

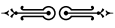
Introduction

Situating Subjectivity



The ambiguous role of ethnographer, occupying a liminal position vis-à-vis two different and often disparate cultural idioms, has been an enduring theme throughout the history of anthropology, from Malinowski to the present (see Asad 1986). Postmodern discourses have well documented the problematic between provisional interpretations in the field and definitive presentations in text, direct experience and discursive presentations, authorial voice and the voice of others (Crapanzano 1986). Notions of “textuality” and “discursivity,” largely championed by Geertz in the 1980s, served as precursors to the postmodern critique of the 1990s, where the notion of “culture as representation” pervaded most discussions, both implicitly and explicitly. The kinds of knowledge sought were symbolic, representational and interpretive; and one gained insights into the lives of others not by simply gaining acceptance or establishing a kind of “communion” with one’s informants—a prerequisite that Geertz declaratively reduced to “part of one’s own biography” (1983: 70), but by “searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviors—in terms of which . . . people represent themselves to themselves and to one another” (Geertz 1979: 228).

Throughout the ensuing era the emphasis on culture as representation and authorial voice often overshadowed concerns for quality in ethnographic description, and the importance of direct experience increasingly faded from anthropological discussions. Representation was often taken to constitute experience and experience, in turn, was reduced to language, discourse, and textual presentation (Csordas 1999: 183). As a result, the most important kinds of self-knowledge were often omitted from the final text and anthropological writing became increasingly removed from the lives of those it purported to describe (Hume 2007: 143).



While gaining insights into another's "inner life" will always be an interpretive issue, it is less a textual problem than an epistemological one. Fieldworkers have traditionally maintained a tenuous balance vis-à-vis their informants, establishing a close enough rapport to gain "inside" knowledge with which to formulate "thick descriptions" that can convey to readers a sense of "being there" (Geertz 1977), while maintaining a composed spectator's distance so as not to lose one's carefully cultivated sense of objectivity. The hermeneutical task of translation has traditionally superseded the real possibilities of exploring the potential of appropriating native ways of seeing and doing, so that one's own horizons might be broadened or cultural capacities enhanced (Asad 1986: 160). In fact, "going native" was (and still is to some extent) regarded as taboo for ethnographers for a variety of reasons—both ethical and practical, but also perhaps not least due to the pretense of objectivity, a sense of which could be jeopardized should the fieldworker lose his/her objective stance vis-à-vis the "other."

Such a methodological posture is further fostered by a paradigmatic assumption that subjective experience produces a kind of knowledge that is inferior to the kinds of knowledge produced in the "hard" sciences under controlled settings. This belief, in large part, has fueled a false necessity of achieving an objectivism that is thought to reveal itself through the adoption of rigid analytical models that often take on a programmatic life of their own, however removed from those experienced realities on the ground. Strathern notes how, "analytical language appears to create *itself* as increasingly more complex and increasingly removed from the 'realities' of the worlds it attempts to delineate ..." (1988: 6). Described worlds often become captive to the analytic model—"the creation of more data to give it more work"—and the model itself becomes the subject of inquiry rather than the *method* of inquiry (Ibid.: 6–7).

Society, to be sure, is not a text that communicates itself to the skilled reader (Asad 1986: 155) and translating fieldwork experience is not a matter of deciphering an exegesis or "reading culture over the shoulders" of those studied. On the contrary, fieldwork produces a kind of authoritative knowledge that is rooted to a large extent in subjective, sensuous experience (Pratt 1986: 32); and to locate the "ethnographic present" in the abstracted discursive text requires a movement toward a more "sensual" methodology (Stoller 1989), toward the kind of self-knowledge that has traditionally been only ancillary or, at best, complementary to the kinds of discursive styles on which ethnographic writing has traditionally placed its credibility. Culture not only resides in various forms of symbolic representation, but also in the bodily processes of action and perception that serve as the experiential foundation for those representations. The various

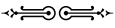


bodily resources we call upon during the course of our communication with others—sights, sounds, scents, touch, movement, and their various combinations—form the experiential basis of intersubjectivity and, as such, serve as the ontological foundation for the creation of cultural meaning (Finnegan 2002). Everyday corporeal experience, then, does not vitiate anthropological understanding but rather *enhances* it, pressing us to replace facile notions of absolute knowledge and objectivity with approaches that can accurately capture and convey the subjective and often transient character of human social life. Ideas and models we employ to make sense of the world should be tested against the *whole* of our experience (Jackson 1989: 14), so that scientific aims, moral sensibilities, and common sense can be validated and continually tested and reaffirmed against our own bodily and sensory involvement in the field (compare Hume 2007: 143).

