

## Introduction

### JUNGLE PATHS AND SPIRIT SONGS

Traveling through the Malaysian rainforest, one first senses the presence of a Temiar settlement through a change in the density of jungle foliage: primary forest gives way in patches to secondary forest. These once-tended fields, now overgrown with brush and young trees, might indicate that one has only reached a former settlement site. Such plots are left behind to be reclaimed by jungle growth when the semisedentary Temiar move on after fertile garden sites surrounding a village have been used up, every three to five years. But when the shaded path the traveler has been following through the jungle opens out onto currently tended plots of tapioca plants, their leaves shoulder-height and open to the sun, or onto a field of hill rice farmed in the slash-and-burn, nonirrigated manner of the rainforest peoples, the presence of a current settlement is firmly announced.

Even before one sees the sun upon the tapioca leaves, the sounds of birds unique to lower brush and thickets at the fields' edge hint of an approaching settlement. The path becomes more clearly worn; dogs sensing the traveler's scent begin to bark. Voices of people calling from one house to another, or children playing outside, can now be heard. This mixture of human voices, dogs barking, and birds of the settlement edge replaces the calls of forest canopy birds and mammals which had earlier accompanied the traveler's journey through tall, dense trees. The path ceases to be a narrow trail for single-file travelers, and joins the firmly packed earth of the village, where brush around dwellings has been cleared.

If approached instead by boat or bamboo raft along the river, a footpath winding down to the riverbank announces a village's presence. In the absence of sandy beach or flat river stones, a floating bamboo platform might be attached to the shore here.

Women washing clothing and fetching water, or men preparing to set off on river travel, call to people further up along the path, who in turn announce the travelers' arrival to inhabitants inside their dwellings: "Stoke the fire, put some water on to boil, your child's father has returned."

About 12,000 Temiar live in small settlements of 25 to 150 inhabitants along five major rivers and their tributaries flowing down from the mountainous divide that runs through the center of the Malay peninsula. The watersheds spread east into the state of Kelantan and west into Perak. Temiar settlements, from ten minutes to several days' journey apart, range across 2,500 acres of rainforest. Temiar horticulturalists grow tapioca, hill rice, maize, millet, and other crops. They also hunt, fish, and gather jungle products for their own use and for exchange. Speakers of an Austroasiatic, Mon-Khmer language of Central Aslian stock (see Wurm and Hattori 1983), Temiars belong to the Senoi ethnic division of the Aboriginal peoples (Orang Asli) of peninsular Malaysia.

Highland Temiar villages near the rivers' sources reach altitudes of 4,000 feet above sea level; lowland villages downstream are about 1,000 feet above sea level. These small-scale segmentary villages comprise cognatic descent groups or "ramages" in which membership is traced through both parents. Temiar villages are agamous; inhabitants may marry within or outside the village group, with marriages contracted according to the preference of both bride and groom (see Firth 1966; Benjamin 1967*b*). Villages consist of extended families linked by kinship or marriage to a core sibling group.

Temiars are relatively egalitarian, with village leaders and headmen who use influence and persuasion rather than coercion to coordinate community tasks. Village leaders are usually elder males of the core sibling group, some of whom received additional sanction as headman from traditional Malay authorities, a process continued today by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs. Relationships between the sexes, discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, reveal a complementarity in everyday tasks that tends toward incipient stratification. While most mediums are male, potential gender inequities are counterbalanced by the structure of ceremonial participation and theories of dream-song composition.

