

## **Aesthetic Consumption in Managing Art-driven Organizations: An Autoethnographic Inquiry**

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### **Abstract**

Arts management is a field of research with many singularities that are still overlooked. Aesthetic and consumption are management dynamics embodying arts management practice but are yet little regarded in research. In this article, we examine how aesthetic consumption plays a significant role in managing art-driven organizations. In order to access the singularities of arts-driven organizations which include the world of aesthetics and consumption dynamics, autoethnography reveals itself to be a powerful methodology. Based on an autoethnographic approach, the lead researcher embraced management experiences from multiple art-driven organizations, applying techniques of participant observation and interviews. The narrative analysis of these experiences generated four managerial dynamics associated with aesthetic consumption: (a) sensible consumption as a source for creating the experience of the beauty and excellence; (b) conventional consumed symbols to engage audiences with unexpected artistic experiences; (c) sensory consumption as a source for generating a vibrant, delightful and personal engagement; and (d) pleasure as a key to involving audiences and make them feel part of the environment. The analysis expanded the current logic of thinking in aesthetic consumption, focused only on managing products, thus highlighting aesthetic consumption as a powerful path to manage art-driven organizations for their sustainability. Implications for further research are suggested and discussed.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic consumption; art-driven organizations; management; autoethnography; sustainability

## **Aesthetic Consumption in Managing Art-driven Organizations: An Autoethnographic Inquiry**

Over five decades, arts management, while originally based on conventional management theories, has grown as a field of research, generating singular bodies of knowledge (Byrnes, 2019; Howkins, 2002; Jung, 2017; Kirchner & Rentschler, 2015; Paquette & Redaelli, 2015). It is composed of interdisciplinary fields (e.g. psychology, policy, art, sociology, marketing, economics; see for e.g., Jung, 2017), yet perceived by the art world with some suspicion (because of its distaste for managerial issues) and by management scholars as theoretically weak (Chong, 2009; Lawrence & Phillips 2002). If in one hand, arts management studies are based mainly on conventional management theories; on the other hand, arts management practice presents several distinct dynamics and managers face unique and complex managerial challenges. Current research deals precariously with these distinct dynamics and generally fails in generating theories of organizational and managerial singularities of art-driven organizations (Johnson, 2002; Lawrence & Phillips, 2002). Thus, the specificities of art-driven organizations management have emerged as a critical issue for study. We argue aesthetics and consumption should be integrated and considered as important to managerial dynamics of art-driven organizations.

This argument sees the need to merge arts-driven organization management with consumption, as has been suggested in some cultural and creative industries research. For example, managerial and organizational singularities of cultural and creative industries have occupied the center of scholarly attention over the last several decades (Gander, 2017; Hartley et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2015, 2016; Mallia, 2019; Morrow, 2018; Townley & Beech, 2010; Townley et al., 2019). Lawrence and Phillips (2002) argued that management and organizational research remained focused on the dynamics of production, rather than examining how and why products are consumed. Such extended understanding may provide a deepened knowledge about the management dynamics in art-driven organizations beyond providing amplified comprehension about the complex relations between consumption and production in them.

Aesthetics can be, on the other hand, another conceptual pole for improving knowledge about art-driven organizations and their management. The practice of arts management is linked with aesthetics, as the art world is rooted to the sociology and philosophy of aesthetics (Becker, 1982; Devereaux, 2019; Monthoux, 2004). Art-driven organizations are defined as systems that produce aesthetic experiences (Stahl & Trondle, 2019). Their products and production activate a highly aesthetic process, turning on its head aesthetic experience, which is essential to its existence. Thus, aesthetics occupies a central role in the ongoing practice of arts management and is frequently noted as a promising concept to improve arts management research (Chong, 2009). However, current studies are still largely silent on its relevance.

Nonetheless, it is possible to find studies addressing the concept of aesthetic consumption in the field of art studies. However, they focus on the artistic product rather than on the art-driven organization (Charters, 2006), and the relationship between aesthetics and consumption is theorized from the perspective of the consumer and the status of the aesthetic object, thus focusing on the customer's needs and desires (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008). The knowledge about art-driven organizations must go beyond consumer-centred marketing strategy and concentrate instead on the value of aesthetic debate (Johnson, 2002) through its management. Hence, we see few studies that link aesthetics, consumption and management, combining them in the managerial logic of organizations.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to examine how aesthetic consumption plays a significant role in managing art-driven organizations. Theoretically, we link knowledge from the fields of arts management, organizational aesthetics and consumption. We define aesthetic consumption as the stimulation of sensory appreciation during the experience of aesthetic products and services, involving pleasure, catharsis, transformation and symbolism. One of the main dimensions of the aesthetic world is sensible knowledge (Strati, 2007) and sensibility (Strati, 2019). Sensible knowledge can be defined as the perception through the senses (visual, the auditory, the olfactory, the gustatory, the touchable), judged through the senses (sensitive-aesthetic judgement), and produced and reproduced through the senses. Sensibility is a theoretical status as a form of knowledge (Strati, 2007). In this study, we use the words sensible, sensual and sensory as synonyms to refer to sensibility. The empirical research takes places in the context of the performing arts. Thus, in this context, aesthetic consumption encompasses audiences' immersive experience in the performing arts, which occurs by participating in a performance or event provided by an art-driven organization, such as a theater, venue, festival, orchestra, or dance company. Art-driven organization is defined as an organization that has art production and diffusion as its main purpose and activity. Art-driven organizations may vary in terms of the types of organization, including permanent and temporary organizations (for e.g., project-based; venue; experimental).

