Sailing through marketing: A critical assessment of spatiality in marketing literature

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Abstract

Marketing has historically been entangled with the study of geography, which has become a very popular focus in the marketing literature nowadays. However, spatially-oriented perspectives in marketing tend to rest on a conceptual divide between place-oriented and space-oriented thinking, thus inhibiting the production of more eclectic and creative spatial knowledge. This conceptual paper endeavors to overcome this dichotomy by rethinking spatiality in terms of boundedness, openness, functionality and expressivity. These constitute the four cardinal points of a "compass rose" that marketers can use to reassess and combine different appreciations of spatiality. The paper suggests the idea of "sailing" as an appropriate metaphor to explore pioneering multi-dimensional appreciations of geography in marketing and go beyond the divide between place-oriented and space-oriented thinking.

Keywords: Space; Place; Geography; Spatiality; Marketing theory; Metaphors

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades or so, we have witnessed a profound transformation in how spatiality is viewed (Warf, 2009) and an extension of the geographical idiom to almost all social sciences (e.g. Anselin, 1999). Geographers have stressed the centrality of the spatial context for understanding any economic and sociocultural phenomena, maintaining that there could not be any proper understanding of how humans create and perceive the world without a rigorous analysis of geographical dimensions. Notably, place and space have emerged as two prominent sets of conceptual tools through which geographers have accounted for the spatiality of economic and sociocultural phenomena. The notion of *place* tends to emphasize ideas of "ground" and "soil", by establishing a tight connection between the reproduction of economic or sociocultural phenomena and their situatedness within specific locations. In this view, the emergence of an individual or collective identity has boundaries and corresponds with a certain place to the exclusion of other places. This is consistent with a historical association of place with land, which has often fortified nationalistic accounts of nations and regions. Alternatively, the notion of *space* proposes more dynamic and fluid geographical accounts, often connected with the idea of "sea" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). In this view, space is associated with the idea of being in motion and becoming, consistent with a more relational school of thought. Here, the importance of relationships and connections between and among locations are emphasized (e.g. Doel, 1999; Whatmore, 2006), often paving the way for appreciations of globalization that overlook, rather than celebrate, the specificities of place.

Recent contributions in human geography have sought to re-examine (e.g. Jones, 2009) and problematize (e.g. Nieuwenhuis. 2016) the distinction between "place-oriented" and "space-oriented thinking" (ibidem), suggesting that resting on only one of these perspectives might not be the most appropriate idea in order to capture the evolution of contemporary societies. This move has resulted in the attempt to reevaluate the underlying assumptions

behind each perspective and their methodological implications, in search of potential complementarities and ways to attenuate this dichotomy. Ultimately, this theoretical challenge has contributed to bring new conceptual vitality into the discipline.

The present paper intends to critically assess the growing spatial awareness that is emerging within the marketing literature, by scrutinizing the conceptual contributions on place and space offered by marketing scholars. On the one hand, in fact, the significance of space and place has not escaped the attention of marketing researchers, who increasingly have come to realize that a considerable amount of companies and consumers' activities have to do with space, not only with time (e.g. Hirschman, Ruvio & Belk, 2012; Hackley, 2013; Chatzidakis, McEachern & Warnaby, 2014; Demangeot, Broderick & Craig, 2015). Nobody could deny that geography and marketing have shared an intimate relationship since the 1950s and 1960s, when the approach of "marketing geography" acquired international recognition. "Can store location research be a science?" asked Appelbaum (1965), one of the founding fathers of marketing geography, in an effort to institutionalize an emerging area of study that aimed to investigate the spatial unfolding of markets and their functioning. In particular, Appelbaum positioned marketing geography as an empiricist and practice-oriented approach aiming to tackle those business problems that are inherently geographical: "The growing role of geographers in business signifies that our profession has something worth while to offer to business. This 'something' is professional help to solve problems" (Appelbaum, 1961, p. 48). Recent conceptual meta-studies in the marketing literature show a thorough engagement in spatial theory. In fact, these meta-studies (e.g. Chatzidakis et al., 2014; Veresiu, Dolbec & Castilhos, 2014) devote attention to the philosophical underpinnings of geography as applied to marketing. In other words, marketing has become an established field where spatial knowledge, not only practice, is being produced and discussed.

On the other hand, however, the understanding of spatiality in marketing seems to be still characterized by the divide between place- and space-oriented thinking that human geography is currently trying to challenge. As the following section will explain in detail, this divide is evident in the use of radically opposite terminologies and conceptual tools connected to the heritage of either place- or space- oriented thinking, which might have, even unwarily, directed the creativity of marketing scholars towards the exploration of specific avenues for spatial inquiry rather than others. Thus, the present paper contributes to the literature that explores the relevance of geographical dimensions in marketing by proposing a more nuanced and holistic way to conceptualize spatiality that reconciles the traditional 'place vs space' divide. It is hoped that a more critical examination of the spatial dimensions articulated in the marketing literature may also constitute a way to respond to Easton's call (2002) in this journal to develop mature reflections on the philosophical underpinnings of marketing research and, ultimately, to encourage conceptual advances within the marketing literature (see MacInnis, 2011).

The paper is structured as follows. The next section tracks the historical emergence of spatial sensibility in marketing literature and illustrates the conceptual divergence between place- and space-oriented thinking. The following section presents the research approach, by linking together three elements: the value of conceptualization in marketing, the relevance of critical reviewing and the importance of metaphors. Afterwards, the three following sections offer an illustration of the metaphor of *sailing*, which the study suggests as an appropriate conceptual tool to understand spatiality in marketing that includes four *winds*, a *compass rose* and some novel emerging conceptual *courses*. Lastly, a number of concluding remarks are presented in the conclusion.

2. The development of marketing geography and the 'place vs space' divide

Accounts that emphasize the interconnection between marketing and the study of spatiality date back to the early 1950s. In the American context, the label of "marketing geography" was proposed by geographers (James & Jones, 1954; Appelbaum, 1961) to describe "that aspect of geography which is concerned with tertiary economic activities and particularly the distributive trades" (Davies, 2012, p. 1). Marketing geography has been understood from either a global perspective, as in the study of overseas demands in relation to the locations of main supply centers, or from a more local perspective, as in the study of retail service activities and retail distribution in specific locations (ibid, p. 2). The creation of "customer spotting techniques" based on the identification of different trade areas, more or less "space-distant" from the store location, is an example of how the traditional marketing geography helped enhance the practice of marketing (Appelbaum, 1966). It is still possible to observe the legacy of the entwined development of marketing and geography in the subsequent emergence of spatial sensibility in marketing, both in popular and scholarly accounts. It is not surprising to note that the largest amount of scholarly spatial accounts have been generated within retail studies, as a main domain of application for particular geographical constructs, such as "shelf space" (e.g. Valenzuela, Raghubir & Mitakakis, 2013), "themed space" (Firat, Pettigrew & Belk, 2011) or more articulated managerial spatial tools, such as geo-marketing (e.g. Gijsbrechts, Campo & Goossens, 2003). Additionally, the long-established "marketing mix" (e.g. Goi, 2009) and its evolutions have understood space mainly in terms of the configuration of distribution channels.

