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Bearing in Mind

Birth, Fathers, Ritual, and 'Reproductive Consciousness' in
Transpersonal Anthropological Perspective

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Abstract

Bearing in Mind: Birth, Fathers, Ritual, and 'Reproductive Consciousness' in Transpersonal Anthropological Perspective is an exploration of 'unusual' psycho-spiritual experiences among a small group of procreative fathering males in New Zealand and the viewing of these experiences through a transpersonal anthropological lens. I have used the transpersonal literature and the anthropological record, coupled with fieldwork among contemporary males to explore some of their more 'non-ordinary' responses to childbirth, paying close attention to the symbolic and therapeutic dimension implicated in their participation.¹

Frequently their narratives suggest psychological encounters with death and transpersonal states of consciousness. This research examines these states of consciousness, the broad cultural context from which they arise and their relationship to birthing. Two basic themes are explored: 1) the social shaping of birth as a transpersonal event and ritual at the time fathers joined their partners in birthing during the late 1960s, and 2) an investigation of the transpersonal experience itself.

Such phenomena have wide anthropological ramifications which opens a third theme for exploration: the possible parallels with more traditional, shamanistic, and/or indigenous midwifery and obstetrical manoeuvres (and therefore religion) – these parallels will be outlined and explored. This thesis relies heavily on a reinterpretation of the transpersonal and anthropological literature; however it is the fieldwork (gathering birth stories from men and women) that is crucial because it is the transpersonal content of their stories that drives the theoretical component.

¹ The term 'non-ordinary' pertains to NOSC or non ordinary states of consciousness (see glossary).

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Introduction: Conceiving Men

The time has come in science to pay credence to reports of transpersonal experiences as presented in the ethnographic, folkloristic, theological and mystical literatures pertaining to peoples around the world (Charles Laughlin 1988:20).

The psychedelic revolution of the middle sixties in drugs, music and lifestyles might seem to be and often was apolitical. But the sense that there was something drastically wrong with the American system, that the whole middle-class career pattern was some kind of pointless game playing, had obvious political implications (Robert Bellah 1976:78).

Since the death of the psychedelic movement, the 'bad science' of the LSD researchers has now been resurrected in the guise of a new branch of psychology, transpersonal psychology (Jay Stevens 1987:500).

This thesis is a set of deconstructive and reconstructive arguments to do with a hypothesis that experiences of transpersonal consciousness might occur among New Zealand fathers engaged in birthing. The thesis is also a re-examination of male birthing rituals. So, after Laughlin (above), I am paying credence to the reports of transpersonal experiences from fathers engaged in birthing. When I set out to do this study I had little idea of what to expect or what would emerge - only that I would take a transpersonal framework to the stories I gathered 'among the fathering males'. If I found transpersonal elements in their stories, I would write about them.

One of the central themes of this research is that the recent fathers' at-birth-revolution (Reed 2005) really begins in the 'psychedelic '60s' in Northern California, and the counter-cultural values in the fathers' at-birth-revolution in New Zealand, are mimetic of the radical 'happenings' of San Francisco between about 1964 and 1971

which, as is well known, were tantamount to a religious [read 'spiritual', 'transpersonal'] revolution (Glock & Bellah et al 1976). Another central theme is the construction of modern day birth as a ritual site and the potential for transpersonal experiences to emerge from participating in 'birth as ritual'.

The first half of this thesis should probably be called 'clearing a path' because my two research subjects: 'fathers at birth' and 'transpersonal consciousness' both emerge out of cultural and research paradigms that have denied or devalued these phenomena. I wanted to criticize these epochs specifically for their ambivalent attitudes toward birth and spiritual consciousness. Furthermore transpersonal anthropology (the impulse to research transpersonal states of consciousness as a form of data gathering in the anthropological field) has a fascinating history which is also linked to currents that came to flourish through the dramatic counter-cultural uprisings of the 1960s. We could include among these currents feminist research, the ecology movements (e.g. deep ecology and eco-feminism) and transpersonal psychology.

I believe transpersonal anthropology is an appropriate research tool for this study because some fathers involved in birthing during this historical period were explicitly interested in transpersonal states of consciousness and were sensitive to them. Transpersonal psychology then, argues for a plausible role of religious experience within the context of our human material condition of embodiment and emplacement within the living world of which we are a part.

Transpersonal psychology, to a degree, can be seen as re-evaluated psychoanalytic theory (which is an important ancestor of the transpersonal movement) and two of the movement's most central and respected theoreticians Stan Grof (1985) and Michael Washburn (2003) are psychoanalysts. Transpersonal theory has attempted to link and extend both Freud and Jung's theoretical perspectives. A basic assumption of

psychoanalytic theory is the notion that early childhood experiences can cause trauma and neurosis. Melanie Klein and others explored the idea further by looking at pre-oedipal states of human development. With transpersonal psychology the search for trauma and 'self' is pushed even further back along the ontogenetic pathway to the experience of birth and beyond (this 'beyond' is similar to the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious). Grof and others argue that an echo of these earliest states is found in adult spiritual states of consciousness but that they can also have traumatic and pathological elements to them (1985). Therefore transpersonal states among fathering males participating in childbirth may well catalyze psychodynamic materials consisting of their own perinatal/birth (see glossary) components and aspects of the psyche that Jung recognized as the collective unconscious (see chapters 7, 8 and 9).

The sub-discipline, transpersonal anthropology, explores the relationship between non-ordinary states of consciousness and culture. Transpersonal states tend to have certain recognisable features: they are felt to be an unusually potent body-mind-world event, they are information-bearing, expansive and numinous (after Jung), and the event is felt by the participant to somehow extend the boundaries of human consciousness. They can have an 'other worldly' transcendent aspect or a 'present centred', 'here now' quality, often referred to as 'embodied' or immanent (e.g. Washburn 2003).

They are identified by high arousal and sensitized feeling states: often referred to as 'peak' experiences. Western researchers speak of suspending the 'subject-object dichotomy' that pervades the Western world and a sense of participation in wider ecology of mind (e.g. Heron 1992; Bache 2000). These states are typically found in various forms of religious practice and mysticism and what follows is a description of

where transpersonal (here called ‘holotropic’ see glossary) consciousness has been cultivated:

Ancient and aboriginal cultures have spent much time and energy developing powerful mind-altering techniques that can induce holotropic states. They combine in different ways chanting, breathing, drumming, rhythmic dancing, fasting, social and sensory isolation, extreme physical pain and other elements. These cultures used them in shamanic procedures, healing ceremonies, and rites of passage ... powerful rituals enacted at the time of important biological and social transitions, such as circumcision, puberty, marriage or birth of a child. Many cultures have used psychedelic plants for these purposes. The most famous examples are different varieties of hemp, the Mexican cactus peyote and *Psilocybe* mushrooms, the African shrub eboga, and the Amazon jungle liana *Banisteriopsis caapi*, the source of yage or ayahuasca. Additional important triggers of holotropic experiences are various forms of systematic spiritual practice involving meditation, concentration, breathing, and movement exercises, that are used in different systems of yoga, Vipassana or Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Vajrayana, Taoism, Christian mysticism, Sufism, or Cabalah. Other techniques were used in the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, such as Egyptian temple initiations of Isis and Osiris and the Greek Bacchanalia, rites of Attis and Adonis, and the Eleusian mysteries (Grof 1992:2).

If fathers reported such events at the birth of children, I planned to examine their experiences for symbolic content and look for models in the anthropological record with which to align them. By treating their phenomenological experiences and the narratives about these moments as both genuine and data-bearing I hoped to contribute to what Davis-Floyd (1992: 245) following McManus (1979) calls “further epistemic exploration” of male-participatory childbirth. I wanted to use their experiences as my central data.¹

¹ Not all altered-states are transpersonal states, for example, alcohol intoxication at the baby’s ‘head-wetting ceremony’ does not count as the kind of altered-state that I am interested in - nor do fainting or vomiting at the sight of blood, which, while undoubtedly interesting changes in consciousness and physiology (the latter even suggesting purgation) do not, however, render a transpersonal content.

This research must then entail the theoretical challenge of blending together the anthropological and transpersonal research paradigms in this study of transpersonal experiences among men engaged in birthing. Before the rise of the transpersonal paradigm in science, two earlier research paradigms, 19th century anthropology and psychoanalysis, also overlapped in the study of male birth practices - the so-called *couvade* rituals. The word 'couvade' stems from *couver* in the Old French language meaning to 'cover' or 'to hatch' - as in a clutch of eggs (perhaps because ganders are known to guard the nest and occasionally sit in for the goose). The word was first applied to indigenous birthing rituals in a 19th century study of Basque peasants, who are considered to be among the last vestiges of early European tribes (Reed 2005: 34).

However, fathers engaged in these 'couvade' practices were seen by early anthropology as participating in sorcery, witchcraft and magic which anthropologists tended to see as a mass of superstition, and a monstrous and menacing reminder that the 'primitive mind' had not yet left the yoke of nature, broken through the shell of superstition, and evolved into 'high' culture. Early psychoanalysis went a step further in its objectifying and saw in the *couvade* a symbolic externalisation of a deep seated neurosis, envy of women, and a desire, not to protect, but to cannibalise the foetus.

Reed points out that 'observing' the *couvade* by missionaries and explorers has been a mechanism for distancing the so-called evolved or civilised European mind from Asians, Africans, indigenous Americans and Pacific Islanders. He says that:

Understanding the commonness of the *couvades* around the world challenges the medical belief that it is both rare and pathological in our own society. Being aware of the social, psychological, and spiritual aspects of birthing fathers in other societies allows us to recognize the multifaceted experience of *couvade* in our own (Reed 2005:38).

Since Reed suggests that the couvades have 'spiritual aspects' I reasoned that a transpersonal lens to explore our contemporary 'couvade' might prove useful since there is an extensive body of anthropological literature dealing with trance, ritual, dissociation, possession and altered states of consciousness (in other words, transpersonal states) and some of this transpersonal material comes from anthropological studies of indigenous midwifery techniques, shamans engaged in healing obstructed birthing, and couvade-like rituals that I will call symbolic perinatal manoeuvres.

Fresh perspectives on non-ordinary states of consciousness coming from anthropological researchers since the early 1970s have legitimised this once taboo field of study (see Turner 1992a and chapter 4). I assumed my understanding of the transpersonal psyche would also be deconstructed and reconstructed by exploring its relationship to culture, power and place (after Gupta & Ferguson 1997). Was there an 'economy' of such states as Weber (1965) has suggested, and what was its capital in relation to the contemporary birthing situation?

