesthetic engagements towards the mythic past contribute to the translation of Viking myth. Hence, this study foregrounds the role of aesthetics in both the production and experience of the mythic past, where the Viking myths are mobilized to reproduce a common culture. Three themes around aesthetic work accommodate the translation of the Viking myths into an aesthetic manifestation: excavation, curation, and alignment. These three practices of the consuming subjects involved work together as a counter-aesthetic strategy against commercial myth-making efforts in the consumer cultural Viking brandscape. Through this particular aesthetic strategy, consumers elevate the mythic content in response to a disenchantment with everyday life.

Paper 4 takes a consumer perspective to investigate how the theoretical concept of “pastness” is delivered through consumers’ interpretive renderings of past-themed aesthetic consumption. The paper explored how the aesthetic formation of the past is elaborated through the hybridity of the past and present and by different agents. The aestheticization processes identified

succeed in making consumers and communities mobilize the consumption objects and experiences as a tasteful rendition of the past. The focus is on a retro aesthetics that mobilizes both positive and negative aspects of nostalgia towards the aesthetic formation of the past. The analysis reveals that the co-creation of this aesthetic formation of the past includes the processes of differentiation, interrelation, and integration. For instance, when consumers who are nostalgic towards the past valorize a past-themed branded object as a bad copy, they celebrate the retro era instead. Furthermore, the act of material production about the past creates integration. The co-presence of consumer and material resources in aestheticization processes facilitates the creation of enchantment in past-themed market and consumption contexts. Viking role-play consumption differs from commercial retro-themed consumption in terms of the “spirit of do it yourself” (Barthes, 1972).

Paper 5 then turns to one of the central domains of consumption research and reviews the domain of advertising aesthetics. The paper investigates the conceptual foundation of advertising aesthetics as a research area worthy of further attention. From a myth-making perspective, ads are one of the powerful tools for a brand when creating a myth, as Holt indicates (2003). This paper aims to bring aesthetic theory into advertising studies and make it more accessible for practitioners. Subsequently, this paper foregrounds the judgments one makes when encountering art-like qualities in ads and provides a research direction in the domain of advertising aesthetics. Following Holbrook and Zirlin’s (1985, p. 2) call for “systematic study of art and aesthetics” in consumer research, this paper identifies seven themes in advertising aesthetics to portray the current understanding of the concept in advertising research. This paper thus offers artful directions for advertising researchers who can draw on aesthetic theory and implement new pathways in their work.

The following section presents an analysis of the collective findings of all the appended papers. That is, I analyze and discuss the individual papers together to theorize myth aestheticization. The collective results of the five papers detail the process of aestheticization, its various sub-processes, the aesthetic work involved, and the ideological aim of myth aestheticization.

Thus, the following sections offer an analysis and discussion of my own papers, their central arguments, and their collective findings. This post hoc analysis and discussion of my findings, taken together, allows me to propose a model of myth aestheticization which builds on a synthesis of the appended papers. This model sets out to answer the question “How are myths (re-)produced into ideals of the beautiful and/or the sublime by brands and consumers?”

4.1. Myth Aestheticization Process

Let me begin this journey into the collective findings of the papers by very briefly contextualizing the idea of theorizing myth aestheticization in marketing and consumption research. The terminology of myth aestheticization aims to capture the idea that something, here a myth, is not “aesthetic” in and by itself, but it is made “aesthetic”. This aestheticization, here understood as a process in which something is intentionally stylized, formed, and objectified, subsequently performs ideals based on affective associations with that form. In that aestheticization, mythic content (e.g., Swedishness, Vikings) is materialized and reproduced as aestheticized market manifestations (e.g., experience, commodity), leading to enchantment. To put it another way, I would like to refine the argument that aestheticization entails a process that typically translates myths into ideals of the beautiful and/or the sublime. Accordingly, I propose myth aestheticization as an overall term to denote the process of (re-)producing myths into aesthetic ideals of the beautiful and the sublime by brands and consumers. Aesthetic work, depending on the producers’ aesthetic competence or literacy and, more importantly, on those activities which aim to give an appearance to things to generate an atmosphere, is the engine of aestheticization. Delving into the standalone papers in my thesis project, together with the previous marketing literature that implicitly points to myth aestheticization, I am able to grasp the multi-faceted, dynamic nature of the myth aestheticization process.

While the reader will read the following sections in a linear fashion, I would like to draw attention to the contextual aspects of the myth aestheticization process. In other words, myth aestheticization emerges as a co-constitutive process with other trends such as marketization and artification. It is important to comprehend the processes listed here to bridge a spectrum of practices circulated in space and time that fall beyond my mere observation. I believe this to be of merit and to serve my purpose of generalization. Here I would also like to open a discussion concerning the substantial and affective side of myth-making efforts by cutting across the processes I present in the papers. I briefly examine these processes here. In what follows I articulate the myth aestheticization process I have developed by analysing all my papers collectively. Accordingly, I answer the research question of this thesis project: How are myths (re-)produced as something beautiful and/or sublime by brands and consumers?

The results of Paper 1 and Paper 5 suggest that a variety of consumer cultural actors are involved in aestheticization. For instance, previous literature on the domain of experiential and symbolic consumption suggests that consumers are encouraged to enjoy aesthetic consumption and experiences while producers blend sensory effects and the deployment of

material in new and innovative ways that are acceptable to markets that re-engage with certain concepts (see Paper 1 for details). As such, when brand actors work on mythologizing the brand (Paper 2), they invite consumers to new forms of relating to brand offerings, often through somatic and corporeal experiences. Once consumers perform through aesthetic manifestations (e.g., a brand concept store), draw themselves into the aesthetic performance (e.g., a re-enactment of past practices), or create an aesthetic practice around a branded product (e.g., around a Harley Davidson bike), mythic content undergirds such performances and reconfigure the experience while at the same time reproducing itself. For example, when Viking re-enactors (Paper 3) consume an imagined past by embodying the past narrative and mythical content through remains and replicas, they introduce new techniques and tools to the Viking scene, performing the mythic construct through geography bound aesthetic ideals. Likewise, as I showed in Paper 2, Volvo brand experience designers located and curated locally distinctive sources and references. They designed an aesthetic manifestation of Swedishness in the form of a brand concept store. In doing so, they were authenticating the brand. Here, mythic content epitomizes the national aesthetic ideals and is melded with enchantment technologies.

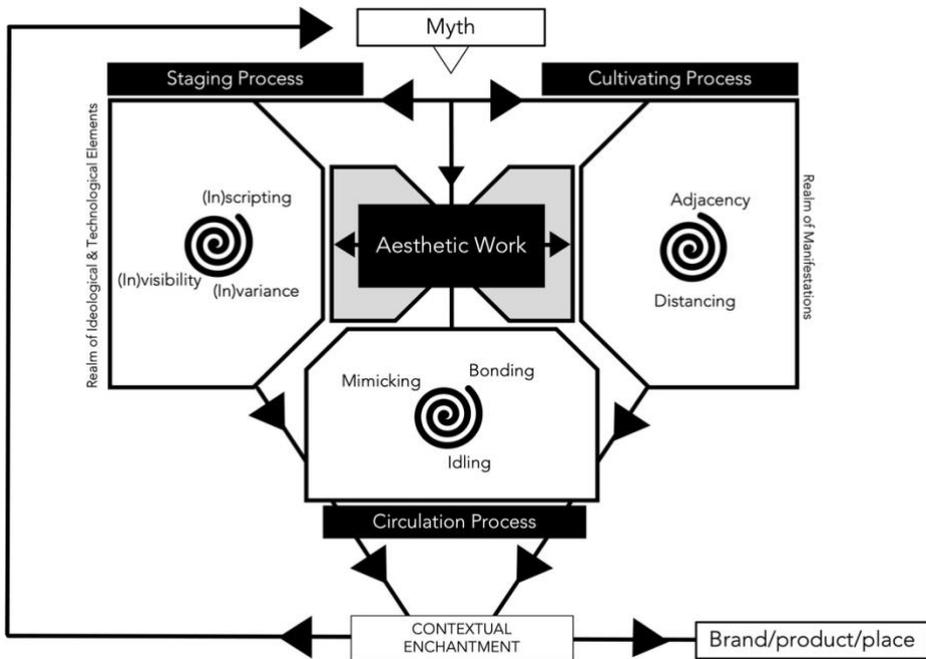


Figure 2: The Myth Aestheticization Process

How are myths (re-)produced as something beautiful and/or sublime by brands and consumers? Figure 2 summarizes the process of myth aestheticization based on the collective findings of my papers. It shows how mythical content is (re-)produced as an idealized and beautified/sublimified version of itself – an aesthetic, subsumed under aestheticization, which contributes to the creation of enchantment. The analysis concerns the spatial, material, and emplaced nature of consumption experiences in creating an aestheticized myth since myth-making performances always operate in a spatial context. Thus, the model offers a synthesis and further conceptualization of the various processes and sub-processes involved in the aestheticization of myth evident in the appended papers.

Accordingly, the model shows how mythic content (the Viking myth, the Swedishness) becomes involved with three central processes: cultivation, staging, and circulation. Each of these processes consists of a number of sub-processes that feed into the (re-)production of mythic content into beautiful and/or sublime aesthetic ideals by absorbing the tensions between past and future, into a set of ideals partly based on stylistic conventions (e.g., Swedish design, Retro, Cottage core, or Norse Primitivism) that serves to absorb such tensions. Mythic content, carrying ambiguity, is the raw material in this process. The processual perspective is visualized with the arrows. The myth enters into a process of aestheticization. The myth aestheticization process is instantiated through a set of processes and practices that are associated with aesthetic work. Accordingly, these three processes together accomplish aestheticized myth and its ideological end, here enchantment – the rendition of something into something special.

Cultivation refers to the dynamic work involved in composing, capturing, and exploring moods and emotions through the practices of distancing, adjacency. Cultivation is about how producers attend to making sense of the experience or objects and seek diverse ways of capturing and exploring the moods and emotions linked to the mythic content.

Subsequently, staging is about how mythic ideals are involved in, re-formed, and translated into the material arrangements that form textural characteristics related to performance. Mythic content, here understood as “imaginative stories and images that selectively draw on history as source material” (Holt 2006, p. 359), allows the harnessing of the material coordinates and conditions to stage the performance. Accordingly, (in)scripting, (in)visibility and (in)variance are aspects through which myths are materially structured, staged, and framed.

The circulation process refers to the creation of new patterns of consuming the myths in stylized conventions and details how mythic content is rendered as being aesthetic by attaching aesthetic ideals where the outcome is enchantment as a particular ideological endpoint. These processes are woven together by producers’ work, which I have detailed as aesthetic work.

Altogether, the myth aestheticization process shows the process of (re-) producing myths as aesthetic ideals by brands and consumers. The outcome of this process, through which mythic content has been aestheticized, is the enchantment.

Before going into detail, let me briefly explain this myth aestheticization process through my empirical observations based on two distinct mythic contents that I have explored in Paper 2 and Paper 3, namely of “Swedishness” and the “Vikings.” Accordingly, the brand actors cultivate the mythic content of Swedishness to enchant the brand through sensory scripting and material treatment framed in the design of brand experience and its atmosphere. By amplifying the ownable elements (e.g., the region’s typical weather conditions) and sensory scripting of the mythic elements (e.g., the dynamic light displays of aurora borealis), Swedishness is scripted in the architectural elements of a wall-floor-ceiling triad. Such atmospheric production forms the stage for the cultivation of a mythical idea of a Swedish Mother Nature who nurtures the brand amid the technological and ideological disruption of the industry and region. Brand actors retool the sensory elements to create perceptual contrasts and dynamic cover that serve the mythic content and ambiguity. Domestication of the branded space stabilizes the sensory elements to secure the enactment of the story. The brand workers’ performance in the brand experience design further contributes to the atmosphere of the brand myth and coproduces the muted atmosphere that is the branded product, experienced as a strong presence in relation to which everything else is muted. The beliefs, ideals, and aspirations of brand actors work in tandem with strategic executions in the aestheticization process. In brand-driven aestheticization, producers encounter enchanted episodes that give them the possibility to discover the moods through sensory elements. The staging process serves to enact the brand myth of care through the spatial aesthetic work of producers.

Delving into Viking re-enactors, where the myth of Vikings is performed in ephemeral dwellings in the form of festive encampments, I found that the nostalgic inhabitation of re-enactment camps makes ‘sense’ as a form of enchantment, cultivating sensory attunements to materials. The co-production of a distant past atmospherically allows people to connect to mythic content, which denotes a distancing aspect of the cultivation process. Simultaneously, a nostalgic embodiment of Viking myths through materialities cultivates adjacency. These two main empirical investigations further exemplify the contextual endpoint of myth aestheticization as enchantment. In the following, I detail each of the above-mentioned processes, beginning with cultivation.

4.1.1. Cultivation Process

The cultivation process refers to the dynamic techniques involved in composing, capturing, and exploring moods (Siles et al., 2002). This process denotes the shared understandings related to mythic content and pre-defines the qualities it can have. Subsequently, propagating myth into aesthetic ideals requires a set of practices to prepare the mythic narrative for the staging process.

This process involves the framing of the coordinates of the mythic content by brand managers and consumers-as-producers. The cultivation here foregrounds the corporeal attentiveness of producers in catching and capturing the moods and emphasizes the impression of materials to be deployed for staging. From the collective results of my empirical papers, I see this process as related to “embodied discourse” in the aesthetic work of producers. In other words, creating a link to the set of meanings related to the future is achieved by aesthetic work, which by definition is framed by the space – be it imaginary, virtual, or symbolic.