Methodologically, we use autoethnography to access the unique field of aesthetics and the sensible knowledge (Strati 2007) that exists in art-driven organizations. Based on an autoethnographic approach, the lead researcher joined several managerial experiences of multiple art-driven organizations she had worked on, using techniques of participant observation and interviews. Narrative analysis of these experiences generated four managerial dynamics associated with aesthetic consumption. The analysis expands the current logic of thinking in aesthetic consumption for managing products; it also provides a path to manage art-driven organizations and make them sustainable.

A key contribution of this study sustains that not only artistic products are aesthetically consumed but also (and most strategically) art-driven organizations. Further, this study generates innovative knowledge about art-driven organization management by integrating consumption and aesthetics as quintessential dimensions for managing art-driven organizations. It may stimulate arts managers to understand aesthetic consumption as something internal to their organization rather than something external to it; and a process that must be integrated into managerial practices, regularly and aesthetically to ensure art-driven organization sustainability. Aesthetic consumption is much more than a transactional process of just increasing the number of attendees (Hill et al., 2003). Managers deal with the challenge of creating aesthetic experiences that are not limited to the artistic product; they need to extend it to the whole of organizational life. Organizations are also consumed as aesthetic experiences, thus, improving the understanding of aesthetic consumption to improve the management and sustainability of art-driven organizations.

### **Aesthetics, Consumption and Management**

In Organization Studies, aesthetics refers to sensory experiences beyond the sense of beauty (Gagliardi, 1999; Strati, 1992), including the sublime, the ugly, the comic, the gracious, the tragic, the sacred, the picturesque and the agogic categories (Strati 2000b, 2019). Aesthetics concern the sensible knowledge perceived through the senses (Strati, 1999; Strati, 2009; Taylor & Hansen, 2005; Linstead, 2000) and the body (Elias et al., 2018), judged through the senses, and generated and reproduced through the senses. Aesthetic judgment involves the visual, the auditory, the olfactory, the gustatory, the touchable, in a way that cognition is informed by the aesthetic experience generated in feelings and reasonings (Taylor & Hansen, 2005). Aesthetics provide meanings, values and beliefs that create the sense of belonging to groups, deeply connecting members of communities and organizations (Gagliardi, 1999;

Taylor & Hansen, 2005). The aesthetic approach emphasizes the importance of people's sensory and perceptive faculties in the analysis of the organizational phenomena that they generate (Strati, 2000b).

The connections between aesthetics and consumption are diverse, as the concept of "aesthetic consumption" is not yet consolidated. In the literature, we find three distinct ways of connecting consumption to aesthetics: (a) sensory perceptions; (b) pleasure, catharsis and transformation; and (c) symbolism.

The first connection is about consuming to enhance sensory perceptions through experience. In consumer societies (Charters, 2006; Clinton D. Lanier & Rader, 2015; Lawrence & Phillips, 2002a), consumers increasingly seek out and engage in consumption experiences as an essential aspect of their lives (Lanier Jr. & Rader, 2015). Aesthetic experiences of consumption provide diverse elements that together, involve the individual emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually (Mossberg, 2007). It goes beyond the rational process, involving the entire being (Schmitt, 2000) at a high level of emotional intensity (Arnould & Price, 1993). Aesthetic experiences convey the multi-sensorial, fantasy, sensations, emotions and symbolic elements (Charters, 2006; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) that affect audience experiences. When audiences consume aesthetic products, they create meaning for their lives (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008). Thus, aesthetic consumption may refer to the primary aesthetic functions of some products (e.g. clothes, music, cf. Goulding, 2002; Charters, 2006), as well to the sensory experiences appearing in the consumption of products and experiences relating to art (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008).

The second connection concerns consumption as a path to pleasure, catharsis and transformation. Consumers experience products in multisensory, fantasy and emotive ways, related to the concept of hedonic consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). These products are consumed in anticipation of the pleasure they provide, in situations that may help people deal with unpleasant or unhappy events that they feel the need to confront, via fantasy and emotional arousal. Aesthetic consumption is related to the need to engage in experiences for pleasure, fantasies and fun (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). The aesthetic theory also considers pleasure as an important human emotion that can be found in aesthetic experience (Cupchik & Gebotys, 1988, 1990; Graf & Landwehr, 2017; Strati, 1992) as well as in the quality of leisure matters (Mannell et al., 1988).