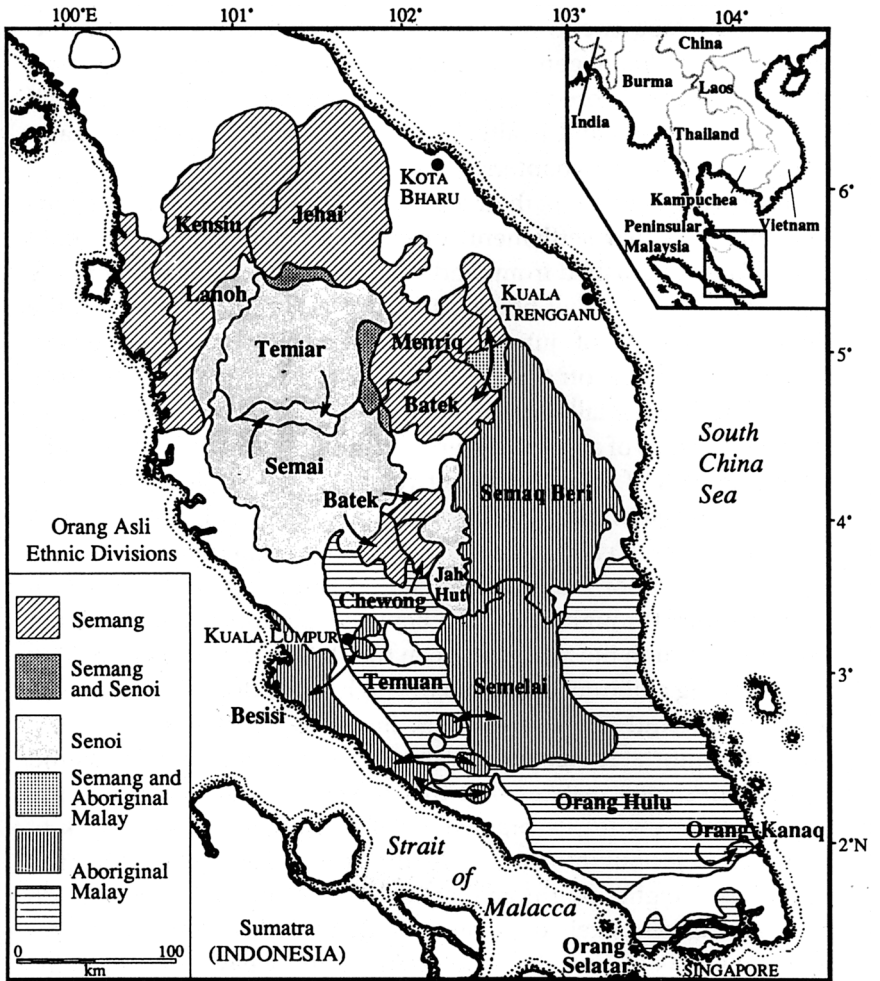


Figure 1.

Temiards practice an economic system of generalized reciprocity (see Sahlins 1965: 145–149), in which food, manufactured implements, and labor are given to others without any direct form of immediate repayment, but with the expectation that other members will be equally generous in the future. This form of economic interaction is mirrored in concepts and actions surrounding self and other, illness and health, voice and performance to be examined in subsequent chapters.

Following a jungle path or a path from the riverbank as it opens out into a Temiar settlement, one realizes that the “settlement” (*deek*) is distinguished from, and yet intimately connected with the “jungle” (*bεek*). Temiar house construction further emphasizes the interpenetrability of jungle and settlement. Thatched houses, raised about 8 feet off the ground, have walls made from bamboo tubes laid horizontally one above the other, similar to the horizontal wooden logs of a North American log cabin. But in Temiar walls, about an inch of space is left between each tube. Similarly, floors are constructed of bamboo slats lashed together with about an inch of space between each slat. Clearly these spaces between wall tubes and between floor slats have utilitarian value: smoke from hearth fires escapes through the space between the tubes; excess bits of food fall through the space between the slats to the chickens below, while young children’s feces fall through to the dogs. But when the cold night wind whistles through the spaces between the tubes, and uncomfortable sleepers awaken to huddle for a while around hearth fires, one realizes that this mode of construction has not survived merely for its pragmatic value. Rather, Temiards speak of the need to see out into the jungle, the desire to be sheltered but not enclosed. Neighboring nomadic Semang groups build shelters on the ground completely open on one side to uncleared forest; downriver, the Malays split the bamboo tubes and weave opaque walls. Seminomadic Temiar hunter-horticulturalists, midway between these groups in their relationship to the rainforest, build permeable houses in clearings that mark limits, yet express the intimate interpenetrability of settlement and forest.