The cultivation process is essential and is the first step when brands and/or consumers are involved in the myth aestheticization process. Accordingly, it starts with the ideological motive of stitching myths onto an idealized brand/consumption experience. From an aesthetic point of view, aesthetically designed spaces have an affective power that is experienced bodily (Biehl-Missal & vom Lehn, 2014); producers then seek diverse ways of capturing and exploring the moods and emotions linked to the mythic content. In other words, the producers are anticipating – haptically – emotions and experiences. For instance, brand producers with the aim of reclaiming legitimacy by taking recourse to the myth of Swedishness, search for clues, senses, and feelings by discovering and recording the Nordic natural environment as mythic content, together with the topography of landscapes and a calm atmosphere, created by using different visualization tools such as computer-generated images (CGIs) and even establishing links to culture and the art world to perform thematized events in branded places. Likewise, consumers of Viking myths rehearse the battle shows and prepare custom uniforms and gear, together known as “kit”, through the reverie of medieval body and place. Moods and emotions emanating out of such searching activities are valorized during this process. The objects, sites, or moments are ascribed as ‘magic moments’ and have a special place in operating this process. Thus, consumers mythologize their social field through aesthetic refinement & symbolic resignification, as my papers (paper 1, paper 3) suggest. I explain two dynamics that constitute the cultivating of mythic content as a mood as people connect to places, be it imaginary (Cayla & Eckhardt 2008), symbolic, or virtual (Kozinets 2001; Ustuner & Thompson, 2012). Cultivating moods covers aspects of adjacency and distancing.

4.1.1.1. Adjacency

Adjacency refers to a process in which producers, nostalgic towards the past or future, cultivate practices of proximity, for instance, when engaged in restoring and maintaining disparate materialities. A visceral connection to past practices is a symptom of establishing proximity. Paper 2 found that producers of the Volvo brand experience design desire to cultivate an idealized mood emanating from mythic content, in this case, the calm atmosphere of Swedish nature, through concrete materials found in forests. The Volvo team searched for materials carrying a certain atmospheric character (Böhme, 2006), in this case, charismatic origin. It is important for the brand to capture the direct connection to the future set of meanings.

The findings of Paper 3 point out this proximity aspect. Re-enactors, who are involved consumers, reconstruct past narratives by engaging with past-present-future dynamics around objects. This demands the affective labour of adjacency. It recognizes the disparity between two positions and works to address it. Aestheticizing past practices such as tapestry weaving, used by re-enactors for their costume projects, thus opens an epistemological window for re-enactors to script and animate the mythic content of harsh nature and the conscious, artisanal Viking framework. For instance, Paper 2 found that re-enactors use archival materials when they create replicas, not only to explore history but also to construct an imagined past and community to articulate the relationship between different temporalities (past-present-future). These materials, together with the bygone practices used in recreating them, allow re-enactors strong evidence of the idyllic nature of Vikingness. This is felt as a spatio-temporal chasm between now and then and as a space for reflection.

Beyond my empirical investigations, the previous literature also suggests adjacency practices when explaining the artification of production moods. For instance, in Paper 1, adjacency practices can be found in the accumulation process. That is, when the market around an object or entity such as food, coffee, or wine creates skills emanating from the mythical face that belongs to craftsmanship and artisanal work.

4.1.1.2. Distancing

Distancing, on the other hand, refers to the defamiliarizing strategies of producers. It is about the temporal and spatial removal of mythic content out of place. For instance, it is common in brandscape literature that producers focus on a more experiential role of the place, that is, on the effects it generates for the subject, rather than the formal properties of the objects. In Paper 2, distancing is discovered when virtual reality technologies and light projections that animate the Northern lights are designed to produce out of place impressions. Surprisingly, material engagements in a performance allow producers to isolate themselves to make an imagined time and location

come alive, as I found particularly in Paper 3. In this way, distancing serves in experiencing mythic content as enchanted moments. Consuming the myths through aesthetic work leads to defamiliarizing the consumers in temporal and spatial ways. For instance, I was informed many times that the consumers of the Viking past feel out of place, being transformed, become a “clean sheet,” “unleash the monster” during mocking the battles, and imagine seeing “an old” building and being a “Viking” as putting helmets on during the performances. These instances are how consumers, by their aesthetic work, defamiliarize themselves from the here and now and bring out these instances as a part of the aesthetic they dwell in, thereby cultivating the moods for mythic performance.

4.1.2. Staging Process

After cultivation, staging refers to the material treatments of objects and/or places related to the moods. It refers to the physical presence of materials to stage mythic content as palpable. The myth is invisible otherwise, so to speak. From an aesthetic point of view, this process relates to the considerable sensual effects and qualities of elements at the level of perception and emotion. This process materializes the mythic content and explains how the mythic content is made texturally ready for framing a renewed emphasis on the tactility and materiality of communication as modes of understanding. Sensory and material elements are crucial in this process since they involve textural details for performing the mythic content. Through staging, the myths are localized.

This process details the way in which producers work on a script and retool it so that the script is removed from the manifestation to make space for the unmediated simulation of myth. For instance, brand experience design managers plan the mise-en-scene for the myth of the Swedish utopia by citing national design heritage through aesthetic elements and sensory codes such as space design, seating arrangements, and particular lighting effects that eliminate the need for verbal narration, instead relying on the atmospheric production of the myth (Böhme, 2013). The collective findings of my empirical studies show that the producers of such aestheticized manifestations make their world the basis of their design; for instance, how it might feel beyond the iconic and indexical qualities of dwelling in an imaginary place belongs to mythic content, either Swedish or Viking.

Staging includes a set of sub-processes. (In)scripting entails the methods by which producers landscape mythic content through sensory elements. Staging further dynamizes the degree of control, which I explain as (in)visibility and (in)variance. They are both in play in this process. (In)visibility refers to the exertion of a higher degree of control over the atmosphere by means of sensory elements, whereas (in)variance refers to allowing the contrasting

elements to create excitement. Both physical affordances and symbolic associations are in play in this process (Coffin & Chatzidakis, 2021). In other words, it is crucial for the animation process that consumers attune to the aesthetic qualities of objects or experiences that deliver myths.

4.1.2.1. (In)scripting

(In)scripting is one of the main prerequisites for staging the mythic content. It entails a strategic process of indexing moods and emotions in a specific place and time through sensory qualities. This relates to what Böhme (1993) points out, namely that atmospheres are produced not just by scripts but also by spatialized aesthetic arrangements (e.g., tonality, sounds, white spaces). (In)scription serves for immaterial objects to become understood through the materiality of the space.

Creating an atmosphere by material means ranges from specifying the material arrangements within a space to filling it with “cultural signs” which can intensify the atmospheric identity of the space (Böhme, 2006, p. 113). Brand actors animate brands, for instance, using the palette of tools offered in the branding and marketing toolbox, not least by advertising and store design, thereby producing a symbolically and materially charged aestheticization of that brand. Such animation is bound to sensory (in)scripting, which creates an aesthetic aura around the brand. Considering the consumer perspective in this subject-object relationship, consumers attribute meaningful connections to correlational actions, events, and objects that imbue mass-produced replicas with charisma, helping to transform them into fetishes (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011). The locus of agency here arises from the object. In Paper 3, Viking re-enactors employ a set of practices such as curating the camp atmosphere and stitching costumes with replica tools and models of relics found in archaeological excavations that occupy the nostalgic moodscapes.

(In)scripting can further be found in ‘auratic’ marketing and consumption practices where, for instance, the relationship between the consumer and the object creates an aura (Borgerson 2005; Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011). For example, Fernandez & Lastovicka (2011) argue that consumers utilize magical thinking to imbue replica objects –guitars, whereby with a certain aura transforming mass-produced replicas into meaningful objects. Viking re-enactors (in)script the imaginary time and place to the materials in a similar way, but the material qualities and aesthetic work allow the enchantment in the first place. In other words, they keep a degree of enchanted properties even if the re-enactor herself is staging the mythic persona and experiencing temporal blurrings during the aesthetic work. Aura is defined as a cover that surrounds an object with feelings and experiences of beauty, exclusiveness, uniqueness, and authenticity that the brand produces in consumption (Björkman, 2002; Böhme, 1993). In this process, brand actors, for instance, tie an aesthetic vision to various manifestations and branded materialities to

make a brand myth appear alive and to radiate or recover an aura (Brown et al., 2003; Björkman, 2002).

4.1.2.2. (In)visibility

(In)visibility is another prerequisite for staging the mythic content. It entails practices of making some elements visible and others conspicuous. In both empirical contexts, the producers play with these mechanisms; the material references to locations become unrecognizable at first sight, yet subtle references are reflected in their choices and materials. For instance, in Paper 3, Viking re-enactors are interested in using historically correct material qualities in patchworking their costumes. In Paper 2, Volvo producers reinforce Swedishness as being silent through free seating arrangements, ascribed to the place through this (in)visibility mechanism. This mechanism further echoes other marketing studies that highlight how spectacular market encounters occur (see Dion & Arnould, 2011). As Thrift (2008) argues, such objects or environments “need to manifest a particular style which generates enchantment without supernaturalism” (Thrift, 2008, p. 9). In other words, this mechanism serves instead of relying on the enchantment of the supernatural; the magic of such brand environments is found in the glamour of commercial realm.

From an aesthetic point of view, (in)visibility refers to a sanitized, softened version of myth manifestations similar to the modernist ideal of order in a designed space. For example, it denotes the harnessing of the space to stage a mythic narrative. This process fulfils the conditions of translating the mythic content into a controllable atmosphere. In Paper 2, the Volvo brand myth aestheticization involves domesticating home ideology through the “care” myth by mimicking the particular nature inspired aesthetic aligned towards the virtual technologies and future-oriented set of meanings in the design of the brand store experience. From this empirical study, I explored the extent to which brand actors configure the atmosphere of the brand experience, particularly through visual aspects. This partly includes the people modifying and co-creating the atmosphere, but the focus was on commercial producers. Designers charge such spaces atmospherically to stabilize feelings of place to produce comfort and a sense of homeliness. The producers of the brand concept store adopt the modernist idea of free seating, a clean desk policy, and the presence of white space, which denotes sterility, screening, and alienation, similar to open office designs.

If (in)visibility belongs to domestication principles, elsewhere, domestication has previously been related to preserving romantic beliefs by masking contradictory elements when consumers valorize the aesthetic or when producers materialize the myths. In Paper 1, the mythologizing efforts of marketplace actors most often engage in creating more sanitized and softened versions of the myth that drives market manifestations to belong to

the rebel. For instance, Mountain Dew's alignment with the slacker subculture, Harley Davidson's alignment with the Hell's Angels subculture, or Apple's alignment with the anti-establishment creatives are the epitomes of rebel narratives. For instance, Harley Davidson's aestheticization reproduces the bikers-from-hell myth as a sublime experience, thus cultivating the myth serving the brand. Accordingly, domestication includes aspects of purification (Canniford & Shankar, 2013), assimilation (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011), and the objectification, for instance, of the primitive (Canniford & Karababa, 2013).

These accounts point out how domestication belongs to (in)visibility strategy mythical content through sensual qualities of design elements. For example, surfers, bikers, clubbers, fur-trade rendezvous, and Burning Man are the instances where consumers of such primitivity become an aesthetic project for those involved (O'Donohoe, Desmond & McDonagh, 2001). From the empirical study of Viking re-enactment, I found a process of reversed domestication that aims to reduce the impact of controllable, stable staging. Producers, for example, are lured by hidden objects that can provoke mixed emotions. Ephemeral dwellings, as a form of camp gathering, are interwoven with the aesthetic work (the sensory directives of replica materials) of excavation, curation, and alignment through reversed domestication.

4.1.2.3. (In)variance

The third aspect that feeds into the staging process is (in)variance. This denotes the presence of contrasting (sensory) elements to create awe and wonder. (In)variance occurs when two sensory elements are placed side by side for comparison, often to highlight the contrast between the elements. It allows, for instance, moving scenography which is actualized through sensory elements (Thrift, 2008). Playing with (in)variance serves to design movement or thresholds in a place. It involves performing a story by bringing the contrasting elements into play. By juxtaposing the elements in that way, producers create a threshold in place. In Paper 2, I discovered how the Volvo brand concept store was designed based on juxtapositions of the aspects of open/closed, warm/cold, presence/absence, and natural/hard aesthetic elements arising from mythic content.

The previous research literature on servicescapes points out the physical environments in themed retailing (Figuerido et al., 2020), for instance, when cosmopolitan performances and the display of cosmopolitan competencies are enabled by juxtaposing the cultural resources. The designer uses juxtaposition as a key strategy because it triggers individuals to engage with cultural resources. Juxtaposition in Viking re-enactments is found in shadow/light, hard/soft, inside/outside elements that are recurrently encountered in the ephemeral dwellings. Most common conversations happen

around, for instance, the smell of food, the warmth of the fire, the dust rays indoors as motivating fuel for the re-enactors to symbolically transport themselves to the distant mythic past.

The staging process, which is an intentional orchestration of mythic content through the impact of sensual qualities of the place, or through aesthetic coding, is oriented towards ideals of how a place, imaginary or virtual, should or could feel. Such normative orientations and the practices of reformulating these ideals in the aesthetic work of producers give mythic content textural characteristics, inscribe and extend moods by tuning the space, and making atmosphere to further cultivate the experiences within.

