Exploring Consumerism in Contemporary Society
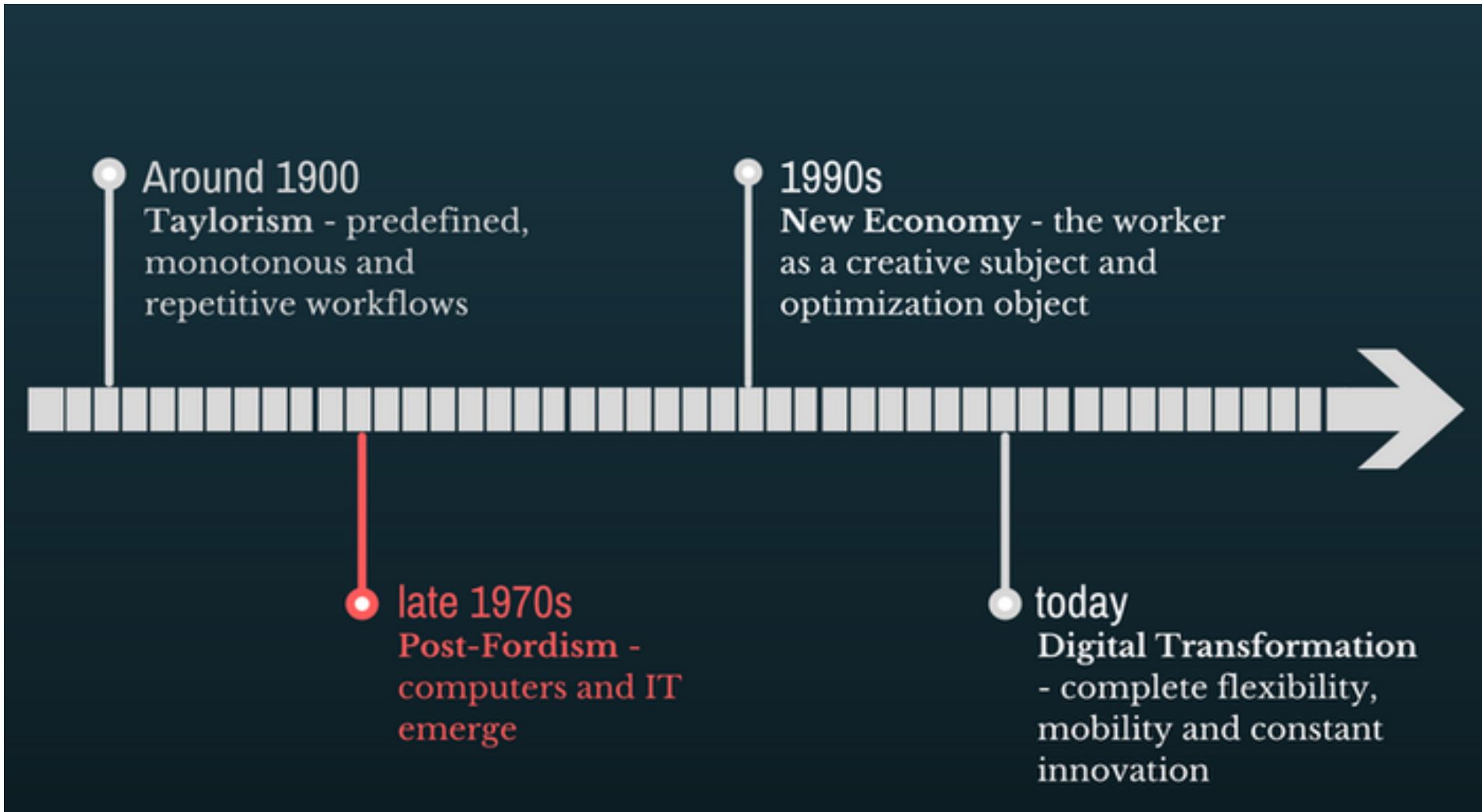## UWAS – C0066

Introduction to the special issue on aesthetics, images and vision

Jonathan E. Schroeder

University of Exeter, UK

Aesthetics - (Greek: *aisthetikos*) - "relating to perception by the senses"

The sense concerned with beaty

Subordination of production to consumption (marketing & design)

Around 1900
Taylorism - predefined, monotonous and repetitive workflows

1990s
New Economy - the worker as a creative subject and optimization object

late 1970s
Post-Fordism - computers and IT emerge

today
Digital Transformation - complete flexibility, mobility and constant innovation

https://medium.com/@TomDahlstrom/a-brief-history-of-why-work-sucks-part-2-of-4-post-fordism-e9f6af425531

"Images … constitute much corporate communication about products, economic perfomrance and corporte identity" (Schroeder, 2006: 5)

Visual experience!

"…computer – mediated environemnt almost entirely dependent upon sense of sight" (ibid: 5)

"I have argued that visual consumption constitutes a key attribute of an experience economy organized around attention, in which strategic communication – including advertising, promotion, Websites, retail environments and mass media – incorporates <u>visual images designed to capture attention</u>, build brand names, create mindshare, produce attractive products and services, and persuade citizens, consumers and voters (Schroeder, 2002)." (Ibid: 5-6)

"[…] products, services, brands, politicians and ideology are marketed via images, and that consumers consume products symbolically […]

visual images exist within a distinctive socio-legal environment – unlike textual or verbal statements, such as product claims or political promises, pictures cannot be held to be true or false – images elude empirical verification" (Ibid: 7)

"[…] products no longer merely reflect images – the image often appears prior to the product, which is then developed to fit the image (Rosa et al., 1999).

Many products and services are designed to fit a specific target market; they conform to an image of consumer demand, exemplifying a seismic economic shift towards experience, towards images, towards attention (Lash and Urry, 1994)."
(Ibid: 7)

Pablo Picaso, Guernica, 1937

THE ORIGINAL OATLY!

