"Analysing Aesthetic Experiences at Classical Music Concerts: Implications for Marketing the Arts"

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Abstract

Numerous authors in social sciences and by consumer researchers sustain that aesthetic experience is supposed to be akin to diving into the deep end of a pool, a total immersion that transforms the individual experiencing it. But immersion is not always easy to obtain in our day-to-day reality. The concept of distance seems to be central here: in art, there is immersion into the experience, only when the distance between the event or the artistic work and the individual is reduced by the process known as appropriation.

In order to contribute to the marketing of the arts, our research adopted the concept of appropriation developed by researchers in environmental psychology. The research programme has two main objectives: validate the model of the aesthetic experience appropriation and assess the services elements that have impact on the appropriation process, in order to propose recommendations to manage this realm of experience.

To realise these objectives, we studied the Discovery cycle of classical music concerts given at the Milan Auditorium. The method used to take account of the subjective experience of each consumer of a Discovery concert was the type of analysis called introspection. The empirical research conducted on the participants to the Discovery experience allowed us to develop two major contributions.

- First, the phenomenon of the consumer's immersion into an aesthetic experience can be addressed more closely. Rather than a single, great plunge, this immersion seems to be more a question of repeated "paddling" which sometimes leads progressively to full immersion and sometimes does not.
- Second, it gives the opportunity to amplify the panorama of services elements with an impact on this immersion or paddling, going beyond the impact of the servicescape alone and considering, in particular the impact of personnel acting as guides, of references and of rituals.

Key words
Aesthetic, appropriation, experience, experiential marketing, immersion, introspective, subjective.

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Introduction

The idea shared by numerous authors in social sciences and by consumer researchers is that aesthetic experience implies a plunge, a total immersion. However, aesthetic experience is not easy to obtain, as is well argued by researchers who have worked on the topic in the field of aesthetics. This statement has considerable consequences for the marketing of experiences. Indeed, some authors define the aesthetic realm as a major component of any consumer's experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998 and 1999), but they provide few interpretations of how the immersion into this aesthetic realm actually happens. As stated by Wagner (2000, p. 71), "apart from the work of Holbrook and his colleagues, marketing scholars have produced very little empirical research on aesthetics". Consequently, this paper concentrates on the aesthetic realm of the consumption experience, with the aim of defining the aesthetic experience and the ways in which it is determined through an empirical study. This paper ends with recommendations to manage this realm of experience on the basis of the so-called appropriation process.

The aesthetic experience

It must be said that aesthetic experience might regard individual experience in general (Maffesoli, 1990). Furthermore, it is often analysed in art, which by its very nature constitutes a privileged point of reference (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990). Here, too, the analysis of the aesthetic experience is aimed particularly at the artistic domain, i.e. those situations in which the entity of experience is an artistic act or an artistic object.

The result of aesthetic experience
The concept of aesthetic experience has been the subject of many reports over the years. An interpretative analysis of the principal approaches to which historically the various definitions and discussions of the aesthetic experience can be traced back has been provided by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990). The idea shared by numerous authors in the social sciences and by consumer researchers (Duhaime *et alii*, 1995; Wagner, 1999) is that aesthetic experience implies a transformation of the individual.

Denzin (1984 and 1992) holds that this transformation is obtained through a plunge, a total immersion. This leads to the point made by Addis and Holbrook (2001, p. 60) that "consciousness of own selfhood is lost due to the complete involvement in the aesthetic experience". Although some scholars (Holbrook, 1986) have tried to moderate this view by considering aesthetic experience somewhere in between hedonist pleasure and transcendence, the majority of consumer researchers seems to have adopted the view of aesthetic experience as a plunge.

Aesthetic experience is therefore one of the types defined as flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990), an extraordinary moment in which "what we feel, what we wish and what we think are in harmony" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29): The metaphor of flow (similar to Maslow's peak experience, 1964) is used to describe an exceptional experience, in which there is no effort on the part of the individual involved, which has no objective beyond itself, returns immediately and, furthermore, deeply involves the subject (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). This is a broad concept which could concern all the activities people perform "not because they expected a result or reward after the activity is concluded, but because they enjoy what they are doing to the extent that experiencing the activity becomes its own reward" (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990, p. 7).