Perhaps the greatest challenge in applying phenomenological approaches to descriptive ethnography lies in adopting methodologies that reflect and capture the actual day-to-day, moment-to-moment processes through which we engage with the world. The objective of “sensuous” fieldwork, then, is to get at the multiplicity of cultural meaning in which we are perpetually immersed (compare Csordas 1999); to capture the richness of experienced realities so as to comprehensibly bring the exotic or foreign into the fore of our own lived experience, thereby expanding our own horizons and enabling us to give the reader a more vivid sense of other experienced worlds.

Eliciting these kinds of embodied knowledge does not require a special set of techniques but, rather, involves the adoption of more “body-centered” methodologies. By inserting a phenomenological sense of embodiment into the ethnographic enterprise the notion of bodily and sensory involvement with others is raised to the methodological level (Csordas 1999d: 184–86) and the body becomes a means of “knowing” in the field. Western epistemic rationality is replaced by more intuitive, sensory-based modes of inquiry and the notion of a “thinking observer” is replaced by a more connected “aware participant” (Hart 1997). Discernible cultural patterns and forms can be viewed from the “bottom-up” by examining the interactions between people and the wider environment that comprise the precursors and content for those forms. In such an approach human behavior is seen *relationally*, as part of a wider field of dynamic interactions wherein individual action and perception is always situated.

Despite the growing interest in the physical body in contemporary sociocultural anthropology there still remains an inherent tendency to formulate the person in discrete terms, as separable from the wider social world from which personhood and identity are born and in which



they continually develop. Such a synchronic view of the person appears to be, in large part, a figment of scholarly imagination, stemming from a western cast of mind that bifurcates individual experience from the experience of others and from an implicit assumption that selfhood is always constituted in distinction from other selves. The idea of a bounded individual as set apart from other individuals, and of individual experience as set apart from the experience of others is, in fact, a bizarre notion to many non-Western peoples, not least to the Orang Rimba among whom I lived. A tacit assumption underlying this study is that persons—both in the ideational and corporeal sense—are constituted through their active engagement with others and undergo continual development through their habitual interactions in the world. An important objective, then, is to examine the dynamics of these various interactions and, in so doing, uncover the underlying processes that constitute the basis for more enduring cultural forms, such as the development of sociality, the creation of cultural meaning, the development of specialized skills and, more generally, those culturally patterned uses of the body and senses that lead to unique modalities of being-in-the-world.

Realizing these aims within the context of fieldwork involves, among other things, collapsing dualities of self and other, and discerning through direct experience with others and the wider environment the inherent dynamics in the boundaries of corporeality itself. As a receptive entity, the body becomes the experiential fulcrum through which meanings can be created and “co-produced” during the course of interactions with other bodies and, as such, serves as a valuable means of gaining knowledge in the field. Through my own bodily involvement in the field I would gain access to aspects of Orang Rimba life that may otherwise have been inaccessible, enabling me to participate in the unique and salient ways in which their sociality is constituted. Also, by learning how to use my body while in the forest I would gain profound insights into the great extent to which the body transforms itself through its kinetic interactions with the non-human environment.

Toward More Body-Centered Methodologies

Once we accept the use of the body as a methodological tool in the field we open ourselves up to the realization that others may not be as inaccessible as hitherto presumed. We also open ourselves up to the notion that we can gain access to the lives of our fieldwork informants not only by eliciting meanings through language and concepts, but also through those more direct bodily and sensory interactions that come into play, and often



guide, the meaning-creation process. The fact that humans share much of the same sensory, emotional, and cognitive capacities already provides a strong basis for high degrees of experiential overlap. Thus, however disparate people's biographical histories and ways of seeing the world, there is often a common experiential foundation on which to build as people intuitively take for granted that they have much in common. If this were not the case, cultural assimilation (and fieldwork for that matter) would not be possible at all. As Hanks points out, "actors have different perspectives, attach different significance to objects, and moreover ... they common sensically recognize this fact" (1990: 44). As "meaning-seeking" beings there is often an incontinent pull toward reaching common understandings, where meanings emerge through our shared experiences within a common social context. Thus while people bring their own sensibilities and dispositions to any social situation, there is often "a convergence of individual projects because of their common origin in the social world" (Whitford 1982: 77).

