

3 *The origin of songs*

Ideas about the origin and composition of music provide an important indication of what music is and how it relates to other aspects of the lives and the cosmos of a community. Suyá concepts of the origin and introduction of new songs can be compared instructively with those of other groups, and the answer to 'why they sing' rests in part on an understanding of what a song is and how it is learned.

According to the Suyá, songs had been introduced in three different ways. Some songs they considered very old, and their origin was described in myths referring to very early times. Some songs were new at any given ceremony, and were taught by men called 'men without spirits' who in some ways resembled what we would call 'composers.' Other songs were introduced by learning them from foreigners. As a group, all songs were said to come from outside Suyá society. Each form of introduction, however, had its own characteristics.

Songs in myths

Certain unison songs and recitatives were said to have been learned a very long time ago, in the period in which Suyá society was taking its present form. The formation of society as it is today was described in a number of myths, including some where songs were learned from partly human partly animal beings in the process of metamorphosis. A man who was slowly turning into a large deer sang a song that has since always been sung in the Savannah Deer Ceremony; a man who became a wild pig/person sang a song that became the Wild Pig Ceremony for the initiation of young boys; an enemy child captured by the Suyá taught the children a naming ceremony that the whole village began to perform after he became an adult. (For versions of these myths, see Seeger 1984: 191–194 [Savannah Deer]; 252–254 [Wild Pig]; 203–209 [Enemy Child].) The origin of Suyá songs and ceremonies described in myths is quite different from those of many other South American Indian groups, where they were taught by culture heroes or spirits.

The lack of transformation in the myth about the origin of maize may be why the myth included no songs. The story involved no metamorphosis. The mouse remained a mouse; the infant grew into a boy (but remained a human); the maize was just maize. I recorded one version of the origin of maize where the teller went on to describe the origin of planted gardens. The origin of the gardens (distinct from taking the crops from the river) involved the metamorphosis of different parts of a woman's body into garden products after she was burned alive when the clearing for the first garden was set ablaze. Before she burned, she sang a song that was sung by the men almost every year just before they ran to their gardens to set them afire at the very end of the dry season. Among the Suyá, where there was metamorphosis, there was song.

Songs from men without spirits (mē katodn kidi)

Although certain songs and ceremonies were part of the construction of Suyá history, new songs were also constantly introduced. As one Suyá said 'if we sing the same thing over and over again, it is boring. So we sing a new song, then another, then another, and we are happy/euphoric (*kin*).' New songs were taught by specialists who had undergone a partial metamorphosis, and had acquired a kind of permanent marginality. Two different kinds of persons were involved in the introduction of new music: a witch and a 'person without a spirit.'

How, I asked a number of Suyá, can certain people teach songs to other people? Takuti, an older man whose answers were often organized into long narratives – almost lectures – of a normative sort, gave me the most easily understood description. He told me that witches are very jealous. They get very angry if they are not given what they want, and in revenge remove a person's spirit from his or her body. When a witch sees someone come into the village with a lot of fish, game, honey, birds, arrow cane, or other desired item, it becomes very angry if it does not receive some. That night the witch will transform itself into a bat or some other nocturnal animal, enter the culprit's house, and take the spirit of the person who failed to share the desired item, while he or she sleeps. The witch takes the spirit and throws it where the thing it is angry about lives: it will throw the spirit to the village of the bees if it is angry at not receiving any honey; it will throw it in the river if it received no fish; it will throw it into the place of some animal or to the birds, or to the trees and arrow canes. Spirit loss causes illness. The now spiritless person will get very sick, lose weight, and suffer fever and convulsions. If the spirit does not return, the person becomes a 'person without a spirit' and a teacher of new songs. Here are his words:

When there were still many Suyá alive, it was very frightening because there were many witches. If a young boy came back with some fish and a person said to him 'Give me one' he might answer 'No, I am taking these to my mother.' The witch would get angry and throw the boy's spirit in the water. So we tell our young children, 'when someone asks for something, give it right away. Do you want a witch to throw your spirit to the fish?' We tell them: 'When someone over there [in another house] asks you for bird feathers, honey or whatever, you say "A-ha! A witch!" and give it.'