The internal determinants of the aesthetic experience

Whereas the definitions of the final result of the aesthetic experience appear to converge, the way in which this experience occurs is less clear: "It is all the more surprising then to realize how little we know about reasons for this response" (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990, p. 5). In this respect, it might be useful to dwell on the characteristics of the aesthetic experience and on some models which seek to analyse its determinants.

Starting with the most frequently cited characteristics, the aesthetic experience is multidimensional and subjective. Regarding the former, Duhaime *et al.* (1991) affirm the complexity of the aesthetic response, identifying various characteristics linked to four different dimensions: emotional, cognitive, conative and affective. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) cite four dimensions of the aesthetic experience: perceptive, communicative, cognitive and emotional. Many authors also agree that the aesthetic experience belongs to the area of subjective experience and not to that of objective behaviour. The concept of subjective experience can be referred to the awareness derived both from the perception of external stimuli and from the individual's intimate internal sphere (Richardson, 1999, p. 469). It is this subjective dimension which some philosophers (Pareyson, 1988) and psychologists (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990) have tried to understand in order to identify the determinants of the aesthetic experience, thereby avoiding the traditional idea of the spontaneous reception of a work of art. Indeed, art is now defined by a specific kind of relationship or interaction – aesthetic relationship – between the object and the consumer (Genette, 1997). A

postmodern claim assumes that the same weight is given to the action of the work of art and the active receptiveness of the individual (Evrard and Colbert, 2000).

The multi-dimensional character and the subjectivity of the aesthetic experience have in some cases found a place among the models used to define the determinants of the aesthetic experience. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) draw attention to the subjective path followed by the individual in developing an aesthetic experience, identifying some fundamental points: such an experience is not natural and immediate, it does not simply happen. First, the subject must concentrate on the artistic object/event, and this concentration can take the form of a large number of repetitions (Spranzi, 2001). Second, the aesthetic experience depends on the objectives and expectations of individual subjects. Finally, this is created by means of a process of discovery which depends on the subject's familiarity in the relation with the work of art and the feeling of control of the relation. In a philosophical context, the same idea is found in hermeneutical theory[1] (Valverde, 2001) in which two principal concepts can be identified, the "hermeneutic circle" and the "horizon of expectancy". The first concerns the fact that every process of aesthetic understanding depends on accumulated experiences. Re-iteration is fundamental in the process of aesthetic elaboration. In this process, tension is created between the horizon of expectancy, a structure crystallised out from previous experience, and the content delivered by a specific work in an individual experience.

It should be noted here that research of a predominantly managerial nature has not made a significant contribution to the determinants of aesthetic experience. Wagner (1999, 2000), as other authors (Lagier, 2002), rather concentrates on aesthetic sensitivity, aesthetic style, the individual's aesthetic attitude, i.e. the individual's personal antecedents and not the internal determinants of the experience.
experience

The difficulty in occurrence of aesthetic experience
Although the above observations provide a good conceptualisation, aesthetic experience does not occur easily in everyday life, as is well argued by researchers who have worked on the topic in the field of aesthetics (Caune, 1999; Spranzi, 2001; Weltzl-Fairchild, 1991). "Consumers are obliged to recognise that in their case at least these miraculous, ennobling events do not occur. Afterwards we are just the same as before" (Spranzi, 2001, p. 18).

Weltzl-Fairchild *et al.* (1997, 1998) formulate the hypothesis that consumers try to be in harmony with the work of art, but often find themselves in disharmony, i.e. there is psychological conflict between their own conceptions and representations and the work

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[1] For an extensive analysis of hermeneutic work relating to the understanding of aesthetic experience, such as Gadamer, Jauss or Ricoeur, see Ficht (2000).

of art. If it is not reduced, this disharmony creates a distance which impedes the occurrence of the described aesthetic experience. On this issue of distance, drawing a parallel between an eighteenth century and a present day listener Levi-Strauss claims with reference to music that, "Educated listeners perceive more (…). The musical pleasure of an eighteenth century listener was probably more intellectual and of better quality, because the distance to the composer was less" (Levi-Strauss, 1993, p. 47), "The separation between the composer and the listener was not as clear-cut as it has become today" (Levi-Strauss, 1993, pp. 45).