Audiences may experience arts-driven products as enjoyable and memorable (Oh et al., 2007). They can feel comfortable, pleasant and delighted as they consume the experience. Artistic products, regardless of their aesthetic value, offer the audience an emotional release that has much to do with purging, self-reflection, satisfaction, interest and pleasure during aesthetic experiences (Biaggio & Supplee, 1983; Cupchik & Gebotys, 1988, 1990; Graf & Landwehr, 2017). Aesthetics also can be about excitement, transformation and catharsis. Aristotle introduced this last one in *Poetics*. *Catharsis* is as a metaphor that describes the effects of tragedy in the audience (Halliwell, 1998). Aesthetic experience can interrupt people from their lives and change their expectations and provoke radical definitions and transformations through something new and unexpected (Denzin, 1992). Thus, this feeling often involves pain, risk, or difficulty as elements of novelty and discovery (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The third connection relates consumption to symbolic experience. Aesthetic experiences, as arts-driven products are full of symbolic dimensions (Charters, 2006) that connect audiences and deliver experiences to them. For example, studies of symbolic, ritualistic, hedonic, and performative consumption behaviour illustrate how individuals collect past meanings, negotiate future meanings, and assemble present meanings of cultural constructs such as

family, religion, gender, age, and tradition through their participation in particular consumption behaviours (Venkatesh & Meamber, 2008). The aesthetic experiences are deeply linked to the symbolic dimensions (Charters, 2006) through which people are connected. Human beings express the feeling of being part of a social group via aesthetic symbols.

In summary, aesthetic consumption can be defined as the combination of aesthetic elements such as sensory perception, pleasure and symbolism through experiences provided by consumption of products that have aesthetics as their main purpose, like those in art-driven products. The way current research define aesthetic consumption emphasises consumption as a process of experiencing products through the senses and focus on artistic goods generate by organizations. In this situation, experiencing artistic goods may generate pleasure, transformations and cartasis.

### **Method: Autoethnography of Aesthetic Consumption and Managerial Experiences**

The empirical study concerns the set of past experiences (19 years) of the lead researcher in managing several art-driven organizations in Brazil. Experiences are grounded in Salvador, the capital city of Bahia, a state of Brazil. Salvador is a cultural and creative city (recognized as a city of music, by UNESCO in 2016), where we may find at least 365 churches, more than 50 museums, several theaters, dance companies, and music groups.

If aesthetics is about sensible knowledge (Strati, 2007), it is not easy to access it through traditional methodologies. As the researcher is the center of the experience, it is the primary source of perception and sensible information. Unlike classic ethnographies, in which the researcher is a stranger in the environment, in the autoethnographic approach, the researcher is intimate and fluent to the experiences and situations she is researching and reflecting on. In autoethnography, researcher's experience is considered to be an extremely rich source for the production of knowledge (Alvesson, 2003; Anderson, 2006; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Chang, 2016) as well as narratives of others experiences (Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 2007).

Autoethnography also includes interaction with other experiences by interviews to provide external data that give contextual information to confirm, complement, or reject data generated introspectively (Chang, 2008). Interviews in autoethnography also stimulate researcher's memory, it fills the gaps that may occur, and by gathering new information from others, it validates the researcher's personal data and provides others perspectives to the theme (Chang, 2008). Thus, the lived experience generated a chain of sensible knowledge that was contrasted with other experiences from other arts-driven managers. This interaction provides another perspective and avoids a toxic and myopic analysis of the theme. The autoethnographic experiences were analyzed in contrast with different managers experiences to explore the meanings – interviewer and interviewees – places on events in their worlds (Spradley, 1979). At this point, we must say that reflexivity was not only applied during interviews but also to the phases of interpretation and writing (Heyl, 2001; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Documents and artefacts from all experiences (autoethnographic and others' experiences) were also included as sources for information, description, perception and reflexivity.

During the research process, the experiences, perceptions and reflections were treated as narratives. Thus, we have engaged with narrative analysis (Czarniawska, 2004; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Riessman, 2008, 2012) as an analytical approach to organize empirical material and generate aesthetic knowledge. Narrative analysis helped us to reach an aesthetic richness imbued in experiences of the lead researcher in stimulation from experiences from all interviewees and the narrative of practice (Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008), which jointly formed a web of narrative of aesthetic experience of managing in art-driven organizations.

The research process was organized into three phases (see Table 1). In phase 1, the lead researcher reflected on her personal experience in arts-driven organization as a manager. She chose six significant experiences (coded as A1, A2, A3, A4, A5 and A6 – see appendix 1) that provided the initial substance for description, analysis, and reflection. Not only the researcher's memories were triggered, but also documents such as brochures, release of shows, photos, posters, video and reviews were analyzed. These experiences provided paths through the narratives that helped to understand art-driven organization mindsets, particularities and managerial practices.