Besides the coverage warranted in retail studies, other marketing research streams have subsequently integrated geographic dimensions in the study of marketing phenomena, such as consumer research (Sherry, 2000), service marketing (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999), branding (Kavaratzis, 2005; Charters & Spielmann, 2013) and international marketing (Thams, Alvarado-Vargas & Newburry, 2016). The influence of spatially-sensitive toolboxes

is evident in concepts such as "marketing landscape" and "*mise-en-scène*", through which Hackley (2013) illustrates how mobile consumers use space. Similarly, geographic units of analysis have occasionally become the testing ground for the application, or fine-tuning, of emerging theoretical approaches, such as Service Dominant Logic (see Warnaby, 2009).

The inconsistent application of geographical tools, concepts and labels is certainly an important issue originated by the existence of various empirical domains of marketing, each of them accentuating specific angles on spatial dimensions. However, this is only a marginal issue if compared to the symptoms of the "place vs space" divergence that also characterizes marketing as a field where spatial knowledge is reproduced. In fact, under a surface of multiple and fragmented geographical accounts in marketing, there appears to be a more profound divergence between the two alternative geographical schools. For example, Chatzidakis et al. (2014) emphasize the relevance of *place*, as a portion of space which is loaded with meaning through the agency of consumers. Accordingly, engaging with *where* consumption experiences are happening implies a consideration of the encounters between marketers and consumers during their daily consumption activities. Marketing scholars who support this place-oriented thinking, especially in consumer research, draw from an anthropological and humanistic geography tradition (e.g. Tuan, 1977) that underlines the phenomenological qualities of spatiality (e.g. Bachelard, 1969). The notion of place, for example, captures spatial dimensions in forms of situated consumption and socially-rooted value exchange between consumers, marketers and organizational buyers, in line with the understanding of spatial identity promoted by Continental Europe philosophy over the last two centuries. In other words, the fact that marketing phenomena happens *somewhere* is based on a geographical tradition that situates identity (in our case, the identity of consumers or brands) within spatial borders, but this is from a perspective that emphasizes places as something static and permanent. This idea is illustrated, for example, by the tendency to

appreciate the situatedness of a certain destination's "sense of place" (Campelo, 2015), or to understand markets and consumers in terms of distinct Nielsen market areas, each delimited by clear administrative boundaries. The work of Tuan has been hugely influential not only for scholars at the border between retail and consumer research (e.g. Clarke & Schmidt, 1995), but also for consumer behavior researchers aiming to investigate the implication of a "sense of place" on the processes of value attribution (see Papadopulos et al., 2011).

A radically different attempt to describe the importance of geographical dimensions in marketing emphasizes the relevance of *space* (e.g. Watson et al., 2002; Veresiu et al. 2014). Veresiu et al. (2014), for example, suggest a "sociospatial approach" to market creation, arguing that space exerts different forms of direct influence over market actors and consumers. In particular, they argue that space possesses an agentic role *per se*, challenging the tendency in marketing research to "[assign] agency mostly to producers and consumers" (ibid., p. 265). This meta-study exemplifies a kind of space-oriented thinking that advances a more dynamic and fluid view of geographical dimensions, yet may under-represent the role played by specificities of place. In this view, which is in line with a more relational school of thought present in both Anglo-Saxon and French philosophies, marketing phenomena activates a number of (local and global) relations in a space that is neither fixedly bounded nor hierarchical organized. This discourse on space may capture ideas of flows of different kinds (products, tourists, capitals, talents, infrastructure networks etc.), which as such are not confined *somewhere* but are produced, assembled and circulated across a variety of locations in relation to one another.

The divergence of place- and space-related thinking and the implications of its resulting research are still predominantly implicit in marketing. If not clarified, this latent ambiguity that tends to oppose understandings of space and place might inhibit marketing scholars' imagination from disclosing alternative, perhaps more eclectic investigations of the nexus

between marketing and geography, namely the direction towards which contemporary human geography is pointing. This is why the present conceptual paper intends to propose an alternative conceptualization of spatiality in marketing that could transcend the divide of the two sets of conceptual tools or, at the very least, attenuate the dichotomy. This will be done by elaborating on the idea of *sailing*, which leverages the descriptive potential of "air" as a way to integrate the previous conceptualizations of spatiality whereby place is understood through "land" and space is understood through "sea" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Our suggestion is to apply the idea of sailing not only as a conceptual device to think differently about spatial knowledge, but also as a way to conceptualize possibilities for further research in the marketing field. Sailing will be thoroughly presented after a detailed discussion of the research approach.

3. Research approach: the value of conceptualizing

This paper is primarily conceptual and follows MacInnis's (2011, p. 150) recommendation about the necessity of "valuing conceptualization" in marketing research. In particular, the contribution offered by this paper corresponds to two of the four possible areas of conceptual contributions in marketing identified by MacInnis, namely "relating" and "envisioning" (see p. 139). In terms of the former, the proposed critical assessment of spatiality in marketing constitutes a way of applying comparative reasoning skills in order to emphasize both similarities and differences between different sets of conceptual tools (in our case, place and space). Analogies and metaphors often play a role in facilitating this type of conceptual contribution. In terms of the latter, the more nuanced elaboration of spatiality in marketing through the metaphor of sailing appears to be a way of questioning assumptions, fostering a kind of innovative thinking and facilitating the search for new metaphors, which are elements common to both relating and envisioning. The conceptual inquiry performed by this paper is

based on a critical review that aims to integrate the different spatial perspectives in the marketing literature. The rationale for it and the procedures adopted are discussed in detail in the following sub-chapter.

