

Rational and Emotional Fools?

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Have we not noticed that experiences have made themselves independent of people?
Musil – The man without qualities
(v.1, 158)

Abstract

This article analyses the phenomenon of connecting an idea of experience with economy as done within modern marketing theories. This, initially, held a promise of moving past rational choice theory by incorporating experiential aspects of emotionality, thus claiming to be a new and more precise kind of economy with new kinds of production and consumption. One academic example of this experience economy will be analysed from a hermeneutical and analytical philosophical perspective, in order to question whether it presents a viable description of experience, and actually presents a new understanding of economy. The article's conclusion claims that the example fails on both issues, presenting us with resuscitation of classic hedonic utilitarianism, but in the guise of a neurophysiologic explanation of experiential intentionality.

Introduction¹

When Amartya Sen wrote his famous article "Rational Fools" in 1977, the critique of rational choice theory was well under way making the under-determination of theory by the plurality of conditions for human agency one of its overall targets.² Sen argued that failing to meet the conditions of rational choice theory was not due to humans' limited strategic sophistication.

On the contrary, it was the lack of sophistication on part of theory instead. Sen placed the notion of commitment at the heart of humans' capabilities to act and in doing so drove a wedge between rational choice's identification of personal choice with personal welfare (i.e. that any choice is based on a rationality of maximizing the gains for personal welfare). Commitments indicated the presence of non-gains-maximizing factors as an important part of human rational behaviour, which was not theorisable in the context of rational choice theory. Sen, therefore, named the anthropological figure presumed in rational choice theory, a rational fool. The figure was a social moron, Sen claimed, because no person could act as if self-interested gains-maximization is the sole preference-ordering principle (Sen 1977, 336). Otherwise this person is most likely lacking the competences needed to act in a social way. Besides the important critique of rational choice theory made in this classic article, a general aspect of Sen's argument should be emphasised. This aspect concerns the intertwining of economic agency and the understanding of the human being, with this being comprising of relations to the world, to other people and the self. Sen's critique of rational choice theory could be rephrased as a request for relevant information about the whole of human experience, as a basis for understanding economic agency. Thus, underscoring some sense of human (economic) agency as influencing any description of (human) economic agency, with the extent of this influence being contested. Implicitly Sen's critique, then, is a critique of the model of human beings that informs rational choice theory, which he sees as narrow-minded and overly rationalistic.

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This article will address an allegedly new economic phenomenon, experience economy and focus, in light of the general implications of Sen's critique, on the human economic agency depicted in this economic model. The idea of the experience economy, while not part of mainstream economics, is more a business- or marketing-oriented economics, trying to understand and model how economic agency is more influenced by experiential than by rationalistic conceived factors (Østergård 2007). It tries, therefore, to incorporate non-economic factors (e.g. symbols or emotions), as part of the informational basis for understanding economics. Just as anthropology and ethnography in the sixties and seventies revolted against the ahistoricity and dehumanisation of the broad theoretical programs of structuralism, and turned to the study of the concrete lived experience instead, a parallel development occurred in the seventies and eighties within consumer studies and business economics. These fields turned from a statistical and quantitative focus on the market-behaviour of people towards a focus on the concrete experience of products. Where the focus on concrete experience in anthropology meant, *inter alia*, turning to immediacy of experience (Turner and Bruner 1986), performance and action (Bronner 2012), the pragmatics of experience (Abrahams 1985) and hermeneutic-inspired thick descriptions (Geertz 1973), in marketing and business economics it meant turning to everyday consumption practices and consumer experiences, and how these were mediated by the use of cultural symbols (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), and expressions of consumers' understandings

of themselves, which were to be studied in a hermeneutical and phenomenological fashion (Thompson *et al*, 1989). The next step towards experience economy was taken by Pine and Gilmore in an attempt to try to understand how experiences and experiencing could be a source of additional economic value over and above the value of choosing regular products and the services build around these products (Pine and Gilmore 1999). Specifically, Pine and Gilmore asked about the economic value conferred by choosing the Disneyland or Starbucks experience, instead of going to the local funfair or diner. Why were these cultural and economic phenomena appealing more to the experiential expectations of consumers than something else? And why were consumers willing to pay more for products within these experiential settings than in other settings? Experience economy, then, tries to model how, why and for whom the different experiences created as part of ordinary and extra-ordinary economic practices work. Experience economy is therefore part of what Löfgren has termed "the new economy," which incorporates both new modes of production (the creation of experiences in conjunction with a regular product or service, like going to Starbucks) and "novel forms of consumption and organisation of everyday life, horizons of planning, logistics of mobility, new forms of materialities and sensibilities" (Löfgren 2003, 239). In the words of Jantzen and Rasmussen, two proponents of experience economy, "designing experience economic offerings revolves around manufacturing products the consumer wasn't aware of needing beforehand, but afterwards fails to understand how living

without was ever possible" (Jantzen and Rasmussen 2007d, 44). Needless to say, the kind of economic thinking described by Jantzen and Rasmussen affects us all in our everyday economic transactions, making it imperative to analyse critically the relation between human and economic agency.

To show how this works, take the following example of how companies try to influence us in our everyday lives through immersive advertising. It exemplifies a paradigm shift occurring in the tracking of our behaviour through technical devices like iPads, phones and computers. We are used to Google or Facebook tracking our behaviour by storing information about our browsing by means of cookies. A shift has occurred, however, because the means for doing the tracking has become more sophisticated opening up the tracking of physiological and emotional indicators, not just plain text-based search queries. For example, certain new phones can detect your physical state of being through their sensors (e.g. accelerometers, gyrometers, compasses) thereby potentially adjusting for your behaviour.³ Whereas cookie-tracking technology is not able to differentiate between multiple users of the same computer or device, thereby giving an inaccurate picture of the individual user, this new technology allows companies to advertise in a much more personalised manner (Dwoskin 2013; Morozov 2013). Emotional targeting is a suitable overall name for this emerging marketing technique. As an illustration of this technique, here is an excerpt from a recent patent application by Microsoft:

The computer system monitors online activity of users. The online activity is processed to identify a tone of content the users interact with during a time period. The computer system also receives indications of the users' reactions to the content... Advertisements are selected for delivery to the users by the computer system...The computer system delivers the selected advertisements with the highest monetization values to the users that are emotionally compatible (Microsoft 2010).

Notice here that the device records the reactions of the users interacting with content, for example a game, and then targets a strategic place for advertising based on these real-time responses. Which ads get shown, then, depends on the experiences and emotions displayed by the users, not on what is conveyed in the game content itself. Companies are already specialising in this technique by targeting "game players at natural, critical points in game play where they are most receptive to brand messages" (Dwoskin 2014). The following quote is taken from one such company helping other companies with proprietary emotional targeting, "through a suite of proprietary products and analytics, the company delivers immersive brand messages during breakthrough moments (BTMs) within games when people are most receptive to marketing messages. Our ads elicit positive emotions by rewarding users and enhancing the user experience during game play" (Mediabrix 2014). BTM's are, for example, getting a new personal high score, or getting stuck on a specific level. In the latter case a brand can offer to help the player

move on to the next level in exchange for viewing a commercial, whereas the former can offer you a reward, for example by using the phone's GPS to give you a free soda to come with a burger meal at a nearby fast food restaurant. Leaving the glow of old-fashioned behaviourism aside,⁴ detecting these BTM's is, of course, the special technique of this company, targeting the gamer and creating an emotional attachment to a given brand. Since the technique supposedly helps creating a positive experience and affects some kind of pleasure either by reward or compensation, it exemplifies the assumption of a notion of the (economic) human being similar to the one expressed by Jantzen and Rasmussen above, a being whose needs are created by rewards or compensations. The potential of affecting our everyday lives, both when using and not using technical devices, is immense and indicates the reconfiguration of parts of those socio-economic processes dealing with the daily consumption practices by using the concept of experience as a new instrument (Christensen 2013, 79). Furthermore, as attested by the growing international literature on the subject (eg. O'dell and Billing, 2005; Sundbo and Darmer 2008; Lorentzen and Hansen, 2012; Sundbo and Sørensen 2013), this should be scrutinised critically.