Witches, who might be male or female, were said to cause all deaths – whether from disease, attack, old age, or even automobile accidents – by removing a person's spirit and taking it to the village of the dead. Although death was said to be the normal result of the removal of the spirit to the village of the dead, when the spirit was removed to an animal or plant community, the patient might continue to live. Takuti described how:

[A witch takes a man's] spirit to the birds. He has convulsions and lies in his hammock for a long time. He lies in his hammock while his spirit is with the birds. A vulture takes the man's spirit flying with him in the sky, and the man has convulsions. Then he sees himself [discovers that his spirit is with the birds in a dream or delirium vision]. 'Oh ho! So some witch took my spirit to the birds!' he says. Another person, whose spirit was taken to the birds long before, will tell the man 'Some time ago I saw the spirits of many of your belongings in the bird village [the spirits of belongings also may be taken by the witch to encourage the owner's spirit to stay wherever he or she has taken it]. That is why you have been having convulsions for so long.' Then the man begins to hear the birds' shout songs (*akia*), and the birds' unison songs (*ngére*). He hears the birds singing about themselves. His health improves and he lives as before.

Then [one day] someone comes into his house. 'What are you coming for?' the man asks. 'I come to see you.' 'What are you seeking?' the man inquires. 'Will you tell (*sarén*) me a shout song?' the visitor asks. 'All right.' The man sits and listens [to the birds]. When he has finished listening, he teaches the shout song he has heard to the man [in the manner described for the opening of the Mouse Ceremony]. When he has finished teaching it he says 'Go and sing, that I may hear it.' The man does.

Everyone in the village hears the new song. They say, 'Who told (*sarén*) that shout song?' 'Our companion has taught it to him. Our companion has become a bird' [meaning his spirit resides with the birds] someone replies. They say, 'Our companion has lost his spirit! He has become a person without a spirit! He has lost his spirit among the birds!' [they can tell all of this by the song]. Now other people come to ask him for shout songs. 'Will you teach me a new shout song?' each asks. 'All right.' He listens and learns the song, then he teaches it. 'Sing, that I may hear it,' he says.

Then the men say 'Let's learn one of his unison songs' (*ngére*). They go to him and he teaches them a unison song. If the song is beautiful the men say 'Hey! That is beautiful!' When they want to learn another song, they go to him and learn one. When they want another, they go to him. His companions seek him out. He teaches beautiful unison songs of the fish and beautiful shout songs of the fish. [Takuti started talking about a man who lost his spirit to the birds, then concluded talking about fish. He is describing a general process, and I think he simply forgot which he was using as an example.] He has become a man without a spirit. They keep coming to him for songs.'

Sickness, and especially serious illness or injury involving possible spirit loss, was of great concern to members of the community. Whenever a Suyá would become quite ill or was injured, members of the family would spend many hours speculating on who might be the witch responsible, and what might have caused him or her to become angry. The sick person's female relatives would evaluate each suspect by name and make a kind of ranking by likelihood. Heavily armed male relatives would stalk around the plaza, speaking angry speech (*grúnen kapérni*), sometimes firing their rifles in the air, asking all witches (without mentioning any names) to stop making their relative sick. If the ill person died, one of the suspects was sometimes held responsible and killed in retaliation. If the sick person improved, the concern temporarily subsided, but fear of witches always lay just beneath the surface. Five accused witches were killed between 1972 and 1984. The fear of witches encouraged Suyá to distribute things, and accusations of being a witch probably inhibited people from asking for things. One old woman refused the present of a dress from my wife saying 'I don't want the cloth, because if I accept it people will say I asked for it and they will say I am a witch.' Suyá society was based on networks of sharing and reciprocity, and giving to people who asked was a fundamental social skill that had its own sanctions. If one did not give, a witch could make one ill; if one asked for too much too often, one could be considered a witch and killed.

In spite of the fear of witches, they were necessary for creating the men without spirits who introduced new songs. Without witches there could have been no introduction of songs from animals after the episodes described in the myths, whereas new songs were a constant feature of Suyá ceremonies. Witches, capable of transforming themselves into animals at will, created composers, whose transformations were partial but often final, through their jealous retaliation for imagined slights. This process illustrates a complementarity between the 'bad speech' of witches and the socially valued songs men without spirits learned from the animals and taught or sang themselves. A village without one would be without the other – a kind of complementarity typical of Suyá dualism in general.

Teachers of songs, the people without spirits, were men and women in a state of what might be called 'halted metamorphosis.' The person's body was alive in the village; the person's

