



## An Embodied Approach to Consumer Experiences: The Hollister Brandscape

Journal:	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>
Manuscript ID	EJM-09-2017-0558.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Embodied Theory, Retail Brandscales, Merleau-Ponty, Consumption, Consumer research, embodied experience

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## **An Embodied Approach to Consumer Retail Experiences: The Hollister Brandscape**

### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose**

This paper uses embodied theory to analyse consumer experience in a retail brandscape, Hollister Co. By taking a holistic, embodied approach, our study reveals how individual consumers interact with such retail environments in corporeal, instinctive, sensual ways.

#### **Design/methodology/approach**

The primary source of data were 97 subjective personal introspective accounts undertaken with the target age group for the store. These were supplemented with in-depth interviews with consumers, managers, and employees of Hollister.

#### **Findings**

We offer a conceptualization of consumers' embodied experience, which we term The Immersive Somascape Experience. This identifies four key touch points that evoke the Hollister store experience - each of which reveal how the body is affected by particular relational and material specificities. These are Sensory Activation, Brand Materialities, Corporeal Relationality, (Dis)Orientation. These may lead to Consumer Emplacement.

#### **Research limitations/Implications**

The authors propose an emergent theoretical framework - *The Immersive Somascape Experience* – that provides a holistic way to analyse how the body leads in emplacing the consumer within a

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3 retail brandscape. It depicts four embodied elements: Sense Activation, Corporeal Relationality,  
4 Brand Materialities and (Dis)Orientation. Together these may culminate in Consumer  
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retail brandscape. It depicts four embodied elements: Sense Activation, Corporeal Relationality, Brand Materialities and (Dis)Orientation. Together these may culminate in Consumer Emplacement. Future consideration of embodied experiences across different retail contexts may further develop these insights.

### **Originality/value**

Overall, the study shows how an embodied approach challenges the dominance of mind and representation over body and materiality, suggesting an “intelligible embodiment” lens offers unique insights into consumers’ embodied experiences in retail environments.

**Keywords:** Embodied approach; embodied experience; experiential consumption; retail brandscapes, Merleau-Ponty

### **Paper type: Research paper**

### **Introduction**

Over the past twenty years there is a growing body of work on the body, and bodily consumption experiences, in marketing and consumer research, much of it emerging from within the phenomenological, experiential paradigm. This research has sought to address our disciplines’ tendency to privilege the mind over the body, whereby the body is “a material for identity-construction” (Thompson and Hirschman, 1998, p. 405), and that by mastering it we may achieve “disembodied transcendence” (Thompson and Hirschman, 1995, p. 143).

Since then, there has been a growing number of scholars who have sought to address this imbalance, and to reconcile the split between mind/body that it reflects, by turning to the

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3 embodied theory literature (Joy and Sherry, 2003). This philosophical tradition emanates from  
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5 Husserl's work on the phenomenology of embodiment. He argued that the lived body is the lived  
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7 centre of experience. His work was later developed by Heidegger and Merleau Ponty. Embodied  
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9 theory privileges bodily responses to phenomena on the basis that all knowledge comes from the  
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11 body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas 1990, 1994; Shilling, 2012), and that we experience the  
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13 world *through* our bodies, as "the lived body is at the centre of individual experience" (Barbour,  
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15 2004, p. 228). According to Csordas (1990), the body is "the existential ground of culture" (p.  
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17 39). He argues that embodiment brings together the active body and the emotional body, and  
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19 leads, he suggests, to "a deeper awareness of the sociality of being and emotion" (p. 62). In  
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21 essence, therefore, embodied theory shows how the body and the mind are "interfused or  
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23 entwined", viewing human experience from the perspective of the "body-subject" (Barbour,  
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25 2004, p. 228).  
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32         There is now a considerable body of work in our field that draws on embodied theory.  
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34 These include studies of consumers in museums (Vom Lehn, 2006), tattooing and skin  
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36 (Patterson & Schroeder, 2010), sport fishing (Valtonen, Markuksela & Moisander, 2010),  
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38 extreme leisure pursuits (Scott *et al.* 2017), surfing (Canniford & Shankar, 2013), freeskiing and  
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40 paintballing (Woermann & Rokka, 2015), tourist travelling (Hamilton & Alexander, 2017), salsa  
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42 dancing (Hewer *et al.*, 2010), clubbing (Goulding *et al.*, 2009) , and free solo rock-climbing  
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44 (Wood & Brown, 2011). Much of this research has focused primarily on how we use our bodies  
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46 to learn how to be in the world; how to perform certain functions, skills, routine habits and  
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48 "techniques of the body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) in an environment, with less emphasis on the  
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50 unconscious, non-cognitive aspects of our experiences. In other words, there is a stronger  
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3 emphasis on embodied knowing rather than embodied experience, intelligible embodiment”  
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5 (Gartner, 2013), or the preconscious body.  
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9 Furthermore, much of this work particularly addresses leisure pursuits such as sports, for  
10 example, and there have been few studies that have drawn on embodied theory in relation to  
11 consumers’ experiences of retail environments. Indeed Yakhlef (2015) argues that “the body is  
12 conspicuous by its absence” in retail studies (p. 545). One exception to this is Von Wallpach and  
13 Kreuzer’s (2013) study, which uses sculpturing to explore consumers’ subjective responses to  
14 multi-sensory experiences in relation to brands, and their attendant introspective states, and calls  
15 for more studies that capture “the multisensory, dynamic, and non-conscious nature of embodied  
16 brand knowledge” (p. 1325), including bodies’ “motor-intentionality” in space and time, and the  
17 corporeal connections bodies make with other bodies as they perceive, are perceived, act, and are  
18 acted upon (Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009). We therefore aim to address this gap in the existing  
19 retailing literature. Our specific focus is on consumers’ embodied experiences in relation to the  
20 American fashion brand Hollister store.  
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37 Our paper begins with a review of the embodied theory literature. Next we offer a  
38 selective review of the literature on brandscapes. This leads us to consider our research site, the  
39 Hollister store. We then explore the embodied processes, movements, inter-corporealities and  
40 experiences of Hollister consumers. This leads to a conceptualization we term *The Immersive*  
41 *Somascape Experience*, which is composed of four key elements: Sense Activation, Corporeal  
42 Relationality, Brand Materialities and (Dis)Orientation. Together these may culminate in  
43 Consumer Emplacement. Finally, we consider our contribution to existing studies on embodied  
44 experience in retail brandscapes, that addresses Geisler and Venkatesh’s (2005) call for more  
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3 work that challenges the “epistemic monopoly” of mind and representation over body and  
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5 materiality, and that considers the experiences of the “body subject” (Barbour, 2004).  
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## 11 **Embodied Theory**

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15 The turn to the body, much heralded across many disciplines in the past thirty years, challenged  
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17 us to adopt new ways of theorizing and studying the body (Shilling and Mellor, 2001; Shilling,  
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19 2016). In order to redefine the field and bring the body back, so to speak, many scholars turned  
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21 to the neglected work of anthropological, cultural, and sociology theorists to advance research on  
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23 the body and overcome the mind/body binary tension that persists. In his book, *Phenomenology*  
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25 *of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962) stated that our body is “always being with us ... we are our  
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27 body ... we are in the world through our body ... perceiving as we do with our body, the body is  
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29 a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception” (p. 206). Viewing perception as a  
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31 complex combination of bodily, emotional and cognitive responses, he coined the term “motor  
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33 intentionality” to convey corporeal understanding of the spaces (and their contents) that we  
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35 encounter. This type of understanding is pre-reflective, a taken-for-granted intuitive response  
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37 that links our actions with our perceptions (as opposed to vice versa). His work thus challenged  
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39 the Cartesian tradition that the mind is what makes us truly human and the body is but an object  
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41 – or a shell – housing a mind that controls its functions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Merleau-  
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43 Ponty, 1962; Shilling, 2012; Thompson & Hirschman, 1998). For Merleau-Ponty, embodiment  
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45 was our “perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world”.  
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53 So embodied theory brings the body and mind together without denying the cognitive  
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55 responses that happen “*within and because of*, rather than in opposition to, our organic being”  
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(Shilling (2012, p. x). To this end Mellor and Shilling (1997) advocate “carnal knowing” approaches, which emphasise our sensual and embodied experiences that fuse experience with awareness. This type of approach is context dependent, recognizing how the body is affected by particular relational and material specificities that exist in any given location.

Gartner (2013) offers an overview of the many ways embodied theory is conceptualized (albeit his categorization is in the context of embodied knowing in organizations). He outlines six key views on embodied cognition, knowledge and learning. These are *brute embodiment* (the body as a container for the mind), *physiological embodiment* (the (neuro-) biological body), *enactive lived embodiment* (the sensing and moving body), *intelligible embodiment* (the bodily basis of thought), *situated embodiment* (the site of the body in ecological and extended cognition), and *social embodiment* (social structures and the body).