3.1 Critical reviewing

This study is based on what is generally acknowledged as a critical review of the literature. Differently from systematic reviews or meta-analyses that imply a comprehensive search, critical reviews aim to synthesize materials from diverse sources and to facilitate the interpretative procedures inherent in conceptualization. In particular, a critical review "goes beyond mere description of identified articles and includes a degree of analysis and conceptual innovation" (Grant and Booth, 2009, p. 93). In fact, critical reviews fulfill their task by suggesting an interpretive framework that helps grasp, compare and integrate a variety of accounts and perspectives in a given domain of knowledge.

Our review was conducted in the form of a thorough critical comparison of peer-reviewed academic marketing literature that featured an evident interest in spatial dimensions. This peer-reviewed literature became the object of conceptual elaboration with respect to the theoretical perspectives adopted by marketing scholars in their treatment of spatiality. Practitioner papers were not included in the amount of sources scrutinized, even though an ad-hoc investigation of that work would certainly offer an insightful contribution. Papers were considered relevant when they featured either an explicit focus on theoretical or

empirical aspects of "space" and "place" (for example in the title or abstract) or when they emphasized units of analysis that are inherently geographic, such as studies on "country image", or consumption of particular types of servicescapes, such as a "pub" or a "neighborhood". The major journals in different marketing areas were scanned for contributions relevant to space and place. Table 1 shows an illustration of the areas of marketing research surveyed, such as retail studies, consumer research, international marketing and tourism marketing. As the purpose of the study is not to produce a comprehensive mapping review of spatiality in marketing, the reader should consider the studies provided in the table as only indicative exemplars.

(insert Table 1 about here)

3.2 The use of metaphors in marketing

As pointed out by MacInnis (2011), the role of metaphors is often prominent in conceptual marketing papers that offer types of contributions corresponding to "relating" and "envisioning". For the sake of consistency, this paper operationalizes its approach through the use of the *sailing* metaphor, which will be the main object of the next three sections. The usefulness of metaphors in marketing research has been thoroughly discussed (e.g. Arndt, 1985; Tynan, 1999) and even though metaphors can provide "partial truths and incomplete models" (Arndt, 1985, p. 17), several benefits of using metaphors can be identified. For example, "liberating metaphors" (p. 18) can play a crucial role in unveiling marketplace conflicts and other critical issues. Similarly, we believe that the sailing metaphor is an appropriate tool to "resolve competing schools of thought" (MacInnis, 2011, p. 93) in the geographical underpinnings of the marketing literature and, hopefully, provide a fresh perspective for creating more innovative spatial knowledge. After a detailed illustration of *four winds* in the next section, the following one will introduce the *compass rose* (see Figure

1) as a dynamic heuristic device in which four main cardinal points guide the production of spatial marketing accounts (boundedness, openness, functionality and expressivity). Finally, some emerging eclectic uses of the compass rose are discussed in section no. 6, in an attempt to promote an alternative, more multi-dimensional treatment of geography in marketing that goes beyond a strong opposition between place- and space-oriented thinking.

4. The *winds*: Four appreciations of spatiality in marketing research

Wind is a first important component of *sailing*. Navigators are aware that a knowledge of winds is essential because each kind of wind carries with it specific meteorological properties (e.g. dry or humid air; associated with unfavorable or favorable weather etc.). Similarly, appreciations of spatiality may imply certain approaches and ontological assumptions of spatial knowledge. This section distinguishes four main appreciations of spatiality that can help orientate researchers through the marketing literature.

4.1 Empiricus

The first appreciation is called *empiricus,* and it understands spatiality mainly in terms of concrete, tangible and measurable aspects of locations (see Thrift, 2003), which for example can be designed by marketers to entice consumers. This "wind" has thoroughly propelled the boats of retail studies scholars, so to speak (e.g. Summers & Hebert, 2001; Grewal, Roggeveen & Nordfält, 2016), in particular researchers interested in examining the nature and impact of retail atmospherics on consumer behavior. In this view, understanding how consumers use and behave in commercial locations is considered a crucial step to design more effective servicescapes and consumption environments. This appreciation has often given empirical prominence to physical design features of retail environments, for example

by highlighting the constraints exerted by surroundings on customers and their behavior (e.g. Bitner, 1992; Stafford & Sharma, 2000; Turley & Chebat, 2002; Sevgin et al., 2003).

This appreciation captures spatiality as a controlled and manageable landscape that possesses specific sets of measurable attributes and properties. In other words, space is understood here mainly as a combination of fixed independent variables that constrain or encourage consumer evaluations and their resulting shopping behaviors (see Kotler, 1973; Turley & Milliman, 2000). Such an understanding dates back to an empiricist consideration of space that can easily be filled with products that are allocated, maximized and measured as in the case of the space of grocery store shelves (see Curhan, 1973). In this view, spatial features can be manipulated in order to address customers who can react to both "nonperson" (e.g. lighting, aisle designs) and human elements, as evident in the research exploring the impact of crowding (Hurrel, Hutt & Anderson, 1980).

Similar attention to controllable and objective spatial characteristics emerges from studies that rely on geographical tools for measurement and prediction. Geomarketing, for instance, constitutes an approach that considers demand to be various according to locations and supply that depends on locational positions (see Cliquet, 2013). Even if the most widespread applications of geomarketing have been adopted within retail studies, opportunities and challenges provided by geodemographics have been discussed within the general debate of segmentation and targeting (Mitchell & McGoldrick, 1994). More specific applications of geodemographic models have been adopted to study consumer channel perceptions and patronage behavior (Inman, Shankar & Ferraro, 2004), as well as marketing research challenges such as sampling (Sleight & Leventhal, 1989). Furthermore, specific perspectives to geomarketing, such as "street marketing" (Spiekermann, Rothensee & Klafft, 2011) have been elaborated to emphasize the importance of physical proximity in marketing

communication and its local embeddedness in urban contexts, exploring the intersection between ambient marketing and guerrilla marketing.

Additionally, GIS-based (Geographical Information System) techniques have been extensively registered in tourism marketing to refine tour operators' efforts in segmentation and targeting (Opperman, 1997) along with analyzing visitor behavior or travel patterns (Chanchellor & Cole, 2008). In this respect, *empiricus* echos the original spirit of marketing geographers in mapping out spatial configurations of consumers, goods and firms. As such, this appreciation gives due recognition to aspects of physicality, measurability, linearity and Cartesian distance. In fact, the notion of spatiality underpinning this perspective is objective and quantifiable; to a large extent, it comes close to a "cartographic space" of representation (Farinelli, 1994). Accordingly, reality is mapped out in terms of selected properties and attributes in a procedure that priorities standardized description of spatiality over its individual or collective meaningfulness in terms of culture, memories and identities.