The concept of distance, of separation, seems to be central in understanding the difficulties which individuals face in living a 'full' aesthetic experience which is translated into what is called immersion. This distance is cognitive, affective, conative and emotional, as shown by the multidimensionality of the aesthetic experience. In art the theory of appropriation does not distinguish between cognitive, emotional or other types of dissonance (Caune, 1999): there is a true aesthetic experience, and therefore immersion, only when the distance between the event or the artistic work and the individual is reduced by the process known as appropriation (Ficht, 2000; Spranzi, 2001). From these considerations, it is possible to deduce that if the immersion is considered the result of the aesthetic experience, then the process leading to that result can be defined as the process of appropriation. This process is not rigorously identified as a structured set of steps, but rather as a set of internal operations (behaviours, thoughts etc.), effected by the individual to reduce the distance from the world of art to which the individual relates in order to appropriate that world

The theory of appropriation

In the present article, we propose to contribute to the marketing of experience, using the approaches developed in art and culture to reduce the distance between the consumer and the work of art and consequently facilitate the immersion into the sublime aesthetic experience. These approaches are based on the notion of appropriation. Our aim is to isolate the main operations in the appropriation of aesthetic experience and to relate these to actuating (or non-actuating) actions of artistic institutions, in order to facilitate these operations and arrive at recommendations to make the occurrence of the aesthetic realm of an experience faster and easier.

The theory of appropriation and the model of appropriation of space
Unfortunately, although the discussions and the studies on the receptiveness of art and aesthetic experience make great use of the notion of appropriation, they do not provide a conceptualisation of the process which is useful for applied purposes. We therefore return to the human sciences, in particular psychology, in order to understand the concept of appropriation. The concept was specifically adopted and developed by researchers in environmental psychology, according to whom (Prohansky *et al.*, 1970),

both individual and collective appropriation are manifested as the exercise of authority, of control, of power (physical or psychological) over a place or an object.

It is the notion of appropriation of space and the construction of a 'my home' ('*chez soi*' in French) that have constituted the greatest theoretical development both in psychology (Fischer, 1992) and in other humanist sciences (Desjeux *et al.*, 1998), as well as in management disciplines (Aubert-Gamet, 1996 and 1997). This is without doubt due to the fact that appropriation is more easily observed, because its physical component is evident. Appropriation is thus defined as (Fischer, 1992, p. 91) "a fundamental psychological process of action and intervention on a space with a view to transforming and personalising it; this system of domination of places includes the forms and types of intervention on space which are translated into relations of possession and attachment".

Fischer (1983, p. 44) identifies the more typical elements of appropriation: 'stamping' space, nesting, investigating and re-appropriation." In line with the work of Fischer, Aubert-Gamet (1996, p. 195) defines "three types of appropriation practice: nesting, stamping and investigating of space". For Fischer (1983, p. 48), nesting corresponds to "a form of installation which always refers more or less explicitly to the creation of a '*chez soi*', and which ...., thanks to various actions and artefacts permits individuals to make their own nest.". Fischer (1983, p. 47) holds that "appropriation is also exercised by giving psychological value to movements", i.e. via investigating which extends the individual's field of action (Aubert-Gamet, 1996). The learning of space occurs in the paths and ways of the individual who explores space and therefore has the possibility "to obtain, observe and receive different information and thus ... to commence the interpretation of the place" (Fischer, 1981, p. 93). According to a popular saying, it allows you 'to find your roots, your signs, via anchorage points in space'.

Fischer (1983, p. 49) believes that at the conclusion of the three operations of nesting, investigating and stamping, "the individual has re-appropriated and tamed the territory."

