

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:00 Today's episode of Hidden Forces is made possible by listeners like you. For more information about this week's episode or for easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io, and subscribe to our free email list. If you listen to the show on your Apple podcast app, remember, you can give us a review. Each review helps more people find the show and join our amazing community. And with that, please enjoy this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:48 What's up everybody? My guest today is Pauline Brown. Pauline has over 30 years' experience acquiring, building and leading some of the world's most influential luxury brands. She's perhaps best known for having served as chairman of North America for LVMH, the world's leading luxury goods company. But she's also taught a course at Harvard on The Business of Aesthetics, currently hosts her own show on SiriusXM titled, "Tastemakers with Pauline Brown", and is out with her first book titled, "Aesthetic Intelligence: How to Boost It and Use It in Business and Beyond".

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:31 This book was so much better than I ever imagined it would be. And I say that as someone who has always had unappreciation for aesthetics but who was often conflated that with a distrust of fashion of what I considered to be its inherent superficialities, fleeting distinctions and labored rationalizations. I couldn't escape the sense that being fashionable made caring about something that was utterly meaningless. Reading Pauline's book, I've come to view the business of aesthetics as more than just a superficial necessity of modern life.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:12 The way that Pauline writes about the allure she felt for the tubular and rich chocolate brown color of the Vidal Sassoon bottles of her early adolescence or the affection she feels today for her classic, square-shaped, quilted, calfskin leather, blush tone lady Dior handbag with its gold tone accents, gave me an entirely new appreciation for the artistry, pleasure and depth that can be found in the multisensorial encompassment that is the aesthetic experience from which the business of fashion and beauty draws its inspirations and accentuates its enticements.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:55 If there is one message that I've taken away from Pauline's book and from our conversation today, it is this, aesthetics matter, and each of us has the potential to boost his or her own aesthetic intelligence through a process of attunement, interpretation, expression and curation. To quote Pauline, when it comes to aesthetics, editorial command is all important. As Coco Chanel said, "Elegance is refusal." And with those words, I bring you my

conversation with Pauline brown. Pauline Brown, welcome to Hidden Forces.

- Pauline Brown:** 00:03:39 Thank you for having me.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:41 It is wonderful having you in studio. I was telling you how much I enjoyed your book.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:03:46 I appreciate the fact that you read it, and you clearly, from your notes, read it cover to cover. That's why I'm especially appreciative.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:53 We're famous for our notes here. So, as you can see, I have 12 pages of a rundown here of material to go off of. But before we go down that path, maybe you can tell our listeners, again, I read the book but what is the book about? The book is called Aesthetic Intelligence. What is this about?
- Pauline Brown:** 00:04:10 So, I have few agendas in writing it. First of all, I had spent close to three decades in industries that wouldn't exist without very high aesthetic content, fashion, cosmetics, luxury goods. There's no reason to buy any of them for utility, right? So, it was clear to me in those industries, and they're big industries, really big, multibillion dollars in each case, in every subsector within, but it was clear to me that there was something going on in the industry that was assumed to be required there. And yet, they're all these other industries that with rare exception, never thought that aesthetics matter for them.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:04:48 And then, every couple of decades, some entrepreneur or industry leader would come around and really transform that industry by bringing in some, what I call, aesthetic content. And I think the most prominent example would be Steve Jobs, who, for the first time in history said, "Computers are not just there for processing power. They're not just there for speed and efficiency," but they actually are part of a consumer and a user's identity, and why can't it look good wherever it's sitting in a room?
- Pauline Brown:** 00:05:17 And in fact, he had that famous line that, "The back of my Apple computers looks better than the front of I think it was HPs."
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:24 I didn't know that line.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:05:25 Or about Dell's.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:26 That's great.

Pauline Brown: 00:05:26 And you could use it on any competitors.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:05:27 What an insult.

Pauline Brown: 00:05:29 And then, I take that forward to more recently like a Dyson. Who would have thunk that vacuum cleaners are anything other than dust accumulators and dust collectors? And the goal in Dyson's design was something that actually didn't have to be stowed away in a closet. And now, he's taken that particular design principle and engineering a prowess into other categories like air purifiers and hair dryers, and so forth.

Pauline Brown: 00:05:53 So, I started to see that some of the capabilities that always existed in fashion and luxury goods were making their way into other industries but very slowly. And I combine that with the fact that we're living an age where the traditional factors for success, which were built on efficiencies and scale, and global expansion, that no longer works. That's just to raise to the bottom, and we just have taken all of that as pretty much as far as we humans can. And so, I called this aesthetic competency.

Pauline Brown: 00:06:25 It actually starts as a class at Harvard called The Business of Aesthetics, which then led to the book, and I decided it wasn't enough to talk about the business of aesthetics, which is how aesthetics create value, but how do people bring aesthetics into companies? And that is what I called aesthetic intelligence, and that is what the book is about.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:06:41 Your class sounds amazing. The students, it's not the first time I've heard you talk about it. The student body must also be very interesting.

Pauline Brown: 00:06:47 I was surprised. So, when I was first given this platform to teach at Harvard, I assumed that my students would comprise mostly of aspiring marketers, maybe brand managers, people who wanted to go into consumer industries, and there were a good number of those types. But in every section I taught, I at least had one medical doctor, because I allow a certain number of cross matriculants. I had some people had either come from or were going back to work for Google. I had hedge fund investors.

Pauline Brown: 00:07:17 Now, what that said to me is that there was something in the idea, whether or not I execute it is another story, but there was something in the idea of the business of aesthetics that hit a button or hit a chord with all these different people in businesses that wouldn't have been obvious that they needed this or that it would benefit them.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:35 Fascinating. I got that feeling also that the interdisciplinary application of what you talk about in the book, I got that sense. Do you feel that working now at Harvard, being in the role of a professor effectively and also having your own radio program, that that gives you an opportunity to maybe reflect on the work that you've done after so many decades in the business, and to begin to assimilate some of that and process it in the way that you wouldn't otherwise?

Pauline Brown: 00:08:04 Well, yes and no. So, first of all, I stopped teaching after two years at Harvard in part because teaching is a very time-intensive activity. And what it allowed me, which is to your point, is it gave me the independence of thought that I never had as a corporate person. As a corporate person, I really was very captive to what my business card said and what the talking points of the company or the brand were. As a professor, I would say two guiding principles as to what I would teach and talk about.

Pauline Brown: 00:08:31 And one is what I thought the truth was and the second is what my opinion on that set. And so, I had a level of freedom that I hadn't known in any of my business jobs. The reason I say yes and no, and this was a frustration of mine in the classroom, but I put a lot of effort into basically illuminating or aspiring to illuminate or to educate as many as a hundred students, and that was a very full section. And I felt like, how can I take what I think is a big idea, what I hope is a big idea and reach a lot more people?

Pauline Brown: 00:08:59 And for that, the book really became my vehicle.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:09:03 So, when did you start the radio program?

