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Experiential Sociology

Arpad Szakolczai

Since its birth, but especially since its academic institutionalization, sociology has been plagued by a series of dualisms and dichotomies that seriously diminish the relevance of much of sociological work. To start with, there is the opposition of theoretical and empirical sociology; an opposition that should have been stillborn, as it is commonplace that theoretical work without empirical evidence is arid, while empirical research without theory is spiritless and boring, but continues to survive and even thrive. There is also the division between substantive and methodological issues, creating the impression of two separate realms and the illusion of a 'free choice' of method. One can continue with the contrast between methodological individualism and collectivism that in our days culminates in the various debates around rational choice theory, but which is just the old debate between (neo-classical) economics and classical (Durkheimian) social theory, in new clothes. Still further, there is the dilemma of dynamic versus static approaches, which could be formulated in the language of historical versus structural, or of genetic versus genetic. There is furthermore the dichotomy dominating so much of contemporary sociology, between agency and structure, which is just another way of posing the contrast between action and system, dominating the structural-functionalism of the 1950s and 1960s, or the even older opposition between object and subject and their dialectic, central for German idealist philosophy. At an even more general level, there is the question of the link between reality and thought, the extent to which thought and discourses can properly reproduce reality, or, on the contrary, the claims about the autonomy of discourse, or the independence of the text, a theme particular cherished by various postmodern approaches.

Of course, distinctions must be made. Analytical and interpretative work require careful discriminations and dividing lines, and it would be foolish to try to reduce all difference to an overall, chimerical identity. Yet, at least two general charges can be formulated against the series of dichotomies ruling social thought, of which only a few examples were given. First of all, why the excessive predominance of

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two opposing 'alternatives'? Where does this fascination with the number two come from? As far as diversity is concerned, three or more possibilities could be even more appealing than the simple opposition of two sides. It is intriguing to note that in the history of ideas (and in number mysticism) the number two is rarely seen in a happy light, due to its inherent association with conflict, division and doubt, and gained supremacy only in fringe religious movements like Gnosticism and Manichaeism, or in the various apocalyptic cults and sects. The predominance of thinking in dichotomies, characteristic of modern Western philosophy since Descartes,[1] continued in a slightly modified form by Kant and Hegel, thus evokes perplexing and uneasy associations.[2]

Instead of dealing with the question of origins and sources, however, this paper will deal with the other side of the question, the consequences of this thinking in dichotomies, which first reduces the world surrounding us to a series of irreconcilable opposites and then tries, hopelessly, to build bridges between them. Having been educated in and accustomed to numerous versions of this dichotomous thinking, one cannot help being overtaken by the suspicion that a certain kind of 'hubris of the thinker' is involved here: the dichotomies don't reproduce the structure of reality, only serve to raise the prestige of the thinker, the 'subject of knowledge' who imposes *his* (or, if you like, *her*) own categories on the world, starting from the self-fulfilling assumption that the world outside is so chaotic that any understanding and explanation must start with the imposition of such artificial categories.[3]

The aim of this paper is to question the need for such artificial dichotomies, and to offer a solution to the Gordian knot by proposing an approach that would capture social reality exactly in the middle, instead of breaking it into two halves and then trying desperately to put them together. Sociology should neither be the science of facts, nor of concepts, but of *experiences*.

Starting with experience one immediately moves beyond the series of dichotomies indicated above. Experiences are clearly facts of life; they happen to human beings in their everyday activities. Experiences – like crime, illness, or sexuality – are the substance of sociological research; yet, their proper analysis and understanding, not to mention their 'operationalization', require careful methodological considerations. Furthermore, experiences are, or can be, both individual and social at the same time. A huge number of people live through and experience major historical events together; yet, the actual experienc-

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ing of events might imply crucial personal differences, while other experiences, central for the formation of identity (another crucial term, and close to experience) are by nature intensely personal. The list can be continued.

But is it really so simple? Can one solve endemic and constitutive problems of social research through such a straightforward proposition? The proper answer must start with the recognition that in a way the entire history of modern thought, starting – paradoxically – with Descartes, is based on a search for experience, on a call for a return to reality, in opposition to scholasticism, mere discourse. Thus, in order to move forward, we first need to reconstruct, shortly, the history of this concern with experience.

Experience in Modern Philosophy

The call for a return to reality, explicitly formulated in the sense of a return to experience has been a central concern in the history of modern Western philosophy. The idea can be traced to Descartes and his attack on medieval scholasticism. Central to the entire project of Descartes was a turn away from books and bookish knowledge, back to real human experiences. His *Meditations* and especially his *Discourse on Method* have the character of a reflection on his own life experiences, and the need to derive the proper 'method' of philosophy on this basis. In fact, it is in these works that the word 'experience', which previously meant 'experimenting', acquired its new, contemporary meaning.

The next major turn in modern philosophy can be traced to Kant, and is again closely related to 'experience'. It was another call against scholasticism, this time the 'rationalist' systems of Leibniz and Wolff, defining itself explicitly as critical. Kant, however, in opposition to Descartes, tried to go beyond the dualism of empirical versus rational. He started by arguing that experience (*Erfahrung*) is a problematic concept. Human experiences cannot be taken as simple facts, or as given, as they are chaotic, turbulent. These are the categories of the transcendental mind that impose some order on this original chaos, and render intelligibility possible. This had two consequences, with a definitive influence on social thought up to our days: first, that experiences are therefore *constructed*; and second, that the main agent of construction is the human mind, or the theorist. The first claim became the source of all kinds of 'constructivism', linking up the

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neo-Kantians, the phenomenologists and the interactionists with contemporary advocates of social constructivism; while the second established the tradition of 'German idealism', with the focus on the human mind and consciousness, up to the contemporary cognitivist approaches, also closely linked with social constructivism. Concerning 'experience', Hegel's thought did not add anything important to the work of Kant. Hegel's philosophy was certainly more dynamic than Kant's; the dichotomous categories of Kant were transformed into antagonistic dualisms, striving for a 'synthesis'. But for Hegel, just as for Kant, all this took place inside the mind or consciousness. Hegel's system was remarkably closed toward real human experiences, giving all forms of neo- or post-Hegelian thought a particularly dogmatic, life-hostile tone.

It should come by now as no surprise that the various challenges to the thought of Kant and Hegel all came from the perspective of reality, a call for a return to existence, or the real world. The best known of these are provided by the three 'masters of suspicion', Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Each of the three made a passionate call for turning back to reality against idealism and abstract speculation. In their manifestos, however, surprisingly little attention is paid to experience. This is because the target of their critique is the central focus of German idealism: the unity of consciousness; and in their attacks they were searching for something more basic, more reliable, more 'ultimate' than anything that 'merely' has to do with experience. Thus, for Marx, as is well known, it is 'existence' which comes before 'consciousness'; but Marx looks for this 'existence' not in human experience, but in some basic, eternal, unalterable laws of history and social structure. Similarly, Freud also claimed to have discovered in the drives and structures of the unconscious the real, objective forces that reside below the level of consciousness, and which concrete experiences only set in motion. Finally, though his entire work would almost beg for a concept like experience, Nietzsche also failed to reflect explicitly on experience and was postulating instead an irreducible, basic, elementary force: the will to power.