To restate my aims: First and foremost my research question is a rather modest one, and it asks, 'can' transpersonal consciousness emerge around the event of birth for fathers? Secondly, I would explore the ritual nature of birth from the fathers' perspective. Thirdly, I believe these research questions cannot be successfully achieved without attending to, and re-evaluating, the recent historical and cultural moment when fathers entered birthing sites (appendix 1).

Grass-Roots and Frayed Genes

I wanted to explore the grass-roots level of the fathers' at-birth-revolution in the Western world. "What was it that brought them into birthing sites?" was something of a historical question that I wanted to answer, especially since birth had been largely

taboo for fathers, but also because there is very little documentation of this moment. Even in the pioneering days of New Zealand, Pakeha fathers were generally excluded from birth unless absolutely necessary (Carbines 2003: 6) and, with the twentieth century's medical confinement of birth, New Zealand fathers were further banished by a powerful professional hierarchy (Papps & Olssen 1997:19).

Birth reform movements in New Zealand, largely stemming from Grantly Dick-Read's 'natural birth' approach, eventually became the Parents Centres in the early 1950s (Donley 1998:82). Parents Centres were an influence in the process of bringing fathers alongside their partners at birth because they also advocated home birth. However, to my knowledge, the fathers' historical participation in this movement is nowhere documented (although we can assume that some fathers were present).

Mein Smith's *Maternity in Dispute: New Zealand 1920-39* (1986), points to the powerful move from domiciliary to hospital birthing. Mein-Smith notes that in 1920, most New Zealand women (65%) had their babies at home or in small, unlicensed one-bed maternity homes. Their care-givers were midwives or maternity nurses, with medical practitioners only being called in the event of difficulties. By 1936 however, 78% of births were in maternity hospitals with doctors in attendance homes (fathers' attendance or non-attendance is not mentioned by Mein-Smith) (1986:1).

It is understandable that fathers are little mentioned in the literature, especially since birth-giving has been traditionally a female domain and because female anthropologists since the 1970s have fought hard to recover women's power in that domain (see chapter 6). For example, Vicki Lukere and Margaret Jolly's excellent anthology *Birthing in the Pacific: Beyond Tradition and Modernity* does not include a chapter on birthing in the Pacific from the father's perspective. Christian Saloman, however, does note that *Kanak* fathers are now joining their partners at birth

(following European trends) (2002: 97); but such trends have not been historically researched or articulated from the fathers' standpoint. Another excellent collection of papers by Robbie Davis-Floyd and Carol Sargent, *Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge: Cross Cultural Perspectives* (1999) fights shy of including a chapter on 'authoritative knowledge and fatherhood' or 'fathers-at-birth' which, in the absence of a male voice, may suggest a perception that fathering cannot add anything to the exploration of authoritative knowledge concerned with childbirth. Indeed such publications can be used to show how fathering and fathers-at-birth is often rendered invisible. I believe this trend has contributed to the lack of evidence and research regarding the entrance of fathers into birthing sites (home and hospital) in New Zealand. This dearth in the literature is partly because father-centred research was criticized for being politically unsound because this research is said to have omitted the status and privileges attached to fatherhood (Lewis 1986:5).

In a similar vein fathers are not mentioned by one of New Zealand's foremost midwife activists, Joan Donley, in two of her books on the subject of 'home birth' (1992) and 'natural birth' (1998) and the contestations between these movements and the medical establishment. Donley does note that attempts by the Parents Centres to gain respectability with the medical profession caused them to betray their original values and lose their impetus as a political force. They ceased advocating home birth for hospital reform (Donley 1998:85). I will show how these birth reform movements remained marginal until they were swelled by the radical contestations of the 1960s and 1970s (see chapters 6, 7 and appendix 1). Indeed Donley, writing on New Zealand birthing, draws our attention squarely to the alternate culture of 1960s (which can also suggest that the 1960s counter-culture is the root of the fathers-at-birth revolution in New Zealand):

Not only was there a considerable scientifically-based body of knowledge building up that was critical of technological birth, a woman's right to opt out of the institutional system had become part of the civil rights and alternative life style movements of the 1960s, and was now part of the growing feminist movement of the 1970s (1992:4).

Her statement is extremely relevant because it suggests that the new home-birth movement (and therefore fathers' entrance into birth sites) is part of a consumer revolt tied to the cultural revolts of the 1960s. But again the father's side of this story is nowhere documented and, indeed, Donley's statement, because it is weighted towards women (naturally enough), does not represent the fathers who were part of this movement. Compare Donley's statement with the following, perhaps more balanced one, from Shelley Romalis:

There is now a recent trend among middle class counter-cultural women and couples to return to the lay midwife, as in California (Romalis 1981:27).

One of the foremost researchers in the field of birthing politics, English feminist Anne Oakley, has also observed this curious historical moment in *The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women* (1984) and she notes that the sites of birth were, in fact, of little interest to early second wave feminists and that ironically the "protesting consumer" was mistakenly equated with the "ardent feminist" (1984:253). Oakley writes that:

In the twentieth century's second wave of feminism, the promotion of motherhood did not at first loom large. Feminist ideology in the early 1970s was an ideology of women's liberation from the burden of reproduction: the ideological platform included free abortion on demand, free and easily-available contraception and sterilisation, and twenty-four-hour-a-day-childcare. The feminists were not demanding natural childbirth, or the rights of women as patients, or the need for self-determination in the achievement of motherhood; motherhood itself was viewed as an obstacle to the goal of sex equality. The

battles of women in antenatal clinics to have their voices heard and their interests as individuals considered were strictly off limits to feminism. There was good reason for the initial location of feminist health care interests outside the sphere of maternity...the childless background of the first women's liberationist in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, it could be said with some justification that it was as these early liberationists themselves embarked on motherhood that motherhood became of interest to the women's movement as a whole (Oakley 1984:253-254).

It could also be said then that it was here that 'feminism' was confused with the consumer revolt which was in fact the home/natural birth movement which was revitalized and largely driven by an ethos hatched in the '60s counter-culture (which was peopled by women *and* men). By doing so, the original enactment of the fathers (and their motivations to enter into the site) is lost to sight; it sinks further underground and set in its place is an assumption—that fathers may have been ushered into birth sites by feminism.

Anthropologist Karen Michaelson says that the relationship between the home birth movement and feminism in America was one that “produced several points of tension...the whole notion of family-centered birth implies much about the traditional roles of men and women in the family, and the presence of the father may accentuate rather than diminish, male control of women's experience” (1988: 28). Nevertheless, Victor Turner, according to Peter Droogers, “has shown how important the margins of society may be for its renewal, particularly because hierarchical relations are experienced less prominently there” (1989:19).

I found some small, but very relevant and interesting snippets about the counter-cultural impact on birth-giving and the relationship with fathers. These statements echo local commentator Joan Donley's concerning the impact of the 1960s counter culture:

The cult of natural birth itself tells us how far we've come from true oneness with nature. Natural childbirth is only one more part of the reactionary hippie-Rousseauian Return to Nature, and just as self-conscious. Perhaps a mystification of childbirth, true faith, makes it easier for the women involved (Firestone 1970:189).

A "rebirth" of home births occurred with the counter-cultural movement that began at the end of the 1960s and continued into the '70s" (Anderson and Bauwens 1982:289).

Ethnic cultural forms and diverse local values such as the "pioneer spirit" or the "counter-culture," shape both the birth options to a woman and the meaning she gives childbirth and motherhood" (Michaelson 1988: 1)

The counter cultural movement led to the association by many persons that home birth was connected with the anti-establishment point of view (Anderson and Bauwens 1982:290).

A New Zealand woman, June, when I told her about my research, told me that during the birth of her child in 1970, her husband had to wait outside, whereas at the birth of her second child in 1971 her husband was admitted into the labouring room. When I asked her why this shift had occurred she said she thought it "had something to do with gestalt therapy" (see appendix 1 for a fleshing out of her statement). Another woman in New Zealand told me this regarding her 1970 birth-giving, "I screamed at the hospital staff that if my fucking husband wasn't allowed with me, I would take my fucking baby and have it somewhere fucking else". Sociologist and childbirth researcher Vincent-Priya supports her statement:

His [the father's] presence at birth was not, however, easily won as, with the hospital emphasis on sterility and professional medical control in the delivery room, a non-professional outsider was not easily accommodated. Whether fathers should be present at birth became a major point of contention between

the medical profession and the activists in the natural childbirth movement (Priya 1982:77).²

This suggests that some of these 'alternate birth' activists were men supporting their partners. A male New Zealander told me that he had been around in the days of the counter-culture (not that he identified as a hippie) and that birth for him had been a community affair, there were "friends, neighbours and kids all present", he said, and the birthing scenario was a place where there was "a lot of bonding going on".³ He made it sound like a communal gathering and he likened the atmosphere to that of a "movement". I believe this to be a reasonable example of the grass-roots movement I am trying to describe.

The counter culture movements and home-birth are connected and it would appear that counter cultural efforts were reasonably successful in that they spread into the wider culture. Birth activist Susan Arms on this subject of diffusion says, "The consumer movement in childbirth, also known as the natural childbirth movement and the alternative birth movement, is today a worldwide grassroots movement whose goal was to foster normal childbirth" (1994:149).

² Brian Jackson (1983:77) says that the first crack in the hospital system (regarding the father's presence) came when doctors were given dispensations to witness their own child's birth. I have found evidence to support this idea but such changes were the exception and not the rule and cannot account for the huge interest and change that occurred. The weight of evidence suggests that hospital staff were antagonistic to the entry of fathers. However this would not mean that all hospital staff, physicians and nurses stayed committed to the 'polluting father' paradigm and it is possible that the winds of change blowing throughout the 1960s also affected sympathetic hospital staff.

³ The 'attachment' or 'bonding' movement in psychoanalysis became an important issue for birth activists who claimed that hospital routines and practices corrupted the naturally occurring and healthy bonding between mother and child. However, Sonja Jackson (1987:29-58) writes that John Bolby's 'bonding' theories were originally severely 'mother-centric' they did not place fathers as significant attachment figures and terms like 'maternal deprivation', popularized in social work, have little to say about fathers. Indeed Jackson says that Bolby was seen as something of 'the villain of the piece' by later researchers because he further dissociated fathers from their children by construing them as only peripheral figures. Therefore it may be premature to simply assume that Bolby's theories played a significant role in the event of fathers at birth-giving. Bolby has since revised his position and 'bonding' is now part of the political backdrop, and a significant health concern among many Western parents.