Pauline Brown: 00:09:05 Radio program happened in parallel and with absolute no connection to the course. So, as I have said a moment ago, for the first time in my career, I didn't have to ask anyone for permission other than maybe my then 13-year-old daughter. I didn't have a boss. So, when SiriusXM had come to me initially because they wanted most or more creative angle in their business station, I asked my real boss, which was me, would I like to do this? Do I have enough to say? Would it be fun?

Pauline Brown: 00:09:32 And the answer to all three questions was yes. And so, that happened about three years ago. After about a year of doing a show on the business channel, which is called Trendsetters, my show was called Trendsetters, I just said that I liked everything about the experience except talking about business. I was actually very interested to talk to creative people about creative

process, about ideas, about lifestyle. And so, lo and behold, they moved me to the Stars entertainment channel.

- Pauline Brown:** 00:09:56 And we rebranded it Tastemakers, and I've been on for about two and a half years now.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:10:00 So, I heard a podcast by Tastemakers. You hosted a panel of three women. One of them was a very funny Russian aesthetician.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:10:08 Yeah, the skin care. Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:10:09 Yeah. What a funny woman.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:10:11 Yeah. She's a good friend. Yeah, Karina Freedman.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:10:13 She's so funny.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:10:14 She is so funny.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:10:14 I know many women like that. I feel like you're going to blow up with this book.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:10:18 Thank you.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:10:19 Yeah. So, we're recording this before the book has come out, so we don't know yet, but that's my feeling. And I want to say one more comment on one more thing, and then maybe we can go to the beginning of the book and start to drill into some of the things you discussed. You mentioned Steve Jobs. Steve Jobs has of course that great story of how he ordered the calligraphy course at Stanford. And then, if he hadn't ordered that course, he wouldn't have learned about Sanskrit, and the Mac would not have the beautiful typography, he said.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:10:45 I think that's a myth, but okay. I know he said it. I know he said it.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:10:47 Oh, that's not true?
- Pauline Brown:** 00:10:49 I think it's true that he ordered the course, and I think it's true that it had an impression on him. I think he has made much of a very marginal experience.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:10:59 That's interesting. Well, he did do that. In fact, he did that a lot. So, the place that I wanted to end up was actually attention to detail. I got that sense throughout the book, and I get that sense

generally speaking when I speak with people that are incredibly successful at something that they do better than anyone else. It's a maniacal focus with detail and with... if not perfection, then certainly the perfect application of oneself, even with theater.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:24 If you go to theater, every night is different. There is no perfect play or version, but you can bring your all to that performance, and I think bringing all of yourself to something. And so, that sort of stuck out to me in the book, and I'm sure we'll have an opportunity to go through it again, but I want to sort of go to the beginning. You talked about this pivotal moment for you when you were a kid. In 1976, you write, "I yearned for only three things in life, pierced ears, a puppy and a Panasonic Take'n'Tape.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:11:54 I begged my parents for all of them, though getting any one of them would have made me deliriously happy." And then, you go on and you actually... it's actually much longer. Apparently, you didn't get the puppy or the piercings until later, but you did get the Take'n'Tape. I wasn't familiar with the Take'n'Tape, but there was a whole family of these portables.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:12:14 Oh boy.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:12:14 Panasonic portables and the tagline for Panasonic in the '70s was, "Just slightly ahead of our time." Tell me-
- Pauline Brown:** 00:12:21 And you look at it now with those stubby buttons and those electric... yeah, colors.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:12:25 Even now looking at this, right? It really is beautiful.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:12:28 It's beautiful. And you know what? I had a similar sort of lightbulb moment probably five years later, six, seven years later, with my first Sony Walkman. And that taxi cab yellow covering and just the elegance, and how it sat in the hand, and the idea, but obviously the technology is exciting. Because in that case, I could listen to music without bothering other people on the go. But I think in both cases, as much of my own joy came from just the silhouettes of these products and the colors, and the way they interacted tactilely and so forth, beautifully designed devices in both cases.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:13:06 Indeed, yes. I mean, the Sony Walkman was a... you come across in the book as being unusually aware of your aesthetic environment. And reading the book, I forced myself, so to

speaking, I was consciously trying to do that last week and look at different people. And I suddenly did become aware of all the diversity of how people express themselves in the physical world.

- Pauline Brown:** 00:13:31 Yeah.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:13:32 Through fashion and through other means.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:13:34 I think people-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:13:34 Were you always that ready?
- Pauline Brown:** 00:13:35 So, the short answer is, I think I was slightly more aware in general than others. I don't think significantly more aware. I think we are all aware of a lot of things. We don't articulate what we see, and we don't necessarily look for pattern recognition or try to understand how to get ahead of it, or even ask ourselves, "Why do I have such affinity now with a Balenciaga sneaker," or whatever the thing of the moment would be?
- Pauline Brown:** 00:13:59 I think I probably asked myself and it probably goes back to my sort of German heritage and culture. The four questions, why, why, why do I like this so much? But people always ask me, "Can you actually teach aesthetic intelligence which is another word for taste? Can you actually teach taste?" And I say, "Absolutely. I mean, you don't teach a child to enjoy ice cream." There are just certain things we enjoy, certain things we enjoy a lot, and certain things we really don't like as humans.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:14:29 In the history of humans, I don't think anyone has ever said, "I'd like to listen to another round of that jackhammer." I mean, it just doesn't sound good to the human brain, which doesn't mean that there's one taste in sound. There are people who love classical music. There are people who love folk music. There are...similarity in taste, there are people who had a sweet tooth. There are people who love salty, crunchy things. But the fact that we love sensations is a human thing.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:14:55 What we do with it and how we continue to fight the elements, because the world is constantly trying to numb our senses. It's trying to tell us to eat fruits because they're good for you, not because they taste good. It's trying to tell us to withstand certain conditions in a workspace, whether it's fluorescent lightings, because that's what we have been conditioned to

think as a good or standardly designed office space. It is corrosive.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:20 That reminds me of a line from a book by Norman Mailer that I read years ago. It was a nonfiction book. I can't remember the name of it, but he was describing how air travel had become dreadful. And he talked about it as part of this larger move towards plastics.

Pauline Brown: 00:15:37 Interesting.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:15:38 And he talked about the overhead bin and everything else, and how things were just made out of wood or metal. So, there is this thing that comes across again in the book, and perhaps I misspoke when I talked about people's fashion or exterior appearance. Because actually, there's a sense... I mean, you talked about the multisensorial experience in the book. There's a sense in which part of what we're talking about here is awakening one senses, right?

Pauline Brown: 00:16:00 Mm-hmm.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:01 So, how much of it is about awakening, and also how much of it is about authenticity about authentically being in touch with what you find pleasurable?

Pauline Brown: 00:16:10 Mm-hmm. So, first of all, I just have to comment on a Norman Mailer quote. I always say that the two most aesthetically disturbing experiences in modern society are going through airports and hospitals.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:22 Hospitals.

Pauline Brown: 00:16:24 Because in both cases, they are there to process people who are dealing with health issues or administrative issues, or in the case of airports, obviously travel and mobility. They're in both cases so incredibly dehumanizing. And someone could say critically, "Well, isn't the most important thing when it comes to an airport that there's security checks?" Yeah, "Or isn't the most important thing when you're being wheeled into a hospital that you're being properly cared for whatever the reason you're there for?"