Guest Editors' Introduction

Oppression, Art and Aesthetics

Samantha Warren & Alf Rehn

"From the outset, we wish to make clear that we are certainly not denying that the birth of organizational aesthetics in the early 1990s crystallized a growing and welcome recognition that processes of human sense-making, organizing and managing at work are far more sensuous, embodied, passionate, and "aesthetico-intuitive" (Gagliardi 1996, 576) than traditional modernist organizational discourses had tried to make out […]" (Warren and Rehn, 2006: 81)

"Theatre can be used as a mode of controlling organizational actors, art may be used as a way to mollify political demands, style used as an offensive weapon—in corporate life we can find a number of ways in which art and aesthetic moves are used not to enhance organizational experience but to establish hegemony." (Ibid: 82)

"In a world defined by consumption, the place of aesthetics and art is obviously a case of something far more complex than mere decoration. Yet, in the economic sphere their place has continuously been studied and discursively constructed as something positive and creative. Such uncritical acceptance clearly limits the potential of these issues to present a more complex and serious engagement with the aestheticized world, and such a myopic view of art and aesthetics leaves a lot of things about organization, consumption, markets, and culture unsaid." (Ibid: 82)

"Multimedia teaching experiences, brimful with animation, video, image, and sound are becoming increasingly commonplace in the design and delivery of higher education courses—the ubiquitous PowerPoint presentation enabling slick styling and televisual feasts." (Ibid: 82)
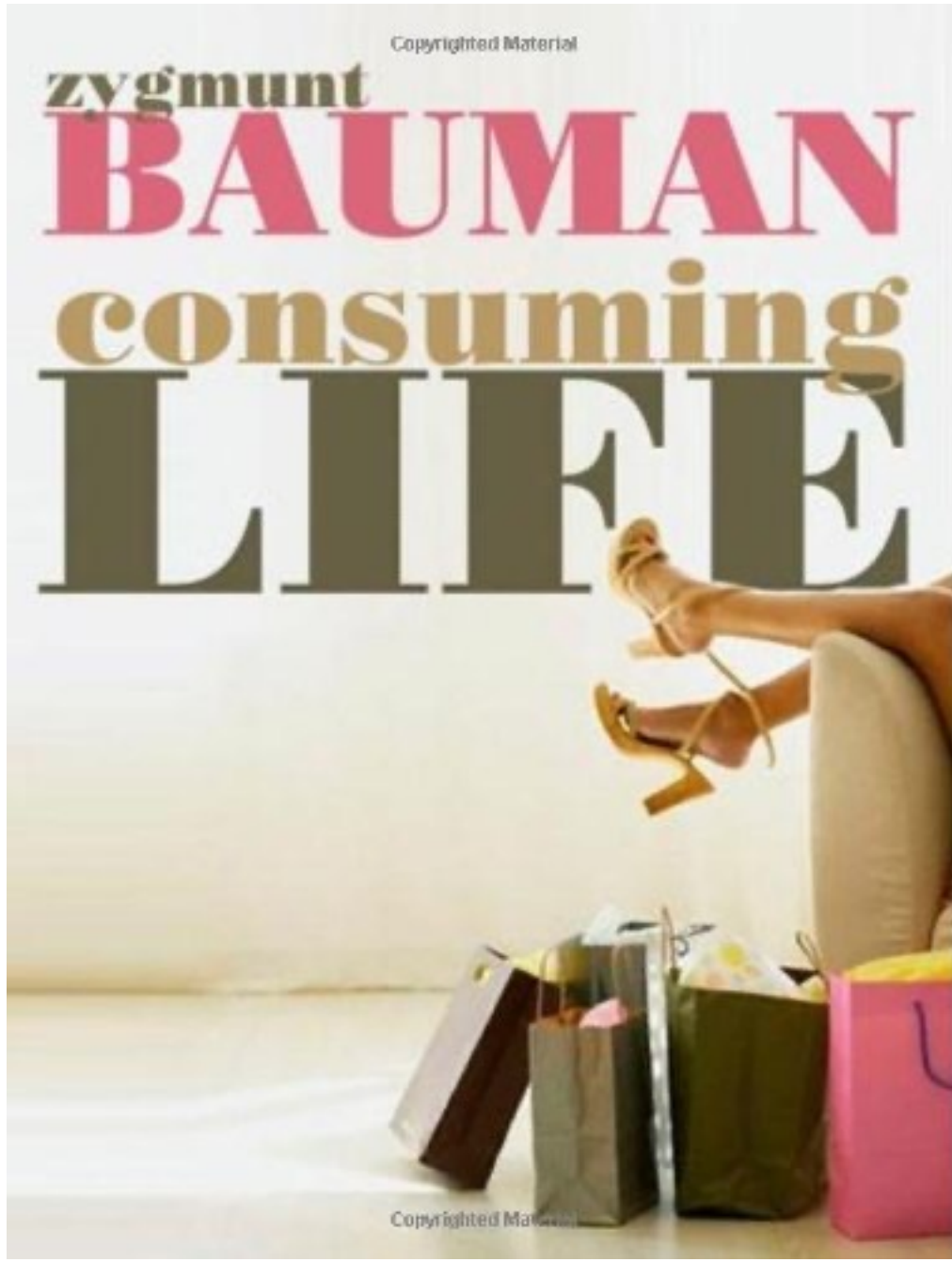
Self

zygmunt BAUMAN
consuming LIFE

2007

"There is no worse deprivation, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity. - Pierre Bourdieu, Pascalian Meditations"

"Wired up" / "Wireless," society

- The effects of social media networks on the "self"
- Bourndaries between the private and the public, blurring
- At the hart of social networking is an exchange of personal information
- Users are happy to reveal intimate details of personal information
- "intimacy acted out in public"
- A PR culture
- "show-and-tell culture"

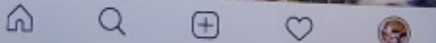- Social life is already routinely electronically mediated
- Social life turned into an *electronic* life or *cyber*life
- Social life electronically is no longer a choice, but a take it or leave it necesity

How about those that are not electronically linked?

