

Managing Authentic Experience in the Hypermodern Economy: Sociological and Philosophical Foundations

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Modern experience economy is about buying and selling experiences, to make intimate experiences and search for customer satisfaction the driving motor of capitalist economies. The concept of authentic experience has become central to management and management philosophy. The paper discusses some foundational aspects of the concept of authentic experience in the framework of the experience economy as a social reality of late modernity. The aim is to elaborate the problem whether it is possible to create deliberately authentic experience in business organizations that have the aim of making profits as a part of their efforts to satisfy search for authenticity.

INTRODUCTION

Modern experience economy is about buying and selling experiences, to make intimate experiences and search for customer satisfaction the driving motor of capitalist economies. The concept of experience and more recently the notion of authentic experience have thereby become central to management and management philosophy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Pine and Gilmore, 2007).

In this paper, I want to discuss some fundamental and foundational aspects of the concept of authentic experience in the framework of the experience economy as a social reality of a globalized society that moves from postmodernity to hypermodernity defined exponential turbo-escalation of all aspects of postmodern society (Lipovetsky, 2006).

This analysis should be considered as an attempt to present the social philosophy of business and society, which can be seen as the foundation for my theory of ethics and philosophy of management (Rendtorff, 2010; Rendtorff, 2011a; Rendtorff, 2011b; Rendtorff, 2013a; Rendtorff, 2013b; Rendtorff, 2013c; Rendtorff, 2013d; Rendtorff, 2014a; Rendtorff, 2014b; Rendtorff, 2015; Rendtorff, 2016; Rendtorff, 2017; Rendtorff, 2018).

The paper is divided into the following sections:

- 1) We will start with a preliminary definition of the concept of experience economy.
- 2) Then we will discuss the phenomenological perspective on the concept of experience and relate this concept to the idea of authenticity. This will be based a comparison between different concepts of authenticity.
- 3) After this, I will analyze this concept of authenticity in the framework of the kind of society that has made experience economy possible. In this context, I am strongly inspired by the French philosopher and sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky, who provides us with a general sociological analysis of the concept of consumption in experience society (Lipovetsky, 2006).

4) On this basis, I will discuss some elements of ethics in the experience economy in order to show how the economy of the gift and philanthropic exchange is an integrated part of the experience economy

5) Finally, I will discuss the search for authenticity in the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 2007) in order to discuss whether authenticity is something like a marriage between capitalism, experience and authenticity arguing that there seems to remain an insurmountable tension between these concepts.

The aim is to elaborate the problem whether it is possible to create deliberately authentic experience with the somewhat artificial investments of business organizations that always seem to have the aim of making profits as a part of their efforts to satisfy the search for authenticity.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITION OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

What is the experience economy and why is creativity important in this kind of economy? We find two major references to creativity in the literature: Richard Florida who gives an analysis of the creative class who are the new producers of the creative society (Florida, 2003), Pine, and Gilmore who propose the experience economy as a stage and theatre of economy activity. According to Florida, creativity is the key to economic success and according to Pine and Gilmore in the future “customer-centric, customer-driven and customer-focused experience economy: “... every business is a stage and therefore work is a theatre” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. x). The life of the bars, gambling halls, Day clubs and nightclubs in Las Vegas all together represent the essence of the experience economy. In this economy, focus has moved from the product to the experience of the product. For example, according to Pine and Gilmore, the importance of the creativity and culture behind the product implies that there is a huge qualitative and accordingly price difference between drinking an ordinary cup of coffee and drinking it on a historical square in Venice.

We can say that the experience economy makes creativity important as guarantee for authenticity of the products. Pine and Gilmore distinguish experience from other products (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 6). While commodities are materials from the natural world and goods are “tangible products that companies standardize and then inventory”, services are “intangible activities performed for a particular client” and experiences are - while emerging out of this service economy, but also breaking its essential paradigm — conceived as something memorable and personal that gives customers emotions that are revealed in the same way as a play on the stage of a theatre reveals sensations among the spectators” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 6). With this view of the creative economy as a theatre and a stage, Pine and Gilmore conceive the experience economy as the creative future of capitalist society: “The growth of both the Industrial Economy and the Service Economy brought with it a profusion of offerings that didn’t exist before imaginative companies invented and developed them. That’s also how the Experience Economy will grow, as companies tough out what economist Joseph Schumpeter termed the “gales of creative destruction” that comprise business innovation. Those businesses that relegate themselves to the diminishing world of goods and services will be rendered irrelevant. To avoid this fate, you must come to state a rich, compelling experience” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 25).