4.1.3. Circulation Process

The circulation process relates to the consumption side of the coin and contributes to the myth aestheticization process by enabling the (re-) production of myths through embedded discourses; that is, through aesthetic work, the mythic discourse keeps going through other places. It also denotes the degree of valorization. Aesthetics plays a facilitating role in creating enchantment (see Paper 4). The circulation process also attends to the valorization of aesthetics. Accordingly, this part is about how the aesthetic formation of myths is elaborated and circulated through the hybridity of the past and present, which foregrounds temporality.

In Paper 1, the consumer process of aestheticization delineates how consumers imbue market objects, experiences, or practices with aesthetic significance, whereby the aesthetic becomes a particular quality that enchants. For example, consumers may consolidate group identity around the aesthetic objects (Hewer and Brownlie, 2007) or may create temporal bonds through re-enchanting consumption experiences (Kozinets, 2002). Storied forms of myths are delivered through aesthetics and atmosphere; in this way, atmospheres become local manifestations of cultural themes such as home (Bradford & Sherry, 2015) or cultural tactics such as mythologizing the company (Paper 2). Building on existing myths, this process leads to enchantment (Paper 3, Paper 4). After all, previous studies have revealed that consumers' experiences are coloured by aesthetic aspects in consumption when they engage in self-authenticating acts (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Södergren, 2022). Retro aesthetics (Paper 4) mobilizes both positive and negative aspects of nostalgic approaches towards the aesthetic formation of the past. When consumers who are particularly nostalgic towards the past valorize a past-themed branded object as a bad copy, they celebrate the retro era instead. Further, in the aestheticization of myths, authoritative acts make certain mythical stories mix with aesthetic practices. In such ways, consumers enter the circulation process through the dynamics of articulating/disarticulating/rearticulating, as Paper 1 argues.

In what follows, I explain three aspects that constitute the final process of myth aestheticization, that is, circulation. It covers mimicking, idling, and bonding. Mimicking and bonding refer to how consumers, individually or collectively, mobilize the consumption object or experience and the myths as a tasteful rendition of the past, while idling is about a process where commercial reactivation of past would be limited to the genre (e.g., GDR retro) and cannot transport the myths related to this particular era into a consumption object or brand.

4.1.3.1. Mimicking

Mimicking is about perpetuating the aestheticized version of myth through the aesthetic qualities it acquires. In other words, it considers whether the aestheticized versions of mythic content are circulated as a stylized convention or not. Mimicking comes from the idea of mimesis as a mode of communication (Maran, 2003). In semiotics, ‘mimesis’ is also often associated with the concept of ‘iconicity.’ The mimetic quality of ads makes consumers connect with the narrative, for example, by feeling sympathy for a character in the communication medium (e.g., an ad) (see Paper 5). When brands use value-laden aesthetic ideals to enchant themselves, consumers’ valorization of the aesthetic involves romantic inclinations towards the past and discontent with the present.

In Paper 4, the findings suggest that consumers can render the aesthetics of past through the interrelation process. This process refers to consumers’ rendition of the aesthetic qualities belonging to objects and/or experiences as tasteful. Consumers reappropriate the past with market-level narratives. In turn, the past and present temporalities affect one another. Consumers are often inclined to decontextualize retro consumption towards an amalgam of lifestyle products. In other words, this process denotes consumer celebration of the past in the form of aesthetic valorization of objects. An object – such as a retrofied Schwalbe scooter – is valorized as a lifestyle brand, then it is circulated by that aestheticized version of the object and around the myths it carries.

4.1.3.2. Idling

Idling refers to the failure to stitch myth to brand/consumption experience, but this is still enchanted by the aesthetic gestalt of the genre (e.g., retro). In Paper 4, the differentiation process exemplifies idling. I observed that consumers valorize aesthetic qualities through their own connection to the past, which renders retrofied objects as less tasteful. Idling, in other words, diminishes the branded enchantment. The aesthetic gestalt of retro may create a sense of dislocation for consumers that fosters backward-looking nostalgia and negative valorization of the commercial offerings.

The past is imbued with a mythical rendering of the good old days and of bygone honest materials. However, this is not always the case when a brand reifies the past for commercial aims. Idling happens when the aesthetic gestalt of genre creates a dislocation and negative valorization towards the commercial offerings. Previous research on aesthetic consumption related to nostalgia argues that while aesthetics can involve romantic inclinations towards the past, it may create discontent towards the present in the form of temporary coping mechanisms or a form of escape (Goulding 2001; 2002).

4.1.3.3. Bonding

Bonding relates to how aestheticized myths are subjected to disarticulation from market logic, being instead rearticulated as a communal ethos such as a retrospective sense of togetherness. Bonding here refers to the collective aspect of linking a myth to brand/consumption experience through shared feelings, interests, and experiences to place. Here I concentrate on the notion of bonding as being what affirms the presence of other community members. It can be seen as a group of people with a mode of singular-being, regardless of the agenda of individuals. Paper 1, Paper 3, and Paper 4 illustrate and explain bonding. For instance, in Paper 3, Viking re-enactment as a form of creative re-appropriation of past practices includes remediating the contested meanings through the warmth of the atmosphere, as an intimate space where people render the space as “outside of normal social boxes”. In Paper 1, bonding is most often seen in communal consumption enclaves such as Mountain Man and Burning Man. Consequently, various products, including brands, are subjected to disarticulation from market logic, being instead rearticulated as a communal ethos such as a retrospective sense of togetherness.

In Paper 4, the integration of the past-present dynamics exemplifies bonding. As an embodied aesthetic strategy, Viking role-play re-instantiates the past in the present, thereby (re-)producing the Viking myths as enchanted, idealized versions. Meanwhile, when consumers have authoritative voices over aestheticized performances in the form of authenticating acts (Arnould & Price 2000), the overall practices facilitate the enchanting dimension of the object. In doing so, the consumption of myths allows consumers to become aesthetic agents and valorize the aesthetics of an object or practice in terms of enchantment. This process is more obvious during the aesthetic work of consumers. The production and deployment of materials creates a bond with the past aesthetics. Further, in the aestheticization of myths, authoritative acts make certain mythical stories mix with aesthetic practices. For instance, individual consumers create aesthetic practices around Harley Davidson motorcycles or Viking-themed encampments. Or, at the collective level, consumers create new meanings around an aesthetic object. Although in both processes, it is evident that enchantment is felt in one way or another,

enchantment is seen as an ideological aim of myth aestheticization, as I delineate below.

Let me close this chapter with a final remark. The processes and dynamics are presented here can be understood with a metaphor of the Möbius strip which is a visual way of showing a range of ideas from multiple perspectives, and to “emphasize not only the simultaneity of stages but also the constant sharing of energy” (Bradford & Sherry, 2015, p. 130). The Möbius strip of myth aestheticization can be theorized from multiple perspectives as it connects sensual, material, reflexive, and contextual dimensions of aesthetics together along one continuous plane. As noted by Coffin & Chatzidakis, “Möbius strips might be mobilized in order to facilitate transdisciplinary conversations, insights, and theorizations” (2022, p. 41) and “seek[s] to create a single plane of theorization along which shared topics of interest can be arranged and alternative approaches can be broached through collaborative conversations” (Coffin & Chatzidakis 2022, p. 55). Hence this metaphor serves in an understanding of how myth aestheticization can be theorized from various perspectives into a single theoretical framework.

4.2. Aesthetic Work

So far, I have shown the process of myth aestheticization and where this process leads to. Here I will explore how this process moves along; metaphorically speaking, what is the engine? I suggest that the mythic content is kept alive by aesthetic work within places. In other words, the process of myth aestheticization aims at inscribing the aesthetic work at the core of the process. The increased aestheticization of life and economy considers the strategic use of aesthetic practices in marketing, management, and consumption. Aestheticians such as Böhme deals with the broad range of aesthetic practices previously confined only to the area of fine arts. Following management and organization studies, marketing research has also come to include aesthetic considerations in its inquiries (Taylor & Hansen 2005; Biehl-Missal, 2013; Biehl-Missal & Saren, 2012) to understand new forms of marketization.

In the context of myth-making, aesthetic work considers producers’ aesthetic competence or aesthetic literacy in mythologizing efforts –most often emplaced in certain settings. For instance, a brand specialist who is working to create the atmosphere of the Volvo brand concept store or a group of re-enactors who are working to make an ephemeral dwelling of the past in museums are examples of consumer cultural actors performing such aesthetic work. The atmospheres they create are intended to be experienced by others who encounter them, as well as to be experienced by the creators themselves. Such work extends the area of aesthetic thought from fine art to marketing,

including consumption spaces, commercial architectures, advertising, brand experience designers, and many other fields.

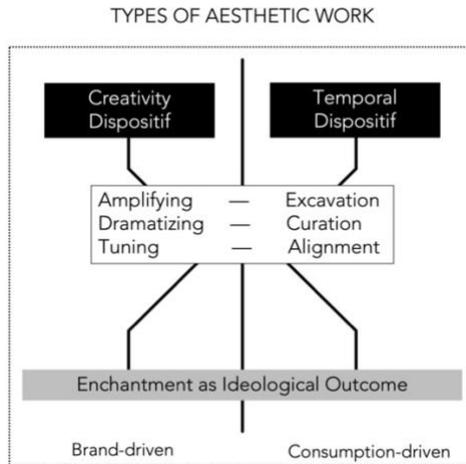


Figure 3: Types of Aesthetic Work in this Thesis

‘Soft’ capitalism is increasingly concerned “with producing new kinds of managerial and worker bodies that are constantly attentive, constantly attuned to the vagaries of the event, through an emphasis on the ludic and the affective” Thrift (2005, p. 6). The figure above summarizes the types of “aesthetic work” I delineated through the empirical studies in this thesis. It details two forms of aesthetic work: brand-driven and consumption-driven (Paper 2 and Paper 3). This categorization aligns with Böhme’s thought when he considers that aesthetic work in marketing has contrasting purposes with artistic works; for example, the atmospheres in department stores are designed to put people in a mood while aesthetic experiences through art can be liberating.

In the contexts of this thesis, aesthetic work related to branding includes twisting the cultural meanings with spectacular effects and new technologies are undergirded by what Reckwitz (2017) noted: creativity dispositif. Creativity dispositif intensifies the aesthetic work that “focused on the production and uptake of new aesthetic events” (Reckwitz, 2017, p. 9). The marketing practices are centred on the imperative to be creative, a capacity for generating cultural and aesthetic novelty.

In the consumption-driven aesthetic work I studied in this thesis, the prominent currency seems to centre on temporality. While there can be consumption-driven aesthetic work with a future orientation, such as aesthetic work around an electric car, technological gadgets (Belk et al., 2021) that allows romantic imaginings of the future, or utopian excitement, I

discern nostalgic orientation as a decisive orientation in my empirical papers. Similar to Reckwitz's thought on creativity dispositif, I define temporal dispositif as a term to stress the influence of temporality complex, as exemplified in past-themed aesthetic work. In the context of the Vikings (Paper 3), nostalgia as a dispositif is what makes people engage with past practices in the process of myth aestheticization. Nostalgia creatively reshapes any efforts to freeze time in place (Kitson & McHugh, 2015). This dispositif aligns the aesthetic experiences with the past. Nostalgia deems to be an "idealized emotional state" that is manifested as individuals attempt to recreate a past era. On that note, Stern (1992) argues that nostalgic experiences are selective through rose-coloured glasses, representing a utopian version of the past (Stern, 1992). Past research highlighted the bittersweet nature of nostalgia; that is, while fond memories evoke warm feelings, the realization that one can never return to this period results in discontent (Davis, 1979). The experience of nostalgia is linked to enchantment with distance felt as a spatio-temporal chasm between now and then. Paper 3 showcases relics and remains that have the ability to captivate and enchant in ways that complete objects simply cannot, as Boym acknowledges on the seduction of ruins, in that "they enable one to experience historicity affectively, as an atmosphere, a space for reflection on the passage of time" (Kitson & McHugh, 2015, p.492). Temporality thus is central to experiencing enchantment (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019; Belk et al., 2021; Hamilton & Wagner, 2014)

4.2.1. Brand-Driven Aesthetic Work

Brand-driven aesthetic work attends to the commercial (re-)production of myths through aesthetic management. Paper 2 argues that brand actors purposefully animate the brand and its meaning through sensory engineering and aesthetic design to comply with the myth market in which it operates. These strategies include amplifying the ownable elements (that is, national aesthetic heritage), dramatizing the experience through spatial juxtapositions that animate the thresholds for aesthetic engagement, and tuning the dwellable factors, including the immersion of branded workers in the brand concept store through the technologies and material environment to secure the brand experience and to translate myths through the aesthetic encounters they create. Brand actors, for instance, translate global aesthetic excellence into cold materials such as glass and marble and warm materials such as lighting. In this aesthetic work, brand experience design executives strategically assign the ideological aspects of being Swedish to brand aesthetics such as silent, simple, but elegant, and inclusive yet luxurious, with romantic and gnostic values (Thompson, 2004). This exemplifies how the designed environments are carefully devised, with toned-down atmospheres,

as previous studies implicitly argue (Biehl-Massal & Saren, 2011; Ulver, 2019). Such aesthetic work creates atmospheres conceived of as affective powers of feeling, moods created by a range of material and sensorial elements and experienced as bodily presence in relation to persons and things or in spaces. For instance, the Starbucks coffee shop analysis by Biehl-Massal and Saren (2012) explores how different features (warm colours, soft seating areas, transparent windows, the odour of coffee, and unobtrusive music) play together to create a captivating atmosphere and an idealized, romantic reality which differs from the contested corporate reality.