4.2 Conexus

The second appreciation is *conexus* and it understands spatiality in terms of what Thrift (2003) termed "marketing pathways". This appreciation understands spatiality mainly as connectivity, and it focuses on the pathways of interaction that characterize markets, marketing processes and consumption activities. *Conexus* emphasizes the movements of commodities, consumers and the networks of marketing processes across different scales (i.e. global, national). This "wind" has often propelled many scholars interested in explaining marketing channels and their main elements. In this regard, the concept of "marketing flow" (Hunt, 1971) is a meaningful traditional marketing notion that understands spatiality as connectivity. This suggests that marketing occurs not only as a single movement, but rather

as a number of movements – whether in a series, parallel, reciprocal, or duplicative – and in the complex relations among individuals (Hunt, 1971, p. 65).

Furthermore, marketing pathways have been understood, for example, in relation to regionalism and the entrepreneurship of modern marketing, or in relation to segmentation analysis, industrial clustering or physical distribution research (Grether, 1983; Bowersox & Morash, 1989). Similarly, ideas of flow and connectivity have been underlined throughout the historical evolution of macromarketing research. In particular, the attention toward elements of spatial connectivity emerges from the analysis of marketing systems both in an Aldersonian (Alderson & Cox 1948; Alderson & Martin 1965) or systemic form (Meade & Nason, 1991; Layton & Grossbart, 2006).

Two specific streams of contemporary marketing research have offered relevant appreciations of *conexus*. A first research stream prevalently adopts a perspective at the macro-meso level, while a second focuses more on a micro level. Illustrations of the former stream can be found in the research literature on international business and international marketing. In this context, scholars have highlighted the processes underpinning the phenomena of globalization and glocalization through notions of "path dependency" (see for a summary, Forsgren, 2002; Hutzschenreuter, Pedersen & Volberda, 2007; Hutzschenreuter and Gröne, 2009) or "culture" (see, for a summary, Steenkamp & Hofstede 2002, De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002; Soares, Farhangmehr & Shoham, 2007). These notions have been helpful to grasp particular spatial patterns of marketing such as the unfolding of supply chain across locations and countries, the diffusion and adoption of marketing strategies, products and services, as well as the role of locational factors in directing and redirecting marketing operations. A comparable angle of spatiality emphasized in terms of relations and connectivity has also been offered by the growing literature on mobile (e.g. Leppäniemi, Sinisalo & Karjaluoto, 2006) and interactive marketing (e.g. Shankar et al., 2010) that has

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been propelled by a succession of waves of technological advancement in marketing communication tools, such as social media websites and apps (e.g. Kim, Lin & Sung, 2013).

The second research stream shifts the focus from a standardized and transactional conceptualization of marketing pathways to more nuanced appreciations. In this fashion, marketing pathways have been viewed as prevalently "relational" and "networked" (see, for a review, Mattsson, 1997), or in their "service and resource" oriented nature (see Vargo and Lush, 2008). This latter stream of research has helped overcome a functional and static tendency to consider spatial connectivity as structural causality. Due recognition is given to how consumers and firms create and negotiate a space of relationship; it is also given to the way products, services and corporations are involved in the circulation of value creation. The result is a more dynamic understanding of marketing pathways that also explain their change and unpredictability.

A further step in rendering a more dynamic and fluid appreciation of the movements and connectivity is provided by recent studies endorsing "relational ontologies" (Hill, Canniford & Mol, 2014; Lucarelli & Giovanardi, 2016) such as Actor Network Theory and Mobility Paradigm. These studies originate from either the research on international purchasing in business (e.g. Hagberg & Kjellberg, 2010; Araujo, Finch & Kjellberg, 2010) or research on cultural marketing (Giesler, 2012; Bajde 2013; Canniford & Bajde, 2015). Further emphasis is attributed here to the ongoing construction of marketing pathways that are seen as movements and origination rather than given directions and endpoints.

The concept of "traveling" has been applied in this respect to trace the transformation of marketing constructs as a source of change and dynamicity. Examples in this regards are studies that analyze the movements of consumers and the trajectories of consumption patterns (e.g. Hansson 2015, Figueredo & Uncles 2015), the mobile and sharing features of marketplace creation (e.g. Giesler, 2012; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Martin & Schouten

2014), the translation feature of markets and marketing strategies (e.g. Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015), commodity chains and their assembling (e.g. Bettany & Daly, 2008; Bettany & Kerrane, 2011), the spatial configuration of market innovations (Onyas & Ryan, 2015). These studies unfold a different appreciation of the connectivity and movements characterizing marketing by giving new life to the traditional concept on marketing flows that had informed the literature in the previous decades.

4.3 Imago

The third appreciation is *imago*. This appreciation understands the spatiality of marketing in terms of visual representations such as logos, pictures, and photographs which are being shared and exchanged by consumers and marketers. The significance of images has become a leitmotif in marketing and especially consumer research because "visual consumption is a key attribute of a experience economy organized around attention" where images are "designed to capture eyeballs and build brand names" and "create mindshare" (Schroeder, 2005, p. 1). In this context, *imago* alludes to the imaginative (i.e. made-of-images) nature of spatiality often featured in accounts of marketing research. Following Thrift (2003), images play a pivotal role since they allow consumers to "register" what surrounds them, and they envision future new directions and change. This might also be the case for managers who may draw from place-related images to choose reliable suppliers and capitalize on positive country associations (Baldauf et al., 2009).

On the one hand, image has largely been treated as a distinct attribute of retail space (e.g. Finn & Louviere, 1996). An established stream of literature has unraveled the features of store image and its influence on aspects of consumer behavior, such as satisfaction and loyalty (Bloemer & de Ruyter, 1998). Specific suggestions about how to create a favorable store image point to the need of combining brands possessing high brand awareness, and

brands with a strong brand image (Porter & Clayomb, 1997), providing an illustration of this imaginative space as a multi-layered brandscape (see Ponsonby-Mccabe Boyle, 2006). It is also possible to highlight studies that consider larger unit of analysis and examine consumers' perceptions of large retail areas image within urban contexts, suggesting that the impact of retail area image on consumer behavior is mediated by consumers' liking of the area (Bell, 1999).