Chapter 6 will explore these themes further, however, for now; one of the most revealing articles that I have found on this subject is in *Women as Healers: Cross Cultural Perspectives* (1987):

The roots of the present-day U.S lay midwifery movement can be traced to the late 1960s and the broader 'counterculture' that emerged at that time on the West Coast (Hazell 1974). The counter cultural movement was primarily composed of middle class women and men who rejected main stream American institutions in favor of a return to a more natural style of living that embraced values and beliefs that were the antithesis of those of achievement --oriented culture. Their approach to food and clothing, as well as their lifestyle, which appeared to emerged from a combination of political radicalism and an attraction to Eastern religious zeal. Couples wishing to live by their principles had home birth (Reid 1987: 226).

All of this brings me back to my argument: that the cultural shift of fathers present at birth can trace its roots to a medico-religious-political enactment drawn in part from a radical transpersonal healing ethos - emergent in the 1960s the counter-culture.

Another important way that the nascent transpersonal movement has influenced birthing has been through its project of conceptual reframing and its revisionist position concerning non-ordinary states of consciousness (see glossary), which has served some feminists in their reframe of the natural birth movement. For example, Susan Arms of *Immaculate Deception* fame, a very popular anti-medical birthing book, writes that, "the roots of the consumer movement lie in the writings and practices of two renegade male physicians, Dr. Grantly Dick-Read in England and Dr. Fernand Lamaze in France". She then adds:

In the 1930s Grantly Dick-Read gained his insights from watching working class women in urban England give birth without help from drugs. He also travelled to Africa where he observed women giving birth on their own in rural villages. He saw the transpersonal and spiritual dimensions of birth and

wrote eloquently about women's capacity to give birth successfully (Arms 1994:149).

'Natural birth' was a crack in the medical armour but it was the religiously and politically charged foment of the 1960s and a combination of the strong anti-hegemonic currents, civil rights crusades, and liberation movements that enabled fathers' entry, *en masse*, into birth sites. And strangely enough, I think it has something to do with the introduction of powerful mind-changing psychedelic substances into the Western world, and something to do with the Vietnam War (chapters 4, 6, 7, and 8 touch on this theme and appendix 1 is a more in-depth exploration).⁴

Just before this thesis was completed, an anthropological account on fathers at birth appeared: *Birthing Fathers: The Transformation of Men in American Rites of Birth* (2005). Author, Richard Reed, writes:

In 1968, the United States seemed poised on the brink of social revolution. Students demonstrated against the war in Vietnam; women organized against the patriarchy; and Blacks took to the streets to demand power. These public conflicts were accompanied by a much more private movement to change one of life's most intimate moments — the birth of a child. American couples who had redefined sexual attitudes and rewritten marriage vows now rejected conventional birth. They refused to submit to a sterile surgical event that removed babies from somnolent bodies; they wanted to birth babies with comfort, control, and confidence. These maternity radicals wanted to transcend biology and technology to make birth a natural, social and spiritual event (2005:104).

⁴ Emile Durkheim showed in the 19th century that religious and socialist revivals were reactions to the crises precipitated by the industrialization of society. This continuing crisis was no more clearly defined for the counter-culture than with America's invasion of Cambodia in 1970 which triggered a massive effervescent happenings and often violent outpouring (see Bellah 1976:77).

While Reed's statement is a strong affirmation of my own position, the new form of spiritual consciousness informing this 'spiritual event' is not an area that Reed pursues in his study and that research field is precisely my primary concern.

The reconstruction of this social context is vitally important because, in the main, this historical watershed is largely overlooked in the birthing literature - especially in regard to fathers. I wanted to understand the shifting cosmology of the times and its rituals, and 'happenings' – and wondered if the father at birth was such a ritual?

Theodore Roszak, who wrote a seminal study on "The Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition" (1968), said: "Is the youthful political activism of the sixties any different from that of the thirties? If the difference shows up anywhere, it reveals itself in the unprecedented penchant for the occult, for magic, and for exotic ritual which has become an integral part of the counterculture" (1968:124-125). Rituals, once enacted, have a way of transmitting their knowledge (Geertz 1957) as part of their magic. But why was this counter-culture so magical, spiritual, and aggressively devotional?

Camille Paglia has noted that the spiritual/political efforts of the so-called 'love generation' have been censored out of "embarrassment" (2003:6). Yet could there be something of their original enactments, as Geertz suggests, still traceable in the present? Maybe not, perhaps the Baby-Boomers' spiritual wave simply crashed on to the rock of Western technocracy and receded back again with their long hair. One of my informants told me that 600 male barbers went out of business in New Zealand after the first tour by the Beatles in 1964 saying that the male youth had refused the uniformity of the 50s 'short back and sides' hair-cutting ritual. Perhaps then, like hair styles, the counter-cultural efforts were simply a question of trivia or fashion? Maybe, but between 1966 and 1969 the Beat-les (influenced by the Beat generation - an artistic modern subaltern culture disaffected with the American 'establishment')

had turned into an Easternising growth industry, publicly promoting LSD use, courting the Maharishi and ‘Transcendental Meditation’, and taking trips to India. They were the first highly marketable Western pop band to use a sitar, crossing-over popular music with psychedelia, with Indian mysticism, with peace politics - their ‘Journey to the East’ had begun – and ‘Beatlemania’ followed them. The haunting strains of the sitar and its non-Western raga harmonics on a hip English record signal an important process known to post-colonial anthropology as ‘cultural hybridity’ (e.g. Homi Bhaba 1994) and music became the principal vein through which Hinduism coursed on its journey to the West which flowed into the hippy’s image of ‘cosmic consciousness’ (see Paglia 2003:79).⁵ I argue this movement’s cultural impetus *was* important and I remind the reader that Victor Turner committed a well-known book to the subject, which secured his work a place in the anthropological hall of fame, a work that showed how potent powers cooked at the margins of culture could change the dominant structure - interestingly enough, he used the Ndembu ritual complex and globalising hippie culture to make his point (1969 and see Prince 1974).

It is here, in the effervescent anti-structural movements of the sixties, I will claim, where civilly disobedient moods and motivations created the cultural context in which men entered birthing sites and this stemmed, in part, from a deep disaffection with the wages of technocratic industrialism.

I will posit that a novel hybridising (see glossary) cosmology emerged in this globalising counter-culture and that it was used to garner more authoritative capital and cultural territory in the hyper-medicalised site of birth (see e.g. Davis-Floyd 1992:292-298). Pan Hindu-Buddhist cosmology plays an intriguing role in this

⁵ John Lennon would marry a Japanese woman Yoko Ono, claim the Beatles were bigger than God, campaign publicly for peace, fall foul of American immigration law, leave music for parenthood, and finally be shot to death outside his home in New York by a deranged person.

subversive process. Partly due to the relaxing of Asian immigration laws in America in 1965 and the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, both Japanese Zen Buddhism and later diasporic Tibetan Buddhism, were re-routed through San Francisco where they were successful in hooking-up with the Beat culture and later the Hip culture (Fields 1992, Cunningham 2004, Campbell 1996 and see appendix 1 and chapter 7). The religion of Tibet's high plateau, sometimes called "The Roof of the World", had pitched its sacred canopy in the West.

The point of all this, for my study, is that in traditional and indigenous symbolic obstetrics (meaning magical midwifery/shamanistic techniques) the world-over, cosmology plays large part in birthing (as it does in Western culture), and reproduction is almost always embedded in systems of belief with deep cosmological ramifications (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988:51). Buddhism, as a healing system, also evinces a magical/charismatic relationship with birth-giving (Tambiah 1970) and so we will have a bit to say about Creole-Buddhism and its relationship to the men's birth revolution in the late '60s.

The unexpected outcome of this exercise for me, this blending of anthropology and transpersonal psychology at the site of birth, was to add something to the ongoing feedback loop between anthropology and transpersonal theory. I will suggest, on the strength of my research, that transpersonalism, the transpersonal psychology movement, as perceived through post-colonial anthropological theories concerning cosmological Creolisation and hybridity, is a form of subversive 'sorcery' at the level of cosmological-linkage (see chapter 7 and appendix 1).

Now if that hypothesis seems a bit slippery, then it's going to get more slippery; sorcery and magic were also one of the central processes in traditional obstetrical/midwifery manoeuvres prior to the rise of industrialism and the colonisation

of indigenous cultures with modernity's medicalised birthing programme. Therefore, taken as a whole, we might well arrive at the conclusion that given their fealty to a Creolised (magically-bound) sacred canopy, the mutually reinforcing act of the procreative male birthing performance can also be seen as an act of sorcery arising in the gulf between the fall of the Cartesian overseer (meaning the established dualistic view: after Bordo 1987), the fall of Christianity, and the rise of something else. In terms of hybridity, Roszak presents this image from the times:

The San Francisco *Oracle* gives us photos of stark-naked Madonnas with flowers in their hair, suckling their babies ... and the effect is not at all pornographic nor intended to be so. At the level of our youth, we begin to resemble nothing so much as the cultic hothouse of the Hellenistic period where every manner of mystery and fakery, ritual and rite, *intermingled with marvellous indiscrimination* [my emphasis] (1968:141).

The key themes here are 'marvellous' 'indiscriminate' and 'mingled' — frayed (gene)ologies, magically misce(gene)ated cosmologies — a 'blasphemous' mixing of 'pure' religious gene pools and the legacy of the Beats social programme.