Pauline Brown: 00:16:56 Of course. But as we've seen in all other industries, somebody is going to make a decision of what color to paint the wall. It isn't like there's no paint on the wall, and it isn't like there isn't any tile on the floor. So, maybe if that somebody, who was

responsible for that decision, took another three seconds and gave a thought to, how does that actually make people feel to stand on that floor or to look from hours in a day against that wall? There's a lot of choices, this is not about investment.

Pauline Brown: 00:17:23 It's really about mindfulness. So, to go back to your question about, is this about awakening? I always say that in the process of developing your aesthetic intelligence, there are four distinct steps. And the very first step and it's so fundamental, is exactly that. It's awakening or what I called in the book, attunement. You won't be able to do anything in terms of starting to curate your own space if you don't have a strong sense of what space you're in right now. And I always say that there's the visible elements or the palpable elements of a space.

Pauline Brown: 00:17:55 And then, there are other elements that I refer to as invisible design. So, for example, when you think of your favorite restaurant, and if I asked you, "Well, what do you like about the restaurant?" Nine out of 10 people would say, "Well, I love the food." Of course, you love the food. You're not going to love the restaurant if you don't love the food in most cases. And then I'd say, "Well, what else do you like?" because you could have picked any restaurant. And you might say, "Well, I really like the design of the space."

Pauline Brown: 00:18:18 Okay, and maybe the design would be the selection of chairs and paneling, and so forth. But very few people will say things like, "You know what? The lighting, it makes me and my partner looks so good, or the acoustics is such that I can hear the music, but I can also hear the conversation." That's invisible design. It has an enormous impact on how you feel about the experience, but we don't identify it in the time. And if you're attuned, you start to identify those cues.

Pauline Brown: 00:18:44 So, that is the first step, attunement. Of course, it doesn't stop with attunement, because you can't... when you think of the people who are the most tasteful that we all know, it's not just because they're aware. It's because they take that awareness and they interpret it, and they edit it. And they express it in ways that get very exciting and original, and authentic.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:04 So, a few points about hospitals. I completely agree in fact that would take it much further, because I think in hospitals, the health of impact of the anxiety of the isolation of the antiseptic, sterile environment, I think is you said dehumanizing, and it's a place where I think we need to feel as human as possible.

Pauline Brown: 00:19:23 Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:23 Because we're, in some cases, confronting very serious mortal issues.

Pauline Brown: 00:19:28 Mm-hmm.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:28 Richard Branson, an interesting example of someone who transformed air travel with Virgin, right? And I think also in a way that what's interesting about Branson to me is that was he... maybe he wasn't, the first to deploy in-flight WIFI?

Pauline Brown: 00:19:43 He may have been actually. I know he was early and I know he was loud about it. I know he also was early and loud about massages on the flights. I don't know how well that stuck though, but it was a good idea.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:19:53 Yeah. Well, it's interesting. We actually also did side note for our listeners. We did this great episode with Safi Bahcall. It was on phase transitions, but we covered Pan Am, the jet age and "jet set." And the transformation that happened during the deregulation, but it's interesting point to note just because it was so glamorous and it was such a different experience back then flying versus what it is today.

Pauline Brown: 00:20:18 And by the way, if you want to relive any of that, I highly recommend going to the TWA Bar and Hotel at JFK.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:25 Oh really?

Pauline Brown: 00:20:25 Are you familiar with this?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:26 No, when did they open that up?

Pauline Brown: 00:20:26 So, their original... It opened up earlier this summer. They took the terminal that was a landmark building, an extraordinary work of design that had been defunct for decades but had been just sitting there, and they reopened it as a hotel right at JFK. Everything is very retro, very kitschy.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:42 Wow.

Pauline Brown: 00:20:42 It's really well-done and it's a lot of fun.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:45 That's very cool. So, what my point about Richard Branson, the WIFI was I believe, Branson had said that, "It's not just about how long the flight is. It's about how you perceived the flight. And also, what can you do when you're on the flight. So, if you have a lot of work to do but you have access to WIFI and the

flight takes and say an extra hour, let's say it takes six hours instead of five hours versus a flight where you're on five hours but you have no WIFI, maybe you'd prefer to be on a six-hour flight with WIFI." I thought that was interesting just sort of the interdimensionality of that.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:21:13 Another point that came when you were talking had to do with design about the invisible design. I read a book years ago called *The Design of Everyday Things*. And one of the things that I remember from the book among many, was door handles, and how many times that there might be a handle on the door that you're only supposed to push, right? Anyway, that came into my mind. So, you have to bring it back to the book. You have this other great scene as you were in Dartmouth in your 20s.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:21:40 We mentioned that. There's another great line of the book where you talked about having been in your head in your early 20s and that you had lost your waist stylistically? Talk to me a little bit about that. How did that transformation happen from when you left college where you were in this northeast college town where you talked about eschewing the defeminized look of your female classmates with their duck boots? And I have a picture-
- Pauline Brown:** 00:22:05 It doesn't get more unisex than that.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:05 I have a picture here of a girl wearing this green color you'd mention. It was very much like-
- Pauline Brown:** 00:22:12 Timberlands. Uh-huh.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:22:13 Exactly. So, how did you go from that to getting into the fashion industry? Because you worked in so many places, I wasn't really able to follow that transition.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:22:20 Okay. Well, let me start by saying there were two things that happened in my life over the course of let's call it a 10-year period that led to what I described as sort of a numbing of my aesthetic senses. One of those two trend line is very, very common. So, one is that I was a serious student, and like all people who immerse their self in their studies, you really praised and reinforced, and encouraged to develop your intellectual capacity. You don't get a whole lot of credit for showcasing other capacities in a classroom setting.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:22:56 And I think it is by the way one of the few problems with standard American education. American education relative to

other countries is seen as posture and creative thinking. But I would say for the most part, it is still very geared toward test taking. And as somebody who's competitive and someone who took my schoolwork very seriously, I just feel like I spent so many hours sitting in my head, and to be aesthetic is not to be an artist, right? So, oftentimes, people think-

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:22 How can you explain... yeah. Explain that.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:23:23 So, to be an artist is to be a maker. Whether you're making a painting, you're creating something. Steve Jobs was not an artist. He may have said he took this calligraphy class as we talked about, but he never produced anything. He did nothing with his hands. What he did was have an imagination of what good looked and felt like to him.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:44 Well, he would say he had taste. He would say.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:23:46 He had taste, and I would say there's probably a more powerful word. Maybe the expression is aesthetic intelligence, but he had... it wasn't just that he had taste because it was his taste. And by the way, his taste is not my taste. It is not Victorian taste, but it was so clear and so crisp, and so well-executed. And what he had was an ability to mobilize thousands of people, some of whom were artists or working at his art departments and creative units, to execute on his vision.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:24:12 So, first things first. There's a difference between being a creative or a maker, or an artist, or an artisan, and being someone with high aesthetic intelligence. So, as somebody who clearly wasn't going to down in art path, I didn't have really an opportunity or mentorship, or encouragement to explore this other side. If I were, it would just be because I was doing it because I wanted my bedroom to look pretty, or I wanted to look adequately well in an outfit.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:24:38 But again, there was no use of training of that portion of my brain. Point number one. Point number two, which maybe more particular to my story than others, is I also went through such radically different style shifts or environments that shape style. So, people asked me at times, so where do you think people's individual taste come from since I referenced that there's a lot of different types of taste? There's bad taste but within the range-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:04 And you have a great point in the book where you actually say there's certainly are something or something along those lines. I don't have it on the rundown but-

Pauline Brown: 00:25:10 Right, I mean, there is bad taste.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:11 Yeah. That-

Pauline Brown: 00:25:12 And sometimes I even find it... and bad taste can be amusing and enjoyable too, but let's come back to that. But within in the range of what we would call good taste, there are so many different styles.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:21 Sure.