The conditions of modern economic activity imply in this sense a pressure on corporations to be creative and give consumers experiences that give meaning to their lives. This search for authentic experience represents a challenge to consumer society because the responsibilities of business are growing from being only related to the importance of product creation towards responsibility for human experiences and emotions. In this sense, we can argue that there is a moral imperative implicit in the experience economy: “Therefore, we believe that the moral emphasis should net lie on whether commerce should shift to experiential offerings. If societies are to seek continued economic prosperity, they must be placed instead on what kinds of experiences will be staged. The business executive, like everyone else, must in the end concern himself with the ultimate ends of man” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. xii). We see how the concept of the experience economy is generalized as a fundamental feature of the economic system of late capitalism. Therefore, it must be the task of critical management studies to face the issue of the experience economy in order to understand modern management.

THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE

Because Pine and Gilmore are some of the most prominent defenders of the concept of experience management and of experience economy, we have presented their concepts as essential for understanding the experience economy. From a critical perspective, we may, however, ask the question about what concept of experience that we face in the experience economy. The notion of experience economy is based on the idea that the postmodern or hypermodern capitalist economic system is not solely about distributing material goods but that immaterial services and experiences are must more important products of hypermodernity. This notion of experience is based on concept of human subjectivity and subjectivation of the costumer as an individual subject who wants to buy and consume experiences. Therefore, it is essential to discuss what kind of subjectivity of experiences that we face is the hypermodernity (Lipovetsky, 2006) of the experience economy.

In fact, the experience economy relies on a postmodern view of the subject where the subject is a function of self-creation and construction. We can argue that experience is not something essential that is pre-given in the mind of subject, but experience is constructed in interaction between subject and the provider of the experience, that is between buyer and seller.

In this context, it is important to ask whether Pine and Gilmore and other authors of the experience economy and experience management really capture the core of the notion of individual and subjective experience. We may ask the authors of the experience economy: But what do you understand by experience and what does it mean for the individual subject? And the answer is important for a critical analysis of the notion of experience economy, because we may argue that the notion of experience by these authors may be too simple.

With existential feelings of emptiness and depression after having enjoyed the happiness creating placebos of the food and culture industry. We are hunting for experience, but lose the grip of life and we are left with boredom and nothingness when we are not enjoying the products of the experience industry.

Therefore, we need a much more complex concept of experience. Pine and Gilmore are partly aware of that when they refer to authenticity and ask how companies can provide customers with “authentic experiences” (Pine and Gilmore, 2007). This search for authenticity leads us beyond the predominant hedonistic and utilitarian paradigm, because authenticity deals with “real experience” as opposed to passive satisfaction of pleasure needs. However, what is “real experience” and how can this idea of experience be related to the postmodern or hypermodern concept of constructed subjectivity?

In this context, critical management studies can refer to the phenomenological or existentialist conception of subjectivity and experience (Husserl, 1936; Sartre, 1943; Merleau-Ponty, 1945). According to the phenomenological view of experience, we should not understand subjectivity as passive reception of preference satisfaction but rather as an active search and construction of meaning. In his phenomenology of the subject the initiator of phenomenology, the German thinker Edmund Husserl conceives experience as based on intentionality. Intentionality is the directedness of the subject towards the world and experience is constituted through the interconnectedness of experience of meaning in the human life world (Husserl, 1936). Experience is the construction of meaning of the subject in a life-world that is intersubjectively mediated with time and space as constitutive elements and conditions of possibility for experience of meaning.

From the existentialist point of view represented by the French philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre this notion of experience is radicalized. Sartre argues that human subjectivity emerges in the negation of the meaningless world of things (Sartre, 1943). It is the existence of the human self, as active creator of meaning through projects and engagements in the world that creates experience. Experience is not passive encounter or reception of the world but it is active engagement in the world through the projects of existence of the self. With Jean-Paul Sartre, we may say that experience is a creative act linked to the self-construction of subjectivity through existential choices and projects in the world. The contemporary philosopher of Jean-Paul Sartre who criticized Sartre of having a too strong concept of human freedom, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, further helps us to understand the limits of the utilitarian concept of experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). For him experience is essential to our being in the world as bodily-incarnated

human subjects. Human beings experience the world through bodily encounter with the world where there is a constant interaction between subject and object and the human freedom only makes sense in the perspective of the fact that it belongs to the world through its bodily experience.