33/64 =	13.96875
32/64 =	12.303125
31/64 =	11.503125
30/64 =	10.753125
29/64 =	10.003125
28/64 =	9.253125
27/64 =	8.503125
26/64 =	7.753125
25/64 =	7.003125
24/64 =	6.253125
23/64 =	5.503125
22/64 =	4.753125
21/64 =	4.003125
20/64 =	3.253125
19/64 =	2.503125
18/64 =	1.753125
17/64 =	1.003125
16/64 =	0.253125
15/64 =	0.003125
14/64 =	1.96875
13/64 =	1.1875
12/64 =	0.40625
11/64 =	0.15625
10/64 =	0.0625
9/64 =	0.03125
8/64 =	0.015625
7/64 =	0.0078125
6/64 =	0.00390625
5/64 =	0.001953125
4/64 =	0.0009765625
3/64 =	0.00048828125
2/64 =	0.000244140625
1/64 =	0.0001220703125

spirit lived with some natural species, accompanied their activities, and learned their songs. People without spirits are examples of liminal figures, characterized by Victor Turner as 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention . . . Liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun and the moon' (Turner 1968: 95). The men without spirits were truly neither here nor there; they were alive but not whole; and their spirits were intimately associated with a natural species. I was repeatedly told by Kaikwati that to be without a spirit like himself was bad. There was a term for men with spirits that could be translated as 'whole' or 'healthy' (*mē tīrī*). Composition, or the introduction of new animal songs, could only begin after liminality was permanently established. When the sick person discovered where his soul was, after he 'saw himself' in Takuti's words, his metamorphosis into a dual being – living in the Suyá village and living in an animal village – would be completed.

Certain individuals who had lost their spirits and who were also respected for their knowledge of songs were given a high status as 'masters of Suyá ceremonies' (*mē ro kin kandé*). Such a person usually decided when a ceremony would be performed; he exhorted everyone to perform it correctly; he often organized collective hunts and fishing parties. Every historical Suyá village had both one or more political leaders and a single 'master of ceremonies' (see Seeger 1981: 180–205 for detail on historical villages). Political leaders and masters of Suyá ceremonies were quite different. A political leader was rarely a person who had lost his spirit. He was supposed to be an ideal man, whose legitimacy resulted from his actions and behavior in everyday life and his inheritance of the leadership role, rather than from the kind of knowledge characteristic of teachers of songs and ritual specialists.

There is a single principle at work in both the introduction of new songs and the myths of how songs were learned from animals in the past. Suyá composition reproduced in a living person the way songs were introduced in the myths. In the myths a group of men would learn a song from a metamorphosing person. The body of a man without spirit would learn the song from his own metamorphosed spirit.

People who had lost their spirits could only teach or perform songs they could hear. A person whose spirit was with the bees could only teach bee songs, one whose spirit was with the birds only bird songs, and the same for fish, plants and the other possibilities. Each kind of animal or plant had its own language, and usually sang about itself. The bees usually sang songs about bees, birds about birds, fish about fish, and so forth. It was easy to tell which animal taught a song from the species named in it. When people learned songs from several different composers, they sang about different animals. An exception to this general rule was the Mouse Ceremony, which was also performed by a number of different animals, plants, and insects. Thus Kaikwati learned the Mouse Ceremony shout songs he taught from the trees and arrow canes that also perform the ceremony at the ripening of the maize. The songs did not come from the mice named in them, but from plants singing about them.

Sometimes a person's spirit moved from one place to another within the natural realm. In the previous generation, approximately thirty percent of Suyá men and women had spirits living with bees, birds, fish, and trees. In several cases their spirits moved during their lifetime. One man's spirit fled from the trees to the arrow cane after he was shot in the leg; another moved from the birds to the arrow cane after an arrow pierced his eye. One old man's

spirit went from the armadillo village to women's vaginas: in his old age he only composed songs naming parts and actions of women's genitalia, which were considered obscene, funny, and highly appropriate for an old person to sing. These changes of location usually accompanied accidents, sickness or changes in social status.

Not all Suyá visits to the animal realm were permanent. A number of people described how their spirits had been with birds, bees, or fish for a short time when they were very sick. They would recount the experience in very convincing detail to fascinated audiences. One man described how he found himself to be a bird. He described what it was like to ruffle his feathers prior to flying – making movements with his arms and hands and a sound with his voice that was unmistakable. He said the birds were having a ceremony, and singing. They invited him to sing with them, and he did. He sang the song for the audience, under his breath. They then flew off to hunt for the food that is an important part of most ceremonies. He described circling high over the ground. People asked him questions: 'Were you afraid?' 'Could you see very far?' 'What did you eat?' He answered each question, expanding on things he had mentioned. He reached the high point when he and the other vultures had plunged their heads into the entrails of a rotten carcass. 'Yummmmm, good ceremonial food' said the vultures (to the disgust of the audience). They flew to a stream, and he described how they drank and threw water on their feathers. 'I was very hot and thirsty.' Then he said 'I wasn't any longer.' Suddenly the bird he had been was no longer, and he was lying in his hammock croaking 'water, water, water.' His mother brought him water, and when he got well he sang the song he had learned, dancing with the birds. Since his spirit had returned to his body, he did not learn any further songs or teach them to other villagers.