Witchery, midwifery and sorcery, as we know, were ruthlessly demonised and devoured by the Christian Inquisition; a long process that eventually coincided with the rise of the Enlightenment's pure reason and capitalism, which baptised a male medical fraternity serving a mechanical and dualistic cosmos in which women's bodies and birth were entrenched and where body and birth became the site on to which that cosmos was inscribed and reproduced.⁶

⁶ This is the same colonialism and Enlightenment reasoning, "From which anthropology was born, and from which delineations of concepts of sorcery, magic, religion and science have been nurtured" writes Marit Brendbekken (2003:55 -56). Following Brendbekken (who was writing about Vodou and anthroposophy in Haiti), this raises "intriguing questions" as to how do I, as an anthropologist, understand this transpersonal sorcery when "anthropology as a Western discipline, and Western science in general, became the alterity by which" transpersonalism, as an "alternative spiritual science nourished itself" (drawing in part from Romantics such as Steiner and the anthropological contact with indigenous cultures). Transpersonal-anthropology then, is intermingled with alternate spiritual systems

According to Davis-Floyd (1992:17, 294); Reid (1989) and Gaskin (1988) an attempt was made at de-ritualising and re-ritualising Western technocratic birth with counter-cultural values during the late '60s. Participation in birth could therefore be seen as ritual with transpersonal dimensions - participation which could lead directly to peak or ecstatic experience (Maslow 1962, 1964, 1971). A couple of brief, but important, examples from my research follow: a New Zealander of about 54 years old and follower of Tibetan Buddhism told me that the moment of birth in 1982 (in a tepee attended by 20 to 30 people at a spiritual festival of 300 people) and the "trippy" "altered-state" he experienced was: "Not otherworldly but it was definitely the non-ordinariness of the thing, you know, in Buddhism they say it's so extra-ordinary that it becomes ordinary...this is very, very ordinary, this is the way it should be". A follower of Meher Baba (a then popular and silent Zoroastrian /Hindu guru), who compared his experience of birth to his spiritual practice, said: "birth was the most powerful *peak experience* I have ever had, it did not come like gradual waves as it does in practice [meaning spiritual practice, meditation etc.] but came with a boom". The birth experience here is clearly being re-spiritualised with transpersonal values.

This is evidence of the shift I am outlining: being born in a tepee is a long, long way from medicalised birthing. I found that for some people of this baby-boom generation in New Zealand this kind of thing was well understood. Once at a dinner gathering the conversation was drifting into the 'reality' or not of angels when a woman (about 40 years old and a Steiner school teacher) began to describe having her baby and how her

(that recede into masculine religious hegemonies) (but which are at once 'irrational' forms of consciousness in terms of Western science, while at the same time keeping a foot in 'empirical science'). This surely lends a certain irony to the project especially when, with a post-colonial glance, transpersonalism turns from a Western psychology back into 'good' sorcery (after being associated with demonised LSD and 'bad science'. Not to mention transpersonal anthropology's stock-in-trade research tool 'participant/observation' which keeps one foot in the Enlightenment's 'objectivity', the other in an altered-Cartesian state. Two vastly divergent cultural streams - one grounded in the Enlightenment's rationale and the other in phenomenology, founded upon the disavowal of the Cartesian materialism and its perspective as *the* view-point for viewing. I begin to wonder if 'slippery' is all we can say about these hybrids.

husband had held her up during her rigorous 'active' labour. She said, "it was the most incredible feeling, when he was born I got that the baby was pure, absolute spiritual essence and I could see how that pure essence pervades all of nature and everything is saturated with that bliss. It was an altered-state that lasted for days". She turned to her husband for conformation and he shook his head, as if incredulous, and said, "It was just like tripping".

Like any peak experience (see glossary), the lustre of the moment, the clarity of insight with its seemingly global relevance, its imparted mission and cosmic import begins to fade - yet remains in the background (so I am told). Like a high-tide, I believe this counter-cultural movement carried men of this generation into birthing sites on a wave of religious fervour and a symbol system appropriate to the task of the times, which according to Glock and Bellah in *The New Religious Consciousness* (1976) was ending the Western involvement in the Vietnam War. Again I believe that this tidal wave of spiritual thinking and its political protest performances peaked and then ebbed leaving the *institution* of the father at birth, 40 years on, without the force of the original revolutionary cultural ethos.

Eventually, this effervescent, heretical, rebellious, relational and *therapeutic* enactment with its spiritual and political overtones, like the natural birth movement before it, was subsumed and colonised by the secular hospital system, but it was also further marginalised by the onset of radical and spiritual feminisms and the re-establishment of professional midwifery which as a professional body, in my opinion, further marginalised fathers (see chapters 5 and 6). The father can be, and often is, seen by these more economically motivated professions as nothing more than a 'fly in the ointment' ... to be tolerated at most (Priya 1992:77) or as an agent of 'the patriarchy' (Davis-Floyd 1992).

The once radical arrival of fathers in birth sites and its symbolic capital are now somewhat culturally submerged. Not many, in later generations, are even aware of its original and heretical challenge to the medical hegemony and American technocracy, its anti-war protest meaning, its support of women's liberation, or its relationship with the transpersonal ethos and values of the times. Most men in New Zealand simply go to the birth by rote, as an informant told me, "It's what we do and it's what is done", and interestingly, "I didn't trip out" (derivation of 'tripping' and 'freak-out' meaning roughly - to lose one's mind).

I recall another moment when a friend, who I had not seen for a few years, and I met at a party. My friend, about 30 years old, told me he had had a child since we last met and I asked him what the birth like for him was. "Look mate", he said exuberantly, "birth, it was just like tripping". At that point a women friend (28 years of age) standing in our circle, exploded at him contemptuously "What the fuck would you know". So I said, "Well, he's got his own way of knowing". To which she snapped: "You men have got everything else why don't you just leave birth to us".

I was somewhat startled that his representation of, and enthusiasm for, the birth of his child was so vehemently discounted and that she could not let his experience have any space. I was also startled that his private familial moment and his transformation into fatherhood would be so politicised and territorialised. But what really struck me was that she felt that as a woman she could claim more rights to his birth moment than he could as a father. I think it has to do with the notion that 'knowledge is power' and power is contested. I saw this kind of pattern operating in several different scenarios and this will be explored in chapters 5 and 6).

Feminist Research

There is much from women's anthropological studies of reproduction and feminism in general that offer the researcher valuable insights when studying men at birth - standpoint epistemology is one such vehicle, it avers that each person has a legitimate knowing from their specific location and context. From the wealth of feminist studies on reproduction there are two useful models that I will appropriate for this study. The first is Robbie Davis-Floyd's *Birth as An American Rite of Passage* (1992) in which the author shows how modern birth is very much a site for contesting ritual enactments - those of the technocratic medical model and those coming from a more holistic woman-centred base (fathers are depicted here as principally minions of the technocracy. See chapter 6 for a critique of this position).

Davis-Floyd shows that birthing can be seen as a rite of passage for women and explores deftly the cognitive changes catalysed by the stress of labour, and environmental factors, and how, when combined, they create both negative and positive possibilities of "symbolic penetration" (the impression of symbolic intention into the 'opened' mind of the initiate) (Laughlin 1988: 21 and see 1994:117). I will adapt this aspect of her account and use it to show how similar symbolic processes can occur for procreative fathering males.

The second model I will appropriate for my study is Rita Gross's (1993) work concerning religious 'revalorisation'. She says,

In feminist theology in general, the task of "revalorization" involves working with the categories and concepts of traditional religion in the light of feminist values. This task is double-edged, for, on the one hand, feminist analysis of any major world religion reveals massive undercurrents of sexism and prejudice against women, especially in realms of religious praxis. On the other hand, the very term "revalorization" contains an implicit judgment. To revalorize is to have determined that, however sexist a religious tradition may be, it is not irreparably so. Revalorizing is, in fact, doing that work of repairing the tradition, often

bringing it much more into line with its own fundamental values and vision than was its patriarchal form (1993:3).

I will now outline how revalorisation is important to me. Another unexpected discovery of my study was the abundance of death imagery in fathers' narratives - and the link I came to perceive between this kind of death and traditional symbolic obstetrics/midwifery as practiced by men and women in many cultures (see Levi-Strauss 1963, Potter 1974, Paul and Paul 1975, Paul 1975, Gross 1980, Kitzinger 1982, Laderman 1983). Let me briefly develop this theme. In *Human Birth: An Evolutionary Perspective* (1987) biological anthropologist Wenda Trevathan explored the adaptive patterns in primates, and our hominid ancestors to reconstruct our species' ancient birth-ways and the early development of the social pattern of midwifery. She complemented this study with ethnographic research in a contemporary midwife centred birth centre on the border of Texas and Mexico. In a similar way I want to look at contemporary males' experience of birth in New Zealand as a window into indigenous, traditional or so-called 'primitive' cultures' rituals around birth and then feed these back into the contemporary male's experience. I am going to attempt a revalorisation of the enactment of indigenous procreative fathering males in an attempt to salvage them from the Western psychoanalytic and feminist notion of womb envy (chapter 5). I will then link this material to more traditional male birthing practices which include man-making ceremonies, couvade, and rites of passage and show their connections to symbolic and magical obstetrics/midwifery, and then link this material back to the contemporary situation.

Thesis Plan

I see my thesis having two basic parts; the first part is a series of three (long) deconstructive arguments that explore the way anthropology has viewed the

relationship between fathers, the womb, foetal persons, and uterine and reproductive processes. This aspect of the thesis is also designed to problematise some of the uncritical assumptions regarding male performances at birth and clear a path toward a divergent viewing of indigenous and Western male's procreative participation. The second part is an exploration of the fathers' non-ordinary experiences at birth, the weaving of these experiences into established and novel transpersonal discourses, and finally, their relationship to some of the traditional transpersonal birth practices found in the anthropological record.

The second half of the thesis is a collection of local men's and some women's narratives, stories and anecdotes relating to their birth experience, the cultural surround, and my interpretation of those experiences. I have utilised Stanislav Grof's 'perinatal matrixes' (1977, 1985) as a theoretical paradigm for viewing, organising and making sense of some of the more 'extraordinary' patterns in some fathers' experiences (see especially chapter 6, 7 and 8 for a fleshing out of these ideas).

Chapter 1) **Introduction: Conceiving Men** this chapter serves as an introduction to the aims of my study. It is also an outline of the overall thesis and gives an account of my orientation and interests. Chapter 2) **Method and Ethics** this chapter explores my method and covers recruiting, research criteria, conversational anthropology and ethics. It also places this research with 'sacred science' and 'new paradigm' research.

Chapter 3) **Anthropology and 'Reproductive Consciousness'**: is a critical review of the major anthropological epochs and their relationship to what I will call 'reproductive consciousnesses'. This chapter will also explore the foundations of the transpersonal movement in Western science which first championed the cause of non-ordinary states of consciousness as healing, transformative, and genuine.

