

Culture, Embodiment, and the Senses

Thursday, 17 November 2005

Reading

- Marina Roseman, *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest: Temiar Music and Medicine*, chs. 5-7, pp. 129-184.
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With an analysis that focuses on embodiment, sensory experience, and the dynamics of illness and healing in order to uncover the sensibility of a people, is there something that gets lost (macro-social, political economy)? Or is there a way to fully incorporate the three bodies (Scheper-Hughes and Lock)?

Roseman writes about the links between Temiar rationality and world view and western medicine and its concepts of illness and bacteria.

- *What, for Roseman, are the pros and the cons of having a sociocentric self? What is a sociocentric self? And what are the implications of having a sociocentric self?*

The **sociocentric self** manifests most explicitly in the realms of illness and healing. As people move through intersubjective realm, they are careful to move in relation to other people. Prohibitions on consumption and contact are to prevent illness, but transgressions can pass on illness through social network of individual.

- *What causes illness for the Temiar?*
- *Why is there such concern about boundaries of the body and the self?*

It isn't just about the individual's boundaries but affects the group, also about how space and time are ordered. Boundaries also maintain order in society. There is **interdependence** and **communality** in the ritual context where there are certain occasions with people coming together and providing unity (functionalist argument). There are different groups with different food prohibitions – different sociocentric implications.

Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* – symbolic/spatial/bodily levels of prohibitions

- ∞ violations of **social boundaries** = threats to security and **social body**
- ∞ symbolism attributed to the body (e.g. negativity attached to female body, like menstruation)
- ∞ four kinds of **social pollution**:
 - ∞ danger pressing on external boundaries
 - ∞ danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system
 - ∞ danger in the margins of the lines
 - ∞ danger from internal contradiction when some basic postulates are denied by other basic postulates so that system seems at war with self

Roseman brings out how **nature, culture, and the body** are all elaborated in a symbolism of meanings. *What are the implications of that on a lived, daily level?*

She brings up parallels between the **realm of illness and realm of spiritual connections**. Healing involves similar agents to those that cause illness. When the medium is able to access the spirit guide, there's a phenomenal plane with agents similar to those who caused the illness – the medium is able to communicate in this specific arena.

- ☞ This is similar to Csordas and **somatic modes of attention** – the **imagined realm** (when healers heal others, healer embodies spirit who diagnoses illness).
- ☞ Think about the space where these encounters are occurring – an imagined space, e.g. dreams, trance. With either healing or illness, communication must occur on this level in order to resolve any ailments.
- ☞ What Roseman is showing is how is it that in the **intersubjective space**, what kinds of engagements are occurring? What is it about? Her description of *the self as sociocentric really shows what intersubjectivity is about*.

p. 145-148

How is it that mediums are engaged in the process of constructing knowledge in their society?

- ☞ Recall Desjarlais with shamans being an **ideological role** in society (through ceremonial work the shaman was able to allow tensions to come to the surface and be transformed into something else). It wasn't the shaman himself, but the spirit within that was the **agent of transformation**.
- ☞ For Roseman, the medium is really an **agent of knowledge production/construction in diagnosis**. *Medium transforms what is unseen/unknowable into something seen/knowable* – and this is an **exercise in power**. (see p. 147 middle paragraph and p. 148-149 last paragraph)

What knowledge is legitimate? Roseman shows a different process of knowledge production. Recall Descartes, Freud, James, and issues of phenomenology.

- *What is the relationship an individual should have to objects of perception?*
- *What role do the senses play as means of knowing, as vehicles of perception?*

For Temiar, primacy (or, what is considered real) is given to that which is *outside* the person. But that which is outside has a hidden dimension or reality to it – almost the opposite to what Descartes would say. Phenomenologists would say that we bring our own biases to that which is out there. Still very different from “the truth will be revealed in dream” or the fact that there is an active engagement with these entities.

For the Temiar, it was accepted and culturally valued that individuals would maintain relationships with things of the unseen. n.b. Csordas – *The Sacred Self* – how Catholic Charismatics really develop relationships with Jesus, Mary, and saints through process of **visualization**. Visualized meetings make them become real to their lives. James argues that it is possible and expected that the unseen will indeed have real effects.

- *How is it we move through our space? What is real to us? What is it that has influence?*

Roseman is talking about **sensibility** (recall Desjarlais' discussion of Geertz), the **aesthetics** of a society, rephrasing Geertz (p. 183) and defining sensibility as the **cognitive/effective/sensate**, e.g. music being heard/thought/felt. Roseman asks herself how can she translate the Temiar experience to Western audiences? p. 182 last paragraph address how can we resonate with the foreign experience? Roseman mentions **soundscape**.

Incident when Roseman recorded sounds of birds – the Temiar didn't like it because it didn't have a beat. Recall MP and the idea of the **pre-objective** – how we are born into a society and culture that has its own **sensibility** prior to us, and this forms/shapes us on some level and influences what things may be appealing to us (n.b. Bourdieu's **habitus**). Notice how certain sounds are appealing to Roseman reflecting her background and how this differs from the Temiar preference.

The natural environment evokes **emotion** in Temiar = another example of **permeability**! *Do we have this sense here, or are there equivalents in our sensibility that we take for granted since it's such a different way of being?*

Even though there are many **restrictions** for the Temiar, there are ways to get around those restrictions, ways to make **restitution**.