It is in an alternative area of retail studies that a more holistic appreciation of this "image space" (Thrift, 2003) can be identified. Knowledge of the environment, or even of products and companies, can occur in terms of spatial imagination. Consumers are in fact deemed to project themselves not only in time but also in space, a process that allows them to visually envision their becoming and the "myself-that-could-be" (Belk, 1996 in Maclaren, Brown & Stevens, 1999, p. 309). Imago has often propelled marketing scholars in their attempt to study the favorable conditions for the above-said process of consumers' projection. For example, Arnould, Price and Tierney (1998) suggest the concept of "communicative staging" as a way to acknowledge the strategies whereby servicescapes are presented, communicated, decorated, and then interpreted by consumers. Thus, this representational space enables marketers to enrich the process of "substantive staging", namely the physical creation of the servicescape's environment.

An additional account of the process of registering spatiality and its influence on decision making can be seen in the literature on international business. Klein (2002) offers a valuable illustration of brands as spatially orienting devices through her discussion of consumers' aversion toward foreign products. Familiarity toward global brands and choices about different branding strategies should be understood by taking into consideration constructs of "international animosity" and "consumer ethnocentrism", which show what both marketers and consumers continuously experience by positioning themselves in a space of

representations. The phenomenon of "foreign branding" makes the relevance of *imago* even more observable. The strategy of pronouncing or spelling a brand name in a foreign language and the consequent influence on products perceptions and attitudes have been explored by the pioneering study of Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubè (1994), which clearly reveals the spatial scaffolding that underpins the cognitive and emotional understanding of brands.

Closely related to this is the established stream of research on the "country-of-origin effect" (e.g. Insch & McBride, 2004; Andéhn, Nordin & Nilsson, 2016) and reverse country-of-origin effect (e.g. Lee, Lockshin & Greenacre, 2015) that emphasizes the key role of images in shaping the mutual relationship between products or companies and their origins. That national images can be strategically used in order to build recognized international brands and create emotional imagery has been long acknowledged in the marketing literature (see Niss, 1996). Similarly, several choices made by organizational buyers are evidently pondered and played out within an imaginative space. Hynes et al. (2014) show that representations of markets, suppliers and customers are strongly influenced by their "country image", which provides buyers with a strong "made in" cue (see Hynes et al, 2014). From a complementary perspective, the agglomerated perception of commercial brands and products can influence the value of a national country brand according to the process referred to as inverse country-of-origin effect (White, 2012).

Imago gives due recognition to the space-dimensionality of image, either as an attribute that can provide a competitive edge within international markets (see Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994) or as a mode for consumers to organize their knowledge and evaluations of brands (Pharr, 2005). The resulting understanding of space that emerges from this perspective refers to an intangible representational infrastructure, the practical implications of which are no less significant than the those of *empiricus*.

4.4 Locus

The fourth appreciation is *locus* and it refers to the process whereby marketers and consumers delimit and make sense of space. This appreciation of spatiality has unfolded in the marketing research literature in the form of two very different perspectives: one prevalently technical-functional, one socio-cultural.

The first perspective can be illustrated through a distinct wind name of *locus empiricus*, the concept of place has traditionally been employed in retail studies to describe what occurs "beyond the servicescape" in terms of service encounters (Clarke & Schmidt, 1995). In this view, place is understood as a meaningfully experienced portion of space (ibid., p. 161) that possesses a "spirit" and has implications on the marketing activities performed, which should thus include a location-specific character. An illustration of this perspective can be seen in the area of place marketing, where place is understood as a portion of space that can include but exceed retail space. Accordingly, cities (Warnaby, 1998) or even administratively wider areas such as nations (Kotler & Gertner, 2002) have been studied as eloquent units of analysis for place managers who are called to implement the most effective development strategies in an arena of global competition. Destination marketing (e.g. Prideaux & Cooper, 2003) and, more generally, tourist attractions (see Martin, Rosenbaum & Ham, 2015) have perhaps been the most prolific themes in the literature since the early 1980s (Haahti & Yavas, 1983). Attractions of new residents (Warnaby, 2009) and businesses customers (Ulaga, Sharma & Krishnan, 2002) have been identified as other notable domains of place marketing, where place has been understood as an effective functional and operational unit. Owing to its resemblance with *empiricus,* this appreciation of place could be represented as *locus empiricus* on our rose compass (Figure 1).

The second perspective through which *locus* has unfolded can be defined as socio-cultural, and it is prevalently grounded in an interpretive research tradition. Accounts of *locus*

emphasize that consumers can load with meanings several portions of space they consume, such as shopping malls, theme parks, specific points of purchase and destinations (e.g. Pettigrew, 2007; Warnaby & Meadway, 2013). In this respect, the appreciation of *locus* goes beyond a mere account of functional or measurable properties of space, and it captures places as "fluid, changeable, dynamic contexts of social interaction, shared cultural meaning and collective memory" (Stokowski, 2002 in Lichrou, O' Malley & Patterson, 2008, p. 32). Scholars' use of the term "place" instead of space refers to the fact that certain locations are able to evoke feelings among consumers as a result of their experience and memories associated with these locations. The development of feelings toward a location (Debenedetti, Oppewal & Arsel, 2014) constitutes an important geographical underpinning of this appreciation of space, which hints at the active role of consumers as producers of space through meaning-making activities. While *empiricus* captures spatiality as a controllable set of properties and attributes, *locus* understands spatiality in terms of the individual and collective emotional engagement of social actors within certain locations.

Locus is largely being consolidated through the production of phenomenological studies on consumption activities. On the one hand, in fact, research has unveiled consumption dynamics that occur in particular locations, such as post-industrial cities (Castilhos, 2015), private houses (Hirschman et al., 2013) or areas of resistance and anti-capitalist efforts (Chatzidakis, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2012). For example, through their study of the Greek neighborhood of Exarcheia, Chatzidakis et al. (2012) embrace Lefebvre's notion of "constructed space" to conceptualize the residents' ongoing reactions against the commodification of the area as a space that includes place as an ever-contested product of social relations.

On the other hand, research has considered places as sets of meanings that can be consumed, showing that both commercial (Pettigrew, 2011) and public (Visconti, Sherry and

Borghini, 2010) areas can be assessed in ways comparable to products, in spite of several differences related to the multiple and often dissonant evaluations of place made by different groups of consumers (Saatcioglu and Corus, 2015). By focusing on public space as a daily-consumed public good, Visonti et al. (2010) identify different ideologies of public place consumption. Here there is the recognition of space as a foundation of the agency for consumption in which the active role of consumers has a "transformational effort" of converting public space into public place.

