AUTHENTICITY AND TRANSPARENCY: 
THE LAST ACT IN THE ODYSSEY OF CONSUMPTION 

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Ladies and Gentlemen, today everybody speaks about authenticity and everybody and everything is trying to look authentic. A vast and barely comprehensible number of products declare their genuine authenticity by means labels, brands, slogans, and of an ocean of certificates. Consumers share information about certain goods and services via a growing number of internet sites and web-blogs, or they form people coop purchase groups in order to be able to acquire certain authentic, original, ethnic, pure, biological, traditional or typical products directly from the farmers.

City people even tolerate long rides in order to buy organic product, meat or fresh milk directly from the farmers, if the countrymen themselves aren’t already delivering them a fix amount of fresh fruit and veggies for a fix price at home every week. Or they join together to form peaceful armies armed with rakes and hoes – and seeds - in order to use the smallest patch of land in the city or in the countryside where they rent from farmers fields for the cultivation of crops, fruit and vegetables. And even at home they have transformed this former pensioners’ hobby not only to relieve the household budget, but also to revitalizes the old model of self supply on a few square meters of freedom.

Some people join together armed with crochet hooks and knitting equipment in order to join the collective adventure of the DIY in one of these Knit Cafes that are sprouting out like mushrooms in our cities worldwide. They gather together not only for knitting socks together but also to socialise and eventually become real gangs who spread everywhere they can their knitted graffitis. They want to give a more authentic, gentler and colourful touch to our grey city streets.

Others take their empty, neatly rinsed bottles and cans into those supermarkets that sell bulk commodities at automatic self-service kiosks. They don’t want our planet to be polluted by even more garbage because of packaging waste. Furthermore, they are convinced they are saving money since they can buy only the amount of foods they really need.

I don’t know if you have heard about the new vitamin found in Italy - a new vitamin found in organically grown products. It is called vitamin “L”. L stands for legality and it designates for example products from Sicilian cooperatives, which explicitly fight against organized crime by cultivating the land which gets confiscated from the Mafia.

However, the most popular label at the moment is called "0 KM". As you may know, this label usually stands for carbon-low products that haven’t been imported from far-away countries. But in my country this stands for products of excellence that are manufactured in the only place with the lowest possible rate of mobility: that is, in prison. And there are many more of these products than you can imagine such as the ice cream Aiscream, prisoner of taste which is made in a prison in Lombardy using fresh regional fruit and of course its brand is misspelled so that it sounds as I scream, I shout...And what about the organic quales’eggs also produced by prisoners Branded as Al Cappone? Or the fashion label cdsb, which means bar code, but can also mean "behind bars" in Italian." It is possibly the only Italian fashion brand where you can be 100% certain that it really IS made in Italy”, says Gianna Nanninin, one of the most popular Italian rock singers.
And talking about Sweden, today you can even find on the chicken’s package the photo and the phone number of the breeder, who stands as the guarantor that his chickens were hatched, grew up and slaughtered on his farm.

But consumers are not simply on the lookout for authentic goods. They are also deeply impressed by people who “tell the truth and nothing but the truth”. It is no coincidence that the successful American television show – “The Moment of Truth” has also come to Europe. Ordinary people, or reality show celebrities, who let themselves be hooked up like criminals to a lie detector to answer the moderator’s most intimate and embarrassing questions. Even Madonna – that icon of the most glamorous show business staging- has recently adopted a much more decent look and wants to open our eyes to the realities of AIDS infected orphans in Malawi with her documentary film “I am because we are”. While Hollywood stars like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie are playing the role of UN ambassadors and fighting for the cause of Iraqi refugees in Syria.

Some people also think that we have to shed all of our “social veils” – even in the literal sense of the word - in order to find truth. Masses of them offer their naked bodies to artists like Spencer Tunick, who arranges them in revealing compositions in the streets of world cities, stadiums, supermarkets, railway stations or parking lots. And what about the so called “naked trekking” that is developing in Germany now? It is supposed to be the most extreme sport of our times, the one that seems to have the highest level of inherent danger and to produce the highest amount of endorphins.