Attaining the appropriate level of subjective awareness within the context of fieldwork, then, involves tuning in to one's surroundings and tapping into processes already in motion, so that one's involvement in the field becomes the primary source through which meanings are created and co-constituted. These meanings, in turn, crystallize into discernible impressions or "events" and become the content of the written text. Stoller (1989: 54) summarizes this idea succinctly when he writes of the need to seek a mode of expression "in which the event becomes the author of the text and the writer becomes the interpreter of the event who serves as an intermediary between the event (author) and the readers." Wikan (1993: 194) echoes this idea when she writes of the need to go beyond language to create a "resonance" with one's informants, and to try to convey that resonance in the written text so as to invoke a similar resonance with readers. Thus while the tension between positivist knowledge and "empathic understanding" remains an interpretive issue, we can approach our subject matter with the understanding that mutual meanings arise and are dynamically constituted through our involvement with others, often through our common perceptions within a shared social space. Moreover, it is through these most basic and spontaneous forms of meaning-creation that the most potentially valuable forms of ethnographic knowledge are produced.

Despite the intuitive means through which these kinds of sensory-centered and body-centered knowledge are elicited, maintaining a steady balance between two often disparate cultural viewpoints and ways of relating to the world is a methodological stance rarely completely achieved (as Malinowski's diary revealed in harrowing detail). What is important,



however, is maintaining a degree of receptivity to situations in the field so that common understandings can be forged, thereby opening up the possibility for enriching one's own cultural capacities and ways of seeing the world. In my case, the primary challenge in achieving these ends involved gaining the acceptance of a shy people who had, for centuries, habitually eschewed almost all forms of contact with the outside world. Establishing a steady rapport was not only a part of "my own biography" and a necessary prerequisite for doing proper fieldwork, but the process in and of itself proved to be an ever-evolving medium through which the course of my fieldwork would take shape.

When I arrived in Indonesia in the winter of 1997, I could speak what can best be described as intermediate level Bahasa Indonesian. It was during my original six-month visit two years previously that I gained a basic working knowledge of the language, and I would further increase my proficiency by undertaking an intensive one-month course upon my arrival in the capital city of Jakarta. However, those people living in the Sumatran interior were primarily ethnic Malays and spoke an archaic Malay dialect, while the Orang Rimba—who used this dialect to interact with their Malay neighbors—spoke still yet another unintelligible dialect of their own. Needless to say my first months in Sumatra were spent in a dizzying fog of incoherence, an experience many fieldworkers share during their initial introduction to the field. During this time I would rely mostly on non-verbal modes of social interaction within the closed confines of the Orang Rimba's domestic camps, engaging primarily in the silent observation of behaviors, speech patterns, body language, and other non-verbal cues, i.e., focusing on what my informants were *doing* rather than saying. This more rudimentary kind of direct sensory interaction with the Orang Rimba—and later to the physical environment I was living in—guided the course of my fieldwork; and those methodologies I adopted and employed along the way were less a conscious undertaking than a response to the exigencies of my particular fieldwork circumstances.¹

Grounding my inquiries in the lived experience of the Orang Rimba, this study attempts to synthesize the immediacy of bodily and sensory experience with more enduring anthropological themes in order to lay the groundwork for a more relational ontology; one that can better elucidate the dynamic and multifaceted character of human social life and development. I begin with the underlying premise that human life can only be viewed within a broader nexus of relations; that human behavior and accompanying processes such as thinking, acting, perceiving, and learning must be situated within the relational contexts of people's practical engagement with their lived-in environments (after Ingold 2000). Starting with the person immersed in the world, human agency—thoughts, feel-

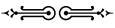


ings, volitions, and intentionality—arises within the context of interactions with others and the wider environment in which these interactions take place. The individual is then seen as a dynamic and ever-evolving locus of creative growth, undergoing continual development through its interactions within a wider nexus of relationships.