The unison songs (*ngére*) were the most important song forms to be learned from animals. Their texts provide another path toward understanding the interaction of men without spirits and animals. They describe parallels between the human and the animal. Many unison songs indicate parallels between the animal world and the human world and create new metaphors of relationship between them. The areas of white fur on the coati are called its 'bird down' for a ceremony; a fish's fins are likened to burity palm frond dance capes, which wave with the movements of the dancer as the fins wave in the water; a swarm of a certain bee species arrives and they dance with their arms over their heads, while another species watches; a catfish wraps its head with cotton and sings. A fish species 'wriggles through shallow water, making ripples.' A wasp 'carries mud to its hanging nest and builds it.' 'A honey bee dances back and forth' ('the way they do on their trees' according to a singer). These derived from direct observation. The coati has patches of white, as do humans with bird down on them; fish fins wave like capes; bees swarm and dance; the 'whiskers' of a certain catfish look as though it has wrapped its head with cotton string.

Other songs are almost short stories. 'A tall tree looks for its formal friend and says "Cut my cape so I can dance."' 'The water turtle says to its formal friend "let's go to the Suyá village and sing the Kahran *ngére* with them."' 'The vulture comes [to the Suyá village] and sings, circling the plaza with its arms in the air [as vultures usually fly] and the men are very happy/euphoric.' 'A certain bee species swarms to the [Suyá village] log racing path, sees the Suyá women on the path and sings about them.'

Finally some texts describe the emotions of the composer's spirit in the natural world. One of the most striking of these was the first song taught by Kaikwati after he had been accidentally shot in the thigh in the confusion surrounding the assassination of a witch. After

he recovered he taught a new unison song, and there was considerable excitement among the listening women. They commented among themselves, and explained to my wife, that he was singing a new song. They said, on the basis of it, that his spirit had fled the trees and was living with arrow cane now. The song could be freely translated as 'The bullets arrive in the arrow cane village to sing, the arrow canes are afraid and leave' for the first half and 'The wide tipped arrows arrive in the arrow cane village to sing, and their [arrow cane] mother is afraid and leaves.' These refer to the way his own spirit became afraid and fled to its new home. Other songs describe the spirit's fearful reaction to situations it encounters: 'a [huge] catfish species muddies the water with its tail and it is frightening'; another species of catfish 'has little fish living in its gills, and they are frightened.' The fright refers to the spirit of the person who taught the song, which was very frightened by the power of the catfish.

The essential reality of the spirit realm was constantly reinforced because Suyá kept going there or had their spirits there, and they discussed what it was like among themselves (this has been described for other Gê-speaking societies as well by C. Nimuendaju [1942] and J. C. Melatti [1974]). The supernatural features of the spirit and animal realms were as real, for example, as Europe or China to Americans who have never been there. We play music written in Vienna, we hear descriptions of life in China, we are quite certain that people have gone there and that those places exist. We have seen travelers leave and have spoken to them when they came back. Different travel accounts emphasize different things, but we do not question the existence of the countries because of that. We know that travel there is filled with unusual experiences and sometimes perils, and that life there is quite different. Those places become part of our lives and experience even though we may never have been there. The same thing was true of Suyá experiences with spirits.

I have no explanation for why some people lost their spirits permanently, and others only temporarily. It was clearly not inherited, as political leadership was. From my discussions with Suyá, it appeared that people without spirits often lost their spirits temporarily as youths, only to lose them permanently later. Political status may have had something to do with it. The children of political leaders were expected to be political leaders also, and would not be as likely to say they lost their spirits, while captives and half-siblings of leaders tended to lose their spirits more frequently. This suggests that although it was not considered 'good' to be without one's spirit, it was a way to become a prestigious adult for those who did not inherit the right to be a political leader.

In 1982 only Kaikwati, the ritual specialist, was a man without his spirit. All the others had died, and no new ones had appeared. When I asked why there were so few today, Takuti attributed it to demographics:

When there were many Suyá alive, it was very frightening because there were many witches . . . In the old days when there were many Suyá it was very frightening. Now there only a few Suyá, [and it is not very frightening].

Without witches there could be no new men without spirits. However, Takuti's sister had been killed because she was believed to be a witch, and three other women in his house were considered to be witches, and feared by women who lived in other houses. Life in the 1970s and 1980s was not free of the fear of witches and retaliation against them.