These few consciously selected extreme examples should make it clear that “AUTHENTICITY” is a very broadly diversified topic. Are we speaking about the authenticity of the original, the pristine and the traditional? Or are we associating the organic, healthy and pure with “authenticity”? Or perhaps we mean fair, ecological and local? And what has to do the legal, the honest, and the unpackaged, or even the naked with authenticity? In reality, ladies and gentlemen, the notion of authenticity has nothing to do with ethical values like “sincerity”, and “honesty” and certainly not with the Platonic values of truth, good and beauty.

We must understand quite clearly that “Authenticity” does not equate to a value system to which we orient ourselves. Indeed, in no way does the Authentic imply a moral posture or a stand point. Like a fixed surveillance camera, it directs its entirely neutral view on that which is, making no selection of the images, no highlighting of the scenes and no marking time until the “right moment” arrives. The “Authentic” is what it is, that which “does its thing” regardless of whether it is good or bad. Indeed, the warlike Tupinamba tribe, which ate human flesh, was just as authentic as the devotees of the peace-loving Jain religion who would prefer to die than to eat any animal. And yet, why has Authenticity developed into such a best seller – and why do we spend so much time talking about this topic?

It is because we human beings tend to always talk about that which we miss the most. We don’t talk about our love when we are in love, we just make love! We only talk about our love relationships when they are in crisis. It is only when we are sick that we begin to think and talk about our health. And we long for and talk so much about authenticity today, simply because the truly authentic has increasingly gone missing in our western societies. A world that pretends that it is all about what we wish; a world in which reality has become a simulation, the oversupply of the compensation to all our longings, however tiny and fleeting they may have become. Such a world creates precisely the opposite of contented satisfaction in us, it breeds confusion, helplessness and a growing sense of loneliness. If we are no longer able to assess if something “is as it is” or is mere appearance or if fixed and trusted associations and points of reference begin to unravel, then our universal trust in the world becomes shaky – and what is even more problematic - we become increasingly alienated from ourselves over time.

It is the alienation from the world and from ourselves, ladies and gentlemen, that awakens such strong and radical longings in us for the “authentic thing”, for reliable links.
Thus, it is not by chance that suddenly, today, from these deserts of non-places and un-places of our consumer worlds and free time worlds without true identity a variety of oases have emerged to wave the flag of authenticity. For the most part, these oases are only a mirage – a simple mirage of our deepest longings and needs.

It would be wrong to regard this new need of consumers as one of many short-term trends. We should, rather, understand our western societies' longing for authenticity as an expression of a re-orientation of our Modern Age, which allowed itself to fast-forward and pan the so-called Post-Modernity in the past 20 to 30 years and which is now in the process of inventing and redefining itself.

It was around 70 to 80 years ago – in his long, unfinished novel, *The Man Without Qualities* that Robert Musil, the great Austrian author very impressively described how the titanic self-image and identity of modern human beings had been broken by the horrendous First World War.

Around 40 to 50 years later, at the end of the 1970s, the French philosopher Jean-François described how, after the second world war, the already traumatized and very fragile identity of our modern societies had been further weakened by the Cold War. He drew the conclusion that our Western Civilizations were not prepared for the globalization and information technology revolution that were on the horizon. He pointed out in his works how these new challenges were beginning to challenge the inner cohesion of the modern world, which was based on cohesion, coherence and conformity.

As a logical consequence, he announced the arrival of a cyclonic new age, the age of the so-called Post-modernity. This new age, characterised by an explosion of individuality, would define the end of a rational approach to the world and the emergence of a very fragile and fragmented world view, which would be composed of a fantastic patchwork of deconstructed bits and bytes of our Western past. This deconstructionist position of the Post-modernity is not only reflected in our Western cultures – from literature to architecture and design – but it also led marketing to undergo a thorough revision.

During the Modernity period, standardized mass-production had to satisfy the needs of goods and free-time of customers who still oriented their identities to a principle of conformity. Post-Modernism spoke to the insecure and fragmented identity of the post modern customer with the language of hyper-reality. And fiction thus became steadily more appealing than simple reality. And so, marketing began to shift its focus from customer needs to customers' wishes and wants.

With this change of focus, our Western economies developed from an economy of needs to an economy of added value, in which the focus was placed more on the built-in symbolic and immaterial value of the product than on its intrinsic material quality.

Naturally, in this emerging dream factory the discipline of Design became an ever-more important marketing instrument in the fabrication of differentiation factors and in the creation of competitive advantages. Design freed itself from the dictates of Modernity in order to adapt to its new role. And so, "Form follows Function" shifted into the more timely design slogan "Form follows Fiction".