"[people] enticed, nudged or forced to promote an attractive and desirable *commodity*, and so to try as hard as they can, and using the best means at their disposal, to enhance the market value of the goods they sell. And the commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are ***themselves***." (Bauman, 2007: 6)

"The test they need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them *to recast themselves as commodities*: that is, as products capable of catching the attention and attracting *demand* and **customers**." (ibid)

In the society of consumers no one can become a subject (*self*) without first turning into a <u>commodity</u>, and no one can keep his or her subjectness (*selfness*) secure without perpetually resuscitating (reviving), resurrecting (bringing to life) and replenishing the capacities expected and required of a sellable <u>commodity</u>. The 'subjectivity' (*selfness*) of the 'subject',(*self*) and most of what that subjectivity enables the subject to achieve, is focused on an unending effort to itself become, and remain, <u>a sellable commodity</u>. (ibid: 12)

Recap

"Consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources, on which they depend, is mediated through market. […] consumer culture marks out a system in which consumption is dominated by consumption of commodities …"
Slater (1997: 8)

"the new logic of the economy" distances itself from "the ascetic ethic of production and accumulation" and comes to focus instead on consumption and pleasure. With this shift, new social standards are established and new groups gain social and economic prominence." Bourdieu (2000, 310)

[…] the contemporary capitalist moment can be defined (in part) by the circulation and (commercial) exchange of expertise in the socially appropriate purchase, use and display of commodities.

In this understanding, [*individuals*]/groups that lay claim to skills in this trafficking of value and <u>taste</u> —or expertise in the translation of such values … —will therefore come to play a more prominent part in the economic and social realms.

• (Appadurai 1986)

Subcultures of consumption

Subculture: "cultural group within a larger culture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture" (dictionary.com)

SUBCULTURE
the meaning of style
DICK HEBDIGE

Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details
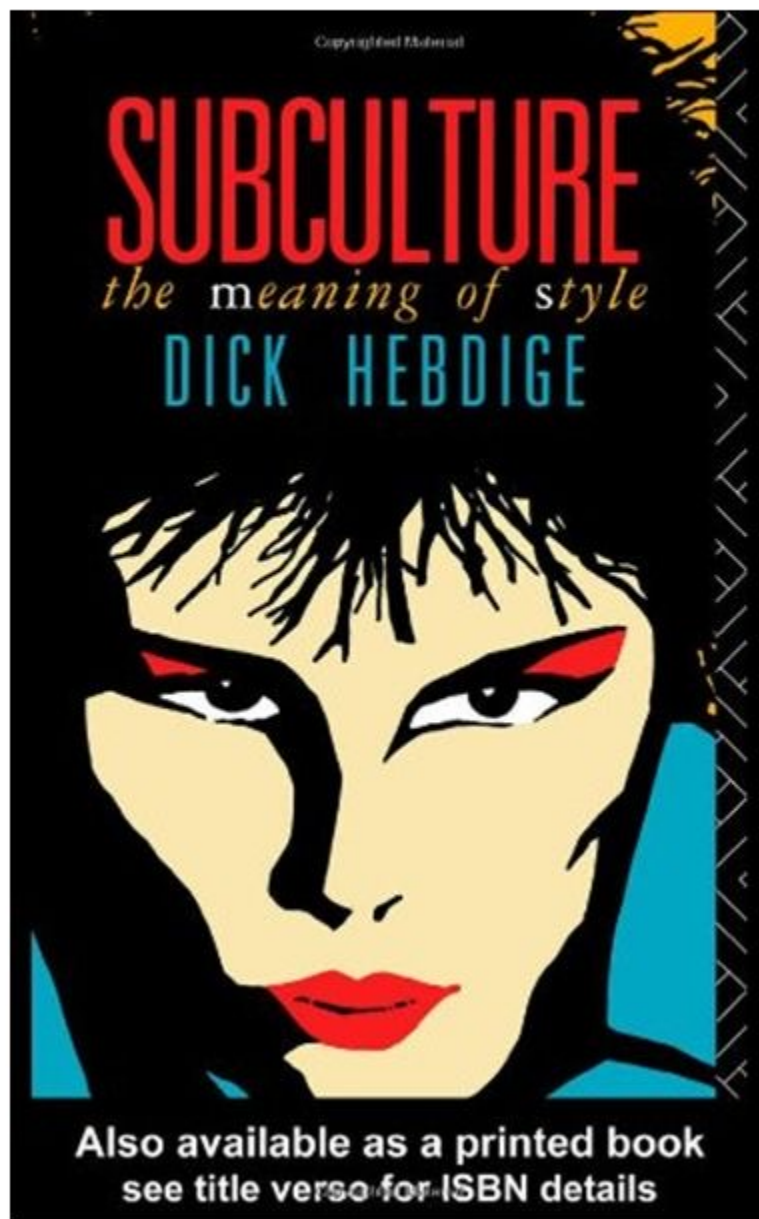
- In his 1979 book *Subculture the Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige argued that a subculture is a subversion to normalcy. He wrote that subcultures can be perceived as negative due to their nature of criticism to the dominant societal standard. Hebdige argued that subcultures bring together like-minded individuals who feel neglected by societal standards and allow them to develop a sense of identity.

Subcultures of consumption include an identifiable:

- hierarchical social structure

- a unique ethos (i.e., its underlying values and their expression and maintenance or set of shared beliefs and values)

- unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression.

(Schoutend and McAlexander, 1995: 43)

What is the impact of SC on the lives and identities of individual consumers?

Structure

A subculture of consumption comes into existence as people identify with <u>certain objects</u> or <u>consumption activities</u> and, through those objects or activities, identify with other people.