Pauline Brown: 00:25:21 And I've asked myself, "So why is this particular set of influences, what shaped this person's taste, and another very different shape, another person's taste?" And I sort of say some of it's a factor of the age in which you live. If I was born in the 1800s, same person, I'd have a very different outlook. Some of it is geography. So, as a New Yorker versus someone living in Tokyo, I have a very different set of influences. Some of it is personal and family. In my own family history, which I talked about in the book and how that shaped, what felt good and right to me.

Pauline Brown: 00:25:52 So, to get back to this idea, I had over the course of a 10-year period or so very different influences that conflicted each other. So, I came from ... I was a first generation American. I came from a very European home, a lot of sort of Victorian era goods and knickknacks, and sort of historical relics. Then, moved to Long Island. I was in a very materialistic world, very fashion-forward, very loud, fashion-wise and otherwise. And then, I'm up in the sort of the ultimate preppy enclave of Dartmouth.

Pauline Brown: 00:26:26 And it was a very different set of what felt good to the norm of those populations. And I don't think I was strong enough to go through that sort of serious, of different experiences, to know what feels good to me. And so, I come out of that, and it took a period of time, and it doesn't happen quickly to sort of get back into my body and my senses.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:26:47 So, you're saying in some sense you were exposed to a variety of aesthetic environments?

Pauline Brown: 00:26:52 I think the combination that I wasn't attuned. So, I was in my head, and the influences around me that I otherwise would

have probably mimic, which is what people do who don't necessarily have a strong internal compass, we're all conflicting. What felt good to the community up in New England was markedly different than what felt good to sort of my more ethnic progressive New York area friends and family.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:27:20 So, did you not... Because there's a point in the book where you talk about transition from Bain & Company, the private equity firm, to the Estee Lauder Companies. So, did you begin in finance and was that the transition that you made into-

Pauline Brown: 00:27:36 Right. A well-kept secret, which I'll share with you, so I guess it won't be a secret anymore is, so I've always enjoyed color. And one thing that I used to do is just a personal passion as a young teen, is I would read the girls in the fashion magazines, the Seventeen and Teen, and probably if I really wanted to be aspirational, I'd look at Vogue. And I would study particularly, because I wasn't really into fashion, but I'd really study the makeup, in how the market makeup artist, and how... what products they were using and what colors they were using, and how they were, in my mind, transforming or potentially transforming faces.

Pauline Brown: 00:28:10 And I used to practice on my sister and on my girlfriends. And I was sort of this closet makeup artist, not trained, but it never left me to the point where I actually have done entire wedding parties, gravis, because I still... I really enjoy doing people's makeup.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:25 What do you enjoy about that?

Pauline Brown: 00:28:26 I enjoy the transformation. I enjoy the mixing of colors. I enjoy even just a sensorial application of the brushes and the ointments, and everything about it, I enjoy. I enjoy the intimacy of just sitting very closely and seeing a face in proximity that we normally don't. But most of all, I enjoy the transformation. So, the reason I'm bringing this up is I didn't know when I was leaving Bain, what I wanted to do. I knew I didn't want to be, and I was on a strategy consulting site of business. I knew I wanted to get into a product company. I knew that I had... I just felt more connected to product than I did to service.

Pauline Brown: 00:29:04 It was this instinctive response, and I knew that certain types of products spoke to me. See, my thinking wasn't much more sophisticated than that. And so, among the products that spoke to me, and I remember looking at music and entertainment, was makeup. And so, I got from Bain to Estee Lauder in part because I had a good strategy background and they wanted a

strategy person. But underlying all that was actually an excitement to be in the sector, even though I knew nothing about makeup other than how to put it on a face.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:36 So, you have this great scene. There are number of these like moments or scenes, or quotes on the book that stuck out to me. I like to collect quotes. And I guess the CEO at the time was Langhammer?

Pauline Brown: 00:29:48 Fred Langhammer. Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:48 Fred Langhammer.

Pauline Brown: 00:29:49 Very tough German man.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:50 Tough German man. So, you have a scene where you talked about walking into his office. This was on your first day?

Pauline Brown: 00:29:56 Probably my first week or two.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:58 Then you put together a deck, or was this deck was just-

Pauline Brown: 00:30:00 I mean, at Bain, I-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:02 We've all had to deal with these decks. They're exhausting.

Pauline Brown: 00:30:04 Oh, exhausting. And I thought that was one does, because that's what one does at Bain.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:09 So, you described the deck, this is what stuck out to me the most. I liked it. You described it as, it clinically described historic performance but offered no big ideas or forward-looking solutions.

Pauline Brown: 00:30:20 Yeah. Lots of graphs.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:21 Yeah, but clinically described.

Pauline Brown: 00:30:23 Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:23 I thought that... That really stuck out to me.

Pauline Brown: 00:30:25 Well, the irony is that one of the biggest brands within Estee Lauder at the time was Clinique, which sounds just a little bit more romantic than clinic.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:32 So, I mean, I'm sure that we all look for moments or we remember things as this was the turning point, or things are little bit more messy than that. But certainly, there seems to have been sort of in some sense, an on-learning on your part?

Pauline Brown: 00:30:44 Yeah, yeah. Well, so I remember in that particular incident, Fred who was a no-nonsense guy, and he just threw down the deck. This is not someone who, as a CEO and frankly as a German, he did not want me wasting his time. And he looked at this and he knew it was a waste of time. And I'm shocked because again, my training was such that this is how you look at business. You look at it just passionately. And I think it was one of the first times, and it took me many, many years to piece these altogether, that I realized that this is not impersonal, that I have to bring as much of myself to this job as possible.

Pauline Brown: 00:31:22 And by the way, I have an advantage, that Fred Langhammer, my boss and CEO, did not have. I wear the stuff. If he could only imagine how a mascara feels on lashes. As far as I know, he didn't wear mascara. But I was treating myself as if I would just an observer as he and all the other executives were. And so, I think overtime, I learned that the more I could integrate, how I feel about things as a consumer, as a woman, as an American, and then what I think about them as well, that the more powerful I could be in my role. And it certainly played out that way.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:54 Yeah. This part really resonated with me, and it also dovetails well with a lot of what I've tried to do with Hidden Forces, particularly in the early stages when we first launched the podcast. We did an episode for example on phenomenology with Christian Madsbjerg, Episode 14 for listeners. Christian does some type of design where generally speaking, I don't know if he did some design work with Chrysler when they launched the Continental, but it had to do with the fact that... and I have a background working in fields where there's lot of quantitative analysis.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:32:27 And a phenomenon that often occurs is that people mistake the map for the territory, right? And it felt very much like that was something you are describing there, and I wonder, how common is that in your industry, and generally speaking, in what you see that people become so fixated on the process or on the model that they have used to simplify the real world, and they don't engage with the world as it is, how common is that do you find?