And just as a few once-applicable rules had been tossed overboard in design, the same rule applied for marketing. One no longer adhered to the law of non-contradiction – one tried to appeal to the disoriented and now multiple core identities of the consumers by means of syncretisms, oxymora and paradoxes as if from a shotgun.

Over time, a lingo, an ambivalent new marketing language emerged which was trying to promote eccentric behaviours among consumers, by magnifying the excessive, the extravagant and the exaggeration. For consumer research, the once-familiar socio-demographic segmentation criteria, were useless for turning the proliferation of consumers’ desires and dream worlds into something comprehensible. New segmentation criteria were
needed. Thus, from the mid 1980s, the psycho-graphic and – above all – lifestyle segmentation increased in popularity.

One must be very aware, however, that this meant abandoning the easily observed and well-measured segmentation criteria of the past. From then on one started to walk on the very thin ice of interpretive and hypothetical qualitative market research. Actually the pioneers of the concept of “lifestyle” were Georg Simmel and Max Weber at the beginning of the 20th century. Weber described it using the terms “conduct of life” (Lebensführung) and “life chances” (Lebenschancen). He practically thought that every life style was always associated with individual and social value systems.

And it is exactly this link, ladies and gentlemen, between the orientation of value systems and the concept of lifestyle that today’s post-modern lifestyle marketing has completely neglected.

Lifestyle hypotheses are therefore rarely based on consumers’ personality structures and they are not developed on the basis of those socio-cultural forces that modify individual and collective awareness and behaviour. Lifestyle marketing is oriented far more to the multiple behavioural patterns of human lifestyles and connects them mechanically with their purchasing decisions without coming to grips with the more universally valid existential aspects of consumption.

Not only does lifestyle marketing strongly distort reality with this approach. It also fails to establish stable segments. It is unable to reduce the complexity that arises from the “bad infinity” of consumers’ wish & wants, presumed from their multiple identities and therefore unpredictable behaviours.

At best, today’s lifestyle segmentation only represents a collection of single snapshots linked to people’s instant short-term desires. And yet, the more that in-depth qualitative hedging of the initial hypotheses is neglected, the less these lifestyles’ categories have to do with the real people desires and longings. They are invented lifestyles. They are held out as new trends to the market and become even more unsettling to consumers, who are – in reality- on the search of their lost identities, as never before.

The marketing model based on lifestyles is thus itself the driver of a vicious circle consisting of ever-newer trends and ever-shorter product lifecycles. It continues the over-flooding of our already saturated markets with regular waves of hyper-differentiated products.

The resulting impacts are catastrophic. For the consumer goods industry, this vicious circle leads to the exponential growth of marketing costs, which – in the meantime – can just barely be offset by improvements in production efficiency.

On their part, consumers no longer regard this marketing attitude of unconditional wish fulfilment as "customer orientation." Indeed, they feel quite the opposite – they feel more and more lost in this vicious circle of “more is not enough.” Not only are they shopping less because they have less money in their wallets than previously, but also because the commoditized world that they are confronted with is becoming of less and less significance to them.

Those of you who know me also know that for the past twenty years I have been pointing out consequences of this fatal development in marketing. And - for that reason few years ago it gave me particular pleasure to read Philip Kotler's foreword to the book Brand Sense by Martin Lindström. In his foreword, Kotler clearly states for the first time:

“Marketing isn’t working today. New products are failing at a disastrous rate. Most advertising campaigns do not register anything distinctive in the customer’s mind. Direct mail barely achieves a one per cent response rate. Most products come across as interchangeable commodities rather than powerful brands…”

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As it happens, it is stated in the Bible that he – or she – who sincerely repents his sins will be forgiven. And Kotler takes this biblical model even further when he states: “Distinctive brands require something more.” I can only agree. Kotler finally understood, that the model of Lifestyle Marketing as it is generally followed today, has led into a dead end.

And yet, the recipe that Kotler provides for this "something more" consists of his assertion that “They - the brands - have to be powered up to deliver a full sensory and emotional experience” a recipe that – once again – makes me very sceptical.