Several factors probably contributed to the decline in the number of men without spirits, among them the death of many of the older men, the abeyance of the full initiation ceremony,

the popularity of Upper Xingu ceremonies during the 1960s, and the increased possibility of learning other kinds of songs from human beings, rather than from animals. The intertribal (and interethnic) community that had developed since the Suyá were peacefully settled into the Xingu National Park in 1959 diminished the importance of the animal realm as a source of novelty, learning, and musical innovations. The best younger singers traveled extensively to other Indian groups as well as to Brasília and São Paulo. They returned with new songs – often recorded on cassette tapes – which were often learned by the entire community. The same men were often the first to pick up new songs from visitors to the village. The disappearance of men without spirits may have been as much the result of an alternative source for powerful things. Until recently, the animal realm was virtually the only source of power from outside the village.

Foreign songs

The third way new songs were introduced represents a kind of inversion of the first two, yet it is intimately related to them. Instead of a song being learned by an individual and brought to the village, foreigners (enemy Indians, peaceful Indians, or non-Indians such as ourselves) were brought to the village where they would teach a song or ceremony to the entire community. The Suyá have incorporated foreign songs on a grand scale: they sang the songs of over ten different groups with whom they have had contact over the past two hundred years. They sang songs they learned from the 'White Indians' (identified by them today as the Munduruku), from the Manitsauá and the Iarumá (now both extinct), from the Kamayurá, Waurá, Trumai, Juruna, Kayabi, Txukahamae, and then from Brazilians and Americans since their 'pacification' in 1959. At that pacification, when the leaders of the expedition reached the Suyá village, the Suyá and the Indian members of the pacification team sang songs for each other. During my stay, when non-Suyá men visited the village they were usually invited to recount news and stories, and to sing. In the 1980s they usually brought cassette tapes recorded in their villages, which they would trade for those recorded by the Suyá of their own ceremonies.

Why would the Suyá want to perform the songs of so many different groups? Part of the answer lies in the significance of foreigners' songs to the Suyá, and the continuities between this mode of learning music and the other ones already described. According to Suyá oral traditions, before they met the Munduruku in the nineteenth century, they had learned songs from a man becoming a deer, from another man in the final stages of transformation into a wild pig, and from a woman who had a penis growing on her right thigh. Clearly, we are not dealing with 'objective' history, but with a pattern of learning songs from outsiders that includes the present and recent historical past but has equal continuity with the 'mythical' past described in 'what the old people tell.' Historical experience cannot be arbitrarily separated from myths, since each influences the interpretation of the other.

The balance of power has shifted during the past hundred years from the power of animals to the power of enemy Indians (who almost wiped out the Suyá in the early part of this century, and from whom they stole captives to survive), to the power of non-Indians today, about whom they were very concerned. Knowledge is an important form of power in most South American Indian groups, and the Suyá were no exception. By taking and performing other groups' songs, the Suyá incorporated some of those groups' power and knowledge into

their own community. They did this first with animal songs, and more recently with foreigners' songs.

Suyá understanding and representation of their own past provide a clue to their incorporation of so many foreign songs. They described their past as the gradual incorporation of items taken from monstrous outsiders that are used for the benefit of the Suyá in their enduring circular villages (that themselves have no myth of origin). Myths recount how the Suyá obtained fire from the jaguar, corn and garden crops from the mouse, names from enemies underground, body ornaments from cannibals, manioc varieties and pots from the Upper Xingu Indians, and so forth. Rarely did they obtain songs alone. Contact with the Indian groups in the more recent past added new material culture (new crops, different ways of processing manioc, new technologies of fishing and hunting) and also songs. The material culture was part of production; songs were part of social reproduction. Suyá history reports the steady and simultaneous acquisition of the means of production and reproduction from first animals, then historical Indian groups, and now from non-Indians.

Although new songs were introduced from outsiders, the social groups that performed them were the same as those that performed the traditional Gê-style Suyá songs and ceremonies. They were based on the fundamental Suyá distinctions of sex, and age (which have no myths of origin), and name-based ceremonial groups. Regardless of their origins, all songs were sung in basically the same social space. Thus while the text and tune changed over the years, the location of the performances and the identity of the actors continued to be the groups of collective social life. The new songs or ceremonies were often performed in the long preparatory periods between the opening of a rite of passage such as the Mouse Ceremony, and the grand finale of the ceremony – at precisely the time they asked us to sing for them on 29 January 1972. When Suyá introduced the new songs, a great deal remained the same.

One result of learning many songs from other groups was that some decision had to be made about which of the many songs to sing. While many Suyá songs were regulated by season and social group membership, this was not the case with performances of many foreigners' songs. It also appeared to me that the Suyá more frequently and more seriously sang songs from groups with whom they had recently intermarried or from whom they had stolen many captives, or had obtained a fairly large amount of material culture. Thus they sang more from the Upper Xingu Indians and Juruna than they sang from the Panará, Kayabi, or Txukahamae, and the Manitsauá and Iarumá songs were sung quite infrequently, now that the captives from these groups have been dead for several decades.