Accordingly, introducing the phenomenological perspective we may critically argue that the utilitarian concept of experience is too simple for the experience economy. With the phenomenology of experience, we see that experience is a very complex fundamental element of human subjectivity. When we rely on the critical insights of phenomenology, we can emphasize the following elements of an anatomy of experience. 1) Experience is not passive preference maximization but subjective construction of meaning through the engagement with the world of the subject 2) Experience is not static reception of impressions from an outside world but it is an event with an engaged encounter of subject and object, consumer and product of consumption. 3) Experience is not something superficial and external to the subject but is fundamental to their identity of the individual. We may say that true experience is a passion that transforms the individual and sometimes even changes us into better human beings with a more profound understanding of life. 4) In the sense of intentionality, experiences are not only feelings of pleasure but also more fundamentally based on the search and encounter of meaning. In this context, experience may also be linguistic and expressed through language in narratives with metaphors and symbols that the individual uses to construct meaningful narrative identities.

Therefore, we see how the use of phenomenological insights might make our concept of experience much more useful for our understanding of the concept of experience that underlies the paradigm of the experience economy and experience management. Now, however, from the perspective of critical management studies the question is whether this clarification of the concept of experience may be a help to make the experience economy even more dominant and manipulative rather than emancipating individuals from an all-encompassing capitalism. What if it is true that the experience economy changes all experiences into goods of consumption? This would include not only banal pleasure preferences, but also all existential experiences of meaning and engagement with the world. Does this mean that all our existence and intimacy of life is commodified and what does this mean for our lives and identities of the self? The question is whether the new experience economy remains an empty anesthetization of otherwise authentic human lives. The problem is whether this phase of hypermodern capitalism leads to the destruction of humanity or whether it is possible to conceive a vision of the experience economy and of experience management that on a postmodern or hypermodern basis would be able to integrate authenticity and real experience into the increased capitalist consumption and production of experience.

The issue is whether or how capitalist markets can sell experiences of the authentic and real. Nietzsche speaks about human beings as makers of symbols and metaphors and about the metaphorical character of reality with nothing behind the theater and stage. In addition, postmodern critical thinkers have replied to this by emphasizing how the illusions are becoming the reality.

Foucault has described how the self is created through the construction of illusions of authenticity (Foucault, 2001) and Deleuze says that subjectivity emerges as a “desiring machine” based on experiences as events of pleasure (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972). So maybe it does not matter so much whether experiences are fake or real as long as the market system manages to sell us experiences that give authentic meaning to our lives beyond pure pleasure maximization.

WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY MADE THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY POSSIBLE?

Therefore, whether we like it or not, it may be argued that the experience economy is so advanced that it includes the phenomenological and existentialist concepts of meaning in the concept of the experience economy. This is why we may argue that beyond postmodernity hypermodernity has reached the level of the total commodification of the self with the concept of the creative experience economy. Nevertheless, how did we get that far and what kind of society is it that makes possible the experience economy?

The postmodern or hypermodern experience economy is built on a kind of creative destruction of experience where the creativity of human beings as makers of metaphors and symbols moves in the

forefront of capitalist production. We are searching for more than maximization of pleasure preferences in the cultural industry. We want to become new human beings when we eat at restaurants, travel, go to the theater, read magazines or books or even when we buy ordinary products in the grocery store or in the supermarket. We want to experience happiness and authenticity in all aspects of our lives as consumers. Consumption shall help us to construct our identities. I shop, therefore I am. Consumption of the products of mass luxury brand products, perfumes, clothing, and electronics is not only material, but also indeed metaphorical and symbolic. I construct my personal identity through the experiences of being special by buying mass product brands of luxury that are based on promotion of my distinguished individuality.

It is the creativity of the producers and designers of experiences that is needed to fulfill this search for meaning in the experience economy. The conditions of possibility of the experience economy are based on the historic changes of the meaning of creativity in human societies. Today with a hypermodern society of creativity, creativity means something else than it was the case earlier in history. What is essential is that creativity no longer is based on a higher divine reality, but instead refers to the entrepreneurial genius of the human creative spirit.