In my many years of advising IKEA of Sweden, I came to understand how customers worldwide appreciate that brand exactly because it’s not pumping –up the volume of the so called shopping experience by using “full sensory emotional” gimmicks, but just by “being different” in its so Swedish authentic way. Experiential Marketing instead stretches the boundaries of a brand to its merely sensorial emotional dimensions – which most of the times have nothing to do with the company’s identity, nor with its values and principles. The experience becomes thus a mere emotional added value, which - like the manifold lifestyles stands for “senses without sense”.

After the economy of needs and the economy of wishes and dreams, Kotler and his disciples of Experiential Marketing have now rung in the so called “economy of experiences”. After all the confusion and commotion of Lifestyle Marketing, this is the next attempt to get in touch with the “soft side” of consumption and it is unlikely to provide any really new stimulus to our already very unsettled Western markets. Indeed – Experiential Marketing will have the opposite effect and further expand the relational gap between the consumer goods industry and consumers.

Allow me to clarify just how seriously the marketing and management practice has lost touch with reality lately by giving you a few examples – and I must warn you: The list has become pretty long, although I have really restrained myself here.

Marketing communication is stuck into the hype of an hedonistic culture, while people are longing for that kind of sobriety which can reconnect them with their sense of self.

Retailers focus on one2one Direct Marketing actions. But people have already formed themselves into shopping communities, peer2peer and many2many networks.

New marketers praise viral marketing as the ultimate tool in communication. People themselves became immune as early as the first campaign intruded into their social networks’ domains and no longer trust corporate viral messages.

Companies make huge investments for implementing the mass-customization of industrial products. People say, “We are the ones who customize your products. Why don’t you just do your job?”

Companies are extending the "Total Branding" to product categories that are miles away from their core competences. People rebel against this "total brand integralism" and demand – instead – greater "total brand integrity."

Analysts assert that brands are the main company’s value. People disagree and ask: "What are your values?"

Advertising agencies pressure companies to maximize their image visibility. People are looking for more credibility instead - and consistency

Art directors are staging brands as if they were Hollywood or Rock stars of the show business. People want to know what’s happening behind scenes, they want transparency

Companies are understanding environmentalism as the last trend to be used in their marketing communication. Customers are informing and warning each other about the risks of greenwash hazard and look for companies that are truly challenging themselves by implementing sustainability in every step of their value chain creation.
Marketing-driven fashion designers create flamboyant, decadent and eccentric clothing for the nouveau riche in developing countries. People in Western countries are looking either for the just "chic and cheap" or for the design of the "extraordinary normality", or for the true uniqueness of the made by hand and the ART craftship.

Big industries and retailers produce and sell only mass products that fit their economies of scale. Creative companies and internet retailers increase their profit margin thanks to the long tail sales of masses of niche products that are unique, excellent and innovative.

Managers are still obsessed by the "idea of power". Fast-growing and start-up entrepreneurs connect the "power of ideas" with character, charisma and passion.

As we can see by these examples, the traditional consumer good industry is still following a very linear and quantitative logic that does not see the ongoing change in our societies. Marketing and Management have not yet developed a new way of thinking, nor the instruments to understand what is really happening behind scenes. Thus it is fixed on a distorted understanding of consumers as "chameleon-like", contradictory, multi-optional puzzle people, a sort of schizophrenic monster, who is – happily – a product of the imagination of only a few market researchers.

In order to break away from this vicious circle of "more is not enough" driven by the Lifestyle Marketing we know - and the Experiential Marketing awaiting us- consumer goods industry must complete a paradigm shift and deliver values-driven meaningfulness. For doing that marketing should dedicate itself more fully to the needs of consumers starting with their latent needs. That is those needs that cannot be directly formulated. This is not possible by means of traditional market analysis of customers' wishes, but requires an hermeneutical, active interpretation of the contents of people's lives and their view of the world.

That means that we must learn how to understand the effective socio-cultural forces in our societies and the themes of the times we live in. To encompass such a scope, it is very helpful to orient oneself to the Humanities and to also observe what is happening in the world of art. And here I do not mean only the fine arts. Everything happening in the world of films, music or literature – and sometimes even in the world of the street artists, of the avant-garde designers and of the fashion design. All that can tell us a great deal more about the latent needs of our societies and – above all – about people’s thinking, their drives and motivations, than any consumers' survey ever could.