Pauline Brown: 00:32:56 I think it's ubiquitous. And I think the bigger companies are and the more established companies are, the more common it is, which is a real disadvantage by the way. It's why entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial setups are moving so much more quickly and gaining so much share, is that they're real. They're authentic. They're connected to what's happening in the marketplace. I think big companies are totally disconnected.

Pauline Brown: 00:33:19 And the people who work for these big companies, if they are connected when they start, they are very quickly become out of touch. I think it's a real problem.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:33:27 So, how on earth do you... because I don't think I could ever be successful at a large company. There's a very little media view out there on YouTube, but there's this one video where it's about like four minutes or so or five minutes, and he talked about an experience at maybe it was when you were at Bain but you were working with a company that was going under restructuring. And they had to let go of people, and everyone was fighting for headcount, and you realized that you didn't really... even know headcount was a power base, that you didn't really want that because you wanted to be able to focus.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:00 You wanted to be free of that so you can focus on innovating or moving the company forward. What do you think the biggest challenges are for being successful at your level? Because again, one of the positions that you held was that you were chairman of North America for LVMH.

Pauline Brown: 00:34:15 Yeah. Well, so a couple of things. I mean, first of all, I think it's really important for a person wherever they sit in an organization, to be brutally self-honest. And by that, I don't mean self-critical, but I mean honest about what you genuinely like and how you thrive, and where you get energy and what saps you of energy. So many people I know start to answer those questions with regards to what's in the best interest of their institution or where they think they'll be best rewarded, instead of who they genuinely are.

Pauline Brown: 00:34:47 And it's not calm overnight, but over the years, I've become very clear with what's important to me, with what I'm willing to trade off in order to have the things where I thrive and just put myself in settings where I can do well. So, if you take the LVMH example and there were aspects of that experience in which I thrive enormously and there were aspects of it I found crippling. But one of the things, it's a very big company. But if you peel the onion, and I don't like big companies by the way-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:16 Which I found fascinating because you mention that, and I found that perplexing.

Pauline Brown: 00:35:20 But the reason I'm... The devil is in the detail. If you peel the onion on LVMH, it really is a collection of a lot of small companies with a few big ones throwing in. So, 70 brands. You have a couple that are 10 billion a year, very small number, in one hand.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:36 Do they own Gucci?

Pauline Brown: 00:35:37 No, that's their arch competitor. Vuitton as one of the mothership brands and Hennessy, and Christian Dior, Marc Jacobs, and I could name about 65 others, but they have a few really big brands. The vast majority of the brands within that portfolio are really small, surprisingly small. They're old. They're well-known, established, but they're small. And so, I always looked at that company as more of a collective than I did of a big corporation. And for that reason, it worked for me.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:07 So actually, let's make a little slide detour, stay where we are a little bit because I pulled out some of these things from that video. This wasn't actually in your book, though you touched on it. We touched on the first one. You had these four turning points. One was we touched on with Fred, think and act like an owner, not like an agent. I think that's what you alluding to about the entrepreneur.

Pauline Brown: 00:36:27 To the dispassionate analysis that I initially approached E Lauder with which did not work. I mean, people who are successful are generally not thinking first and foremost what's it going to take for me to succeed in this job? They are thinking first and foremost, what's it going to take for me to create value?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:44 Yeah.

Pauline Brown: 00:36:45 And that's an owner's mentality.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:47 And also, I think that the sense of being in touch with the consumer. I mean, you mentioned that as a woman, that you would actually try these products?

Pauline Brown: 00:36:55 I love and it's probably because I'm a freak of nature, I love going to stores, not even to shop. Just for me, it's an anthropological experience. It is like, I get more joy than kids do go to zoos. And I like to see how people navigate when they walk in shops. I like to see even merchandise that I would never

remotely buy, like what's sitting there and why, and what's moving and what's not. I'm fascinated by how stores get designed and how misdesigned most of them are.

- Pauline Brown:** 00:37:25 So, for all sorts of reasons, it was a real frustration for me at another stage in my career when I was a private equity investor, focused on consumer and retail, that my colleagues spent 90% of their time in their offices looking at spreadsheets and financial projections, and modeling and otherwise. And I felt like, the rubber meets the road in the store. And people like Leonard Lauder, who's the former chairman of Estee Lauder, or Bernard Arnault, who is the current chairman of LVMH, they spent more time in the stores than most of their people.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:37:57 So, I'm going to touch on something, and we're jumping around a little bit here, because I've got it all over the place, but I have this in a different section talking about the halo effect, which I find fascinating and I want to ask you about that. But this is so directly tied to what you just. There's a quote from the book where you write, "If you go to a Lauder beauty counter and inquire about a particular moisturizer, the salespeople will rub it into your hand as if they are giving you a massage. In doing so, they create a very intimate, warm moment that for most people is enjoyable and relaxing. How can you not buy the product?"
- Pauline Brown:** 00:38:28 [laughter] It sound so sinister.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:31 No. But I mean, to your point, and that's about being in the store, and then I'll throw another one out there because you mentioned the department stores, and I do want to get into that as well. You write, "It's not the traditional retail stores are dying. It's that they've lost their way. They're formulaic, and what's worse, forgettable."
- Pauline Brown:** 00:38:49 Oh, yeah. Forgettable is the worst.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:51 Forgettable. What's worse than forgettable? Nothing. But there's that word again though: Formulaic. Clinical. Right?
- Pauline Brown:** 00:38:58 Mm-hmm.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:58 That those things, and I can't give you an exact reason and maybe you can answer, but what do you drive again when you use words like formulaic and clinical, and-

Pauline Brown: 00:39:05 Right. Well, the irony of ironies in both cases, those two words are typically associated with scientific experiments and with big data and analysis.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:13 Dehumanizing environments.

Pauline Brown: 00:39:14 And we have lived in a world where STEM is everything (science, technology, engineering. And I say great by no means am I suggesting we throw data out the window. We have more data that we don't know what to do with and we should be making better use of it, but I'm saying it's just not enough. Most industries are not going to win on data alone, and that's why I call aesthetic intelligence, which I think is one of the few areas we still can win as humans, "the other AI."

Demetri Kofinas: 00:39:43 Yeah. I mean, I was about to go there to see the plan words. Let's go back again to, a little bit, you made a point earlier about... I don't know if you articulated it this way, but you've articulated this way in the past, "Fight for what drives you not for what drives others." Can you explain the significance of that? Taking it back a little bit to the context of your management style and how to be successful working at the top of a major corporation?