We see that this was not always the case when we look at the concept of creativity in classical Greece and the Middle ages (Kerhane, 1998). At that time, creativity and therefore maybe experience referred to higher reality as being imitation of the divine. The aim of human creativity was to imitate the divine creativity, but at the same time, the human imagination should stay within the divine order. A mythical figure like the hero from Ancient Greece Prometheus who stole the fire from the Gods and moved near the sun illustrates that human creativity should not move beyond the boundaries of the divine. This idea of creativity as mimetic illustration of the divine was also dominant in the middle Ages where it was the task of the artist to make pictures and illustrations of the divine. In modern times after the Renaissance, however, we encounter a break with this concept of creativity. Creativity is no longer defined as an imitation of the divine, but it refers to the “transcendental imagination” of human beings as it is described in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant who talked about creativity as the free play of the imagination.

Although the romantic period after Kant redefined creativity in the terms of subjective representation of the divine, the Kantian approach to creativity marked a strong break with earlier concepts of creativity because it no longer referred to a mimetic conception of creativity. Instead, we see the emergence of a concept of creativity, which refers to the unknown beyond existing reality. Creativity is linked to the free play of human imagination and it is this creativity without reference that we find as being an essential concept in the experience economy where creativity is no longer imitation of the divine but instead a tool to provide creative solutions to satisfy the needs of authenticity and pleasure by the consumers of experiences and meaning. Where no divine meaning is left to imitate, it is still up to the creative class to fill the empty place of the loss of meaning in postmodernity or hypermodernity and because there is no pre-given meaning dependent on a metaphysical reality also the consumer must be creative and create meaning through experiences.

The French sociologist and philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky helps to define the social conditions that makes the experience economy possible. He is the one who argues that we have moved beyond postmodernity towards hypermodernity. “Hyper” indicates an exponential acceleration of the features of capitalism in postmodernity. According to Lipovetsky we no longer live in postmodern society but instead we should talk about the hypermodern consumer society. In this society, the features of advanced consumer society have been generalized. Human beings are now primarily defined as hyper consumers and their appearance as citizens is derived from this condition of consumption. Hypermodernity expresses a metamorphosis of liberal culture (Lipovetsky, 2006). We live in a consumer society that now has become global and international. In the hypermodern society we can talk about a new system of consumption that has become universalized. What characterizes hypermodern society is the development of a world culture of consumption or we can talk about universalization of the brand market economy to everywhere in the world: The West, Asia and China, South America and Africa. This global market culture is a culture of global media and of global commercial culture. Hypermodern society is made possible with the neo-liberal ideology of the free market and private happiness through consumption and it was accelerated with the global revolution of information technologies.

In his work on hypermodernity *Le Bonheur paradoxal*, Lipovetsky describes the three phases of the development of hypermodern consumer society: 1. The period from 1880 to the second world war. 2. The period from 1950 to 1970. 3. The time of the 1970ies to the 1990ies, where we really can see that consumer society is developed. From the 1980ies we are facing hypermodern society. This is a society where consumption is democratized and made available to everyone (Lipovetsky, 2006). Whereas the first phase of industrial society is the emergence of industrial society, the second phase is a generalization of a consumer society that is characterized by increased individualization of consumption, for example by the generalization of luxury products like perfumes etc. for women. The consumer society produced comfort projects and it was marked by increased individualization of products.

However, it is only with the emergence of hypermodern society that we really face the emergence of individualization of products (Lipovetsky, 2006). In this individualist society we see how individuals are able to organize their space and time on the basis of their individuality.

