PHILOSOPHY OF MARKETING

THE NEW REALIST APPROACH

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Philosophy of Marketing

How can we overcome the rapidly ageing postmodernist paradigm, which has become sterile orthodoxy in marketing? This book answers this crucial question using fresh philosophical tools developed by New Realism. It indicates the opportunities missed by marketing due to the pervasiveness of postmodernist attitudes and proposes a new and fruitful approach pivoting on the significance of reality to marketing analyses and models.

Intensifying reference to reality will boost marketing research and practice, rather than impair them; conversely, neglecting such a reference will prevent marketing from realising its full potential, in several contexts. The aim of the book is foundational: its purpose is not a return to traditional realism but to break new ground and overcome theoretical obstacles in marketing and management by revising some of their assumptions and enriching their categories, thereby paving the way to fresh approaches and methodological innovations. In that sense, the book encourages theoretical innovation and experimentation and introduces new concepts, like invitation and attrition, which can find fruitful applications in marketing theory and practice. That is meant to be conductive to the solution of important difficulties and to the uncovering of new phenomena. The last chapter of the book applies the new approach to eight case studies from business contexts.

This book will be of interest to philosophers interested in New Realism and to researchers, scholars, and marketing professionals sensitive to the importance and fruitfulness of reference to reality, for their own purposes.

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Philosophy of Marketing
The New Realist Approach

Matteo Giannasi and
Francesco Casarin

to our wives Marian and Crista

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Preface

Is the notion of reality of any use to marketing, or does it rather stand in the way of mature and self-aware marketing research and practice?

This book is about the relevance of reality to marketing. It is about the meaningfulness and significance of reference to reality for marketing models, strategic marketing analyses, and effective marketing policies.

In a nutshell, the main thesis of this book is that reality matters to marketing. Its consequences and corollaries are:

- that reference to reality ought to play a central role in marketing theory and practice;
- that marketing researchers and practitioners would greatly benefit by devoting a larger share of their attention to the role played by reference to reality in all human thought and behaviour;
- that reality and the (informal or institutionalised) quest for it ought to be the beacon—and not a blind spot—of present and future marketing theory and practice.

The second, subsidiary, thesis of the book is that intensifying reference to reality would boost marketing research and practice rather than impair them; and, conversely, neglecting such a reference has prevented marketing from realising its full potential in several contexts.

A greater appreciation of the value of reference to reality for marketing will emerge not as an inconvenient, if inescapable, theoretical requirement but rather as a fecund and viable intellectual opportunity that marketing scholars and practitioners should feel eager to embrace and explore alongside philosophers, psychologists, and social scientists. In order to uphold these views, the book will vindicate 'realism', the thesis that there is a reality, a way things are independently of any particular perspective, and it will criticise various versions of 'antirealism', the thesis that there is no reality (or, in different versions, that reference to it is impossible, that it does not make any sense, or that it is irrelevant).

Aims of the Book

This book is an exploration of the still partly unexpressed (and largely underestimated) theoretical potential of reference to reality for the description, modelling, and analysis of human thought and behaviour, with a special focus on phenomena of primary interest for management research and practice. It is not, primarily, an extrinsic philosophical survey of marketing models from an epistemological perspective.[1]

The aim of the book is to break new ground and overcome theoretical obstacles in marketing theory and practice by revising some of their assumptions and enriching their categories, thereby paving the way to fresh approaches and methodological innovations. This is intended to be conducive to the solution of important difficulties and to the uncovering of new phenomena. In that sense, this book seeks to encourage theoretical innovation and experimentation in marketing theory and practice, not to promote an unlikely *retour à l'ordre*, through the restoration of some orthodoxy.

Indeed, in writing the book, its authors did not intend to issue a philosophical wake-up call about, say, a supposed epistemological relaxation in marketing theory and practice, which may have compromised the theoretical rigour or scholarly credibility of its output; the aim of the book is not, for instance, to remind the reader of the meta-theoretical principle that every theory which disregards reference to reality as irrelevant is in one way or another self-refuting. We shall, on occasion, touch upon such issues, but we are not primarily concerned with prescriptive epistemology or with Manichaean taxonomies of marketing theories and styles.

What we are concerned with is pointing out genuine and partially unexplored theoretical possibilities and of course arguing for them and defending them against traditional or possible objections. We are also interested in distinguishing such theoretical possibilities from earlier versions of similar ideas, which for some time have been considered (sometimes correctly, sometimes too hastily) as philosophically outdated or discredited.