From this follows a dynamic view of human social life and development that can only occur through our emplacement in the world and, conversely, a view of the world that takes on form and significance by being *lived in*, rather than through the attribution of meaning by a disembodied mind, or by being constructed in accordance with a preordained mental design (Ingold 2000). It is through our ongoing interactions with both the human and nonhuman environment that the world takes on significance; and those embodied skills and habitual patterns of behavior required to live successfully in the world are appropriated through our incorporation into the world and by maintaining a characteristic pattern of day-to-day activities. Through everyday actions such as perceiving, learning, and remembering, both the body and senses come to be fashioned in relation to the lived-in world over the course of a lifetime; and it is through such basic forms of embodied experience carried out in every day contexts that salient developmental processes are revealed.

By exploring various forms of bodily and sensory experience, both within the context of interpersonal relations and through interactions with the wider forest environment, I examine how sociality and social life is constituted, maintained, and reproduced among the Orang Rimba. On the intersubjective plane, I pay particular attention to nonverbal forms of bodily and sensory interaction in order to shed light on the underlying processes at work in the formation of key social bonds and relationships. In Orang Rimba society most interactions are carried out in the “open” context of forest camps, where shelters are erected without walls and in close propinquity to one another. Such open living arrangements engender particular ways of interacting, where personal activities are carried out in plain view of others and distinctions between public and private domains of experience are often collapsed. I treat perception and bodily interaction as constituting processes, whereby sociality becomes shaped and “co-constituted” through being-with-others and maintaining close bodily proximity within the context of the domestic camp.

Sociality is also constituted through interactions with the non-human environment. In a hunting and gathering society where resources are widely dispersed, intimate knowledge of large expanses of the landscape is required to make a living; and this leads to a strong sensory-cognitive and emotional identification with vast areas of geographic space and the features found therein. By maintaining a trajectory of movement in the



forest, the Orang Rimba develop an intricate familiarity not only with the topographic features of the landscape, but also with a wide host of resident deity manifestations on whom they depend for their wellbeing and survival. Through continual interactions within the context of the forest meanings come to be discovered, reproduced, and transformed in relation to human activities (compare Tilley 1994: 25), and those impressions that people take away from the forest feed back to condition notions of self and society.

Just as humans imbue those features of the landscape with agency and meaning, so too the senses, through their ongoing reciprocal interplay with the forest, come to be conditioned by the environment. In an ever-changing “living” environment persons must attend to the right things in the forest, to continually monitor its resources and learn to identify its “affordances” for survival. Starting at an early age the relationship between cognition, perception, and the environment is established, and the senses continue to undergo development over the course of a lifetime of interactions with the forest.

Through everyday interactions in the forest the body also comes to be conditioned in highly specific ways. Much like bodily and sensory interaction with others, I also treat bodily kinesthesia as a constituting process whereby habitual patterns of movement are acquired in relation to the nonhuman environment and continue to develop over the course of a lifetime. Specifically, I am interested in how certain skills and capacities are learned and come to be embodied through people’s ongoing engagement with the forest. To live in a tropical forest environment requires the development of a highly specialized skill set. These skills become appropriated as “embodied knowledge” and are expressed in various bodily techniques and kinetic patterns that are employed during the course of day-to-day activities. Through activities such as hunting, gathering, forest product collecting, and everyday movement in the forest, the vectors of the body come to be set in response to the rigors of the environment, resulting in a high degree of bodily-kinetic conditioning that is unlike the typical bodily regiment required for the maintenance of a modern urban lifestyle. Drew Leder highlights the increasingly “decorporealized” character of existence in modern society:

Western society is typified by a certain “disembodied” style of life. Our shelters protect us from direct corporeal engagement with the outer world, our relative prosperity alleviating, for many of us, immediate physical need and distress. Via machines we are disinvested of work that once belonged to the muscles. Technologies of rapid communication and transportation allow us to transcend what used to be the natural limits imposed by the body. (1990: 3)