From a similar point of view, marketing research has examined the spatiality of marketing phenomena through a narrative approach, both in marketing studies investigating tourism (Lichrou, O'Malley & Patterson, 2008) and in more general contributions focusing on the consumption of heritage (Chronis, 2008; Chronis, Arnould, & Hampton, 2012). Following prior attempts to grasp the narrative-based articulation of consumption (Shankar, Elliot & Goulding, 2001), the framing of places as narratives has allowed scholars to register the dynamic and contested nature of marketing spaces, thus urging a true encapsulation of local place narratives in strategies of place marketing (Lichrou, O' Malley & Patterson, 2014). The investigation of the production and consumption of place as a blend of identity-related processes has been conducted not only in traditional community contexts, such as the "Oda" (room) culture in Turkey (Dedeoğlu & Güzeler, 2016), but also in specific domains of online space through netnographic accounts of online communities (Cappellini & Yen, 2016).

The process of dwelling, whereby consumers appropriate their living space, happens not only in discursive or narrative forms (Lichrou et. al, 2008), but also by means of "practicing" and performing in these locations (Van Marrewijk & Broos, 2012). For example, the concept of "internal design proxemics" has been proposed by Van Marrewijk and Broos (2012, p. 387) to study the influence of "spatial arrangements" on "sociomaterial performances" in retail stores. Consistent with recent advancement in geography along the route toward more-

than-representational modes of spatial knowledge (Hill et al., 2014), marketing research has sought to propose more thorough conceptualizations of consumers' dwelling practices. The role of smell and its influence on place experience described by Henshaw et al. (2015) is an illustration of the emotional bonding that ties together consumers and places through the involvement of other senses.

Locus emphasizes that meaning making and the maintenance of a sense of place are thus actively contributing to the reproduction of space through the individual and collective commitment of consumers.

5. The *compass rose*: four cardinal points

The Greek navigator and geographer Timosthenes is known for his pioneering attempt to go beyond treating winds merely as meteorological phenomena. He began to view winds as reference points for orientation, associating them to geographical locations and people. In general, compass roses illustrate the relations between wind and tools of spatial orientation by visually linking wind names (usually six or twelve) with four cardinal points. In the compass rose illustrated in Figure 1, cardinal points are represented on two meridian axes: a first spanning from Boundedness (B) to Openness (O); a second spanning from Functionality (F) to Expressivity (E). These four cardinal points orient marketing scholars' engagement with the study of spatiality and can be used to better comprehend the similarities and differences between the "winds" discussed in the previous section, as well as the relationship (and possible overlapping) between repertoires of place-oriented and space-oriented thinking.

The wind names appear in quadrants, each of which is characterized by a varying degree of Boundedness, Openness, Functionality and Expressivity. Accordingly, *locus* explicitly rests on an understating of spatiality as bounded and location-centered, in line with the tradition of place-oriented thinking (Neuwenhis, 2016). While *locus* emphasizes the

expressive role of spatiality, evident in aspects of identity and sense of place underlined in the literature on place consumption, *locus-empiricus* leans toward a prevalently functional view that stresses administrative boundaries and, in other words, conceives spatiality in areal terms. *Empiricus* occupies the left part of Figure 1, indicating a shift toward an understanding of spatiality that captures connectivity, evident for example in aspects of measurable physical distance between points of purchase or tourism destinations. The significance of movement, circulation and transterritoriality becomes more explicit as one considers the two upper quadrants. It is the case for *conexus*, which captures the significance of spatial uses and operations; and for *imago*, which instead captures scholars' attention for the symbolic, imaginative role of spatiality.

Notably, the compass rose functions as a heuristic device that is useful to reflect on the traces of power (and, thus, the fascination) that historical conceptualizations of spatiality continue to exert on posterity (see Foucault, 1972). If we recall the classical rose compass created by ancient sailors, we realize that the centre of the rose was traditionally located in Malta, at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. This explains the origins of the wind names appearing on the classical wind rose: for instance, *grec*ale came from Greece, *lib*eccio from Libya, *sci*rocco from Syria. And yet, for example, both historical and contemporary sailors navigating from Western Italy to Spain had referred to or still refer to those winds with the same names, although these do not originate from Grece, Lybia or Syria, respectively. Similarly, marketing scholars today still deal with spatially conceptual tools that carry with them historical connotations, norms and even names that are embodied in a hegemonic divide resting on place vs. space. One could draw from a traditionally-named wind for a contemporary, perhaps different purpose and vice versa. Thus, the chosen traditional form of spatial thinking nominally appearing in manuscripts' titles (e.g. "space") and their actual treatment of spatiality (e.g. *locus*) can appear to be misaligned. For example, the study of

Visconti et al. (2010) features the label of "space" while emphasizing the expressive and identity-related characteristics of spatiality.

This misalignment is why, ideally, Figure 1 should not simply work as a conceptual framework to assess the different understanding of spatiality of marketing research studies. In fact, it is worth noting that accounts of spatiality rarely are one-dimensional. Thus, sticking to a static and rigid application of the framework would risk oversimplifying the multiple appreciations of geography in marketing, frustrating the attempt to open up alternative discourses on spatiality underpinning the present paper. For this reason, next section takes the idea of sailing forward by discussing how the compass rose can assist marketing scholars in their efforts to come up with multi-dimensional accounts of spatiality.

6. *Using* the *compass rose*: Toward multi-dimensional geographical accounts

Sailors cannot simply "run with the wind" if they want to reach the next port or the desired island. Rather, they must creatively adopt different points of sailing (e.g. close-hauled, broad reach) in order to (a) keep their route as the wind changes during the day; or to (b) carry out different types of *helming* (i.e. luffing up, bearing away, tacking, jibing) if a change of direction is required even if the wind remains stable. In other words, expert sailors can follow a specific *course* only by deploying specific sailing abilities, which include for instance the capacity to tighten or loosen the boat's sails.

Similarly, appreciations of spatiality are not necessarily mutually exclusive: they can overlap and be combined in endeavors that may render multi-dimensional geographic accounts. Consistently with the what is argued at the end of the previous section, it is possible to identify pioneering creative "courses" that appear to feature combinations of more than one single "wind".