Philosophical Paradigms and Marketing Research

This book may appear to some scholars in the humanities and social sciences as something like a retraction of a well-known philosophical thesis, a thesis which was for a period so commonly accepted as to be considered as something like a contemporary philosophical received view: that reference to reality plays no crucial role in such phenomena as meaning, thought, language, semiosis, iconicity, theory, understanding, knowledge, belief, desire, volition, and the like. In fact, the book is also an attempt to show that such a radical claim has been recently challenged with fresh arguments and most importantly that it can lead both philosophy and the social sciences into sterile theoretical paths.

In fact, the book may even appear to some as a philosophical *mea culpa*: it denounces the responsibilities of prominent twentieth-century philosophical movements, which, with their most radical slogans, contributed to leading astray some part of contemporary marketing research. They also distracted marketing from the appreciation of the relevance of referring to reality for human thought and behaviour and suggested that reference to reality is epistemologically obsolete, redundant, or untenable, that there is no place for it in contemporary culture and society at large.

In that sense, our appeal to reality is animated by the desire to challenge what sometimes seems to be considered common knowledge in contemporary marketing and other social sciences: the idea that the notion of reality is a theoretical dross or scoria and not a genuine resource and beacon.

Reference to Reality as a Theoretical Opportunity

Our primary goal is to point out that banishing a robust reference to reality from marketing scholarship and other social sciences may have become a kind of theoretically sterile orthodoxy. Calling for a return of reality—or to it—is an encouragement to open new theoretical windows and sail new seas, not to return to some safe harbour.

We do not wish to bring contemporary research back from the alleged exclusive concern of marketing with appearances to the purported passion of genuine philosophy for being. We do not even attempt to bring marketing back from open and pluralistic approaches to some supposed classical epistemological ideal. We rather strive to expose both contemporary marketing and contemporary philosophy to the revitalising asperities of reality. Indeed, rather than accepting the received oversimplification of marketing theory and practice as exclusively concerned with appearances and persuasion (Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995), and not with reality, this book promises to draw the attention of marketing scholars and practitioners to the importance and fruitfulness of reference to reality—for their own ends.

Note

1. Epistemological debates are common to all sorts of research fields, including, of course, marketing. Cf. for instance, Hunt (1983, 1993, 2003); Reidenbach and Robin (1991); Brown (2001).

Introduction

1 Setting the Stage

Twentieth-century philosophy was certainly much more than a long series of attempted refutations of realism. However, despite its protagonists having many different and often mutually incompatible agendas, it was largely dominated by antirealism. The most prominent exponents of phenomenology, existentialism, philosophical hermeneutics, analytic philosophy, neo-pragmatism, and post-structuralism proposed or endorsed some version of the thesis that realism is false or meaningless at best (Husserl 1913, 1931; Heidegger 1927; Carnap 1928, 1950; Sartre 1943; Merleau-Ponty 1945; Wittgenstein 1953; Gadamer 1960; Dummett 1959, 1982, 1991; Derrida 1967b; Goodman 1978; Rorty 1979, 1989; Putnam 1981a, 1990; Davidson 1983; Vattimo 1983).

Philosophical realism never became extinct. However, it was considered (and tended to consider itself) a marginalised position, especially in the second half of the twentieth century (Devitt [1984] 1991; De Caro 2015). The rejection of realism was so widespread, even across hard-felt philosophical divides, that it was sometimes used as a bridge by philosophers attempting to resume a fruitful dialogue between different philosophical schools (Rorty 1979, 1991a, 1991b). Antirealism reached its cultural pinnacle with the postmodernist movement (Lyotard 1979; Baudrillard 1981; Vattimo and Rovatti 1983; Rorty 1979, 1989). Postmodernism boosted the credit and influence of antirealism to further academic, political, and social debates, from literary criticism to critical theory, feminism, postcolonial studies, gender studies, art studies, theology, anthropology, historiography, and beyond. Under the influence of Postmodernism, late twentieth-century culture interpreted antirealism as fruitful and liberating (Rorty 1979, 1989; Vattimo 1983, 1989).

Dissatisfaction with classical modernist strategies and assumptions in the 1980s and 1990s did not leave marketing untouched: leading researchers abandoned traditional approaches, which they sometimes deemed as "positivistic" (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy 1988; Hunt 1991) and launched alternative or complementary programmes, pivoting upon

different concepts. Experiential Marketing (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 2000; Gilmore and Pine 2007; Carù and Cova 2007a), Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 2007), Relationship Marketing (Gummesson 1999), and Service Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2008) are the most influential of these non-modernist programmes, and they all share a discontent with "modernist" assumptions and methods. Those four programmes contributed to the renovation of marketing research and practice over recent decades and became dominant. As we shall see, their emergence during the postmodernist era has left clear birthmarks on all of them, in terms of assumptions, concepts, and intellectual bias. We shall discuss them here.