This critique might strike more than a note of similarity with the concept of *Kulturindustrie*. Familiar psychotechniques (of which emotional targeting is one) for influencing customers, such as the infantilisation of or barbarism toward subjects as a method for the simplification of life, are part of experience economy and seek to characterize, as will be described below,

modern society in a positive vein. Despite this similarity, as Hullot-Kentor (2008, 138) notes, understanding and using the concept *Kulturindustrie* is possible in a very special sense only, since the noued vital of the concept, as Adorno and Horkheimer used it has gone. Nevertheless it "lives;" it is used, but in the almost exact opposite sense of how it was originally conceived, i.e. as an industry manufacturing culture-products and thereby contributing, the industry claims, positively to the overall growth of society. But what is this culture industry, then? Hullot-Kentor claims that "the manufacture of culture as the production of barbarism is the culture industry" (2008, 145). Barbarism, then, is similar to Sen's description of foolish rationality in the sense that it connotes a primitivization of life, namely the reducing of life to few variables like conforming to a set of idealistic conceived economical laws, or a simple fulfilment of needs. The case study below, a scientific justification of experience economy, displays this power of primitivization by reducing humans to pleasure-seeking individuals only. It may appear to concur with Sen's critique of rational choice theory by stressing the emotionality of human beings, but instead simply adds a premise to the overall rationality of maximizing the gains for the personal welfare. Furthermore, it wraps itself in a selective and simplified understanding of the history of modern society, supplying the importance attached to this experience economy with a glow of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This essay's object of study, henceforth the Aalborg interpretation⁵ (Jantzen and Jensen 2006; Jantzen and Rasmussen 2007a; 2007b), is distinctive in invoking a

biological/neurophysiologic explanation of experiences as a point of departure, and combining this with a socio-historical explanation of experiences. Furthermore, these explanations are used to justify a new version, it is claimed, of economical hedonism, arguing that human economical agency intentionally seeks experiences to achieve the optimal homeostatic and joyous well-being. The aim of this article, then, is to critically question this connection between experience and economy by inquiring whether this particular interpretation actually delivers what is promised, i.e. presenting a suitable and new frame for understanding economy and experience as connected. Hence, as Sen might put it, does it present a viable picture of human economic agency? And is it actually as new as it claims to be? To address this, critical theoretical inspiration is found within the argumentative rigour of both the analytical and the hermeneutical philosophical tradition, as well as studies of everyday culture such as Highmore (2002), Abrahams (1985; 1986; 2005) and Berger (2009). Another purpose of the article is, therefore, to initiate a discussion between scholars investigating expressive and everyday culture, and those studying economics and public policy. One significant result from the investigation in this article concerns the implications of the notion of agency analysed. The essay argues against both a reductionist naturalistic and social conformist version of human agency—understanding peoples' actions as based, roughly, on either a causal or a norm/cultural based interaction with the surrounding world. Instead human agency, economical or otherwise, ought to be understood as intertwined by both biological and social conditions, serving as joint facilitators of these practices.

First, the biological/neurophysiological and socio-historical explanations of the intentionality of the experiential economic agency will be presented. Second, I will put forth a description of the concept of experience as intentional, using both a hermeneutical and analytical-philosophical framework. This will disclose some important traits necessary for understanding experience as a whole and how experience, as part of human agency, can be significant.

Initially, intentionality and experience might be understood as connected in the following ways. First, people crave experiences: they want to experience because experiencing releases some sense of pleasure or excitement. In this sense, experiences are comportments, i.e. intentional stances, having a positive state as the object of the comportment. Second, experiencing is a comportment in the sense that one cannot crave something without understanding it in some way. These two connected senses loosely correspond to the German terms of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, the first connoting a sense of “lived experience” or eventful intensity, the other a sense of being “experienced,” of living in a mode of ordinary meaning—not necessarily a happy or joyous state—but a state with-duration or continuity (Goodman 2003, 117, see also Highmore 2002, 66-67). Third, this essay shows that the Aalborg interpretation cannot accommodate these necessary traits within its own description of experiences as intentional. Finally, the model interpretation ultimately characterises human beings in a reductionist fashion as emotional fools, making the alleged new economy a reawakening of an old combination of hedonism and util-

itarianism—a resuscitation of Bentham within a supposedly neurophysiological frame of reference. In other words, the experience economy in this hedonic guise reproduces plain rational choice theory's emphasis on self-maximising behaviour as the prime human indicator, but with the difference that its informational base includes an appeal to emotions in addition to an idealised rationality.

Hedonic Experience Economy

Initially, however, the essay describes experience economy as consisting of two parts. The first part describes how the socio-historical development of the Western society made the hedonic part of consumers' intentional behaviour predominant. In the second part, this essay will show how individuals of this hedonic society are craving experiences due to certain biological inclinations describable in neurophysiologic terms. Hence, according to Jantzen and Rasmussen (2007d, 37-38) the first part establishes how individuals, through their hedonic behaviour, intentionally comport themselves towards specific objects of preference. The second part, referring to a neurophysiologic perspective, explains why they do so, taking its point of departure in biological intentionality as "...the motivation of the organism regarding the world of objects." (Jantzen and Rasmussen 2007d, 38)

A Historical Justification for the Joining of Experience and Economy: The Hedonic Society

According to the Aalborg interpretation, present-day society is characterised by a predominance of certain collective hedonic dispositions, serving as the basis for

modern economy. The force of these dispositions, it is claimed, is the result of a specific historical development implied in the idea of modernity. In particular "structural conditions of late modernity was a requisite for experience to function as an acceptable, and perhaps even dominating, motivational reason for many people" (Jantzen and Østergård 2007, 89). The relationship between the hedonic dispositions and these structural conditions is synergic in the sense, "that a modern form of hedonism, one the one hand, was promoted by particular circumstances of modernity and, on the other hand, it promoted these particular circumstances as well" (*ibid.*). The particular circumstances of modernity emphasized here are, firstly, a change in the overall extent of market-supply offering more experiences for the individual(s) to purchase and, secondly, a change in mentality causing more individuals to be oriented towards experiences than before. Hence, a certain kind of dialectic between the extent of market-supply and the historical conditions of the collective hedonic consciousness is established, where each somehow presupposes and promotes the other.

This dialectic is summarized by Jantzen and Østergård. Following the increase in production of goods in the last century, an aesthetisation of goods occurred, endowing these with both expressive and impressive functions (92). The former endow goods with a certain style and makes them recognizable within the social space (Bourdieu 1984). The style becomes a brand and shows something for and, primarily, *of* those who buy it. The latter appeals to the senses of people (Ritzer 2005). The sensuousness of goods entices

consumers; it appeals to their imagination and makes the act of consumption private and difficult to communicate to others. Both of these functions are most clearly at work in advertising “emphasizing the pleasure the use of goods can produce, and appealing to emotions and the wish for meaningful experiences” (Jantzen and Østergård 2007, 93). However, according to the authors, commercials only work when the consumers picture themselves as partial hedonists and acknowledge the implicit values behind advertising. Enjoyment, feelings and experiences must function as the implicit values of a commercially constructed “good life,” supplying consumers with sufficient reasons to consume. Hence, the aesthetisation of products from the supply-side only works if a certain demand exists, and this demand presupposes a certain attitude on the consumers’ part approving the above set of values. These values, then, function as instrumental reasons for the craving of experiences: “The hedonist is orientated towards pleasure, and acts in a calculating way with the aim of obtaining as much pleasure as possible” (Jantzen and Østergård 2007, 86). The presupposed attitude of approving the values is, according to the authors following Schulze (1992), the result of the historical development of the mentality of hedonic behaviour oriented toward experiences. This development creates a new *preference-order* based on what is exciting (Jantzen and Østergård 2007, 104), by connecting enjoyment with *calculation* (107). Notice the italicised words, the first originating within neoclassical economical theory, connected with utility maximisation and revealed preference theory

(see Walsh 1996), underlining a connection between revealing one’s preferences and the imperative to enjoy the experiences. The second echoes Bentham: “Passion calculates, more or less, in every man: in different men, according to the warmth or coolness of their dispositions: according to the firmness or irritability of their minds: according to the nature of the motives by which they are acted upon” (1789/1987, 111). Dispositions, emotions and excitements are here connected with a calculation directed at either promoting or avoiding what Bentham claims are humanity’s two masters: pain and pleasure.