6.1 The Embodiment course

A first promising course is characterized by a joined up appreciation of *locus* and *empiricus*, which has sought to understand the role of consumers' agency in spectacular servicescapes (Penaloza 1998; Kozinet et al. 2004; Maclaren & Brown, 2005; Borghini et al. 2009; Diamond et al. 2009; Varman & Belk, 2012). An illustration is provided by Kozinet et al's (2004) analysis of themed flagship stores as spectacular environments in which consumers can actively contribute to co-creating and reproducing retail areas. In line with a tendency to emphasize the human and social component of serviscapes (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003), those scholars have sought to offer a less deterministic treatment of the relationship between retail environments and consumer behavior. Far from being fixed and given aggregations of attributes and properties that can be engineered and measured, retail spaces are also brought to life through the creative agency of consumers. In a similar vein, Yakhlef (2015) emphasizes the bodily and spatial character of customer experiences in servicescapes by acknowledging the reciprocity and continuity between the managerially planned empirical space and a more human place space that is also created through the bodies of consumers.

6.2 The Relational course

Another promising avenue of research in which multiple appreciations are joined up can be found within the areas of project marketing and industrial marketing (Cova, Mazet & Salle, 1996; Cova & Salle, 2007). Here it is once again *locus* that appear to be to be coupled, in this instance with *conexus*. Through the concept of "milieu", Cova et al. (1996) seek to demonstrate relations among business actors, and many of its functions are often structured in territorial forms of districts (see Cantù, 2010). In particular, they argue that "supplier firms selling capital projects tend to view their business as a milieu, i.e. a socio-spatial entity, geographically bound" (1996, p. 662). This contribution enables a consideration of place as

also networked and articulated through marketing pathways, which are reproduced by marketers, suppliers and customers in specific locational contexts. The networked nature of specific place-related spatial characters can also manifest in ways that further stress the role of international mobility and connectivity. Viewing "places as spatial entities", Demangeot et al. (2015a) suggest to re-examine the "interethnic contact among mobile and immobile consumers within shared places" (p. 271), proposing a more dynamic rendition of the relations between place and ethnicity at the intersection between consumer research and international marketing (Demangeot et al., 2015b).

An equivalent combination of *conexus* and *locus* is provided in consumer research by Bradford and Sherry (2015) in their study on the phenomenon of tailgating. Through a creative approach that incorporates semiotics and the heuristic tool of the Moebius strip, these authors present the multi-layered geographies of the ritual of tailgating. Their effort of approaching spatial dimensions more holistically is manifest in their attempt to render the conversion of "private space" into "public place" by combining appreciations of space both as connectivity (*conexus*) and as a socially constructed process of meaning making (*locus*).

6.3 The Brandscape course

A final promising eclectic area of spatially-informed marketing research is place branding. Place branding is a rapidly expanding area of research that investigates the role of symbolic and reputational assets in the process of marketing tourist destinations (e.g. Pike, 2005) and, more generally, creating a more attractive environment for local communities within cities, regions and nations (e.g. Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Gertner, 2011; Charters & Spielmann, 2014). The very label of place branding explicitly couples appreciations of *locus* and *imago*, stressing the nexus between symbolic capital and places in terms of competitiveness and

attractiveness. Place branding research has shown how images both influence and are influenced by the creation of places, highlighting the spatial situatedness of brands and branding and their implications not only for the economic performance of cities, regions and countries (Charters & Spielmann, 2014), but also for the spatial process of identity formation (see Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Giovanardi, Lucarelli & Pasquinelli, 2013; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Accordingly, the value of image space is captured in its two-way relationship with specific place identities in a continuous interaction and dialogue between place stakeholders. Additionally, other winds have been used in place branding research. The role of *empiricus* is evident, for example, in the place-branding research that adopts metrics to create rankings of international place brands, such as the Anholt GfK Roper Nation Brand Index (Fetscherin, 2010), and to measure what is generally regarded as place-brand equity (Florek, 2015; Bose, Roy & Tiwari, 2016).

7. Conclusion

The present paper has attempted to contribute to the literature that explores the relevance of geographical dimensions in marketing (Chatzidakis et al., 2014; Veresiu et al., 2014), by nuancing the conceptual opposition between place- and space-oriented thinking that is still dominant in extant literature. To achieve its goal, this paper has offered the metaphor of sailing as a conceptual device that can facilitate the development of innovative spatial thinking, thereby responding to MacInnis's (2011) emphasis on lack of conceptual thinking in marketing. Via the metaphor of *sailing*, this study has identified four main appreciations of spatiality in marketing research and proposed an alternative way of conceptualizing spatial knowledge in marketing by emphasizing the emergence of various eclectic combination of spatial perspectives.

In particular, this attempt has endeavored to reconcile the varied and fragmented accounts of the geographical dimensions featured in the marketing literature that have resulted in divergent views on what spatiality is and how it can be investigated. The proposed "compass rose" has sought to shed light on the underlying research beliefs of scholars who have produced geographical accounts of marketing. In fact, before any type of geographical investigation can be initiated, researchers must first make a number of assumptions about what spatiality is and how it can be grasped. Furthermore, the use of the "compass rose" and the illustration of the three eclectic "courses" has shown that contemporary understandings of spatiality in social sciences can transcend rigid distinctions between different traditional approaches.

Connected to this, the problem highlighted in the introduction pointed to the existence of diverging theoretical accounts of spatiality that appear to be grounded in two opposite schools of thought, namely place-oriented and space-oriented thinking. In spite of a vibrant debate in human geography that is integrating the differences between the two schools of thought, marketing scholars still tend to view place as a limited portion of space in a territorial and cartographic way that tends to marginalize the idea of places as open and connected to other portions of space. From an opposite perspective, instead, the recent discussion on the material turn in marketing (e.g. Scott, Martin & Schouten 2014, Canniford & Bajde 2016, Hietanen et al., 2016) has often left aside the specificities of locations and situatedness, overlooking place's specificity in a drastic relational perspective of space-oriented thinking.

In line with recent accounts in human geography, our proposed approach to spatiality in marketing seeks to conceptualize it through heuristic devices that relate to "air". In particular, the conceptualization of the four "winds" (see Section 4) and their combinations (see Section 6) can be helpful to shift away attention from a mere opposition between space- and place-

oriented thinking towards a more holistic and integrated understanding of spatiality that is associated neither with the fixity inherent in ideas of "land" and "soil" nor the fluidity inherent in the idea of "sea". In this respect, the compass rose suggests a novel way for marketing scholars to orient themselves through spatiality by looking at it through the lenses of two main dimensions spanning from "boundedness" to "openness" and from "functionality" to "expressivity". This suggestion opens up possibilities to recognize and further explore pioneering multi-dimensional spatial accounts ("routes", see Section 6) that may integrate the rich theoretical traditions of place- and space-oriented thinking and resolve this apparent opposition by stressing complementarities. As shown in Section 5, eclectic perspectives have combined appreciations of, for example, *conexus* and *locus* in the same studies (Cova et al., 1996; Bradford & Sherry, 2015), thus exploring the intellectual and methodological potential inherent in the combination and mutual exchange between different schools of thought.

