

Executive Course of The European Centre for the Experience Economy
April 18th -22nd 2005

Part I

In this full and hectic programme, Albert has asked ‘the department of science’ in room 18, to write a log for all of you about our personal impressions of the Course. In what the Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis calls the “in-between” time (tussentijd) riding the bus to Barcelona¹, this log is my reflection on Part I of the Course, the theoretical part.

Going back to Sunday when most people arrived, I especially remember all the discussions at the dinner table. For me it is the fifth time I experience the Course, but every time I am happily surprised with how quick the participants connect with each other, on a very deep level. What Falk and Dierking said of the fact that for many people it is the social context that they remember most of a good experience, completely applies to me. Another thing I won’t forget is the image of Albert and Thomas dancing on loud house music while building up the meeting room for Monday. Being young at heart is a good thing.

After a good night sleep for everyone, after 50 laps in the swimming pool for some of us, and after a luxurious breakfast, it was time to start the Course. Day 1 was the day of reflection on everyone’s own personal, socio-cultural, and paid-for experiences, of the presentation of experience-guru Joe Pine, and of my own presentation about the insights from my research.

The results of the exercise were interesting. As I expected the personal experiences all had to do with *Erfahrung*. They were examples of birth, illness, death (also of family and friends), about home and life (things like migration), and about career and professional things (like education). Almost all looked like breaking-points, which changed one’s life or view on life and the world. One of the key aspects of an *Erfahrung*. They were not just isolated events, but they set in motion a process of undergoing and doing, of causes and effects, of action and reflection. The event became meaningful outside of its’ own context.

The socio-cultural experiences were different. They were more isolated, like things as a meeting, a visit, a concert, holiday, marriage. But also here we saw more “heavy” examples as abuse, meeting ones’ partner, death of a friend or an impactful training session. Especially when looking at the characteristics of the experiences everyone gave a distinction could be seen. Some experiences were said to lead to a feeling of trust and freedom in general (thus in more contexts of life), where other resulted in laughter, crying or joy within the original context. Being connected with complete strangers and sharing with them were also important examples people gave.

The economic experiences got me thinking. What was clear was that most of the examples dealt with uniqueness and ‘first-time-ness’ (which is also a kind of uniqueness since there is only one first time). First house, first boat, first painting, etc. The question remains: is the object bought the experience? Is the buying the experience? Or is the consumption, the use of the object, the experience (the living in the house, the driving in the car, the looking at the painting)? Nice question for Joe Pine, if anyone is into paid-for experiences, it is him. When

¹ The plan was to hand out the logs in the bus to Barcelona on Wednesday.

resuming his presentation, the conclusion should be that only when the buying of the house or car is the experience and is being paid for, then we speak of a paid-for experience. Pine was very clear that what he calls experiences are not the same as what others call customer or user experiences. In his eyes, something is an experience, when the decisive factor is the time people spend with the company (and when the company charges for that time!). Consuming or using the boat, house, painting, shoes or car is then not an economic experience according to Pine. We could say that in many cases we pay to be able to make our own experiences. Food for thought I would say. What are people paying for? Or like Pine says: you are what you charge for.

Another interesting (new) aspect in the presentation was the “competing against the world” concept. Everyone competes with everyone else for peoples’ time, attention and money. These are. According to Ralph Barton Perry, an expert on values, exclusionary values. You can only spend them once. An hour spent somewhere is not coming back to spend somewhere else, there is only a limited amount of attention we can pay to things, and a Euro spent on one thing can’t be spent on another. These exclusionary values are very different from for example intellectual or aesthetic values. Different people can easily think about one and the same subject intellectually, and different people can aesthetically enjoy for example the same painting. Sometimes these values even interact. Two know more than one so thinking together can result in better knowledge. The same thing goes for aesthetic values: people that enjoy something together can possibly enjoy it more. Food for thought.

One other important and complex aspect is authenticity. Like experience, also authenticity gives rise to difficulties when it is not clear what it is. For me the distinction Jaap Lengkeek of the University of Wageningen makes between different kinds of authenticity, is helpful.

In a European context authentic concepts have a far greater chance for success than in an American context, where the design of theatrical, scened experiences is the norm (partly because of the lack of written and felt history). American literature on this subject can thus not be copied one on one.

‘Invented’ concepts don’t work: they don’t involve the imagination of the consumer and are therefore not memorable. Experiences need to be ‘real’.