Phase	Sources of empirical information	Analysis
1. Describing self-experiences	Past participative observation Documents (brochures, releases of shows, photos, posters, videos, and reviews)	Narratives from the lived experiences of the lead researcher
2. Relating to others' experiences (managers, staff and audience)	<div> <p>Focused pole: ethnographic interviews</p> <p>Holistic pole: ethnographic interviews, observations, documents (institutional folders, annual report, photos, videos, brochures, releases, reviews, and websites)</p> </div>	Narratives generated in contrast (strangeness) to other experiences (managers, professionals, and audience)
3. Conceptualizing and theorizing	Narratives generated in phases 1 and phase 2	Concepts generated from the reconstructed narratives to stimulate theoretical understandings

**Table 1 – The design of autoethnographic research**

In phase 2, the experiences used in phase 1 were contrasted with experiences from other managers, professionals and even the public for artistic organizations from different states in Brazil. Appendix 2 illustrates this phase and organizations are coded as S1 to S10). We examined phase 2 around two poles: the focused and the holistic pole. In the focused pole, the lead author's experience was confronted with other performing arts managers experience through ethnographic interviews. Four focused sets of experiences were contrasted. Each interview lasted on average 70 minutes. All of them were recorded, and notes were taken during the conversations. The lead researcher shared experiences about consumption, and the interviewees shared their experiences. In the holistic pole, an analysis was done integrating interviews, observations and documents, such as institutional folders, annual reports, photos, videos, brochures, releases, reviews and websites. There were six holistic experiences that were compared. As in the focused pole, the interviews with managers lasted an average of 70 minutes, were recorded and transcribed. In the holistic pole, there were other sources, such as observation of the organization's routine; observation of shows and events held by the organizations; information taken from annual reports, websites, brochures and audience research (when available). Informal conversations with employees and audiences were undertaken.

In phase 3, information was organized into narratives. Initial thematic groups emerged at this stage of analysis that suggested dimensions, processes and principles of aesthetic consumption in relation to management. The emerging thematic concepts generated were analyzed into a coherent articulation and resulted in a theoretical understanding of the aesthetic consumption of art-driven organizations. Narrative analysis was a spiral process,

meaning that phases were analysed and reanalysed as many times as needed for themes to emerge. Narratives were organized in relation to locus and activity (Table 2). Some narratives supporting this theoretical understanding were chosen as more representative and significant as an illustration of the concepts presented. In this study, we focused on stories about managing consumption of art-driven products and organizations.

		Locus	
		Product	Organization
Activity	Production	Stories about managing the production of art-driven products	Stories about managing the production of the art-driven organization
	Consumption	Stories about managing the consumption of art-driven products	Stories about managing the consumption of art-driven organization

**Table 2 – Narratives about production and consumption**

### Analysis: From Aesthetic Consumption to Management

Stories about managing consumption of art-driven products and organization were analyzed, and they generated four dynamics of aesthetic consumption and four dynamics of managing aesthetic consumption (Table 3).

	Art-driven product	Art-driven organizations
<b>Aesthetic consumption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensory perception consumption of the arts-driven product</li> <li>• Transforming consumption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensory perception consumption of the art-driven organisation</li> <li>• Belonging through consumption</li> </ul>
<b>Managing aesthetic consumption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensible consumption as a source for creating the experience of beauty and excellence</li> <li>• Conventional consumed symbols to engage audiences with unexpected artistic experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensory consumption as a source for generating a vibrant, delightful and personal engagement</li> <li>• Pleasure as a key to involve audiences and make them feel part of the environment</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Dynamics of aesthetic consumption and management**

### Aesthetic consumption of art-driven products and organizations

Aesthetic consumption is characterized by singular ways of consuming arts-driven products through arts-driven organizations. We identify two ways audiences consume arts-driven products (sensible and transforming consumption) and two ways audiences consume arts-driven organizations (sensory and belonging consumption). *Sensory perception and consumption of the arts-driven product*

Artistic products are created through an aesthetic process, and consumption happens through senses and emotions. Each person in the audience can feel and experience the same product differently because of their personal history. The first author explains the sensory perception during an aesthetic experience:

*During these years working at the arts field and having an important background in performing arts, I believe when someone experiences an*

*aesthetic product, it's not only rational. The whole body, including sensations and emotions, is related to the experience. Sight, hearing, smell, touch, emotions, memories everything is triggered to compose the unique and personal experience.*

Organization S9 created a play for an early childhood audience. The managers reflected about the sensory perception between artists and children. The relationship between them was through colours, smells, touch, and feelings and led managers thinking about the delicate process that is part of artistic consumption. One of the organisation's managers, which acts in the play, accounted:

*I need to be prepared emotionally and sensitively to be on stage. All relations with the audience are through feelings, through a look, through the breath. And we must be connected with them to provide the experience we want to deliver. (...) The audience is connected with everything, what's on stage, each movement, each sound, each sign matters. Even silence. Everything is part of the sensory experience.*

### *Transforming consumption*

Experience is a means by which audiences depart from their lives and expectations and are transformed through it. The experience can be triggered through different sensations: happiness, sadness, tension or fear. The aesthetic experience is not limited to something that delivers a pleasant feeling or that is somehow expected. The lead author argues:

*During my years of working in the arts, I realized that sometimes we try to deliver what we believe consumer wants. But, aesthetic consumption is about experiencing something that the audience doesn't know they want. Audiences consume the possibility of transformation and redefinition of themselves through an unexpected experience.*

