

from Turner, V., & Bruner, E., (1986)
The Anthropology of Experience,
 Urbana, University of Illinois Press.

experience — subjective
 behaviour — observed

reality — experience — expression
 (representation)

generalisation + detail
 → reintroducing detail into 'general' research

DILTHEY'S HERMENEUTICS

Dilthey (1976:161) wrote that "reality only exists for us in the facts of consciousness given by inner experience." What comes first is experience. The anthropology of experience deals with how individuals actually experience their culture, that is, how events are received by consciousness. By experience we mean not just sense data, cognition, or, in Dilthey's phrase, "the diluted juice of reason," but also feelings and expectations. As Fernandez points

out, experience comes to us not just verbally but also in images and impressions. As social scientists we have long given too much weight to verbalizations at the expense of visualizations, to language at the expense of images. Lived experience, then, as thought and desire, as word and image, is the primary reality.

Experience, in our perspective, is not equivalent to the more familiar concept of behavior. The latter implies an outside observer describing someone else's actions, as if one were an audience to an event; it also implies a standardized routine that one simply goes through. An experience is more personal, as it refers to an active self, to a human being who not only engages in but shapes an action. We can have an experience but we cannot have a behavior; we describe the behavior of others but we characterize our own experience. It is not customary to say, "Let me tell you about my behavior"; rather, we tell about experiences, which include not only actions and feelings but also reflections about those actions and feelings. The distinguishing criterion is that the communication of experience tends to be self-referential.

The difficulty with experience, however, is that we can only experience our own life, what is received by our own consciousness. We can never know completely another's experiences, even though we have many clues and make inferences all the time. Others may be willing to share their experiences, but everyone censors or represses, or may not be fully aware of or able to articulate, certain aspects of what has been experienced. How, then, do we overcome the limitations of individual experience? Dilthey's (1976:230) answer was that we "transcend the narrow sphere of experience by interpreting expressions." By "interpreting" Dilthey meant understanding, interpretation, and the methodology of hermeneutics; by "expressions" he meant representations, performances, objectifications, or texts. For example, the expressions analyzed by the contributors to this volume include theater, narratives, hunting stories, revitalization movements, curing rites, murals, parades, carnival, Thoreau's *Walden*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Helen Cordero's pottery. Certainly a broad array, but nonetheless expressions that are presented to us by the cultures we study; they are what is given in social life. Expressions are encapsulations of the experience of others, or as Turner (1982:17) wrote, they are "the crystallized secretions of once living human experience." For Dilthey (1976:175), we deal with the subject mat-

ter of human studies, including anthropology, "when we experience human states, give expressions to them, and understand these expressions." Turner, in this volume, refers to Dilthey's distinction between mere "experience" and "an experience": the former is received by consciousness, it is individual experience, the temporal flow; the latter is the intersubjective articulation of experience, which has a beginning and an ending and thus becomes transformed into an expression.

The relationship between experience and its expressions is always problematic and is one of the important research areas in the anthropology of experience. The relationship is clearly dialogic and dialectical, for experience structures expressions, in that we understand other people and their expressions on the basis of our own experience and self-understanding. But expressions also structure experience, in that dominant narratives of a historical era, important rituals and festivals, and classic works of art define and illuminate inner experience. As we well know, some texts (e.g., *Hamlet*), are more intense, complex, and revealing than everyday experience and thereby enrich and clarify that experience. More simply put, experience is culturally constructed while understanding presupposes experience. To Dilthey, these dialogic relationships of mutual dependence were not an impossible dilemma but rather were basic to the nature of data in the human sciences. That experience structures expressions and expressions structure experience was for Dilthey a hermeneutic circle, something to be worked through: "Our knowledge of what is given in experience is extended through the interpretation of the objectifications of life and their interpretation, in turn, is only made possible by plumbing the depths of subjective experience" (1976:195).

The critical distinction here is between reality (what is really out there, whatever that may be), experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated). In a life history, as I have indicated elsewhere (Bruner 1984:7), the distinction is between life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience), and life as told (expression). Only a naive positivist would believe that expressions are equivalent to reality; and we recognize in everyday life the gap between experience and its symbolic manifestation in expression. Some experiences are inchoate, in that we simply do not understand what we are experiencing, either because the ex-

periences are not storyable, or because we lack the performative and narrative resources, or because the vocabulary is lacking. As we ourselves are telling others about an experience, we sometimes realize, even as we speak, that our account does not fully encompass all that we thought and felt during that experience. Every anthropological fieldworker would readily acknowledge that the accepted genres of anthropological expression—our fieldnotes, diaries, lectures, and professional publications—do not capture the richness or the complexity of our lived experience in the field. There are inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expressions, and the tension among them constitutes a key problematic in the anthropology of experience.