In other words, our proposed rose compass intends to encourage colleagues to appreciate some of the complementary and convergent approaches that affect different areas of marketing literature and thus to add nuance to any potentially dichotomous position. This paper has thus sought to reaffirm the freedom of marketing researchers to creatively assemble together different appreciations of spatiality, while being conscious that every choice in research carries particular assumptions and consequences, and that being confined in one mode or perspective may inevitably marginalize other possibilities.

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Areas of spatially sensitive marketing literature	Illustrative examples	
	Journal	Study
RETAIL STUDIES	*Journal of Retailing* *Journal of Consumer Marketing* *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* *Consumption Markets & Culture*	Gijsbrechts et al. (2003); Spiekermann et al. (2011); Bell (1999) Pettigrew (2011)
CONSUMER RESEARCH	*Journal of Marketing Management* *Journal of Consumer Research* *Journal of Business Research*	Chatzidakis et al. (2012); Debenedetti at al. (2014); Insch & McBride (2004)
INTERNATIONAL MARKETING	*International Marketing Review* *Journal of International Marketing*	Demangeot et al. (2015); Lee et al. (2015)
SERVICE MARKETING	*Journal of Marketing* *Service Industries Journal* *Journal of Retailing*	Bitner (1992); Arnould et al. (1998); Borghini et al. (2009)
BRANDING	*Journal of Brand Management* *Marketing Theory* *Journal of Business Research*	Gertner (2011); Giovanardi et al. (2013); Charters & Spielmann (2014)
MARKETING THEORY	*Journal of Marketing Research* *Advances in Consumer Research* *Marketing Theory*	Appelbaum (1966); Castilhos et al. (2014); Yakhlef (2015)
TOURISM MARKETING	*Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* *Journal of Strategic Marketing* *Journal of Business Research*	Opperman (1997); Lichrou et al. (2008); Martin et al. (2015)
INDUSTRIAL MARKETING	*Industrial Marketing Management* *International Marketing Review*	Ulaga et al. (2002); Cantù (2010); Hynes et al. (2014)
MOBILE AND INTERACTIVE MARKETING	*Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* *Journal of Mobile Marketing* *Journal of Interactive Marketing*	Watson et al. (2002); Leppäniemi et al. (2006); Shankar et al. (2010)

Table 1: Areas of spatially sensitive marketing literature and illustrative examples
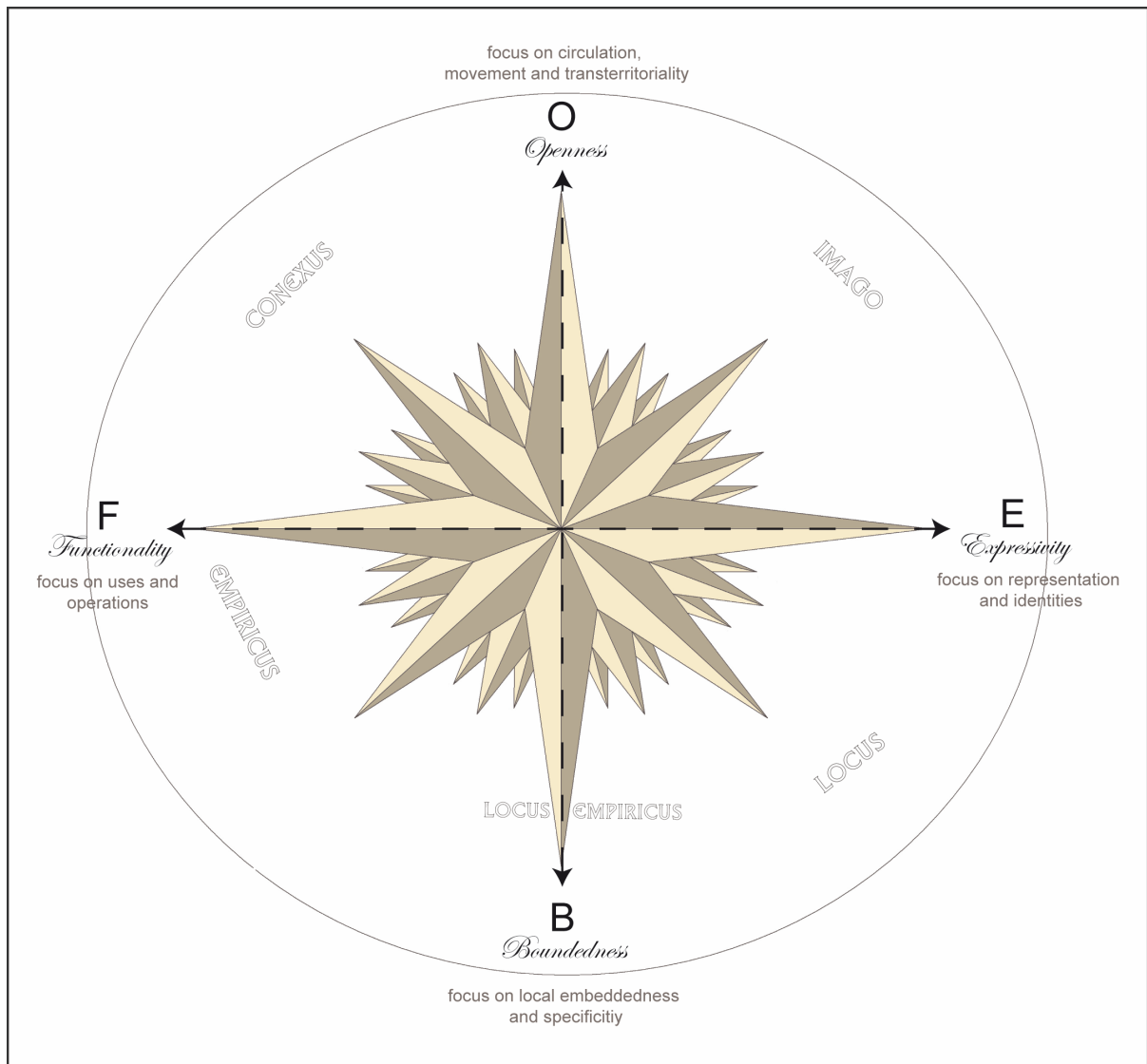
Figure 1: a "compass rose" for sailing through marketing literature