Drawing out such a contrast aptly illustrates the varying degrees of bodily attunement people must undergo to live successfully in their diverse environments and invokes an appreciation for the demands that a foraging lifestyle imposes on the body. Eliciting this kind of embodied knowledge requires careful study of the body's development in relation to the multifaceted characteristics of a tropical forest environment. By maintaining habitual patterns of movement and perception, the nonhuman environment feeds back and further establishes the parameters of the body's kinesthesia and its sensory-motor repertoire. The forest thus serves as more than a mere backdrop against which social life unfolds. Body and environment become co-constituted through people's habitual patterns of action and perception, and these affects are discernible through the body and expressed through characteristic patterns and ways of acting on the world. As Polanyi (1969: 147–48) writes, "every time we make sense of the world, we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to these impacts."

Body and World are thus mutually engendering phenomena, and through their codependence, become self-propagating processes. In this regard, the body, the senses, and the wider lived-in environment can be seen in a properly "ecological" context; constituting a coherent field of relations, their interactions can be studied as a *relational system*. Working and living among hunting and gathering people in an open environment is particularly instructive, where the body and senses are in continual engagement with others and the wider forest surroundings, and where the acquisition of those specialized skills necessary for survival highlights the extent to which the body transforms itself in relation to the non-human environment. The environment acts as a conduit for development, not only imposing its particular characteristics on the body and senses, but—as Orang Rimba ethnography will show—the forest also serves as a nurturing ground for thought and as a wellspring for ideology.

The focus of this study, then, is not on culturally or symbolically mediated meaning per se, but on the underlying processes of embodied action, perception, experience, and "inter-experience" that serve as the basis for the creation of cultural meaning. Rather than rooting my explanatory framework in the workings of the mind, I move away from a cognitivist understanding of "culture from the neck up" (Csordas 1990: 186) toward a more body-centered methodology, taking as my starting point the "body-in-the-world." I treat the body as a dynamic and ever-receptive locus of awareness; one which transcends its own corporeity through the senses and through its habitual patterns of action and movement in the world. As a precursor to all experience, the body serves as the fundamental mediating point between thoughts, feelings, sensory-motor awareness, and



the wider environment in which people habitually engage. This rather expanded understanding of the body (and corporeal practice more generally) has come primarily by way of French phenomenology, and I now take a moment to lay out a general framework for its application in the chapters that follow.

The Perceiving Body

Mauss's "Les Techniques du corps" (Techniques of the body) is generally regarded as the precursor to the contemporary interest in the body in anthropology. Mauss regarded the body as both the original object upon which the work of culture is carried out and the very instrument with which that work is achieved (Mauss 1934). His early formulation of *habitus* is envisaged as the sum of culturally patterned uses of the body in society—an idea later developed by Bourdieu (1977) who was greatly influenced by the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Husserl. Such an approach to the body stands in stark contrast to the notion of a passive and malleable *tabula rasa* upon which society imposes its codes and representations (for example, see Douglas 1973). The body, instead, should be posited as an active center of action and awareness, and a source of agency and intentionality that in-*habits* the world and is constituted through its engagement with others and the wider lived-in environment. Culture and personhood are then best understood as an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source and intersubjective ground of experience. In phenomenological terms, the body is the primary vehicle and locus of our being-in-the-world and, as such, not an object to be studied in relation to culture, but the very existential ground and embodied manifestation of culture (Csordas 1999d: 181; 1990: 5). "Culture," then, becomes shorthand for a wide range of overlapping and intertwining aspects of our existence—from thoughts and ideas that we employ to act on the world, to specific bodily usages and embodied skills (Barth 1995: 66).

With this in mind, I approach Orang Rimba ethnography with a wide scope, placing equal emphasis on interpersonal dynamics and those dynamics operating between people and the non-human environment—the underlying theme being those culturally patterned uses of the body that come into play during the course of these interactions. The language of phenomenology is compatible with descriptive ethnography, in particular Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the lived body. According to Merleau-Ponty, the social world should not be constructed or formed, but described through our immediate bodily and sensory experience in the world. These pre-personal links comprise the ontological foundations



onto which all human experience is built and, as such, serve as precursors to our subjective experience in the world. Perception, then, is best regarded as a *prerequisite* process—not as a deliberate taking up of a position or intentional act, but as the “background from which all acts stand out, and [which] is presupposed by them” (Fischer 1969: 31). The world that is experienced through the body and senses, then, is posited in contradistinction to the world that is conjured in the mind through thought and imagination.