Jantzen and Østergård present four additional features within the historical development of this hedonic mentality. First, that the craving of experience presupposes the actual increase in income, education, spare time, and life expectancy that followed World War II. This increased societal wealth in Western societies was, according to the authors, transformed into individual welfare and wellbeing through the production of a multitude of goods and the legitimisation of subjective reasons to choose these goods. An example of this is answering the question “why did you buy it?” with “Oh, I just felt like it” (Jantzen and Østergård 2007, 94). Second, according to the authors, again following Schulze (1992), the “rebellion of ‘68” against fixed norms and static and hierarchal societal structures for what is right to do and feel, rehabilitated a diversity of feelings, emotions and experiences as authentic evaluations and judgements for what you (can) do and, hence, buy. Expressions like “This is cool,” “This is so me” or “I like that” are all emotional expressions of the *justified* consumption

act made “not for the *outer* recognition but for the *inner* enjoyment” (Jantzen and Østergård 2007, 94). Hence, the authors claim, a democratization of enjoyment was the result, since most people could now afford to buy what they wanted. Needless to say, since it is so blatant, this can appear as democratization only if the issues of poverty and distributive justice are excised from the understanding of economics. Third, justified enjoyment, or modern hedonism, has its basis in Protestantism and its connection with Capitalism. Drawing on Campbell’s interpretation of Weber’s *locus classicus* of the connection between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of Capitalism (1987), the authors want to show that the effort to control the emotions of the Protestant ethic produced an acute sensitivity as well. Alongside the prohibition of enjoying the fruits of labour and the resulting ethics of production, a consumption-ethics developed, apparently redirecting drives and wants in a sensuous direction. The result was enjoyment not as a satisfaction of innate needs, but as the redemption of desires caused by consumer fantasies. Hence, “the roots of the modern orientation towards experiences lie in the Puritan renunciation of secular nonsense and foolishness” (Jantzen and Østergård 2007, 98). This paves the way for:

The modern hedonist, a capable manipulator of sense impressions and the turning up and down for the fantasy, with a larger and more differentiated register of experiential and joyous possibilities than the biggest potentate. He or she has become a dream-artist, controlling the object-world and the modulation of his or her feelings by a “controlled decontrol of emotions”. And this is everything else but irrational (99).

Notice here that this rationally controlled decontrol of emotions is the core output of this new hedonism, manifesting the new preference-order above. Fourth, a certain therapeutic praxis was legitimized, which helped people experiencing trouble with this new sensuousness. Jantzen and Østergård conclude that:

The modern hedonism is conditioned by a marketing economic enterprise creating a sensual world of ideas around the product and consumption. On the other hand, the experience orientation is a consequence of protracted mentality-historical changes, emphasizing how sensuality and sensitivity promote the individuals’ quest for meaning in life. These two sides encourage each other (107).

To recapitulate then, the basis and justification of this view of the modern consumer and modern hedonic society relies on a historical explanation of the predominance of the hedonic experience orientation based on, firstly, a change in mentality causing people to be oriented towards experiences, and secondly, the extent of the market supplying goods that appeal to the sensitivity of possible customers. The example of proprietary emotional targeting above is a clear example of targeting the sensitivity of consumers, inasmuch as it aims to create an experience by directing (controlling) consumers’ emotionality (decontrol) towards a positive fulfilment.

Hence, the authors seem to base their explanation on a dialectic in the supply of the market, which is both influenced by and influences the demand structure of the collective hedonic consciousness of consumers. However, failing to discuss both contradictory historical descriptions of how experience as a concept has been

used, and criticisms of Weber's classical study,⁷ the argument seems to be, in the terms defined by Hutchinson, Read and Sharrock, tendentious and a case of *apriorism* "to be committed to something—a method or the relevant explanatory factors in one's explanation of social action—prior to one's investigation" (Hutchinson *et al.* 2008, 3). Thus, it is assumed that the hedonic society is predominant now and that the history of mentality is the right method in explaining the development of society. No wonder, then, that experiences turn out to be pretty much what the theory claims it to be—namely hedonic and describable in mentalistic terms like sense impression, fantasy, and sensitivity. This picture of human experiential agency, then, presupposes a picture of economical agency in which human beings are primarily embedded in an (quasi-)equilibrrious supply-demand structure, choosing to buy experiences as a way of maximizing pleasure, and then justifying these choices by appeal to internal emotions created by and embedded in the exact same supply-demand structure. The Aalborg interpretation, therefore, presupposes a specific connection between economical ideas of hedonism, preference-orderings and utility-maximisation, as the sole basis for human (economical) experiential agency. So even though Jantzen and Østergård claim that they are not arguing that hedonism is the only way modern consumers relate to goods (89), they fail to follow up on this point, making their argument *non sequitur*.

This reduced picture of experiential human agency will be discussed in the last section; however, the next section will examine the claim that the significance of

the hedonic regime of our society lies in its naturalistic basis (Jantzen *et al.*, 2012). A biological understanding of experience could explain the predominance of hedonic experiences in our society on a deeper level, i.e. not as a matter of cultural based preferences, but of the motivation of the biological organism regarding the world of objects. In this view, the historical explanation above describes a social norm-regulating adjustment pattern, justifying the right way(s) to want and procure hedonic experiences and denouncing others, thereby reproducing the naturalistic account of experience, but on a societal level. The novelty consists, then, of combining a naturalistic explanation with a social-regulatory account of experiential economical agency.

Experience Naturalised

Emphasizing emotionality (sensitivity and sensuality) as the primary human trait when it comes to experiencing, makes a connection with naturalistic and cognitive ways of explaining the experiential process straightforwardly. Jantzen claims, however, that consumer-studies, or microeconomics, have conceived experiences primarily as a non-economical side-effect of consumerism, understood as a satisfaction of needs called the needs-paradigm (Jantzen 2007, 139). Moving experiences to the centre of microeconomics therefore means dealing with three problems within this needs-paradigm for Jantzen. Firstly, people are controlled by motives other than the pure satisfaction of needs. Some people, Jantzen exemplifies, continue eating even though they are full, hence a wider model of what satisfaction consists in is called for. Secondly, microeconomics has failed

to conceptualize the process after needs are satisfied, particularly how the evaluation of an act of consumption proceeds, from the perspective of the consumer. A consumer's disappointment with a product can be explained as product failure, or as a result of misleading marketing, "but the reason is frequently, that the consumer was not capable of bringing himself into the right mood leading up to the anticipated moment" (140). A strong responsibility is placed on the consumer here and, as such, the fear of disappointment when buying a product is what creates the connection between the revealed preference and imperative to enjoy.⁸ The final problem is the "lack of the lack of needs." People eat, not because they are hungry and uncomfortable anymore, but to keep the hunger from manifesting itself in the first place. Hence, the satisfaction of needs is anticipatory rather than responsive.

These three problems show, according to Jantzen, that the experience process is not a pure side-effect of consumerism and that "experiences as goods need another calculus and another theoretical basis than the need-paradigm of microeconomy" (141). This calculus, according to Jantzen, consists of expectations, bodily and emotional reactions during the consumption, affective evaluation and reflexive cultivation after the consumption act. These elements comprise the *new calculus of the rationality of the consumer behaviour*, creating the frame for explaining the justified emotionality (the controlled decontrol) described above (141). Jantzen proposes a three-level biological explanation of this new calculus, naturalizing the experience process, claiming that instead of

...[C]onsidering experiences as an organism's inner response to an outer stimuli, the intentionality of the organism towards outer stimuli with the aim of reaching an inner response must be investigated. The organism, however, is not motivated by scarcities or lacks, in need of satisfaction, only, but also by a constant neurophysiologic activity creating experiences – even when scarcity is not present (145).

The first level consists of neurophysiological activity and is explained through an arousal-paradigm based on Scitovsky's introduction of neurophysiologic factors into consumption instead of the need-paradigm described above (Jantzen 2007, 147f). The basic assumption in this paradigm is that the biological organism is not only motivated by situations of scarcity or lack, which the need-paradigm assumed. The organism is instead motivated by an inner biological urge for homeostasis, aiming at the optimal level of wellbeing between higher and lower neurophysiologic arousal levels. This idea is captured by fig. 1, a reproduction of Jantzen's model (149).

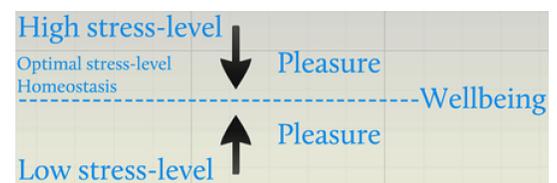


Fig.1.