The entities that form and inhabit these interpenetrable domains are conceived of as having similar structures and modes of action. Temiards posit a homologous division of potentially detachable souls among humans (who have head and heart souls), plants

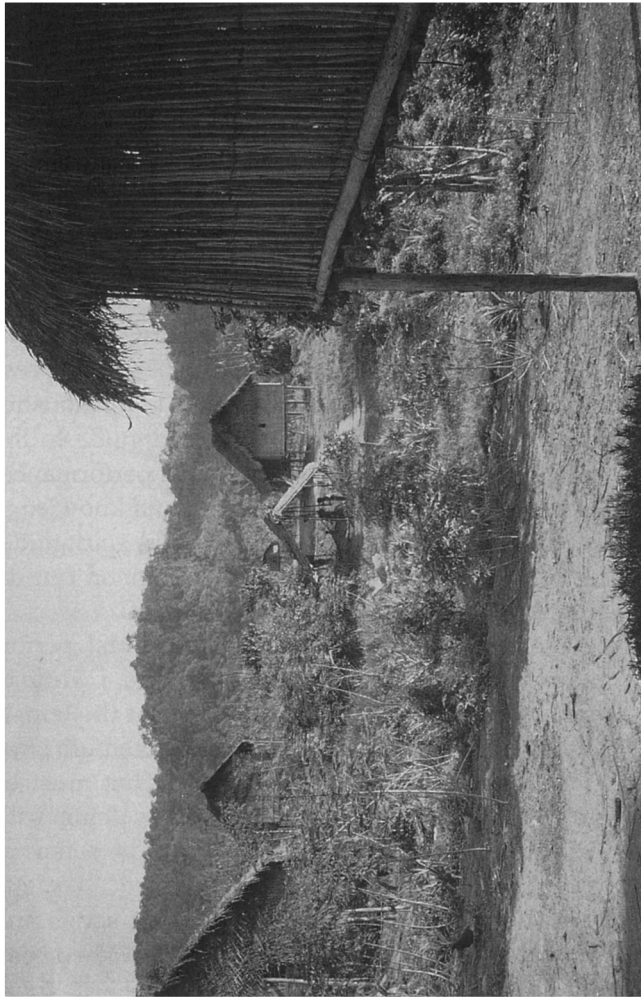


Plate 1. The Temiar settlement of Kelaik (*Keluyet*), surrounded by rainforest. This house in the foreground is built according to the traditional building method, leaving space between poles, but the poles are aligned vertically according to a vision the builder received in a dream. Houses in the background follow lowland Malay style, weaving split bamboo into a more opaque wall. In the unwall shelter in the center, women pound rice.

(which have leaf and root souls), animals (which have upper and lower souls), and landforms (such as summit and underground souls of mountains). Bounded souls can be liberated as unbounded spirit during dreams, trance, and illness (see Benjamin 1979). The shared properties of upper:lower and bound:unbound souls make interaction and the flow of information possible between human and nonhuman entities. In Temiar ideology, this relationship of resemblance enables dream and trance encounters, promoting song composition and precipitating illness. When unbound as spirit, entities of both jungle and settlement are capable of engaging humans in benevolent interactions as spiritguides, or malevolent ones as illness agents. Jungle is not opposed to settlement as the realm of danger versus the realm of safety, as is sometimes found among Malays; rather, both domains exhibit positive and negative dimensions.

During dreams, the detachable, unbound head soul of the dreamer meets with detached upper- or lower-portion souls of entities (such as trees, river rapids, tigers, houses) who express their desire to become the dreamer's spiritguide. The relationship is confirmed through bestowal of a song from spiritguide to the dreamer. Later, singing that song during ceremonial performance, the person becomes imbued with the voice, vision, and knowledge of the spiritguide. Singing the song links person and spiritguide; thus transformed into a medium for the spirits, a person can diagnose and treat illness.