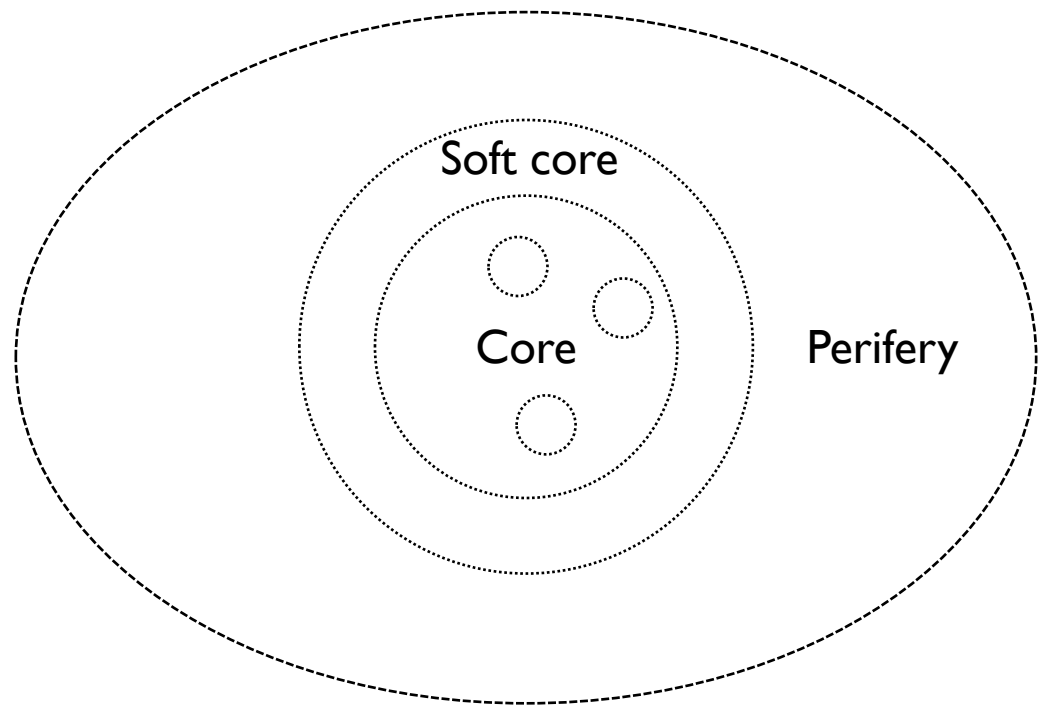The unifying consumption patterns are governed by a <u>unique ethos</u> or set of common values.

The structure of the subculture, which governs social interactions within it, and which we now address, is a direct reflection of the commitment of <u>individuals to the ethos</u>.

(ibid: 48)

Ethos (values)

- Underlying the behaviors of a subculture of consumption is an identifiable ethos, that is, a set of core values that are accepted to varying degrees by all its adherents.

- Those values find expression in certain products or brands and their usages. Where multiple subgroups coexist within a subculture, expressions of the core values through symbolic consumption may reflect cultural or socioeconomic idiosyncrasies of the subgroups.

- Commitment to key brands and product usage behaviors may be held with religious intensity, even to the point of elevating certain brands to the status of icons. The popularity of such brands may be enhanced by missionary-like behaviors on the part of enthusiastic members of the subculture of consumption.

- Personal freedom: libertarianism
  - Ideological expression: bike vs. car

- Patriotism and American Heritage

- Machismo
  - "Real men"
  - Particular masculin identity category
 - Bodily performed through particalar clothing
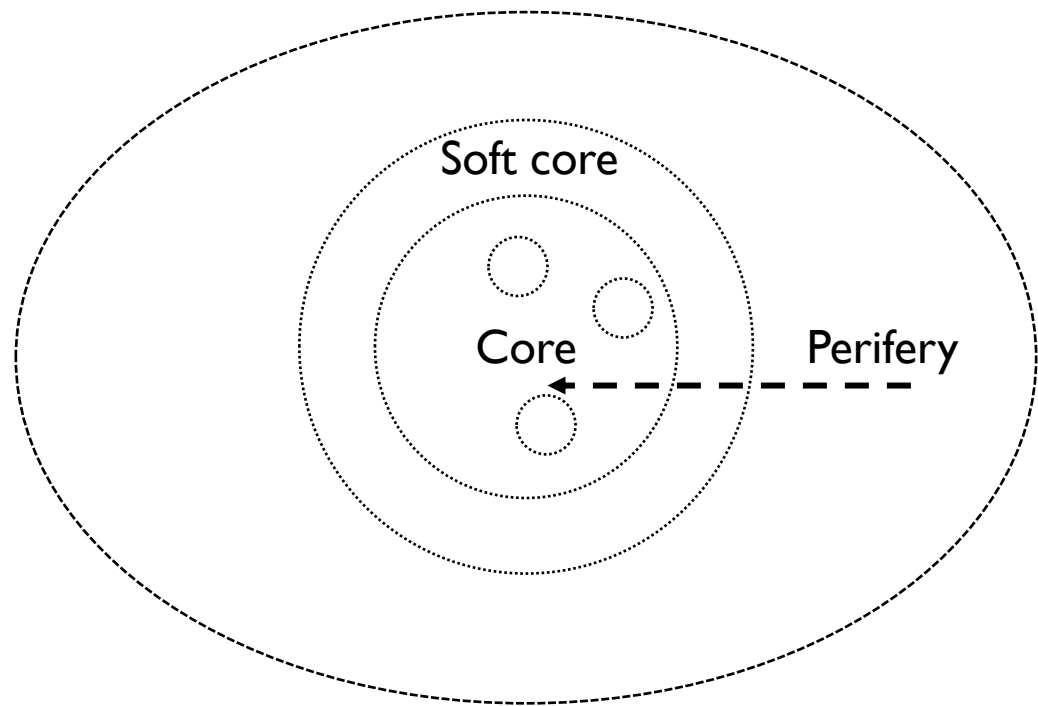
Status within a community:

- Cultural capital
  - Embodied form (knowledge what you know, embodied knowledge of what is important to people in the community. "This over that")
  - Objectified form (commodity/objects owned)
  - Institutional form (degrees, for example)
- Social capital
  - Whom you know and connections. The status people you know, is important
- Economic capital (€€€)