The organism has a continuous biological readiness to react intentionally towards the exciting surrounding world, balancing the level of activity approximating it

to the optimal homeostasis. The process leading to the optimal homeostasis, balancing out either the high or low stress-level is experienced as pleasurable. The difference between pleasure and wellbeing explains why different people create different preference-orders for themselves. Jantzen explains, for example, that “for introverted people pleasure comes from relaxing, whereas extrovert people wants pleasures motivated by stimulating experiences” (150). Wellbeing, then, is absence of the unpleasant, which itself is a condition for pleasure since pleasure is the diminishing of unpleasantness. Due to the abundance in modern (Western) society the overall degree of unpleasantness is low. Hence, “pleasure needs to be induced in another way: by trying something new, surprising as it is with other sense-impressions than the usual ones” (152). Therefore, *how* and *what* you experience is important. It must be intense and eventful, a range of enlivened experiences (142). This can serve as a naturalistic epistemological justification for the notion of BTMs used in emotional targeting described above. Understanding when the consumer is distal from the optimal homeostasis provides information about when the consumer is most receptive to brand messages, and therefore when the use of compensation or rewards as instruments in fulfilling the biological urge for homeostasis is most effective.

At the next biological level, a certain emotional evaluation commences, aiming at the creation of a positive evaluation of the brand. Both trying and evaluating something new, creates an emotional involvement causing behavioural adjustment. According to Jantzen and Vetner,

“emotions act as anticipating or annulling in behavioural dispositions,” influencing the promotion or prohibition of certain complexes of actions (Jantzen and Vetner 2007a, 208).

Does it feel good? Do I want to continue? Will I do it again? These evaluations serve as an emotional basis for creating preferences culminating in habits and routines, minimizing the risk for disappointments, but also limiting the chance of experiencing something excitingly new (Jantzen 2007, 154). At the third and last biological level, individual preference schemes are created and adjusted in accordance with the social environment in which the consumers move. These three levels, the neurophysiological, the evaluative, and the habitual “constitute the biological level of experiences, where the organism receives, cultivates and pursues impulses without the necessary involvement of the consciousness” (Jantzen and Vetner 2007a, 210). All three levels make up the biological intentionality of the experiencing⁹ and pleasure-seeking individual, who responds sub-consciously to the exciting world through balancing the homeostatic stress-level. This creates behavioural adjustments by promoting and prohibiting certain dispositions culminating in individual preference orderings, which needs some sort of further social adjustment.

As an addendum to these levels, a fourth socio-cultural level therefore exists. At this reflexive and conscious level, a meaningful connection between past, present and future experiences and behaviour is created within the experiencing individual. This creation of meaning“ consists of interpretations and explana-

tions of impulses informed by the individual's picture of him- or herself and his or her social identity" (Jantzen and Vetner 2007a, 210). A sense of continuum, or meaningful duration, which the individual experiences in relation to the surrounding world, supplies the individual with a narrative of personal history for use in the social milieu. Experiences are here communicable and meaningful in an intersubjective sense, enabling the individual to justify the planned experience-causing actions within a social setting. Hence, instructions in where, how and why enjoyment should be pursued, are necessary regulations of the experience economical agency within the hedonic society (Jantzen and Østergård 2007, 108). These necessary regulations are, of course, made up by the emotionality that justifies each individual's intentional desire for and procurement of hedonic experiences. To return to our gaming example above, incentives to continue to play a game, and thereby receive additional rewards or compensations, can be connected to a personal narrative justifiable by reference to social sanctioned emotions like "I won" or "I made a new high score" and therefore "I think I'll try this game again."

The next section will take a step back and bring out some necessary implications of connecting experience and intentionality. The succeeding section will return to the two descriptions of experience (biological and social-historical) and ask, in light of these necessary implications, whether they present a coherent description of experiential agency. As will be seen, neither the biological nor the socio-cultural account of experiential agency are convincing due to serious shortcom-

ings in the description of the concept of experience. The result is an emotional counterpart to Sen's rational fool argument, which seriously questions the overall novelty of (human) economical agency implied in the Aalborg interpretation.

Experience as intentionality I

The experiential comportment described in the Aalborg interpretation above consists of two aspects: a biological account of intentionality directed towards the optimal state of wellbeing, and a socio-individualist account (since it is described from the singular person point of view), which describes the regulation of where, how and why this biological intentionality is appropriate in a social setting. This section will try to delineate a more precise characteristic of experience as part of intentional agency by emphasising certain necessary aspects of intentionality taken from hermeneutical and analytical philosophy and cultural theory.

First, as Stoller has convincingly argued, it is possible to understand the concept of experience as connected to intentionality without foreshortening the concept empirically (2009, 709). This foreshortening, following Malpas' understanding of experience as a whole, "refer[s] to human existence as it comprises capacities to think, to feel, to grasp, to act and so on" (1999, 16). Furthermore, Stoller defends the concept of experience against different accusations, two of which are important here: immediacy and uninterpretability. These two characterisations are connected, since both accusations are levelled at experience as an unmediated access to whatever experience is directed at. As Stoller claims, it is exactly the intentional-

ity of experience which makes this interpretation impossible, since “intentionality refers to the fact that a given *something* is always experienced *as something*” (716). Hence, for Stoller this (old) hermeneutic idea indicates that what is given in experience is always connected to how it is given. Being directed at something in experience is intimately connected to how the directedness between that something and the experience of it is conditioned. Being comporting towards a game is not, in this particular gaming situation, a matter of two separate things—the game and the intentional comportment—just being conjoined. Both are conditioned by number of factors influencing the experience of this situation: things to be aware of when gaming outside, the right time for being allowed to play (e.g. not before the homework is done), the batteries not running out, competing with other people. Together, these factors facilitate a particular relation between the game and the comportment. One consequence of this view is that experiential intentionality is not something internal to the mind, but describes the practical conditions for this particular gaming-intentionality to take place (see Carman 2003, 44-52). This is not denying the importance of the cognitive or the mental in experience;¹⁰ it is just not the primary in understanding experiential intentionality. In the words of Malpas “rather than viewing intentionality as some sort of occult relation between mental states and their objects, we can see intentionality as always grounded in the sort of spatial orientation and causal involvement that is characteristically a feature of engagement with objects in action” (1999, 95). Experiential intentionality, then, hap-

pens within and not besides different agencies and situations, as entanglements between persons and things, social practices and natural events, effectuated for a number of different purposes. It is on the basis of these entanglements that the understanding of something/someone is possible. Hence, different settings of engaged involvement with entities serves as the (back-)grounds on which these entities can become objects for particular instances of experiential intentionality, thereby understanding something as something. Understanding something as something involves, as Berger claims, the experience of both factual (size, weight etc.) and valuational traits of the entities we experience, including ourselves (Berger 2009, 137n1). These cases of experiential intentionality are, furthermore, always transforming. As Jay claims, experiencing happens “through an encounter with otherness, whether human or not. That is, an experience, however we define it, cannot simply duplicate the prior reality of the one who undergoes it, leaving him or her precisely as before; something must be altered, something new must happen, to make the term meaningful” (Jay 2006, 7). Experiential agency, then, is connected with change in the sense that experiencing opens up a space for different degrees of a transforming character: my experience of entities, of my self, or of other people is altered to a greater or lesser extent. As Abrahams describes it, experiences therefore come in varieties “providing the details of the daily process of life to those out of the general run, which we call *an* experience (or an *experience*) and beyond this a big experience, one memorable and worthy of being recounted” (Abrahams

1985, 325). *Erlebnis*, as a particular experience, and *Erfahrung*, as the continuation of experience, then, go together because to experience implies the possibility of being more experienced, and even failing to be experienced in a particular manner, is, in a certain sense, also a case of *Erfahrung*. For example, if you fail repeatedly to pass the exam for the bar, you will realise that being an attorney is not an experience you will get. As Highmore claims, *Erfahrung* is what makes *Erlebnis* socially meaningful (Highmore 2002, 67). Identifying an experience as new presupposes a context, e.g. a tradition in Abrahams' interpretation of William James (1985), or a social practice (Berger 2009, 97), from which this experience differs in a meaningful sense. The possible denunciation of previous ways of doing things and the embrace of others, are part of becoming experienced as well. Experiencing, therefore, also implies some sort of self-correction, making experiential agency part of a self-correcting enterprise.¹¹ For example, parents know how the experience of having children changed their way of life, giving them new practical knowledge as well as causing them to renounce certain behaviours.