4.2.2. Consumption-Driven Aesthetic Work

Consumption-driven aesthetic work in this thesis includes consumers (e.g., core consumer groups, hobbyists) as producers of aestheticized manifestations of the myth. In the context of this paper, practices of aesthetic work attend to individuals' aesthetic competence or aesthetic literacy (Lynch et al., 2020), whereby they passionately objectify themselves (Veresiu et al., 2018) as a template for future objectification and for deriving enchantment (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019). This knowledge is crucial for marketing theory and practice since it illuminates a specific proportion of the myth treatment process (Holt, 2004) that lies beyond the purely commercial realm. The findings of Paper 3 explain the consumption-driven aesthetic strategy in relation to the past-themed consumption in the context of the wider Viking myth market. These Viking age re-enactments can also be viewed as performances of acts of resistance in the face of a hegemonic brandscape (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Most of the commercial manifestations of Viking myths create discontent among these core consumer groups.

The findings of Paper 3 further contribute to a nuanced understanding of past-themed consumption in relation to its aestheticization dimension. Research on past-themed consumption has recently suggested that the aesthetics of nostalgic consumption allows consumers to playfully engage with the future using past-oriented market offerings (Veresiu et al., 2018). The present study illustrates the details of aesthetic labour in such a consumer-driven aesthetic strategy to reconstruct the past and its appeal. Such aesthetic work can also be found in previous consumer research, such as studies exploring seemingly ludic consumption (Belk & Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2002; Seregina & Weijo, 2017). Like live-action role-play or historical re-enactment (Belk & Costa, 1998; Daugbjerg, 2013; Chronis et al., 2012), Viking age enthusiasts perform immersion and story engagement practices. Such consumption-driven aesthetic work facilitates enchantment within communal settings.

4.3. Ideological Aim of Myth Aestheticization

While Hirschman (1983) proposed that artists create primarily to express their subjective conceptions of beauty, emotion, and a few other aesthetic ideals, Barbara Stern (in Carlson, Grove, & Stafford, 2005) stated that art-like manifestations (e.g., advertising, brand store formats) can pretty well be understood as created works. For instance, in visual productions, professionals use specific methods to produce the aesthetics of advertisements. In particular, these professionals use images and other non-verbal formats to craft discourses and narratives, and thus, these representations are never natural ones. From that angle, as Marion (2006) informs us, consumption experiences produced by society and marketing practices include ideologizing. After all, the concept of aestheticization entails a process that typically translates myths into ideals of the beautiful and/or the sublime. Accordingly, I propose myth aestheticization as an overall term to denote the process of reproducing myths as aesthetic ideals by brands and consumers. It is not surprising that this process involves ideological ends from that angle. As Dion and Arnould (2011) remind us, ideologies are not restricted in scope to moral or social values, yet they encompass any sort of normative ideals, and ideologies may also be communicated through materials; the ideological aim in this thesis project includes enchantment.

The aesthetic production of meanings is capable of serving the ideological requirements of brands and consumers alike. All consumption is ideological (Schmitt et al., 2022). Hence the myth aestheticization process needs to be understood as profoundly enmeshed within the ideological aim of enchantment. The collective findings of my empirical studies suggest that enchantment occurs when facing something “real” and “uncanny” simultaneously, resulting in awe and wonder (Bennett, 2001) and understood as the generation of “awe” and “excitement” (Ritzer, 1999), an outcome of the myth aestheticization process. In other words, the myth aestheticization process is a vital ingredient in the creation of enchantment, for example, when producers rely on different techniques to produce enchantment. While earlier accounts focus on the consumption of enchantment (see Hartmann & Brunk, 2019, Hartmann & Östberg, 2013), its production has not been researched in the marketing domain as far as I am aware. This thesis argues that enchantment results from the myth aestheticization process, whereby myths are materialized and experienced through aesthetic work.

The ideological aim of myth aestheticization has been identified as being to make the brand/product/place enchanting. For consumers, they are creating enchantment in the here and now (re-enactment). On the one hand, the myth is rendered as an idealized form of beauty, and on the other hand, the brand as a carrier of that myth becomes a source of enchantment. This is more

visible in the performative practices of consumers. For instance, in Paper 4, the findings suggest that consumers lured by the retrofied brand consume the myths related to the GDR's past as beautiful. Hence, I argue that there is symbiosis between myth and brand/consumption activity.

Unlike Weber's (1917) assertion that intellectualization and rationalization create disenchantment, it has become common to see that technological infrastructures (Paper 5) can be enchanting. The sounds, images, smells, and sights capture the individual who then participates in its creation (Thrift, 2008). Previous studies in the consumption domain instantiate, for example, how consumers use magic that helps to elevate the mass-produced objects into magical meaning. In the fetishization process illustrated by Fernandez and Lastovicka (2011), a myth of charismatic aura around replica objects ends up assimilating the possession (object) inward, into the self (subject). In this case, guitars, as magical instruments (that are mass-marketed objects), become fetishes. Guitar players have customized and assembled these objects, and in these works, subjects (the guitar players) radiate the aura that domesticates the object as part of the statement.

From this and similar examples in the consumption and marketing domain, I discern that these producers – commercial or consumer – experience enchantment as an initial aspect of their production. Gell (1992) points to the enchantment of the creative process. As such, the artist's technical process is a magical form; it transforms raw materials into objects that fascinate individuals. Such technologies of enchantment secure “the acquiescence of individuals in the network of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed” (Gell, 1992, p. 43); Hancock (2005) further discerns it “as purposeful interventions into the realm of the cultural economy that operates by virtue of their ability to mediate the space that exists between the intellectual and the aesthetic” (2005, p. 30). It is then plausible to think aesthetic work can provide enchantment through direct sensual, somatic engagements (Hancock, 2005). That is why mood boards, templates, and collections are valued in the cultivation process of myth aestheticization. I found that through consumption-driven aesthetic work, hobbyists of the Viking age do not only consume the past and its myth, but they also enchant it by participating in the atmosphere. For instance, the findings of Paper 4 show that consumers act as aesthetic agents and derive enchantment from past-themed products and practices by integrating past-present dynamics. As an embodied aesthetic practice, Viking role-play involves re-instantiating the past, whereby it becomes encapsulated as an authentic representation rather than as purely ludic re-appropriation through its integration into the present by consumers. Mythologizing the past includes practices such as extracting natural dyes from the outer shells of walnuts, attempting to connect artefacts to their archaeological contexts, and looking at how an item was made, eventually fostering enchantment. In these examples, elements (natural pigments that are

believed to be produced in the distant past, the sound of guitar replicas) are part of technologies of enchantment (Gell, 1992). At the heart of the power to enchant are aestheticized myths, which are (re-)produced not only through images but also through material culture, through objects and commodities that the re-enactors themselves produce and that partake of the embodied discourse, via designs, crafts, being worn on bodies, displayed at campsites, and so on. In such contexts, experiences can be ruled by the idealization through the sublime, the beautiful, or the cute, or the zany, which enchants.

Similar to what Kitson & McHugh (2015) suggest, enchantment is a process whereby the relationship with social worlds is temporarily transformed, Viking re-enactors are dissolute, the established conditions of the social system are temporarily assumed to create a more egalitarian interaction where there is no pre-supposed superiority of one group. In that sense, it is similar to Kozinets' study of Burning Man, where participants come to engage in performance, spectacle, and laughter in the absence of commercial imperatives, and to the Goth subculture where the participants aestheticize the Goth myth and create an atmosphere of macabre (Goulding & Saren, 2009). Re-enactment performers in Viking encampments (Paper 3) draw enchanted episodes from the "warmth of the fire." On that note, Ger (2005) argues that warmth is an aspect of aesthetics and warming makes objects humane and is crucial in shaping habitats. That is, warm aesthetics underlie the beautification of spaces. Warmth helps fuse the new and the old, the unfamiliar and the familiar. For Turkish homemakers in Ger's study, the aesthetics of the novelty of urban life and its things is warmed by the aesthetics of the old. While the new is aspirational, the old is the identity: the traditional provides a sense of warmth because it is both distant and, at the same time, constructed to be 'us,' 'our customs' (Ger 2005; Beverland et al., 2020; Brunk et al., 2018).

On the other hand, Swedish design operates closely with technologies of enchantment. As a technology of enchantment, Swedish design aesthetics, manifested in the objects that people encounter in their daily lives, often draws on particular semiotic associations centred on a concept of "care" (Munch, 2017). Objects designed with simple ergonomic curves take care of their users physically by providing comfort. An emphasis on projecting straightforward beauty provides care. The Volvo brand concept store is designed to some degree to invoke this care myth, not only through iconic and indexical authentication but through the aesthetic treatment and atmosphere of the concept store. For example, the findings of Paper 2 argue that brand experience design executives create poetic thresholds, for instance, when they design lighting fixtures for the brand experience concept store.

4.4. Conceptualizing Myth Aestheticization

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and conceptualize the aestheticization of myth. The following research question has been proposed: How are myths (re-)produced as something beautiful and/or sublime by brands and consumers? The collective results of the papers explore the way in which mythical content is translated and reproduced in that particular process to become legitimate objects of consumption and marketing ideology.

The aestheticization of myth is a particular type that differs from the conventional understanding of aestheticization bound up in the art world. The thesis has thus shown how myths are translated and (re-)produced over the course of aestheticization (see figure 4). The process begins with cultivation to stage myths, and intended moods belong to the myths, not just by means of scripts but through spatial aesthetics and materials. (in)visibility entails a sanitized version of space to maintain the utopian ideas or to purify threatening encounters to stabilize meanings and feelings and preserve a particular distance in order to keep the allure. On the other hand, (in)variance simultaneously sharpens contrasting sensory elements to evoke novelty and dynamism. Staging strategies result in the production of moods, places that contribute to the circulation of the aesthetic ideal through mythic rendering. Hence, these sub-processes serve together to emplace the myths and enchantment.

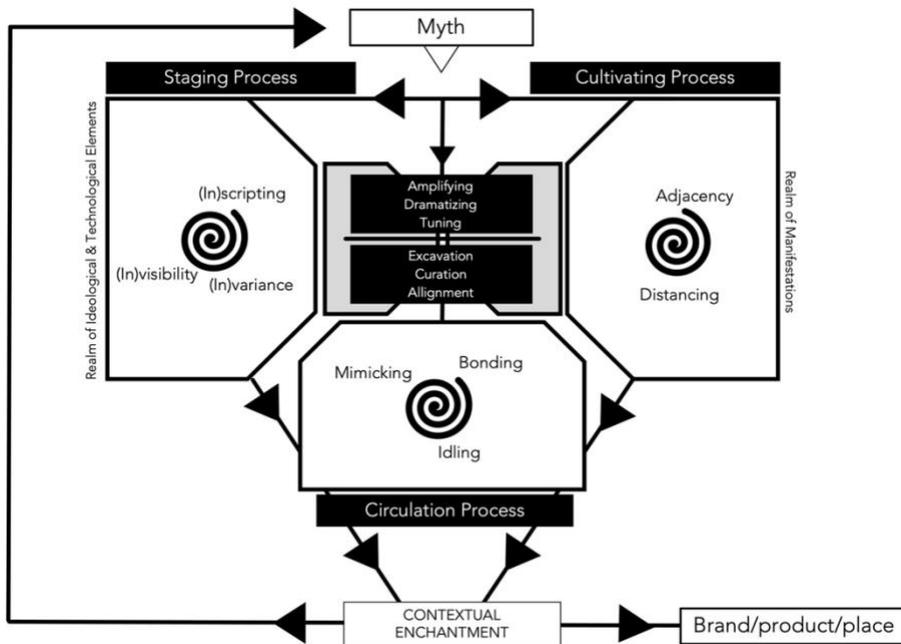


Figure 4: Myth Aestheticization

What is crucial in this operation is the aesthetic work of these diverse domains of producers. While brand-driven aesthetic work includes future-oriented brand myth-making using technical elements and novelty, it exemplifies creativity *dispositif*, which focuses on the production of new aesthetic encounters; the consumption-driven aesthetic work that I explore is centred on temporality, again pointing to another version of the idealized emotional state. It appears that while capitalism invests in future-oriented imaginaries and worldings, consumers are still mesmerized by the past. Enchantment is seen as an ideological endpoint in myth-aestheticization. Accordingly, this aesthetic work creates and makes brand/product/place enchanting through direct, sensual, somatic engagements and, since brands, products, and places are carriers of myths, myths are (re-)produced as being beautiful or sublime. In this aestheticization there is a symbiosis between myth and consumption activity. In other words, producers design brand and/or consumption aesthetics that render a specific myth as well as the connected brand as beautiful, sublime, interesting, or in a one word, moving. Myth aestheticization is then a vital ingredient in the creation of enchantment.

4.5. Implications and Contributions

In what follows, I offer a further discussion of the implications of this thesis as regards myth-making, the operation of consumer culture, a producer perspective on consumer culture theories, and future research opportunities.