We believe that an *intelligible embodiment* approach has particular relevance to this study. This emphasis is based on the premise of the bodily basis of thought. It focuses on how the body shapes the mind, and how we draw on embodied metaphors to interpret our lived experience. Embodied experience is thus described as a blending of “physical interaction and conceptual blending” (p. 343). Given that we primarily draw on consumers’ written accounts of their experiences within the Hollister store, *intelligible embodiment* provides a useful means of framing our approach in this study.

### **Embodied Theory in Consumer Research**

Since Joy and Sherry’s 2003 study of the embodied imagination in an art gallery, there has been a growing number of articles in the marketing and consumer behaviour fields that have

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3 considered the value of taking an embodied theory approach. Vom Lehn's (2006) study of  
4 consumers in museums analysed how people look, deport themselves and interact with others,  
5 using video-based methods to track how they experience exhibitions through their bodily "being"  
6 and "acting" in the world (p. 1353). Patterson & Schroeder's work on tattooing and skin (2010)  
7 explores intercorporeality and embodied aspects, drawing on Deleuze's work to view the body as  
8 an *event*, rather than an *object* or instrument of the mind, thus challenging the mind/body  
9 dualism, and calling for a shift from what a body *means* to what a body *does*. Valtonen has  
10 added considerably to the work on embodiment, drawing on embodied theory to explore sport  
11 fishing in Finland (Valtonen, Markuksela & Moisander, 2010), sleeping (Valtonen & Närvänen,  
12 2013, 2015, 2016), embodied consumer agency (Valtonen, 2013) and travelling (Valtonen, 2007;  
13 Veijola & Valtonen, 2007). In their 2010 study on sensory ethnography, Valtonen, Markuksela  
14 and Moisander refers to the "sensorial turn", which has drawn attention to "sense-related  
15 aspects" and "the performance and coordination of practices" in the social and material world.  
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34 In more recent studies with Närvänen on sleeping practices (Valtonen & Närvänen, 2015;  
35 2016), the authors argue that too often we "skate over the issue of the body" (p. 1584), or rely on  
36 the emotional, aesthetic, visual or symbolic aspects of consumer practices, rather than on  
37 consumers' embodied experiences. Valtonen, Markuksela and Moisander (2010) acknowledge  
38 the difficulty of deciphering the senses, however, "when a sophisticated vocabulary of the senses  
39 is missing" (p. 378), a challenge also recently noted by Canniford, Riach and Hill (2017), and  
40 Scott, Cayla and Cova (2017). Woermann and Rokka (2015) draw on embodied theory,  
41 specifically Merleau-Ponty's work on the phenomenal field and time-flow of practice, to study  
42 consumers' temporal experiences and bodily routines and skills in relation to freeskiing and  
43 paintball. And Scott *et al.*'s, (2017) study on the Tough Mudder extreme assault course draws on  
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3 Merleau-Ponty (1962) as well as on carnal and sensory sociology (Crossly, 1995) to enable a  
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5 rediscovery of the body and “a more fundamental embodied humanity” (p. 38).  
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9 Hill, Canniford and Mol (2014) and Yakhlef (2015) have added to our understanding of  
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11 the theoretical and methodological challenges of researching consumers from an embodied  
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13 perspective. The former discuss the precognitive aspects of consumer experiences, and how as  
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15 researchers we might study the “onflow of everyday life”, citing work by Hower *et al.* (2010),  
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17 Goulding *et al.* (2009) and Wood and Brown (2011), all of which has explored the corporeal  
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19 aspects of consumers’ experiences. Hower *et al.* (2010), for example, consider the human body  
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21 as a moving agent in time and space, salsa dancing as a metaphor for writing the body, and the  
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23 body as a means of emotional expression. Wood and Brown (2011) draw on Deleuze and  
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25 Guattari’s concept of “lines of flight” to explore the intense, lived experience and free-flow  
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27 nature of free solo rock-climbing, using documentary film to capture sensory knowledge in this  
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29 context.  
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35 Most of these studies focus on learning, skills, techniques, and the socio-cultural context  
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37 within which embodied knowledge is acquired, often in the context of sports and leisure  
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39 activities. They often move beyond phenomenological approaches, drawing on theories such as  
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41 practice theory (Valtonen, Markuksela & Moisander 2010; Valtonen & Narvanen 2013, 2015;  
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43 Woermann & Rokka 2015), and assemblage/non-representational theory (Hill, Canniford & Mol  
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45 2014; Canniford, Riach & Hill 2017). This shift of emphasis, argues Askegaard & Linnet (2011),  
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47 reflects the practice turn in contemporary theory, whereby researchers increasingly seek to move  
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49 beyond a phenomenology of individuals’ lived experience, and address wider, macro, social  
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51 frameworks such as “the systemic and structuring influences of market and social systems” (p.  
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53 381). Whilst such studies have contributed valuable insights into social contexts, for the purposes  
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3 of this present study we wish to return the focus to individuals' lived experience - specifically  
4 how he or she interacts with the immediate environment - as we are concerned with elucidating  
5 the experiential aspects of contemporary shopping. To date there has been a paucity of research  
6 on consumers' embodied experiences in retail environments as the next section will discuss.  
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### 16 **Consumers in Brandsapes**

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19 Turning to the literature on retail brandsapes there is a plethora of insightful studies that explore  
20 the lived experiences of consumers, in particular how they weave symbolic meanings into their  
21 experiences of these environments (see, for example, Hollenbeck *et al.* 2008; Kozinets *et al.*,  
22 2002; 2004; Penaloza, 1999; Sherry, 1998). Sherry (1998) and Peñaloza (1999), for example,  
23 explored Niketown from the perspective of how such sensorial, stimulating retail environments  
24 invited imaginative associations on the part of consumers. Peñaloza's study acknowledged the  
25 importance of consumer's bodily motor and visual capabilities, but her primary focus was on the  
26 latter, using visual ethnography to explore spectacular consumption. Sherry *et al.*'s (2001) and  
27 Kozinets *et al.*'s (2002) studies of the ESPN zone in Chicago as a cornucopia of multi-sensory  
28 opportunities that invite consumers to engage in fantasies, play, agency, and spectacular  
29 consumption in a liminoid retail space. The latter study specifically considered the mythological  
30 appeal of flagship brand stores, and their entertainment, therapeutic, and spiritual aspects. More  
31 recently, Borghini *et al.* (2009) built on the work of Sherry *et al.* (2001) and Kozinets *et al.*  
32 (2002, 2004) to explore the ideological underpinnings of consumers' brand store experiences in  
33 the context of American Girl Place, arguing that such brandsapes were "a detailed  
34 representation of moral and social values, presented in an extensive and intensive manner  
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3 through the physical environment” (p. 365). Their study offered insights into “the materiality of  
4 retail experience – the role of physical presence – and its time-bound, situated nature” (p. 365).  
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6 Their key focus is on the ideological aspects of such immersive brandscapes, however, rather  
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8 than on consumers’ embodied experiences.  
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13 One study that did explicitly adopt an embodied theory approach was Sherry *et al.*’s  
14 (2001) study of ESPN Zone Chicago, which focused on consumers’ multisensory and sensual  
15 responses to retail brandscapes. Whilst the study shed much light on embodied processes, the  
16 authors acknowledged that sight was privileged over the other senses. Joy and Sherry’s (2003)  
17 research on art museum consumption built on this approach to offer a more detailed  
18 consideration of embodiment at both a phenomenological and a cognitive unconscious level,  
19 showing how art museum spaces offered multi-sensory, embodied experiences for consumers  
20 that shaped their subsequent cognitive interpretation of these experiences.  
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32 In summary, phenomenological research on consumers’ interactions with retail  
33 brandscapes has been dominated by approaches that privilege mental processes over bodily ones,  
34 with a reluctance to foreground the body. Instead, the emphasis is typically on consumers’ (and  
35 researchers’) meaning-making in terms of their lived experiences in the marketplace, with  
36 particular interest in the psychological, social, cultural, symbolic, spiritual, or sacred dimensions  
37 of consumption, rather than its embodied aspects (Joy and Sherry, 2003; Yakhlef, 2015). As  
38 such, the cognitive sense we make of our experiences has tended to be privileged over our  
39 embodied experiences. Our emotions, feelings, and cognitive processes have been given more  
40 significance than the immediate, sensuous, somatic aspects of our engagement with the world.  
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3 We therefore aim to advance work on retail experiences that take an embodied approach,  
4 foregrounding the perceiving body and “sense experience” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), in order to  
5 better understand the lived experiences of consumers’ being-in-the-world as embodied subjects  
6 within a retail brandscape. We now turn to the context of our study on consumers’ embodied  
7 processes, the Hollister brand store.  
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### 19 **Hollister**

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22 Hollister Co. (HCO) was founded by Abercrombie and Fitch CEO Michael Jeffries in 2000 to  
23 target the young teenagers between the ages of 14-18 that Abercrombie and Fitch were failing to  
24 reach. Like Abercrombie and Fitch, it offered a teen fashion emporium with a “where sex-meets-  
25 Ivy League aesthetic” (Maheshwari 2012). Hollister’s brand positioning was to give young  
26 consumers a taste of SoCal (Southern Californian) surfing culture, a relaxed, outdoor lifestyle  
27 that, according to its brand story, was “a story of passion, youth and love of the sea [carrying]  
28 romance, beauty, adventure” (usnook.com). From 2008 the parent company, in the face of  
29 declining sales in the US, progressively expanded the brand globally, particularly in the UK  
30 ([www.hollisterco.com](http://www.hollisterco.com)). Hollister stores worldwide peaked at 589 in 2012, and now number 553,  
31 with expansion in new markets such as China helping to offset declining sales in the US and UK  
32 ([www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)). After a number of difficult years for both brands, sales have been gradually  
33 recovering since 2014 following rebranding efforts.  
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50 Like Abercrombie and Fitch, Hollister offers a unique take on a retail space, and adopts  
51 sensory branding or “five senses marketing,” aesthetic labor, and “walking self-marketing” in its  
52 stores. There is no doubt that Hollister’s use of loud music, strong fragrance in the air and on the  
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3 clothes, minimal but targeted lighting, and aesthetic, sexualized labor takes sensory marketing to  
4 new levels of intensity with its full-scale “immersive sensory approach” (Lund, 2015, p. 17).