But it is of course clear, ladies and gentlemen, that people themselves are showing us how our societies and their every-day life cultures are changing in their inner motivations and motives due to the economic, social and environmental pressures they are exposed to, also depending on where they live.

So, today, on the other side of our planet, we have people living in the new hope for prosperity and for the achievement of a Western life-style. On this side of our planet, we see the end of the dream of constantly growing material prosperity. This was the dream of Mr. and Ms. Everyman when they were – quite recently – still identifying themselves as members of an increasingly wealthy middle class. For them, the Damocles sword of a next energy crisis and the soaring costs of basic foods, their children's education, and of health care has become a serious problem.

They do not care if the media talk about the first subtle signs of an economic recovery. They only notice that the bursting of the speculative bubbles has also left deep holes in their own pockets and that, in the meantime, planet Earth has become as small as their own flat and that suddenly, everything is somehow interconnected.

They have understood that the so-called BRIC countries have awakened and are hoovering up energy, raw materials and jobs by manufacturing cheap products for the whole world.

Of course, Mr. and Ms. Everyman have noticed with their own daily purchasing habits that these cheap products are what have made it possible to more or less uphold their standard
of living, despite the drop in real income - until recently. But their employer's "headcount reduction measures" showed them very clearly just how much these foreign cheap articles production sites impact their industry. But they also realised, how much their jobs depend on those fast developing countries’ markets, too.

Thus, the life of Mr. and Ms. Everyman has changed all of a sudden and quite unexpectedly. Concerns about their standard of living, their pensions and their jobs are added to private crises, which are accelerated by the decline of the traditional family model and the dissolution of obsolete gender roles.

In view of the economic, political, social and environmental turbulences of our time, our previous life style, aimed at material, ephemerally hedonistic and irrationally entertaining consumption, can no longer provide the security they desperately need today. What was so self-evident until recently now seems remarkably unreasonable.

We should thus not be astonished that consumers have become more shopping reluctant. They are less and less impressed by the advertising campaigns and turn their attention increasingly to the quality-price ratio of what they eventually are still ready to buy. That is why they flock to discount shops, into factory outlets of all kinds or private label retailers like IKEA, Zara or H&M, which all manage to offer premium quality at discount prices.

And their only luxury is a private item, a little something that is very special and unique, that is clean and fair however, very probably handcrafted, something that makes sense and that is able to tell the story of its tradition and origin. No extravagances. After the excesses and exaggerations of the past decades, when they helped to keep the "hedonistic treadmill" in motion, rather like hamsters, they began to discover what I call "the sober happiness" or "the happy frugality" as a new lifestyle.

The new significance of consumption

Naturally, consumption also remains associated with the act of reaching for an object of desire. However, our research results clearly show that consumers are no longer fascinated with the ways and means that consumption manifests itself today. They prefer the sober and the moderate to the blatant and hype, the extraordinary dimensions of normality to the excesses of extravagancy, the creative and unexpected re-interpretations of tradition rather than the vernacular folklore. Shortly said: they feel much more drawn to the aesthetics of ethics.

On the past we knew this changed attitude towards consumption from politicized niche groups, later it developed into movements as slow food, slow life, slow fashion, and more recently market researchers are identifying this new consumer behaviour as a new market segment of so called LOHAS that refers to people striving for a healthy and sustainable lifestyle.

But this more cautious attitude towards consumption can be found amongst a steadily increasing number of mainstream consumers in our saturated markets.

For the one of you that are sceptical and don’t believe in the paradigmatic dimension of this deep change in consumers’ attitude, let me say that during my recently started collaboration with Walmart in USA I could learn that exactly in that country that was inventing consumerism, precisely the typical XXL supersize-me Mid-American Walmart consumer is dramatically changing his and her purchasing habits.

Mike Duke, the new Walmart CEO is sure that we will have a big shift from the purely lowest price competition, to the quality-price-ratio-driven one. Few weeks ago he publicly declared: "shoppers are keeping a watchful eye on prices and are less likely than before to stock up on items or to purchase lower-quality ‘throw-away’ items. This is the ‘new normal’. This is NOT something that is going to change".
The "New Normal" is therefore not just a new market trend. It is a new socio-cultural force that is starting to stretch across all social classes and across all generations. It is as if, after all of the hullabaloo of too much, too many, too tempting “offers, bargains, points-of-sale and advertising messages” aiming always and exclusively at their purse while making use of the most extravagant marketing means, consumers are now asking for a time-out.