Pauline Brown: 00:40:09 Yeah. Well, a couple of thoughts on that. I mean, first of all, I think that philosophy is not only an easier way to live, but I think it's a more enjoyable way. I mean, for so many people I know, they kind of bifurcated their life. This who I am in my office, and this is how I express myself. This is how I decorate my space or have someone else decorate my space. This is my wardrobe for my professional being. And then, they have their personal space, and there's so little competitiveness between that. And especially for working moms, which I am, it's exhausting.

Pauline Brown: 00:40:45 So, just to use my closet as a metaphor, like long ago, I stopped saying, "this is where my work clothes are, and this is where my play clothes are." Now, there are certain things that would be out of range, I'm not going to wear sweat suit to a board meeting. But for the most part, I bring it all together. I want to be comfortable when I'm at a meeting. And I also want to express myself, and look presentable when I'm going to yoga, and how I integrate. It's really about more of a fluidity in our life, which makes it easier to live, but I think more enjoyable.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:22 That's interesting, I thought of it in a different way. I think one of the common characteristics that successful people have is that I think, they tend to have a chip on their shoulder. There's something that doesn't sit right with them.

Pauline Brown: 00:41:34 I have lots of chips.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:41:35 Yeah. So, I think it is a common... at least in my personal experience and the experience of people I know that we fight battles, whose origins go back to our childhood, or in some cases go back so far, we can't remember where they came from. And it's a challenge to extract yourself or your own volitions or desires from those that are shadows, really. Now, how do you know when you're fighting for what drives you, and not what drives others?

Pauline Brown: 00:42:05 Well, I would go back to the question you asked at the beginning of the interview, which is what's the first step in developing aesthetic intelligence? It's this very basic concept of attunement. I think the more attuned, and now in that case, it's attunement to how things feel that are hitting you sensorially. In the case of professional, and leadership conduct, it's about how do things feel based on how you're behaving, or how others are reacting, and how that sits with you. I'm not a non-confrontational person, but I get no joy in fighting. I know people who enjoy a good fight, right?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:42:42 You sound like you could be good at it though.

Pauline Brown: 00:42:44 Well, I defend my ground.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:42:45 You don't seem like a pushover.

Pauline Brown: 00:42:46 No, I'm not a pushover, but I'm a lioness. I defend my cubs, but I'm not an aggressor, right? And so, I fight for things that to me are whether it's survival or it's my territory, I'll certainly fight. But I am not going to fight for battles that I just don't care to win. That's not my nature.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:43:04 And my point though that what I was trying to get at is, at least in my own personal life and experience, it's been a challenge, and it's taken a lot of work, and reflection, and maturation to extricate myself from other people's battles. The battles that I have been fighting for so long that I thought they were mine, but they're really not, you know what I mean?

Pauline Brown: 00:43:22 Yeah. Look, we're all growing, and I feel like I'm still growing, and learning, and experimenting, and getting it wrong, and course correcting, and that's part of the journey. And I do think though, people who are successful overtime, I mean there's a lot of people who have moments of success. Sustainable

success takes a different character. But people who are successful overtime are good learners.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:43:44 So, there are a lot of other things from the book that I do want to get into, but I'm curious to talk to you a little bit about, I keep writing it down as fashion, I know this isn't exactly right because the book is not about fashion.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:43:56 But fashion is important symbol.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:43:58 Yeah. I mean, and the truth is, in case it isn't already obvious to you and everyone listening, I don't know much about the industry. In fact, reading the book... I bought this book years ago, called Elegance in the Age of Crisis. And that was driven by my own interest in things like the lipstick indicator, and the hemline indicator from my background in finance, and economics, and markets. And the book was about how fashion changed during the depression. And I've always found stuff like that very fascinating and interesting.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:27 We did an episode, episode four, two years ago, when we started the program, which was on the history of American television, and culture as historian, and culture maker. How television interacted with the people and people interacted with... and that created society. But I'm fascinated by fashion. I'm fascinated by how it works, I'm fascinated by what constitutes innovation in fashion. So, maybe you can educate me and our listeners, where do you think the world of fashion is today, where are we today?
- Pauline Brown:** 00:44:56 It's so broken. I think when I was coming of age, it really was setting sort of a mood that would extend all the way through the market. There were certain industries, generally ones like automotive that have long timelines that were probably earlier in areas like, color selection, or textile trends. But fashion was able to absorb all of these early trends, bring it together in a spirit, and kind of establish the structure of a market, and a big market. Things have changed markedly.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:45:31 I mean, first of all, very few shoppers look to the runway to indicate what they're going to be wearing whether it's now or in a year from now.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:45:38 They used to do that?
- Pauline Brown:** 00:45:38 They used to do that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:38 Shoppers, really?

Pauline Brown: 00:45:40 So, well, if not shoppers there'd be buyers-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:42 Taste makers or-

Pauline Brown: 00:45:43 Taste makers, and that what I would have seen coming out of Paris Fashion Week, which was just a week ago, and determining the collections for, Spring of 2020 or fall of 2020, there would be this cascading effect. And it would start with fashion, but then it would ripple through beauty, or through other related image-oriented businesses. It just doesn't work that way anymore. Part of the reason is I think the best and brightest creative minds are not going into fashion, at least not in America.

Pauline Brown: 00:46:11 They're going to Hollywood, so entertainment is hugely impactful, they're going to Silicon Valley, so technology has become a creative hot bed, albeit, a different kind of creativity. There are structural changes in the industry. I think the economics of fashion have also made it very unwelcoming of that next generation, and have not had the fuel to really invest in innovation the way, for example Silicon Valley has. So, I don't look at fashion today as where I'm going to determine where the real people are going. It's almost-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:46:43 That's interesting, where the creative people are going or the aesthetically intelligent people.

Pauline Brown: 00:46:45 Where the mass is, where the... what I'm going to see, so for the same reason, I don't look at New York where I live or other major cities like LA, as necessarily spawning the next great creative thinkers. I go to the sort of second-tier cities like Nashville, or Savannah, Georgia, and I was like, "Wow, really?" And why? Because the big cities like New York have become so expensive to operate in, you can't afford to take a risk. And to be creative, and to live off of ideas, and to express yourself, A, you got to be able to experiment, and B, you need time. And cities like New York also moving so quickly.

Pauline Brown: 00:47:25 I think that a lot of things have been turned on their head, and yeah, I think there's more creativity that's being produced than ever in the history of man, and it come out in the form of my daughter making Tic Tok videos, and foodies, opening interesting restaurants, and side snack businesses. There's a lot of creativity, it's just not coming out of the Paris runways and some of the traditional sources.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:48 One of the things that I was thinking about when I was reflecting on this conversation or reflecting on what I thought this conversation might become or be, I feel like during the 1980s, we begun to see the power of celebrity and stardom really blow up. And I mean the crossover celebrity, right? You had the athletes like the Michael Jordan's, you had the Michael Jacksons, you had the Madonna's, you had people who were brands onto themselves. I don't know that that exist really before that. You might have had famous actors or musicians, but a person as a brand? I don't know of any-

Pauline Brown: 00:48:20 I mean, you always had Marilyn Monroe, and Elizabeth Taylor, and so forth, but they weren't productized.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:48:25 Right, exactly. But like, Michael Jordan had the Air Jordan's. And now, it feels like we've gone to a new place where celebrity itself has become in a sense commoditized or democratized. And you've got all these "tastemakers or influencers" and they're driving so much of product placement, and advertising, and things like this. I mean, I've seen them in certain areas. How much of that is what's happening with fashion?