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7 Hollister and Abercrombie and Fitch also use aesthetic labor and erotic advertising to reinforce  
8 its “popular and cool kids” credentials (Mike Jeffries, CEO, 2006). We therefore regard Hollister  
9 as an ideal retail setting in which to explore consumers’ embodied experiences, as it is an  
10 environment that invites an extreme, intense, corporeal response on the part of its customers.  
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18 In its retail stores, the brand aims to evoke an up-market Californian beach house. In a  
19 dramatic departure from conventional shopfronts, its dark grey, louvre-shuttered exterior are  
20 designed to conceal rather than display, building a sense of mystery and curiosity about the brand  
21 and giving it a “members-only, clubby environment” (Barbaro, 2006). Steps lead up to a  
22 doorway that has an inner wall directly inside, which serves to further conceal the interior space.  
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These architectural details are designed to create a unique appearance of secrecy, exclusivity, and heritage. Whilst off-putting to some, the rationale behind it is to create a mystique around the brand, drawing young consumers in to see its hidden wares, as well as serving “to ward off those who do not belong inside (and whose presence might diminish the shopping experience of those who do)” (Barbaro, 2006).

## Methodology

Ethnography is argued to be the best means of capturing embodied experiences (Sparkes, 2009; Valtonen *et al.* 2010; Yakhlef, 2015). Sparkes *et al.* (2009), for example, advocate “sensual ethnographies” full of “rich sensory description and vivid metaphors” (p. 32). Indeed, they suggest that “all the senses deserve serious attention in ethnographic work if we are to better

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3 understand the life world of others” (p. 26). In so saying they call for experiential ethnography  
4 that acknowledges the “fleshy body” (Mellor and Shilling, 1997, p. 56), a point also made by  
5 Hill, Canniford & Mol (2017), who argue that ethnographic approaches can transcend the  
6 merely representational and discursive. Yakhlef (2015) suggests that a “first-hand” style of  
7 study into “the personal nature of experience” is more likely to reveal the “person-world  
8 connectedness” that is at the root of an embodied approach (p. 559). He also notes that  
9 ethnographic research is of particular value for understanding retail experiences.  
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20 Merleau-Ponty, the founding father of embodiment theory, based his book *The*  
21 *Phenomenology of Perception* on his own experience in the world. Autoethnography comprises  
22 self (auto), ethnos (culture) and graphy (process) (Reed-Danahay, 1997). It is a method that  
23 places the informant in the role of researcher, foregrounding subjectivity rather than attempting  
24 to minimize it, blending self-observation with reflexive investigation (Marechal, 2010). Adams  
25 *et al.* (2015) observe that it is a method that invites and indeed validates freedom of movement  
26 and expression on the part of the researcher. This has very much been our approach in this study:  
27 empowering our informants, as researchers, to describe, in their own words, their sensuous  
28 experiences in the Hollister store.  
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41 Closely allied to autoethnography is Subjective Personal Introspection. The SPI method  
42 was first introduced by Holbrook (1985) and has proved to be an excellent means for gaining  
43 deeper insights into consumption (Gould, 1995, 2006, 2008, 2012; Hirschman, 1990, 1992;  
44 Holbrook, 1995; Maclaran and Brown, 2005). It enables consumers to describe their feelings,  
45 sensations, behaviors and experiences in a personal, reflective manner. Furthermore,  
46 introspection is considered to be a key stage in the embodied knowledge process (Barsalou,  
47 2008; Sparkes, 2009; Von Wallpach and Kreuzer, 2016). Von Wallpach and Kreuzer (2016), for  
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3 example, write that there are two stages to embodied experience: firstly there is the conscious  
4 and non-conscious aspects, and secondly, a process of introspection, emotion and reflection.  
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6 When informants write about their experiences, language, conceptual reasoning and  
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8 metaphorical processes enable them to interpret their embodied pre-reflective experiences  
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10 (Gartner, 2013). Hill, Canniford & Mol (2014) have also noted that introspective methods,  
11  
12 poetry and videographies are all ideal for researching embodied experience, as they help us to  
13  
14 understand “how the preconscious, somatically felt source of affective atmospheres impinges on  
15  
16 the body” (p. 389). Scott, Cayla & Cova (2017) would concur with this, and suggest that by  
17  
18 “invoking the epistemology of emotion” the reader is moved “to feel the feelings of the other.”  
19  
20 (p. 29). Whilst we are not suggesting that auto-ethnography and SPI are the only or best means  
21  
22 for capturing embodied experience, we concur with others that auto-ethnography and SPI  
23  
24 complement other ethnographic methods in research of this nature.  
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31  
32 Borghini *et al.*'s (2009) ethnographic research into American Girl Place discusses the  
33  
34 significance of consumers' stories as they reflect on their retail experiences. Others also agree  
35  
36 that more imaginative (and often literary) devices such as metaphors, similes, analogies,  
37  
38 sculptures, collages, and so forth, can help consumers articulate their embodied experiences to  
39  
40 others (Belk *et al.*, 2003; Joy and Sherry, 2003; Von Wallpach and Kreuzer, 2013; Zaltman and  
41  
42 Coulter, 1995). Von Wallpach and Kreuzer (2013), for instance, invited their informants to  
43  
44 create three-dimensional brand sculptures, as a means to tap into their embodied experiences, as  
45  
46 they result in non-verbal, multi-sensory material objects that are metaphorical expressions of  
47  
48 “multi-sensory mental brand images” (p. 1328).  
49  
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53  
54 This study is part of a larger, longitudinal and qualitative study on Hollister, using in-  
55  
56 depth interviews with consumers, managers, and employees of Hollister, as well as 97 subjective  
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3 personal introspections (SPIs) with young people in the target age group. The latter were the  
4 primary source of data. Whilst we do not include our field notes and SPIs as researchers, our  
5 own visits to numerous Hollister stores enabled us to better understand the context of the  
6 research and informed our understanding and interpretation of the SPIs. Our informants are  
7 undergraduate students who were given course credit for their participation. They were therefore  
8 not voluntarily entering the Hollister store, but were required to do so, which clearly had a  
9 bearing on some of the more negative SPIs that were written. It should also be noted that some  
10 were more familiar with the store than others, who had never ventured beyond the threshold.  
11 14% of them were either employed by Hollister or had previously worked for the brand. 42% of  
12 our sample were females ranging from 19 to 45, and the majority were Irish. As part of a module  
13 assignment, they were asked to visit a Hollister store and write about their in-store experiences.  
14 The essays ranged from 1509 to 2538 words, with an average of 1910 words. All three authors  
15 engaged in close reading of the resultant essays. From this process of immersion, it was clear that  
16 the body loomed large in the SPIs, in terms of sensuous experience movements and interactions.  
17 This then led us to the literature on embodiment theory so that we could better understand the  
18 embodied processes that occurred when our informants were in the Hollister brandscape.

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41 Our aim in this study, therefore, has been to use embodied theory as a framework in our  
42 interpretation of the SPIs. From our analysis of the SPIs we identified selective themes related to  
43 embodied aspects of experiential consumption (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and then proceeded in  
44 an iterative manner (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997), moving between the students'  
45 SPIs and the embodied theory literature. This enabled us to come up with a greater understanding  
46 of the embodied processes young consumers go through in terms of their in-store experiences,  
47 and these are captured in Figure 1 below, around which we present our findings.  
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## Findings

Figure 1 below depicts the emergent conceptualization from our findings and what we term as *the immersive somascape experience*. The word “soma” refers to the body, to flesh and bones, as distinct from the mind, soul or psyche, and thus we believe it is an apposite word to use to conceptualize our findings, as it foregrounds the “lived body” (Gartner 2013) as being at the frontier of our experience in the world. This framework provides a holistic way to present our findings and analyze how the body leads in emplacing the consumer within a brandscape environment. It consists of four key embodied elements – sensory activation, brand materialities, corporeal relationality, and (dis)orientation – that contribute to consumer emplacement.