When audiences consume arts-driven products, the relation between them and the product takes a different dimension than it would take in another kind of consumption like consumer goods, for example. Audiences seek satisfaction through a transformed experience, even if the product represents beauty, ugliness or the grotesque. They seek satisfaction if it stimulates reflection, redefinitions, emotion, anxiety or a deeper thought about a specific issue. The manager of organization S9 argue there is transformation during an aesthetic experience:

*Audiences relate with arts in a different way they relate to any other product or service. Through art, people shift their minds, they always get something new, and somehow, when they leave the venue, they are different from what they were before the experience. It happens with adults, children, seniors, everyone.*

### *Sensory perception and consumption of the arts-driven organization*

There are many symbolic elements that go beyond the artistic product itself. The organization is a site where artistic creation happens and is distributed throughout the organization and beyond. When the audience attends an arts-driven organization, it is consuming all the symbolic and sensory elements that are inherent to it. Audiences consume the whole organization and each one of its sensory, aesthetic elements. The lead author brings her memories about her experience working at organization A5:



*Audiences come to organization A5 not only because of the arts-driven products we offer but also because of the organization itself. They consume the venue, the cafe, the products we have at our shop. They consume the relationship with staff, the advertisement of other shows.*

Audiences consume a combination of aesthetic elements that is part of art-driven organizations, and through these elements, sensorial perception can be activated. The Organization S7 is an indigenous dance company, highly connected with their regional culture. The manager explained:

*Our company has this strong identity, which is consumed by people in different ways. This identity is not limited to the shows; it is reflected in everything we do. Our staff are committed to this identity, and they are proud of it as well. So, when people come to our venue that is located in a neighbourhood that means a lot to our history or when they enjoy the venue architecture that reminds the traditional city culture when they take dance classes we offer to artists or non-artists, or even when they interact with our staff they are consuming all these sensorial elements that are part of our organization.*

#### *Belonging through consumption*

Audiences develop a sense of belonging through pleasure and wellbeing experienced in the organization. In many cases, this feeling is not related strictly to an art-driven product but to the whole organization through the connection established between it and the audience. The manager of organization S6 argued many people consume the organization due to the sense of belonging and connection with the organization:

*There are many people who come to our venue that sometimes don't even know what play is on. It is interesting because they come just to be here, at the venue. Some of them know the name of the ticket seller and come here as if it was their home. They feel free to give suggestions, criticize or make compliments. They are part of the venue, they like to be part of it, and we feel like we are part of their lives too.*

The lead author explains:

*Organization A6 has a plural audience due to its plural art-driven products and projects. Different people, from different neighbourhoods, social scale, gender, compose the general organization audience. However, despite the differences, some of them have a sense of belonging with the organization. This engagement was clear to me when we organized a crowdfund due to a financial crisis we were facing at that time. Instead of getting much money from a few people, we got a little money from many people. And much more than donating, people came to the organization to offer help, to attend the shows, to show support to a place they had as part of their lives.*

This relation, based on sensory connection, can be fragile, on the other hand. The manager of organization S5 claimed our attention to it:

*Audiences come to see a play. If they love it, if they feel pleasant, happy, they start following the organization, they recommend the shows. But if for some reason, one day, one single day, this consumer feels mistreated, unpleasant or*

*unhappy, marriage doesn't last the end of the honeymoon. It is all about subjectivity.*

### **Managing aesthetic consumption of art-driven products and organizations**

Managing aesthetic consumption is characterized by singular ways of managing the consumption of arts-driven products and arts-driven organizations. We identify two ways consumption can be managed in arts-driven products and two ways consumption can be managed in arts-driven organizations.

#### *Sensible consumption as a source for creating the experience of beauty and excellence*

For several managers, the artistic product must be surrounded by beauty and excellence to deliver the best experience to audiences. Aesthetic consumption deals with sensibility and subjectivity, and the beauty ideal is something to be considered when creating a product. Beauty is also related to quality which means audiences expects products should be presented in the most accurate way. When Organization S7 produces shows, they are aware of all elements of the scene. The manager of the organisation argues that:

*everything must be sharp, perfect. The outfits, light design, scenario, makeup and accessories, everything is planned to deliver to the audience an aesthetic of abundance, excellence and perfection.*

The manager of Organization S5 believes that consumers seeking aesthetic performances would not leave their homes to see a sub-standard concert. For him:

*beauty matters and an artistic product must look beautiful and well done, even if it is to show the worst ugliness ever seen.*

#### *Conventional consumed symbols to engage audiences with unexpected artistic experiences*

Aesthetic consumption is about transformation through an unexpected experience. However, managers offer aesthetic symbols known by audiences which establish a connection that will be the path by which the unexpected can be presented. It was observed that aesthetic consumers look for some references to engage with an aesthetic experience, even though the unknown generates pleasure and satisfaction. In other words, managers can mobilize audiences known symbols and references as bait to diffuse unexpected experiences for them. The manager of organisation S10 said she and the artistic director felt like they were "art dealers". She detailed:

*Sometimes we feel like we are offering things that they know already, or at least they feel safe about, to catch their attention to something they still don't know, and at the end, audiences will be addicted to new forms of the arts.*