Chapter 4) **The Emergence of Transpersonal Anthropology:** explores the blending of anthropology and transpersonal psychology. I outline the most significant transpersonal anthropological methods, and at the same time, I hope to show how the emergence of transpersonal psychology and anthropology are expressions of sweeping changes in the Western world's willingness to embrace and experience such states of consciousness.

Chapter 5) **Womb Envy: The Hell of the Hungry Ghost** here I critique the Western construction of 'womb envy'. This idea further de-legitimises male involvement in birth on the basis that all men hunger after women's birth-giving powers, or even desire to eat the foetus. I will suggest there *is* a relationship between procreative fathering males and the womb and this relationship will be explored and offered as a strong refutation of the thesis of 'womb envy'.

Chapter 6) **Running the Gauntlet: Re-cognizing Male Reproductive Manoeuvres:** this chapter will explore some of the traditional, indigenous and ritual roles of fathers in some cultures and revise some of the common explanations for fathers' presence at birth in the Western World.

Chapter 7) **The Fathers' Shore: Transpersonal Comprehension at the Site of Birth:** I will explore several categories of transpersonal 'comprehension' and will use these to argue that fathers' entrance to birthing sites in America, New Zealand and some other Western cultures was *not* an extended wing of the male medical domination of women. This is a very important factor since it changes the way we think about *why* fathers got involved in contemporary birthing. It paves the way for a revisiting of fathers' experience of birthing from a radically different historical entry point.

Chapter 8) **Skulls at the Banquet: Birth and the Human Encounter with Death:**

explores one of the most consistent 'comprehensions' I found among men - a psycho-cultural brush with death. I attempt to make sense of these frequent associations and argue that these encounters are the surface content of deeper unconscious patterns closely linked to what transpersonal theorists call the perinatal psyche. There is an interesting birth-death-rebirth connection to be made from these accounts which in turn may place some contemporary males' experience alongside the ritual efforts of males in some indigenous cultures.

Chapter 9) **Spiritual Emergency: Male Reproductive Crises** I make links between the traumatic near-death experience of three males reproductive crises and what Western researchers have glossed as a 'shamanistic crises' (see glossary) and its declension into traditional shamanistic, or magical obstetrical manoeuvres.

Chapter 10) **Conclusion** will outline the conclusions of my study.

Appendix 1) The Attack of the Flower People: explores four basic trends that coalesce in the 1960s and early 1970s: the influx of Eastern religion into the West, the widespread use of psychedelic drugs, arboreal metaphysics, and the rise of the humanist movement. The blending of these movements forges a new world-view and identity which inevitably draws fathers into birthing.

Method and Ethics

Introduction: Sacred Science

Denzin and Lincoln have asserted that, “a sacred science is certain to make its effects felt within the emerging discourses of qualitative research” (1994:583). My study can be seen as such, however, what I mean by ‘sacred’ needs to be explained. This research has nothing to do with some cheerful vaunting of the ‘mysteries of childbirth’. Rather it has to do with the exploration of some procreative males’ non-ordinary states of consciousness as anthropological artefacts, as numinous events in consciousness rather than simply given spiritualizing beliefs (see chapter 7), and artefacts that may belong to a more ‘primitive’ response to birth in the ‘savage minds’ of we post-moderns. So this approach represents a revalorisation of the male’s transpersonal consciousness as catalysed by reproduction.

Anthropology is, arguably, the earliest of transpersonal disciplines since the experiences of anthropologists in spiritual shores (far flung from Western rationalism) have contributed much to transpersonal theory (see Laughlin, McManus, & Shearer 1993 and chapter 4). Briefly, transpersonally oriented anthropologists are interested in the ‘sacred’ dimensions undergirding the mind-worlds of different cultures. They explore the rituals, spiritual practices, and significant figures in healing systems, apprentice themselves to shamans, undergo initiation and conversion, practice consciousness expanding techniques such as meditation, or ingest psychotropic plants as forms of radical transpersonal participant-observation (see Laughlin 1988; Young & Goulet 1994). Information gathered in these states of consciousness is deemed valid, if not essential, ethnographic data.

Mine, however, was ‘insider’ anthropology in that I am a New Zealand male and an

insider of the dominant culture. I was looking for transpersonal events not in a traditional indigenous culture, among shamans, healing ceremonies, possession cults or monasteries, but within secular, Westernized, medicalized birth sites. Furthermore, rather than entering a non-ordinary-state-of-consciousness myself, I was simply gathering the fathers' testimonies of unusual states and uncommon psychic experiences. I took a transpersonal frame (e.g. Anderson 1998: xxiii) to look into so-called 'normal' Western birthing sites, working on the assumption that if birthing has a ritual side to it (e.g. Kitzinger 1982; Davis-Floyd 1992) then fathers too, could be conceived as ritual participants. And ritual participants, it is well known by anthropologists, can undergo a process of "cognitive transformation" (Davis-Floyd, 1992, pp. 15–16). This is something like a 'breakthrough' leading to a new order of consciousness similar perhaps to *communitas* (a sense of oneness and ecstatic communion with the society, nature, and cosmos promoted by ritual) (Turner, 1969; d'Aquili, 1985).

Researcher's Background

I also hope to understand the field of anthropology in both its historical and contemporary relationship to religious experience and the shaping of the anthropologist and his or her experience of, or even recognition of, what I will call the 'deep other' or the 'sacred mind' (after Bache 2000). Of interest is an article entitled *Transpersonal Anthropology* (Laughlin et al 1993) in which the authors deal specifically with the kind of experiential training and practices that would be necessary to enable the transpersonally oriented anthropologist to re-cognise the sacred and participate in non-ordinary realities.

According to Laughlin those of us intrigued by the potential of transpersonal anthropology should have taken the time to integrate, through "slow developmental

seasoning”, our own transpersonal experiences (1988:24) into what Hollan calls, “higher order, conscious levels of integration” (2000:541). I am not all that comfortable with the hierarchical implications of “higher order” but I *can* accept the idea that certain psycho-cultural processes, such as a ‘peak experience’ take time to integrate and that the psyche seeks such integration and that integration is a desirable outcome. I think it is more useful to argue that the anthropologist who has undergone this kind of developmental seasoning may have developed a *different* way of knowing the world that may provide certain advantages in certain circumstances.

Laughlin believes that transpersonal participant/observation is both a developmental and reflexive process engaging transpersonal aspects of personhood (1994:103). Therefore some sort of previously integrated transpersonal experience is required to participate and practice this kind of inquiry (Laughlin 1988:24) (this is not to say that other social, economic and political forces at play are unimportant - but these have been the subject of much anthropology concerned with reproduction which have often overlooked the transpersonal dimension in human life).

Implicit to this method then, is the notion that the psyche of the anthropologist; may have to go ‘cognitively native’. I believe that I have had the appropriate training to carry out such a study (at least within New Zealand where I am an insider) which basically hinges on empathising enough with the participants in a way that allows them to disclose their post-rational encounters around birth and any altered-states of consciousness they might have experienced.¹ Writing about the anthropology of consciousness Michael Winkleman informs us that:

¹ A selective account of my training would include a 17 year inquiry into holotropic states of consciousness under the auspices of Stanislav Grof. I have a graduate diploma in psycho-social studies and have attended dozens of transpersonally oriented workshops and trainings in Australia, New Zealand and America. Much of my professional reading has been in the areas of transpersonal psychology. I have studied collaborative inquiry with John Heron for ten years. I have also

Transpersonal psychology and anthropology and contemplative and Eastern psychologies provide data about forms of experience beyond ordinary rational ego identity and consciousness. These experiences reveal aspects of the self and identity beyond that conventionally recognised in the individual personality (2000:2).

Thus the post-conventional, or in other words, the trans-rational personhood of the anthropologist (in this case me) shares in the study - simply because (theoretically at least) the ego defences of the transpersonal researcher are less likely to contract against the kind of information proffered since she or he has already known like-categories of mind. Furthermore adequate training and exposures in these areas can normalise the experience. The logic is simple and well-known to the post-modern, reflexive moment in anthropology, which is to say that the context and worldview of the anthropologist are the filters through which experience is construed (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

As someone who has had a reasonably lengthy association with the transpersonal movement, its literature, groups and some of its educators, it is fair to say that I am something of an insider. My worldview has become (first accidentally and then intentionally) that of a transpersonalist. The logic follows: transpersonal states of consciousness and practices are held to be transformative. Through certain transpersonal states and practices, I continue to develop a participatory worldview which is sympathetic to certain tenets found in eco-psychology, feminism, transpersonalism, and the holisms of pre-industrialised cultures - constructed from and through direct non-ordinary states of consciousness - as opposed to an uncritical intellectual understanding of a 'given' or received belief system.

professionally developed in several therapeutic environments including psychoanalytic, Jungian and gestalt therapy.

So on my part then, this research method reflects a purposeful, deliberate and intentional *viewing* of the subject matter through a transpersonal-anthropological lens willing to hold such phenomena as primarily genuine data-bearing cultural artefacts; and secondly as potentially positive healthy experiences; and thirdly, possibly disclosing both function and meaning. It is in this spirit that I also attend to the historical social advent of procreative fathering males at the birth of their children.

This, as I have already said, is not the only perspective to take when considering procreative masculinity nor does such a position deny the history in the Western world of gendered, professional, religious, or medical domination of women and the wielding of systems of power and authoritative knowledge to control and disrupt a woman's rights to greater autonomy and authority in birth-giving; her choice of birthing situation, her choice of intervention, and her choice of support persons.

New Paradigm Research

This research falls into the broad category of 'new paradigm research' e.g. *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research* (Reason and Rowan 1981) or *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honouring Human Experience* (Braud and Anderson 1998). My research has some parallels with *Sacred Science: Person Centred Research into the Spiritual and Subtle* (Heron 1998) in that my research also incorporates and validates transpersonal dimensions of human knowing as ethnological data. Heron's incorporation of transpersonal data is useful to this study in that it drew from re-evaluated transpersonal theory coupled with person-centred phenomenological inquiry into non-ordinary states of consciousness, which are central to its participatory epistemological paradigm (Heron 1998).

My conversational method differs substantially from Heron's co-operative inquiry method and other collaborative methods. The connection, as I see it, for the purpose

of this study, is the assumption that human experience can disclose certain idiosyncratic transpersonal realities beyond a strictly materialist paradigm or authoritarian religious context.