When I first heard mediums sing during ceremonial performances, I was told what they were singing: "nɔŋ." *Nɔŋ*, I wrote in my notebook, must mean "song." When I asked what the female chorus, vocally responding to each line sung by the medium, was doing, they responded with the word: "*wedwad*." That must be "choral response," I thought. One day, as I was walking with Temiars through the forest on the way to the rice fields, someone pointed out a path between the trees and commanded: "*Wedwad nɔŋ-na'*." What are these people doing talking about songs and choral responses out here, I wondered in surprise. What I had been told, they explained, was to "follow that path." I realized, then, that songs were paths, and choruses were following the path. The spiritguide shows a path, a way, a route; the medium sings of the route traversed by the spiritguide, describing the visions and vistas seen by the spiritguide during its travels. The path links spiritguide, medium, and other ceremonial participants.



Plate 2. River and footpath provide a "way" or *noŋ* through the dense jungle foliage.

My experience on the path points toward a fundamental method in the study of ritual performance: if you want to understand the building blocks of ritual, the movements, the music, the colors, the shapes, you cannot spend all your time taping rituals and playing them back for transcription and analysis. Even moving from documentation to performance and singing with the chorus or dancing with dancers gives but a partial picture. You must live the life of a people, follow their paths, dig in the dirt, gut a fish, ford a stream, and always be alert for the links between daily life and ritual activity. These links, which Gregory Bateson called "the pattern that connects," are the threads that give coherency to culture.

The patterns may connect in a straightforward pattern of iconic resemblance, as the Javanese calendar's intersecting cycles are reiterated in the coincidental cycles of the various instruments forming their *gamelan* orchestra (Becker 1979; Becker and Becker 1981). Or the patterns may connect through twists, turns, and symbolic inversions, as the street masquerades and celebrations of Brazilian *carnaval* invert the roles and playfully transgress the prohibitions of everyday life (Parker 1987, DaMatta 1984). In order to understand the medical or musical dimensions of culture, the anthropologist or ethnomusicologist must investigate the whole with all its nicks and undersides, much as a filmmaker moves from close-up view to wide-angle lens or from negative to positive image and back again.

For Temiars, the symbolic power of the image of the path arises from their daily travel along land and river routes running through the jungle and settlement. The pervasive sensate experience of the path is given symbolic expression in the root metaphor *nɔŋ*. Negotiating the path, knowing the way through the jungle, constitutes essential knowledge in Temiar life. Getting lost, losing the path, can be fatal in the jungle. Consequently, in Temiar etiology, illness often results when a person's detached head soul gets lost or waylaid; treatment then involves singing a "way," finding the head soul, and leading it back home. If the chorus fumbles when repeating the medium's initial phrase, their mistake is also spoken of as "losing the path." The foot path or *nɔŋ* links jungle and settlement; the path of the river links one settlement and another. As a song describing the path of the spirits, this gift from the dream-time sung during ceremonial performance conjoins human



and nonhuman realms; as a metaphor, it links domains of traveling, knowledge, singing, and healing.

#### THE ARTICULATION BETWEEN MUSICAL AND MEDICAL DOMAINS

Temiar mediums sing when they cure. A major technique of healing involves singing/trance-dancing ceremonies in which mediums sing tunes and texts given to them during dreams by spiritguides. Songs are paths that link mediums, female chorus members, trance-dancers, and patients with spirits of the jungle and settlement. Even treatment of less serious cases, which occurs outside the ceremonial context, involves singing by the medium.

How is it that singing is considered able to intercept the course of illness? What are mediums doing when they "sing"? To answer these questions, I explored the articulation between Temiar concepts of illness etiology and their strategies of diagnosis and treatment, on the one hand, and indigenous ideas about musical composition, speech, performance, and affect, on the other. I used healing performances as a point of entry into the domain of Temiar illness and well-being, letting performance acts and native exegesis lead me into issues regarding relations between humans and their rainforest environment, as well as relations among self, society, and cosmos.