There has not always been agreement about which ceremony should be performed. I was told that the explanation given for a 1984 dispute in the Suyá village that led to the establishment of a second village by a sizeable faction was that the members of the community disagreed over the kinds of ceremonies they were going to perform. One faction was interested in performing mostly Upper Xingu women's songs, while the other wanted more traditional Gê-style Suyá ceremonies. Although there were multiple motives behind this factional dispute, the selection of ceremonies was clearly also a political event.

The contemporary Suyá adoption of foreigners' songs was a way of incorporating the power and material resources of strangers into the social reproduction of their own society, while they simultaneously established the otherness of the others (who were on a par with animals) and the changing, growing, creative, self-ness of themselves.

Men, animals, and music

Suyá ideas about composition are fundamental for understanding their cosmology as well as their music. Suyá musicology involved central cosmological concepts and processes, and the origin of songs reveals how the very epitome of the social world (a ceremonial group of men singing in the center of the plaza) is linked to the domain of animals and non-Suyá through contrast and reciprocity.

In *Nature and Society in Central Brazil* (Seeger 1981), I argued that many aspects of Suyá cosmology rested upon the fundamental distinction they made between animals and human beings. Although I glossed these as 'nature' and 'society,' the real basis of the opposition was the relationship between fully social adult men and animals. While the argument is presented at length there (Seeger 1981: 21–35), I will summarize it here.

Humans and animals were carefully separated and contrasted in many aspects of Suyá life, including the delineation of space and time, the characterization of persons, the conceptions they had of the life cycle, and the definition of sickness. Nature and society were principles expressed through specific attributes such as spatial relationship to the plaza or classification by odor. In space, animal classification, and other domains there was a clear gradation between the extremes of the social and natural. But nature and society were not fixed realms containing categories such as women, parrots, anthropologists, and jaguars. Instead they were principles that organized thought and action, which the Suyá used in dynamic and creative ways.

Nature and society operated on each other constantly, transforming each other. The transforming process might make something natural into something social, or something social into something natural. Nowhere were the dynamic and creative aspects of the interaction of the natural and the social clearer than in food and song. Carefully isolated from the social world in some domains of Suyá life, the animal domain was essential to both subsistence and ceremony. The earlier book dealt extensively with food and the classification of humans and animals, but not with song. Singing transcended the purely human, it participated simultaneously in the social and the animal realms. In ceremonies such as the Mouse Ceremony, the performers themselves transcended the purely human, becoming simultaneously men and animals. Both food and song were parts of the natural world that were introduced into Suyá society at its very center: rites of passage such as the Mouse Ceremony. They shared other aspects as well: both were oral. Eating and speaking (including singing) are central features of the cosmologies of many South American Indians.

A corollary of the power of nature is that it could be dangerous (this applied to foreigners as well). The Suyá observed extensive restrictions on the animals they could eat, including those that could not be eaten at certain moments of their lives or by certain sexes and ages (see Seeger 1981: 92–120). Singing, too, was restricted to certain times, places, ages and sexes. Suyá musical genres did not include domestic songs, lullabies, protest songs, or work songs. Domestic performances were restricted to myths or descriptions, and the songs reported then were sung very quietly. Musical performance had a ceremonial purpose – controlled and associated with certain social groups. When a ceremony was being planned, and later during its realization, there were constant injunctions against 'fooling around' or not taking the ceremony seriously.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his famous volume *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969) described at

great length the importance of transforming raw flesh into cooked meat in the cosmologies of many native South American groups. Fire, which effects that transformation, is central to many of those cosmologies. The Suyá were no exception. For them, both fire and songs were obtained from the animal realm. Fire transformed raw food to cooked and edible food (they abhorred raw or rare meat), and song transformed humans.

Nature thus had two aspects. On the one hand nature was represented as individual game animals (food). On the other it was represented as collective and social – by groups of animals singing. Certain animals were rarely eaten, but were often sung about or invoked. The Suyá avoided the flesh of the jaguar, the giant otter, the sloth, and the vulture; they highly restricted the consumption of the flesh of the deer; they placed restrictions on the flesh of the wild pig and many other mammals. These same animals appeared in the invocations, where their power was used to cure a patient or improve a human body, and in songs. The very power that made those species dangerous to eat made them powerful tools for curing: they transformed humans, making them more like animals. The incorrect performance of an invocation, the indiscriminate eating of animal flesh, or the improper performance of a ritual could transform a patient, an individual or an entire society in undesirable ways.