If realist philosophers never abandoned the philosophical battlefield, even in the heydays of post-structuralism and neo-pragmatism, the twenty-first century has witnessed a clear resurgence of openly realist positions and research programmes (Searle 1995, 2010; Ferraris 2001, 2012; Harman 2002; Meillassoux 2006; DeLanda 2006; Brassier 2007; Garcia 2010; Bryant 2011, Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman 2011a; Bogost 2012; Benoist 2011, 2017, 2018; Gabriel 2014b, 2015). The "Return of Reality" (De Caro and Ferraris 2012) and "New Realism" (Ferraris 2012, Gabriel 2014a, Benoist 2018) have marked a significant shift in recent philosophy and have partly reshaped the philosophical landscape of the past decade. No less importantly, they have questioned the long-lived dominance of postmodernist antirealism in other academic fields as well as in politics, ecology, literature, and the arts. Antirealism is still a largely prevailing attitude. However, the shift can be detected, and allegiances have begun to change.

The new and powerful wave of philosophical realism has different causes. It certainly depends upon the gradual depletion of the postmodernist movement itself, of its potential for innovation. It is also related to a genuine philosophical dissatisfaction with arguments against realism or with certain of their consequences (Searle 1995; Nagel 1997; Ferraris 2001; Benoist 2005; Meillassoux 2006; Boghossian 2006). The return of reality is also related to significant changes in sensibility and awareness, linked to political and ecological factors. Most significantly, the postmodernist expectation that an era of post-truth and post-reality would contribute to a cultural emancipation from authoritarian ideologies and consolidate the perspectives of liberal democracy had to come to terms with the resurgence of historical negationism, the proliferation of conspiracy theories, the disintegration of public opinion, and the unprecedented manipulation of democratic processes through micro-targeted fake news (Latour 2004; Ferraris 2012). Finally, realism has gained traction also thanks to the growing global awareness of—and concern about—unprecedented ecological and environmental challenges, threatening future generations and, indeed, life itself on the planet. Contemporary ecological consciousness appears more and more dissatisfied with the postmodernist

antirealist philosophical horizon, with its insistence upon the conceptual, linguistic, and institutional relativity of socially and individually attested phenomena (Latour 2004, 2012; Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman 2011b), and it has grown averse to the use of antirealist arguments against the reality of climate change.

Far from revealing itself as an uncompromising ally of liberal democracy, antirealism has turned out to be surprisingly susceptible also to a cynical, demagogic, and negationist political agenda. Can—and should—contemporary marketing be unaffected by all these changes? Our answer is that these changes are too significant to be ignored, and that marketing ought to embrace them, instead of trying to resist them.

2   Conflicting Paradigms and Philosophical Prophecies

As should have begun to emerge from the opening remarks, this book aims to be constructive but nonconformist, arguing against some widespread views, both in and about marketing theory. It challenges certain common assumptions regarding marketing methods and models and their relation to influential trends in contemporary philosophy. In doing so, this book attempts to also tell a somewhat different tale from the one many may be used to, about contemporary philosophy, its purportedly unquestionable tenets, and its most promising trends.

We argue in favour of a cluster of philosophical programmes and approaches revolving around a core attitude called 'New Realism', to distinguish it from previous versions or formulations of similar ideas. Neither antirealism nor realism are schools or orthodoxies of any sort: proposals belonging to either side may diverge from each other with respect to specific issues or topics. Nevertheless, those expressions capture significant patterns in recent philosophical debates and cut them up in fruitful ways.

Philosophers sometimes enjoy producing assessments of what contemporary philosophical scholarship, or its allegedly most sophisticated representatives, have ruled out once and for all as untenable or have incontrovertibly proved or recognised as indisputable. Such assessments typically have the unpleasant side effects of oversimplifying debates, of underestimating theoretical alternatives, and perhaps of censoring non-conventional approaches by polarising perspectives between imaginary avant-garde and more traditional positions. Such assessments[1] rarely stand the test of time, but they are sometimes taken at face value by scholars from other fields, who mistake them for unbiased reports about accepted theoretical paradigms and do not realise that they are at best thought-provoking manifestos. Such uncritical acceptance typically occurs when the relevant philosophical position enjoys intellectual acclaim, but sometimes it lingers on long after it has lost its early supporters.