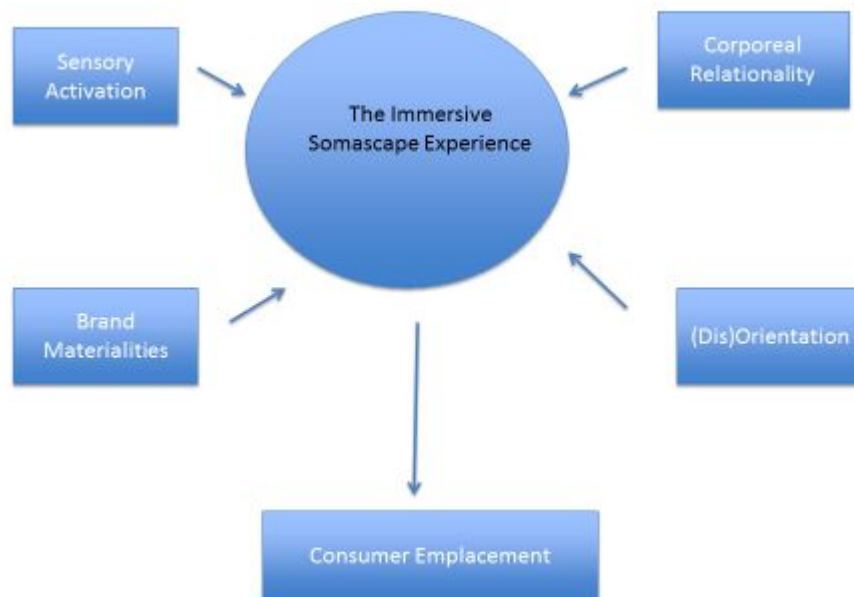


FIGURE 1: The Immersive Somascape Experience

*Sensory Activation*

Although the five senses may be relevant (in various combinations or individually) to all key elements of our conceptualization, *sensory activation* refers specifically to the multi-sensory stimulation that is a key part of contemporary store layouts designed to encourage purchase behavior, the retail atmospherics (Kotler, 1974). In contrast to Kotler's information-processing model of sensory stimulation focused on an ultimate purchase decision, however, and in accordance with Joy and Sherry (2003) and others we show how consumers engage with a multi-sensory environment through their bodies, in a less linear and rational way. Thus our framework captures both the intended and unintended sensory influences, depicting a more holistic engagement with the retail environment.

As previously noted, there is no doubt that Hollister engages in a full-scale and relentless sensory assault on consumers. This operates in both a somatic (bodily) and visceral (internal organs and nervous system) way. Our informants are sensorially assailed, from the store's intense scent, to its loud music, dim lighting, and tactile dimensions that encourage touch, not to mention the sexually charged and seductive combination of desirable models and lifeguards, both in the flesh and on the walls in the form of sepia-tinted posters of gorgeous young people in amorous clinches.

Spence et al (2014) note that multisensory atmospherics – visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory stimulation – creates affective, optimal, cognitive, and direct behavioral effects that may cumulate to create “sensory overload,” and one can clearly see this holistic,

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2  
3 fundamentally multi-sensory process in our informants' embodied experiences of Hollister.  
4  
5 Usually the first sensory encounter was the Hollister scent, which wafted out of the doorway and  
6  
7 into the shopping mall. For most this was enticing and lured them into the Store: "it smelled  
8  
9 good, really good actually," it was a "fabulous, sweet, thought provoking smell that evoked  
10  
11 summer and sunshine," and one used the simile "like walking in a field of daisies, or freshly cut  
12  
13 grass" to vividly convey the pleasurable sensations evoked. Another said that the scent "got me  
14  
15 hooked straight way, I needed this smell in a bottle." It is heady, addictive, and makes them feel  
16  
17 high, and adjectives such as "vibrant," "inviting," "sensual," "evocative," and "exciting"  
18  
19 underline its powerful sensuous appeal and emotional effect.  
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25 For others, however, it was too strong and potent, with several commenting that it was  
26  
27 overwhelming and they were concerned it would bring on a headache; and in fact several did  
28  
29 develop headaches whilst in the store. Indeed it was so intense for some that it also impacted  
30  
31 their sense of taste. Nadine, for example, writes that the "overpowering smell" was taken in by  
32  
33 her taste buds. As the following two extracts show, our informants' bodily reactions sometimes  
34  
35 took more extreme forms:  
36  
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39 My nose tingled and my throat filled up with the musky scent that overpowered the whole store bringing  
40  
41 me to a coughing fit, unattractively spitting and spluttering towards passing consumers before even getting  
42  
43 a chance to fully enter.  
44  
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46 You nearly choke to death on your way in and I honestly felt like taking out my inhaler at that point.  
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49 Their intense physical reactions all have other effects, such as feeling embarrassed that their  
50  
51 overt bodily responses, such as coughing, place them in an awkward and conspicuous position in  
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53 relation to others.  
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3 Haptic elements of sensuous experience are not neglected in the Hollister store, with  
4  
5 Hollister claiming that its fabrics are particularly soft to the touch and against the skin. Certainly,  
6  
7 the desire to feel the fabrics was a strong one for several of the informants, as the following two  
8  
9 extracts show: John commented “I had to feel the wool, leather and cotton on my hands”.

10  
11  
12 Another, James, is equally compelled to reach out and touch Hollister’s wares:

13  
14  
15 Each piece of clothing I passed the touch, feel and smell of them was attracting me towards it. I couldn’t  
16  
17 walk by anything without having to feel or smell it.  
18

19  
20 In these examples instinctive, non-cognitive and preconscious desires drive their actions, rather  
21  
22 than cognitive, conscious processes, to make contact with the clothes, vividly conveying a deeply  
23  
24 embodied, sensorial response and demonstrating how we experience the world through our  
25  
26 bodies. Responding to atmospheres is referred to by Hill, Canniford & Mol (2014) as creating or  
27  
28 altering one’s affective state, and here we can see how this happens at a pre-reflexive level.  
29  
30

31  
32 Hollister completes its sensory assault with extremely loud music that intensifies the  
33  
34 impression of being in a licentious, hedonistic, primal world of the senses, a liminoid zone of  
35  
36 dark intimacy. The music generally met with approval, adding to our informants’ sense that they  
37  
38 were in a nightclub where everyone was having a good time together. This is a space that is  
39  
40 meant to be chilled out, hedonistic and stimulating, evoking a powerful bodily response. The  
41  
42 high volume of the music also makes conversation difficult, and thus verbal interactions between  
43  
44 staff and customers are made difficult if not completely impossible. But like Valtonen,  
45  
46 Markuksela and Moisander’s (2010), our findings here highlight how the audio-visual domain is  
47  
48 only one aspect, and other senses – in this case smell and touch - play a major role. This is of  
49  
50 course particularly the case in the dark interior of Hollister, where the sense of sight is the most  
51  
52 challenged sense. We also show how our senses interact with one another and with other key  
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3 embodied elements, including visceral aspects (eg. gut-feelings and nausea), and support Joy and  
4  
5 Sherry's (2003) observation that the imagination is central to embodied experience and  
6  
7 contributes to a sense of equilibrium between the body subject and the environment he or she  
8  
9 finds him or herself in. Significantly, sensory responses to atmospheres, in creating or altering  
10  
11 one's affective state at a pre-reflexive level (Hill, Canniford & Mol (2014), may appeal or  
12  
13 alienate, with some consumers alternating between the two.  
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### 21 *Brand Materialities*