My method, while basically ethnographic, also involves two people conversing around their experience of the topic and reflecting on the topic together. This seems to overlap in some ways with a collaborative approach known as *reflective synergy* (Mealman and Lawrence 2002). We, however, were simply engaged in conversation, but these conversations included feeling states, descriptions of post-rational states, self-analysis, imagery and metaphor. What this means for this project is that each person agrees to talk about her or his own psycho-cultural reality around birth articulating it and feeling into feelings as knowledge-bearing phenomena. The working assumption here was that collaborative discussions and hermeneutic conversations on the topic coupled with descriptions of phenomena in a supportive environment would yield deeper insights and understandings of the topic in question.

I see these new paradigm methods and philosophies as having several appealing advantages in that they attempt to give all participants a full and autonomous voicing of their experience. This conversational method overlaps (at different points) with several other important research methods such as action research, feminist research, qualitative research, organic inquiry, appreciative inquiry, participative inquiry and action science because some of these methods also have an extended participatory and transpersonal epistemology as found in Grof (1985), Jackson (1989), Tambiah (1990), Tarnas (1992), Heron (1998), Bache (2000), and Ferrer (2002).

I felt it was useful to share my own experiences of birth and fatherhood and my own responses in the dialogue. As Jackson says, “Radical empiricism is first and foremost a philosophy of the experience of objects and actions in which the subject

itself is a participant. This implies that there is no constant, substantive self which can address constant, substantive others as objects of knowledge. We are continually being changed by as well as changing the experience of others” (1989:17).

It is impossible to render any kind of representative or authoritative voice around the subject of fathers-at-birth since everyone has a valid and different story. It is extremely important to note that I am not attempting to portray *the* male experience of childbirth because there simply is not one experience. I was specifically looking for transpersonally oriented moments in their narratives. Again, to borrow from Jackson, “The narrative approach is grounded in the lived experience” of the males in this study, therefore it “becomes a collage of information and avoids closure in any one person, society, or discourse” (1989:18). I am aware that this small group of interviewees is not representative of ‘men at birth or ‘men and maternity’. This is a small group of men aged between 20 and 73 who live in New Zealand and who were interviewed between 2002-2005 in and around Auckland city. I am also aware that asking people to recount and recall their birth stories is to place them in a very specific event and more or less wait for them to make sense of that event. Even so, both male and female narratives around birth can be shaped in many idiosyncratic ways: “This makes truth a variable, changing, unfolding artefact of creative minds on ever shifting social contexts, participating in, and shaping, given being” (Heron 1996:169).

Procreative male narratives and experience at birthing are not fully encoded or cognitively supported in Western culture: there is no *ancestral voice* telling them how to be - partly because they are historically dissociated from women’s realms and birthing business (Mead 1950, Priya 1992, Ginsburg and Rapp 1995:4). Likewise transpersonal experiences generated around birth can potentially take men and women

to the edge of what was, or is, deemed psychologically appropriate (according to the dominant medicalized world-view) or even possible for humans to experience.

Experiential encounters with death, transpersonal states, and spiritual emergencies, confrontation with spiritual-landscapes until very recently were assigned to a pathological basket in the Western world (Tart 1971, Peters 1994) or were reserved for quaint religious ‘nuts’. Thus men might find an added incentive to remain silent about their experience - perhaps the last thing a man wants to do (or admit to) in Western culture when attending his partner in time of her travail is to “flip-out” or “trip out!” Yet I heard from another young man, “men flip-out all the time”.

Many of the fathers in this research had not spoken of the more unfathomable aspects of their birthing experience prior to the interview with me so the interview was very much a vehicle for the carving of a cognitive niche for the epistemological exploration of male ‘birth’ narratives. However once they entered these reflective realms they were all quite capable (some were extremely sophisticated) when it came to articulating their feeling states during the birth scenario - coupled with self-analysis and cultural musings. It seemed to me obviously useful to have a group of men willing to ‘language’ the phenomenon as opposed to those who, for whatever reason, were unwilling to talk. Thus the people who came forward to be interviewed were undoubtedly enthusiastic about relating their experience - positive or negative.

The frequency of death imagery (for example) and the timing (the moments when this imagery would emerge into our conversation) were quite uncanny. These statements would seem to emerge in feeling-toned moments like the “I-thou” experience of Martin Buber (1958). As a researcher, after so many descriptions of these moments, I found myself anticipating a feeling in my body, a physical

acknowledgment of the participants' experience. I also became very interested in these phenomena which I saw as a psycho-cultural one.

I was interested in co-creating a space where the male voice could be heard without fear or favour (maybe a little favour) and where they could have an opportunity for speaking and shaping their experience in the way they wanted to shape it. We simply sat together for about 60 to 90 minutes and talked. I understand that stories do not necessarily offer closure or an accurate description of "a world as it really is" (Jackson 1989:17). Yet several strong and repetitive patterns emerged among this small group of procreative fathering males. The following quote from Nourse's work on Indonesian birth customs was also a guiding concept throughout the study:

We can move beyond Clifford's (1986) claim that all perspectives are partial truths and Tyler's (1986) assumption that the anthropologist should not analyse what she observes for fear of imposing her own cultural experience on another. Anthropologists can and should present their own analytic interpretations following Wolf (1992) who says it is our responsibility to do so. The reader needs the anthropologist to listen to various people's fragmentary views and tell us how they fit, whose voice is really central and whose is marginal? We must know if people with similar backgrounds have similar responses to events and experiences. If so these patterns deserve to be noted too (Nourse 1999: 20).

This method goes somewhat beyond the standard participant/observation that is the backbone of anthropology. The data gathered was based on epistemologies alternate to rationalism and Newtonian-Cartesian worldviews, and it includes aspects of phenomenology, lived experience, intuitive grasping, emphatic communion, knowing through the body, post-conceptual knowing and the inclusion of imagery, dreams, psychic phenomena and so-called psychosis as data. Such ways of knowing are radical departures from positivist science (e.g. Laughlin 1988).

Approach to Inquiry

I formally asked forty fathers ranging in age from 20 to 73, and ranging in occupation from labourers, to technicians, and educators to tell their stories of childbirth. Mostly I went to their homes and tape recorded unstructured hour-long conversations between my participants and me. When it came to formal taped interviews with my informants, my opening line was something like: “Tell me your experience of birth. Start where you want and then either at the end or when I feel like we are touching on a theme, I will ask you some questions, and I might direct you to some areas just to get your thoughts and experience”. We then conversed. Following Kuper: “In this context anthropology is seen as a conversation, implicating ethnographers, informants and the ancestral voices they invoke” (Kuper 1994:55). These unstructured conversations were the main method of gathering ethnographical data.

The questions tacitly guiding this research wheeled around the idea that if birth has ritual properties; then I might find, in the fathers’ narratives, the kinds of psychological changes wrought by ritual—including transpersonal states of consciousness (e.g. Davis-Floyd, 1992; d’Aquili, 1985; Peters, 1994; Laughlin, 1994). I chose purposefully not to ask direct questions about transpersonal states because I thought such a question might guide and shape the participants’ answers. Rather I asked a more general question and waited to see if fathers would go there without prompting from me.

I informed my participants that I was generally interested in men’s experience at birth because it had largely not been studied but made no reference to my spiritual and transpersonal interests. To my surprise, the fathers in my study frequently spoke of a psychological/emotional brush with death evoked over the duration of the pre- and

perinatal episode (i.e. around conception, gestation, labour and birth and post-partum) and often described states that in any other context would be deemed 'religious' or transpersonal (see chapters 7, 8 and 9).

Relevant Data

To study transpersonal consciousness among fathering males narrows the material I can use in this thesis. Anthropologists studying say 'transpersonal events' among Tibetan Dharma Meditation practitioners' (Laughlin 1994) or 'the relationship between myth and peyote hallucinations' (Meyerhoff 1974) or 'Jungian archetypes in spontaneous visions' (Young 1994) have a very specific research orientation. First and foremost they are interested in the *fact* of the event – that they *can* happen as events in consciousness. The first thing I wanted to establish was 'do some fathers experience transpersonal states?' Therefore I reasoned that there was little to be gained in exploring the fathers who do not have these experiences – although another laudable study among many other research possibilities in such a widely understudied field.

Let me draw some analogies with the study of feminist witchcraft in New Zealand (Rountree 2003). To study a specific group like this suggests that the group with whom the study is undertaken must be both feminist orientated and practicing some form of witchcraft; it should be feminist witchcraft. That other women are feminists, or participate in spiritual practices, while interesting anthropologically, are not the focus of such a study. The anthropologist, depending on her topic, narrows the research field but at the same time she opens up new vistas of human knowledge by dint of her intention.

In the same way I am not studying fathers-at-birth, but transpersonal events among some fathers-at-birth. Admittedly this is a funnelling and sifting process and cannot

do justice to the broad topic of 'fathers-at-birth. When a father's narrative contained a sentence or a description of a transpersonal moment, often no more than a nugget, then I would use this nugget as data. This approach might seem a bit like panning for gold or cherry-picking and these may not be bad analogies. I am aware that I privilege these small nuggets, these transpersonal fruits over the rest of the material I gathered, and this was my intention.

Having said that I can say that not all fathers had transpersonal experiences but almost all fathers spoke of psychological changes and challenges. It may have been that they did in fact have such experiences but could not find the right language or opening in the interview to tell me about it. It may be that a longer interview or one specifically asking questions about spiritual or transpersonal states would have elicited more exchanges around these states. It may be that they simply did not recognize or suppressed the experience. It may be that they did not have them at all for various reasons.

Three fathers in my study did not speak of anything remotely to do with transpersonal phenomena. Although one of these said he thought it was an expectation on him to have a 'peak experience' and was distrustful about such an expectation. Another said he had 'regressed' to a small child (he was psycho-dynamically trained psychotherapist) at the sight of his wife's copious blood and referred to himself as being in shock at the time. Another had a death experience and found the whole birthing scenario depressing and damaging to his marriage. He felt himself isolated and lost and was not able to make meaningful emotional contact with his wife and child.

I have used 58 statements from these interviews throughout this study to amplify certain typical categories of experience. Some of the statements are no more than

snippets/nuggets of conversation nevertheless they point directly to the phenomena in question. Some are analysed and others, because I think they speak for themselves, are not. Around 15 fathers were men born into the post WWII Baby-Boom generation now in their late 50s or early 60s and lived through the 1960s counter-cultural movement as students and made strong reference to these influences. These men tended to use spiritual terms for describing their birth/death experience. An example of this relationship was when a 46 year old man said birth had been a “peak experience but it came like a bam! Like pow! You know the Buddha says you just have one of those experiences and then that’s it. Well I don’t know about that. I can’t say that I got enlightened from the experience but it sure changed me.”