S10 manager also told a story about a Christmas event for the community. They were researching a Russian Christmas, with classical Russian waltzes. At a certain point, the design team was preparing the advertisement, using all the typical Russian outfits and the usual snow associated with European Christmas. However, the presentation was to be performed in a tropical town with temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius and had little in common with Christmas in Russia. The team, therefore, decided to rethink the aesthetics of the show. The orchestra invited a group of young waltz dancers from the outskirts of the city to join the presentation, and even the repertoire remained as classical Russian music, some pop music was included. The audience had the chance to attend a Christmas concert that was close to

their habits and culture, and at the same time, they had the opportunity to enjoy classical music that for many of them was the first experience. The manager explained:

*From the known elements you can open the doors to the unknown, that's the game. We offer what is recognized and wanted by the audience, and at the same time, we create this tension bringing new things. We believe, also, that it is crucial to avoid the conception that things that are wanted or desirable don't have artistic quality.*

At this point, it is essential to say that those know symbols vary according to the audience and to what audience knows and what they are familiar with. Sometimes art-driven products were created to deliver one kind of message, but the audience feels differently, according to their own references, senses and emotions. The lead author reflects about it according to her experience:

*Hamlet's tragedy can touch one in a different way than it does in another person. People come from different backgrounds, and each one of them reacts according to their previous personal experiences. Each one has a unique way of feeling, understanding and recognizing symbols. That's why aesthetic experience is so personal and sensitive.*

#### *Sensory consumption as a source for generating vibrant, delightful and personal engagement*

Audiences consume the organisation itself beyond the products it offers. However, it is observed that one of the most common strategies used by organizations is the advertisement and promotion of arts-driven products through the press office. It is agreed this strategy needs to be rethought, and the sensory consumption of organizations can be a way of rethinking management strategies to engage audiences. Organization S3 is a public and austere theater, and for many years, the population avoided the venue, because even they knew about the programme, they refused to attend because they didn't feel comfortable, or welcome. The manager, then, decided to host a party to announce the annual programme, but it would be an informal and humorous event. The manager told the following story:

*We offered lunch with typical food and a mandolin concert. The entrance to the party was free, and everyone in the community was invited to lunch and listen to popular music. Those people that maybe never had been in a theatre had the chance to know what it was about and became part of the audience. Of course, there were people that disagree with it, how could a theatre like this open its doors in this way? But we knew we were doing the right thing; we were making a meaningful connection with people at that moment.*

Art-driven organizations are surrounded by aesthetics, and they can use them in their favour, engaging and affecting the audience experience using different sensitive symbols to impact and engage those who relate to it. Organization S1 is a comedy theatre company that is settled in a small venue, with basic furnishings and lacking an air-conditioning system. However, the manager provides a home-sensory experience to the audience, using humour, and treating each one as if they were close friends. The cast and staff create a funny and familiar environment that stimulates the audience to feel confident and engaged. The managers of organization S1 explained:

*We want people to feel like they are in their home or at a very close friend's home. We try to make them feel comfortable in a snug place. We don't have air conditioners, but we use humour, jokes, we offer manual fans, and we make*

*a scene with that. When it is too hot, we stop the performance and offer water to everyone so they can refresh. Our theatre is like a friend's house, where you go to feel cosy and to have some fun.*

*Pleasure as a key to involve audiences and make them feel part of environment*

Arts managers interviewed agree that the audience develops a sense of belonging and affection when they feel pleasure in the organization. The arts-driven organization can be a place of pleasure without interest and wellbeing. S10 is an orchestra based in a state that does not have a broad appreciation of the culture of classical music. The organization noticed a need to attract new, younger audiences due to an ageing audience base. So, they created a concert in which the orchestra played some famous movie soundtracks. To create an alluring aesthetic, the conductor and the musicians dress up as their favourite movie comic-book characters. At the end of the show, a contest was held in which the audience decided the best character. The orchestra manager argues that it is an overwhelmingly pleasant experience for orchestra members and audiences alike. Also, as the audiences feel comfortable and engaged with the orchestra, they, therefore, are more willing to attend other projects. The manager of the organisation reports that:

*In this concert, not only audiences have fun, but also the musicians, the crew and everyone else involved. And for me, this is an issue for what we call high culture. Because high culture doesn't want to entertain, it wants to provide emotion, reflection or a more spiritualized relation to the experience, and here we try to put all this together plus leisure. And it works, people feel delighted and provoked with this experience.*

## **Discussion and implications**

In seeking to reach our research goal, we uncovered that aesthetic consumption relies on sensory perception and transforming consumption of products, as well as sensory perception and belonging through consumption of organizations. Understanding how products and organizations are consumed aesthetically, managers should act accordingly. They face products knowing that (a) sensible consumption is a source for creating the experience of beauty and excellence, as well as (b) conventional consumed symbols can be mobilized in order to engage audiences with unexpected artistic experiences. When managers face organizations as the focus of aesthetic consumption, they understand (a) how sensory consumption can be a source for generating a vibrant, delightful and personal engagement, as well as (b) how pleasure becomes a key to involve audiences and make them feel part of the organizational environment.