The neglect of experience by these three master thinkers who more than anyone else ignited not just the minds but also – for better or worse – the spirits of the 20th century is all the more puzzling as it would be easy to reformulate their basic tenets in the language of experience. After all, Marx started with the recognition of how differently the world is experienced by people who live under different social, economic and political conditions, while his work was moti-

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vated by some of the most powerful negative experiences: oppression, alienation, exploitation; in one word, suffering. Sexuality is again one of the most basic, if not the strongest, of human experiences, while behind the will to power it is not difficult to identify a similarly overwhelming human experience: warfare.

Central for the shortcomings of the three 'masters of suspicion' was that they have only gone halfway in their critique of German idealism. With Kant and Hegel, philosophy subordinated experience to the mind, the motivating and organising power of consciousness. When trying to escape the 'iron cage' of idealist mental categories, the critics were searching for similarly 'objective' forces, below and beyond the level of consciousness, and failed to return to the genuine, but not easily objectifiable, reality of human life experiences.

A third strand, distinct from both previous, but remaining for long only an undercurrent, being repeatedly defeated by the academically and politically stronger and also more popular forces of the previous two, is the attempt to return to experience in an explicitly religious-spiritual sense. The question of religion (or of Christianity) was in the background of all the classical philosophical attempts discussed before. Scholasticism, the main target of Descartes, was not just a philosophy but a theology; and in developing his theory he had a clear intention of developing a new theology as well. Kant was critical of Descartes even in this sense. His aim was not to present a critique of religion at all, but rather to completely separate philosophy and religion; an attempt that proved surprisingly successful but that turned out to be even more problematic than the separation of the 'natural' from the 'social' or 'cultural' sciences. Hegel, on the other hand, especially in his *Phenomenology of the Mind*, explicitly tried to construct a theological system, in which it is not difficult to recognise basic aspects of a Gnostic theology. Finally, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche each explicitly formulated their project as a critique of (Christian) religion, with the aim of complete destruction and annihilation.

Instead of a critique of religion, protagonists of the third strand advocated a new return to Christianity, and in this endeavour a central concern was played by religious experience. Their aim was not a return to Christianity as an official cult or a dogmatic theology, but as an *experience*. The three central figures of this strand were Friedrich Schleiermacher, Soren Kierkegaard and Wilhelm Dilthey. Schleiermacher was a crucial figure of transition, being academic philosopher, Protestant theologian and active pastor at the same time, and the last figure who did, or could, take up these three functions at the

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same time. Though highly respectful of Kant's philosophy, Schleiermacher, instead of separating philosophy and religion, attempted to connect the two through an analysis of religious experience in his best-known work, which was also a polemic against the Enlightenment (Schleiermacher 1996). Kierkegaard is usually considered as a forerunner of existentialist philosophy, but such a reading overlooks the fact that Kierkegaard's central concern was not simply to express the feeling of loneliness characteristic of modern man living in a world deprived of god, but rather the return to Christianity at the level of its basic motivating experiences.

Like Schleiermacher, Dilthey considered Kant as *the* reference point, but a 'touchstone' that must be complemented and overcome. According to him, the three critiques of Kant should be supplemented by a critique of historical reason. This work should focus on reassessing the central concept, and at the same time weakness, of Kant's work: experience (*Erfahrung*). The problem with Kant is the programmatic claim that experiences are unstructured, chaotic, and incomprehensible in themselves, without the categories of the transcendental mind. Dilthey's entire work was based on the opposite hypothesis: human experiences *do* have a structure on their own. The task of the interpreter is not to impose an external order on experiences, rather to elucidate their internal, real, existing structure. In order to indicate this fundamental difference, Dilthey came up with a new concept, hardly used before in German: *Erlebnis*, or 'lived experience'.

In his work Dilthey proposed a series of fundamental insights concerning the proper study of structures of experience (*Erlebnis*). He emphasised the connections between life and work, or the life experiences of a thinker and the works he produced, and developed these ideas in a path-breaking biography of Schleiermacher. He also emphasised the links between experiences and the activity of reflexive thought, or between *Erlebnis* and *Verstehen* – a concern that would have a major impact on Max Weber. He attempted to write the 'missing' fourth 'Critique of Historical Reason', and thus provide a new foundation for the human sciences, or the *Geisteswissenschaften* as he called it. In his historical studies he emphasized the creative potentials of temporal transitoriness and spatial in-between position. Thus, he emphasised that the singularity of German thought should not be attributed to some kind of 'essence' (*Wesen*) of the German people (*Volk*), but rather attributed to the in-between position of Germany in Europe: between North and South, and West and East, which stimulated thought especially in certain transitory periods like the Refor-

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mation (with the collapse of the medieval world), and the late 18th and early 19th centuries (with the collapse of the *ancien regime*) – clear anticipations of Victor Turner's concern with liminality.

However, Dilthey failed to complete his lifework, even his books. Both his biography of Schleiermacher and his programmatic *Introduction to the Human Sciences* remained fragments. These were mistakes that the German academic life, biased anyway towards excessive systematicity and accuracy, could not forgive. Dilthey thus became unjustly classified as a hopeless romantic, a 'man of first volumes', and even his followers like Weber, Heidegger and Gadamer tried to minimise, even hide, his influence on their thought.[4]

At this point, the review should continue with Husserl's phenomenology, and the most important followers or critics of Husserl's position: Alfred Schutz, his friend Eric Voegelin, and Michel Foucault. However, all these thinkers – just as Heidegger and Gadamer, perhaps too anxious to avoid sharing the fate of Dilthey – failed to take up explicitly, and consistently, the undertaking Dilthey rightly defined but failed to complete: the elusive project of re-founding the social (or human) sciences on the very structures of experiences.

Thus, it seems that for at least four centuries Western thought desperately tried to put 'real experience' into the centre of its thought. So far, evidently, with far from full success. Something inside seems to resist the idea. The thought of Kant is indeed crucial, though not in the sense of providing the solution, or at least the ground for the possible answer, but in pinning down the problem with clinical precision. Experiences, or actual, living reality is too chaotic to serve as the starting point for thought and research: this is the quintessence of Kantian wisdom. This is exactly what Nietzsche diagnosed as hostility to life, the source of modern nihilism. We only need to connect this diagnosis closer to the analysis of experiences.