4.5.1. Refining Myth-making through Myth Aestheticization

The perspective on myth aestheticization I offer in this thesis contributes to our understanding of myth-making. If, as Slater puts it, “all the world is consumable experience” (Slater, 1997, p.15), then my thesis offers a refined understanding of how aestheticization typically (re-)produced myths into ideals of the beautiful and/or the sublime. The collective findings of this thesis hold implications as to the theorization of myth aestheticization by offering a nuanced understanding of the process. Previous literature puts an emphasis on how myths are a fundamental ingredient in how a consumer culture operates, and delves into how consumers and commercial actors take recourse to the mythic content to interpret consumption and marketing activities, whereas the process of myth-making as a fundamental strategy for consumer cultural actors is relatively under-researched. Myth-making is deemed to be a central process in culturally oriented marketing and consumption studies. I contribute to this central process by offering myth aestheticization as a process we witness in our current consumer society. Myth aestheticization is one type of myth-making. It foregrounds how the

mythic content is retooled by brands and consumers through sensory and material elements rather than disseminated by written stories. In this way, myth aestheticization illuminates the performances of storied forms of myths.

Aesthetic spaces such as concept stores seem to enchant consumers and relate to their senses through the producers' careful engineering through material arrangements. Consumer cultural producers such as brand designers set "the conditions in which atmosphere appears" (Böhme, 2008, p.4), creating tuned spaces with tones, hues, and shapes to produce a particular mood, feel, or ambience (Edensor & Sumartojo, 2015). In social places, or "the third place", as the sociologist Roy Oldenburg (1999) named them, lighting, temperature, music, and décor are devised to attract and retain customers. Myth aestheticization, in this way, details the concept of emplacement.

Recently, marketing studies foregrounding market spatiality suggest that understanding the atmosphere can also be enriched by considering emplacement (Coffin & Chatzidakis, 2021). Emplacement –understood as the space-to-place transformation – focuses on the spatial essence of marketing activities. It is, however, important here to delineate the difference between spatiality and emplacement. While spatiality is constitutive of social activity and components of atmosphere (Chatzidakis et al., 2012; Böhme, 2013) and considers the precognitive and subliminal, emplacement remains associated with "cognitive deliberation and explicit cultural representations" (Coffin & Chatzidakis 2021, p. 46). It is thus plausible to employ the concept of aesthetic work to understand how it contributes to emplacement. Hence, myth aestheticization process here can be viewed as a conceptual bridge to understanding the concept of emplacement. A few studies in the marketing domain investigate this concept. For instance, examining the process of dwelling, Bradford and Sherry (2018) unpack the pillars of community emplacement as chorography, conviviality, and community that together serves consumers – in this case fans – to modify a public space into a private place and then into a public place. These processes involve both the deployment of material and the negotiation of meaning in creating places. For instance, their study found that chorography commingles enstorying, ensouling, and emplacing. The prominent currency can be construed as the potential allure of participants. From a commercial emplacement, studies have looked at how commercial ideologies are emplaced (Diamond et al., 2009; Borghini et al., 2009). In these studies, as Diamond and her colleagues remind us, textural elements "are embedded in the well-orchestrated material culture of enterprise" (2009, p. 122). Here the visual is a starting point for multi-sensory attempts to shape how spaces feel. In such aesthetic regimes, culturally informed consumption literature here attends to understanding how atmospheres also become local manifestations of cultural themes such as utopia (Maclaran & Brown, 2005) or home (Bradford & Sherry, 2015).

Emplacements are, in effect, when market actors identify places with physical affordances and symbolic associations (Coffin & Chatsidakis, 2021). From a myth-making point of view, emplacement is a process that serves to animate the myths. In other words, geography is significant because myths tend to be animated in certain locations and settings. Hence, in the animation of myths, such “geo-temporal” details are needed. Accordingly, if we look at the studies around consumer myths, we can find that these myths are most often found in geographically and temporally circumscribed contexts, as Brown and colleagues (2013) have pointed out (Belk & Costa, 1998; Brown et al., 2013; Cayla & Eckhardt 2008; Ustuner & Thompson, 2012; Diamond et al., 2009; Kozinets, 2002; Penalzoa, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The Mountain Man rendezvous (Belk & Costa, 1998), the Burning Man festival (Kozinets, 2002), Denver’s annual stock show (Penalzoa, 2001), or Harley-Davidson HOG fests (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) are such instances where myths are emplaced. We can thus understand that myths are emplaced in certain settings and can be felicitously adopted by consumers.

4.5.2. The Operation of Consumer Culture through Myth Aestheticization

My work has implications for our understanding of the operation of consumer culture, by pointing to how aesthetic work, and, specifically, the aestheticization of myth is an integral part of much of what brands and consumers do. As Reckwitz (2017) points out, the aestheticization of the social is a symptom of the lack “of affects in organized modernity” (2017, p. 214). In that sense, aestheticization provides motivational fuel to mobilize people to seek aesthetic experiences and engage in creative activities. Likewise, I have acknowledged that ideological and technological elements (see Paper 5) provide a framework for the circulation of “the aesthetic” and the changing nature of aesthetic judgments and experiences in contemporary conditions in society, culture, and media. Marketization is one of the main concerns here, as it encompasses almost all social spheres and constitutes “a dominant mode of the production of culture” (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2007, p. 146; Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016), and it continuously takes on new forms (Andehn et al., 2019), where the commodities are being captured and where they need to manifest a particular style (Thrift, 2008). The myth aestheticization process, alongside the aestheticization of places, products, and experiences, is one of the essential ingredients for marketization. Therefore, it is conceptually linked to the broader process of marketization as it generates new “intangible,” “magical” values, articulated in previous studies as enchantment (Hartmann & Brunk, 2019; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013; Gell 2002). Consequently, marketized props can be almost anything, from an object to a place, from a feeling to a practice (Tadajewski, 2020), as

long as they involve the production of various mechanisms of fascination (Thrift, 2008).

Zooming in to the concept of marketization for a second, I bring to the fore one of the most discussed processes in past research, that is, commodification. Commodification is defined as the process of making what were previously seen as non-market goods into marketed goods that can be branded, priced, and promoted in a marketplace (Belk, 2020). I see the previous understanding of aestheticization that I traced in cultural studies as being similar to this process (Welsch, 1996; Featherstone, 2007; Veblen, 1899). For instance, Veblen (1899) discussed how producers deliver eye-catching product packaging to provide a “saleable appearance” for the items. If goods can enter the realm of exchange, then we can also think in the opposite direction. In consumer research, Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry (1989) named this process sacralization. Sacralization involves ascribing special meanings to an object such that it becomes symbolically stamped by an owner, also known as the extended self (Belk, 1988). After all, the myth aestheticization process in this thesis goes beyond mere commodification for several reasons. First, commodification principally engages in how goods are transformed into commodities. In contrast, the myth aestheticization process I present in this thesis explores instead an idea of blurring the distinction between objects and subjects (consumers, marketers) and going beyond the group of “commodities”. Second, myth aestheticization reveals an immersive, captivating, enchanting process, as Thrift (2008) suggests. In other words, while aesthetic appeals foster the commodification of goods, myth aestheticization is also about new marketization patterns.

Elsewhere in literature, aestheticization and artification are used as interchangeable concepts (Naukkarinen, 2012). Recently Shapiro (2019) has identified the process of artification and the prerequisite of artification as displacement – that is, the removal of works of their original environments to create conditions for them to circulate. Following this is what Shapiro further defines as organizational change – a process of enhancing, for instance, a cultural practice (e.g., hip-hop dancing) through institutionalizing effects (e.g., festivals). This follows aesthetic formulation –that is, intellectualization with a corporate foundation. The concepts of aestheticization and artification are interlinked with each other, for instance, in cases where artworks are explicitly used to marketize the lure of luxury in retail settings. However, the process of artification deals with non-art becoming art (Shapiro, 2019), while aestheticization deals with how something is rendered as being “the aesthetic.” On that note, Naukkarinen (2012) suggests that artification is instead a particular case of aestheticization. In Paper 1, this process is evident in the market forces of refinement and accumulation. Institutional efforts foster the legitimization of the aesthetic as an essential attribute of certain markets (Smith-Maguire, 2018). Here, supra-firm actors such as supportive

institutions, states, and cultural intermediaries, as well as activists. Refinement denotes the reframing of the market aesthetic through the discursive, material, and symbolic reformulation of marketplace resources (e.g., national myths, institutional logics, new technologies). For instance, in the wine market, a process of refinement occurs when a provenance lures consumers, amplified by mythical narratives related to transparency of authenticity. Accumulation points to another market process by which resources, moods, and experiences are woven together by consumer cultural actors (Dagalp & Hartmann, 2021). This relates to manifesting a particular market regime (e.g., Nordic food market aesthetics, electric guitar market aesthetics, Viking re-enactment market aesthetics). Accordingly, refinement and accumulation processes cover various actors that play with material, sensory, and textural dimensions of manifestation defined in aesthetic deliberation and the cultivated lifestyle. These processes are about how ideologies and mythologies are captured in aesthetic treatments and how consumer cultural actors mobilize ideologies as stylistic qualities in expressing consumption. Accordingly, marketization here sensitizes us to capture the context of context (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011) in the presumably subject-framed concept of consumption aesthetics (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008).

4.5.3. Advancing a Producer Perspective for CCT Inspired Marketing Studies

The collective findings of my paper further contribute to the theoretical debate on CCT inspired marketing studies by foregrounding a producer perspective. This thesis answers to recent calls to study aestheticization in the consumer culture to understand the role of producers in crafting, shaping, and reproducing the aesthetics and manifested mythical content (Thompson & Tian, 2008; Rokka, 2021). The empirical materials focused on the producers of aestheticization by investigating different types of aesthetic work (Böhme, 2013). Aestheticization in this thesis is understood as multi-layered phenomenon, happening on many levels and involving a variety of actors in consumer culture (Dagalp & Hartmann, 2021). Consumption and marketing around aesthetics such as retro branding and spectacular retailing are where aesthetics matter for both marketers and consumers (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Brunk et al., 2018). These domains of literature implicitly pinpoint aestheticization as a way of reactivating the subcultural ethos and the recreation of myths around the aesthetic (Goulding & Saren, 2009; Kates, 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Shouten & McAlexander, 1995; Brunk et al., 2018). The aestheticized markets (e.g., the retro market) are shaped by the underlying cultural tensions as producers seek to revitalize cultural ideals through marketing. In this thesis, this body of literature is examined through

the lens of myth aestheticization; in doing so, the present thesis foregrounds the producer perspective and how producers incorporate aesthetic dimensions in their commercial activities with the aim of finding creative ways that are acceptable to markets, most often by encouraging consumption around aestheticized consumption experiences (Reckwitz, 2017).

4.5.4. Implications for Understanding the Production of Enchantment

From a consumer cultural point of view, it has been acknowledged that brands play an ideological role in consumer culture. This ideological role, first and foremost, has a capacity to transform (emergent) culture into (dominant) norms (see Holt, 2006). This branding ideology operates as a model of utopian representation – the envisioned state of perfection, through the discursive (the way the brand speaks about its product) and material (taking a physical form) symbolic spaces (Heilbrunn, 2006). Such ideals offer more welfare-induced narratives and are shaped by market interactions and structural regulations. Such brands radiate ideology, for instance, through ubiquity and repetition (Holt, 2006).

Ideology hence informs branding and consumption activities. For instance, brand actors leverage brands for cultural effect by triggering a sense of well-being amongst displaced communities, stitching brands to collective memory (Beverland et al., 2020). Brands further provide a set of cultural resources for consumers to deploy in the construction of a legitimized identity, be it cosmopolitan or heroic femininity (Borghini et al., 2009; Figueiredo et al., 2020). For instance, the American Girl brand concept store offers scripts for the enactment of heroic femininity and templates for replicating and perpetuating domesticity; the brand helps mitigate the effects of cultural contradictions surrounding the contemporary female identity role. Similarly, in a cosmopolitan servicescape, consumers demonstrate a set of competencies in handling multiple cultural forms and objects. From these examples, it is plausible to see that ideology becomes a consumer cultural performance that integrates individuals and their cultural repertoires with objects and spaces (Figueiredo et al., 2020).

The collective findings of this thesis further contribute to the consumption ideology by focusing on the production side of enchantment. Ideology is integral to consumption and marketing (Schmitt et al., 2021). Marketplace actors most often re-appropriate content that has previously been rendered as profane and reframes it in seemingly non-ideological roles. This process has recently been named consumption sublimation. It refers to consumers' participation in the ideological system through their expression of desires (Schmitt et al., 2021). The manifestations of such a process include forms of commodity fetishizing, such as ascribing a personality to brands, revering

brands as luxuries, mythologizing the iconography of product designs, anthropomorphizing products or brands, and stylizing ads as art. I argue that such manifestations are the areas in a situation where “the present is aestheticized” (Ngai, 2012), for instance, by anthropomorphizing products or brands, giving human traits to non-human entities, falls into the category of cute aesthetics, as Ngai describes. Cuteness serves for “what Hannah Arendt calls the ‘modern enchantment with small things’” (Ngai 2012, p. 3). On the other hand, according to Eagleton (1988), the sublime is coercive and relates to that which crushes us into admiring submission; consumption sublimation can thus fall under the aestheticization process. In such consumer sublimation, it is then possible to touch upon technologies of enchantment (Gell, 1992) in producing such impacts. Technologies of enchantment, that is, the way in which particular material artefacts are understood as aesthetically inscribed with meaning, is a power of “securing the acquiescence of individuals in the network of internationalities in which they are enmeshed” (Gell, 1992, p. 43). To sum up, when it comes to aesthetic work, my findings point to enchantment through the acts of the producers involved.