The kind of immediate visceral experience we have with our bodies runs counter to the reflective processes that detach subject from object, whereby corporeal experience becomes thought about the body, or the experienced world becomes “thought about the world” (Ibid.: 212–13). Descartes and Kant both detached consciousness from the world by presuming that a subject could only apprehend its existence by first experiencing itself as existing in the act of apprehension. While accounting for self reflexive states of the mind and subjective experience more generally, such a view obscures the possibility of a direct, pre-personal connection with the world. Cognitive science has had a similar tendency to create a disembodied relationship between individuals and the wider experienced world, and the result has been a separation of perceiving subjects from the sensorial world in which perceptions are born and given content. A phenomenological approach recognizes that the lived-in world exists only in relation to the experiencer and vice versa; and this body-world contingency, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) showed, is facilitated by and made tangible through acts of perception. Human existence, then, is not predicated on thoughts or cognitive formulations, but on our direct apprehension of the world by way of the senses. Decarte’s *cogito ergo sum* could thus be reformulated: “I perceive therefore I am.”

We are rooted in the world through innate processes of perception and the most rudimentary aspects of our being-in-the-world are grounded in a pre-personal awareness that arises through our immersion in an environment. To perceive is to already embody certain characteristics of the world. That is to say, perception must be “perception of” —vision of tangible objects, olfaction of discernible odors, aurality of sound, tactility of physical objects, and so forth (compare Merleau-Ponty 1962: 203). So our bodily actions in the world are always movements of perception and intentionality casting out into the world; movements that are fueled by the innate motility of human consciousness (Bohm 1980) and grounded in our direct bodily experience in the world. As perception begins in the body, I follow Merleau-Ponty’s lead and treat the body as the very instrument of perception.² Paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty, Drew Leder notes how linkages between body and environment and the perceived cogency of

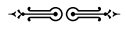


the experienced world all rest upon fundamental linkages from within the lived body:

My two eyes integrate their powers to form a unified vision when, for example, I gaze at a vase. As I reach out to pick it up with my hands, vision is woven together with motility and touch. This synergy of bodily power does not require the assistance of conscious will or intellection; it is a prethematic accomplishment. (1990: 87)

Ingold echoes this notion of a generalized bodily perception, emphasizing how the senses, rather than working in isolation and combined at higher levels of cognitive processing, operate “as aspects of functioning of the whole body in movement, brought together in the very action of its involvement in an environment” (2000: 262). Any one sense “homing-in” on a particular object of attention “brings with it the concordant operations of all the others” (Ibid.). So rather than treating the senses as distinct registers of perception, our sensory experience in the world can be seen as a generalized corporeal activity, diffused throughout the body and the wider lived-in environment. The boundaries of the body are thus open and porous, continually absorbing stimulus through the senses and their collaborative bearing on the features of the world. Experiencing a tropical rainforest aptly illustrates the notion of a unified bodily perception. While walking in the forest the landscape unfolds to the senses as a vast tapestry, made up of many seen and unseen components; and these sensorial elements are often not reducible to one sensory modality or another. Through the body’s innate receptivity to the world and the concordant workings of the senses the forest is experienced in a generalized way, as an “aura” or “atmosphere.”

The body also exhibits its own kind of memory during the course of movement and navigation through familiar settings, as it continually orients itself in relation to the world it encounters. By maintaining habitual patterns of action and movement, certain features of the environment become incorporated into the body’s own kinetic patterns and responses—or into what Gaston Bachelard called our “muscular consciousness” (1964: 11). The body thus has its own kind of innate “intelligence”, and those habitual ways of acting on the world become integrated aspects of the body’s kinesthetic and sensory-cognitive repertoire, undergoing continual refinement throughout the course of a lifetime. These embodied forms of knowledge and experience are achieved not through conscious learning, but through performance and *routinization*, whereby behaviors and actions become embodied through continual practice and repetition (compare Bloch 1990). Once expertise is acquired, such habitual patterns of



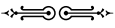
action and movement become integrated aspects of the body and thus part and parcel of one's sense of being and self.