During twenty months of field research among the Temiar of Ulu Kelantan (1981–1982), I observed, recorded, and participated in numerous singing and trance-dancing ceremonies, some of which were held for curative purposes. Others were held to mark the agricultural cycle, to herald the advent of the fruit season, to end a period of mourning, to strengthen or publicly celebrate connections with spiritguides, to entertain guests or inaugurate travels. Often, a ceremony held for other purposes became the stage for curative ministrations, when an attendant sufferer took advantage of a singing medium empowered with the vision of his spiritguide. These ceremonial performances were analyzed in terms of their (1) symbolic structure: an aggregation of multivocal metaphors in visual, auditory, kinetic, proxemic, and olfactory modes; (2) value structure: these symbolic codes convey meaning in terms of the values of a believing community; (3) role structure: rituals are social facts,

reiterating, inverting, and realigning Temiar social relations; and (4) emergent structure: Temiar ceremonies are socially constructed and reconstructed, continually transformed as extemporaneous improvisation takes place within conventionalized boundaries, and capable of effecting transformations from illness to health through the process of performance (Durkheim 1915/1947; Turner 1968; Schieffelin 1985).

These ritual singing and trance-dancing performances are embedded in a network of social life that extends far beyond the parameters of the ceremonies themselves. Commenting on the difficulties of delimiting the range of inquiry, Margaret Mead jokingly bemoaned how anthropological residence involves attending to a village full of “people whose every word, grunt, scratch, stomach-ache, change of wearing apparel, snatch of song sung on the road or jest flung over someone else’s wall is *relevant*” (1977:200). Never content to limit the range of my inquiry before I knew how far I must trace the network of associations, I observed and documented the range of Temiar daily and seasonal life—from hunting among the men to gathering tubers with the women, from clearing swidden fields to collecting fruits. During my stay among the Temiar, minute details of social interaction among women walking to the river, chance observations out amidst the jungle foliage, and laborious translations of song texts would suddenly combine to reveal the meaning of a ritual gesture recorded months earlier. To understand the ritual form of bending, swaying dance movements precipitating trance, for example, I traced an aesthetic value that led from the supple swaying of a woman’s walk, to rainforest foliage waving in the breeze.

The way Temiars pattern their daily actions in relation both to one another and to the rainforest reveals as much about the ordering of their cosmos as time- and house-bound ceremonies do.<sup>1</sup> When the order of daily life is disrupted by a promise broken, for example, or when a food is incorrectly prepared, consumed, or named, then illness might occur. To study that moment of articulation between medical and musical domains exemplified by healing ceremonies, I traced the fabric of meanings leading through settlement and jungle, person and cosmos, dreams and performance, ritual and everyday life.

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Accompanied by an interactive female chorus playing bamboo-tube stampers, Temiar mediums sing to heal. To approach this extension of musical performance into the domain of illness and healing, I have integrated theories from interpretive anthropology and performance theory with ethnomedicine and ethnomusicology. Although the domains of music and medicine are usually separated in Western cosmopolitan practice, their confluence in other cultures invites us to reexamine the pragmatics of aesthetics, to investigate how appropriate forms of sound, movement, color, and odor become repositories of cosmological and social power.

Western cultures have not always proclaimed a radical disjuncture between medical and musical, or human and nonhuman realms; at certain times, in certain places, trees were considered to have spirits in a manner not wholly unlike that of the Temiar. In Europe, however, the collapse of the medieval cosmos resulted in the separation of humans from nature and laid the foundation for two enterprises: the empirical investigation of nature, on the one hand, and hermeneutic interpretations of God's revelation, the Bible, on the other. While empirical science and interpretive understanding coexisted during the early Renaissance, the Enlightenment saw empirical science, joined by pragmatic utilitarianism, begin to claim supremacy (Dallmayr and McCarthy 1977:1-9). Utilitarianism aligned with positivism, a doctrine proposing that "knowledge" consists only of the empirical and scientifically useful and is only approachable through the "scientific method" (1977:9). In response to the growing predominance of positivism in the late nineteenth century, Max Weber, building on the work of Dilthey and others, began to develop an alternative approach in which social phenomena were examined in terms of cultural meaning, while natural phenomena (at least, in his early works) were relegated to the realm of empirical laws. "Empirical reality," he wrote:

becomes "culture" to us because and insofar as we relate it to value ideas. It includes those segments and only those segments of reality which have become significant to us because of this value-relevance. Only a small portion of existing concrete reality is colored by our value-conditioned interest and it alone is significant to us. . . .