4.5.5. Implications for Marketing Practitioners

This thesis also has implications for what marketers need to do now. Future consumption spaces, experiences, and objects seem to continue to become sophisticated products of aesthetic work. As such, brands seem to adapt a multitude of experiential strategies with an increasing emphasis on the multi-sensorial experiences that they offer. The possibility of aesthetic experience thus becomes more common, at least in marketing, when the marketing is invested with aesthetic properties: “lifestyles,” art, and the reproduction of its artefacts and designed atmospheres. The question, then, is how marketers should think about aestheticization. And how can they “manage” it? The role of the aesthetic in myth-making is an essential element of transforming brands to make them relevant in society and speaking to ideological infrastructures regarding what and how to consumer. Brand experience design somehow becomes myth experience design. Clearly, my analysis reinforces the contention that specific ideological meanings associated with the brand should be actively managed in the brand store atmosphere. Consequently, rather than speaking about the brand experience design, practitioners need to think about producing the atmospheric qualities of the myth they address. Particularly in its strategies of design, brands need to attend to defining the cultural setting and understanding its products through a renewed emphasis on the tactility and materiality of communication, and its capacity to affect consumers at the level of emotion. By being physically and visually present in the store atmosphere, the brand aestheticizes the myth as something experienceable through the aesthetic qualities inscribed to the

brand. The aesthetic setting of the brand is further staged and reformulated by consumers. Consumers are active producers and engage in a process of creative presumption and they co-articulate the meaning of the brand by producing images and by presences in branded atmospheres. The brand becomes an aesthetic product for consumers to actively engage within contemporary culture.

The model I offer in this thesis suggests a three-step approach to aestheticizing myth, and thus gives managers a recipe for how to structure and work with myths. Marketing practitioners can play with adjacency and distancing aspects to cultivate the moods and emotions related to the myth they want to animate. Following this, they can transfer these moods and emotions to the retail environment by playing out (in)scripting, (in)visibility, (in)variance dynamics. Lastly, managers need to acknowledge that consumers are also producers of the myths, at various levels of appropriation. Brand managers should hence be attentive to diverse media platforms in addition to store environments and branded workers. For the store environments, tuning a space through material configurations is not something vague but quite the opposite; this appears to be a clearly defined practice. Spatial atmospheres can be viewed as spatial bearers of moods, which are workable and commodifiable.

The destructive impact of marketing practices on environmental, economic, and diversity practices reflexively creates a sustainability myth in a consumer culture. The findings of this thesis can be appropriated to brands who want to work with sustainability. Brand-driven myth aestheticization serves to govern the communal interaction and market process that foster aestheticization. Brands ought to work on reproducing future mythic tensions around the product, the experience of ideals of the beautiful, sublime, or should be related to other aesthetic ideologies. Brands that want to work with sustainability should try to reproduce mythic tensions around their products. Managers need to focus on emotional values and affective dimensions when designing an experience around the myth. This has important implications for marketing practitioners when they try to reproduce mythic tensions rendered as beautiful, sublime, or other aesthetic ideals. Similar steps can equally be applied to ethical consumerism, for instance, brand actors can work to retool ethical consumerism into a more refined versions of responsibility.

While gimmicky aesthetics summarize the capitalist efforts of aesthetic treatment (Ngai, 2020), considering the conceptual foundation of aesthetics can provide significant insights into practitioners. If successfully executed, aesthetic communication captures audience attention, as I show in Paper 5. Practitioners can enhance the appeal by making it more provocative, immersive, and poetic in promoting social causes. In this way, social aesthetics will become increasingly important in the coming years. Myth aestheticization as a particular form of making use of aesthetics is specifically

relevant to retro branding, brand experience design, and luxury and heritage branding. Marketers can think about how to (re)purpose the rich cultural resources and social values they are tapping into, and animate them in and through aesthetic elements. Similarly, marketing activities that co-interact with consumer creativity can find insights into developing resonant and compelling stories by including consumers, embedding them in the consumption space, and facilitating their empathy towards marginalized consumer segments, or other social causes such as environmentalism and health promotion, by communicating social issues. For instance, advertising aesthetics can contribute to the development of collective memory (Baker et al., 2004).

4.5.6. Educational Implications

This thesis has consequences for teaching marketing. Traditional marketing books present aesthetics as a competitive factor for brands. Thus, aesthetics is seen as one factor in sales-driven activities and helps marketers stand out from the crowd. Most marketing education continues to present aesthetics as being product attributes that merely fascinate customers. Aesthetic treatments in this thesis illustrate how culture is not an external variable but inseparable from consumption and the marketing of aesthetics. Marketing strategies, albeit often implicitly, draw from cultural resources in such aestheticization. At the same time, these marketing books treat the producer and the consumer as separate concepts, and each is limited in their capacity to perform. However, as illustrated in Paper 3, re-enactors are both consumers and producers, and aestheticization can be a platform for consumers in forming their identity.

Finally, the implications for society and future research possibilities have been identified. The myth aestheticization framework helps us to understand how aesthetics are an elemental force in current marketing practices as aesthetics is heavily incorporated in these practices and can be a powerful element through various dimensions. As scholars are increasingly pointing out, an aesthetic economy characterizes today's conditions (Böhme, 2003; Reckwitz, 2017; Thrift, 2008); this thesis adds to this understanding by detailing the process in marketing as being a socially constructed enterprise. This gives authorities such as marketers, NGOs, and other institutionalized bodies the possibility of thinking about the aesthetic dimension in communication strategies to tap into the collective imaginaries and create inclusive values.

4.5.7. Future Research Opportunities

Consumer cultural actors mobilize aesthetics to valorize and animate the past and the future to be seen as a meaningful frame. For instance, novelty and

innovation are essential ingredients for aestheticization, as Reckwitz (2017) has argued. The consumer cultural actors seem to be united in that when they invent new products and markets (e.g., electrified cars) they introduce new meanings (sustainability is fun). In that aestheticization, while the aesthetics of the markets are created, brands aestheticize not only identities but also national local, and regional ideologies, subcultures, practices, cosmopolitanism, and innovation, or certain modes of production (e.g., relating to sustainability issues, craft production, or hand-made products). Hence this thesis calls for the further investigation of the mythical (re)invention through the lens of aestheticization when the market expands towards a refined version.

The framework presents some conceptual links between the primary marketing constructs. I suggest that the concept of myth aestheticization serves the purposes of future research as well. Firstly, future research could study the working bodies of consumer culture from the perspective of the aestheticization process I presented in this thesis. The working bodies of consumer culture are increasingly incorporated into the processes of making value. To study the aesthetic dimensions of embodied everyday consumption patterns and imaginations about the future and aesthetic consumer movements I call for more diverse ethnographic research tools such as sensory ethnography (Pink, 2006) and videographic diaries (Bates, 2013)

Secondly, the production process of market aesthetics in alternative markets (e.g., electrified cars) could be a fruitful avenue to theorize market-level practices when they incorporate sustainability and aesthetics. The materiality of myth aestheticization is another essential aspect to theorize object-focused market activities, such as craft beer or knitting, as aestheticized markets. Also, while the focus is not on gender performances in aestheticization, future research could look at how gender is constructed in Viking nostalgia. The present thesis foregrounds the producer perspective and looks into consumers and brand actors. Future research can investigate other market actors, such as states, NGOs, and advertisers, and detail how they contribute to the myth aestheticization process. More importantly, future research can study and explore how sustainability myths about an imagined future as utopia or dystopia are aestheticized by brands and consumers.

Future research could also look at the new media and its role in creating aesthetic opportunities. Future technologies in marketing include augmented reality, avatar marketing, artificial intelligence, anthropomorphizing chatbots and crypto ads (Paper 5), all of which bring a chance to tell better stories and create intimate publics (Thrift, 2012) by cultivating moods and emotions, facilitating aesthetic bonding when audiences invest affectively in new media platforms. Media brands, such as Spotify, are highly crucial in this operation.

While I focus on the myth-making process from an aesthetic perspective, future research should look into the recursive process of the mythification of

aesthetic categories, such as how the value-laden aesthetic is mythified. For instance, from a discursive dimension, beauty is claimed as the core of aesthetic practices, so it would be interesting to focus on diverse beauty ideals in marketing activities to help increase the credibility of branding endeavours.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

This thesis theorized myth aestheticization with implications for marketing theory and practice. Grounded in the problematization of aestheticization as one way through which consumer culture operates, whereby aestheticization involves a particular form of marketization, I asked: how are myths (re-) produced into something beautiful and/or sublime by brands and consumers?

In order to answer this question, this thesis draws on five papers encompassing the conceptualization of aestheticization as a consumer cultural phenomenon, taking brand actor perspectives, consumer perspectives, and advertising, as an institutionalized body of aestheticized consumer society, as the sites for studying myth aestheticization processes.

By focusing on both, producers and consumers, this thesis deals with central actors in consumer culture as depicted by marketing and business literatures alike. Although the previous literature acknowledges that myths are fundamental in operating consumer culture, the processual perspective has been under-researched. By studying the aesthetic work of producers in marketing and consumption, this thesis reveals how mythic content is transformed into enchanted moments to operate in the ideological infrastructure known as consumer culture.

Accordingly, the thesis takes an aesthetically informed perspective to understand different levels of aestheticization and processes of how consumer cultural actors aestheticize myths. When it comes to aesthetic work, my findings point to enchantment through the acts of the producers involved. Storied forms of myths are delivered through aesthetics and atmosphere; in this way, atmospheres become local manifestations of cultural themes such as home (Bradford & Sherry, 2015) or cultural tactics such as mythologizing the company (Paper 2).

Future consumption spaces, experiences, and objects seem to continue to become sophisticated products of aesthetic work. As such, brands seem to adapt a multitude of experiential strategies with an increasing emphasis on the multi-sensory and aestheticized experiences on offer. Such an approach will be suitable for research that seeks to enhance the power of aesthetics in marketing and consumption phenomena.

References

- Adorno, T. W. (2013). *Aesthetic Theory*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Andéhn, M., Hietanen, J., & Lucarelli, A. (2020). Performing place promotion—On implaced identity in marketized geographies. *Marketing Theory*, 20(3), 321-342.
- Andersen, L. P. (2019). The Aestheticization of Place, Politics and Products Selling ‘The Nordic Way of Life’. *Akademisk kvarter / Academic Quarter*, 19: 104-114.
- Andersen, L. P., Kjeldgaard, D., Lindberg, F., & Östberg, J. (2019). Nordic Branding: An Odyssey into the Nordic Myth Market. In *Nordic Consumer Culture*, 213–38. Springer International Publishing.
- Arnould, E., Press, M., Salminen, E., & Tillotson, J. S. (2019). Consumer Culture Theory: Development, Critique, Application and Prospects. *Foundations and Trends in Marketing*, 12 (2), 80-166. ISSN 1555-0753
- Arnould, E. J., & Price, L. L. (2000). Authenticating acts and authoritative performances. Questing for self and community, in Ratneshwar, S., Mick, D.G. and Huffman, C. (Eds), *The Why of Consumption*, Routledge, London, 140-163.
- Arnould, E. J., Price, L., & Moisio, R. (2006). Making contexts matter: Selecting research contexts for theoretical insights. *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing*, 106-125.
- Arsel, Z., & Thompson, C. (2011). Demythologizing Consumption Practices: How Consumers Protect Their Field-Dependent Identity Investments from Devaluing Marketplace Myths. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(5), 791-806.
- Arsel, Z., & Bean, J. (2013). Taste Regimes and Market-Mediated Practice. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(5), 899-917.
- Askegaard, S., & Kjeldgaard, D. (2007). Here, There, and Everywhere: Place Branding and Gastronomical Globalization in a Macromarketing Perspective. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 27(2), 138-147.
- Askegaard, S., & Linnet, J. (2011). Towards an epistemology of consumer culture theory. *Marketing Theory*, 11(4), 381-404.
- Baker, S., Motley, C., & Henderson, G. (2004). From Despicable to Collectible: The Evolution of Collective Memories for and the Value of Black Advertising Memorabilia. *Journal of Advertising*, 33(3), 37-50.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*, London: J. Cape.
- Bates, C. (2013). Video diaries: Audio-visual research methods and the elusive body. *Visual Studies* (Abingdon, England), 28(1), 29-37.
- Baudrillard, J. (1993). *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, London and Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Becker, H. S. (1978). Arts and Crafts. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83: 862-889.
- Belk, R. W. (2020). Commodification as a Part of Marketization. In *Marketization*, 31-72). Singapore: Springer Singapore.
- Belk, R. W. (1991). Possessions and the Sense of Past. *ACR Special Volumes*.