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24 This section concerns how the brand's meanings are materialized in "spatial aesthetics" (Kotler  
25  
26 1974, p. 50), such as store design and décor, but also goes beyond this. Brand narratives may be  
27  
28 encoded in the architecture of themed environments such as ESPN zone and American Girl Place  
29  
30 (Kozinets *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, the materiality of built space often determines or guides our  
31  
32 actions in unconscious and embodied rather than cognitive ways (Miller, 2005). Indeed there  
33  
34 have been a number of studies in the marketing and consumer behaviour fields that consider the  
35  
36 relationship between the material world and people, such as Valtonen and Närvänen's 2015 and  
37  
38 2016 studies. In the case of Hollister, our findings show how initial impressions of the  
39  
40 architecture (building, windows, steps etc.) and the entrance to the store (the colonial aesthetic  
41  
42 employed) provoke strong embodied reactions that unsettle, as much as they intrigue.  
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48 Walking conveys the pre-reflective, spontaneous connection the body makes with the  
49  
50 environment, and is based on the relationship between sensations and perception. The "motor  
51  
52 intentionality" or corporeal understanding and pre-conscious and intuitive negotiation of the  
53  
54 world (Merleau Ponty, 1962) is immediately challenged by our informants as they approach the  
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3 entrance. The exterior windows of Hollister are typically shrouded in dark grey shutters, and  
4  
5 most of the informants are taken aback by this. Its shutters and lack of shopfront windows create  
6  
7 an instant barrier for them, as they can't see what is behind its obscured entrance. It is a threshold  
8  
9 to another, mysterious world, and the very act of approaching the doorway requires a certain  
10  
11 amount of courage, as they don't know what to expect once they step inside. Their bodies are  
12  
13 tense and expectant as they climb the steps and walk into the dark, inner sanctum beyond.  
14  
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16  
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18         Once they cross the threshold they are met with an inviting tableau inside the entrance:  
19  
20 two large leather armchairs, a coffee table, potted palms, warm lighting from a table lamp, and  
21  
22 an elaborate chandelier, which offers a visual delight and invites relaxation. The doorway is  
23  
24 typically flanked by a female ("model") and male ("lifeguard") employee. This reinforces the  
25  
26 impression that they have entered a private, members-only night club, and for some of our  
27  
28 informants it presents the possibility that they might be barred from entering.  
29  
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32         Others see the threshold as evoking an instinctive, flight or fight response. This is a  
33  
34 physically unsettling place that is experienced in a very visceral, instinctive, gut-wrenching way,  
35  
36 an adrenalin pumping combat zone that is confrontational, challenging, potentially lethal, and  
37  
38 requiring a somatic response from the body that is not without its dangers.  
39  
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42         Nathan compared his sensations as he approached the entrance to that of the Cowardly  
43  
44 Lion in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In so doing he vividly conveys his strong sense of  
45  
46 discomfort and temerity at entering the store, and his fear that someone will catch him and pull  
47  
48 him out again if he steps inside:  
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3 I was feeling apprehensive like the Lion due to meet the Great and Powerful Oz. ... I felt like somebody  
4 was pulling my tail, like I should return to my natural habitat at Primark but I bulked up some courage and  
5  
6 took my first step into Hollister.  
7

8  
9  
10 He must “bulk” himself up, a word which suggests puffing out his chest, straightening his  
11  
12 shoulders and indeed making himself appear bigger and more muscular as he endeavors to give  
13  
14 the impression of being more physically formidable and confident than he actually is. His  
15  
16 reference to the budget fashion chain, Primark, underlines his sense of being in unfamiliar and  
17  
18 unknown territory, and he powerfully conveys his sense of displacement and physical  
19  
20 vulnerability. Like the Cowardly Lion, he needs courage to continue. As previously noted, we  
21  
22 often use literary devices such as metaphors and analogies to try to convey our embodied  
23  
24 experiences (Joy and Sherry, 2003; Gartner, 2013; Von Wallpach and Kreuzer, 2016). In this  
25  
26 instance, Nathan’s analogy shows his intensely physical sense of being in a strange and  
27  
28 potentially dangerous place. In the extract below, Lauren describes the store as dark and  
29  
30 somewhat menacing, its uncharted terrain compared to a jungle:  
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36 When I walked inside, I saw ... NOTHING! I had to let my eyes adjust to the lack of light and suddenly I  
37  
38 felt crowded and claustrophobic, I felt like I had entered another world – Hell! All I saw was mountains  
39  
40 and mountains of clothes everywhere. I began my trek around what now looked like a rainforest, I was  
41  
42 intrigued and tried my best to look at some of the clothes but found myself bumping into palm trees and  
43  
44 expecting coconuts and maybe a monkey to jump onto my head.  
45

46  
47 The above extract shows how the brand materiality, in terms of the clothing, décor etc.  
48  
49 challenges their motor responses as they attempt to navigate the physical environment, the new  
50  
51 world that they have entered.  
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3 Whilst many found that crossing the threshold was quite an intimidating experience that  
4 called for grit and determination, others were filled with anticipation, willingly seduced and  
5 excited by its décor and ambience, and eager to embrace its enticing inner space. For Laura,  
6 “rustic pleasure was driving my steps”. Her excitement is triggered by what she sees, giving her  
7 visual pleasure and making her imagine herself transported “far away.” Her whole body  
8 responds, a sensory/emotive response that motivates her to move forward, propelling her into the  
9 store. Shay goes even further and personifies the store, writing that it “began to get a hold of me,  
10 I couldn’t shake it.” For John, this space is also intriguing and compelling, and he too considers  
11 it a transformative zone, but in his case, instead of feeling that his body will transport him to  
12 another place or that he will be grabbed by the store, he envisages that his body itself is actually  
13 the center of a potential transformation:  
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29 As I made my way up the steps towards the front door I was greeted with a glorious smelling cologne  
30 coming from the store which instantly enticed me. ... There was no going back now, darkness surrounded  
31 me and I was about to enter the Hollister experience. Would I come out alive? Would I become “one of  
32 them?” Will I come out topless with a surfboard? I entered the dark cave.  
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38 Whereas Joy and Sherry theorize how the body influences the aesthetic appreciation of various  
39 artworks, we develop further their insights in relation to brand aesthetics and orchestrated brand  
40 materiality from an embodied perspective. We explore how consumers have a deeply embodied  
41 sense of these aesthetics, which impacts on their sense of self and of others. Merleau-Ponty  
42 (1962) refers to phenomena as “the layer of lived experience through which other people and  
43 things are first given to us, the system of ‘Self-others-things’” (p. 57), and these “things” in the  
44 context of Hollister, are the material objects within the retail space as well as the architecture and  
45 design of the space itself, and its atmospheric aspects such as mood, lighting, scent, and music.  
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### *Corporeal Relationality*

Meeting and interacting with other bodies are significant elements of embodied experience, as we do not experience the world in isolation from others but in relation to others. We use the term Corporeal Relationality rather than Intercorporalities (Merleau-Ponty 1962), as the former more accurately captures the general relationality of the body, rather than actual connections with other bodies, as per Merleau-Ponty. However, we do address certain aspects of the social nature of the body, and the bodily nature of social relationships; in effect the body is inherently relational, and other bodies impact on our own bodies in multiple ways, both tangibly and intangibly. Furthermore, where there is a tension or a mismatch in these corporeal relations, a sense of difference and distance from others is created (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, in Yakhlef, 2015, p. 552).

Employees for Hollister at the time that these SPIs were written were recruited based on their physical appearance, and a Look Book was used in their recruitment of employees. This features photos of current “models” and “lifeguards” who personify the brand (Maheshwari, 2012; Walters, 2016). This aesthetic labour policy is now being revised, due to the controversy it created in terms of discriminatory work practices, but it was still in place at the time the SPIs were written. Given this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that corporeal relationality primarily emerges in our findings in relation to our informants’ corporeal responses to employees of the store. Our informants had mixed reactions to confronting the ideal, “other” bodies inside the store, but often it was a negative reaction.

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3 The “lifeguards” and “models” serve to simultaneously welcome customers whilst raising  
4 the possibility that some customers may be barred from entering. The sense of not being a  
5 member of the Hollister club could create considerable unease for our informants, and much of  
6 this unease is based on self-identifying as not conforming to Hollister’s “cool” image, thus being  
7 “outed,” both socially and perhaps even literally, as the following extract from Ross conveys as  
8 he steps into the store:  
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10  
11  
12 My first visit was one of curiosity ... I walked out when I saw a girl from my school working in the back –  
13 if they hadn’t already worked out I didn’t belong here she would know for sure. ... So unsure if I was even  
14 welcome back or if the model-cum-bouncer’s early smile would turn to a grimace as they pointed towards  
15 my picture on the ‘not-cool man’ list of banned customers ... my first reluctant steps inside were filled with  
16 dread, the lack of a dragon-model-bouncer guarding the entrance to “Cali-cave” made me wary and on  
17 guard.  
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20  
21  
22 Ross knows he is not the target market and half expects to be frog-marched off the premises.  
23 This bodily self-consciousness was common in the SPIs. Many of our informants found it  
24 impossible not to be aware of “other” bodies in comparison to their own bodies, and this  
25 typically created feelings of inadequacy and disruption as a result. Colin immediately feels  
26 uncomfortable due to the physical appearance of the employee who greets him, and his own  
27 grubby attire. Notably he is also intimidated by the employee’s speaking voice, which he regards  
28 as more refined than his own:  
29