Most of the younger men did not use specific ‘religious’ language to describe their experience. Three younger men aged between 20 to 30 certainly used terms pertaining to Buddhism and ‘spiritual awareness’ while others used less ‘religious’ language like “high as a kite”, “rapture” “the most amazing experience I have ever had”, “I cried for the first time in years” or “it was like a mystical thing” or it was a “spiritual moment”.

Almost all men spoke of an ‘encounter with death’. Several described their death encounter as having a spiritual or mystical aspect to it. Thirty-nine fathers spoke of death (one way or the other). Many of these experiences overlap with each other in complex ways; in particular the theme of death was often co-present with, NDEs (near-death experiences), OBEs (out of body experiences), spiritual emergencies, and peak experiences). The one man who did not speak of death spoke of “rapture”. However, the term “rapture” can still pertain to psychological ‘peak experience’ or ‘ego-death’ in Grof’s map (1985) which I used as a central organising tool. Some spoke of death in a way which did not extend into ego-death or transpersonal states.

Six fathers described something like ‘out of body experiences’. Three participants spoke of ‘peak’ experiences. Another 7 spoke of ‘tripping’ or compared their experiences to drug use. Five spoke of OBE’s, another three suggested NDE’s. Another said he had a sense that “something cosmic” was happening there. Several compared their experiences to Buddhist influences. Others simply described moments that conveyed their sense of awe and mystery.

Recruiting Fathers

Informants were recruited by networking through acquaintances, friends, and chance meetings. Later, some fathers who heard I was studying ‘fathers and birth’ sought me out and volunteered themselves to the research. Also, a call for participants went out over a local radio station (Radio BFM). I rang the station and we went briefly on air. I stated that I was looking for individuals to participate in a study I was conducting to understand any emotional or psychological changes individuals might have experienced during childbirth.

Potential participants were invited to telephone me to discuss the research objectives and criteria and to make a time when I would interview them. Information sheets and consent forms were made available to the informants, both men and women, before the actual interview took place. Participants either talked over their informed consent with me on the telephone or at the meeting and interview and signed consent forms at that point. Permission was given to me by the participants to use statements and stories from the interview in my thesis and any journal articles that I might write.

In order to participate in this study a father must have participated (been present) in the site of birth with their partner and also needed to be willing to verbalize their experience. Ten participants engaged in the research as a result of the radio broadcast. The 30 other men were recruited informally; including three men who sought me out.

The criterion of being present at birth simply means that they must have accompanied or attended their partners during the birth of their children. This means that, either at home or in hospital, they were in the same room as the birthing mother.

Tangata Whenua²

During the course of my research I also spoke informally with several Maori people, including a male *tohunga*³ and midwife, about birthing. In almost all of these conversations *cosmology* was at the heart of the matter. I chose not to specifically seek Maori participants because I did not think I could do justice to the material without a much deeper understanding of the Maori world-view which would no doubt precipitate a more focused anthropological study (see Coney 1993:58, Donley 1998:122-137, Lukere & Jolly 2002). Furthermore from my snow-balling method used to recruit participants, which included a general invitation over the radio, no men who identified as Maori actually came forward, whereas 10 Pakeha (non-Maori) males did. I suspect that studying Maori fathers' experience of birth would be an important and equally rich research field. This would suggest another project perhaps with ethnicity at its base and a more qualified and appropriate researcher, who could possibly build on the positioning of this thesis. Having said that, I also feel that studying procreative fathering males of any ethnic background may well elicit certain universal cognitive experiences, and certain similar symbols related to biological universals, which are then shaped by culture, gender, religion, and political agendas (see e.g. Laughlin, 1988 and Aijmer 1992).

I want to acknowledge all those divergent areas and the people they concern who deserve to be researched (including a more comprehensive study of women's

² Meaning: 'People of the land' – 'whenua' also means placenta.

³ A sacred religious specialist.

transpersonal experience around birth) but were not since time and space did not allow.

Women's Stories and Transpersonal Events

Although fathers were the focal point of my study, in the course of my interviews with men we were sometimes joined by their partners, or on other occasions I specifically interviewed mothers and midwives. I collected narratives from several women whose experience I hoped would give me insights into how they perceived the father's actions, women's transpersonal states of consciousness, and insights into the birth revolution in the late 1960s. I interviewed twelve women - six of whom were midwives. During the course of my research I gathered some fascinating material from women about the transpersonal aspects of birthing and I will include this material when relevant. I did this because women's perspectives were useful to my research questions. Several women affirmed that partners were not there as patriarchal figures while others seemed to share transpersonal consciousness with their partners. Others spoke of the 'encounter with death' and in doing so affirmed the father's perspective that such an encounter was, at least sometimes, in the field. Several other women's stories affirmed the part played by the 'spiritual' counter-culture of the times. Therefore women's statements seem very relevant to this study. Again the positioning of this thesis could serve the researcher with women's transpersonal experience during reproduction as her/his figural topic.⁴

Midwives and women were recruited through similar methods to the men; largely through a process of networking. One father I interviewed early in my field-work introduced me to a midwife and she put me on to several others. Also a midwife was

⁴ I have written a separate article about women's transpersonal events at birth which is published by the Australian Midwifery Association's journal, *Women and Birth*, see Lahood (2006).

taking a paper at my university and I asked her for an interview. She also put me in touch with several other midwives. Some of the midwives also put me in touch with other women. Sometimes, when talking of my research to women in different social scenarios, they would mention their birthing stories and I would ask them for an interview.

Antenatal Class Participation

I should also mention my relationship to antenatal classes. As part of my research I sat in on two series of antenatal classes in Auckland run by two separate independent midwives for two different midwife collectives. The first class was run over eight nights in the Grey Lynn area and I was able to sit in. I did this to immerse myself as much as I could outside of talking with people casually or recording informants' stories. Although I was looking for men's stories post-birth the opportunity to join the antenatal classes was valuable in terms of gaining a sense of participation in the male pre-birth reality. This next point interested me: in both classes we were taught that children, as foetal persons, have agency - that is, they are active, conscious participants in birthing. This interested me on two counts; firstly, some of these children are on their way to becoming men and have participated in the 'female' reproductive cycle. So there is a problematic foetal standpoint to consider and this experience, while likely unconscious in the minds of men, may well be seeking symbolic elaboration (again, this could conceivably contribute to male rituals that utilise the imagery of reproduction). This must also surely problematise the archaic notion that birthing is therefore *only* women's business or that women birth alone, or that males have not participated in biological gestation and labour (which they have at the foetal level). And secondly because, at another level, this suggests that procreative fathering males are hearing that they too, must have had agency, that they too must

have some kind of awareness of the struggle of birth, and that they too *may* have memories of such a moment. Another memorable moment was observing men *without* their partners (who had other commitments or were tired) coming into the antenatal class by themselves which seems to suggest a strong commitment to the education process, partnership, the group and their families, and perhaps a signalling of their agency in the process or their status as father/partners. On another occasion we watched a video of a woman giving birth, and as I looked around I noticed many of the men and women wiping tears from their eyes. I became aware of the strength of emotion in the room and noted the relief and strange kind of ecstasy that accompanied this televised child and birthing mother and their final release from labour.

After interviewing one midwife I was invited to attend another antenatal class, one that she ran for her collective. I was not sure about joining at this point since I had already attended one set of classes and my interviews were well on the way. Furthermore I was not doing a study of antenatal classes in Auckland (again another interesting topic) but this woman was enthusiastic and extremely pro-father in the birthing situation and believed that fathers should 'catch the baby'. For this midwife 'catching the baby' was embedded in strongly held and articulated beliefs that this act empowered the ongoing psychic health for the child, the father, the mother and family. So I decided this was a good opportunity to observe a pro-father midwifery-based environment.

However observation was definitely *not* to be my only place in these classes and I was quickly enrolled as part of childbirth educating team. This was interesting anthropologically and could have easily opened the door onto some action research - but with commitments to the study in-hand I had to let that fantasy go. It was interesting nevertheless, because I was now being paid (\$50 every six weeks) to turn

up and engage in conversations with men and women about my research findings and particularly to endorse and valorise the therapeutic side of male presence.

Gaining informed consent from the antenatal trainers and the participants for me to sit in on the antenatal classes was an important issue. I started with a face to face conversation with the midwives who were facilitating the class and told them of my desire to become a participant observer. Once I gained their acceptance I asked the midwife for guidance on how to engage the class in getting their consent. We agreed that I would turn up to the opening class and that the midwife would introduce me to the class at the beginning with the caveat that if anyone found my presence disturbing I would leave. Once I was introduced I would then talk about my research interests. If anyone on reflection after the first night found my presence not wholly to their satisfaction they could ring or email the midwife with their thoughts so they did not have to publicly reveal their position. If, after a conversation with the midwife and an airing of any distress around my joining the class, the person still found my presence objectionable, then I would be asked not to attend further classes over the phone. I would bring information and consent forms the following week and hand them out to the class for the group to discuss and query. After that they would sign their consent. The process seemed to work and all parties appeared to make their decisions from an informed and safe position.

Ethics

In terms of ethics my major concern was for the emotional safety of the interviewee. Since participants were articulating a potentially traumatic situation then some care needed to be taken to ensure that my interviewee was psychologically safe during the interview. Because human mortality was an issue (some fathers might have lost children or even partners), I reasoned that they might have to confront some deep

existential feelings associated with life and death. I suggested in my ethics application, lodged with Massey University's Ethics Committee, that since I had substantial training in transpersonal psychology and a background in health, counselling, and psychotherapy, I was in a reasonable position to carry out the interview. During my career in transpersonal psychology I facilitated over 100 workshops where people make sense of their extra-ordinary experiences. My job in such a situation is to 'hold', and normalise or bring a certain degree of curiosity and dialogue to such moments while finding cultural narratives which support these experiences and thus perceive them in a healthy way. In one sense transpersonal phenomena and the psychological encounter with death are not strange to me. Also because participants were recruited through word of mouth it would appear that the impetus to share their experience came from the interviewee's own desire to relate their story to me.