Pauline Brown: 00:48:50 So, I think that particular trend is short lived because it's not credible. I mean, it's clear to anyone who is following an influencer when they are promoting something for pay that it doesn't have the same quality as when they started out, and developed their influence base, and we're just promoting something because they liked it. You can see, and feel the difference, and the bigger they get, I think the more obvious it is.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:14 It feels less authentic.

Pauline Brown: 00:49:15 It is a commercial, it's a commercial.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:17 Yeah. it doesn't feel authentic.

Pauline Brown: 00:49:17 And then it's for the same reason that if I see a commercial on TV for Coca-Cola, I'm not more inclined to buy Coca-Cola because I saw the polar bear. I am inclined if on a hot day, someone is sitting next to me, and sort of opening the can, and I hear that pop, and the bubbles come out, and it just looks really refreshing. I mean, so our form of influence is changing, and I do think that there'll always be some form of influence, just that particular sort of Instagram-type media for doing it is probably one that's going to run its course.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:46 I like the way you described the... was it a Pepsi or Coca-Cola?

Pauline Brown: 00:49:49 Well, that was Coca-Cola because it's just like Pepsi.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:52 But I like how you described it, and I got that feeling in the book, right? With how you wrote, you talked about it popping, the bubbles, you're very attuned to the experience.

Pauline Brown: 00:49:59 Well, so let's think of a champagne bottle, if you can send men to the moon, and occasionally a woman, you can come up with an easier way to open it than that freaking cork that pops people's eyeballs every New Year's Eve. Actually, I have a friend who's a night actor and says it's one of the biggest days of the year for calls to come, because people-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:50:17 It does seem like a crazy time to be doing, opening, like shooting projectiles when everyone's drunk.

Pauline Brown: 00:50:24 But it is part of the aesthetic experience of having champagne. It's a ritual, and I do think a champagne bottle sort of like, I don't like screw tops on wine bottles, even though there's nothing to indicate that the quality of wine is sacrificed. I feel like there's something in that ritual, and there's something about the pop, and there's something about the cork that is enjoyable.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:50:45 So, that word resonates, so does the word sacred. The word sacred came up to me when I was reading your book, but ritual I think also, or maybe just now, there's a feeling of, for me, when I read your work, or I read your thoughts of the world and life being an experience. And that you want to get as much out of it sensorially at least as possible.

Pauline Brown: 00:51:12 I do, and I would say as a marketer, and a business person, the additional point is that people don't need more stuff. This is the first times in history where-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:23 We're drowning in crap.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:24 We're drowning, and we're aware of the wastefulness, and we get pleasure more out of experiences, and it's why people are renting clothes because they can post it once. They don't even have to put it away in the closet. My point being, we don't need stuff, right? There are few things we need. We need enough food to sustain ourselves, but we don't really even eat for that purpose. We eat for enjoyment. So, it's incumbent upon makers of things to give something that provides more than utility.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:51:53 What we do need, and really is a human need is to feel alive, and whatever you can do, whether you're offering a product, or a service, to make that person on the other end feel alive, to feel human. Whether it's through stimulating their senses, through giving them some joy, through surprising them, through making them feel something that they didn't feel before they had interacted with your product. That is a service, and that will continue to be sold in the marketplace, the rest goes away.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:52:22 So, let's talk about the halo effect because a few things came up. Again, what's the name of your Russian aesthetician friend?

Pauline Brown: 00:52:28 Karina Freedman, she's going to love that you brought her up.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:52:32 She's so funny. I know women like her. I love Russians.

Pauline Brown: 00:52:34 She's actually a great aesthetician as well.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:52:36 And that you said, she's excellent. In fact, I kept thinking that I need to get your recommendations. But there's something that she had said about, was it her husband, I think? She mentioned her husband was American, and that well, she's like, why do you... I can't do the accent, but why do you want to eat chicken? Why chicken nuggets make you feel better? It's crap, it's bad, or whatever. But then, just made me think about how enduring these experiences are, right? The experience of going to McDonald's. So enduring, in fact that grown adults who should know better than to eat that, will eat because it brings them back, right?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:53:11 And so, this is a way of talking about this thing you talk about, which you call the halo effect. Which is that, when you're thinking about products or experiences, you're not just thinking about the actual experience itself. But also, you're thinking about the residue, the memory that it will leave, and I'm familiar with some of this from the work of Daniel Kahneman, I think it's called the peak-end rule, which is basically heuristic that people remember the height of an experience, and the way it ends. So, talk to me a little bit about the significance of that in the work that you do.

Pauline Brown: 00:53:46 Right. Well, so the theory of halo is about 50%, of course, it varies by different categories, but about 50% of people's pleasure with particular product or service, is some combination of their anticipation of experiencing it, and their memory after the fact. And yet, most companies deal with their customers

just around that point of purchase and that point of usage. And so, one of the best examples of a successful application of the halo effect, and I talk about it on the book, is Disney World.

- Pauline Brown:** 00:54:16 So, when you actually think about Disney World, and most people have been there at one point or another, whether it was with your children or as a child, the actual experience is not that great. If you're in Orlando, particularly if you're there in this hot summer months, it's a swamp, it's so hot. The lines are so long, it's expensive, there's so much noise, kids screaming, and crying, and laughing. It can be annoying if too many people are laughing in your ears. It's an overload of experience.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:54:47 The food is not that great, but how many people, whatever the actual experience on that premises are dying to go back after the fact, and why? Some of it is just that, for most people who go there, they were sitting on those plane tickets for maybe two months, and everyday leading up to it, whether it was the kids or other family members, who are sort of anticipating this delight, "I can't wait to get to Disney, I can't wait to get to Disney."
- Pauline Brown:** 00:55:13 And then while they're at Disney, they're posting, and they take great pictures, and it's colorful, it's a very photogenic backdrop. And then, afterwards, of course you're not going to talk about the heat. Nobody ever talks about the swamp heat. But they talk a lot about, "Oh, remember, we went on that ride." They don't talk about the line that they waited, the hour line getting on the ride. So, I think they do a great job at leaving people with this combination of memories, and anticipation so that they come back.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:55:38 I think also the same... and you talked about this actually in the book, the same principle holds biology with respect to labor, and pregnancy, and birth.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:55:45 Oh, yes.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:55:46 And even birth, right? I mean, I've had so many of my friends tell me that after they've given birth, the process itself is obviously horrifically painful, or can be. And then right after they've given birth, they can't wait to do it again, which is just remarkable, right? And that speaks to it.
- Pauline Brown:** 00:55:59 I have a friend who had her first baby two months ago, the baby is so cute, but it wakes up every two hours, and it's cranky, and colicky, and you got to change the diaper, and it's exhausting,

and as I was observing her, it took me back to having raise two of my own, and birth two of my own. That was not a pleasant time in my life, but I always describe my kids, and I genuinely believe, they were the best thing I ever did. I never talk about the number of diapers I changed, when I talk about my kids.