Analogy, metaphor and the model of appropriation in art
Artistic discourse recurrently uses the notion of distance in a metaphoric sense with reference to the problems of interaction between art and the public (Levi-Strauss, 1993). We propose to go beyond this analogy, extending it to the appropriation of art, i.e. taking up the model of appropriation of space (Fischer, 1983 and 1992; Aubert-Gamet, 1996) to imagine the appropriation of art. Recent theoretical developments among post-structuralists (Brown, 1998) and postmodernists (Maffesoli, 1996) have brought back the use of analogy and metaphor in social sciences in general and in marketing in particular: "construct a theory means develop, by analogy, pertinent concepts" (Van den Bulte, 1994, p. 406). Thus, "with the help of metaphors we

construct the world and give meaning to reality" (Alajoutsijärvi *et al.*, 2001, p. 93) when there are still no sufficiently defined concepts to do it with any greater precision.

A first test undertaken by the authors based on their own experience of the same artistic experience allowed the analogy to be validated, precisely defined and also enriched. This led to a re-definition of the practice of nesting, investigating and stamping of the essential operations of the subjective appropriation of the world of art:
- *Nesting*: individuals feel at home by isolating a part of the world of art to which they relate, that part which is already familiar as a result of accumulated experience, and installing themselves in this part. Often individuals exercise a control by limiting themselves to one artist, to one area or a track (which repeats all the time) which they try to control, leaving out all the rest of the world of art to which they could relate.
- *Investigating*: starting from the mental nest, individuals try to explore, to find new pieces, areas, to develop new anchorage and control points. For example, in a CD, they look for the pieces they know already, they listen to them again and again and then begin to get interested in the preceding and following tracks. This develops the knowledge of the world of art with which they interact and progressively extends their territory;
- *Stamping*: individuals give a particular sense to the work, to the artistic performance which they confront. This meaning is not the general meaning given to the work of art, but their meaning, built from their references and personal history. For example, those invited to a concert by a friend might give the event the following significance: "for me this concert is not a concert of eighteenth century classical music, it is Anto's concert because she asked me to go with her." Here, creativity is used to play subjectively with art and impress a meaning on it.

Although environmental psychology (Fischer, 1992) does not specify that appropriation practices follow a univocal process, hermeneutic studies, further confirmed by the perceived activity model (Neisser, 1976), favour the idea of circular operations in appropriation. The perceived activity model highlights the central aspect of anticipatory schemes, i.e. cognitive structures which prepare individuals to accept some types of information rather than others and guide them (or maybe not) towards the exploration of new situations which, in turn, will modify the anticipatory schemes. In this approach, nesting appears to be the preliminary adjustment operation which precedes any investigation of new perspectives. Subsequently, individuals re-appropriate these new perspectives only to the extent to which they are able to give them sense. Having acquired the significance of a new work, individuals reach both a certain level of routine and a new nesting phase from which new investigations can initiate, and so on. In other words, the hypothesis is that of an appropriation cycle which repeats throughout the confrontation with a single work of art (Figure 1).

- TAKE IN FIGURE 1 -

The research programme

The research programme has two main objectives:
1. Validate and define in detail the model of the appropriation cycle of an aesthetic experience in three operations: nesting, investigating and stamping;
2. Survey and assess the services elements that have a positive or negative impact on the three operations in the appropriation cycle;

To realise these objectives, our research is based on an analysis of introspective reports by consumers associated to an extreme type of aesthetic experience in which the consumer participation component is almost completely absent, while the essence of immersion does not envisage any movement and occurs by relation to an artistic object. This often limits the individual's sensory perception to one (or at most two) of the five senses, i.e. hearing for a classical music concert or sight for a painting, artistic events in which the consumer is essentially seated in a given place and participates physically only through applause.