This is indeed what I have attempted, in the context of an interpretation of Foucault's 'vision' of modernity, in my *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (Szakolczai 2000: 189-91). There I argued that in modern society there is a tendency to problematize, to hide away or even to repress the central human life experiences such as birth, death, illness or sexuality, and that the understanding of this phenomenon, in its connection with modern science, institutional power and the formation of personal identity, was at the heart of Foucault's entire work. As Foucault came to realize, but only in his last years, it is experience that forms the subject (Foucault 1988a: 253), including the formative impact of thought in the form of 'problematization' (Foucault 1984b: 388-90;

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1986: 10-12; 1988b: 256-7), a recognition that led him to the thematization of the three basic axes of experience in some of his last, crucial pieces (Foucault 1984a; 1986: 4-5). He also came to recognise, much against his own earlier convictions, that his entire work can be considered as a series of autobiographic fragments (Foucault 1988c: 156).

The idea that modernity denies and represses experiences may seem paradoxical in light of the enormous importance attributed in modernity to some of these experiences, or the 'craze' for experiences, diagnosed already by Max Weber, that has only become more pronounced in our days. Experience, like identity, has become a buzzword today – so how can one argue about the disappearance or denial of 'experience'? The problem, however, is that it is a very restricted meaning of 'experience' that circulates in contemporary social theory and popular practice; a type of experience that – not surprisingly, given the philosophical foundations of modernity – is very close to simple sense perception. What is meant by experience in contemporary talk is little more than the excitation, the titillation of the senses, motivated by a search for simple pleasures. As the ideal-typical representation of this search for pleasurable sensations, one can indicate 'bungee jumping'. The excitation, by evoking the fear of death, is as high – and as artificial – as possible; but there is no question of undergoing a cathartic, earth-shattering and potentially personality-changing experience. In Kantian language, the identity of the subject – what in any genuine experience is put to the test – remains fixed, the distance between object and subject is maximal, and at stake is only the challenging of the senses that have become too dumb and in need of stimuli in the utter dullness of the standardised routines of modern everyday life, which the desperate attempts to personalise the mechanical – a genuine squaring of the circle – fail to hide.

All this renders evident the need to reconsider the very term 'experience' outside the taken-for-granted settings of modern philosophy. Indeed, what has been the exact meaning of experience in various non-modern languages? History and anthropology, with the help of etymology and comparative mythology, might come again to the rescue of contemporary thought, by putting modernity in due perspective.

What is Experience?

The meaning of the term 'experience' originally, up to the times of Bacon and Descartes, was identical with 'experiment'. Experiment-

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ing stood for a testing or a trial, as for us; however, it usually meant the testing of a human being. Indeed, one of the central innovations of Bacon was to shift the method of testing from the sphere of human beings into that of inanimate objects. An experience therefore is what happens to a human being, as if putting him or her on trial. This is also visible in the German word *Erfahren*, with its link to the tiresome and transformative, testing activity of travelling; and is also present in the word *Erleben*, 'invented' by Dilthey. Significantly, the etymology of both experience and *Erfahren* goes back to the Indo-European root **per* which meant a dangerous passing through.

In Russian the concept has similar connotations, though with a slight difference. The Russian word for experience is 'opyt' while 'to experience' is 'ispytatj'. This evokes a quite peculiar association, as in Russian *pytatj* means to torture, with its reflexive version 'pytatjsia' meaning to try or to prove. The Hungarian *tapasztalat* moves in a similar key, as its root, the term *tapad*, stands for whatever 'sticks' on somebody, leaving a mark.

Not surprisingly, the Greek term evokes particularly important associations. The word is *pathos*, meaning 'that which happens to a person or a thing', or 'what one has experienced', whether it was good or bad. The etymological root of the word is even more important, as it is *paskho*, to 'have something done to', or to suffer. This root stayed alive in several modern derivatives, including the word 'passive' itself, then 'pathology' and 'passion', partly through the Latin term *passio*.

There is another Greek word that should be mentioned here, *patos*. It means path, or the trodden or beaten way, and is directly linked to words like 'path' or 'passage'. The etymological dictionaries deny any link with pathos; yet, given the manifold links between experience and travel, road, or passage, the similarities are just too conspicuous.

The short discussion of meanings and etymologies can be resumed in two points. First, central to the meaning of the word, especially the more we go backward in time, touching more archaic levels, is the emphasis on the passive aspect of experience – an idea that radically contrasts with the modern view that singles out the freedom and sovereignty of the subject undergoing the experience. According to our modern way of viewing the world, we experience something when we choose or decide to do so – to have sex, to open a bottle of wine, or to jump into the void (with safe precautions, of course). The ancients (and, among them, archetypically the Greeks) experienced something

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when they were passively overcome by a greater force; when certain events happened to them.

It is from this perspective that we can understand an aspect of Greek mythology that certainly seems not just repulsive but outright absurd for us – the frequency with which the gods were actually raping women. Sexuality is a central experience for our age, and – perhaps more than anything else – is associated with free choice and consent, while rape is widely considered as one of the most atrocious of crimes. The peculiarity of this aspect of Greek mythology is not simply the frequency of rapes, but their modality. It has nothing to do with the scene more familiar from history books – the wartime rapes committed by soldiers. These are the gods, most frequently Zeus himself, who commit rapes, and the offspring of these acts are some of the most important gods and heroes of the Greek Pantheon. This fact could only be made sense of by realising that the experience of sexuality, as any other experience for the Greeks, was closely associated with passivity: for the gods, who are simply overtaken by the force of desire; and for the women, who simply yield to this male force. As Foucault (1986) has shown, it is exactly from the perspective of passivity that the search for such pleasures became problematized later in Greek ethical thought, as part of the mastery of the self.

The corollary of all this is that experience, traditionally or archaically, relates not to action, but to *event*. It is the human correlate of an event, where an event is something that just happens, outside human control. Human life is fundamentally passive and reactive, dominated by the sudden outbreak of events and the sufferings they produce.

This view of the world, which could be considered as pessimistic and hopeless, at least 'tragic', must be complemented and partially modified by the second major aspect of experience: the idea of trying or testing. Human life is a series of 'experiences', but not simply in the sense of passively endured and accumulated sufferings. These experiences also test us, and if we successfully go through them, we become changed, transformed at the core of our very personality or identity. This gives a fundamentally different view of the world, as if revalorising the very experiences of suffering: the 'bad' becomes 'good', in the sense of making us resistant to the various vicissitudes of life.

The short overview given above can help us better appreciate the fact that the feat of a synthesis between the modern and archaic meanings of experience has already been accomplished in one of the most important and least appreciated events of recent intellectual history.