We all knew that consumers had become more competent and more demanding. But now we have to take into consideration that they have – all of a sudden – also become much more critical. This critical attitude of consumers is not directed against consumption per se, but is - much more - the expression of the consumers’ need to develop their own individual viewpoint and position towards the various brands, retailers and the products that they will eventually be evaluating, choosing and purchasing.

We must not understand that as an abstract, ideological, ethical transformation of consumption but rather as a substantiation of peoples’ new motivations and values orientation that gets expressed via the act of consumption. It is the logical consequence of the new social and ecological sense of responsibility held by more and more consumers.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me put that in another way: People are no longer "consumers"! They operate as professionals that are able to evaluate products on the basis of their quality-price-ratio. On the one hand, they are ready to pay only a low price for standard industrial mass products. On the other hand, they behave as enlightened individuals, that not only are able to evaluate the real higher intrinsic quality and higher value of products and brands, but also to choose them if they are in accordance with their need for relationship, trust, and well-being and which fit-in with their own life philosophy.

These four value fields define the twelve main action fields of the socio-cultural model of consumption that we have developed. It does not describe the shopping experience as a merely multi-sensory experience, but indicates how the holistic experience of a product or brand’s real value (and not just added value) can be developed and communicated by a company inwardly and outwardly.

Consumers today move along a transverse path throughout all market segments as they assemble their entirely personal products and market mix. In so doing, they prefer the two extremes of "discount" and "excellence", both of which stand for products which are consistent in their QPR and what they stand for. And yet, they increasingly avoid products and shopping locations of the mid-range and also the premium segment, whose higher price don’t get justified since their supposed higher quality is no longer perceived as such. Instead, both Discount and Excellence are the two segments that are perceived as the most authentic. They both deliver a real quality for a real price.

A "made for IKEA" tapestry designed by the Danish artist Hella Jongerious, stewarded by UNICEF and made by Indian craftswomen, a beautifully aromatic, filet of Suovas made by the Sámi population from the innanlår of a wild reindeer that only ate the grass of the Sápmi pasture lands or a romantic weekend in a hotel that is a true place.

A place that talks with no pomposity about its story, its heritage and allows you to finally know where on the planet you are, are few examples of authentic quality for a fair price.

Products and brands that hold out blue-sky promises and still talk the language of superlative and have lost touch with their roots, their cultural heritage or to nature, are revealed as artificial and as forgeries.

Today, the term "forgeries" is not simply applied to all those copies of products that are flooding our markets. Forgery is all what you just can’t associate anymore with your personal need for transparency, integrity and originality.

The "Authentic" also embodies a "Genius Loci" – the true "spirit of place" – from which "down home", indigenous, native, traditional or maybe just typical products come from. The “terroir”, the trusted terrain stands for the authentic quality of such products.
For that reason the interpretation of the “authenticity” in the form of the "Rustic" is the most direct and probably simplest approach to that notion. Thus, certain traditional food products firmly rooted in the heritage and culture of a country, a real place are enjoying a second spring. And it is therefore not by chance that we are even seeing a certain return to primitivism in furniture and interior decoration design, as well as in fashion and among the new entries of the apparel business. And then there is the "Original", which has its own history and heritage, BUT it also keeps on re-interpreting its own tradition by adapting it to the present.

As a matter of fact, we should regard traditions as innovations that worked. By the same token we can also say that innovation as the art of inventing new traditions. Just to clarify this: A reinterpretation of tradition in harmony with the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times, does not mean re-activating old, dusty traditions. That would be “folklore,” which is used all too often to give to fake products the shimmer of tradition.

Besides the rustic and the original there is also another expression of authenticity and that is – the “New”, the true innovation. But – watch out! Today innovation that has the power of authenticity is not just about a new product. It also has to do with a new business design that is able to truly involve people in its business model.

Bionade was the last phenomenal case we had in Germany. It appeared on the market as the first cool organic, healthy, tasty soft drink, developed by the youngster of a traditional family run brewery. It seemed to have become the cult product, the icon of a new age of healthy and sustainable life style. Instead it failed, because its authentic novelty quota was not supported by any authentic sustainable business, and by any customers’ involvement.