We feel that something like that has happened to the well-known claim that contemporary philosophy has once and for all emancipated itself from the idea that reference to reality ought to play a theoretically crucial role: an idea deemed by some of its critics (and they were legion) as archaic, obsolete, theoretically unsophisticated, epistemologically redundant, or even ideologically compromised. We believe that scholars in the social sciences, and more specifically in marketing studies, have not been immune to such a tendency and have overestimated the theoretical strength and intellectual credit of the claim that reference to reality plays no significant role. Indeed, they may even have mistaken a provoking intellectual *vogue* for something like an enduring philosophical standard. We, therefore, believe it is time to draw the attention of marketing researchers and practitioners to alternative and viable philosophical voices.

3   The Turning of the Tide

We are prepared to admit that at least part of the reason why reference to reality was not at the forefront of debates in philosophy and the social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century is that a large share of the best intellectual energies of that time was spent investigating the perspectives of the opposite thesis: the thesis that reality has no significant role to play in a philosophical account of meaning, thought, knowledge, and action and that consciousness, experience, language, or interpretation have much more to say about them. However, the philosophical tide is now starting to turn again. Part of this book is about the new, strong, and promising tendencies in town. *Nota bene*: not the only legitimate ones, but surely solid, credible, and fruitful ones.

Without falling prey to a temptation to make a final assessment, we believe it is appropriate to draw our readers' attention to the gradual loss of philosophical credit of the claim that reference to reality has no crucial role to play in philosophical or theoretically sophisticated accounts. In fact, that claim never vanquished its opponents from the philosophical battlefield: some authors (Searle 1983, 1995; Millikan 1984; Devitt [1984] 1991) have always argued against it. For at least the last twenty years that claim has even lost many of its original supporters (Ferraris 2012), and philosophers who occupy alternative positions have been developing sophisticated theoretical arguments, categories, and research programmes which, we believe, can provide inspiration to marketing scholars.

Denying any relevance to reality has never been the only available option, and it may no longer be the most innovative. There is something more that will be pointed out in what follows: reference to reality, in philosophy, and elsewhere, enables us to elaborate interesting and effective concepts that would otherwise be unavailable, and to find alternative solutions to contemporary marketing problems, solutions that would

otherwise be precluded. Indeed, part of the allure of new theoretical proposals has always been their ability to let new phenomena appear, or to highlight new kinds of relations amongst already known phenomena. In reviewing the credentials of philosophical positions, vindicating the significance of reference to reality, it will be our concern to make out whether such reference enables us to envisage new types of phenomena or new types of hitherto ignored relations amongst them.

4   The Cultural Credit of Reference to Reality

One of the objections against the rehabilitation of reality might be that, even if philosophy or some other discipline may argue for the inconsistency of theories that deny the relevance of reality, the force of such arguments is confined to epistemological debates: the point is not whether it is epistemologically unacceptable to disregard reference to reality—which may be all good and well—but rather whether contemporary society has bidden farewell to reality and is therefore now interested in different kinds of approaches, regardless of their putative epistemological credentials.

If that were the case, then perhaps philosophical arguments and categories could be of little help to marketing theory and practice, which may be taken to focus on the ways in which beliefs are formed and justified, desires are formulated and expressed, and behavioural patterns emerge, rather than on the ways in which they are supposed to be or would be, if contemporary society were more epistemologically demanding than it is. If society has turned its back on reality, as some have been arguing (Rorty 1989; Vattimo 1989), then it might be the task of marketing scholars and practitioners to adapt to it, and to adopt all theoretical means they see fit to analyse it and interact with it as effectively as possible (Firat and Venkatesh 1993; Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995; Firat and Dholakia 2006). Although we believe that such a thesis would be an oversimplification, we shall address that issue, too, by pointing out counterexamples to such an interpretation of contemporary society.

We appreciate the contribution of philosophers, social scientists, and media theorists, who have underlined how radically communication technologies have changed the world over the past hundred years or so (Floridi 2014). However, we are very sceptical about the thesis that contemporary society has turned its back on reality. Indeed, we are glad to acknowledge the extraordinary contribution to philosophy and the social sciences by scholars who have investigated the role of spectacles, virtual worlds, and simulacra in contemporary societies (Baudrillard 1981, 1991). Nevertheless, we insist that the door should not be shut to reality and its role, and that reference to it still does play a role, and a growing one, in contemporary life. We leave it up to others to prophesy about what society will be like in, say, fifty years. What we, together with other prominent scholars, insist upon is that, no matter how mediated, constructed, virtual,

hyper-real, or however distant from more intuitive and traditional forms of reference to reality our lives become, such a reference will always play a crucial and inescapable role in human thought and behaviour.