According to Ex and Lengkeek there are multiple layers of ‘realness’ within any object. For this reason they distinguish four types of authenticity:

- 1) material authenticity
- 2) conceptual authenticity
- 3) contextual authenticity
- 4) functional authenticity

These dimensions of authenticity can enforce each other but can also contradict each other. Furthermore it is possible according to the authors, to make an additional distinction between historical and a-historical authenticity.

Within the area of art a-historical and historical authenticity revolve around the question whether the object is being restored to its old glory or not. He who has eye for the historical authenticity shows that a work of art has a history of changes. Age and lifeline are allowed to be seen. Genitals overpainted with fig-leaves, bulletholes and earlier restorations can remain:

the artwork is conserved in the condition in which it was found. Not with a-historical authenticity. Those who prefer this type of authenticity, remove the observable life history. The object should be restored in the condition in which it was originally.

Material authenticity: real is to be defined as that which has been made with the original material and by the person who has signed it. This is the most simple and obvious definition of authenticity but it is not adequate for the design of experiences.

Conceptual authenticity: made according to the idea of the original maker. An example of a conflict between material and conceptual authenticity was seen in the restoration of “who’s afraid of red, yellow and blue?” of Barnett Newman in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, where the red area was cut up by someone in 1986.

“the American restorer Daniel Goldreyer claimed to have removed the damage by two million dots of paint. This however appeared to be false. Goldreyer had taken a paintroller and had repainted the red area with synthetic paint. There was great indignation because painting over the damaged and authentic material is not-done in the restoration ethic. However Goldreyer was defended by the museum director. He gave precedence to the importance of conceptual authenticity instead of the conservation of material realness. It had been the intention (the concept) of the maker to make a clean, monochrome red area, with two narrow lines of yellow and blue on both sides. By restoring the damage invisibly, Goldreyer had restored the unity of the red. To put it even more strongly, had he not painted over the painting, the damage would have been forever visible.

According to director Beeren of the Stedelijk Museum, the hand of the master was no more than a sentimental problem. This example shows how great the conflict can be between the conceptual (the intention of the maker) and the material authenticity (the original material). Furthermore, in this example the conceptual authenticity goes together with what is called a-historical authenticity: restoring something in the original state.”

Contextual authenticity: being in its original surroundings/ environment. An example of a conflict between the contextual and the material authenticity is the chocolate sculpture “Zwerge” by Dieter Roth:

“In the tower of chocolate dwarfs have been built. Only their red hats stick out. The sculpture belongs where dwarfs belong, in the open air, so the work of art can be eroded and ultimately destroyed by wear and tear, rain and wind, worms and snails. Or, so was the idea of the maker. The Staatliche Museum however strongly opposed this idea. To be able to retain the sculpture as long as possible, they decided to put the artwork inside in a glass vitrine. To safeguard the material authenticity, the idea of the maker (conceptual authenticity) was sacrificed and Zwerge was furthermore taken out of its original surroundings (contextual authenticity).”

Functional authenticity: striving to retain/preserve the original use function of a product.

“A good example of striving for contextual and functional authenticity can be found in some Canadian anthropological museums, where Indian ritual objects are exhibited. These objects are regularly given back temporarily to the Indian tribes for use in their original rituals. Because of possible restoration work some restorers of the museum in Alberta have been initiated into the secrets of the Indian culture.

The functional authenticity can also be the subject of discussion in many ways. The use of windmills, unique street organs, or antique clocks causes wear and tear and therefore the destruction of original material. In the same way someone who has an original vintage car cannot afford to subject it to vandalism etcetera in the street. The conservation of the car conflicts with the functional authenticity as a driving vehicle. Ultimately the car will be removed from its original context to be presented in a museum.”

The authors conclude: “realness in all its facets is never to be insured. One chooses one form, or in the most positive case a couple of forms. Which one(s) depends on the more or less conscious notions about the importance of the work of art and the meaning one gives to it. Realness therefore is not a static, provable characteristic, but a label that experts put on something.” And: “ It is not always easy for tourists to connect the sight and the various aspects of authenticity. Often more information is given to them in visitor centres. Education of the ignorant tourist is the goal. In a sense this is an initiation in the thinking world of the experts, who are more focused on questions of authenticity than the average tourist.”

(Translation of a part of pages 90-93 of *Imagineering* by Diane Nijs and Frank Peters, 2002)

Then, because of a heavy lunch in the sun, people first worked on their business cases, with their personal coaches Jempi, Ed, Steven, Albert and Thomas. I made a round, listening in and issues like whether you should first change internally or first try to influence your customers, whether change can be pushed or should be pulled, what your true reasons are for wanting to enter into the experience business, how companies can help other companies to deliver experiences, came to the fore.