 Shortly said: Its former customers are now showing their back to the product and to its company and are now buying its imitations at discount stores.

Another dimension of the NEW is today also linked to another category: the one of “simplicity”.

I am talking about a form of communication that is just saying very plainly what the product is, without frills. Examples of that language of simplicity can be the packaging design of an Italian chips brand designed by Oliviero Toscani, the famous art director of Benetton brand. Or, even better, the design of the “menos es mas” environmentally friendly new soft drink that Coca Cola launched last summer in Spain. And last but not least let me show you one of my favourite advertising spot of a very old Italian pasta, which has recently been reintroduced to the market: Pasta Rummo.

• VIDEO

Very simple, but poetic! This is an example of an authentic communication, which speaks the language of the heart, of affection, of universal sentiments: It takes consumers seriously and doesn’t just push the bioneuronal bottom of our emotions for activating the hype of lifestyle and experiential marketing.

People today are seeking out the authentic in the uniqueness of every-day life, in the extraordinary appeal of normality. You can see this clearly with today’s heroes, who are no longer Supermen or muscle men – but entirely ordinary people, like fire fighters, emergency doctors, forensic crime investigators, small and peaceful "hobbits", near-sighted kids who have just undergone and experience that changed their lives – or at least had a strong impact.

Ladies and gentlemen, the nostalgia of consumers for authenticity represents great challenges for the consumer goods sector. It requires that we are all prepared to confront with the need of change and transparency and to examine nearly everything that we do from fresh, new perspectives.
The good news is that we have some emblematic models that can give us orientation in that sense. Think for example to the Footprint Chronicles that you can find on Patagonia website. Where Patagonia, the legendary company that had ecology inscribed in its stamina cell from its birth more than ... years ago, is not just listing the names and the coordinates of all the suppliers of its products, like Nike does. Those guys are going deeper. They don’t just tell us what they are doing right. They also allow us to know and to discuss what are the troublesome spots of their product supply chain that they have NOT managed to fix yet.

By the way: if you want to meet Yvon Chouinard, the legendary founder and owner of Patagonia, come to The Design of Prosperity Conference in Boras on November 2. I was so happy when he accepted to come all the way from California to Boras in order to be our keynote speaker.

I could go on for hours talking about the many companies that are giving evidence of how possible it is to do good business with good business. But I have to conclude my speech by summing-up my message: We must change, dear colleagues and friends, before the ongoing change will force us to change.

There are some things that we can sort out immediately, others need to be thought out thoroughly, but without delay.

The first thing that we could change immediately would be our marketing point of view. We cannot be permitted to view consumers as our "targets" anymore. They are our partners. The logic of the "targets" leaves us blind to the real needs of people, does not permit any real relationships. It is a logic that turns consumers into the enemy and that would be a great pity, because once you have hit them, they are dead and then they’re no longer able to consume anymore!

Secondly, we must express and materialize our contents, our values and principles as truthful, real expressions of what we believe. That means that we must re-learn to provide customers with orientation by applying what WE have to offer, and not just what we asked them to tell us that they wish.

And finally, we cannot be permitted to apply communication and design simply as a marketing cosmetic instrument. We must free ourselves from the schizophrenia and neuroses of a post-modern communication that is only obsessed with the latest trend but doesn’t have a clue about any grammar or syntax. We must scrape off all marketing encrustations that have obscured the real so that we can finally call an egg an egg once again.

If we can follow these three points, that would then mean a real coming-to-grips with our previous way of working. Why should we wait to do this until we once again have our back to the wall and no more real room to manoeuvre?

In any case, the last act has begun in the Odyssey of consumption. The return of Ulysses to Ithaca. Because, just as Ulysses after his long wanderings, so many beguilements and illusions, today also people after so many fleeting seductions, delusions and disappointments, have a deep longing for authenticity: for something that means "home". For something that is exactly that what it is.

Because same a Snow-white, they got told to many stories about what was good, beautiful and right for them. They also couldn’t resist to the temptation of biting that apple that looked so fresh, so red and juicy...although it was gifty. But now they have all become, same as Snow-white and her Prince, Queens and Kings and what they order to us is to provide them FINALLY, dear ladies and gentlemen, with REAL QUALITY and for its REAL PRICE.

Thank-you.