Second, Anscombe describes a further characteristic of intentional agency, important for our understanding of experience. She argues that what distinguishes intentional actions from regular actions is "that they are actions to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application" (Anscombe 1957, 9).¹² This description, of course, involves some serious question-begging if the putative answer incorporates something remotely in the vicinity of being interpretable as "being intentional." Hence, Anscombe proceeds

by calling attention to the much-discussed category of things *known without observation* (13),¹³ which can be described without using notions like "willed", "voluntary", or "intentional". To give the reader an example, think about the situation of reaching for the coffee cup on the table, while reading the news on the computer screen. When reaching for it, one knows where the cup is without looking.¹⁴ Anscombe concludes, through analysing this particular kind of knowledge that intentional actions are known in a special sense—in answering the question why, no appeal to evidences nor mental causes will serve as reasons (24). Intentional actions, and therefore experiences, are something for which reasons can be given, but reasons should not be confused with causes. Instead, reasons comprising of a description of past history, a description of current action, or a desire for future experience, can serve as reasons for (intentional) actions. For example, answers like "I know from past experience...", "I think he did it, because in his experience..." or "I would like to experience this..." would comply with Anscombe's criteria for intentional actions. Answers like "I was not aware I was doing that" or "I *observed* that I was doing that" would not work, because they refuse the application of the question "why?" (25). The answer "For no particular reason," however, would work since "the question is not refused application because the answer to it says that there is *no* reason, any more than the question how much money I have in my pocket is refused application by the answer 'None'" (*ibid.*). Connected to intentional actions, then, is the joint possibility of and necessity for reason-giving. It is possible

in the sense that the answer is not given beforehand. But if the action is intentional, then not refusing the application of the question “why?” is also a necessity. So, ignoring whether this reason-giving is a species of either practical or theoretical reasoning, intentional action opens up a space in which one is accountable to this action in a variety of ways.

Now, Anscombe ends her discussion by addressing perhaps the most important question: why it is that the question “why?” distinguishes intentional actions? The reason is, according to Anscombe, that the description of intentional actions we are looking for is one which could not exist, if “why?” wasn’t applicable to it. Just like a description of something like a sentence could not occur prior to sentences carrying meaning at all, “So the description of something as human action could not occur prior to the question ‘Why?’, simply as a kind of utterance by which we were *then* obscurely prompted to address the question” (83). Hence, *describing* something as human action and asking why it was done are closely entwined in marking human action as intentional. In other words, describing an action as intentional is simultaneously understanding its place within a space of reason, or meaning-giving pattern, its sense of accountability. Anscombe gives the example of ‘offending someone,’ which makes perfect sense as an unintentional action (offending by mistake, for example), but is dependent upon there being a description of offending as an intentional action for being understandable (84). This also shows that intentionality is not the property of an act (the act being both offensive and not offensive at the same time) as if they were

virtually separable. In Anscombe’s evaluation, “an action is not called ‘intentional’ in virtue of any extra feature which exists when it is performed” (28). An action is intentional in virtue of internal features in its execution expressed by understanding the action within a pattern, namely a pattern exemplifying the understanding of an action *as* an (intentional) action.

As a whole, then, experience has at least these three characteristics. It is part of an overall intentional human agency, denoting activity and changeability. Furthermore, experience is always experience of something *as* something, the understanding of which presupposes involvements and engagements with objects and persons in different situations, leaving none of these unchanged in the process. Lastly, and in parallel to the experiencing of something *as* something, is the *description of intentionality* in such a way that it opens up a space within which there is a certain sense of accountability as part of intentional agency. Any putative experience economy would have to address these important aspects of experience to hold any credibility. The next section will question whether our case study can seriously accommodate these aspects.

Experience and intentionality II

The last section indicated how experiencing should be characterised as an intentional action. It argued that intentionality concerns the directedness of experience from within specific agencies in different situations. What role, then, can arousals play within this intentional agency? One very likely answer will depict these as bio-causal elements influencing the experiencing person, whose intentional agen-

cy is directed at achieving well-being as a perfect homeostatic equilibrium. Hence, the reward/compensation (arousals) in the emotional targeting example works, it would be claimed, because they cause equilibrium in human nature. In this section this answer will be questioned, especially whether the arousal paradigm can actually accommodate, in the light of the characterisation of experience as intentional above, the experiential tasks assigned to it by the Aalborg interpretation – serving as a biological explanation with a social-individualist explanation on top. The discussion will be framed within Haugeland’s (1998) and Rouse’s (2009) respective modes of discussing biological and social intentionality.

Rouse pictures existing theories of intentionality along two axes (Rouse 2009, 3-6). One consisting of the difference between descriptive and normative theories,¹⁵ the other containing the difference between empty and fulfilled intentional relations as a point of departure. A descriptive approach to intentionality “seeks to articulate those features of intentional compartments that are operative in producing their directedness toward their objects,” whereas a normative approach “identifies the domain as those performances and capacities that can be held normatively accountable in the right way” (3). Framed within Rouse’s picture, the arousal paradigm is, first of all, descriptive in identifying the homeostatic process as the prime operative function in establishing directedness towards objects and culminating in wellbeing. Responding to something as part of the experiencing process, then, is not being normatively accountable, but instead is just part of

the natural process of reaching an optimal stress-level. The other distinction divides intentional approaches starting with the actual relation to things—the fulfilled—from the possible relation to things—the empty— since the entity that the intentionality is directed at might be non-existing or non-present. For example, it might be an imaginary entity such as a unicorn. Put simply, how is intentionality possible when directed at non-existing objects—how do we make sense of non-referring intentional states? The arousal paradigm is clearly a case of fulfilled intentionality, since it starts with the actual relation to things through a causal stimulus-response relation. This does not exclude a sense of “empty” intentionality like dreaming of something not present, but the significance of this empty intentionality is, primarily, tied to how this dream is expressed in the causal interaction with the surroundings. So, as a characterisation of intentionality, the arousal paradigm is explanatory and assumes the primacy of fulfilled intentionality as point of departure. Notice that the evaluation described as part of the arousal paradigm fails to qualify it as a normative approach, since the evaluation revolves around whether the intentionality maintains the optimal homeostatic stress-level or not. That is why the evaluation is placed in the biological level, and helps the establishment of dispositions become ossified as habits at the last level.

But experiences are, as described above, also expressing accountability within the normative space they help open up. One does not just go through an experience; part of the experience is committing to some sort of accountability (pictured with-

in a frame of asking ‘why?’). For instance, being trained as a carpenter makes one accountable both to an employer, through an appeal to past experiences and towards the job, the right interpretation of the action in Anscombe’s terms. However, if experiences are understood in causal terms, as they are in the arousal paradigm, any normativity must be related or reduced purely to cause and effect. Furthermore, the causal space opened up by experiences this way must be viewed as uniform. Hence, it is wrong to speak of any kind of normative space being opened up because experience is inert (Luntley 1999, 197). The following will present an argument questioning whether experience, since it is exhibiting a normative saturated intentionality, can be reduced in this way to a matter of pure causality. The argument is a species of a genus of a plenitude of arguments against proclaimed naturalist explanations of intentionality in this way (see for example, Sellars 1953; McDowell 1984; Brandom 1994; Haugeland 1998, 305-361; Luntley 1999; Rouse 2002; and Janack 2012), however, the main inspirations for the argument here are Luntley and Haugeland. The argument proceeds in two steps. First, I will question the reduction of experience to the neurophysiologic or naturalistic description in terms of the arousal paradigm. Can it account for the inherent normative intentional element within experience, such as being accountable for discriminating right from wrong? Can it distinguish beliefs from the subject of those beliefs? Ultimately, I claim that it cannot account for this normativity and, instead I offer a possible alternative strategy for accommodating this insight, namely retreating to a so-

cial level for construing this normativity. The Aalborg interpretation could be pictured as using, tentatively, one example of this strategy through sanctioning the pursuit of hedonistic experiences at the social level. Hence, we have a biological explanation of inert experiences, which are then regulated at this top level, supposedly through structures ranging from the everyday production of norms for correct (experiential) behaviour to, one could imagine, the punishment of severe violations of these norms. This alternative strategy will also be questioned and claimed unsuitable as a description of experiential normativity.

Upon accepting the inertness of experience, does it make sense to claim that experience is connected to experiencing something, which *has* to be the case? Well, probably in the minimal sense of being biologically “normal,” i.e. as displaying a proper functioning within an overall biological whole. The arousals within the arousal paradigm described above, function as kinds of dispositional properties. As objects of a neurophysiologic explanation of what goes on, the arousals work as causal mechanisms of a plain stimulus-response regulation type within the homeostasis as a functional whole. Hence, the arousal-paradigm, we might say, aims to describe “the mechanism by which the proper functioning has been rendered typical in the current population” (Haugeland 1998, 309). As dispositions, we expect these causal mechanisms to work properly, just like we expect metabolism to work or our hearts to keep pumping blood around our bodies. They might stop working, but then we would speak about a malfunction on their part,

not their doing something wrong or being non-accountable, which would sound ridiculous since hearts work as properties and not as a proprieties.