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This event was the encounter between classical German philosophical anthropology and modern Anglo-Saxon social anthropology when Victor Turner came to read Wilhelm Dilthey and – in the manner of a true 'reading experience' (Szakolczai 1998: 28-30) – recognised the profound affinity between their respective, central concerns: Dilthey's *Erlebnis* and his interest in rites of passage and liminality.

Victor Turner Encountering Wilhelm Dilthey

Victor Turner's work, especially through the term 'liminality', is quite well known in contemporary social theory. However, the potential relevance of this work is still far from being exhausted, and Turner's reading of the work of Dilthey is practically unknown. This is partly because Turner died shortly after this intellectual encounter – with his most important related writings only published posthumously – and partly because Turner never got to publish the book that would resume and synthesise the various stages of his work. In the following, an effort will be made in this direction.

Turner's work started with the recognition in the early 1950s, based on his fieldwork, that the methods of Durkheimian structuralist anthropology, coloured by Marxism, which he learned from his teachers, were not able to properly capture what happens in rituals (E. Turner 1985). Instead of representing the structures of social order, rituals rather perform or stage events that previously upset the social order, in order to remember what had happened in the past and to prevent similar occurrences in the future. For such a characterisation of rituals Turner came up with the term 'social drama', and analysed the processual structure of rituals, or social dramas, in four stages (Turner 1985a: 215-21; see also Turner 1968).

A social drama starts with the *Breach* of regular social relations, and continues with the *Crisis* in which the sudden and temporary gap takes up a life on its own, and society is divided into rival and conflicting groups. The third phase is *Redress* when attempt is made to arrest the process of disintegration and restore social order. This phase is similar both to a judicial process and to religious and magical procedures (Turner 1985a: 218), and is characterized by a high degree of reflexivity (Turner 1985a: 216). Finally, after the 'deployment of legal or ritual mechanisms of redress' (Turner 1985a: 220), there is either a return to phase two through another crisis, or a return to normal order, in a phase of *Reintegration*.

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The development of the concept of 'social drama', however, originally took place in the 1950s, before Turner encountered the work of Arnold van Gennep on rites of passage (in the mid-1960s), which then led him to the distillation of the concept 'liminality' (Turner 1967; 1969). The study of rites of passage led van Gennep and Turner to the identification of a three-fold sequence. These rites start with a *rite of separation*, in which the individual is isolated from his immediate social surroundings and prepares for the testing. The second stage is the proper stage of the rite, or of *liminality*, in which certain acts must be performed, where the individuals undergo certain trials. Liminality can also be characterized as a stage of reflection, where participants who go through the initiation ritual are 'alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society' (Turner 1967: 105). However, Turner also emphasizes that liminality goes beyond the realm of rational thought, as it touches upon the 'most sacred things' of the community (Turner 1967: 107), where the initiates receive, as if through a 'master stamp', the 'basic assumptions of their culture' (Turner 1967: 108). This also brings out the parallels between the transformative aspects of the middle stage of a rite of passage and the religious experience of conversion. Finally, in the *rite of re-aggregation*, the social order suspended during the rites is restored and the individual is returned to the community, in his or her new status or role.

The two schemes, one four-fold, the other three-fold, show evident similarities, but Turner never discussed explicitly the relationship between the two. The next significant redirection in his work happened in the late 1970s, when he read the works of Dilthey and came to recognise that his own life-long preoccupations, culminating in the concepts of social drama and liminality, do provide exactly the proper, 'empirical' substantiation of Dilthey's insights.

Traces of his encounter with Dilthey are contained in three late pieces: two papers, published posthumously (Turner 1985a; 1985b) and the autobiographical 'Introduction' to his last published book, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (Turner 1982). In these pieces, Turner argued that the etymology of experience, especially the indo-European root **per* which meant a dangerous passage, link up experience directly with rites of passage, and thus the concept of liminality. Furthermore, he claimed that the structure of the ritual experience, which he identified in the four stages of 'social dramas', model exactly and thus provide solid empirical basis to Dilthey's attempts to identify the structure of experience. Even fur-

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ther, through emphasizing the performative, expressive aspect of rituals and social dramas, Turner succeeded in providing a broader social basis to the conceptualisation of the evocative, expressive aspect of lived experience, that Dilthey restricted too narrowly to the field of art and aesthetics. Finally, the broad range of possible applications of the concept of liminality, for example, the affinities with the term 'crisis', also enabled Turner to better link up (individual) experiences and (socio-political) events. The work, however, remained incomplete due to premature death.

In the following, an attempt will be made to bring together the concepts of social drama and liminality from the perspective of Turner's reading of Dilthey. First of all, the four-fold sequence of social drama modelling events, and the three-fold sequence of rites of passage modelling experiences closely correspond to each other. They both start with something 'negative': the collapse or suspension of the normal order of things, the routines of everyday life, and the separation of those individuals who are selected or rather destined to undergo the rites of passage. Similarly, they both end with something 'positive': the solution of the conflict and return to the normal order of things. The differences are at the crucial middle level; but they are more apparent than real. What in a social drama is thematized as two different phases, *Crisis* and *Redress*, in a rite of passage are considered as a single moment of testing and liminality. But it is exactly the Diltheyan perspective that helps us to understand that these are only two ways of capturing the same phenomenon. The phases *Crisis* and *Redress* have the character of a question and an answer. A crisis is a problem that needs a solution; the two aspects express the dialectic of experience and reflexivity in Dilthey, which has been followed in the emphasis on the dialogical character of philosophy in Gadamer (1976), or in the concept of 'problematization' in Foucault. Furthermore, the middle, liminal stage of a rite of passage has exactly the same characteristic. It is a stage of testing, where the initiates are supposed to successfully overcome the trial to which they are submitted. One might evoke the typical modern case of a rite of passage, an examination, which clearly has the character of questions and answers.

However, events and experiences are still not identical, and the differences can be best seen in what happens after them. Events call for a solution, for a way out. The challenge must be met; order must be restored. Experiences, however, cannot be 'solved'. They require interpretive understanding. With the exception of illnesses, the move-

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ment from one state of being to another is irreversible: birth or death cannot be undone, a mature person can't become a child again, nor somebody sexually experienced regain his or her virginity. Such experiences cannot be 'solved', but they require some kind of coping, of understanding and interpretation; they need some degree of reflexivity: more *re*-action than action.

Karl Kerényi: Myths and Experiences

Victor Turner developed his understanding of experience through a study of rituals. Given the affinities between rituals and myths, one might wonder whether the analysis of experience presented so far could be supported with the help of a study of myths.

A proper study of the links between sociology and comparative mythology is indeed long overdue. The almost complete neglect by sociologists of the vast literature of mythology is particularly difficult to explain, given some clear and promising affinities between the two undertakings. Thus, Georges Dumézil, the founder of the structural method in comparative anthropology was the most important source of method for the historical works of Michel Foucault, while Mircea Eliade developed a phenomenological approach to the study of myths, close to the interests of Schutz and Voegelin. Yet, Dumézil's work is practically ignored in the enormous Foucault industry,[5] while Eliade is rarely referred to even by sociologists of religion.