Accordingly, we can argue that with the individualization of consumption combined with the focus on individual experience we are facing a society of hyper consumption combining mass consumption with individuality and making immaterial experience and pleasure the focus of product promotion and product content. This new society of hyper consumption is marked by a break with the conformities of class society. Although there class differences still exist, there is no longer a specific class culture. The consuming individual is liberated from the institutions and all from the bonds of society. We can say that the consumer of the experience economy is a “turbo-consumer”, a capitalist consumer who is no longer regulated by strong law and ethics and who is free to consume as much as he or she wants. A very good example of this “turboconsumer” in hypermodernity is the consumer of the great international brands. The brands are expressing the global logic of hyperconsumption. Through global marketing brands, appeal to the dreams of having authentic experiences of the global turbo consumers. Consumers of hyper society are not particular loyal to one particular brand, but they are loyal to the promise of happiness in the brand economy that activate their dreams and emotions. The global brand economy expresses the logic of experience as emotional rather than bound to the materiality of the products. Hyper-consumption is a continuing renewal of the sensations. It is travel in experience. The turbo consumer wants the most intense experience and in order to get this experience the turbo consumer overcome traditional limits of time and space that is taken over by commercial logic. There is a close link between brand economy and the search for happiness as an ultimate imperative of hyper consumer society.

In another book with Jean Serroy *La culture-monde. Réponse à une société désorientée* Lipovetsky discusses globalization of culture in the perspective of hypermodernity (Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2008). We can mention fashion, advertisements, tourism, art, the star-system from Hollywood as aspects of a world culture that has become dominating in hypermodernity that manifests itself as a cultural hypermodernity aiming at satisfying the search for satisfaction of experiences by consumers in hypermodern society. Nevertheless, at the same time this globalization of culture in the framework of an experience economy is marked by the paradoxes of increased complexity and increased collective and individual disorientation. The capitalist market experience economy is supposed to respond to the dark sides of increased individualization and narcissism. Because of individualist mass society with less common references to give a sense of meaning and community the world culture of brand consumption of culture is supposed to be the compensatory device that can give individuals meaning and fullness in their individual lives that are increasingly void of meaning. World culture promoted through experience economy is the tool to give meaning and sense to individual lives.

We can say with Karl Marx that the generalization of consumption on the hypermodern consumer society implies a situation of total commodification of everything in the human world. It is however, a paradox that this situation is closely linked to individualization and a cult of the individual self-realization in remarkable personalities. In experience society as “dream society” (Jensen, 2001) everyone is special and we are all searching for happiness as the ultimate realization of meaning and authenticity in our lives. As desiring machines (“Machines désirantes” with Deleuze) it is essential that marketing and selling of experience correspond to our need to appear as personal and individual, We have become individualistic egoists of consumption (*Le Bonheur sinon rien*). The happiness of the experience economy is not only

material, but indeed symbolic through the enjoyment of the feeling of being special by consumption of luxury brands for the masses (Lipovetsky and Roux, 2003). In this sense, the combination of experience economy and hyper modernity shows how society has become a civilization of desire. In this individualistic emotional binding to products through experiences we see the realization of the move from industrial fordistic economy to the post-fordistic service economy as a brand economy with emotional binding of consumers to products through the search for happiness as the ultimate demand of the experience economy. However, we may still question whether people in hyper consumer society are happy? Lipovetsky reminds of the happiness is paradoxical: As the poet Aragon says “The one, who speaks about happiness has often sad eyes!” (Lipovetsky, 2006).

WHAT IS THE MORALITY AND ETHICS OF EXPERIENCE SOCIETY?

What happens to morality in this period of hypermodernity? When people are individualized and no longer find metaphysical foundations of meaning in divine reality, humanity, the state or other collectivities, the other or all other instances outside of the self we may ask whether it at all can be meaningful to refer to ethics in hypermodernity (Lipovetsky, 2006). In other words, when there is no duty left in the sense that morality has no legitimation in itself how can we have ethics in advanced consumer society. Moreover, is the experience economy the replacement of ethics and morality by the search for personal happiness or can we perceive other implications for business and ethics as results of the global experience society in hypermodernity?

Again we can find help in the work of Lipovetsky who in the book *Le Crépuscule du devoir* analyzes the aim of ethics in postmodern society — insights that we can also apply to the context of the experience economy of hypermodernity (Lipovetsky, 1992). Gilles Lipovetsky argues that in postmodern times there has been a change of morality from duty to virtue. It does not mean that morality is gone in postmodern times but rather it has changed character. This is linked to the individualization and narcissism of the experience economy of hyper consumer society. As we have argued the postmodern consumer uses consumption of experience products to get meaning, pleasure and happiness in his or her personal lives. In this sense consumption is an important tool of the individual to construct a meaningful identity that can be respected by others as a part of the cult of the personality that is most important element of procuring social status when the pre-given elements of social positions of class society are eliminated. In addition, when the world is void of pre-given morality, ethics has to be chosen or constructed according to the values and choices of the individual. Therefore, we perceive that in the emptiness of hypermodernity morality has become a part of the personal self-realizations of individuals. In experience economy, morality and ethics is realized through the experiences. Morality becomes a part of the product in order to give consumers possibilities to brand themselves as moral persons with particular moral identities.