We studied the Discovery cycle of classical music concerts given at the Milan Auditorium (see exhibit 1). Following Richardson's statement that "although agreeing that we can never know anything about a subjective experience as such", it is possible to search for an intermediate solution "by arguing that we can at least study the reports that are made" (Richardson, 1999, p. 470), the method used to take account of the subjective experience of each consumer of a Discovery concert is the analysis of the introspective reports. Although close to the category defined by Wallendorf and Brucks (1993, p. 341) as "guided introspection", this type of retrospective introspection differs by virtue of the fact that the subject's report is compiled without the presence of the researcher. This means that there is a preparatory phase in which subjects are given instructions that have been previously tested by the researchers on themselves (Richardson, 1999). According to Wallendorf and Brucks (1993, p. 353), "Guided introspection offers consumer researchers the potential to explore numerous other topics concerning consumer experiences and internal states that have been under-researched within the field."

The study was therefore based on two Discovery concerts[1] and involved 11 subjects (3 at the first concert, 10 at the second, and 2 who attended both) not accustomed to attending classical music concerts[2]. All the subjects involved in the experiment had an open mind towards and were moderately interested in this type of event. Subjects clearly expressing a complete lack of interest in classical music concerts were excluded. Prior to the concert, each subject received a set of pre-tested instructions. The subjects

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[1] The two concerts were Strauss' "Don Quixote" conducted by Chailly and Stravinsky's "The Rites of Spring" conducted by Caetani.

[2] The eleven subjects comprise the two authors of the present paper, seven researchers in marketing and two members of the administration of the Department of Marketing of the university.

were asked to note the sentiment of distance/proximity with respect to all the elements of the Discovery experience, and to describe their feelings over time (before, during and after the concert), paying attention to their individual experience and the relation with other members of the audience. The report had to be written the day after the concert. Notes could be taken during the concert.

- TAKE IN EXHIBIT 1 -

The analysis of the content of the introspective reports used both an intertextual and an intratextual approach (Thompson, 1997). Unlike the hermeneutic framework proposed by Thompson (1997) to interpret the significance that consumers attribute to their experiences, the analysis used the hypothesis of an appropriation cycle to interpret the consumers' reports of their experience. Initially, the content of the introspective reports was categorised according to the characteristics of the three main operations in appropriation. A first lexical re-distribution of the content was undertaken starting from the verb or verbal expression as the unit of analysis. The verbs of state which express a static nature (have, be, know, etc.) led to the content being associated with nesting. The verbs of movement which express a dynamic concept (walk, go out, follow) led to the content being associated with investigating. The verbs of feeling which express a personal interpretation (feel, think) led to the content being associated with stamping. This lexical re-distribution was completed with a semantic re-classification by topic. Everything linked to proximity and safety points to nesting, things linked to a challenge are associated to investigating, and finally elements concerning significance indicate stamping.

On this basis, three different investigations were undertaken:
- first, a thematic intertextual analysis for each operation to characterise in greater detail each phase of the appropriation cycle model;
- next, a syntactic intratextual analysis for each report to permit (or not) a validation of the dynamics of the appropriation cycle model;
- finally, an inter-textual thematic analysis to highlight the impact of the services elements on each operation, categorise these elements (occurrence) and assess the relative weighting of each on the basis of the number of citations (frequency) in the reports. The thematic analysis also sought to attribute a positive or negative sense to each citation referring to a factor in the report and also to consumers' phisical and/or mental states.

In the present study, the analysis and interpretation of the results focuses on the individual dimension of appropriation (leaving aside the collective dimension) and on the period of the concert (leaving aside the periods before and after). This choice is simply for reasons of priority and is justified by the clearly greater weighting in all the reports of the individual dimension during the concert.

Results

Validation of the operations in the appropriation an aesthetic experience
The first analysis was performed on the overall content of the reports that had been re-classified in accordance with the three hypothesized operations of the model. The main results are:
- confirmation of the overall validity of the proposed appropriation model divided into the three operations: nesting, investigating and stamping;
- the possibility to describe the operations in greater detail.

In all three operations, but particularly during stamping, there is a significant influence of the characteristic elements of each person which pre-date the experience itself and give a profoundly subjective imprint to the path developed (Duhaime *et al.*, 1991). As stated, these elements were recorded, but were not analysed.

