

Culture, Embodiment, and the Senses

Tuesday, 15 November 2005

Reading

- *Dream Songs and Healing Sounds in the Rainforests of Malaysia*, Smithsonian Folkways.
 - Marina Roseman, *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest: Temiar Music and Medicine*, ch. 4, pp. 80-128.
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How do **gender roles** manifest in the Temiar? What is the rationale behind the power differentials and the appropriate spheres for men and women?

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Roseman opens her book with the idea that the Temiar are egalitarian, but then says there men have more access to ritual and power. There is a **surface egalitarianism**, as is evident in decisions regarding marriage, inheritance, and locality but Roseman argues that men are privileged in becoming mediums. But women can play pivotal roles too – such as in the female chorus or as the influential role of the wife of the medium. **Access to public space** determines access to ritual power and the ability to connect with spirit guides (see last pages of chapter).

Roseman's analysis is similar to Desjarlais' – how for the only certain people can be shamans or mediums, how language is used, and how both shamans and mediums act as **vehicles for spirits**.

p. 80

dreaming = socially organized sound

sound, person, and power are intertwined in the dream performance

Leaf ornamentation are used to attract spirits to cultural space – *permeable boundaries*.
Instruments are gendered to a certain degree.

Roseman is showing us how culture is formed and made anew in the context of an existent environment. This addresses her fundamental issue of how **culture and power structures are reproduced** over time.

Just as much complexity and sophistication in terms of form and what is happening culturally as if one looked at Western Europe and looking at Catholicism. How do you evaluate something that seems incredibly foreign and **assess it on its own terms** and still try to see what's going on? It takes a lot of work to notice the similarities.

Various **crises** that lead one to seek spirit guide, e.g. parents whose child dies. Father's spirit followed child's spirit to meet spirits and learn song for revival. Certain power is then conferred as a healer. Another example was the dragon snakes – how should one propitiate the spirits/demons who have influence on material space? Ordinarily the contact between individuals and spirit guides occur under common circumstances, not crises normally.

Illness is something that precipitates a crisis for an individual that can only be solved by the

individual becoming a shaman him/herself.

∞ similar to Haiti and possession

∞ Haitian psychiatrist Louis Mars said that there are other ways to interpret bodily manifestation

There is the sense that mental illness can result from an external spirit.

∞ What about the psychotic episode that was cured by Malay and not Temiar ritual?

Theoretical point: in the ritual performance, the participants are dealing with a “circle of meanings” that are oriented towards sound, p. 106 – **sound as an ordering force** in society. Who can use certain instruments? Who can use what sounds and what times?

For the Temiar, every entity (humans, plants, etc.) has a **consciousness** that can approach us and teach us, bestowing information how to heal and perform ceremonies that can affect others' lives, similar to Catholicism and supplication to saints but this is not entirely the same as walking through space and *everything* has a consciousness that can communicate with and affect you.

There are sexual overtones to the relationship between the medium and the spirit guide. The inversions and transformations that occur during the performances also indicate that a certain amount of desire/fantasy play a part in that role. **Symbolic inversions** are a form of **leveling** in society...

Roseman brings up theory of Bakhtin (who worked on carnival) and Turner (who also worked on carnival as well as liminality). **Carnival** = social restrictions get relaxed, people loosened, social structure temporarily overturned, people coming together as they normally would not.

Liminality = space outside normal time, normal expectations of behavior. Some theorize that the function of carnival is to help release social tensions that have built up because of social inequities that have been building up – there is a **ritualized release** and people can then go back to the status quo, no real revolution or permanent change (but not impossible). There is a creation of space out of the mundane normality that allows for inversions to address the inequalities in society.

○ *To what extent are people reproducing their own lack of agency?*