Haugeland claims that there is a normative distinction this biological perspective cannot accommodate, namely, the distinction between being “functionally right but factually wrong, so to speak” (310). If any normativity is to be connected with experience, then it has to be accountable to some matter making an imposition *upon* experience. Haugeland’s example of birds refraining from eating yellow butterflies, shows this:

Imagine an insectivorous species of bird that evolved in an environment where most of the yellow butterflies are poisonous, and most others not; and suppose it has developed a mechanism for detecting and avoiding yellow butterflies. Then the point can be put this way: if a bird in good working order (with plenty light, and so on) detects and rejects a (rare) non-poisonous yellow butterfly, there can be no grounds for suggesting that it *mistook* that butterfly for a poisonous one; and similarly, if it detects and accepts a (rare) poisonous orange butterfly. . . For there is nothing that the response can “mean” other than whatever *actually* elicits it in normal birds in normal conditions (*ibid.*).

In other words, it makes no sense to answer the ‘why’ of the bird’s behaviour with anything other than “it just did.” If, however, we claim that it mistook the butterfly (a claim not hard to imagine), then our description of this bird’s allegedly intentional behaviour is a case of projection. We recognise it, because it is part of our intentionality to recognise something like

that as mistaken. Now picture this setting as applied to the arousal paradigm, the function of which works so as to avoid things that do not elicit joy, and to pursue things, which do. As a responsive disposition can it be held accountable to anything besides doing what it always does? Can the response mean anything other than the fulfilment of its disposition as Haugeland claims? No, it cannot be wrong since there is no way for it to exhibit intentional content, or be wrong in a factual sense. Rouse puts it nicely when he claims, “Haugeland does not spell out the underlying principle here, but the point is clear enough: intentional directness must introduce a possible gap between what is meant and what is actually encountered, such that there is a possibility of error” (Rouse 2009, 11). If claiming the bird as mistaken was a case of projection, then the arousal-paradigm, as a description, is a case of not recognising the distinctive character of human intentionality. Haugeland claims that the problem with the birds/arousal paradigm is that it makes no sense to claim that they are *supposed* to respond to something besides what they actually *do* respond to, because there is only one kind of functioning normativity, i.e. the biological one controlling their responses (1998, 308). In the arousal paradigm, what one wants cannot matter in such a way that I am accountable it. No independently determining and normative status applies to it, since it functions only as part of my biological responsive disposition. Failing to account for the possibility of error, and thereby disregarding intentionality as human intentionality, the experiential agency modelled on the arousal paradigm has a glow of infan-

tile behaviour about it: doing what one's dispositions tells you to do to reach pleasure—or, in the case of emotional targeting, assuming that the consumer will react when most receptive in a purely positive manner to a given brand. Here the other part of the argument comes in, because this cannot work as a proper description of consumer society. A sort of reciprocal “contractual connection” (Luntley 1999, 197), regulating this behaviour is needed as well. Which is to say, some sort of societal-based regulation is needed, binding the different experiences together and making us accountable to what is binding in terms of social norms. So, on top of the inertness of experiences, a social regulatory mechanism is placed. Within the Aalborg interpretation this is the function of the historical institution of hedonic society, legitimizing the *correct* and orderly way of pursuing hedonic experiences.

This, however, faces the same problem as the biological intentionality, according to Haugeland, just the other way around. In the social regulatory version, the normativity connected with experiences is socially instituted,¹⁶ regulating behaviours and circumstances for experiencing by matching the proper experiential agency with the appropriate circumstances. Take the example of waiting in line for riding the rollercoaster. This is a circumstance in which a whole range of behaviours is both appropriate and not appropriate. It is acceptable to show excitement as part of the anticipation of what is to come, but it is not acceptable to be so excited you try to bend the rules for waiting in line. Different statuses and roles are exhibited, connected with different authorities: the parent and a “first timer” child; two

youngsters, one an “experienced” rider, the other a rookie; the usher and the customers etc. Haugeland asks whether this kind of social normativity is able to account for the distinction above (1998, 313). Is the possibility of error an actual possibility here, equipping intentionality with the capability of self-correcting or, we might say, with the status of being experienced?

Not so, according to Haugeland, because a parallel to the problem with biological intentionality exists here, but in a social-conformist form. Common to both of Haugeland's critiques is the indication of the incapacity of intentionality to demonstrate a sense of openness. That is, none of the accounts are capable of showing accountability towards matters being authoritative in a way not instituted by the intentionality in question, whether this is made up of biological functions or social institutions. Take the example of waiting in line again. As a social institution, it institutes both the norms for behaving properly when waiting in line and the conditions for recognising a situation where waiting in line is realised. So, part of behaving properly when waiting in line is being able to tell when queuing conditions obtain. Is there any room for behaving properly when waiting in line, and yet misunderstanding the conditions? Not really, because the status of these conditions are dependent upon their involvement in the norm for proper behaving while waiting in line. Hence, “[t]here is really only one type of norm at work: the instituted conditions themselves have no *independent* criterial status at all” (314). We might make room for individuals failing to conform to the norms, even groups of people,

but “[w]hat cannot happen is that all or most of the community members systematically respond wrongly to a certain class of instituted conditions—for their common systematic responses define the very conditions in question. Thus, the “independence” of instituted conditions can extend no farther than the usual consensus” (315). This is a strong argument. If we want to understand intentionality and experience as opening a space in which we are held normatively accountable, then what our intentionality is directed at, the aboutness of our experience, must have an independent criterial status capable of exerting a normative authority upon us. It must be capable of mattering to us in a way beyond our influence. Otherwise the genuine possibility of being wrong, hence of self-correcting, by way of being experienced, is non-existent. Take another simple example like the gaming model used above. In contradistinction to the way games are used within emotional targeting, there is an aspect of playing a game where one learns, for example, that achieving something takes an effort.

What can be inferred about the case study’s depiction of experience from these excursions into Haugeland’s thinking?¹⁷ Haugeland claims that a sense of change, a mediating role, and an opening up of a space of normativity are important traits of experiencing as a whole, and I posed the question as to whether the Aalborg interpretation could accommodate these traits within its description of the biological/neurophysiological foundation of experiencing in hedonic society. The neurophysiological explanation cannot, according to its premises, describe experiential agency as normative since arousals are, as biolog-

ical agency, just part of a functional whole of which it is nonsensical to claim any accountability. It is just adaptable. Describing human agency in this way is too simplistic: it reduces agency to regressive and familiar reactions, without any possibility of maturing or developing, i.e. becoming experienced. Of course, it makes sense to claim that a process of adaptability displays some kind of development, but this is not tantamount to ascribing accountability to this development, except as a case of projecting. However, recourse to the social level of hedonic society instituting regulating norms for how, when and where the pursuit of pleasurable experiences is allowable, might be taken to instantiate the normative space opened up by the experiential agency. Here the experiential agency in the Aalborg interpretation is accountable, but in a conformist sense. Accountable means conforming to the pre-given norms by recognising the conditions under which it is right to act properly in an experience economic sense. Furthermore, these norms and the conditions for recognising these norms are instituted by the experience economical logic legitimised by the hedonic society. It dictates both the needs (the pleasurable experiences we never knew we could live without) and the proper way to redeem these needs. In the emotional targeting case it is, of course, the advertising agency’s job both to instil these needs and the proper way to redeem them on behalf of a company. This seriously limits the sense of experiencing as change, mediation and transformation connected to any idea of a self-correcting enterprise, *Erfahrung*, making any change a matter of conforming to the established consensus. Thus, being

experienced amounts to nothing more than the consumer having learned how to redeem the dictated needs by adapting to the marketers' norms for correct consuming behaviour. A primitivisation of life by reducing it to conformity to the dictated needs, and furthermore never questioning these, results. What matters for consumers, then, is apparently an aggregated sense of *Erlebnisse*, a punctual fulfilment of increasingly pleasurable experiences. Neither the biological nor the social accounts of experiential intentionality in the Aalborg interpretation have any room for the important aspects of experience claimed a necessary part of experiential intentionality. So, the human (economical) agency described by the Aalborg interpretation through experiential intentionality is a reduced human agency, incapable of engaging in any self-correcting enterprise besides adapting to the biological circumstances and conforming to the pre-given and experience economical established norms. All in all, this interpretation replays an old *Kulturindustrie* song using a combination of naturalism and social conformism as instruments, with social science as lead singer. Furthermore, these signs present a strong indication of a society incapable of being wrong except by its own consensual hedonic standards. It is, we might say, a society made of emotional but nevertheless foolish members.

Closing: What's new, you silly Benthamite?