Based on the results of our analysis, we have proposed some directions and implications to improve theory, methodology and practice of arts-driven products and organizations. In terms of theory, art management scholars may deal with four kinds of implications, at least.

The first implication for theory on arts management concerns the comprehension of arts-driven organization management singularities through both consumption and aesthetic perspectives. The arts-driven organization field is still overlooked, and its peculiarities demand more research. Scholars that argue characteristics that are unique to the arts sector must be considered to understand better and to improve the knowledge of the field (Lawrence & Phillips, 2002). It is agreed arts-driven organizations and arts-driven products are highly aesthetic in their final products and process (Charters, 2006; Lanier Jr & Rader, 2015; Lawrence & Phillips, 2002). Curiously, we struggle to find researches that integrate arts-driven products and organization management with aesthetics. Also, consumption is still neglected.

Research fails to integrate consumption as an essential element of management, and the dialogue between production and consumption in arts-driven products and organizations is still scarce. If we agree that arts-driven organizations create and sell meaningful experiences rather than efficiently producing a product (Lawrence & Phillips, 2002) and that those products are highly aesthetic (Charters, 2006), the understanding about those organizations and their management must go through aesthetic consumption and production.

This study brought to light arts-driven products and organization management singularities through the eight categories that emerged from the autoethnographic approach applied. The categories of aesthetic consumption helped us to advance knowledge about the unique kind of consumption that happens in both arts-driven products and art-driven organizations. The four categories of aesthetic consumption (sensible, transforming, sensory and belonging consumption) show us this is a one-of-a-kind consumption kind in which experiences, that involve senses, feelings, emotions and subjectivity are considered. We could not find, until now, any study that had systematized this information. The categories allocated in management concerning aesthetic consumption answers the main question of this study. The four categories explain how aesthetic consumption, now systematized, are manifested in management. In other words, how management can use the knowledge of aesthetic consumption to improve the performance in arts-driven products and organizations.

The second implication for theory in arts management refers to a managerial conceptualization for arts-driven products and art-driven organizations that considers a two-way process, allowing ongoing dialogue between production and consumption. Arts-driven products and managers deal with the tension between "art and commerce" (Bernstein, 2007; Cunningham, 2002; Hill et al., 2003). They must deal with potentially conflicting goals as they attempt to both produce art and wealth, and they face measures of success in artistic and commercial terms – critical acclaim and profitability – that are often irreconcilable (Lawrence & Phillips, 2002). This challenge becomes higher due to the scarcity of public funding (Rentschler, 2014) and with audiences declining in recent decades (Bernstein, 2007). Bourdieu (1996) argues that the opposition between art and money can be the generating principle of most judgments to establish the border between what is and what is not art.

On the other hand, there are scholars who claim that this principle vanishes (Martel, 2012). Studies in arts-driven product consumption take place mainly through a marketing lens: consumer needs and demands are those that are potentially considered. Even scholars agree that art consumption is not about satisfying all consumer expectations, the majority of studies examine the consumers' perspective (Bernstein, 2007; Hill et al., 2003; Kolb, 2005; Kotler & Scheff, 1997) rather than the organizational perspective. We agree arts-driven products and art-driven organizations must keep the sovereignty of their artistic creation; however, the path we found to maintain audiences goes through a customer-oriented perspective. In this study we argue it is possible to find a dialogue between production and consumption by recognizing the singularities of aesthetic consumption in arts-driven products and art-driven organizations, applying these singularities in management to improve the connection between audience and organization and to amplify the experience provided by both arts-driven products and organizations.

The third implication is about methodology. The use of the autoethnographic method to research aesthetics and art-driven organizations is new. The field of art-driven organizations management has been overlooked, and it is agreed we know very little about its singularities. We also recognise that arts managers (some of them are also researchers, like the first author of this study) obtained their knowledge from practice in diverse organizations and with a long-term perspective. These managers accumulate a vast and rich experience about arts management in the field, its specificities, challenges and issues. Such knowledge allows

managers and researchers to understand complex situations and enable them to access nonobvious, sensible, and subtle information and uncover knowledge from in-depth places. In this study, the experiences accumulated from the first author helped us to understand some nuances and subtleties of aesthetic consumption and management that could be easily eclipsed by a researcher without this kind of immersion in the field.

Such an approach is risky if researchers are not aware of the care that needs to be taken in some cases. Autoethnography is not an autobiography. The research is not about the researcher's own life or their own experience. As it is suggested by ethnography, some distance must be taken. That is why is important to include interviews with other managers as a means to uncovering new knowledge, stimulate strangeness and reflexivity, as it provides additional perspectives and contextual information that helped the investigation of subjectivity. There were many occasions when it was necessary to return to the autoethnographic experience to rethink, reinterpretate, enrich the narrative and deepen the analysis. It was a dynamic process that demanded incessant flows of reflexivity, criticism and sensible interpretation. This methodological approach can be extended to other organizations beyond art-driven organizations. It would be helpful to explore new perspectives, going deep into the peculiarities that permeate of each kind of phenomenon and organization.