Pauline Brown: 00:56:32 Yeah. I guess nature has worked out the halo effect pretty well for the survival of the species.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:37 And also, this thing also reminds of when I used to get... actually, I didn't regularly go to this place, probably went once, maybe once. In fact, this is probably the peak-end rule in full effect. I remember once, because it was such a great experience, but it was extremely expensive, and probably my barber was out of town or something, and I went to this Japanese hair salon. At that time, I was living on Cornelius Street years, and years, and years ago, and this would have been on West Forth, between I guess 7th Avenue and-

Pauline Brown: 00:57:02 I think I remember this place. It very glass-open front.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:05 Well, you need to go down, you'd walk down some stairs, I think.

Pauline Brown: 00:57:07 No, I didn't go to that one.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:08 Yeah. I think that was the one. Maybe that, maybe it was ground floor.

Pauline Brown: 00:57:11 By the way, I'm not surprised at Japanese. Did you refer to it as Japanese?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:13 Yes, exactly.

Pauline Brown: 00:57:14 Yeah. They are by far, the most aesthetic people.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:17 Yeah, they are. And when I would leave, they would all, all the girls would stop, it was all girls that were in the store, and they'd be like, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you." And I'm like, "Okay, you're welcome, thank you, thank you."

Pauline Brown: 00:57:29 They really appreciated you.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:31 Exactly, and that stays with you. There's something else here I have also, you see this, you mentioned a designer, I thought his stuff was moderately ugly.

Pauline Brown: 00:57:42 Good. At least it wasn't forgettable.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:43 Yeah. But no, it wasn't forgettable. This is forgettable. I mean, I just picked it because it was the ugliest thing I could find. I don't know if this qualifies as pretty ugly, which is the term we use.

Pauline Brown: 00:57:55 Right. Jolie laide.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:56 Yeah, exactly. So, this is a really interesting thing, and it kind of resonated, because there are things... I mean, there are people I don't find in the East Village charming in any way or attractive, but some people really like it. They like the kind of gritty feel kind of feel. I feel like that qualifies in a sense.

Pauline Brown: 00:58:11 It does. I mean, the idea behind jolie laide, which is the literal translation from French is jolie is pretty and laide is ugly. And it was historically used to describe a woman's face, and specifically, a beautiful woman. And why was she beautiful? Because there was something a little off. She might have had a mole, maybe a gap between her teeth, something a little bit off, not so off that she really was ugly. But something that fell out of the standard of normal beauty. I think what's important, and I use that to describe brands, that for things to stand out, they have to be a little off.

Pauline Brown: 00:58:45 When things are perfect, too clean, too orderly, too predictable, they are forgettable. And I feel for a lot of businesses in this quest to be perfect, and this lack of experimentation, and this lack of whimsy that they lose sight of that. And it's why a few stores, like Anthropology, which was designed to sort of replicate a walk in the forest, and it does a lot of things that are kind of illogical in the world of retail design. But it makes their store environments kind of exciting. The product is not exciting, but the store environments are.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:59:18 That's so interesting because I was going to ask you in terms of beauty marks, and distinctions, because I don't think you mentioned in the book, but I guess this is what you covered. And you see here, I have a picture of Cindy Crawford, of course, the most woman with a mole in her face in the history of time. And Michael K. Williams, who has a giant scar from a knife that runs all the way down his head through the side of his face.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:59:39 I remember distinctively an interview he did on television years ago where he talked about how he turned that into something that basically became some kind of a distinction, something that, a beauty mark, or whatever. And I think that's interesting

too because that makes me think of some work that I've read of philosophers in information science, which really looks at systems that are extremely simple, or let's say songs that are actually simple, no one likes them. And if they're really chaotic, if it's all noise, it's grating, it's horrible. But like beauty is somewhere in between, it's in the complex, that's what's more human, right?

- Pauline Brown:** 01:00:13 And I think, yes, because by the way in nature, which is our most beautiful expression in this planet, it doesn't look like a supermarket. It's not like all the trees are neatly lined up on the mountain. There is sort of a roughness, and there's an organicness, and the Japanese call it wabi-sabi, which is this idea that objects are living. And that sometimes when for example, a porcelain plate has a crack in it, that's all the more part of its glory.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:42 Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's interesting.
- Pauline Brown:** 01:00:45 And it's the problem I have by the way with a lot of modern architecture, when I walk the streets of New York, all of these glass skyscrapers, I sort of say, just because they might be tilted a little bit differently at the top, there's nothing organic about them. There's nothing really interesting about a lot of these buildings.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:01:03 I think it's an interesting observation. I also wonder what you can tell about individuals based on where they choose to live in Manhattan. Because I think also sometimes, you go through phases, and you like to move to different neighborhoods. Have you seen Man in the High Castle?
- Pauline Brown:** 01:01:17 This is the one that if the Germans had won?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:01:18 Yeah.
- Pauline Brown:** 01:01:19 I saw the first several episodes.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:01:21 Because I'd be-
- Pauline Brown:** 01:01:22 Dark.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:01:22 Yeah, very dark. But I think that's an interesting example, one, the point about the Japanese, and sort of the spirit, or the essence of the teacup, the broken teacup. But really, the Nazis, they're whole world was... it had to be perfect, it needed to be cleansed, and then everything. And whereas, the Japanese in

that movie, there was just much more soul and place for humanity. Pauline, I'm going to move us to the overtime.

Pauline Brown: 01:01:47 Okay.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:48 I want to thank you so much for being on the program, and sticking around. For regular listeners, you know the drill. If you're new to the program, or if you haven't subscribed to our Patreon overtime, autodidact or super nerd tiers, you can do that by heading over to patreon.com/hiddenforces, or looking right into the description of this Podcast where I have a link, and you can gain access to the overtime that I'm about to have with Pauline, as well as a transcript, as well as the rundown, which is full of pictures of Kanye West, of Spock and Drag.

Pauline Brown: 01:02:25 Okay. That's funny.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:27 And pictures of Pauline as well looking fabulous.

Pauline Brown: 01:02:30 Well, with my Faroe Island skirt, my cloud skirts.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:33 It is my favorite picture of you.

Pauline Brown: 01:02:34 Thank you. Wow. That skirt was made by two designer friends, and it's a whole show onto itself about the Faroese.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:39 It feels very Alice in Wonderland-ness.

Pauline Brown: 01:02:43 Hopefully, I won't fall into that trap. That's a nightmare.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:46 So, thank you so much for coming on the program.

Pauline Brown: 01:02:49 Thank you, thank you. It's been a delight talking to you.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:52 Today's episode of Hidden Forces was recorded at Creative Media Design studio in New York City. For more information about this week's episode, or if you want easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io, and subscribe to our free email list. If you want access to over time segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns, we'll have links and detailed information related to each and every episode.

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