Initially the notion of the experience economy held a promise of moving past an overly rational conception of economic agency by incorporating experiences, sensualities, and sensibilities as a further

informational basis for understanding this agency. Some resemblance to *Kulturindustrie* was noted, though, which could question the self-proclaimed novelty of experience economy. As an example of a theory of the experience economy, the Aalborg interpretation, consisting of two levels, was described. This interpretation appeals to a biological basis of experiential intentionality with a description of social-individualist intentionality layered on top, within what was claimed a modern hedonic society. This called for an inquiry into experiential intentionality and what characterised this intentionality as a whole, namely a sense of changeability, mediation, and the opening of a space where people are accountable to what is disclosed in their experiences, i.e. what these experiences are about. A question was asked about whether the example of experience economy scrutinised could accommodate these necessary characteristics of experience. In the section above, it was claimed that within the premises for a two-level account of experience that the experience economy establishes for itself, a coherent description is not possible. It fails to account for the normative status of experiences, making the naturalistic explanation more about biological responses than experiences, and the social-regulatory account inherently incapable of correcting itself in a non-conformist manner. The result was a somewhat confused and reduced description of human (economical) agency, adoptable by culture industrial techniques like emotional targeting. What remains to be seen, then, is what this discloses about (human) economic agency. Can the promise of establishing a *new* "economy," using this

bio-social agency be redeemed? Let us end with a, perhaps, unsurprising answer that the narrow view of human agency is connected to a very simple form of utilitarianism as economical agency.

First, the depicted economical agency is not different *in spirit* from Bentham's hedonic utilitarianism where agency is based on choosing pleasure and avoiding pain. The difference being, obviously, that Bentham's conception of pain and pleasure as psychological dispositions is now reconceived as biological dispositions. Hence, pain in the arousal paradigm is not necessarily being avoided, since painful activity can release a sense of pleasure as well. Bentham would probably agree with this, since this still makes the painful activity a means to the end of pleasure, and hence a calculated passion. Bentham's idea of a calculated passion is termed a controlled decontrol of emotions within the arousal-paradigm. The objective of both is pleasurable wellbeing, with the controlled decontrol making up the new calculus for explaining the rationality of consumer behaviour. In other words, emotions serve, when controlled and in tandem with affective evaluation and reflexive cultivation, as premises in the rationality of maximizing the utility: the well-being of the consumer.

Following Sen and Williams, this is characterisable as utilitarianism in the guise of *welfarist consequentialism* (1982, 3). This is, first, tantamount to assessing any given state of affairs on the basis of pleasure, satisfaction, or people getting what they want, as welfarism or wellbeing. Second, it implies an idea of correct agency since actions are chosen on the basis of their consequences, hence con-

sequentialism. Utilitarianism, then, "recommends a choice of actions on the basis of consequences, and an assessment of consequences in terms of welfare" (Sen and Williams 1982, 4). The experience economical agency falls, obviously, within this categorisation since welfare (or wellbeing in the arousal paradigm) is the sole criteria for evaluating whether a given state of affairs means that people are getting what they prefer—that is, the satisfaction of their preferences. The choice of actions, then, depends on their consequences in terms of pleasure: balancing the stress levels to approach the optimal stress level. Furthermore, it should be noted that the experience economy has its own version of the welfarist concept of sum ranking. Sum ranking is an aggregated principle of utilitarianism, which claims that one consequence is better than another if and only if it contains a greater total sum of well-being. Hence, individual welfares, or utilities, are simply added up to assess the outcome. As claimed above, the only notion of being experienced, *Erfahrung*, realisable in the Aalborg interpretation was an aggregated sense of *Erlebnisse*, joyful experiences, which constitute a sense of sum ranking. Being experienced means knowing how to evaluate which experiences cause the most pleasure. There is, however, no room for a person's experience to affect what he or she desires, which Elster has indicated to be a problem with this kind of utilitarianism (1982). This impotence in picturing agency as a self-correcting enterprise presents us, again, with a very narrow view of being a person and engaging in economical agency. Human economical agencies are, namely, defined

by their utilities only, i.e. the sites where activities such as desiring and having pleasure and pain take place. According to Sen and Williams, “once note has been taken of the person’s utility, utilitarianism has no further direct interest in any information about him” (1982,4). Sen and Williams sum this up in the following memorable phrase: “Persons do not count as individuals in this any more than individual petrol tanks do in the analysis of the national consumption of petroleum” (*ibid.*). This, again, points towards human economical agency as depicted within the experience economy as rationally and emotionally foolish behaviour. The experiencing human being is represented as a pleasure-maximizing individualist, making experienced behaviour inexplicable unless it is understood as effectuating pleasure (actions within the vicinity of renouncing pleasure are not options). Furthermore, once note has been taken of how the person’s pleasure is obtained and described within the arousal paradigm, no additional information is needed except the coordination with others seeking pleasure as well.

So, the experience economy in the Aalborg interpretation is hardly a new economy—it is classic Bentham-like hedonism and utilitarianism that simply seeks to be legitimised through biological explanations. With this, let us return to the historical explanation of modern hedonic society. What was left aside was the question begging character of this explanation. Sen and Williams might have the best description of this question begging. In a theory of human economical agency:

...[N]o large question is being begged if one merely assumes the individual agent to be deciding, quite often, what is the right thing to do, and deciding it, at least sometimes, in the light of moral considerations. A large question is being begged, however, if one assumes that the agent is required in rationality to subject all those decisions to one criterion of decision, and it is still being begged if one assumes that rationality requires that any other criteria of decision must themselves be justified by one over-riding principle (1982, 2).

Arguments direly need to show why people ought not make decisions based on their experience, for example as a result of a self-correcting behaviour different from biological adaptionism or social conformism, but express the accountability connected with experiencing we saw above. The reason these arguments are lacking is, simply, that the experience economy, *aka Kulturindustrie*, cannot handle a “mature” human economical agency without undermining its own livelihood. Therefore, the way forward for creating a viable model for connecting experience and economy is by accepting that human economical agency is based on a number of different experiences and reasons, all of which cannot be reduced to, or based upon, one overriding biological or social principle. So we need to accept a pluralist basis of conditions for understanding experiential intentionality, without losing a sense of accountability necessary for evaluating the bearing these experiences has on economical agency. Sen’s capability approach is an excellent point of departure, since it pays attention to

diverse factors, including pleasure and utility (1996), without using only one of them as evaluative criteria, which would result in a misrecognition of the diversity. The capability approach is, in Robeyns' brilliant description, a broad normative framework creating an evaluative space, including natural, social and personal factors, for understanding and assessing people's experience of well-being, and the design of policies and societal change needed for this well-being to be established in a just manner (2006, 352). People are here held accountable, in their experience of well-being, to societal and natural issues not of their own making, and not just to the immediate utility or pleasure of their own well-being. As an evaluative frame, however, it will need to be connected to a more thorough description of the normative implications of experiential intentionality if advancing an understanding of the different biological and social factors in forming economical agency is to take place.

Notes

¹ Thanks to the editors of *Cultural Analysis*, and especially Anthony Bak Buccitelli, and one anonymous reviewer for very helpful comments.

² For example, Hollis and Nell 1975; see Walsh 1996 for a historical overview.

³ For example, the sleep-cycle app for iPhone (see www.sleepcycle.com). Placing the phone near your head while you are sleeping, it uses the accelerometer to detect your movements through the night and suggests the optimal time for waking up. One problem is that the app uses an average human sleep pattern as a generalized model of the right sleep pattern. Sleep patterns, however, are both highly individual, and compensatory, i.e. if you miss a night sleep, you will compensate for it through

your coming sleeps. Hence, it might be behavioural adjusting in a negative sense at first, i.e. not sensitive to one's particular sleep pattern and actually wake you up at the wrong time. However, as Lewis (2013) suggests it can also have positive effect on behaviour, since it might indirectly spur people to reflect on their sleep habits and thereby change these.

⁴ See Miracle (1992, 63) for understanding the concept of play as a biological adaptive process.

⁵ After its place of origin, the University of Aalborg, Denmark. The following translations from Danish are made by the author.

⁶ The headline of Jantzen and Østergård 2007, "ENJOY IT! ENJOY IT!," underscores this imperative.