The fourth implication concerns practice. Art-driven organization managers obtained their knowledge from practice, and we still need more systematized information about art-driven organization management and its singularities. Managers can use this study as a tool to improve their practice and to provide amplified knowledge that can motivate further studies about it. By practising aesthetic consumption consciously, managers can improve consumption management by adding more procedures that can generate information for new studies. Scholars may find this study is a starting point to expand the knowledge about aesthetic consumption. Public policy officers can develop awareness about particularities in organizations that are part of the creative industries. By knowing the specificity and mainly, by knowing about its consumption singularities, strategies and policies, they can create improved organization development, maintenance and sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to examine how aesthetic consumption plays a significant role in managing art-driven organizations. Through the autoethnographic approach, the study generated four managerial dynamics associated with aesthetic consumption: sensory perception consumption of the arts-driven product; transforming consumption; sensory perception consumption of the arts-driven organization and belonging through consumption. The analysis expanded the current logic of thinking in aesthetic consumption as a way to manage products; it was also seen as a path to manage art-driven organizations and make them sustainable. Not only artistic products are aesthetically consumed, but also organizations themselves are consumed by audiences in their whole meaning and structure. It means aesthetic consumption must be thought beyond the arts-driven products and arts-driven organizations aesthetic consumption must be seriously considered. Art-driven organization can be recognized as the main product and as the primary source of experience that is delivered to the consumer.

Our main intent was to extend the arts management literature by integrating consumption and aesthetics as quintessential dimensions for managing art-driven organizations. We contend that this new understanding on arts management may help arts managers to perceive aesthetic consumption not as something external to their organizations, but rather a process that must be integrated into their managerial practices, regularly and aesthetically to ensure art-driven organization sustainability. As managers, they deal with the challenge

of creating aesthetic experiences that are not limited to the artistic product, but the whole of organizational life.

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**Appendix I – Autoethnographic experiences in art organizations**

<b>Organization</b>		<b>Experience</b>	<b>Duration / Year</b>
A1	Theater Company	This was the first experience of managing an art-driven organization by the first author. She founded the organization with a university graduate colleague, and they both created and sold plays for other companies, such as hotels, malls, schools, universities.	19 months 2003 – 2004
A2	Dance Company and Theater	This dance company was recognized as one of the most relevant in the country, and as a result, the government offered a theater as its company headquarters. The first author came to the organization to organize the new headquarters and theater management. Afterwards, she was the producer of the company and led its national tour.	168 months 2005 – 2019
A3	Theater	This was a theater that produced its own plays and received other artistic productions as well. The author was the head producer, responsible for all leading management processes.	29 months 2008 – 2010
A4	Art production agency	The first author and two other partners created an art production agency. The organization managed projects of artists associated with it. The agency dealt with different kinds of art forms such as theater, music, visual arts, dance, and had multiple art projects. The agency also created its own projects. It was a for-profit organization, expected to sell artistic products that held meaning to the partners.	50 months 2010 – 2013
A5	Theater	For four years, the first author was the head of operational and management of this organization, with a history of more than fifty years. This organization produces its artistic products, and it contains a Theater Company plus an artistic, educational program and an archive.	50 months 2016-2019
A6	Arts Managers Association	This association was formed by a group of artistic managers from more than twenty theaters and venues that produce and distribute artistic products. The association has private and public organizations represented by its managers. During the monthly meetings, the arts managers discuss and make decisions about a variety of subjects that are linked to the art-driven organization field, such as matters of public policy, tax and law as well as audience concerns and art-driven organization practice	50 months 2016 – 2019

**Appendix 2 – Narratives with art-driven organizations**

<b>Organization</b>		<b>Pole</b>	<b>Sources of empirical material</b>	<b>Year</b>
S1	Theater, venue (private)	focused	Interview with the investor and director of the organization	2018
S2	Theater company (private)	focused	Interview with the investor and director of the organization	2018
S3	Theater, venue (public)	focused	Interview with the general manager	2018
S4	Arts center (non-profit)	focused	Interview with programming director, plus website, annual report, brochures	2018
S5	Public art foundation (public)	holistic	Interview with the foundation president, plus website, public notices, advertisement, sponsorship programs contracts, observation of two shows sponsored by the foundation	2018 - 2019
S6	Theater, venue (private)	holistic	Interview with the general manager plus website, brochures of shows, observation of three shows in the venue, observation of audience	2018-2019
S7	Dance, venue (non-profit)	holistic	Interview with the founding and director plus website, videos, contracts, advertisements, activities report, observation of shows, rehearsals and administrative routine for three days	2018-2019
S8	Arts center (public)	holistic	Interview with the programming director plus website, videos, observation of three shows at each one of the three venues of the complex (nine shows in totality), observation of audience and employees during events, advertisements, brochures	2019
S9	Theater company and school (private)	holistic	Interview with the two managers of the organization (artistic director and actress) plus documents, videos, photos, observation of two shows held by the organization and observation of the administrative routine for one day	2019
S10	Orchestra (non-profit)	holistic	Interview with the general manager, observation of two concerts held by the organization (each in a different venue), observation of audience, social media and advertisement.	2019

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