“Culture” is a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which *human beings* confer meaning and significance. (Weber 1905/1977:27,31)

This concern with meaning and significance, with a value orientation that plucks particular experiences from the infinite realms of possibility and makes them culturally relevant, guided the phenomenological philosophy of Alfred Schutz, and later the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz. Durkheim and Mauss’s focus upon symbolic classification, their study of how categories are formed and systemically related, similarly reflects a concern with the way social groups place differential values on the experiential world (1903/1963:7–8). Lévi-Strauss proposed chromaticism as a prime example of differential valuation. Each half-step of the diatonic scale in Western music renders the continuous natural realm of sounds into a discontinuous cultural reality (1964/1969:16).

A concern with meaning and value informs my own research. How do human beings, as historical and individual entities interacting in cultural groups, make sense of their experience, order it, and share it with one another?

The study of illness and health thrusts us into the midst of these concerns. An illness, with its seemingly blatant symptoms and sensations, seems at first glance so empirically *real* that it appears to be on a plane above or prior to illusive cultural relevancies. But when a Sahkalin Ainu hunter distinguishes between a headache that sounds like the light gallop of a musk deer, and a headache with chills that feels like a lamprey eel boring into a rock; or differentiates between a dry boil whose pain simulates the cry of a bat, and a boil with fluid that feels like a lamprey digging into the flesh, something else is going on. The Ainu are classifying illness in terms of the acoustic and sensory range of hunters; and their distinction between illnesses associated with land versus aquatic animals replicates the Ainu spatial classification of the universe into land and water (Ohnuki-Tierney 1981:49–59). And when Ainu consider most scratches to be merely *scratches* treatable with herbal preparations, but the scratch of a *bear* to be a metaphysical illness necessitating shamanistic rites, we realize that illness definition and concomitant treatment is not in the scratch itself, but is located rather in the source of the scratch, the bear, and its position as a deity (Ohnuki-Tierney 1981:36–37).

To deal with the dilemma posed by empirical realities and cultural interpretations, Fabrega proposes the distinction between "disease," a "biomedical thing" defined in terms of biological system malfunction, and "illness," defined by social and psychological criteria (1972:168,213; 1974; 1975:969). However, the biomedical categories of Western cosmopolitan medicine themselves express cultural influences and cannot necessarily stand as "etic" categories representing an empirical reality.

My research draws upon the ethnomedical approach in medical anthropology. Ethnomedicine studies how particular groups of people conceive of and deal with health and illness. Illness experiences, practitioner-patient transactions, and the healing process are sociocultural phenomena, constituting what Kleinman (1980) terms the "health care system," a cultural system integrally interrelated with local patterns of meaning, power, and social interaction.

A health care system is composed of many sectors. In Kleinman's study of the Chinese health care system in Taiwan, he identifies three overlapping sectors: popular, folk, and professional (1980:49-60). The popular sector is "the lay, non-professional, non-specialist, popular culture arena in which illness is first defined and health care activities initiated" (1980:50). The popular sector includes family, social network, and community beliefs and activities; it involves activities such as self-treatment by the individual or the family. The professional sector includes both the Western professional (e.g., Western cosmopolitan medical doctors) and the indigenous professional (e.g., Chinese acupuncturists). The folk sector includes nonprofessional, nonbureaucratic specialists, who may be closely related to the professional or the popular sector. In the Taiwan study, this includes folk healers such as shamans (*tāng ki*).