Looking in greater detail at the results, the confirmation of the validity of the model is connected to the ease with which the content of the various reports is traced back to the three operations. Only the references to results in terms of aesthetic appropriation (positive or negative) or overall assessments of the experience were placed in a different group of elements outside the three operations.

The analysis revealed that the three operations in the appropriation cycle of an aesthetic experience can be broken down further into sub-operations enriching the overall model.
- In particular, the nesting operation appears to present sensations linked, on the one hand, to the consumer's physical and mental state, and, on the other, to the search for anchors both at the beginning and during the performance.
- Moving on to the investigating operation, a path between the description of events and the discovery of something is recurrent in all the reports.
- Finally, in the stamping operation, there are two typical activities: the attribution of significance to the situations that the subject is experiencing and the elaboration of impressions regarding the situation itself.

The analysis presented also reveals the probable significance of temporal dynamics in the appropriation cycle, suggesting a close examination of each of the reports. A number of nesting, investigating and stamping cycles are evident within the model. Moreover, in all these micro-cycles, the typical nesting/investigating/stamping sequence is not always maintained, attenuating to some extent the hypothesis that the model is rigorously circular.

The intratextual analysis of the reports produced other details with regards the results. If it is true that no report describes a flow experience, a state of immersion or a plunge

into the aesthetic experience, all except one show evidence of micro-results or "paddling", which translates into feelings of growth, well-being and gratification on the part of the consumer. On the other hand, the absence of any such moments, defined in terms of distance and lack of understanding, is the origin of frustration and the non-valuation of experience.

Service Elements and Appropriation Operations

After having validated and defined in detail the model of the appropriation cycle in terms of the consumer's aesthetic experience, the inter-textual analysis of the reports provided a picture of all the positive and negative impact of service elements (occurrence and frequency) on the aesthetic experience in the various operations of the appropriation cycle. This analysis provided an evidence of the impact of the physical and mental state of the consumer, too. We summarized the major results hereunder (for more detailed results, please contact the authors).

The nesting operations (mainly the search for points of anchorage) were first and foremost facilitated by the referents the Maestro used during the initial Discovery section to explain the music. These referents stemmed from cultural fields that were so multiple in nature that it appeared almost mandatory that each consumer be able to latch onto a few of them, thereby mobilising his/her competencies and knowledge. Certain referents stemmed from the Maestro's own personal experiences, yet belonged to a cultural or generational field that was accessible to most people, thus accentuating the proximity effects. Unfortunately, this anchorage in the work (facilitated by the Maestro's teaching efforts) was sometimes destroyed by the fact that the rest of the public could disturb a person's concentration; and above all by a succession of rituals that consumers did not understand and which no one explained. Lastly, nesting was impeded by certain negative sensations, mainly ones stemming from deficiencies in elements of the auditorium's details. Thankfully these negative sensations were often alleviated both by the auditorium's very architecture (often perceived to be warm and welcoming) and by the way the auditorium was set up, with everyone having a good view of the orchestra.

During the investigating operations, the Maestro assumed the role of a guide helping people on their voyage of discovery, someone very close and almost intimate with consumers and who uses broad referents to help them to acquire competencies enhancing their understanding of the music. In other words, a guide who gave to the public, and who also gave of him/herself. Inversely, where the description involved a poorly understood ritual event there would often be negative assessment as well as a feeling of distance.

Concerning the stamping operations, several service elements underwent an attribution of meaning by consumers, starting with the Maestro, followed by the music, the pieces played (or their composers) the musicians, the rest of the public or oneself.

Discussion and Implications

As regards consumer behaviour and the impact on consumer experience of elements brought into play by the Auditorium, the results obtained from the Discovery concert experiment must be returned to their context in order to appreciate the implications and limitations. First, it has already been said that the people involved in the study were not familiar with classical music or classical music concerts. For the majority, this was the first visit to the Auditorium, and only one person had previously attended a Discovery event. A second person attended two events as part of the present study. This lack of sequence effects (Wagner, 2000) might explain the limited importance attributed to the rituals and the difficulties in understanding the latter. Furthermore, the weighting of some service elements could be linked to the nature of the experiment undertaken. The fact that the subjects' participation in the study was not spontaneous but by our invitation may have conditioned some results. For example, the almost marginal role of the music could be due to the fact that subjects were not attracted by a particular programme and did not spontaneously choose to attend the event. Again, the concert was experienced with a group of friends/colleagues and therefore had an inherent linking value (Cova, 1997).