After this it was time for my presentation. My intention was to give an overview of the insights and inspiration one can find in very diverse theory when looking into experience and value, to be able to look out of the box. This was also the main reason for the research since almost all current literature focuses on just the financial value and reasons from the business viewpoint, trying to offer or deliver or stage experiences for a customer, while experiences are inherently personal and insight into the individual perspective is much needed. Alas, too much stuff in too little time (for the non Dutch participants: my last name is Snel, which means ‘fast’ in English so I have an excuse). The main point I wanted to make was that developments show that the focus on stimuli and controlled messages from the outside only is not enough. To connect with the individual and to be able to do something meaningful for him, means you’d better think about how you can help him to make sense of things in a time of too much information and a continuous bombardment with signs. To try to support the individual in what he knows, wants, can and is. To help him develop his interpretive framework his worldview.

At night we again had a delicious dinner and I had a strange but inspiring discussion about 25 percent, and Nout initiated the group into abbreviations like P.O.G. and P.L.O.R.K. Never mind...

The second day, the day of the senses, started with questions about my presentation of the day before, to be followed by Jempi’s look into the future. His company FreshForward indeed shows client companies a fresh look forward into what the future will bring. According to

Jempi we now live in the new 50s and the new 60s are awaiting us. The large database with parameters and images is used to inspire companies to dream, think out of the box and be creative.

During the business cases I stucked with one group, discussing about how you can motivate and inspire the rest of the organization to think in terms of experience. In every single one of the five courses, this problem has been discussed. People say they feel like a lone caller in the desert, they know what to do and why, they see the success and can show it, also in the bottom-line, but how do you achieve a mind shift in the others? Food for thought.

Although watching a DVD might seem like a passive event, the things Köster tells and the way in which he illustrates his theory with many anecdotes and examples, kept most of the audience wide awake and paying attention. Köster told that he is not a big fan of staged experiences, they are way too explicit and should be more subtle, they should give the opportunity to the individual to make it his own thing, they should leave room for your own interpretation without controlling everything from outside. Otherwise what the individual is left with are half-baked experiences. He also told about the errors in research, which often does not take into account the diversity of human beings (but takes the 'average' as its basis), the change of individuals, and that base everything on the notion that people are reasonable beings, which according to Köster couldn't be further from the truth. Learning, he says, is the real experience, all the rest is a distraction from this real experience. I hope that the piece of the flying bird will be refound somewhere on the cutting floor of Eliace, the company that made the DVD.

After the senses of Köster we continued, live, with the senses of Kim van der Leest. It was a pity that her pictures and sheets were lost somewhere in cyberworld but her knowledge and insights were still very inspirational. Although of course stories about red and purple bedrooms catch the attention of everyone, her ideas about using research into dyslexia and people who haven't lost the symbiotic connection between all their senses, a thing we all had when we were babies, to help creativity to me were very inspirational. When people like Einstein and Picasso and many more of the great thinkers, feelers and doers of all times had this gift, we should better pay attention to this kind of people to learn how we can look at things differently from many perspectives.

The sensory journey continued with master chef Angelique. Risking jail time by smuggling live coquilles Saint Jacques from the Netherlands and having spent over 24 hours in the kitchen to surprise us with tomato juice that looked like wine, with fried chocolate sticks that looked like bitterbal-type snacks she continued to defy our expectations. What I loved, but my hobby is cooking, was that she makes the whole thing into an art, a real experience. She not only served the fish but showed it inside and out, thereby making contact with Dewey's 'raw stuff', raw stuff in a very literal way. She even recited a poetic ode to the tomato. That's an art. And when the food is as good as it was we speak of a real artiste.

Yvonne van den Nieuwenhuize had arrived in the afternoon and she prepared us for the trip to Barcelona today. By showing the special sites and giving the background information I think most people have become inspired and motivated to really see Barcelona today.

The evening inspired me to initially call this log, this kind of diary, “Food for thought and Ramadan”. The food was incredible at La Roca, as it has also been delicious every time in our ‘own’ Castell, but many people were in doubt about making it till the last course. Fasting, like the Muslims do in the Ramadan, started to sound good for a moment. The same thing goes for the food for thought. I wish everyone a chance to find some time for reflection once in a while in the hectic of the programme, to just be able to have all this input sink in and be able to interpret it, give meaning to it. A bit of silence and solitude, even for just a short moment, a short Ramadan in the culinary spectacle of knowledge.