The body can thus be regarded as an open repository for embodied knowledge and skills, most of which are not "transmitted" through structured teaching but, instead, are "cultivated" or "grown" into the body (Ingold 2000: 356) during the course of people's habitual engagement in the world. It is with this dynamic understanding of a receptive, ever-developing, perceiving body that I approach the following chapters. I situate social practices, bodily usages, and ways of perceiving and acting on the world within a broad framework of dynamic interactions, emphasizing the many intertwining aspects of experience that constitute Orang Rimba culture and social life. Broad themes such as sociality, the creation of cultural meaning, the development of specialized skills, and corporeal practice more generally are examined within the context of Orang Rimba life with the wider aim of drawing out those more universal processes at work.

Organizing the Chapters

The book is divided into two parts—Part I: Intersubjectivity and Part II: Body and World. These divisions are somewhat arbitrary, but serve the heuristic purpose of organizing the chapters along loosely circumscribed areas of inquiry: the first focusing primarily on social interactions between persons (including the Orang Rimba's interactions with their Malay neighbors), and the second on interactions between humans and the forest. For the Orang Rimba, and hunter-gatherers generally, human-environment relations take on a truly interactive quality much like intersubjective relations between people. As such, both analytical frameworks are inherently social in nature, as the following chapters will bear out.

Part I is comprised of chapters 1–4. Chapter 1 is written in a somewhat traditional anthropological vein: describing the environmental setting of rural Jambi Province, recounting my arrival to the field, and introducing some of my main fieldwork characters. I write mostly in the first person to situate myself within the ethnography, as I chronicle the slow and challenging process of finding my feet in a new social setting. This chapter sets the stage for chapters 2 and 3, where I examine some salient aspects of Orang Rimba sociality by focusing primarily on non-verbal modes of social interaction. In chapter 2 I illustrate the ways in which individual perceptions become public and how self-other boundaries are continually encroached and negotiated within the context of the domestic camp.



In chapter 3 I continue with the theme of sociality by examining tactility and other “corporeal” modes of social interaction. I take a somewhat pragmatic approach to tactility and the sense of touch, treating both as an innate behavioral need and as integral components of our biosocial makeup as a species. I explore tactile interactions within the context of mother-infant bonding and child development, along with the role of tactility in a child’s education of the forest environment. I also examine some important ways in which touch cements key social relationships through selective grooming and through sleeping in groups, or “social sleeping.”

In chapter 4 I look at the various ways in which Orang Rimba identity and worldview is constituted vis-à-vis the external Malay society. I show how ontological security is achieved and maintained by following paths of movement in the forest. For centuries evasive mobility has been a strategy employed to avoid the depredations of their dominant village-dwelling neighbors. Maintaining high residential mobility in the forest has thus enabled the Orang Rimba to effectively manage the tenuous balance between themselves and an often hostile encompassing Malay world. So movement serves not only as a means of gaining knowledge about the forest’s resources and other people but also, through its continual practice, affirms their staunch opposition to village ways. Movement embodies the ethos and collective values associated with forest dwelling and I argue that movement, ethnic identity, cultural continuity, and the continuity of the forest are mutually dependent phenomena and, as such, are regarded as one and the same for the Orang Rimba.

In Part II (chapters 5–9) I shift my focus from intersubjectivity to human-environment relations. I construe the forest not as a static environment where food is sought, or an inert backdrop set apart from the sphere of human activities. Instead, the forest is conceived as an animate, interactive life-world that feeds back to condition the body and senses in highly enduring ways. Through the body’s innate receptivity to the animate and inanimate agencies in the environment, the forest comes to serve as a conduit for personal growth, development, and change. As such, I treat both humans and forest as mutually engendering processes.