- Belk, R. W., & Costa, J. (1998). The Mountain Man Myth: A Contemporary Consuming Fantasy. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25(3), 218-240.
- Belk, R. W., Weijo, H., & Kozinets, R. (2021). Enchantment and perpetual desire: Theorizing disenchanting enchantment and technology adoption. *Marketing Theory*, 21(1), 25-52.
- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139-168.
- Belk, R. W., Wallendorf, M., & Sherry, J. (1989). The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the Odyssey. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(1), 1-38.
- Benjamin, W. (2002). *The arcades project*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Benjamin, Walter (1969 [1936]). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Illuminations. Ed. H. Arendt. New York, Schocken. 217–251.
- Bennett, J. (2001). *The enchantment of modern life: Attachments, crossings, and ethics*. Woodstock: Princeton University Press.
- Beverland, M., Eckhardt, G., Sands, S., & Shankar, A. (2021). How Brands Craft National Identity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(4), 586-609.
- Biehl-Missal, B. (2013). The atmosphere of the image: an aesthetic concept for visual analysis. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 16(4), 356–367.
- Biehl-Missal, B., & Saren, M. (2012). Atmospheres of Seduction: A Critique of Aesthetic Marketing Practices. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 32(2), 168–180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146711433650>
- Biehl, B., & Vom Lehn, D. (2016). Four-to-the-Floor: The Techno Discourse and Aesthetic Work in Berlin. *Society* (New Brunswick), 53(6), 608-613.
- Björkman, I. (2002). Aura: Aesthetic Business Creativity. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 5(1), 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1025386029003127>.
- Blackburn, S. (2016). *Aesthetics*, The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bode, M. (2010). Showing Doing. The Art–science Debate in a Performative Perspective. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 9 (2): 139-55.
- Böhme, G. (1993). Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics. *Thesis Eleven*, 36(1), 113-126.
- Böhme, G. (1995). *Atmosphere*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Böhme, G. (2003). Contribution to the critique of the aesthetic economy. *Thesis Eleven*, 73(1), 71-82
- Böhme, G. (2013). The Art of the Stage Set as a Paradigm for an Aesthetics of Atmospheres. *Ambiances*.
- Böhme, G. (2016). *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (J.-P. Thibaud, Ed.) (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315538181>

- Borgerson, J. (2004). Materiality, Agency, and the Constitution of Consuming Subjects: Insights for Consumer Research. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 32, 439.
- Borghini, S., Diamond, N., Kozinets, R., McGrath, M., Muñiz, A., & Sherry, J. (2009). Why Are Themed Brandstores So Powerful? Retail Brand Ideology at American Girl Place. *Journal of Retailing*, 85(3), 363-375.
- Borghini, S., Visconti, L., Anderson, L., & Sherry Jr, J. (2010). Symbiotic Postures of Commercial Advertising and Street Art: Rhetoric for Creativity, *Journal of Advertising*, 39(3), 113-26.
- Bradford, T., & Sherry, J. (2015). Domesticating Public Space through Ritual. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(1), 130-151.
- Bradford, T., & Sherry, J. (2018). Dwelling dynamics in consumption encampments. *Marketing Theory*, 18(2), 203-217.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). Ethics in business research. *Business Research Methods*, 7(5), 23-56.
- Brei, V., & Tadjewski, M. (2015). Crafting the market for bottled water: A social praxeology approach. *European Journal of Marketing*, 49(3-4), 327-349.
- Brown, S., McDonagh, P., & Shultz II, C. (2013). Titanic: Consuming the Myths and Meanings of an Ambiguous Brand. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(4), 595-614.
- Brown, S., Stevens, L., & Maclaran, P. (2018). Epic aspects of retail encounters: the Iliad of Hollister. *Journal of Retailing*, 94(1), 58-72.
- Brown, S., Kozinets, R., & Sherry Jr, J. (2003). Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(3), 19-33.
- Brunk, K., Giesler, M., & Hartmann, B. (2018). Creating a Consumable Past: How Memory Making Shapes Marketization. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(6), 1325-1342.
- Buschgens, M., Figueiredo, B., & Rahman, K. (2019). How brand visual aesthetics foster a transnational imagined community. *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(11), 2268-2292.
- Canniford, R., & Shankar, A. (2013). Purifying Practices: How Consumers Assemble Romantic Experiences of Nature. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(5), 1051-1069.
- Canniford, R., Riach, K., & Hill, T. (2018). Nosenography. *Marketing Theory*, 18(2), 234-248.
- Canniford, R., & Karababa, E. (2013). Partly primitive: Discursive constructions of the domestic surfer. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 16(2), 119-144.
- Carlson, L., Grove, S., & Stafford, M. (2005). Perspectives on Advertising Research: Views from Winners of the American Academy of Advertising Outstanding Contribution to Research Award. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(2), 117-149.
- Carr, A., & Hancock, P. (Eds.). (2003). *Art and aesthetics at work*. Springer.

- Cayla, J., & Eckhardt, G. (2008). Asian Brands and the Shaping of a Transnational Imagined Community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(2), 216-230.
- Chang, C. (2013). Imagery Fluency and Narrative Advertising Effects, *Journal of Advertising*, 42(1), 54-68
- Charters, S. (2006). Aesthetic Products and Aesthetic Consumption: A Review, *Consumption Markets & Culture* (9)3. 235-55.
- Chatzidakis, A., Maclaran, P., & Bradshaw, A. (2012). Heterotopian space and the utopics of ethical and green consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 28(3-4), 494–515.
- Cho, B., Kwon, U., Gentry, J., Jun, S., & Kropp, F. (1999). Cultural Values Reflected in Theme and Execution: A Comparative Study of U.S. and Korean Television Commercials. *Journal of Advertising*, 28(4), 59-73.
- Chronis, A., Arnould, E., & Hampton, R. (2012). Gettysburg re-imagined: The role of narrative imagination in consumption experience. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 15(3), 261-286.
- Coffin, J., & Chatzidakis, A. (2021). The Möbius strip of market spatiality: Mobilizing transdisciplinary dialogues between CCT and the marketing mainstream. *AMS Review*, 11(1-2), 40-59.
- Crockett, D., & Davis, L. (2016). Commercial Myth-making at the Holy land experience, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 19(2), 206-227.
- Cuny, C., Pinelli, M., Fornerino, M., & DeMarles, A. (2020). Experiential art infusion effect on a service's brand: the role of emotions. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(11-12), 1055–1075, DOI: 10.1080/0267257X.2020.1755343
- Dagalp, I., Brunk, K., & Hartmann, B. (2020). The aestheticization of past- themed consumption. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 48, 509-511.
- Dagalp, I., & Hartmann, B. (2021). From 'Aesthetic' to Aestheticization: A Multi-Layered Cultural Approach, *Consumption Markets & Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2021.1935900>
- Daugbjerg, M. (2013). Patchworking the past: materiality, touch and the assembling of 'experience' in American Civil War re-enactment. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20(7–8).
- Davis, F. (1979). *Yearning for yesterday: a sociology of nostalgia*. New York: Free Press.
- De Clercq, R. (2013). *Beauty*. The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics. Routledge, 321-330.
- De la Fuente, E. (2019). After the Cultural Turn: For a Textural Sociology, *Sociological Review* 67(3): 552–67.
- Deighton, J. (1992). The consumption of performance, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(3), 362-372.
- Diamond, N., Sherry, J., Muniz, M. A., & Mcgrath, M. A. (2009). American Girl and the Brand Gestalt: Closing the Loop on Sociocultural Branding Research, *Journal of Marketing*, 73(3): 118-34.

- Dion, D. & Arnould, E. (2011). Retail Luxury Strategy: Assembling Charisma through Art and Magic, *Journal of Retailing*, 87(4): 502-20.
- Eagleton, T. (1988). The Ideology of the Aesthetic. *Poetics Today*, 9(2), 327–338. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1772692>
- Edensor, T., & Sumartojo, S. (2015). Designing atmospheres: Introduction to special issue. *Visual Communication*, 14(3), 251-265.
- Endrissat, N., Islam, G., & Noppeney, C. (2016). Visual organizing: Balancing coordination and creative freedom via mood boards. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(7), 2353-2362.
- Featherstone, M. (2007). *Consumer culture and postmodernism*. London: Sage.
- Fernandez, K., & Lastovicka, J. (2011). Making Magic: Fetishes in Contemporary Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(2), 278-299.
- Figueiredo, B., Larsen, H., & Bean, J. (2021). The Cosmopolitan Servicescape. *Journal of Retailing*, 97(2), 267-287.
- Folkmann, M. N. (2018). *Conceptualizing aesthetics in design: A phenomenological framework*. In P. Vermaas, & S. Vial (Eds.), *Advancements in the philosophy of design* 263-283. Springer. Design Research Foundations
- Folkmann M. N., & Jensen, H. (2017). Design and the Question of Contemporary Aesthetic Experiences, *Design Philosophy Papers*, 15:2, 133-144, DOI: 10.1080/14487136.2017.1375756
- Friberg, C. (2019). In the mood. Valorisation of moods in an aesthetic economy. *Rivista di estetica*. 105-119. 10.7413/18258646085.
- Gagliardi, P. (1996). *Exploring the Aesthetic Side of Organizational Life*, in S.R. Clegg et al. (eds), *Handbook of Organization Studies*, 565-81. London: SAGE.
- Gaut, B., & Lopes D. (2013). *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, New York: Routledge.
- Gazley, A., Clark, G., & Sinha, A. (2011). Understanding preferences for motion pictures. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(8), 854-861
- Gell, A. (1992). The technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology. *Anthropology, art and aesthetics*, 40-63.
- Ger, G., (2005). Warming: Making the new familiar and moral. *Ethnologia Europaea, Journal of European Ethnology* 35(1-2):19-21.
- Giese, J., Malkewitz, K., Orth, U., & Henderson, P. (2014). Advancing the aesthetic middle principle: Trade-offs in design attractiveness and strength. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(6), 1154-1161.
- Giesler, M. (2008). Conflict and Compromise: Drama in Marketplace Evolution. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(6), 739-753.
- Goulding, C. (2001). Romancing the past: Heritage visiting and the nostalgic consumer. *Psychology & Marketing*, 18(6), 565–592
- Goulding, C. (2002). An exploratory study of age related vicarious nostalgia and aesthetic consumption. *Advances in Consumer Research*. 29. 542-546.

- Goulding, C. & Saren, M. (2009). Performing Identity: An Analysis of Gender Expressions at the Whitby Goth Festival, *Consumption Markets & Culture* 12 (1): 27-46.
- Gunel, G., Varma, S., & Watanabe, C. (2020). A manifesto for patchwork ethnography, *Society for Cultural Anthropology*. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography>
- Hamilton, K., & Wagner, B. (2014). Commercialised nostalgia: Staging consumer experiences in small businesses. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(5-6), 813-832.
- Hancock, P. (2005). Uncovering the Semiotic in Organizational Aesthetics. *Organization*, 12, 29 - 50.
- Hartmann, B., J. & Brunk, K., H. (2019). Nostalgia Marketing and (Re-)Enchantment. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 36(4), 669-86.
- Hartmann, B., J. & Östberg, J. (2013). Authenticating by Re-Enchantment: The Discursive Making of Craft Production. *Journal of Marketing Management* 29(7-8), 882-911.
- Harvey, L. (2011). Intimate reflections: Private diaries in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 11(6), 664–682.
- Heilbrunn, B. (1999). *Brave New Brands: Marketing Paradiso between Utopia and A-topia*. In S. Brown & A. Patterson (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Marketing Paradiso Conclave: 222-235*. Belfast: University of Ulster.
- Heilbrunn, B. (2006). *Brave new brands*. Brand culture, 103-117.
- Hewer, P., & Brownlie, D. (2007). Cultures of consumption of car aficionados: Aesthetics and consumption communities. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 27(3-4), 106-119.
- Highmore, B. (2013). Feeling our way: mood and cultural studies. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 10(4), 427-438.
- Hirschman, E. (1983). Aesthetics, Ideologies and the Limits of the Marketing Concept, *Journal of Marketing*, 47(3), 45-55.
- Hirschman, E., & Thompson, C. (1997). Why Media Matter: Toward a Richer Understanding of Consumers' Relationships with Advertising and Mass Media, *Journal of Advertising*, 26(1), 43-60.
- Holbrook, M. B. & Hirschman, E. C. (1982). The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(2):132-140.
- Holbrook, M., & Zirlin, R. (1985). Artistic Creation, Artworks and Aesthetic Appreciation: Some Philosophical Contributions to Nonprofit Marketing, in *Nonprofit Marketing*, Russell Belk (Ed.), Greenwich: JAI Press.
- Hollenbeck, C. R., Peters, C., & Zinkhan, G. M. (2008). Retail spectacles and brand meaning: Insights from a brand museum case study. *Journal of Retailing*, 84(3), 334-353.
- Holmqvist, K., & Płuciennik, J. (2002). A Short Guide to the Theory of the Sublime. *Style* 36, 4718–36.

- Holt, D. (1997). Poststructuralist Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption in Postmodernity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 23(4), 326-350.
- Holt, D. & Craig T. (2004). Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption, *Journal of Consumer Research* 31(2), 425-40.
- Holt, D. B. (1995). How consumers consume: A typology of consumption practices, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1),1-16.
- Holt, D. B. (2002). Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding, *Journal of Consumer Research* 29(1), 70-90.
- Holt, D. B. (2003). What Becomes an Icon Most? *Harvard business review* ,81, 43–9.
- Holt, D. B. (2004). *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Holt, D. B. (2006). Jack Daniel's America: Iconic Brands as Ideological Parasites and Proselytizers, *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6 (3), 355-77.
- Holt, D. B. & Cameron, D. (2010). *Cultural strategy: Using innovative ideologies to build breakthrough brands*. Oxford University Press.
- Hughes, G., & Walter, A. (2021). Staying Tuned: Connections beyond ‘the Field’. *Social Analysis*, 65, 89-102.
- Humphreys, A., & Thompson, C., J. (2014). Branding disaster: Reestablishing trust through the ideological containment of systemic risk anxieties, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(4), 877-910
- Joy, A., & Sherry Jr, J. F. (2003). Speaking of art as embodied imagination: A multisensory approach to understanding aesthetic experience, *Journal of Consumer Research* 30(2), 259-282.
- Joy, A. (2022). *The Future of Luxury Brands: Artification and Sustainability*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.
- Kant, I. (2000). *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kates, S., M. (2002). The Protean Quality of Subcultural Consumption: An Ethnographic Account of Gay Consumers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(3), 383-99.
- Kim, T. Y., & Lee, Y. J. (2017). Contemporary dandies: The behavioral characteristics of Korean male consumers in fashion multi-brand stores and tailor shops, *Journal of Business Research* 74, 149-153.
- Kitson, J., & McHugh, K. (2015). Historic enchantments – materializing nostalgia. *Cultural Geographies*, 22(3), 487-508.
- Kotler, P. (1973). Atmospheric as a marketing tool. *Journal of Retailing*, 49(4), 48-64.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2001). Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek’s Culture of Consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(1), 67-88.

- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(1), 20-38.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. London: Sage.
- Kozinets, R., Sherry, J., DeBerry-Spence, B., Duhachek, A., Nuttavuthisit, K., & Storm, D. (2002). Themed flagship brand stores in the new millennium: Theory, practice, prospects. *Journal of Retailing*, 78(1), 17-29.
- Kristensen, D. B., Boye, H., & Askegaard, S. (2011). Leaving the Milky Way! The formation of a consumer counter mythology. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 11(2), 195-214.
- Kuldova, T. (2017). The Sublime Splendor of Intimidation: Outlaw Biker Aesthetics of Power. *Visual Anthropology*, 30(5), 379-402.
- Lash, S., & Urry, J. (1994). *Economies of signs and space*. London: Sage.
- Levy, S. J. and Czepiel, J. (1974). Marketing and Aesthetics. *Proceedings of the American Marketing Association Educator's Conference*, 386-391.
- Levy, S. J. (1959). Symbols for sale. *Harvard Business Review*, 37(4): 117-124.
- Levy, S. J. (1981). Interpreting consumer mythology: a structural approach to consumer behavior, *Journal of Marketing* 49-61.
- Lindqvist U. (2009). The Cultural Archive of the IKEA Store. *Space and Culture*, 12(1), 43-62.
- Lofland, L., & Lofland, J. (1995). *Analysing social settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Lynch, L., Patterson, M., & Ni Bheachain, C. (2020). Visual literacy in consumption: consumers, brand aesthetics and the curated self. *European Journal of Marketing*, 54(11), 2777–801.
- Maciel, A., & Wallendorf, M. (2017). Taste Engineering: An Extended Consumer Model of Cultural Competence Constitution. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(5), 726-46.
- Maclaran, P., & Brown, S. (2005). The Center Cannot Hold: Consuming the Utopian Marketplace. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(2), 311–323.
- Maran, T. (2003). Mimesis as a phenomenon of semiotic communication. *Sign Systems Studies*, 31(1), 191-215. <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2003.31.1.08>
- Marcuse, H. (1978). *The aesthetic dimension: Toward a critique of Marxist aesthetics*.
- Marion, G. (2006). Research Note: Marketing ideology and criticism: Legitimacy and legitimization. *Marketing Theory*, 6(2), 245-262.
- McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(1), 71-84.
- McCracken, G. D. (1988). *The long interview* (Vol. 13). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McCracken, G. D. (1988). *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

- McCracken, G. D. (2005). *Culture and consumption II: Markets, meaning, and brand management*, Indiana University Press.
- McQuarrie, E., & Mick, D. (1996). Figures of Rhetoric in Advertising Language. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(4), 424-438.
- Merkel, I. (2006). *From Stigma to Cult—Changing Meanings in East German Consumer Cultures*, in *Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. Frank Trentmann, Oxford: Berg, 249–70.
- Mick, D. G., & Oswald, L. R. (2006). *The semiotic paradigm on meaning in the marketplace*. *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing*, 31, 45.
- Molander, S., Kleppe, I., & Ostberg, J. (2019). Hero shots: Involved fathers conquering new discursive territory in consumer culture. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 22(4), 430-453.
- Munch, A., V. (2017). On the Outskirts: the Geography of Design and the Self-exoticization of Danish Design. *Journal of Design History* 30.
- Muniz, A., & O'Guinn, T. (2001). Brand Community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412-432.
- Murphy, K., M. (2013). A Cultural Geometry: Designing Political Things in Sweden. *American Ethnologist* 40.1: 118-31. Web.
- Nash, M., & Moore, R. (2018). Exploring Methodological Challenges of Using Participant-Produced Digital Video Diaries in Antarctica. *Sociological Research Online*, 23(3), 589-605.
- Naukkarinen, O. (2012). Variations in Artification. In Naukkarinen and Saito, 'Artification',
- Ngai, S. (2012). *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ngai, S. (2020). *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- O'Donohoe, S., Desmond, J., & McDonagh, P. (2001). Counter-culture and consumer society. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 4, 241-271.
- Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The great good place: Cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community*. Da Capo Press.
- Oyedele, A., & Minor, M., S. (2012). Consumer Culture Plots in Television Advertising from Nigeria and South Africa. *Journal of Advertising*, 41(1), 91-108.
- Park, C. W., Eisingerich, A. B., Pol, G., & Park, J. W. (2013). The role of brand logos in firm performance. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(2), 180-187.
- Peñaloza, L. (1998). Just doing it: A visual ethnographic study of spectacular consumption behavior at Nike Town. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 2(4), 337-400.
- Peñaloza, L. (2000). The Commodification of the American West: Marketers' Production of Cultural Meanings at the Trade Show. *Journal of Marketing*, 64(4), 82-109.

- Peñaloza, L. (2001). Consuming the American West: Animating Cultural Meaning and Memory at a Stock Show and Rodeo. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28 (3), 369-98.
- Peñaloza, L. & Cayla, J. (2006). *Writing pictures, taking fieldnotes: towards a more visual and ethnographic consumer research*, in Belk, R. (ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing*, Cheltenham, UK, Northampton, US: Edward Elgar
- Phillips, B. J., McQuarrie, E. F., & Griffin, W. G. (2014). The face of the brand: How art directors understand visual brand identity. *Journal of Advertising*, 43(4), 318–332
- Pine, B., J. & Gilmore, J. H. (1998). *Welcome to the experience economy*. Harvard Business Review. 97-105
- Pine, B., J. & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The Experience Economy: Work is theater and every business a stage*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Pink, S. (2006). *The future of visual anthropology: Engaging the senses*. London: Routledge.
- Postrel, V. (2003). *The Substance of Style. How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture and Consciousness* Harper Collins, New York.
- Reckwitz, A. (2017). *The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New*. Cambridge, UK: Malden, MA: Polity.
- Rifkin, J. (2000). *The age of access: The new culture of hypercapitalism, where all life is a paid-for experience*. New York: Tarcher Putnam
- Ritzer G. (1999). *Enchanting in a disenchant world: Revolutionising the means of consumption*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press
- Roberts, D. (2003). Illusion Only Is Sacred: From the Culture Industry to the Aesthetic Economy. *Thesis Eleven* 73(1) (May 2003): 83–95.
- Rokka, J. (2021). Consumer Culture Theory's future in marketing. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 29(1): 114-24.
- Sandbye, M. (2016). The New Nordic? A critical examination, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 8(1), 335-71
- Schmitt, B., Simonson, A. & Marcus, J. (1995). Managing Corporate Image and Identity. *Long Range Planning* 28(5), 82–92.
- Schmitt, B., Brakus, J. J. & Biraglia, A. (2021). Consumption Ideology, *Journal of Consumer Research*.
- Schmitt, B., & Simonson, A. (1997). *Marketing aesthetics: the strategic management of brands, identity, and image*. New York: Free Press,
- Schneider, M. A. (1993). *Culture and enchantment*. University of Chicago Press.
- Schouten, J. W. & McAlexander, J. H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 43-61.
- Schroeder, J. (2005). The Artist and the Brand, *European Journal of Marketing*, 39(11-12), 1291-1305.

- Schroeder, J. (2006). Aesthetics Awry: The Painter of Light™ and the Commodification of Artistic Values. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 9(2), 87-99.
- Schroeder, J., & Borgerson, J. (1998). Marketing Images of Gender: A Visual Analysis. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 2(2), 161-201.
- Scott, L. M. (1994). Images in advertising: The need for a theory of visual rhetoric. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(2), 252-273.
- Seregina, A., & Weijo, H. A. (2017). Play at any cost: How cosplayers produce and sustain their ludic communal consumption experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(1), 139-159.
- Shapiro R. (2019). Artification as Process. *Cultural Sociology*, 13(3), 265-275.
- Sherry J. F., & Kozinets, R. V. (2022). Being at Burning Man: Fabulations and Provocations. in *The Future of Luxury Brands: Artification and Sustainability*, Annamma Joy, ed. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 73-93
- Sherry J. F. (1998). *The Soul of the Company Store: Nike Town Chicago and the Emplaced Brandscape*. in *ServiceScapes: The Concept of Place in Contemporary Markets*, Sherry John F. Jr. ed. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books, 109–46.
- Siles, I., Segura-Castillo, A., Sancho, M., & Solís-Quesada, R. (2019). Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions through Playlists on Spotify. *Social Media + Society*. 5.
- Slater, D. (1997). *Consumer culture and modernity*. London: Polity
- Smith-Maguire, J. (2018). Taste as Market Practice: The Example of “Natural” Wine. *Consumer Culture Theory* 19: 71–92.
- Södergren, J. (2022). ‘Woke’ Authenticity in Brand Culture: A Patchwork Ethnography (PhD dissertation, Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University). Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-199361>
- Spiggle, S. (1994). Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(3), 491-503.
- Stern, B. B. (1992). Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de siècle Effect. *Journal of Advertising*, 21(4), 11–22.
- Stern, B. B. (1995). Consumer Myths: Frye's Taxonomy and the Structural Analysis of Consumption Text. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(2), 165-85.
- Stewart, A. (Ed.). (1998). *The ethnographer's method* (Vol. 46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strati, A. (1999). *Organization and aesthetics*. Sage.
- Szmigin, I. (2006). The Aestheticization of Consumption: An Exploration of ‘Brand New’ and ‘Shopping.’ *Marketing Theory*, 6 (1), 107–18.
- Tadajewski, M. (2020). Marketization: Exploring the Geographic Expansion of Market Ideology.
- Taylor, S., & Hansen, H. (2005). Finding Form: Looking at the Field of Organizational Aesthetics. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42, 1211-1231.

- Thompson C. J., & Kumar, A. (2022). Analyzing the Cultural Contradictions of Authenticity: Theoretical and Managerial Insights from the Market Logic of Conscious Capitalism. *Journal of Marketing*.
- Thompson, C. J. (2004). Marketplace Mythology and Discourses of Power. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31.
- Thompson, C. J. & Tian, K. (2008). Reconstructing the South: How Commercial Myths Compete for Identity Value through the Ideological Shaping of Popular Memories and Countermemories. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(5), 595-613.
- Thrift N. (2012). The insubstantial pageant: producing an untoward land. *Cultural Geographies*, 19(2), 141–168.
- Thrift, N. (2005). *Knowing Capitalism*. London: SAGE.
- Thrift, N. (2008). The material practices of glamour, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 1(1):9-23.
- Tillotson, J. S., & Martin, D. (2014). *Understanding myth in consumer culture theory*. Myth and the Market.
- Tzanelli R., & Yar, M. (2021). Atmospheres of the inhospitable in staged kidnappings. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 24(5), 439-455.
- Üstüner, T., & Thompson, C. J. (2012). How marketplace performances produce interdependent status games and contested forms of symbolic capital. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(5), 796-814.
- Van Duijn, S. (2020), Everywhere and nowhere at once: the challenges of following in multi-sited ethnography, *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 9(3), 281-294.
- Veblen, T. (1899). *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Norwalk, CT: Easton Press.
- Venkatesh, A., & Meamber, L. A. (2006). Arts and Aesthetics: Marketing and Cultural Production, *Marketing Theory*, 6 (1), 11-39.
- Venkatesh, A., & Meamber, L. A. (2008). The Aesthetics of Consumption and the Consumer as an Aesthetic Subject, *Consumption Markets & Culture* 11(1): 45-70.
- Veresiu, E., Babic-Rosario, A., & Robinson, T. (2018). Nostalgicising: A Performative Theory of Nostalgic Consumption. *Association for Consumer Research*.
- Vukadin, A., Lemoine J., & Badot, O. (2016). Opportunities and risks of combining shopping experience and artistic elements in the same store: a contribution to the magical functions of the point of sale. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(9-10), 944-964,
- Wallendorf, M. (1980). *The Formation of Aesthetic Criteria Through Social Structures and Social Institutions*, in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 07, eds. Jerry C. Olson, Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Consumer Research 3-6.
- Welsch, W. (1996). Aestheticization processes: phenomena, distinctions and prospects. *Theory, Culture & Society* 13(1), 1-24. Vancouver

- Wilner S. J. S., & Huff, A. D. (2017). Objects of desire: the role of product design in revising contested cultural meanings. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(3-4), 244-271.
- Yanow, D. (2006). *Studying physical artifacts: An interpretive approach*.
- Zhao, X., & Belk, R. W. (2008). Politicizing consumer culture: Advertising's appropriation of political ideology in China's social transition, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(2), 231-244.
- Zwick, D., & Bradshaw, A. (2016). Biopolitical marketing and social media brand communities. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33(5), 91-115.