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32 As I entered the dark cave I was addressed by a topless gentleman as “dude” ... it felt like I was entering a  
33 new dimension when compared with how I’m usually addressed from strangers. In spite of his politeness I  
34 felt extremely incompetent and awkward being greeted by someone who not only towered over me in terms  
35 of strength and size but also who was much better spoken than me ... [once inside] the Hollister zombies  
36 were all around me and I was struggling to blend in wearing dirty grey sweatpants.  
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3 This recalls the mutual interdependence between bodies in the world – comprised of gestures,  
4 actions, the gaze and other embodied processes, as well as the challenge posed by a dark and  
5 intense environment in terms of one's bodily movements, a high level of sensory stimulation,  
6 and the possibility (or not) for real or imagined interaction with others. These potential  
7 encounters may be fraught with disorientation, insecurity, and embarrassment, compounded by  
8 the fact that they are being observed by an inhabitant of the space who belongs there. In the  
9 extract below, Darren is uncomfortable in terms of which direction he should move in once he  
10 enters the store, and he feels gauche and inadequate when confronted by the impressive physical  
11 appearance of the member of staff who greets him:  
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24 The store, despite its attempts to create a laid back relaxed atmosphere couldn't have made me feel more  
25 awkward, after deciding which of the two doors I was to go in ... I was greeted by what I had hoped to be a  
26 member of staff, tall, blonde, and busting out of his shirt, also slightly intimidating might I add.  
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31 Embarrassment is a spontaneous, corporeal response to an unsettling situation, made worse  
32 because it may show on the outside, through walking in the wrong direction, being clumsy, or  
33 blushing. Emma is taken out of her comfort zone by the scant clothing of the male employees in  
34 the doorway, and is further disoriented when she tries to negotiate the dark space within:  
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41 ... I was greeted with two half naked men ... after I got over the shock of the half naked people I continued  
42 walking into the shop. Until I suddenly fell over the two steps that I didn't see due to the lighting in the  
43 store. The shop was so dark that I didn't see the steps ... and to make this even more embarrassing ... a  
44 supermodel looking girl said "Hey guys, how are you today? If you need anything I am here to help." It is  
45 safe to say I don't think I have ever been so embarrassed in my life.  
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51 Her embarrassment is made more excruciating by being observed by a "model" as she stumbles.  
52  
53 Emma's experience of tripping on the stairs is in marked contrast to the poise of the member of  
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3 staff who observes her fall from grace. Part of the difficulty is that many felt they were in a  
4 staged environment that contained performers. One informant observes “I started to feel like I  
5  
6 was walking around a film set and a full cast of workers were staging a show.” For some this  
7  
8 creates a sense of being a detached spectator. Neil writes that he feels like the staff are actors and  
9  
10 he is “an onlooker from a distance.” Others felt part of the “show.” For Mark, the shopping aisle  
11  
12 feels like a catwalk, and he is taking part in the show, feeling good that he is the centre of  
13  
14 attention. He feels physically transformed, confident, and basks in the spotlight:  
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19  
20 ...the lights were shining down the aisle. My first thought that came to mind was that I felt like a model  
21  
22 walking down the runway. ... when I was walking down the aisle it made me feel like it was all about me.  
23  
24 With the spotlight shining in my face it was like I was being judged but in a good way. It would make  
25  
26 everyone feel like they're in a different world.  
27

28  
29 Thus we see clearly in this section how Hollister's use of aesthetic labour is a very embodied  
30  
31 way to make consumers feel part of their club (or not), as well as engendering a self-critical and  
32  
33 self-reflexive process whereby consumers compare their own bodies with those around them.  
34  
35 This process reinforces Braidotti's (1994) point about how embodiment brings together physical,  
36  
37 symbolic, and sociological aspects. Encountering the physicality of the idealized bodies of  
38  
39 Hollister staff, bodies that represent a slim, wealthy, attractive elite, visitors self-select as  
40  
41 Hollister consumers on their feelings of perceived belonging or inadequacy to the privileged  
42  
43 group (i.e. our informants' various comments about being too fat). Contrary to Kozinets *et al.*'s  
44  
45 (2002) study, empathy and inclusion are not the overriding emotions experienced in this retail  
46  
47 space. This is a quasi-exclusive (and excluding) environment that provokes highly physical and  
48  
49 instinctive responses. Furthermore, visitors to Hollister engage in “carnal knowing” (Mellor and  
50  
51 Shilling, 2001), gaining information about the brand from their embodied experiences and  
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3 interactions with others, whether through looking, bumping into others, or attempting to engage  
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5 in conversation with shop floor assistants in order to get assistance, etc.  
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### 10 11 12 *(Dis)Orientation* 13

14  
15 How one moves and orientates oneself in a specific space is another key factor in any  
16  
17 somascape, and motor functions are central to the concept of embodied perception and how we  
18  
19 live in-the-world (Valtonen, Markuksela and Moisander, 2010). As Joy and Sherry (2003) show  
20  
21 in their study on museums, vision, bodily movement and agency work together in terms of how  
22  
23 visitors experience the space. Likewise, Hollister visitors must find their own way as agentic  
24  
25 bodies in an environment that deliberately disorients them, with informants acknowledging  
26  
27 the very physical challenge of moving in a darkened setting. Orienting themselves becomes  
28  
29 paramount, but often this is an acutely embodied sense of “displace”, which has been identified  
30  
31 in other liminoid retail environments (see, for example, Maclaran and Brown, 2005).  
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36  
37 Once consumers choose which direction to walk in, or rather, are directed by the signs to  
38  
39 go in one direction or another, a narrow walkway takes them through a series of small, dark  
40  
41 “rooms.” Large wooden tables, shelves and cabinets display illuminate clothes, and towering  
42  
43 potted palms are carefully placed throughout the interior space. Brown wallpaper, featuring  
44  
45 exotic animals such as gazelles, giraffes, and elephants, intensifies the dark intimacy of the  
46  
47 space, building a sense of being in an elegant colonial club in an “other” location. Aside from  
48  
49 the dark wallpaper and the surfing and travel memorabilia, the walls are covered in large, sepia-  
50  
51 tinted posters of gorgeous young teenagers on the beach who represent the ideal, sexy lifestyle  
52  
53 that the brand promises.  
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3 This is not an easy environment to navigate around, despite an in-store layout that maps  
4 out narrow pathways between the merchandise that they should follow, and many of our  
5 informants felt disorientated and lost in the cluttered and dimly lit interior, variously describing it  
6 as a packed nightclub, a crowded rock concert, “an ant colony all moving around in sequence,” a  
7 football match, a lorry load of cattle on their way to the slaughterhouse, and an assault course, as  
8 in the following example, where Nicola’s body collides with various objects:  
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18 ... a dangerous obstacle course from the military. Second guessing every step I took, bumping into all sorts  
19 of furniture including random bookcases and bare coat hangers I could already feel the bruises forming.  
20

21  
22 Our informants’ sensations are described in a deeply embodied way: their vision is challenged;  
23 they are not sure which way to move; they lose their orientation in the space; they bang into  
24 unseen objects; and they often experience physical symptoms such as headache and even mild  
25 panic as their bodies struggle to make sense of and adapt to its labyrinthine interior. This recalls  
26 Merleau-Ponty’s observation that we cannot separate sensations from perception, as both are  
27 about our contact with the sensory life that we “live from within”. It also emphasizes the self-  
28 others-things triad that comprises our experience of the world, and how our “motor  
29 intentionality”, and bodily skills enable us to successfully negotiate (or not) the physical  
30 environment we move in (Merleau Ponty, 1962). Siobhan clearly struggles to get to grips with  
31 the space she has entered:  
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46 Everywhere in the shop was in complete darkness, making it extremely challenging to find my way around  
47 the shop. To make things even more difficult for me, there was no particular layout to the shop. At this  
48 stage I found myself struggling to find my way around this dark and cramped environment.  
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52  
53 Colette draws on a maze analogy, as indeed do others, to describe the physical sense of being  
54 lost in this liminal, alternative space. Furthermore, she describes her mounting panic as she  
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3 stumbles around in this, for her, dystopian space, disorientated, deafened by the music, with no  
4  
5 orientation, out of touch with her friends, and not knowing which way to go:  
6  
7

8 I felt like I needed to take a flashlight out in order to navigate my way around the shop. ... With every twist  
9  
10 and turn I felt like I was going around in circles, never-ending circles I might add. Therefore, with the  
11  
12 terrible lighting and confusing layout, my ears were numbed by the overly loud music as well as the  
13  
14 amount of signal I was able to receive on my phone. What if I had lost my way and couldn't find my  
15  
16 friends? How was I supposed to text or ring them?  
17  
18

19 For Mark, the interior is compared to an obstacle course as he is beset by various physical  
20  
21 challenges: people, objects, and other paraphernalia. He is propelled forward, as he has no other  
22  
23 direction to go in, and feels trapped, almost frozen in time and space, yet compelled to slowly  
24  
25 keep moving, assailed by objects and people, as he seeks his escape:  
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28  
29 As I was jittering down the aisle I noticed I suddenly started to get bombarded with employees greeting me,  
30  
31 posters and sales racks everywhere, tables and cupboards filled with clothes. It made me feel  
32  
33 claustrophobic, as if I had nowhere to go but just keep moving forward gradually, to see if the carnage of  
34  
35 this clothing area eventually minimizes. To me it felt everlasting.  
36  
37