The appearance of powerful, sometimes dangerous, and ultimately transforming persons or objects is common to ceremonies around the world. In the Catholic mass and the witches' coven, powers are brought together and used for different ends. The common association of the sacred with the taboo or dangerous led to the consideration of the sacred and the tabooed as a single unit (Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1898]). The Suyá were little different from other groups in this. What did distinguish them was that the principal items reintroduced from the powerful and transforming domain of nature were food and music.

It should be clear that Suyá song meant much more than what we call music today. It was far from being simply entertainment. Songs were obtained from dangerous beings through an intermediary who had lost his or her spirit through the actions of a witch, or who had confronted foreigners and learned from them. They had to be performed carefully and seriously. Ceremonies and their associated songs transformed members of the society and also each individual's experience of self and social relationships. Song was associated with euphoria and with personal and society-wide transformations. Songs, and the Mouse Ceremony among them, were not something at the periphery of essential experience, but at its very center.

Kaluli, Suyá, Ancient Greeks, and Americans

Ideas about the origin and nature of music can be fruitfully compared among different societies. They can provide some instructive contrasts. An interesting comparison would be between the Suyá and other Gé-speaking groups. Unfortunately, too little has been written on Gé song composition and ideas about music except for the Xavante – whose songs apparently consist entirely of song syllables without direct semantic meaning and are heard in dreams by adults and taught to younger men (Aytaí 1985). Not much else is known. Looking further afield, an excellent description has been provided for the Kaluli of New Guinea, and an instructively different one is attributed to the Pythagoreans in ancient Greece.

Among the Kaluli, as they are described by Feld (1982, 1984), music is modeled on a metaphor of bird song. As with the Suyá, most Kaluli music is song. One Kaluli myth recounts the transformations of humans into birds, where the metamorphosed human sings

Kaluli words to the melody of a certain bird call. Feld's analysis details how certain songs (and other forms of verbal expression such as weeping) have the same melodic structure and range as the cries of specific birds. The Kaluli apparently talked a lot more explicitly about verbal art than the Suyá did, and Feld brilliantly explicates a number of Kaluli metaphors in several chapters on song and weeping.

Kaluli and Suyá ideas may be compared in a general way to those of Pythagoras. Relationships among tones were declared to be a 'natural series,' and harmony was thought to derive from formal mathematical relationships among tones. Lewis Rowell describes it as follows:

Harmony was also a symbol of universal order, uniting all levels of the cosmos – the four basic elements (earth, water, fire, air), higher forms of life (man), and the structure of the universe (the planets, sun, and moon). As Aristotle testified with respect to Pythagorean doctrines, 'they supposed the elements of number to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale [harmonium] and a number.'

(Rowell 1983: 41)

Music was also said to unify opposites:

The Pythagoreans, whom Plato follows in many respects, call music the harmonization of opposites, the unification of disparate things, and the conciliation of warring elements . . . Music, as they say, is the basis of agreement among things in nature and of the best government in the universe. As a rule it assumes the guise of harmony in the universe, of lawful government in a state, and of a sensible way of life in the home. It brings together and unites. (Theon of Smyrna, cited in Rowell 1983: 41)

Although comparisons across time and space inevitably run the risk of caricature, comparisons are as essential to anthropology and ethnomusicology as in-depth understanding of single cases. The Suyá, Kaluli, and Pythagorean ideas about music emphasize some important similarities and contrasts.

First, in all three cases song is the result of a particular relationship between humans and the rest of the universe, involving an unusually close relationship and merging of states of being into a single combined state of being expressed through music. When humans, birds, animals, or other aspects of the universe are conjoined, the result is song.

Second, the non-human order provides a model for music. For the Kaluli the model is bird song, for the Pythagoreans it is the harmonic scale that provides natural relationships, and for the Suyá it is not the apparent sounds of individual birds but the songs natural species are said to sing when they are in groups that are taught to the village by specialists who are the only ones who can hear them.

In all three musical traditions, music provides an emotional experience of considerable force. Kaluli songs arouse sadness and anger, Suyá singing arouses sadness in some and creates euphoria in the rest, for some Ancient Greeks music produced a gradual approach to absolute beauty.

There are some essential differences, however. A Kaluli becomes a bird by decorating himself with feathers and singing 'like' birds in melodies 'like' waterfalls, identifying places in the surrounding forest which play on people's emotions. The surrounding forest, and the real birds and sounds in it, provide the textual and melodic model for human song. Although the Suyá learn music from the natural kingdom, what they sing (and therefore what the natural kingdom sings) bears no sonic relationship to the sounds of animals, plants, birds, fish, or insects that a tape recorder could capture. Animal songs – what the people without

spirits hear in the villages of the animals – are entirely different from their calls in the forest, which are called *kà*, and might be translated as ‘cry’ or ‘bark.’ To ‘become a bird’ in the sense that a person loses his spirit which then lives with the birds, is to be able to see and hear the essential social reality of bird life – which is in many ways the same as human life today and radically different from the animals’ apparent natural habitat and sounds. There is a myth in which a woman literally becomes a bird (Seeger 1984: 499–502). When she does so, however, instead of singing as the bird sings (as the Kaluli might have told it) she simply gives a ‘cry’ (*kà*) and flies away. The differences between the way humans and animals are juxtaposed are probably the essence of larger differences between the Suyá and Kaluli cosmologies.