Temiaris similarly operate within a multisectoral health care system that includes self- or family elder's application of herbal remedies from the jungle, in addition to the more specialized herbal knowledge of mediums and midwives. More complicated cases require the services of mediums, who may perform ministrations outside of the ceremonial context or may call for a spirit seance. During nighttime, house-bound, singing and trance-dancing ceremonies, the medium performs diagnosis and treatment. Temiaris also have access to Western cosmopolitan medicine through

government-trained Orang Asli paramedics posted at various jungle sites, "flying doctors" and dentists who travel from settlement to settlement by helicopter, and an Orang Asli Hospital in Gombak, located in a forested site ten miles outside of the national capital, Kuala Lumpur. The Gombak Hospital, staffed by Orang Asli, Malays, Tamils, and Chinese, is administered by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs. Orang Asli are also beginning to visit clinics and hospitals located near the jungle's edge. Temiars move among these sectors, trying Panadol or vitamin C from a jungle paramedic, visiting a medium, trying another medium or spending time at Gombak if the mediums have been unsuccessful, returning to the mediums if Gombak has been unsuccessful—drawing upon their repertoire of options and seeing what works.

Since illness concepts and categories are closely linked with therapeutic strategies and thus are systems of knowledge *and* action (Kleinman 1980:34; Friedson 1970), it was vital to investigate how Temiars think about, talk about, act out, and act upon illness—and how they contrive to avoid meeting with illness in the first place. In this study, I focus upon daily activities of rainforest life and the ceremonial treatments performed by mediums, dealing tangentially with other sectors of the health care system as these intersect with ceremonial treatment.

Symbols and meanings come alive in the intersubjective world of ritual action and social interaction, whether that be diagnostic discourse between patient and physician in the West or the singing of a Temiar medium empowered to heal through the voice and vision of his spiritguide. Meanings take public form in the animated symbols of ritual and social action (Geertz 1973:17,18). George Herbert Mead's hermeneutic studies of meaning in social interaction (1934) informed subsequent research into the social construction of reality in everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and religion (Berger 1967) and influenced the development of social interactionism (Blumer 1969). With "frame analysis," Goffman provided a framework for examining speech and gesture in the interaction rituals of everyday life (1974, 1967). In a related trend within sociolinguistics, a focus on the communicative event as the arena in which symbols are formulated and negotiated gave rise to the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1964, 1971). Folklore studies of verbal arts bolstered the ethnography of speaking by expanding the research

frame of performative folklore to include not only text, but context (Bauman 1977; Bauman and Sherzer 1974).

Turner advocated "performance-analysis and event-analysis" of ritual symbols in action in his "processual symbology" (1975:149–50). Tambiah (1977), Kleinman (1980:311ff), Csordas (1983), and Errington (1983:554ff) suggest fruitful ways of incorporating the analysis of performance into medical anthropology. The performance-oriented approaches of Kapferer (1979*a*, 1979*b*), Schechner (1983), and Schieffelin (1985) push these considerations even further, urging us to attend not merely to the semantic content of ritual symbols, but to the dramaturgical and rhetorical aspects of performance. Performance theory focuses on the ways symbols are put across through manipulation of ritual frames; aesthetic distance; performance roles; audience participation and commitment to the performance reality. Developments in the ethnography of communication and performance theory were incorporated into ethnomusicology under the rubric "the ethnography of performance" (McLeod and Herndon 1980; Béhague 1984).

Cosmological theories take sensate form in Temiar dreams and ceremonial performances: bounded souls of entities emerge in imaginal human forms, sing through the voices of mediums, and move with entranced dancers. The way Temiars order their universe and position themselves within it informs the texture of performance—the particular configurations of sounds, movements, odors, colors, shapes, and shadows. Meaningfully patterned sounds and movements set the cosmos in motion, releasing spirits from their bounded forms so they can interact with humans.

In order to entice the spirits to attend ceremonial performances and to prepare humans to meet with them, the sentiment of longing is intensified through symbol-laden sounds and body movements. Temiars say that pulsating sounds of the Malaysian rainforest, such as calls of particular birds and insects, move with the beat of the heart, and thus move the listener to feel longing. The pulsing of the bamboo-tube percussion that accompanies Temiar singing ceremonies is similarly structured, alternating high and low pitches in continuous duple rhythm. These socially structured sounds, sonic icons of the heartbeat, move the heart to longing.

This linkage of beating tubes, pulsing hearts, and moving spirits is culturally mediated: the evocative power of Temiar music is sit-