Indentity and subcultures

(1) experimentation with the biker identity,

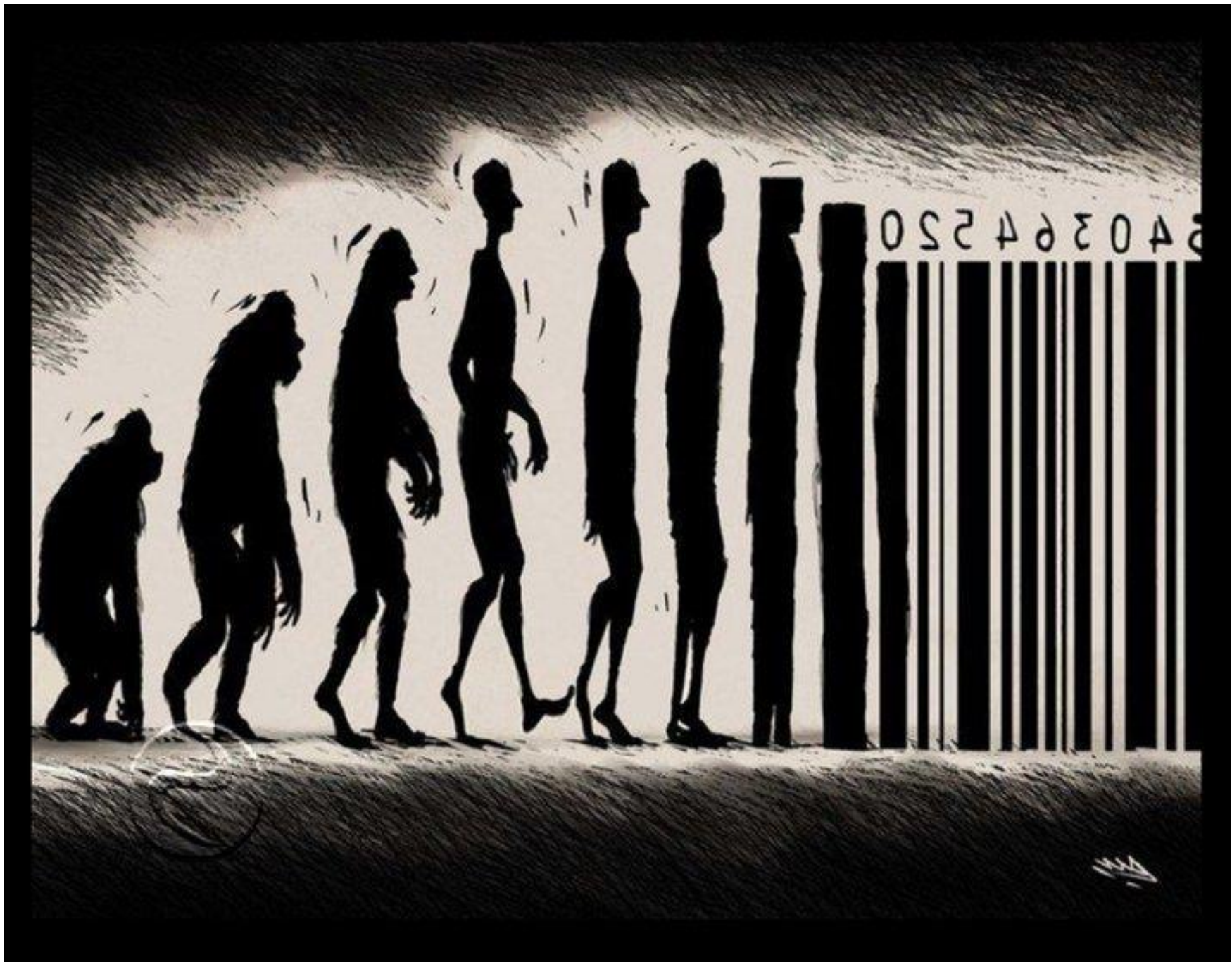(2) identification and conformity, and

(3) mastery and internalization.

Concept
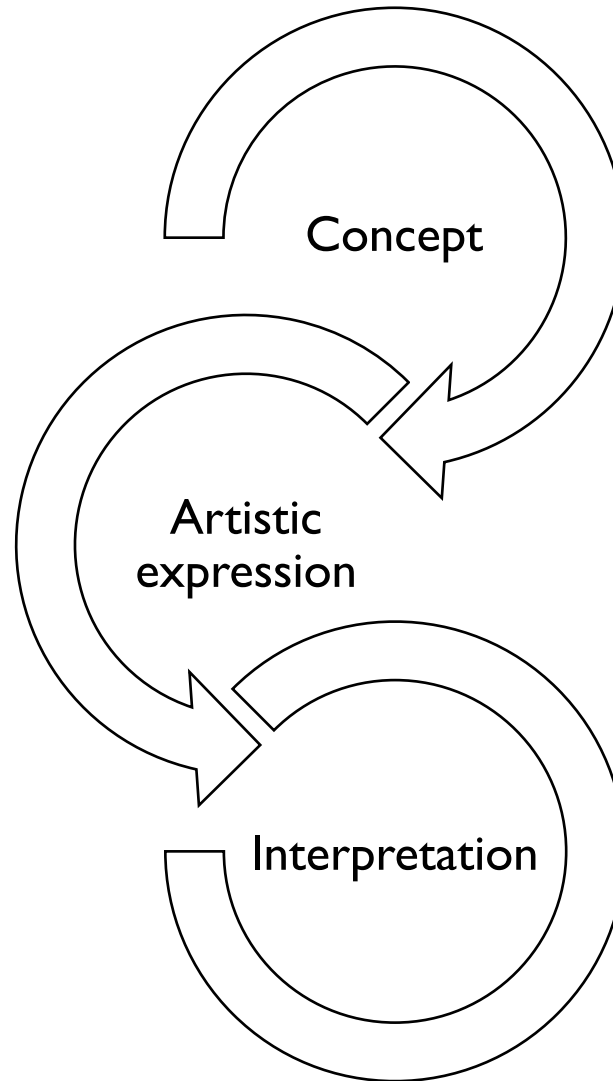
e.g.: "identity construction"

Artistic expression

e.g.: painting, collage, installation, animation, …

Interpretation

Critical: impression of free choice and authenticity. … in reality, what is being reproduced is individualism, shallowness, and so on.
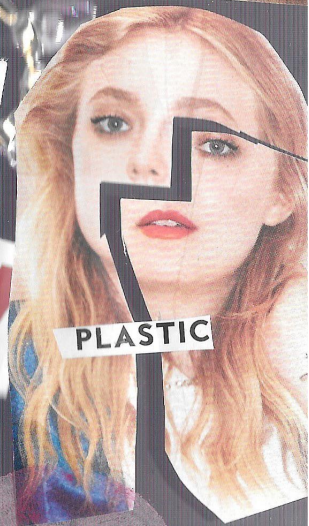
Celebratory: market and free choice enabling emancipation (to free from restraint, control, or the power of another).