Despite these limitations, some of the research findings, albeit within the specific context of the study, might be combined with Pine and Gilmores's model of the economics of experience (1999) or Colbert's marketing of art (2000), in order to improve the management of the aesthetic realm of experience.

First, the phenomenon of the consumer's immersion into an aesthetic experience can be addressed more closely. Rather than a single, great plunge, this immersion seems to be more a question of repeated paddling which sometimes leads progressively to full immersion and sometimes does not. Each paddling event is the result of a partial or complete (cycle) process of appropriation. In this sense, the idea of planning extraordinary experiences (Hetzel, 2002) could give way to the idea of managing the sequence of small appropriations that the consumer might experience in the various operations of the cycle. It is therefore important to pay attention to the management of all operations in the appropriation cycle. While the critical nature of the nesting operation in the appropriation process is well known, greater attention should perhaps be paid to the investigating operation, in order to help the consumer in the construction of a new horizon of expectancy. Finally, the stamping operation, in which the consumers attribute their own significance to experience, is possibly the most complex stage to manage, because it is highly subjective and influenced by the individual antecedents.

These operations can be facilitated by the experiential impact of services elements that have already been thoroughly studied in marketing such as the different material and

human elements in the environment surrounding the experience (Aubert-Garnet, 1996; Bitner, 1992; Duhaime *et al.*, 1995; Goulding, 2000a; Grove and Fisk, 1997). However, the most interesting finding, which may also extend knowledge of the marketing of experience, is that of the results which appear in part unexpected.

First, the disappearance of contact personnel in favour of a different human figure: the master guide throughout all three operations of nesting, investigating and stamping. This result can be compared with that found in other cases of experiences, such as those in Arnould and Price (1993) with river rafting. Indeed, a Maestro is a specific type of contact person distinct from staff and managers. He is the object of a kind of transfer by the audience. This leads to the post-modern tendency to release the role of contact personnel from a purely mechanical and standardised dimension towards a re-integration of emotions and the unexpected (Manolis *et al.*, 2001).

Subsequently, the very important role of the references used by the Maestro points to things seen in other environments, for example the cinema, which is very self-referential, where nesting and investigating are much easier thanks to re-cycling and the re-use of references to previous films, or even total re-makes and imitations. This is a feature of post-modernity as defined by philosophers: "One of the feature of novels and films which are characterized as post-modern is the use of appropriation: the practice of abstracting artifacts (such as images, characters, and plots) from historical texts and re-contextualising these artifacts in a new text" (Corbett, 1995). It is the same idea of citation and reference taken up by Brown in post-modern marketing: "The indiscriminate pillaging of past styles is apparent in the shape of 'retro' fashions, pop groups, advertisements, shopping environments and indeed products. Examples of the latter include art-deco Walkman, 1950's style freezers, Box Brownie look-a-likes (with auto-focus and motor wind), the Nissan Figaro, the Mazda Miata and Branningan crisps. Self-referentiality is also a commonplace" (Brown, 1994, pp. 39-40). Some references also provoke for the consumer the "return to the familiar" described by Duhaime *et al.* (1995, p. 374) and the recollection of the past (Goulding, 2000b). In this light, consumers do not expect the organiser of experiences to offer a pre-programmed package of references, but rather resources to make their imaginations work. As suggested by Goulding for museums (2000b, p. 845): "imagination became the source of escape and was largely stimulated by the atmosphere of the resource, the degree of freedom experienced by the individual, and the stimulus to construct an experience of the mind".