5 Fruitfully Philosophical

This book is about the theoretical correctness of considering reference to reality as an important element of human experience and thought and about the fruitfulness, for marketing, of taking such a reference into account. The viability of the approach we propose will also be illustrated by pointing out a number of alternative or innovative philosophical categories, which cluster around reference to reality and which are effective notions for marketing research and practice. Such categories will be put to the test and measured against prominent competing theoretical tools and models with respect to selected topics in marketing research, such as value, authenticity, identity, participation, co-creation, relationship, experience, and perception. Our discussion will include the arts as well, because they may be (and perhaps have been) considered by some as the domains with the feeblest or least essential reference to reality and therefore as the very lion's den for perspectives such as the ones we are recommending.[2]

6 Credible Claims

Marketing scholars and practitioners may feel that reference to reality plays little or even no role in their discipline (Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995). In fact, it is sometimes claimed that marketing is about the sizzle, not the steak, and even less about the cow. That attitude, which associates marketing with an exclusive focus on appearances and persuasion, can be found amongst marketing specialists as well as amongst people with no professional interest in marketing or management proper. Sometimes, it even constitutes a reason to distrust marketing as a discipline or even to doubt its ethical acceptability.

Philosophers themselves at times fall prey to the linguistic inaccuracy of using the expression 'marketing' as just another word for a deliberate mis-portrayal of a situation aimed at manipulating someone to purchase something against their best interest (Vattimo 2012b). Moreover, and just as seriously, marketing specialists may feel conflicted about philosophers now drawing their attention to the relevance of reality after decades of apparently unanimous rejection of the value of such reference, as philosophically or epistemologically naïve, regressive, or even ideologically compromised (Rorty 1989; Vattimo 2012a).

Postmodernist philosophy considered itself as something of a new *koine* (Vattimo 1987). However, certain of its promoters may have retracted their earlier, more radical versions of antirealism (Ferraris 2012, 79–83, 106–111).

7   Marketing as a Farewell to Reality?

We understand the reasons for such possible incredulity on the side of many marketing researchers. However, we believe we can show that such incredulity rests upon a misrepresentation of the relevant philosophical debates, rather than upon conclusive theoretical grounds. In particular, we are aware of the powerful claim, famously made more than two decades ago by prominent scholars (Firat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh 1995, 40) that marketing particularly thrives in societies in which culture has bidden farewell to the very "modernist idea that human social experience has fundamental 'real' bases" (notice the very bracketing of the expression 'real'), and even that, "from its very inception", marketing was a "precursor" to such a purported farewell from all contemporary culture to reality, and thus "to the larger society to come" (43): that marketing is "at the forefront" of a "transition" to an age in which reference to reality would play almost no role any more, or that it even "represents the essence" of such a transition that such a reality-free age to come would be "essentially a marketing age" (48).

Challenging the thesis that marketing as such is indissoluble from a farewell to reality and from an exclusive focus on appearances is amongst the theoretical aims of our work. However, our approach will not be meta-theoretical: we shall not mainly insist upon the age-old point, originally made by Plato (1997, *Timaeus*, 171a-b) and reformulated countless times, perhaps most prominently by Husserl (1900–1), that weakening the relation between theory, truth, and reality is fundamentally self-refuting and therefore irredeemably misguided. We shall not primarily insist that denying the relevance of reference to reality for a certain theory, including marketing theory, would be at odds with a formal requirement of theories in general, that is, their implicit or explicit claim to represent reality accurately. We believe that such arguments are, indeed, as strong as they intuitively sound;[3] however, they do not directly impact on the topic of this book. Our main point is not that marketing theory, as a type of theory, cannot deny the significance of reference to reality without becoming epistemologically inconsistent; it is rather that marketing has no good reason for denying the significance of reality in the first place and that such a denial is unjustified and counterproductive.

8   Philosophical Puzzlement

We are convinced that the philosophical tide has begun to turn. That is not the whole point, though: unlike a number of other publications in the philosophy of marketing with sympathy for truth and reality (e.g. Hunt 1993, 2003), and whose primary concern is a defence of the academic honourability of such notions, our main objective is the illustration of contexts in which a renewed awareness of the centrality of reference to

reality for human thought and behaviour could make a difference to the quality and fruitfulness of marketing field research. Our main objective is not to defend realism as a preconceived philosophical position, but rather to propose a theoretical alternative to a largely dominant paradigm in marketing research by indicating topics in which it would outdo its philosophical competitors.

