

TURNER, Victor W. and Edward M. BRUNER, Editors. *The Anthropology of Experience*. With an Epilogue by Clifford Geertz. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986. 391 pages, with figures, photographs. ISBN 0-252-01249-6. Cloth, \$34.95; paper, \$15.95. ISBN 0-252-01249-6.

It is no overstatement to say that the leading concern of the late Victor Turner's anthropology was symbolism, not as a simple this-for-that-type which neatly gives itself to formal "scientific" analysis, rather as a polyvalent form of expression which never ceases to tease its student because it hides more than it reveals. Since his first analyses of Ndembu symbolism he grew more and more convinced that symbolism is something living, something that is alive in rituals and performances and calls therefore for new means to catch and measure the pulse of such events in order to interpret what they have to say. This, combined with his interest in dramas and theater, quite naturally led him away from merely generalized accounts of ritualistic activities to try to fathom the meaning of what the active individual is actually doing at a given moment in time. It turns out that this is, in BRUNER's words, what *The Anthropology of Experience* is all about, i.e., a study of "how individuals actually experience their culture" (p. 4).

As other "new" anthropologists before, this one finds its ancestors in a different but related field to anthropology. For its incentives and methodology the anthropology of experience owes much to Dewey and Dilthey. Dilthey's terms "experience" and "expression" are the central points of reference for the volume. The reader will be grateful for BRUNER's introductory explanation as a convenient guide to the essays because they do not all interpret these key terms strictly in the same sense. GEERTZ sums up the situation saying "that 'experience' [is] the elusive master concept of this collection, one that none of the authors seems altogether happy with and none feels able really to do without" (p. 374). In spite of this elusiveness (which, incidentally, holds the reader in continuous suspense for what still other facet of "experience" will be revealed next), there are some fundamental ideas which are shared by the authors in various degrees and are the main contribution of this volume.

Since experience is "how events are received by consciousness" (p. 4), all the studies in this volume are first of all concerned with what culture means for *individuals* living it. They do not describe general features of a given culture but seek to read and interpret how individuals express their culture or certain aspects of it. Both "experience" and "expression" are understood to form a dialectical relationship in the sense that individual experience is accessible to an observer only through the expression given to it, and that the expression colors the manner by which an experience is interpreted. This may

call to one's mind Evans-Pritchard's famous rebuke of the "if-I-were-a-horse" kind of thinking, where one merely imagines what another might think or feel. However, the point made here is not to imagine another's possible experience; it is rather to "read" an individual cultural expression for what it means to say in the particular circumstances where it happens, much in the way a text would be read or a story received. Two contributions deal in fact with literary texts (Thoreau's *Walden* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), but others discuss "stories" in a larger sense of the word (narratives, rituals, performances, pottery, etc.), including also the anthropologists' own stories about stories, and so demonstrate something of the range of possible applications for an anthropology of experience. The crucial point is that all these expressions are not simply stereotyped repetitions of some innate structure, but are true *ad hoc* re-enactments of one's culture, moments where individuals are "authors of themselves" (MYERHOFF, p. 263). Expression is therefore eminently "creative," shaping individuals as well as the actually expressed aspect of their culture. ROSALDO's fascinating analysis of Ilongot hunting stories, MYERHOFF's sympathetic account of a colony of elderly Jews, or BABCOCK's rich story about Helen Cordero's "little children" in clay are just a few random examples of this.

A sensitive interpretation of such expressions needs therefore to keep two things in mind. First, the expression does not communicate mere "experience," i.e. an experience where the individual is only an instant in an on-going stream and mainly passive, but rather "*an* experience" (Dilthey's terms), namely "the intersubjective *articulation* of mere experience, which has a beginning and an ending" (BRUNER, p. 6; emphasis added), and is therefore set apart as individual.

Second, although such expressions can be considered as texts to be "read," they are not static texts, they are "performed texts" (p. 7) and being that they cannot be fully "read," unless the performance itself and its cultural premises are taken into account as well.

The emphasis on *individual* as against generalized experiences entails that their number becomes practically infinite, and a definite account elusive if not illusory. Yet, this should not be to the disadvantage of anthropologically sound interpretation. It is not to open the doors to sheer subjective interpretations, it rather opens our eyes to the multiformity of cultural symbolic expressions and provides basic guidelines for interpretation without attempting to squeeze all individual expressions into the straight-jacket of some rigid and abstract system. Institutions, rituals, performances, etc., "allude to each other in a perpetual reflexivity" (p. 245) and remind us therefore that "we must look beyond any allegorical Machinery to the dialectical field (the text) from which it emerges" (p. 245). As a result, this approach makes us better aware that there is in

BOON's words nothing like a single "meaning of meanings" or "the symbolic system par excellence" (p. 244).

Under such circumstances it cannot be expected that the authors offer a once and for all solution to the problem of symbolic interpretation by their emphasizing individual experience. What they offer is a reasonably good way of grasping and interpreting the pluriformity of individual experiences in their respective cultural expressions, a way which allows one to appreciate the dynamics as well as the fragility of such expressions.

Only two of the contributors, FERNANDEZ for Africa and KAPFERER for Sri Lanka deal with religion directly, showing how in these cases meaning is established and shared by and with those participating in the performance of rituals. This is however not to mean that the approach advocated here would have but limited value for the interpretation of religious experiences, rather it underscores the fact that religion is not a field radically apart from all the others covered by humanistic or social sciences. This book can therefore be highly recommended also to students of religion, because it suggests ways to capture at least some of the pulsing life of a culture in its manifold expressions and to appreciate exactly its fertile vagueness and ambiguity.

Peter KNECHT
Nanzan University