What we see in the experience economy, therefore, is not that ethics is conceived in opposition to society but rather that ethics is integrated in the experiences that are sold through the branding of the different products of hyper consumption. A very convincing example of this is the branding of ecological products. Products that are proposed by companies like Body Shop do not only signal the ecological responsibility and protection of animals with no use of animal experiments of the corporation and the consumer, but they also illustrate the affirmation of the moral identity of the consumer through the values that are confirmed when the consumer buys a specific product from this corporation. When buying ecological products that gives an experience of being friendly to nature and animals the consumer affirms his or her moral identity as a responsible person that does not destroy the world and its natural resources and this makes the consumer feel happy and authentic. Accordingly, ecological products cannot only contribute to the wellbeing of the person, but also to the person’s appearance as a person with a strong integrity and moral identity.

An even better example of the relation between ethics, morality, and self-construction as a moral person in experience society is buying and selling of charity as an experience. When we look at the marketing and promotion of charity and care for the poor of many humanitarian and third sector help organizations, we can see how ethics and morality are not necessarily excluded from the experience

economy but also can be integrated in the experience economy. However, how can charity make a difference as an experience? Here, we can point to the sociology of giving and receiving (Mauss, 1924) in order to understand how, the experience of giving is marketed as an essential element for motivating potential supporters of a given charity purpose.

Analysis of the marketing of their products by charity organizations shows how they include experiences of well-being and character-building as an essential motivation for the act of charity. In Denmark, the example of the Children's Foundation can illustrate this point. The Children's Foundation has developed a charity concept where it promotes the help for children not through anonymous donations but with a personal relation between the donator and the receiver. The donator can "adopt" a child in Africa by paying a certain amount of money each year and thereby help the child to go to school. As a return for the gift, the donator receives personal letters from the child thanking him and her for the gift and there may also be potential for further relations between the two in the sense that the donator eventually will visit the child and get personally acquainted with the child and us family. This personalized charity has been very popular and we may add that this is because the donator is given a personal experience of charity through the process of giving and receiving. According to social anthropology, a gift relation includes both a giver and receiver who both needs to be recognized in the gift relation (Mauss 1924). So the example of charity illustrates how not only the receiver but also the giver is recognized in the gift relationship. We may argue that the gift relation illustrate a moral imperative of the experience economy, namely that morality may be an essential element of the experience that is sold so that the customer can use the experience to build his or her personal identity as a moral and virtuous subject.

Pine and Gilmore are aware of this dimension of the experience economy when they discuss the morality of the experience economy (Chapter 9 and 10 in Pine and Gilmore, 2007). They emphasize that the customer is the product (Pine and Gilmore, 2007, p. 163) and that companies are asked to affirm and accomplish our experiences, but also to transform us according to our wishes to be better human beings. In this sense, there may be a convergence between experience management and management of corporate social responsibility and business ethics. Consumers want to be transformed towards greater responsibility as moral subjects through their choices of products and we can argue that the ethics of the experience economy in hypermodernity opens up for an individualist responsabilization as an integrated part of the experience economy. Of course, the effort to change the customer through experience may not be limited to ethical values and it may include other forms of values. Nevertheless, through the experience economy, companies are supposed to transform their customers so that they become different and better human beings and it is very difficult not to include a moral dimension and moral intention in this view of the experience economy.

In the experience, economy corporations have great ethical responsibility because they sell experiences that can change the individual (Pine and Gilmore 2007, p. 165). This new responsibility is of great attention to critical management studies. Of what kind of responsibility can we talk about? In addition, isn't it wrong to reduce morality to a question of identity construction through commercialized experience? It seems like the move from duty to virtue in the experience economy has a heavy price of the commercialization and commodification of all aspects of human life. Can morality really be marketed and commodified?