In this perspective an expression is never an isolated, static text. Instead, it always involves a processual activity, a verb form, an action rooted in a social situation with real persons in a particular culture in a given historical era. A ritual must be enacted, a myth recited, a narrative told, a novel read, a drama performed. For these enactments, recitals, tellings, readings, and performances are what make the text transformative and enable us to reexperience our culture's heritage. Expressions are constitutive and shaping, not as abstract texts but in the activity that actualizes the text. It is in this sense that texts must be performed to be experienced, and what is constitutive is in the production. We deal here with performed texts, recognizing that the anthropology of performance is part of the anthropology of experience.

performed
texts

As expressions or performed texts, structured units of experience, such as stories or dramas, are socially constructed units of meaning. If we write or tell about the French Revolution, for example, we must decide where to begin and where to end, which is not easy, so that by our arbitrary construction of beginnings and endings we establish limits, frame the experience, and thereby construct it. In real life every beginning has its antecedents, and an ending does not imply that time has stopped or that the event is over. We create the units of experience and meaning from the continuity of life. Every telling is an arbitrary imposition of meaning on the flow of memory, in that we highlight some causes and discount others; that is, every telling is interpretive. The concept of an experience, then, has an explicit temporal dimension in that we go through or live through an experience, which then becomes self-referential in the telling.

For Dilthey, life was a temporal flow, a "restless progression," and all events occupied a position in a time sequence. Experience and meaning were in the present; the past was a memory, a reproduction; and the future was always open, linked by expectation and potentiality. However, present experience always takes account of the past and anticipates the future. What holds the present and the past together is a unitary meaning, yet that "meaning does not lie in some focal point outside our experience but is contained in them [in experience] and constitutes the connections between them" (Dilthey 1976:239). Dilthey's processual perspective emerged clearly when he wrote that "the moment the future becomes the present it is already sinking into the past" (1976:209). Although life is a flow, we can never experience that flow directly because every observed moment is a remembered moment. Temporal succession cannot be experienced as such because the very observation of time fixes our attention and interrupts the flow of experience, leading to periods of reflexivity when the mind becomes "conscious of itself."

Much of what Dilthey had to say is familiar to us because it resonates strongly with the interpretive-performative perspective in contemporary anthropology and contrasts sharply with alternative theoretical perspectives. For example, as Rosaldo points out, our ethnographies focus on generalized routines, clusters of customs, norms, habits, and prevalent patterns of social relations. Monographic descriptions tend to be synthetic in that they are composites based on abstractions from a series of particular instances. They seek the general so as not to be misled by the unique. But in striving for a balanced, representative account, much of the meaning and the drama in the event itself is lost. "Lived experience is robbed of its vitality," in Rosaldo's terms. A similar critique applies to structuralism, which also seeks a generalized pattern, a model, but on a deeper level, somehow underneath or behind the behavior, conceived of as a surface manifestation. Experience is thus dissolved into a set of transformational rules. Culture and personality, especially in the early years of Edward Sapir and Ruth Benedict, shared much with the anthropology of experience. The focus, however, was on the individual and society. Yet the individual as a total human being, with biological and cultural dimensions, is not conceptually the equivalent of subjective experience, nor is the concept of society the same as cultural expression.

Further, culture and personality turned to issues far removed from the anthropology of experience in the development of cross-cultural personality assessment, methods of child rearing, and national character studies.

The anthropological enterprise has always been concerned with how people experience themselves, their lives, and their culture. Traditionally, anthropologists have tried to understand the world as seen by the "experiencing subject," striving for an inner perspective. Indeed, this is still the rationale for long-term field research, and the field tradition, in fact, is what sets anthropology apart from such related disciplines as sociology and history. The difficulty, however, is not in the fieldwork experience but in our conceptual apparatus for interpreting the field data, which tend to filter out experience. Most good ethnographers, interestingly enough, reintroduce vitality in their descriptive accounts by including illustrative snatches of personal narrative, bits of biography, or vivid passages from their fieldnotes (Peacock 1984). In effect, the experiential component returns to the account as a by-product rather than as an explicit object of research. We systematically remove the personal and the experiential in accordance with our anthropological paradigms; then we reintroduce them so as to make our ethnographies more real, more alive.

The anthropology of experience turns our attention to experience and its expressions as indigenous meaning. The advantage of beginning the study of culture through expressions is that the basic units of analysis are established by the people we study rather than by the anthropologist as alien observer. By focusing on narratives or dramas or carnival or any other expressions, we leave the definition of the unit of investigation up to the people, rather than imposing categories derived from our own ever-shifting theoretical frames. Expressions are the peoples' articulations, formulations, and representations of their own experience. Although expressions are not necessarily easy places to start, because of their existential complexity, they usually are accessible and isolable, in part because they have a beginning and an ending. As Milton Singer, Dell Hymes, Richard Bauman, Victor Turner, and others who have written about performance have taught us, expressions are not only naturally occurring units of meaning but are also periods of heightened activity when a society's presuppositions are most exposed, when core values are ex-

pressed, and when the symbolism is most apparent. Even if the events in an expression are not contiguous in time and space, they do have a coherence based on a common meaning. The interpretive process, however, always operates on two distinct levels: the people we study interpret their own experiences in expressive forms, and we, in turn, through our fieldwork, interpret these expressions for a home audience of other anthropologists. Our anthropological productions are our stories about their stories; we are interpreting the people as they are interpreting themselves. Some of the papers in this volume (e.g., Rosaldo and Kapferer) focus more on the first level, on how people move between experience and expressions—for example, between the experience of hunting and stories about the hunt, or between the experience of illness and curing rituals—whereas other papers (e.g., F. Turner and Gorfain) tell us more about the experience of anthropologically coming to know. My own paper on narratives about American Indians claims that the two levels merge and that the Indian stories about themselves and the anthropological stories about Indians are essentially similar.