In this paper, the work of one important scholar of mythology will be analysed, Karl Kerényi. Kerényi, who was born in 1897 in Hungary, emigrated in 1943 to Switzerland and then wrote in German, mostly translated into English. He was in close contact and intellectual affinity with Carl G. Jung and Thomas Mann, but just as important for the unfolding of his life project was his long friendship at the formative stage of his career with another important though little-known Hungarian scholar, Béla Hamvas.[6] Kerényi's approach complements Turner particularly well, as it shifts the emphasis to an aspect left aside by Turner, and also by Dilthey: the experiences of the child, in its 'archetypical' characteristics.

For Kerényi, mythology is rooted in experiences. This is shown first of all by its etymology: mythology is the telling (*legein*) of stories (*mythoi*) (Kerényi 1958: 4). The stories are rooted in events that happened, and in the all-too-human urge of those who lived through these events, who experienced them, to communicate to others, thus

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leaving a lasting memory. However, due to their roots in experiences, myths involve much more than mere words, implying that a science of mythology is almost a contradiction in terms. These stories have a musical quality. They belong not simply to the world of words, but the 'world of sound; so a 'right attitude', a 'special "ear" is needed' to hear and understand them, where '"ear" means resonance, a sympathetic pouring out of oneself' (Jung and Kerényi 1951: 3-5). At the same time, they also possess a pictorial quality, as the telling of a myth implies the streaming out of a 'torrent of mythological pictures' (Jung and Kerényi 1951: 4).

Still, words and language are fundamental for myths – not in the sense of the ideal of a perfect, exact, scientific representation of what has happened, but through the magical, evocative qualities of words. This is because, beyond (and before) being an instrument of philosophy or reflection, 'language is the direct expression of experience' (Kerényi 1976: xxviii). Even further, paraphrasing Wilhelm von Humboldt, and pointing towards Foucault or Voegelin, Kerényi argues that 'languages are not so much means of expressing truth that has already been established as means of discovering truth that was previously unknown' (Kerényi 1976: xxxi).

If Kerényi strove to restore validity to words, after carefully indicating their limits, he does the same with rational, 'scientific' explanations, in a polemic with Malinowski (Jung and Kerényi 1951: 7). Malinowski also asserted the experiential aspect of mythology, its roots in a reality actually lived, but denied the 'aetiological' aspect of myths, or the claim that they also attempted to give an explanation of what has happened. Kerényi rejects this assertion, arguing that even though the kind of explanation given by myths is not fully comparable to scientific curiosity, nevertheless it is an attempt to make sense of the world, of what has happened, and this aspect is just as central to myths as their experiential content. This search, furthermore, moves beyond the singularity of experiences, back to first principles, even a 'primordial reality'.

This last of the twists in Kerényi's efforts at an understanding of myths is perhaps the most difficult to follow, as it outright claims to move out of the orbit of experience. Beyond the level of stories and experiences, myths touch a more basic, indeed primordial level, the level of foundations. Kerényi talks about 'mythological "fundamentalism"', the attempt to 'step back into primordiality', where primordiality is identified with authenticity; a search for the origins, which is 'the mid-point about which and from which our whole being orga-

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nizes itself'. Understood in this sense, myths reach the heart of identity: '[g]oing back into ourselves in this way and rendering an account of it we experience and proclaim the very foundations of our being; that is to say, we are "grounding" ourselves' (Jung and Kerényi 1951: 10-12).

One must recognise emphatically that Kerényi is not moving out of the realm of reasoning here. Quite the contrary, the words used include 'giving an account' and 'grounding'; and while he then goes into an elaborate etymological discussion, first of the link between 'origins' and 'rising', meaning that 'mythological fundamentalism' builds 'on a foundation where everything is an outflowing, a sprouting and springing up' (Jung and Kerényi 1951), it is soon followed by an analysis of the dual meaning of 'origins' in mythology: not just a foundation (*Gründung*), but also a giving of grounds, or reasons (*Begründung*).

Kerényi provides a series of further examples for the concern with primordiality, origins and foundations. In philosophy, it is manifested in the concern with the original matter of the world, and especially in the famous term of Anaximander, the boundless (*apeiron*). In myths, this is especially shown in stories about the origins of the world, or the foundation of cities (Jung and Kerényi 1951: 14-16). It is present in the unique Greek distinction between two words for life, *zoe* and *bios*, the first signifying the infinite forces of life, while the second finite individual character (Kerényi 1962: 13-14; 1976: xxxi-xxxvii). It is also manifest in the Greek deity Okeanos, alone permitted to stay in his place under the new rule of Zeus – but whose home is 'really not a place, but only a flux, a boundary and barrier between the world and the Beyond' (Kerényi 1958: 15).

Kerényi's explicit aim is to move beyond the level of experiences – and yet, strangely, all the evidence brought up by him fits into the theoretical framework exposed so far, placing experiences at the level of foundations. Experiences are 'in the middle' also in the Voegelinian sense of the metaxy (Voegelin 1974; 1978); experience is also identical with 'flux', as described by Victor Turner, following the works of Mihály Csikszentmihályi; the term *apeiron* contains the etymological root of experience (**per*), and at any rate is identical with liminality;[7] while Kerényi himself emphasizes that the distinction between *zoe* and *bios* is experientially based.

Before concluding, however, that Kerényi's search for the foundations of myths can be resolved with experience, we need to look further into what he is searching for beyond experiences, using a central concern of his entire work: the motif of the Divine Child.[8]

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The Divine Child

The very idea of gods having a childhood seems a contradiction in terms. Gods are immortal, they never die; they have no end, and no beginning. It is not accidental that we do not know about the early days of most deities. And yet, many gods do appear in Greek mythology as child-gods. The solving of this paradox is one of the central concerns of Kerényi's work, and of fundamental relevance for his theorization of experience. The problem is the relationship between an experience-oriented, biographical approach and the essential characteristics of gods, related to the primordial realities touched by myths. The Divine Child motif clearly moves beyond mere biographic aspects, as the child-god immediately demonstrates the essential characteristics of the mature god – one only has to think of the first day of Hermes, started by stealing the cattle of Apollo. But then, why the need to emphasise the fact that the god was a newly-born child?

The first step towards the solution is suggested by the motif of suffering. The Divine Child has a difficult time in his first days and years. He is abandoned and exposed, reared by foster parents, living under continuous threats and persecution, and often killed, even in particularly cruel ways. Kerényi here evokes the 'orphan child' motif of folktales, posing the question of priority concerning the orphan child and the child-god, and also the question of whether these were merely the (biographical) experiences of suffering that produced the exceptional 'divine' character, or whether there was something deeper at stake. Given the etymology of experience through pathos as suffering, and the state of homelessness as a primal experience of liminality, the question is again fundamental for the stakes of this paper.