Suyá and Kaluli rituals both reduce the distinctions between men and animals. Kaluli songs are based in part on observations of what we call ‘nature’ – their songs are similar to the cries of certain forest birds. Suyá songs are not. In Pythagorean theory harmony was a symbol of a universal order to which men should become attuned. It existed in nature, and could be expressed through music. The later idea of the ‘harmony of the spheres’ described in medieval texts proposed that the operation of the universe itself produced music. Kaluli and Pythagorean ideas of music were partly based on observations of nature and mathematics, and human song is said to reproduce something natural. Suyá ideas of nature are fundamentally based on observations of (or interpretations of) society, just as their animal songs do not mimic observable nature but rather the true sounds of the communities of animals that live much like human beings.

These ideas about music as fundamentally ‘natural’ can be compared with contemporary American ideas about musical talent. In everyday discussions with Americans about music, it is clear that to a certain extent music is related to a ‘natural’ force rather than a purely human one. While among the Suyá every member of the society was at some time a performer but only a few lost their spirits, many Americans appear to believe that although most people can be taught music, only a few of them are musically ‘gifted.’

In a very interesting dissertation on musical values at a music conservatory in the United States, Henry Kingsbury (1984) discusses the concept of talent as an essential component of modern ideas of music. Music at the conservatory is said to be something created by certain individuals who have been ‘naturally endowed’ at birth with something that other people may or may not have. Technique is of course essential, but there is more than ‘mere’ technique in the evaluations at the conservatory. In fact, ‘pure technique’ is a strong criticism of any performance. Music is conceptualized as a kind of natural gift, and a considerable amount of anxiety at the conservatory revolves around whether one ‘has’ or ‘doesn’t have’ talent which is expressed in ‘feeling.’ Kingsbury writes of a certain master class:

A fundamental principle of Goldman’s teaching was that students *must* play what is printed in the score, and yet that they *must not* play something simply *because* it is written in the score, but rather because they *feel* it that way.

(Kingsbury 1984)

The ‘feeling’ required of musicians is quite distinct from their intellectual grasp of the musical system, and relates to an American contrast between what has also been called nature and culture. In the United States, many features of life are considered to be part of the natural order – and therefore legitimized and ordained. David Schneider, writing on the symbolism of American kinship, observes ‘kinship is the blood relationship, the fact of shared biogenetic substance . . . This is nature; these are natural things, these are the ways of nature. To be

otherwise is unnatural, artificial, contrary to nature' (1968: 107). His discussions of the difference between 'natural kinsmen' and 'in-laws' and between 'American born' and 'naturalized' citizens, parallels the distinction between talent and 'mere technique.' Musical genius, feeling, and talent are somehow innate, in the blood (and therefore justified), the others are learned through self-discipline, training, and (in the case of citizenship) legislation.

Composers are often said to possess a special kind of genius. The introduction of new music is the result of individual experience among the Suyá and the result of a genetic lottery among Americans. Yet in both groups musical innovation is broadly 'natural' or beyond the control of the individual involved. For the Americans music is the result of the genes; for the Suyá it is the result of a witch. One society's individual gift is another society's individual evil transformed into a benefit.

All of these ideas may be contrasted with the North American Plains Indian vision quest. There, an individual purposefully sought a vision through isolation and fasting. The visions experienced were somewhat similar to those described by the Suyá (Native American cosmologies have many broad themes in common), but meant something quite different. A Plains Indian who saw a vision was a complete adult with powerful spirit. In a similar pattern, shamans in many of the Tupi-speaking groups in Brazil sought spiritual journeys and were often political leaders as well. A Suyá who lost his spirit, on the other hand, was less complete than adults who had them. He would almost never become a political leader, and the fate of his spirit after his physical death was quite uncertain – many people said that his spirit would never join its relatives in the village of the dead when the body died.

Music, in a great many places, is said to come from beyond the mind and beyond the body – from the natural order as it is differently conceived by different peoples. This gives music a pre-ordained, transcendent, and often unquestionable reality. The following chapter will describe how singing is part of the construction of the Suyá world, and thus part of the creation of certain social, spatial, and personal processes, forms, and ideals.