9   Philosophy and Marketing

Philosophy can play different roles with respect to research in the social sciences. It can be a source of inspiration, a challenge to dominant assumptions and paradigms, an exploration of theoretical alternatives to mainstream models, a forge of ever-new conceptual toolboxes, and a demand for increased epistemic rigour. But philosophy can also become a repository of trite slogans, a factory of theoretical orthodoxies, or a catalogue of academic fashions. In what follows, we undertake to argue philosophically in favour of the following opportunities:

- exposing marketing and management research to the refreshing effect of reference to reality, after decades of antirealist attitude;
- providing a conceptual alternative for marketing researchers, after a long period dominated by a theoretical framework which has lost traction;
- challenging the credentials of a philosophical stance that is still largely accepted in the social sciences, although it has lost part of its intellectual strength;
- exploring the philosophical landscape in search of opportunities for marketing and management thought and in particular for new categories, reference points, research paradigms, and conceptual frameworks.

It is inevitable that dominant philosophical paradigms run out of innovative potential, perhaps even that their main theses become mere academic *mantras*. It is then all the more important to evaluate the state of a given philosophical perspective and to search for promising alternatives. This is what this book is about: an assessment of the declining trajectory of philosophical antirealism and an appraisal of the main opportunities introduced by the renewed attention on the significance of reference to reality that we have been witnessing over recent years.[4]

Leading marketing researchers have often engaged in epistemological debates, for example, regarding the foundations, purposes, and methods of their disciplines. Field research has often been inspired or influenced by classic or fashionable philosophical perspectives and even slogans, frequently adopting or adapting some of their categories, models, and strategies (Jones and Tadajewski 2018; Tadajewski, O'Shaughnessy, and

Hyman 2013, Vol. 2). Philosophy can be an influential hub for conceptual and linguistic innovations, and as such it can both promote genuine theoretical progress and launch short-lived academic fashions. For non-philosophers it may be even more difficult than for professional philosophers to estimate whether a certain philosophical position will stand the test of time or soon be archived as a passing fashion, but we would like our readers to keep their minds open for theoretical alternatives and to evaluate philosophical programmes also on the basis of their capacity to inspire and orient research.

The book consists of a first *pars destruens* and a second *pars construens*.

The *pars destruens* is dedicated to antirealism, both in philosophy and in marketing. In particular, Chapter 1 illustrates the main theses of antirealism in different respects; Chapter 2 is dedicated to the arguments and cultural reasons in favour of antirealism; Chapter 3 delves into the influence of antirealism upon leading marketing approaches and into the shortcomings suffered by those approaches deriving from that influence.

The second, longer, part of the book is its *pars construens*. In particular, Chapter 4 illustrates the main arguments against antirealism and in favour of a realist approach. Chapter 5 introduces eight case studies from different business contexts, in which the limits of an antirealist approach and the fruitfulness of a realist one are indicated *in concreto*. Readers who are particularly impatient to find out what conceptual instruments can derive from the adoption of a realist perspective, and do not want to wrestle their way through fastidious philosophical arguments first, may jump to the case studies at the end of Part 2; they do not presuppose the reading of the previous chapters, although the relevance of those proposals and their mutual consistency would be much better appreciated against the background of the previous chapters.

Notes

1. Cf. Dummett (1975), Tugendhat (1975), and, in a more open and problematic form, in Vattimo (1987).
2. The arts and aesthetic experience occupy a special position in contemporary debates, at the crossroads between philosophy and the social sciences. Cf. already Bubner (1989, 150); Featherstone (1991); Honneth (1994); and Welsch (1993).
3 "The worst objection that can be made to a theory . . ., is that it goes against the self-evident conditions for the possibility of a theory in general. To set up a theory whose content is explicitly or implicitly at variance with the propositions on which the sense and the claim to validity of all theory rests, is not merely wrong, but basically mistaken" (Husserl 1900–1, Ch. 7, § 32). Similar points are made in Nagel (1997, 15 *et passim*) and in Boghossian (2006, 53–54).
4. A sign of the times was Latour (2004). Reality has gained centre stage in different philosophical traditions. Cf. Benoist (2011, 2017); Gabriel (2014a); DeLanda and Harman (2017).

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