I am what I OWN

SELL yourself to Buy
heaps and heaps of STUFF

BUY

PLASTIC

BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT.™

USA FOREVER
USA FOREVER
USA FOREVER
USA FOREVER

BUY

VENUS XL

SHHHHHH.

BUY TWO GET ONE FREE*

MADE TO SPARKLE

self-expression

But I'd like to be FREE*

shouldn't cost an arm and a leg.
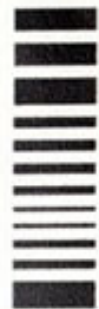
M(Art)Worlds: Consumer Perceptions of How Luxury Brand Stores Become Art Institutions

Annamma Joy [a,1], Jeff Jianfeng Wang [b], Tsang-Sing Chan [c], John F. Sherry Jr. [d,*], Geng Cui [e]

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[b] *Assistant Professor of Marketing, Department of Marketing, G 7515, Academic 1, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*

[c] *Shun Hing Chair Professor of Marketing, Department of Marketing and International Business, Lingnan University, 1/F Simon and Eleanor Kwok Building, Lingnan, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*

[d] *Herrick Professor of Marketing, Mendoza College of Business, The University of Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA*

[e] *Department of Marketing and International Business, Lingnan University, 1/F Simon and Eleanor Kwok Building, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*

Recap and stage setting:

- Contemporary capitalism, …focus on consumption and pleasure (Bourdieu 2000)

- Aesthetics as all forms of sensory experience, including mundane objects (Meamber and Venkatesh 2008)

- Consumer culture increasingly becomes a visual culture ➔ aestheticization of mundane consumption practices (Shroeder 2002)

[…] the contemporary capitalist moment can be defined (in part) by the circulation and (commercial) exchange of expertise in the socially appropriate purchase, use and display of commodities.

In this understanding, [*individuals*]/groups that lay claim to skills in this trafficking of value and <u>taste</u> —or expertise in the translation of such values … —will therefore come to play a more prominent part in the economic and social realms.
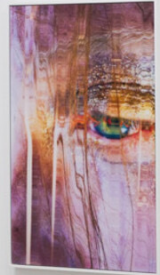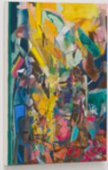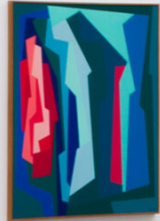
• (Appadurai 1986)

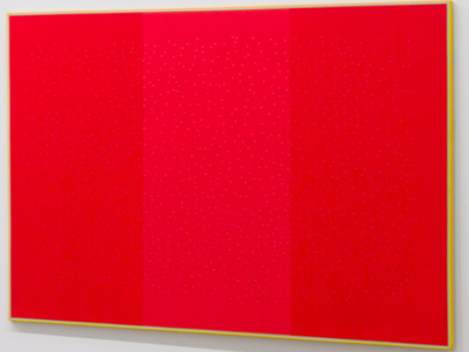CULTURAL PRODUCTION!
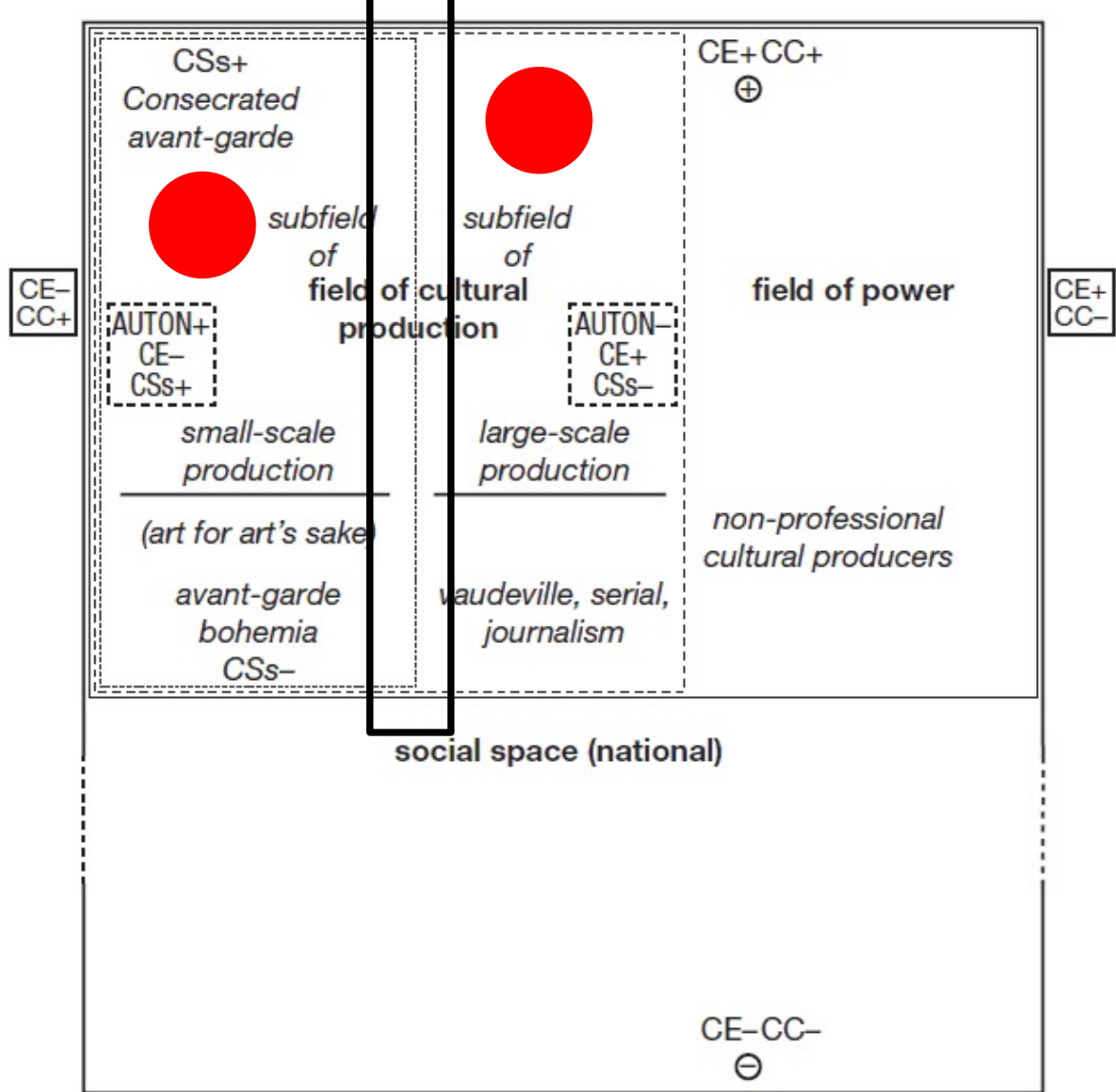
Key