So is Kerényi's answer. The experiences of deprivation and suffering do not matter for their biographical aspects; they do not only serve to evoke the pity or compassion of the listener. Rather, they should be conceived of as a kind of testing; and again not simply in the biographical, nor even the rite-of-passage sense. They rather help to reveal the primordial, divine essence of the child: 'this fate [of exposure and persecution] is the triumph of the elemental nature of the wonder-child' (Jung and Kerényi 1951: 51). The Divine Child is therefore not the product of human biography; it is rather 'the divine principle of the universe at the moment of its first manifestation' (Jung and Kerényi 1951: 59).

This can be best seen where the sufferings go well beyond the 'purely human point of view' of 'an unusually tragic situation' (Jung

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and Kerényi 1951: 50), like that of the orphan child, and reach the abominable, almost unutterable level, where a child is torn up alive, dismembered, and cooked in preparation for a cannibalistic meal; or the story of Dionysus.

Dionysus

The figure, and the story, of Dionysus are well known, even if it is not always realised that the god of dance and wine is identical to the child-god who was brutally killed and almost eaten by his murderers. Nietzsche's great innovation, the rediscovery of the figure in *Birth of Tragedy* is also widely familiar. The great, and still little recognised merit of Kerényi was to add a third figure to the Nietzschean pair (and strictly in the spirit of Nietzsche), the figure of Hermes,[9] and to considerably deepen our understanding of Dionysus in a posthumous book which could well be considered the crowning achievement of his life-work (Kerényi 1976).

Kerényi starts by contextualising the emergence of the god-figure in ways that Nietzsche could not even have guessed. In a feat of scholarship he traces the god back to Crete, and even the very heart of the Cretan civilisation, which was discovered by Sir Arthur Evans only around the last years of the 19th century. The Cretan origins of Greece, and of Dionysus, are of central importance also from the perspective of liminality. Crete is the source of Greek civilisation, its cradle. But it also has an unmistakable in-between position, both in space and time: the island is literally in-between Africa and Europe, or Egypt and Greece; and it also was a major transmitter of the achievements of Egyptian civilisation to Greece.

Dionysus, the god of fertility and wine embodied the distinguishing features of Cretan civilisation – its vitality, its joy of life and gracefulness.[10] Kerényi also demonstrates, beyond the manifold and very old misinterpretations of the Labyrinth motif, that originally it was not at all impenetrable. Rather, it had a spiral shape, and the difficulty was given not by the impossibility of leaving it, but by having to go through the Minotaur at its centre. The spiral shape represented the forces of life and fertility, depicted similarly in many other cultures, but also the experience of turning around at the middle, or experience of conversion, so close to the Platonic *periagoge* in the cave (Kerényi 1976: 93, 96).[11]

However, just as life and death belong together, a god of joyfulness also must deal with the dark experiences of human existence; aspects

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which accompany the very vital forces of life. The Dionysus myth deals with both in a particularly telling and evergreen manner. On the one hand, the two great gifts of the god, wine and his manhood, both need some moderation. This is taken care of through the motif of the Three Graces, which also seem to go back to Cretan origins. In a song from the early cult of Dionysus, he is addressed as a hero and invited to come forward 'raving with the bull's foot' (Kerényi 1976: 181-2), which was 'a euphemism whose meaning was generally understood' (Kerényi 1976: 183); but was 'bidden to come with the Graces, the Charites, because without the soothing power of these goddesses what the women expected of him would have been a rape' (Kerényi 1976: 182-3).

On the other hand, since the beginnings Dionysus was also a suffering god. One of his early names was exactly Pentheus or Megapenthes, a man 'full of suffering' or 'of great sufferings' (Kerényi 1976: 69-70, 185). However, eventually this figure of pure suffering was separated from the god and became one of his main adversaries and persecutors. Even further, associated with Megapenthes are his three sisters who were punished for their persecution of Dionysus by 'a state of extreme and indecent nymphomania' (Kerényi 1976: 186), or the exact opposite of the Graces. One might risk stating here that in Pentheus and his three sisters we find the negative alter-ego of Dionysus and the Three Graces: if suffering became not just a trial and a part of existence but an exclusive identity, there is a similar, parallel transformation of the erotic into a pursuit of sexual excess. Megapenthes is the one who, when sucked into the maelstrom of the Labyrinth, did not manage to overcome the Minotaur; for whom the life experiences, the genuine personal sufferings did not lead to a conversion, but rather to a licking of his own wounds and a subsequent attempt to take revenge on the very forces of life, an attempt to destroy life itself – of which Dionysus was the embodiment.

Dionysus did succeed, even though his sufferings amounted to a genuine catastrophe. With this word, the circle is closed and the parallels with the analysis of Turner's work become complete. Indeed, Kerényi often and emphatically uses this word, and in a way that ties the links tightly between the individual and the collectivity, between the fate of the god and of Crete. At first, there is only an allusion, a vague feeling to be gained through a comparative study of Cretan and Greek art that between the two there was 'a downfall similar if not even more catastrophic' than the separation between pagan Rome and the early Christianised Germanic people (Kerényi 1976: 5). Cretan

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civilisation in fact ended with a series of catastrophic earthquakes. Whatever the exact links, the horrifying story of Dionysus's death was also a clear case of catastrophe. Kerényi here uses the original Greek word, and gives an interpretation: the sacrificial meal, representing the attempted cannibalism, was 'the tragic climax of the entire drama, the *katastrophe* redounding to the benefit of mankind' (Kerényi 1976: 244). This benefit is rebirth, the rebirth of nature, the return of Dionysus to life from the underworld.

After this detailed account of perhaps the most important of the Divine Child motifs, we can return to Kerényi's conclusion to his earlier work, where Dionysus was indeed the last of the various examples or case studies (Jung and Kerényi 1951). The great question there was whether the 'child-god' is experientially grounded or not. Though Kerényi took up a position against a simplistic biographical approach, it does not imply that he would come up with a clear-cut, unambiguous answer at the end. Quite on the contrary: '[w]e shall let the issue remain vague and undecided in its essence. For that was our subject: the undecided, the undifferentiated of old, the Primordial Child' (Jung and Kerényi 1951: 94).

René Girard: Against Rituals and Myths

The term 'undifferentiation', however, turns out to be a central concept for one of the most important and still relatively little-studied contemporary social theorists, René Girard. Girard's work, furthermore, is a frontal attack on the relevance of rituals and mythologies, including Turner's concern with liminality; and, even further, claims to rehabilitate, on a fully rational basis, the original Christian position. This paper must therefore to turn to his arguments.