⁷ See Jay (2005) for the different uses and meanings of experience through history, leading to opposite claims of the function of, and appeal to, experience within different theories of epistemology, politics, history, post-structuralism, aesthetics and pragmatism. Furthermore, see Gay's (1984-1998) monumental historical description of the bourgeois experience from Victorianism onwards, denigrating the supposed "mental" and "bodily" rigidity usually attached to conceptions of Victorianism. This questions the connection between a protestant ethics and a capitalist spirit as an overall thesis and not, it should be emphasised, the eventual existence of particular examples of this connection. However, it thereby also questions the explanatory power Campbell and these authors attach to Weber's thesis and their development of it, that an overburdened control necessarily led to a de-control. For another critique of Campbell and his reply, see Boden and Williams (2002), and Campbell's reply (2003).

⁸ A new hedonic imperative logic might be at work here as well. Combined with the idea that the consumer is partly, if not mostly, to blame for any possible disappointment of the consumption act, this hedonism, as Zizek (2009, 58) points out, "...resides in the way

permitted *jouissance* necessarily turns into obligatory *jouissance*." The imperative, "enjoy it!" functions as a reversal of the Kantian imperative "You can, because you must", instead becoming "You must, because you can" (*ibid.*). Zizek provides the following example of how this works, "On the information sheet in a New York hotel, I recently read: Dear Guest! To guarantee that you will fully enjoy your stay with us, this hotel is totally smoke free. For any infringement of this regulation, you will be charged \$200." As Zizek (*ibid.*) explains "The beauty of this formulation, taken literally, is that you are to be punished for refusing to fully enjoy your stay." Sen's fool is no longer only rationally obliged (in theory) to act in a certain way he is emotionally obliged as well.

⁹ Interestingly, but not surprisingly, Jantzen (2007, 142) emphasizes experiencing and not experienced as the concept of experience par excellence. The devaluation of *Erfahrung* is, following Campbell, sought justified in the (almost usual) romantic rebellion against enlightenment predominance of reason over feelings. Furthermore, the only room for being experienced consist of the evaluation of the experiencing; hence it is an instrumental kind of rationality seeking the best means for experiencing. As will be seen in the next sections this leaves no room for experiencing as a self-correcting enterprise, making the experiencing individual a conformist and emotional fool.

¹⁰ Schear (2013) contains a recent discussion in the wake of a famous debate regarding this between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell.

¹¹ That the word experience connotes both is manifest in its use. We speak of an experienced (*Erfahrung*) person as someone who has gained knowledge of something, which can be transferred to another person. *Erlebnis* on the other hand refers more to a contextual sensate registering of the world, what we experience at a given moment. Raymond Williams describes experience as one of the

keywords thus: "At one extreme experience (present) is offered as the necessary (immediate and authentic) ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis. At the other extreme, experience . . . is seen as the product of social conditions or of systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception, and thus not as material for truths but as evidence of conditions of systems which by definition it cannot itself explain." (Williams, 1983: 128) Turner and Bruner (1986) use *Erlebnis* as introduction and fail to spell out the necessary connection with *Erfahrung*. For the classical argument against viewing *Erlebnis* as denoting some kind of pure immediacy, see Gadamer (1975, 53ff).

¹² There are several reasons why Anscombe's Intention, despite not being the most recent work on intentionality, is important here. First of all, it has basically been bypassed in both anthropology and economics since it was published, but is receiving a massive attention within philosophy and social science these years (for example Thompson 2008). Second, this has to do with, among other things, Anscombe's sophisticated but complex description of intentionality as resisting any unilateral physicalist, or naturalist explanation.

¹³ See Ford *et al* 2011 for a recent discussion of this.

¹⁴ The reader might retort that this is due to the fact that the same person very observantly placed the cup in its position. Hence, picking up the cup is an action based on knowing upon previous observation and not without observation *per se*. Anscombe would partly agree since she would claim that this, in a justificatory sense, pertains to past experiences. She would, however, deny that knowledge of past experiences function as some sort of mental cause making the person pick up the cup.

¹⁵ Not to be confused with Anscombe's descriptions, which would belong with the normative theories.

¹⁶ For Haugeland this institution is understood in a broad sense of training and learning, comprising both the possibility of norms or rules induced by parents or chess-teachers and, I take it, learning to be a consumer with market induced norms, as the why, when and where of experiential consuming.

¹⁷ It should be emphasised that Haugeland is not repudiating natural scientific explanations, only claiming, first, that the meaning of intentionality cannot be reduced to such explanations and, second, that we should therefore be aware of not stretching the explanatory power of natural scientific explanations beyond their conceptual confines. Nor would he claim that reducing intentionality to a social scientific explanation would work. Using concepts like social practice or tradition as expressing that on which the correctness of the intentionality depends, risk failing to account for how the difference between what we know/believe and what this knowledge and belief is about, is not dependent on us. I claim this is the real challenge to social sciences and humanities moving within the vicinity of social constructionism—including the narrative and performance turn—describing how they are not, in the end, depending on a sort of social conformism. Haugeland's effort of articulating the complexities in our biosocial intentionality is therefore a precursor to recent efforts of understanding and expressing the intertwinedness of our biological and social nature, or our biosocial becomings (see for example Harré and Moghaddam 2013; Ingold and Palsson 2013), i.e. how our biological and social lives are intertwined and influence each other, but without being reducible to each other.

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Response

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In tackling Bo Allesøe Christensen's evocative essay I must confess to feeling, at first, distinctly out of my depth. After all, the literature cited and the approaches taken to the idea of agency, intentionality, the economy and consumption are indeed alien to my own work and the literature I am used to seeing. That being said, I was immediately struck by the ways in which Christensen's arguments and the scholars he engages with, are asking very similar questions to ones I *am* used to seeing. In this brief response I want to focus on a few simple observations I made, almost impressionistic ones, it might be said, while reading the piece.

Christensen does an admirable job of getting to the heart of several scholarly approaches to the issue of, basically, decision-making by consumers. It would seem to me that this is the "holy grail" of advertisers and marketers: what makes the consumer "tick." And how can they position their products in ever more precise and predictably successful ways. The dream of the sales department is to unlock the secrets of buying, take the guess work out of product development and sales and hit a "home run" every time. The bug in that machinery has always been the dizzying array of variables in consumer choices (not the choice of products themselves, but the factors involved in understanding why choices are made). Christensen's intervention into the literature, beginning with Sen's critiques and mov-

ing on to Aalborg's attempted correctives, neatly highlights that the advertising departments of the world have put faith in some kind of social scientific approach that might help them. Aalborg's approach is instructive because it attempts to fuse a kind of nature-nurture set of explanations making recourse to biological markers like stress levels in tandem with social norms. Biological explanations such as these (and these are not the only bio-cultural approaches one might take it should be added) always strike me as having missed an essential observation made by both linguistic and cultural anthropologists: perception is not meaning. That is to say, even such potentially objective, biological facts like measurable markers of stress cannot tell us what will produce those responses from one group of people to the next. It reminds me a bit of the attempts to universalize color terms on the basis of the biological fact that humans see color in the 1960s and 1970s. Such efforts were mostly criticized by cultural anthropologists on the basis that the ability to perceive something like color based on our biological equipment should not be thought to allow us subsequently to understand how people make sense of those perceptions. Thus, a marker that indicates a pleasurable level of stress reduction or increase cannot tell us from one person or group to the next what will cause that stress level. I think here Christensen's evocation of Anscombe is quite correct:

She argues that what distinguishes intentional actions from regular actions is "that they are actions to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application" (Anscombe 1957, 9)...In-

tentional actions, and therefore experiences, are something for which reasons can be given, but reasons should not be confused with causes. Instead, reasons comprising of a description of past history, a description of current action, or a desire for future experience, can serve as reasons for (intentional) actions.

In the example that follows a type of incident is given in which someone accidentally offends someone else. This could be seen as *unintentional* in the sense that if you asked the person why they offended the other they might say "I did not intend to", but they would still need to comprehend that that there existed, culturally speaking, a version of that act that *was intentional*, was patterned and codified and occupied a categorical position in person's cultural scheme. In that sense, then, the issue of agency becomes complex. As Christensen says "experience is always experience of something as something, the understanding of which presupposes involvements and engagements with objects and persons in different situations, leaving none of these unchanged in the process... Any putative experience economy would have to address these important aspects of experience to hold any credibility."

If the goal of understanding the experience economy by the "industry" is to create new kinds of experiences to sell while also utilizing the time of the experience to insert new and other products to consumers, a general lack of understanding of the enormous cultural complexity of what it means to want and have experiences is certainly going to be crippling. It seems to me that much of the literature that

Christensen successfully critiques starts with an idea of the "consumer" operating within an "economy." If one does not start by undermining the assumption that one can create such an identity in isolation for all the other aspects of that person's social universe than one will fail, from the start, to grasp what kinds of actions one can anticipate.