38 His use of the word "carnage" graphically illustrates his visceral and somatic response to this, for  
39  
40 him, unpleasant space, as he conjures up images of mass, bloody slaughter, and the flesh of slain  
41  
42 animals or men.  
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45 Not all of our informants experienced being lost in a negative light. For some this added  
46  
47 to its fascination. It was another place, where the norm, as in all liminal spaces, was turned on its  
48  
49 head, but in a good way, and some were more than willing to give themselves up to it: "There  
50  
51 was a definite atmospheric shift when you walked through the doors," said Erin, who went on to  
52  
53 describe that this immersion in the space was a pleasant sensation; she is seduced by it and loses  
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3 herself in the experience, an alluring sensation that adds to her “excitement”: “if you got lost  
4 you’d be lost forever.” Others, such as Shay, displayed a more ambivalent response as he entered  
5 the unknown place “that was uncommon to me.” He feels “literally” lost, emphasizing that this is  
6 an embodied experience rather than a figure of speech, and he becomes claustrophobic in its  
7 “windy” darkness.  
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15 These accounts of orientation and disorientation within the Hollister landscape  
16 demonstrate how the body responds when plunged into a dark, unknowable space, recalling  
17 Tissiers-Desbordes and Maclaran’s (2013) work on *Dans le Noir*. When one’s senses are  
18 challenged the environment becomes a series of negotiations with human and non-human  
19 objects. The sense of going in the right direction is also challenged, and one may submit to the  
20 chaos of the space, or try to find one’s direction so that one may reach the end of the journey, in  
21 this case the cash registers or exit.  
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### 32 33 34 35 36 *Consumer Emplacement*

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38 These four key elements – Sense Activation-, Brand Materialities, Corporeal Relationality, and  
39 (Dis)Orientation – are precursors to consumer emplacement within the brand store for those who  
40 have gone with the “flow” and fully immersed themselves in the brand store experience.  
41  
42

43 Emplacement, as the embodied experience of place, means that place is “concrete and at one  
44 with action and thought” (Casey 1993, p. ixiii). Elsewhere it is described as “the sensuous  
45 interrelationship of body-mind-environment” (Howes, 2005, p. 7), and becoming one with the  
46 environment (Pink, 2011). For Merleau-Ponty this is when the object/event is synthesized  
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3 through the body, with the imagination, which is at the heart of perception, creating a sense of  
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5 integration at the cognitive level (Joy and Sherry 2003).  
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8  
9 Whilst the journey through the store is physically challenging for most of our informants,  
10 the “heart” of the retail space offers a functional as well as a sensory and experiential oasis. This  
11 is a “living room” space where the tills and fragrance shelves are located. Soft, comfortable  
12 leather sofas invite customers to stop moving, sit down, and relax their bodies. Once they are no  
13 longer in motion, they become grounded in the material space, and they can then look around  
14 and take stock of their surroundings more easily. As such, the physically challenging movement  
15 of the body through a particularly difficult space stops. After the busyness of negotiating the  
16 space they may therefore experience the timelessness alluded to by Woermann & Rokka (2015)  
17 in relation to embodied temporal experience. When the body is still, our minds become more  
18 active as we gaze around us and reflect on the place we find ourselves in. In their discussion of  
19 the consumers’ embodied processes consumers in retail spaces, Sherry (1998) and Sherry *et al.*  
20 (2007) discuss emplacement (“being put in a place”) as a key component of consumers’  
21 experiential co-creation.  
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39 In the Hollister store, emplacement occurs when our informants reach the sitting area, by  
40 which time they may have physically adapted to the environment, and most feel a deep sense of  
41 relief at being able to sit down on the inviting sofas. There is plenty to see, not least Hollister’s  
42 piece de resistance, a large screen that is a live feed of Surf City, Huntington Beach in California,  
43 bringing them closer to an aspirational world of hot sun, beautiful beaches, a surfing lifestyle,  
44 and amorous couplings. Many of our informants enjoyed being emplaced here at the Hollister  
45 store’s central core, using phrases such as “chilled out” and “trippy” to convey their physical  
46 euphoria and sense of immersion.  
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3 Thus, we witness the quasi-spiritual aspects to which Kozinets *et al.* (2002) refer in  
4 relation to other themed brand stores, with Hollister's sensory stimulation engendering a  
5 meditative state that transports consumers to other imaginative worlds. This recalls Woermann &  
6 Rokka's (2015) observation about phenomenal fields that enwrap subjects as they tune into an  
7 experience. Joy and Sherry (2003) note how audio technologies enable virtual body exploration  
8 in the museum by disrupting traditional ways of seeing the art. Similarly Hollister use of its Surf  
9 City live feed encourages consumer fantasizing in a liminoid zone that transcends everyday  
10 reality.  
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22 Immersion or experience of flow is understood, from an embodied perspective, to be  
23 achieved through a feeling of "holistic oneness" with one's environment that makes time seem to  
24 stand still (Celci *et al.*, 1993). The examples below describe two informants' sensory sensations  
25 as they kick back and let the ambience wash over them. Significantly, it is then that the reflective  
26 process commences, as Mark and Gillian consider their surroundings and allow their  
27 imaginations to take over:  
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37 The sitting area! Whilst I was recuperating on this huge leather sofa, a smell triggered my nose, it was  
38 sensational! A woof of an air conditioning summery effect ... A live satellite feed ... if that doesn't make  
39 you feel chilled out I don't know what will, it made me feel like I was lying on the beach with not a care in  
40 the world.  
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45 I wanted to be part of their story ... the experience made me want to leave the bright fluorescent lights  
46 behind in pursuit of the "laid back lifestyle" and I wanted to learn how to surf.  
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50 Mark feels like he has been physically transported, and Gillian feels sufficiently stimulated to  
51 imagine herself being on a beach in California and actually living the dream.  
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3 The above extracts illustrate the power of imaginative projection of the body, as  
4 consumers imagine themselves elsewhere, an “embodied imagination” as described by Joy and  
5 Sherry (2003), among others (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Borghini *et al.*, 2009).  
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9  
10 This section also illuminates the “onflow of consumption” and how our preconscious,  
11 somatic feelings in relation to atmospheres impinge on our bodies (Hill *et al.*, 2014, p. 389).  
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13 Prior to arriving at the seated area, consumers have experienced various timeflows and these, as  
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Woermann and Rokka (2015) have highlighted, are triggered by particular activities and practices rather than being the result of cognitive interpretations. In our case, the overall timeflow of the Hollister environment is a slow pace that the other four elements of our conceptualisation (sensory activation, brand materialities, corporeal relationality and (dis)orientation) engender. Slow does not necessarily mean relaxing of course. Time slows as shoppers initially approach the doors and their steps falter at the visual impact of the architecture and the overpowering smells emanating from the entrance. Added to this is the fact that there is often a queue to get into the shop. Once inside, however, there is the impetus to move, albeit at a slow pace, driven by the crowded conditions and the pressure from other bodies, as well as the need to orientate themselves. But time stands still when they are motionless, or so it seems; hence their accounts of daydreams and Utopian fantasies of being elsewhere.

## Discussion

We believe that our findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on embodied approaches in marketing and consumer research, and particularly in relation to retail brandscapes. They show how the young consumers in our study experience the Hollister world

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2  
3 through their bodies, and from their embodied experiences arises introspection and reflection,  
4 thus supporting Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "the body is at the root of all thought" (in Joy and  
5 Sherry, 2003, p. 278). The findings also show how "bodily movements structure the retail  
6 experiences" of consumers, and that such experiences are less about thought processes, and more  
7 about "the unthought, the tacit, bodily skills" that guide our everyday practices (Yakhlef, 2015,  
8 p. 559). The manner in which our informants react to the Hollister brandscape reveals a wide  
9 range of powerful corporeal and often paradoxical responses. This is a space that can arouse an  
10 embodied sense of "orientation and security" as the body seeks to strike a balance with the world  
11 and "maintain a grip on it" (p. 558), or create a sense of disorientation and confusion. Merleau-  
12 Ponty writes that the body is in a state of "constant operation", as it copes with new  
13 environments, and this was apparent in our findings, with orientation and disorientation often  
14 occurring in quick succession as informants negotiated the complex, multi-sensory interior  
15 environment and its unique kinesthetic and inter-corporeal challenges.  
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34 Our findings support the notion that consumers' interaction with retail spaces may be a  
35 positive experience (through immersion, pleasure and imagination) or a negative one (through  
36 distance, revulsion and resistance). Hollister is experienced in a highly embodied, instinctive,  
37 and sensuous way, where bodies are the means through which one feels and senses one's way  
38 through the space; placed in corporeal relation to other people and things, in the dark, without the  
39 possibility of speech; where consumers are bombarded with music, pressed together with others  
40 in the dimly lit space; where the "porous boundaries" and "energetic flows" (Hill, Canniford &  
41 Mol (2014) between self and others are all too real, intense, and not necessarily pleurably  
42 experienced.  
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This study thus builds on current work on embodied experience in the consumer behavior and retailing fields to show how taking an “intelligible embodiment” (Gartner 2013) approach to consumers’ experiences in retail brandscapes enables a deeper, more holistic understanding of the embodied processes involved.