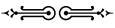
In chapter 5 I chronicle my first journey to a remote forest region in northernmost Jambi Province, where I expanded the scope of my fieldwork by establishing contact with and residing among a new Orang Rimba group. Through these longer stints of fieldwork in the deep forest among highly mobile groups, I gained a deeper appreciation for the kinds of “tacit knowledge” that are required to make a living in the forest. By examining the salient connections between vision, cognition, and bodily kinetics, I show how the body and senses become attuned to the features and nuances of the forest environment through even the most quotidian



of actions such as walking. Movement in the forest also conditions the body's muscular development and sensory-motor responses and establishes the foundations for the acquisition of more specialized skills such as hunting, which I turn to in chapter 6. Few studies have brought to light the high degree of bodily and sensory conditioning that is required to hunt effectively in a tropical forest environment (but see Puri 2005). By following in the footsteps of experienced hunters and undergoing a kind of apprenticeship of my own, I examine some of the salient ways through which the body transforms itself in relation to the non-human environment and how the senses undergo continual attunement to the ever-changing characteristics of the forest. Hunting also constitutes the core of a nomadic foraging phase and I argue that its continued practice carries the same ideological significance for the Orang Rimba as movement and stems from the same nexus of ideals and core beliefs associated with forest dwelling.

In chapter 7 I explore the salient links between memory, pre-personal experience, and the perception of the environment. Edward Casey's (2000) phenomenological study of memory and Chris Tilley's (1994) *Phenomenology of the Landscape* have greatly influenced my thinking and approach to this area of inquiry, and I use their work as an entry point for this chapter. Following Tilley (1994: 40), I argue that the forest serves as the fundamental "reference system" through which individual biographies and social identities are anchored. I show how recollective experiences are "embedded" in the Orang Rimba's perception of the environment and how personal biographies and memories take on enduring meanings, and are preserved, by being rooted in the tangible features of the forest. These embodied forms of "meaning-creation" point to more general, often pre-personal, processes of appropriation, and I show how these processes become embodied at a very young age through early interactions with the environment, when the forest first opens up to the burgeoning senses of the Orang Rimba child.

In chapter 8 I shift my focus to those more esoteric modalities of perception that occur through shamanic practice. Shamanic visions represent continua of experience from the quotidian to the esoteric, and those perceptions that take hold of the shaman arise out of a wider nexus of ideas or "ecologies of mind" (Bateson 1972) that find their source in everyday interactions with the outside world. I illustrate the various ways in which exogenous forces influence the Orang Rimba's perceptions of the forest and how these external influences play out during the course of shamanic rituals. Trance-induced visions provide a window into the unconscious mind and often reveal those subliminal and overt fears that the Orang Rimba experience in their ongoing interactions with the wider Malay society. As the dynamics of their interactions with the outside world change



over the course of time, so too new meanings are woven into the forest and given expression in shamanic trance imagery.

In the final chapter I examine the Orang Rimba mourning practice of *melangun* through an ethnographic account of a death that occurred during my final weeks in the field. The tragic events I witnessed would greatly shape my understanding of Orang Rimba notions of death, separation, society, and belonging. I emphasize the more spontaneous aspects of mourning that often occur within more structured ritual frameworks and contrast these genuine displays of grief with more codified displays of emotion. I highlight the co-constituting nature of emotional experience by showing how mourners become uncontrollably drawn into the ebb and flow of activity and, in so doing, open themselves up to the wider tide of emotion through which genuine feelings of grief are born and given expression.

The chapter progression and part divisions also serve a narrative purpose. My fieldwork began among a settled group, where I focused primarily on language learning and gaining a basic understanding of Orang Rimba culture and social relations. I later moved to the forest, which greatly enhanced the quality of my knowledge by enabling me to situate my data and the accompanying analysis within the proper context of the forest. So the layout and general progression of the chapters, in many aspects, reflects the evolution of my own growing understanding in the field—a journey I invite the reader to join as the following chapters unfold.

Notes

1. It should be noted that my access to Orang Rimba females was somewhat limited (for reasons that will be explained in chapter 1), and the majority of my social interactions took place among Orang Rimba males. As a male interacting primarily among other males, the content of my data is undoubtedly skewed.
2. This is where Merleau-Ponty's and Mauss's notions of the body differ. While Mauss treated the body as an instrument through which the work of culture, by way of the self, is carried out, Merleau-Ponty regarded the body and self as intertwining phenomena, leading him to the conclusion that it is the body *itself* that perceives.