Have a good time in Barcelona, and a great Part II,

Anna

Part II

After a long Barcelona break-day, part 2 of the Course started on Thursday. The first presentation was that of Bert Kranendonk. He shared his experiences of designing the Heineken Experience with us. Not just the successful ideas but also pitfalls in the process were discussed and the importance of full support by top management, in the case of Heineken the support of Mr. Heineken himself, was stressed. This issue of support has been mentioned by other participants while discussing their cases and during many discussions in the past with people active in the experience economy. Actually it has been this issue that has led me to believe that indeed we are dealing with a shift in logic. The same issues people are faced with when trying to ‘offer’ an experience to customers, come to the fore when people try to ‘teach’ people to think in an ‘experience way’. You cannot make someone experience something, just as you can’t make someone think differently. They have to do it, they have to discover it for themselves. And as Steven Olthof told me during lunch, for every change process there is the need for discomfort (onbehagen) with the current situation, vision, conditions, and courage. If they don’t see the problem, if they don’t have a vision of how things could be, etc, then it will be difficult to change anything. As I showed in my presentation, most traditional businesses still think in a value system of self-enhancement and control, in power values. To get people to change their values, change their worldview, change their logic, is perhaps the most difficult change one could accomplish, and it can never be accomplished from the outside when the inside is not involved.

The next presentation of the day was by Duncan Stutterheim, one of the founders of ID&T and therefore the ‘D’ in the name ID&T. He showed us lots of examples of activities of ID&T in which the themes ‘Release’ and ‘Fuck it all’ were implemented. What interests me in the ID&T case is that they manage to invent these sorts of ‘lifestyle themes’ that don’t just apply to one event or magazine, but can be applied to a whole way of life. In the hectic lives of everyone, there is a need for relaxation, for releasing the pressure and just having fun, don’t worry, in ID&T’s terms ‘Fuck it all’. ID&T doesn’t try to explain the themes in an explicit way to people but people can give their own interpretation to the themes, do whatever they wish with them. In that sense the meaning of it is given by the people themselves, from the inside, instead of by ID&T, from the outside, and because of this the meaning can transcend the context of the events they organize. Another thing that Duncan focused on was the giving

back to the community. They try to do this in various ways. For example there is the new Studio 80, in which ID&T has a testing lab where small parties can be organized without the need for the organizers to arrange all kinds of permits and investments. In this way a big organization like ID&T can help new talents and people who have just started. Another way in which the influence on the community is clear is the case of Sensation Black and White. In the weeks before these events the mannequins in the shopwindows in Amsterdam are completely dressed in white and a week later in black. A third example Duncan gave was the redesign of Cineac. This famous building in Amsterdam has been brought back to the design of Kuyper, its original architect. Furthermore he showed us examples of good and bad sponsoring. Placing your logo everywhere is not useful; companies should creatively make a connection with the events. Good examples he gave were Renault, Sixpack and Grolsch (Grolsch will even brew a white beer for the upcoming Sensation White). The ultimate goal of ID&T is to be 'a picture on the fridge'.

After Duncan it was time for the presentation of Brian Boswijk. Brian is one of the inventors of Interdit, a sort of flashmob dining experience. Once every while they set up a restaurant in a very unique setting, for example under the Rijksmuseum, or in an Amsterdam 'Pakhuis'. In the week before they send an sms to people who then reply with their reservation. The three to four days that the restaurant is existent sell out in no time after which it disappears again, to resurface somewhere else, some other time. Because of the huge success of another initiative of Brian & Co., 11, a café/restaurant/club on the topfloor (the eleventh floor) of the old Amsterdam postal office, there unfortunately is not enough time at the moment to organize new Interdit dinners, but given time people will have the opportunity to experience it again. The most striking part of this case to me is the way in which it is drenched in the passion and sincerity of the organizers. Although they could probably also fill the restaurant for two weeks, they stick with the idea of leaving after a couple of days which retains the extreme uniqueness of the experience. If you haven't been there, you have missed it, forever. Furthermore they could start charging much more for dinner but they stick to their principle of a great price/quality ratio.