The warnings but also ambiguous potentialities of the experience economy that increase corporate moral responsibility is the fact that through the selling of experience as the major product of the service sector it is not only the experience but also the customer in him or herself that is the product (Pine and Gilmore 2007, p. 168).

Therefore, the hypermodern consumers need an ethical experience economy in order to construct themselves and their identities in their search for increased well-being and it seems that Pine and Gilmore are aware of this when they argue that a so-called Transformation Economy (Pine and Gilmore 2007, p. 173) will take over from the experience economy. We can say that individuals in times with no other meaning-giving authorities and reference left than brands are begging the brands to change them and give them meaning in their lives. In this context, the moralization of the needs and understandings of

individual consumer experiences is essential to the understanding of the experiences of customers. In the words of Pine and Gilmore: “Experiences transform guests into participants in the encounter, whether the long-term effects are deleterious or therapeutic. In addition, transformations turn aspirants to “a new you”, with all the ethical, philosophical, and religious implications that this implies. All commerce involves moral choice” (Pine and Gilmore, 2007, p. 183). With this, Pine and Gilmore have great ambitions for the experience economy that they even want to conceive as a wisdom economy. Service with care is an essential element of the experience economy and the metaphor of the theater as the illustration of the market economy of experience must not make us forget the transformational character of the theater that aims at the purification or catharsis of the feelings of pity and fear of the spectators.

Indeed, we may generalize the function of morality in experience economy as an illustration of a classical gift economy (Mauss, 1924). As in the example with the Children’s Foundation, the anatomy of the gift in gift-giving is based on the fact that the one who gives, searches for recognition. What is given is spiritual and it is very important that both the one who receives and the one who gives get the required recognition in the gift relationship. What is important for the gift relation in the experience economy is that economic relation is no longer limited to the pure instrumental anonymous exchange, but instead ethical experiences of meaning are mediated into the relation between giver and receiver. We see it in the experience of charity where the customer is getting an experience of being a good person through consumption, but we can also mention entertainment with an ethical and political aim as for example the famous concert “We are the world!” where the participation in the party-like atmosphere of the concert gives the individual the possibility to contribute to a greater purpose and ideas of saving humanity. Another example is “Football against racism!” where a political purpose is added to the football match, but we can also mention the campaign “Red” where certain luxury mass brands under the auspices of the Rock Star Bono were characterized by donation of a percentage of the price of the product to poor people in the third world. Through the commitment to the brand “Red”, the individual could get a sense of taking part in a greater social purpose. In this sense, the most characteristic feature of ethics in the experience economy is the combination of business, morality and aesthetics in the sense that morality becomes an integrated part of strong brands that indicate commitment to higher purposes as an essential element of fostering improved happiness for individual consumers.

CAN CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES AND EXPERIENCE ECONOMY BE COMBINED?

So what should critical management studies say about this realization of the experience economy in the move from postmodernity? What critical lessons can we draw from the preceding analysis of the experience economy? What if the experience economy of hypermodernity is a social fact how should scholars of critical management relate to this situation? Should we stay with revealing the illusions of the ideologies of experience economy or should we accept some aspect of the experience economy as a progress for humanity? Indeed such questions are important, but also difficult and I am not yet able to answer all of them.

Instead, I want to focus on one important element that makes the link back to our discussion of the necessity of integrating the phenomenological concept of experience into the idea of the experience economy. This is the problem of authenticity, which is a most radical way to put the problem of the ideology of the experience economy. We can in this context, ask whether the search for authenticity of Pine and Gilmore is acceptable as an answer to the need for the experience to go beyond passive pleasure satisfaction.

When they say that authenticity is the new business imperative they try to deal with human existence. Moreover, this is characteristic of the fact that consumers paradoxically want to buy real stuff at a capitalist market that by definition cannot be real as such but only the market faking the real and authentic situation of existence. So experience economy must go beyond utility and pleasure and with the words of Pine and Gilmore: “Organizations today must learn to understand, manage, and excel authenticity”. Management in the experience economy must according to this view deal with authenticity as the new

business imperative. Consumers want real products that can give them meaning and feelings of being authentic. Products must appear as real and what is artificial should be the most real of all as in the tale of Danish author H.C. Andersen about the nightingale where what is natural is not accepted as real but only the artificial is praised as authentic and really real. With critical management, we can say that it is possible to conceive the ironic and ideological elements of this concept of authenticity. What we think is authentic is not authentic and what we think is real is unbearable and not acceptable because it does not seem authentic.