Girard's central point is that all cultures are based on a singular mechanism of sacrifice and victimisation (Girard 1977; 1987; 1989). This is due to the fact that in simple communities, in the absence of a judicial system, any conflict potentially threatens the coherence and thus the very existence of the community. The first act of violence, sparked by a mimetic rivalry which emerges due to the breakdown of the system of social differences or a situation of 'undifferentiation', would be imitated and repeated until the entire community is torn apart by conflict. The contagious spread of violence can only be stopped by a simple but very costly technique: somehow an innocent victim, at either the upper or lower margins of society (a foreigner or

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a prince; a person who is particularly beautiful or who has physical handicaps) is designated as the guilty, as the 'scapegoat'. This renders it possible to redirect all the accumulated hatred and search for revenge against the scapegoat, who becomes expelled from the community and killed. The elimination of the scapegoat, in a 'miraculous' manner, indeed results in a calming down of the passions. As a consequence, rituals of sacrifice (originally human sacrifices) would regularly be performed, and this is the origin of rituals.

At the same time, the figure of the scapegoat would be transformed. The act of brutal and unjust murder is forgotten, and emphasis shifts to the consequences of the murder, the return of stability and peace, which then is attributed to the victim, who in this way is transformed into a saviour, and eventually would be divinised. The myths told about the god express, in a distorted manner, this transformation, through his death and eventual resurrection. The novelty of the Judeo-Christian tradition, according to Girard, is that in the Bible, through the prophets and culminating in the story of the Passion, the scapegoating mechanism is identified and revealed.

The question is whether rituals and myths indeed do not tell and celebrate, in a hidden way, anything else but the expulsion and sacrificing of the scapegoat; or whether there is a way to render Girard's account compatible with the line of argument followed so far. First of all, Girard's account can be translated into the conceptual framework developed so far, as it uses the same terms, though in a special way, presenting a limit case of experience. The innocent victim corresponds to the passively suffered aspect of experience, the correspondence between 'child' and 'innocence' being particularly strong. On the other hand, also present is the catastrophe, the situation of 'undifferentiation' or 'dissolution of order'. Finally, there is also a kind of performance or testing involved. The moment of culmination or catharsis, the expulsion of the scapegoat, which – according to Girard – eventually turned into the ritual, shows manifold similarity with the 'testing' aspects of rituals, except that there is no question about the outcome: the scapegoat does not stand a chance. The scene described by Girard does indeed depict an experience, but of the most extreme kind.

It also gives an insight concerning the 'child-god' or 'child-hero'. The term is immediately perceived as paradoxical, as the classical model of the hero is the warrior who saves his community, as this is exactly what, by definition, a child simply cannot do. In fact, the typical initiation ritual is the transformation of an adolescent into a war-

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rior. In the Dionysian rituals, archetypical according to Kerényi, however, the child does manage to come up with the solution, but only by passively suffering death.

Thus, if the starting claim of this paper was that the foundations of social thought must be thought at the level of experiences, Girard's approach does not contradict it. Rather, it reinforces it by asserting that *all* cultures are founded on a special type of highly traumatic event-experience.[12] This experience, furthermore, played a foundational role in our own culture as well, as the scapegoating mechanism has been resurrected at crucial liminal moments. There is the story of Socrates, put to death as an innocent victim just when Athens lost in the Peloponnesian Wars, ending its claims to supremacy; a death that, through Plato and his disciples, became the founding experience of classical philosophy. There is the story of the murder of Caesar that, according to Girard's analysis in his most recent book, can be considered as the foundational sacrifice of the greatest of the 'ecumenic empires' (Voegelin 1974), the Roman Empire (Girard 1999: 135-7). Finally, there is the Gospel story, where the innocence of Jesus was again maintained by his disciples, leading to the rise of Christianity, again out of a traumatic experience.

If, however, the rise of Christianity represented the unmasking of the sacrificial mechanism, it also meant something else: a general problematization of experiences, even of attitudes with respect to nature. Let me single out only two of the most important human experiences in this regard: sexuality and religious conversion. Concerning the first, it is well known that Christianity, also influenced by Plato and by neo-Platonism, was deeply suspicious of the powers of physical love (Pagels 1982). In light of the previous analysis, this can be connected both to the mimetic rivalry underlying the escalation of conflicts in small-scale communities, and also to the moving forces of the first age of global empire-building.

The second, however, seems more puzzling, as the experience of conversion seems to be crucial, indeed foundational for the rise of Christianity. However, it is also clear that direct religious experiences, including conversion, present one of the most important instances of the well-known Weberian conflict between charisma and institution building. It is true that the basic Christian institutions are built upon certain religious experiences; but the claims of new conversions and mystical experiences threatened the consolidation of institutions (Pagels 1989). This conflict was fundamental in the first Christian centuries, as related to the various Gnostic sects, and – mostly through

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the consolidation of the institution of infant baptism – led to the denial of the possibility of not only individual conversion, but of direct, personal religious experiences as such. The 'right' of personal conversion was only reclaimed in the Reformation.[13] This, however, led again to extremely traumatic experiences: the religious and civil wars of the 16th and 17th centuries.

The consequences of this new trauma was a new denial of conversion, and of experiences in general, with the rise of another kind of – now secular – myth or dogma, this time the myth of the original contract and the corresponding foundation myths of the national states. With this, we return to where we started: the paradoxes of modern thought, the attacks on medieval scholasticism, the claim for a return to experience, and at the same the building of another kind of – increasingly dualistic – dogmatism.

Conclusion

This paper started with the claim that instead of thinking in terms of static dichotomies and dualisms, like the contrasts between agency and structure, object and subject, or action and system, sociology should rather capture social life in the middle, with what actually happens in real life, with events and experiences. This is all the more the case as these are the events and the experiences that form and transform structures and institutions, including identities, personal or collective.

However, as we also came to realise, the neglect, downplay and denial of the significance of experiences does have a genuine reason, and this is the traumatic character of the historical formative experiences of the society in which we are now living; indeed, of all culture. In past societies, myths were told about heroes and gods in order to hide away these events and experiences. In our own societies, though some similar myths are also perpetuated, especially as far as the origins of nation states are concerned, these are certain scientific (or pseudo-scientific) discourses and theories which claim that social life and human action have clearly identifiable rational bases, to be traced to certain law-like regularities or legal constructions. Thus, at one level, the challenge facing social theory today is to overcome the artificiality of this 'neo-scholastic' position, based on a combination of Cartesian rationalism, British empiricism and German idealism, and to return, not simply to 'empirical research', but to the complexity

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involved in the reconstruction and understanding of the basic, foundational experiences of human life. This requires an attitude similar to the debunking of myths, where, paradoxically, a return to the similar concerns of classical philosophy and even Christianity (following Girard) might play a major role.