After Brian it was time for Rob Wagemans, of Concrete Architects, to show us his vision on design. If I have to give one word for the way in which they approach design it would be 'provocative'. What Angelique Schmeinck did with food, Concrete does with design. Both defy the expectations of people. Instead of for example making male and female bathrooms they make gay and straight bathrooms in the Supperclub. They want staff to carry around Gucci handbags from which they serve salad (and they want Gucci to pay for it!). On Valentine's day they had the guests handcuffed to each other. In San Francisco they have designed the biggest handicapped bathrooms of the world (in pink). In the Laundry Industry they have made use of a sense that usually is forgotten: the sense of equilibrium. In a museum in Utrecht they have made glass walls so people cannot only see the front of the paintings but also the tags and labels at the back, which show where the paintings have been (contact with the raw stuff in Dewey's terms). In the words of Rob, usually people don't put coriander in dishes because many people don't like it, and Concrete tries to put as much coriander as possible in everything.

After Rob it was time for Jan Sinnema to tell us about the ING Private Banking experience. Their definition of a good brand experience is a 'relevant emotional encounter'. It has relevance for the client, the brand, and for the business. It focuses on one or more of the basic emotions: anger, fear, confusion, joy, grief and/or disgust, and it is always an encounter between people. One of the experiences ING has invented is the theme dinner for business succession. By focusing on the emotions that people who are confronted with the problem of business succession experience and by having them talk with each other, ING has succeeded in creating a meaningful encounter between the concerned individuals. Not only does the experience help the individuals who participate but it also is done in a way that ING in the end makes money with it. The best part of the experience according to me is the fact that it doesn't just focus on the technical aspects of selling the company, but it starts with the individual entrepreneur. The problem is not just that the company has to be sold but that the company is like the entrepreneurs' child and everything that happens to this child causes profound emotions which have to be dealt with first. What happens to the company is not just a business fact or a professional decision, it impacts the life of the individual and his family and this is where ING is facilitating support.

Marcel Goossens then showed us examples of the experiences DST is active in, especially the experiences at Schiphol. The goal is to make Schiphol into a destination, where people go just for the experience. Examples are a simulation of what can happen in the air traffic tower, a 'Be the Bottle'-ride but this time for luggage and a simulation of what it would be like to fly on the wing of an airplane. Because of the staged-ness of the examples the question remains as always how long it takes before people get bored with it.

Chip Conley of Joie de Vivre Hospitality did not give a presentation but instead we all moved to the restaurant where Albert interviewed him. Chip told us about the philosophy of JdV, of the idea of translating the 5 words that describe magazines that people love into his boutique hotels, of the literal 'heart' of JdV and of Yvette, which matches your personality with one of the hotels and with people who can give you advice about what to do and where to go.

Friday was the last day and in the morning the contents of the book of Albert, Thomas and Ed were presented. The 31st of May it will be officially presented to the public in the College Hotel in Amsterdam. Afterwards Steven Olthof of KPMG told us about the Strategic Experience Journey and the levels of perspective. Einstein has said that problems can never be solved within the logic that has caused, created or discovered them and Arnold Cornelis calls trying to solve problems within the wrong logic a catastrophic learning process. This is why it is ever more important to learn how to think from different kinds of logic, to be able to see different perspectives. When you have more than one way of thinking available within your interpretive framework, you can look at reality from different angles and chances are you can come up with different, and possibly better, solutions and answers.

After this presentation there was time again to work on the cases. With two others I decided to take some time off for reflection on the whole Course and we walked around in the surroundings of the castle. We spoke about which cases that were presented according to each of us would be successful and which would fail and why, and we had a long discussion about authenticity-issues. There were babbling crooks and small waterfalls and horses nearby the

castle and the whole experience of these would have been changed if we would have known that these had been put there (staged) for us. The trees were all planted neatly in straight lines. Does this make them fake trees then? Is this not a forest? Those kinds of discussions.

We arrived back just in time for the question round. Everyone had to answer three questions for him or herself: What did you learn, what did you experience, and what are you going to do in practice with this? A fourth, added, question was: what are the three words that for you describe this last week, the Course? During lunch we discussed the answers in pairs, after which Albert invited us to climb the tower of the castle to share the three words with everyone.

This to me was a kind of metaphorical ending: we ended the Course with the overview of the surroundings, seeing that there was more than what happened within the castle. And that's what I hope has also happened during the Course, that everyone has seen that the experience is not some small marketing or even just business idea, it is a shift in logic, impacting everything within and outside of organizations. I wish for everyone to have gained an overview of the possibilities of experience thinking to be able to think out of the box and inspire other people to do the same.

Anna