We have also tried to build on existing phenomenological work in the consumer behavior and retail brandscapes fields to demonstrate the value of taking a multi-sensory approach to understanding consumers’ embodied experiences of retail brandscapes. Sparkes *et al.* (2009) critiqued “ocularcentric bias,” and the preoccupation with spectacle and “scopic metaphors” in many ethnographic studies in Western cultures. Valtonen, Markuksela & Moisander (2010) also critique the “audio-visual hegemony” of much ethnographic research, advocating that it is more fruitful to focus on the role of the senses in relation to practices and interaction with the social and material world rather than on individual experiences. We have tried to do both in this study, revealing personal embodied experiences in the context of a public, inter-corporeal, material landscape. Whilst we do not claim that this is an ethnographic study, nevertheless we have tried to show how auto-ethnography (which gives the power to our informants as researchers) together with SPI (which gives the power to our informants as reflective writers) can enable us to better understand embodied experience in such settings.

Of equal importance to the five senses is “motor capabilities” (Peñaloza, 1999), or the movement or locomotion of the body in the store (kinesthetic sense), and bodily emplacement that is the culmination of that experience. For Merleau-Ponty (1962) the world is experienced through spatial and motor functions, i.e. the body’s agency, and by considering the body’s movement (and indeed its stillness when emplacement and flow is experienced), we can see how the body inhabits space and time and combines with and includes them (pp. 139-40). Other

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2  
3 scholars go further to suggest that the kinesthetic sense is the primary means by which we  
4 understand and experience the world (See, for example, Barbour's (2004) discussion of this).  
5  
6 Sherry (1998) and Peñaloza (1999) have written about a number of these aspects. However, we  
7  
8 argue that we need to try to bring *all* aspects of embodied experience together in order to develop  
9  
10 a deeper understanding of the embodied processes that take place in retail contexts.  
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14  
15 In this study we have seen how the body interacts with an environment in a deeply  
16 embodied way that can go well beyond the traditional focus on the sensory stimuli of  
17  
18 servicescapes (i.e. Kotler, 1974). Nor does the Hollister experience fit neatly into any of the  
19  
20 existing four quadrants of themed servicescapes identified by Sherry (1998) and Kozinets *et al.*  
21  
22 (2002) and classified around the twin axis of nature/culture and ethereal/physical: 1) cyberscape;  
23  
24 2) landscape; 3) marketscape; and 4) mindscape. These binary divisions work against a more  
25  
26 nuanced analysis of experience rooted in embodied experience where physical actions,  
27  
28 sensations, emotions, perception and imagination interpenetrate one another in a holistic manner.  
29  
30 We therefore propose that the "immersive somascape" more closely encapsulates embodied  
31  
32 experience in the retail environment. Equally, using an "intelligible embodiment" lens, we can  
33  
34 see how the body shapes the mind through the use of metaphors, similes and analogies in the  
35  
36 students' written accounts of their Hollister experiences. As previously discussed, these literary  
37  
38 devices are a key means by which we seek to conceptualise our embodied experience (Von  
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40 Wallpach & Kreuzer (2016).  
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48 We believe that our study adds to recent studies in our field that have also advocated  
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50 ethnography, auto-ethnography and introspection as methods which offer us insightful means of  
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52 exploring consumers' embodied experiences. Sparkes (2009), in his study of sports consumption,  
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54 argues that "autoethnography, poetic representations, and fictional representations" are better  
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3 able to capture the multi-sensory nature of experience (p. 32). He further suggests that, too often,  
4  
5 researchers in the ethnographic tradition view the body as a text to be analyzed, and thus the  
6  
7 lived experiences of those we study are written up in “bloodless language” that ignores “rich  
8  
9 sensory description and vivid metaphors” (p. 32). We think that our study adds to the growing  
10  
11 body of work in ours and related fields that demonstrates the value of literary methods such as  
12  
13 SPI and auto-ethnography for describing and deepening our understanding of consumers’ lived,  
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15 embodied experiences of retail environments.  
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20 To conclude, we acknowledge that Hollister is an extreme case of sensory marketing that  
21  
22 creates extreme effects on the part of consumers. Nevertheless, we think our approach offers  
23  
24 interesting insights into how consumers experience in store retail environments, and we add to  
25  
26 the growing literature in the marketing, consumer behaviour, tourism and leisure fields that are  
27  
28 drawing our attention to the value of adopting more anthropological (body-grounded) approaches  
29  
30 to the study of consumers in the marketplace. This would involve us considering how consumers  
31  
32 are continually encountering and interacting with not just sightscapes but also soundscapes,  
33  
34 tastescapes, touchscapes and smellscapes. With regard to the latter, Canniford, Riach & Hill  
35  
36 (2017) have already begun this process with their “nosenography” manifesto, which offers an  
37  
38 alternative, embodied theory epistemology in relation to this neglected aspect of consumer  
39  
40 sensory experience. There are also a growing number of studies that focus on the movement of  
41  
42 bodies in time and space, such as Hamilton & Alexander’s (2017) study of travellers on the  
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44 Jacobite steam train in the Scottish Highlands, which emphasizes the importance of pace as well  
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46 as space.  
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53 The young consumers in our study were also on a journey which had a beginning, a  
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55 middle and an end, and the journey itself was the primary focus in their accounts of how they  
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3 moved through time and space, pointing to the importance of the kinesthetic sense and the  
4 primacy of movement in embodied experience (Barbour, 2004). More work is needed in retail  
5 studies to show how and in what ways perceiving bodies move through space, and how they  
6 interact with the material environment, including other bodies.  
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13 Our study also shows how consumers “motor intentionality” or corporeal understanding  
14 of the world can be challenged, disrupted and paradoxically controlled in retail environments,  
15 and how consumers may achieve a fully-embodied sense of immersion and emplacement in a  
16 space (Joy and Sherry, 2003; Sherry, 1998; Sherry *et al.* 2007). Joy and Sherry (2003) argues  
17 that a greater focus on the “sensual creation of meaning” and on “embodied apprehension” may  
18 enhance our understanding of consumers’ experience of and in the world. We hope that we have  
19 contributed to that agenda, adding to the growing body of research that takes an embodied theory  
20 perspective, and answering Yakhlef’s (2015) call for more studies of consumers’ embodied  
21 experiences in retail environments.  
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34 Finally, retail stores are increasingly, some might say desperately, turning to experiential  
35 branding, offering brand experiences in a bid to entice consumers into their stores and halt their  
36 decline in the face of on-line behemoths such as Amazon. It has also been noted that there is now  
37 growing consumer demand for experiences that inspire, engage or provoke them  
38 (www.campaignlive.co.uk). We suggest that these trends point to the importance and indeed  
39 value of taking embodied theory approaches to consumer research, as well as the need for more  
40 research, from an embodied perspective, that contributes to our knowledge of how consumers  
41 interact with retail brandscapes.  
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**Supplementary File for Review**

Many thanks for offering us the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript (EJM-09-2017-0558 – An Embodied approach to Consumer Experiences: The Hollister Brandscape).

We have now made revisions in response to the reviewers' recommendations.

We have clarified our research stance by using the terms 'embodied approach' and 'embodied theory' consistently throughout, and have sought to clarify the different approaches as per reviewer 2's recommendations. We have clarified different theoretical perspectives in the literature review and in the methodology. We have also removed references to storytelling as we appreciate this was misleading, as per reviewer 2's comments. Furthermore we have made cuts to the findings to remove instances of repetition, and have strengthened our implications by adding another paragraph at the end.

**Specific responses to Reviewer 1:**

We thank you for your comments and recommendations, all of which we have tried to address in this revision.

We have now used the terms 'embodied approach' and 'embodied theory' consistently throughout.

We have also built up the literature review to address the practice turn (see our revisions in the Embodied Theory in Consumer Research section, specifically pp. 7-9).

We have also made cuts to sharpen up the findings, particularly in the Brand Materialities section where we removed non-relevant, repetitive material (see pp. 20-24).

With regard to your comments about the 'intercorporeality' dimension, we have now renamed this Corporeal Relationality and included more discussion of this (see pp. 24, 25).

**Specific responses to Reviewer 2:**

We thank you for your comments and recommendations, all of which we have tried to address in this revision.

We have built up the discussion to address brands and branding and the insights offered by embodied approaches to the study of retail brandscapes (see p. 40).

We have also tightened up our literature review, including more information on different approaches to embodied theory (see pp. 8-9).

We have now dropped our reference to the enactive lived experience approach, instead focusing on intelligible embodiment as you suggest (see p. 6 and throughout).

In the methodology we have dropped all references to stories in light of your comments that this was misleading. We have included more elaboration of introspection (see pp. 14-15). And have added new material (pp. 14-15) to clarify our approach.

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Results: We appreciate your comments about intercorporeality and in light of them we have now called this theme Corporeal Relationality in this paper, and included more discussion of this (p. 24, 25, 26).

Research Implications: We have built up our research implications, particularly by adding comments on the growth of experiential branding in relation to retail brandscapes (p. 40).

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