Therefore, from the critical perspective we may ask whether it really is possible for the market economy to provide authenticity for consumers. It seems to be an illusion that the market should be able to give us the meaning in our lives that we are not able to establish ourselves because of the increased fragmentation, individualization and disorientation in hypermodern society.

Nevertheless, Pine and Gilmore insists that the aim of the experience is self-realization of the subject (Pine and Gilmore, 2007). They define authenticity as the ability to purchase in conformation with one's self-image. The authenticity should be generated through the ability of the corporations to overcome the fake/real distinction in the products that they provide for the consumer. So according to business in search of authenticity, what we need is to give people authenticity in their in a postmodern condition where reality itself seems to be socially constructed. The paradox is that people need authenticity but they cannot find it in the real world because social institutions do not exist to give them this meaning of life.

Accordingly, we can ask the question whether business can help individuals to find authenticity in a world where people cannot find meaning. In addition, the answer to this question according to Pine and Gilmore is that in a fundamentally capitalist society the most important force defending uniqueness and authenticity would be the market place itself.

With this situation, ethical management studies might reply that this really seems to be the realization of the total reification of human reality because now human beings have left everything in their lives to be solved by the market economy. However, we may also argue that authenticity is a too difficult concept to make into a tool for the market economy. This is indeed present in the discussion of Pine and Gilmore of the concept of authenticity.

They propose five axioms of authenticity that shows the dilemmas and tensions of existential and economic authenticity: Axiom 1. If you are authentic then you doesn't have to say that you're authentic. Axiom 2. If you say you're authentic, then you'd better be authentic. Axiom 3. It's easier to be authentic if you don't say you're authentic. Axiom 4: It's easier to render offering authentic, if you acknowledge they're inauthentic. Axiom 5: You don't have to say your offerings are inauthentic, if you render them authentic (Pine and Gilmore, 2007). These axioms show how difficult it is to refer to authenticity in experience economy and experience management. In fact, the most difficult thing is to be authentic when you know that you are not authentic and the problem centers around the paradoxes of having a corporate strategy for authenticity because it seems like that at the minute you say that you artificially want to be authentic you are not authentic any longer.

In the context, we can use the phenomenological insights of Jean-Paul Sartre to point to more problems of authenticity as a fundamental strategy for the experience economy. In fact, Sartre argues that authenticity is impossible because every human experience is based on a tension between being and non-being (Sartre, 1943). To be authentic in the sense of being totally present for oneself is impossible. Accordingly, it is impossible to be authentic to one self, because "human beings are what are not and they are not what they are". This critical insight illustrates the impossibility of authentic experience as a preferences based on overcoming the fake/real distinction. Human beings are not what they are but they play roles of existence like it is the case in a theater where the actors play different roles without being identical with the role that they play. Therefore, it seems like the concept of authenticity can be deconstructed with the insights of existentialism and critical reflections show that the experience of the experience economy will never be authentic experience. The only authenticity is the authentic experience of being inauthentic. Nevertheless, does it really matter? Wouldn't it be worse if the market economy could really provide authenticity? Such are the questions that we could ask from the perspective of critical management studies.

CONCLUSION

Summing up, we have in this paper tried to present some critical reflections on the concept of experience economy that seems to be dominant in hypermodernity defined as the turbo escalation of postmodernity. In particular, we have present immanent criticism where we follow the logic of the experience management theory from the inside in order to ask critical questions to the conditions of possibility of this theory. We have shown how the concept of experience as preference must be accomplished with a much wider and profound phenomenological concept of experience. We discussed the relation between creativity, experience economy and hypermodernity and demonstrated that the experience economy will be one of the most predominant elements of hypermodernity, in particular because of the increased individualization of turbo consumers as an essential element of hypermodernity. Moreover, we have looked at the relation between ethics and experience economy and we can see that there does not have to be an opposition between virtue and self-construction in the framework of hyper consumption, but rather that the market may be able to integrate economics and ethics in experience management. From a critical point of view, this ambiguous condition, which needs further reflection. The same may be the case for the concept of authenticity in the experience economy that from the point of view of critical management studies represent an ideological concept but also creates a certain perplexity because

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