Finally, we can be surprised by the counter-intuitive role of rituals in the nesting and investigating operations. However, it should not be forgotten that together with its function as a social bond, the ritual also acts as an exclusion: "ritual has a sense for those which understand it (and not for the others). Ritual is recognisable as the fruit of learning, and therefore implies the continuity of generations, age or social groups within which it is produced" (Segalen, 1998, p. 20). The Discovery cycle is an attempt to

reduce the consumer's distance from the work of art and the Maestro without thinking of reducing the distance from the liturgy put into play by the social group. This may also help to explain the negative role of the external audience (the audience, except friends) on nesting and stamping, an effect in conflict with Gainer (1995) who claims that during artistic events, individuals seek to establish relations with other members of the audience.

Conclusion

The empirical research conducted on the participants in the Discovery experience at the Auditorium led to considerations that can help managers to control the aesthetic realm of experience. The two major contributions of this study are:

1. the necessity to complement the notion of consumer immersion highlighted by experiential marketing with that of a prior appropriation process (nesting/investigating/stamping) that may limit immersion to paddling (to stick to the metaphor);

2. the possibility to amplify the range of factors exerting an impact on this immersion or paddling; these factors go beyond the servicescape alone and consider, in particular, the impact of personnel acting as guides, of references and of rituals as yet not managed by companies.

Globally, the research seems to contradict a broad theoretical trend which conceptualises aesthetic experience in an ideological fashion around the attractive notion of flow experience. This trend puts managers in the difficult position of being obliged to design and sell extraordinary or peak experiences. This conclusion might have great impact on the way the aesthetic realm of consumption experience is conceived by consumers and marketing researchers. Different levels of intensity of experience must be taken into account in order to avoid over-focusing on a marginal type of experience.

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Figure 1: the appropriation cycle of an aesthetic experience
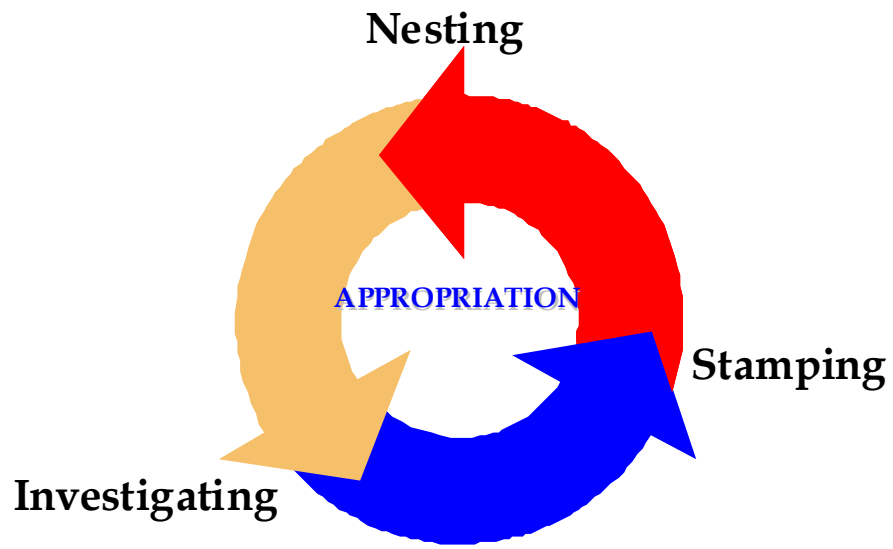
**Exhibit 1: The Discovery concerts at the Milan Auditorium
Giuseppe Verdi Milan Symphony Orchestra**

The Milan Auditorium, opened in 1999, is the institutional home of the Giuseppe Verdi Milan Symphony Orchestra. The orchestra's programme each season clearly reflects the personality of its director of music, Riccardo Chailly, and in particular his enormous enthusiasm for music and his strong sense of a mission to teach the orchestra and, above all, the audience. This results in peculiar choices of programme, including the Discovery initiative. Each concert is divided into two parts. In the first part, the conductor – or Maestro -, either Riccardo Chailly or another conductor, describes a piece of a music with the help of short excerpts underlining the particular characteristics of the composition and placing the piece in its historical, biographical and musical context. In the second part, the orchestra plays the entire work.