— Social space
— Field of power
----- Field of cultural production]
······ Subfield of small-scale production

CE   Capital – economic
CC   Capital – cultural
CSs Capital – symbolic, specific
AUTON+ High degree of autonomy
AUTON– Low degree of autonomy

Bourdieu, 1993

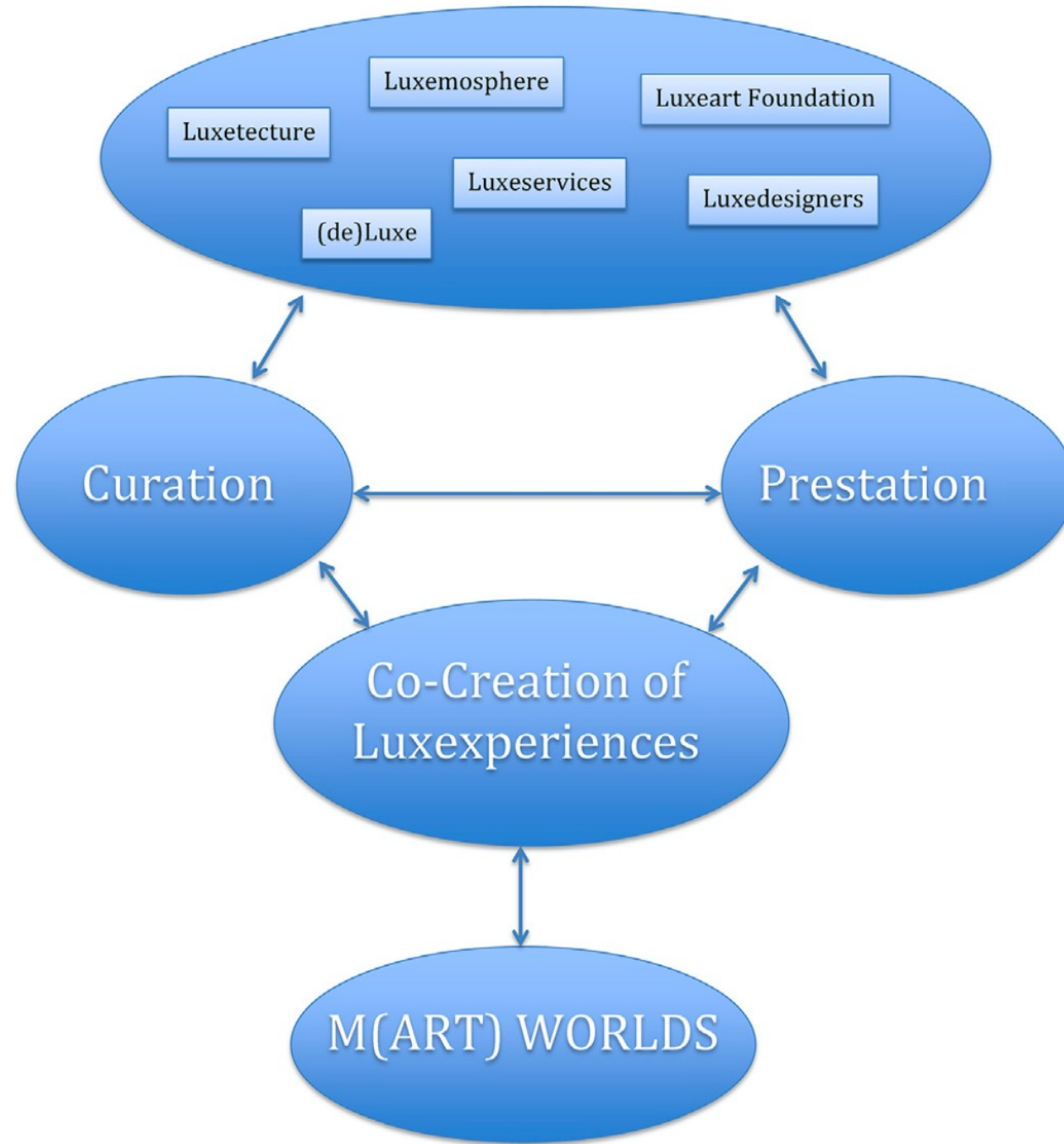the logic of art vs. the logic of business

- LV intentionally elides (blurs the line between) art and commerce
- The production of a precisely engineered retail narrative
- "Art is becoming indistinguishable from lifestyle culture, and the logic of fashion dominates how art is made visible."

- LV flagship stores offer a quintessential site for the field study of the aesthetic transformation of retailing.

Table 2

Distinctions between department store, flagship brand store, premium brand store and M(Art) world.