I noted earlier that the relationships between experience and expressions are always problematic. Now I turn to a different point, that neither experiences nor expressions are monolithic entities, for each breaks down into smaller processual units, and the interplay between these units frequently constructs its own dynamic. Schechner, for example, writes that in going from script to performance in the theater there are at least two intermediary stages: the workshop, a time of breaking down, play, and experimentation; and the rehearsal, a time of building up and polishing preparatory to the actual performance. I refer to a workshop-like stage in anthropological field research when we transform direct observations and interactions in the field situation into our fieldnotes. In our notebooks we can play with ideas and express our fears and feelings, without concern for the performative conventions of the discipline. Then, in the rehearsal-like stage we transform our fieldnotes and impressions into first drafts, preliminary lectures, and papers presented at meetings. At this stage we may receive feedback from our colleagues that enables us to change and polish before the final product is submitted for publication, thereafter to be forever fixed in print—except insofar as each reader interprets our message differently.

There are additional ways of opening the gap between experience and expressions, and of expanding each term. Fernandez reminds us that experience consists of words and images, that the two are not necessarily concordant, and that rituals are not based on one metaphor but rather on mixed metaphors; hence the play of tropes. Myerhoff's paper on elderly Jews in California analyzes a parade and a mural, which are not equivalent. Kapferer breaks down Sinhalese curing rituals into words, music, and action, showing us how each of these activities plays off against the others within the context of the whole performance. Gorfain writes about the play within the play in *Hamlet*, and about the various mechanisms of reflexivity when the play comments on itself. Lévi-Strauss has dealt with different sensory codes, and Bateson has shown that we can enrich our information by combining different sources, with the difference between the sources becoming new information. From Derrida we have learned that writing is not a copy of speech and that representations never simply represent. In this volume Boon demonstrates that expressions in different domains of culture are decentered and radically plural. Some varieties of structuralism would reduce house plans, village organization, ritual, and mythology to the same structural model, but Boon makes the point that the different domains do not stack up and that various expressive modes do not replicate each other or tell the same story. We know that participants in a performance do not necessarily share a common experience or meaning; what they share is only their common participation.

All of these points then, highlight different dimensions of the problematic between experience and expression. And although this volume deals with large-scale expressions, the same problematic would apply to the little performances of everyday life as well as to those that are not "art" but are more political or work-oriented, such as demonstrations or meetings.

It is in the performance of an expression that we re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct, and re-fashion our culture. The performance does not release a preexisting meaning that lies dormant in the text (Derrida 1974; Barthes 1974). Rather, the performance itself is constitutive. Meaning is always in the present, in the here-and-now, not in such past manifestations as historical origins or the author's intentions. Nor are there silent texts, because once we attend to the text, giving voice or expression to

it, it becomes a performed text, active and alive. It is what Victor Turner called "putting experience into circulation."

The anthropology of experience rejects all such binaries as static-dynamics, system-process, continuity-change, ethnography-history, and synchrony-diachrony, because these oppositions postulate a fixed and timeless world of essences, an imaginary world; and having done so, they can only account for change by having it originate from outside that timeless entity, as if change were always exterior to the system. So the source of change becomes the introduction of the steel ax, the proverbial raiders from the north, or the penetration of a money economy. The main problem is that there is no conceptualization of the system from the inside, so that all creativity is relegated to a separate outside domain, beyond the boundaries of ordinary life. By contrast, the anthropology of experience sees people as active agents in the historical process who construct their own world. Using Myerhoff's phrase, we are "the authors of ourselves." Selves, social organizations, and cultures are not given but are problematic and always in production. Cultural change, cultural continuity, and cultural transmission all occur simultaneously in the experiences and expressions of social life. All are interpretive processes and indeed are the experiences "in which the subject discovers himself" (Dilthey 1976:203).

What was considered "traditional" for Dilthey is a process of scanning the past until we identify a perceived similarity with the present. It is a triumph of reexperiencing when we believe ourselves to be confronted by a continuity. Cultural transmission is not simply a replication of an old original, a mechanical transfer of the cultural heritage from generation to generation, as if we were passing along the class banner to each new cohort. The "little people" of Cordero's pottery reflect not only her grandfather's pottery but also her own life experiences. Culture is alive, context sensitive, and emergent.

There are no raw encounters or naive experiences since persons, including ethnographers, always enter society in the middle. At any given time there are prior texts and expressive conventions, and they are always in flux. We can only begin with the last picture show, the last performance. Once the performance is completed, however, the most recent expression sinks into the past and becomes prior to the performance that follows. This is straight Dilthey. Life consists of retellings.