Important as this point is, however, it is only one half of the agenda; and perhaps not even the most crucial one. This is because the claim that social thought should return to the reality of experiences is not equal to a reassertion of a dividing line between reality and thought. Quite on the contrary, human experiences inherently involve thinking. When undergoing experiences, even at first in a most passive way, human beings reflect on what is happening to them and interpret their own situation. The formative power of experiences is inseparable from the formative power of thought. Due to this very characteristic, emphasis on the reality of experiences (in opposition to merely talking about the reality of external structures) paradoxically reasserts a certain formative power of discourse and thought.

One has to be extremely careful and precise here. The formative power of discourse, which can well be called 'magical', does not mean that whatever we claim to be existing and true becomes so; only that such a transformation might happen in special cases and under special circumstances, cases and circumstances which are related to the formation of *identity*. It is at this instance that the critique of social theory, suggested in this paper, is transformed into a critique of modernity. In the footsteps of Foucault, Elias, Goffman and Girard (among others), this paper claims that the most fleeting character of human beings is exactly what modern societies proclaim as foundational: the identity of the self, with its wishes and desires. Such identities are continuously in the process of formation and transformation, as life experiences generate fluid, liminal situations where the transformation of previous stabilities becomes possible. This is exactly one of the main reasons why experiences – even the seemingly most trivial, natural or banal experiences – can be so threatening.

It is here that the formative power of discourses comes in to play its role not simply as a stabiliser, but also as a substitute. There are two circumstances in which discourses can play a formative role with special ease, when human beings are in a particularly fluid, malleable state: the first is childhood, and the second when one is directly talking about oneself. These two cases identify the most important instances when the formation of identities through direct personal experiences is replaced in modern societies by abstract discourses: the

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first is the educational system, a place famous for its hostility to direct life experiences and a profound suspicion of children (and also parents); while the other concerns the various situations in which human beings are forced to talk about their own selves – from the confessional through the preparation of CVs, job interviews and talk shows, up to any situation in which people are invited to pin down and thus reinforce their own identities – and at the same time the identities of others, alongside social and demographic variables, be they gender, class, race, national, sexual, or other.

Experiences are dangerous, as they question and uproot certainties, which are anyway lacking in precarious times as ours. Even further, the foundational experiences of modernity, the world wars and the various revolutions represent an outburst of violence that has been unprecedented in human history. All of which call for extreme precaution against any simple call for a 'return' to 'unmediated' experience.

However, on the other hand, a world in which the discursive construction of identity is replacing genuine life experiences is just as dangerous. At one level, this appears as a loss of a sense of reality, in the boredom of living in an increasingly standardised, bureaucratised and rationalised world. But such a world presents immediate and direct dangers on its own, as the flip side of the same discursive construction of identity. Identity discourses not only try to create a stable and static world, but they also mobilise and incite by imprinting desirable objects, forms of conduct and identities on the mind, by continuously perpetuating the mimetics of desire. The so-called 'politics of identity' is not the outcome of the 1990s. It has been forever a basic characteristic of modernity, since the formation of modern nation states, even going back to the Reformation. This politics of identity only became intensified in the 20th century, with the religious and national boundary drawings being partly substituted, but partly only complemented by divisions along race and class lines. This game of identity and exclusion culminated in the two world wars and the rise of the totalitarian systems of the 20th century, two developments which are closely interrelated. As Girard rightly observes, the core mechanisms at the heart of the two most powerful totalitarian systems, Nazi Germany and Bolshevik Russia, reconstructed the old sacrificial mechanism now in the context of Christian societies, through the scapegoating of the Jews in one case, and the forged trials in the other, both being followed by a period of terror and mass murder of innocents. It cannot be accidental that these mechanisms of terror emerged in the country that was the home of idealist philosophy and

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an excessive concern with ritualised law (Germany), and in a country that was dominated by the utopian philosophy of Marxism (Soviet Russia). These two cases, far from representing unique aberrations unrelated to the dynamics of modernity, identify with particular quality the dangers involved in living in societies where identities are constructed increasingly by discourses and not real life-experiences; especially because, as always, extremes have a tendency to call forth other extremes: this time the politics of victimisation, self-victimisation and the evocation of suffering – the permanent tearing up of the wounds instead of healing them.

This paper presents a sociological analysis, and cannot pretend to suggest solutions to the range of problems covered. It can only try to contribute to a better understanding of reality, by identifying the manifold connections between real life experiences and discursive thought. But exactly this might be of importance: the reconstruction of the links between experiences and thought at the very moment when they occur. Beyond constituting two separate, sovereign sides which then 'interact', experience and thought are profoundly and inseparably intertwined, founding and forming reality – our reality.

NOTES

1. The philosophy of Descartes is based not on the act of thinking, but the act of doubting, and in most languages the term for 'doubt' is a derivative of the number two (see French *doute*, German *Zweifel*, or even Hungarian *kétség*).
2. For a crucial attempt to investigate some of these issues, see the works of Eric Voegelin and Frances Yates.
3. The prime example for this type of thinking, and the hubris it represents, is Kant. Strangely enough, it has not been common to apply to the case of Kant the famous quip of Bertrand Russell concerning the 'dogmatism of the untraveled'.
4. For Heidegger and Gadamer, see especially Berner (1995: 13-25). Concerning Weber, while in his early works he frequently and amply referred to Dilthey, in *Economy and Society*, although his entire terminology was strongly influenced by Dilthey, he failed to name him once. Arguably, this can be explained by the open hostility of Rickert to Dilthey, and Weber's reluctance to get into conflict with Rickert on this point. I should recall that Weber was an outsider to the German university system for most of his life, while Rickert, with Windelband, was the official representative of neo-Kantian philosophy and the unchallenged ruler of *Academia*.

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5. For an exception, see the works of Eribon.
6. For some details, see Szakolczai (2003: 259-60; forthcoming).
7. About this, see Szakolczai (2003: 66-69).
8. This motif was central to the book Kerényi first published, together with Jung, in 1942, just around the time of his leaving Hungary (Jung and Kerényi 1951), and was also central to his last book and *chef d'oeuvre* that was only published posthumously (Kerényi 1976).
9. About this, see Szakolczai 2003: 214-17. Kerényi also identified Thomas Mann as being closest to the spirit of Hermes among modern thinkers (Mann and Kerényi 1975: 6, 65).
10. One should note the paradox of a *male* god of fertility. This could only make sense in a society governed by women – as Minoan Crete evidently was.
11. For details, see Voegelin (1957), and also Rossbach (1999).
12. On trauma, see Alexander et al, forthcoming.
13. I owe this point to Alessandro Pizzorno.

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