Features	Department store	Flagship brand store	Premium brand store	M(Art) world
Focal object	Branded commodities	Branded goods	Superior goods	Branded art pieces
Store design	Display	Participation	Presentation	Curation and prestation
Architecture	Utilitarian	Experiential	Hedonic	Artistic
Visual impact	Sensory	Sensory	Glamorous	Aesthetic
Customer orientation	Purchase	Participate and enjoy	Admire and desire	Appreciate and understand
Service personnel	Salesperson	Personal assistant	Personal assistant	Curator
Product orientation	Fashion	Fashion	Trend	Taste
Positioning	Market orientation	Market and some aesthetics	Balanced aesthetics and market	Aesthetic and custodial orientation

- We create the term "M(Art)World" to capture the essence of this aesthetically oriented strategy.

- Participants take note of the company's sleekly elegant architecture, interior design, and adroit use of lighting that are modelled after those of museums housing world-class exhibits.

- The store's merchandize is artisanal, often produced in collaboration with artists. Objects for sale are displayed alongside actual art, ==rendering both products equivalent==.

- Employees function as curators, offering guidance and knowledge, as well as goods for sale. ➔ <u>taste</u>!

Luxemosphere

Luxeart Foundation

Luxetecture

Luxeservices

Luxedesigners

(de)Luxe

Curation

Prestation

Co-Creation of Luxexperiences

M(ART) WORLDS

Luxetecture: prestigious locations and elegant presentation

Luxemosphere: contemporary interior design, extravagance, and playfulness

"luxemosphere" (coined by Luxe Corp. analysts) to refer to the prestigious and splendid universe created by luxury brands such as LV.

(De)Luxe: luminosity and art

The word "luxe" literally means light; luxury products are envisioned in terms of their luminosity and beauty (Kapferer and Bastien 2009).

Luxedesigners: creating aesthetic experiences via contemporary art objects

Associating Couture with Art

Retail Luxury Strategy: Assembling Charisma through Art and Magic

Delphine Dion [a] ✉, Eric Arnould [b, c] ✉

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Abstract

Luxury retail strategy differs from other retail strategies not merely in distinctive formulations of product, price, distribution, and appeals to customer distinction. Instead, it increasingly stands or falls on the legitimacy of a charismatic creative director. The director offers an aesthetic brand ideology. Luxury retail draws on the principles of art and magic to assemble the charismatic persona of the creative director and to diffuse his aesthetic ideology to the brand. Moreover, luxury retail strategy enlists magical and aesthetic principles within and without the store to achieve these ends. Finally, retail luxury is producer rather than consumer oriented and seeks to generate awe rather than community. This strategy appears to be to some extent a response to legitimacy crises provoked by recent strategic extensions of luxury brands into mass marketing. We offer some implications for marketing in which the charisma of a key personage is at stake.

The experience of authenticity

The companies highlight the work done in ateliers by artisans who are limited in number, given the extensive training, apprenticeship, and commitment to craft that their positions require

Luxescape: curatorial attention and service

- In luxury stores, products are not always accessible to the customer, as a deliberate strategy.
- One goes, one looks, and one leaves. No decisions, no pressure. In LV stores, the underlying sales function is concealed via a similar lack of pressure to buy, an approach typical of luxury stores that creates a museum-like experience.
- As is the case for visitors to a museum, the experience is in the here and now. The customer enjoys personal attention, and becomes more culturally informed. Dion and Arnould (2011) note that salespeople must be very knowledgeable about the brand's history.

LuxeArt foundation: the luxury brand as patron of the arts

- The association with art makes the products look even more luxurious.

- Corporate collaboration with famous artists highlights a clear aesthetic strategy in operation

- The strategic aim is to foster the brand identity

Concept
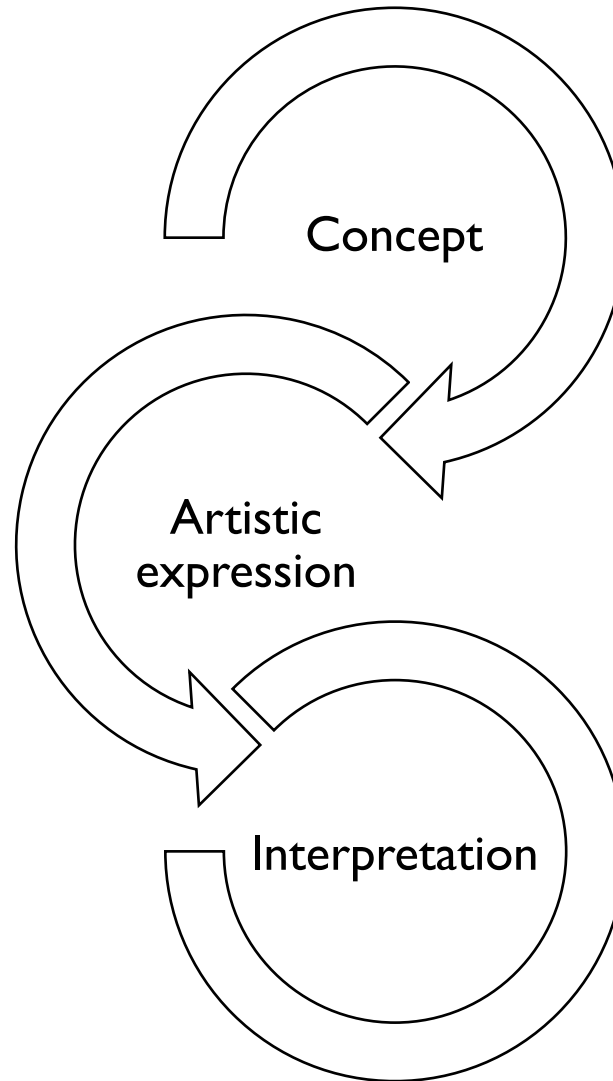
e.g.: how (luxury) brands co-construct/co-produce consumer experiencies

Artistic expression

e.g.: painting, collage, installation, animation, ...

Interpretation

How is this done?
What does this entail?