I am of the opinion that to share an experience, to find the language around such events, is useful because it unhooks the story from its potential isolation and becomes part of a more social dialogue. Thus the research project enables fathers to express themselves around an area of their lives that is generally thought to be taboo, without, as I say, fear or favour. However, I was also aware that I was not in a role as a professional counsellor or therapist and my engagement with fathers was on a more conversational level. I also heard from several fathers that their experience around sharing their birth stories was valuable and that it put them in touch with feelings of worth. Furthermore participants were in no pressing danger; they were in a safe atmosphere engaged only in conversation about an event that they had already experienced. This minimalised the chances of the recollected material becoming harmful. Because of the information and consent procedures and the nature of the overall endeavour I thought it unlikely that the interview would become problematic.

Should a situation have arisen, I was in contact with a variety of health care professionals and could have made an appropriate recommendation; however, this did not occur.

There was also a very slim chance that the offspring of some of these men might, in time, have access to this document and that, theoretically at least, learning that their fathers had been negatively impacted by their arrival in the world might cause the offspring some psychological pain. However the chances of such an event occurring are unlikely and the pseudonyms used throughout the document will conceal the identity of all persons. The ethical considerations encapsulated here were submitted to the Massey University Ethics Committee who reviewed them before my interviews began.

Transpersonal Anthropology and Reproductive Consciousness

The mother's vagina was transformed into a golden tunnel through which the genipa people would travel when called by the medicine men, and her breath became a golden wind to speed them on their canoes made from the lips of her vagina (Michael Taussig 1993:113).

Introduction

Early anthropology tells us that birth-giving was a primary site of what was called 'primitive' magic (Tylor 1878, Frazer 1910, Malinowski 1925). The study of magic and sorcery (and by association trance), originally at the heart of rationalist anthropology's narrowed and ethnocentric taste for 'exotica' and the 'strange,' nevertheless invariably "dealt with weighty issues—the foundations of religion, the underlying features of the human psyche and, indeed, the very nature of science" (Kapferer 2003:1). As the discipline of anthropology became more self-conscious of its position, the interest in the study of magic was to eventually shrink and give way to later intellectual fashions or deflect onto "smaller more empirically manageable concerns" (Kapferer 2003:1-2).

However, magic and the anthropology of magic are beginning to reassert themselves (Kapferer 2003 et al, and see Taussig 1987, 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). My attention is arrested by a recent study that suggests the birth of magic is itself bound to birth-giving (Taussig 1993). It appears that post-colonial anthropology can also bring us back around again to a seat of origin magic: the reproduction of human bodies, emerging from the bodies of women, and astonishingly, according to Taussig, the birth of spirit-worlds (non-Euclidian landscapes, cosmic domains,

alterity-scapes¹) emerging from the body/minds of men conspiring unconsciously with their secret relationship to the wombs of women (1993). Just as the study of the birth of bodies can flow into the study of magic, so can the study of magic ebb back to the site of birth.

The study of birth-giving is one of the most enduring aspects of early and contemporary anthropology. So important is the subject that recently some have argued for “making reproduction [birth] central to social theory” (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995: 1). “Cultural construction of birth”, according to Goran Aijmer, “has been, and will remain, the starting point for anthropological investigation and thought” (1992:1). Notably, the study of fathers’ participation in birth-giving has a history almost as old as the discipline itself having been first studied by E.B.Tylor in the nineteenth century.

However the anthropological project surrounding birth-giving is one of high complexity reflecting the discipline’s academic moments; its early commitment to European rationalism, its gendered past, its colonial epoch; and the political ideologies that have shaped the kinds of research carried out on this central aspect of culture. Indeed the anthropological legacy reveals birth-giving as *a* central hub around which anthropology’s conceptual crisis has wheeled. This “enduring crisis driven by shifting certainties/uncertainties” has defined the discipline of anthropology as it has wrestled with what “constitutes reason and rationality and the appropriate perspectives for their revelation” (Kapferer 2003:2). A male ‘armchair’ scholar, Tylor, studied reports from male Christian missionaries of other males engaged in the

¹ Following Appadurai’s list of global flows he calls: ethnoscapas; financescapas; technoscapas; mediascapas and ideoscapas (1996: 33-37), McAlister (1998:156), has suggested an additional category – ‘religioscapas’ referring to the ‘subjective religious maps (and attendant theologies)’. I suggest alterity-scapes because they slip beyond the monolithic and ethnocentric edifices that the words religion and theology evoke. I am also interested in the potential for ‘mutant’ alterity-scapes

couvade (procreative rituals) finding in the father's behaviour a magical (and therefore 'mistaken') attempt to identify with the foetus.

Birthing is a highly territorialised event in terms of site and place, gender roles, language, practices, epistemologies, religious styles and worldviews. It has also been pointed out that while birth is a biological universal it is also always everywhere socially constructed and shaped to such a degree that we can think of birthing as a constantly contested and contesting cultural performance and a ritual pregnant with multiple meanings (Jordan 1978, Romalis 1981, Davis-Floyd 1992, Ginsburg and Rapp 1995). Birth-giving is at the heart of cultural reproduction, yet paradoxically, far from being a static cultural reproduction, it is more often embroiled in transgressive politically symbolic enactments (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995:2, Davis-Floyd 1992).

The research field is so rich that Charles Laughlin has suggested that a whole new sub-discipline, "perinatal² anthropology" is warranted (1989:261 and see 1990, 1992, 1994). I am inclined to agree having come to the conclusion that the womb (and by extension women's birthing bodies and the creation of new bodies) is one of the most politicised, aspect of the human body – not to mention mythologised, medicalised, demonised, theologised, pathologised and territorialised, and one deeply engaged in the intricacies and struggles of the human condition. I would, however, add one simple caveat to Laughlin's foresight; that perinatal anthropology is ultimately inseparable from transpersonal anthropology – a claim to be outlined in this chapter.³

The womb and reproduction have been implicated in some of the broadest categories of human activity such as creativity, architecture, origin mythologies, systems of healing, ritual patterns, masculine and feminine religious styles (such as

² 'Peri' from the Latin meaning 'around' and 'natal' from the Latin natalis meaning birth.

³ I would suggest they are actually two sides of the same coin and I do not find it useful or theoretically sound to separate this field into two disciplines. Laughlin's work often demonstrates how inseparable the perinatal and transpersonal realms are (see 1990, 1994).

female possession or male transcendental flight); the notions of pollution and purification, and cosmological systems (in which birth is often seen as a 'gateway' to mortality and therefore death). The foundations of cognition are deemed by some to emerge from a womb-world of perception and therefore the bodies of women (i.e. Merleau-Ponty 1964; Laughlin 1990); reproduction creates the division of labour (Mead 1950), under-girds both Hegelian dialectics and Marxist theory (O'Brien 1981) and creates 'universal' male domination (Ortner 1974). Susan Bordo (1989) sees the emergence of the modernist Cartesian mind-world as a direct expression of birth and the materialist cosmos as a:

"Drama of parturition": cultural birth out of the mother-world of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and creation of another world – the modern. The "great Cartesian anxiety," although manifestly expressed in epistemological terms, discloses itself as anxiety over *separation* from the organic female universe. Cartesian rationalism, correspondingly, [can be] explored as a defensive response to that separation anxiety, an aggressive intellectual "flight from the feminine" into the modern scientific universe of purity, clarity, and objectivity (1987:5)

Such insights have repercussions for anthropological research methods which we will attend to below. The womb and reproduction have been the central concern of political efforts by various movements in feminism, feminist anthropology, medical anthropology and spiritual feminism. Ongoing battles within psychoanalysis from Freud to Irigaray have been fought over the importance of the womb and its impact on both the human psyche and culture. And the power of the womb or rather, the discovery of a psychodynamic perinatal dimension in the human psyche was central in the formation of transpersonal psychology (and by extension the sub-discipline transpersonal anthropology). Birth-giving has been researched from many perspectives; but the largest body of anthropological work emerged in the late '70s early '80s with the rise of feminism. This growing critical interest in the ways that

birth was shaped cross-culturally offered a critique of Western biomedicine (McClain 1989:1). A small sample of these authors include Mead (1950); Mead and Newton (1967); Kitzinger (1964; 1982); Paul (1975); Raphael (1975); Jordan (1978); Shostak (1981); Kay (1982); MacCormack (1982); Cominsky (1982) Romalis (1981); Laderman (1983); Trevathan (1987); Michaelson (1988); Ginsburg and Rapp (1995); Davis-Floyd and Sargent (1997) and Nourse (1999). According to Ginsburg and Rapp the strength of this work—cultural specificity—was also its weakness. They suggest the focus on transnational and globalising influences on local practices is now primary (1995:1).

Another much smaller but growing research field was a renewed interest in fathers at birth with several semi-anthropological contributions, focused largely on Western culture, also emerging in the late '70s and onward including Lamb (1976,1987); Richman and Goldthorp (1978); Lomas (1978); Lewis (1982); Richman (1982); Jackson (1983); and Romalis (1981). A few anthropological studies have also emerged, among them Heggenhougen's study of contemporary male birthing as *couvade* (1980); Katz and Konner's study of father-infant relations in five cultures (1981); and, very recently, Reed (2005), published a study on contemporary fathers from an anthropological perspective.

Orientation

My interest is in what philosopher Margaret O'Brien has called "reproductive consciousness" which women and men share - but differently (1981:27-29). However O'Brien is a Marxist feminist and it is the *transpersonal* nature of reproductive consciousness of men that is my study's concern.⁴ While many of the studies

⁴ Charlene Spretnak says that most "feminist anthropologists view culture from a Marxist perspective, in which considerations of spiritual power would be symptomatic of brain damage" (1982:129).

mentioned above have alluded to what I will call 'transpersonal' phenomena they have not necessarily used the terminology in their research and none (that I have seen so far) have sought to specifically explore this area through a transpersonal anthropological orientation.⁵ Let me give an example of what I consider to be transpersonal reproductive consciousness emerging from women-centred anthropology in this statement by Sheila Cominsky from her study of Guatemalan childbirth:

Bodily movements, such as twitches or tremblings are also felt. Some midwives say they feel movements, like air, in the hand or some other part of the body when someone is going to come to call for a birth. If it's in the left hand, the birth will be delayed, and if the right, it will be quick. These bodily manifestations, such as dreams, twitches, and sickness, are regarded as messages from God or the spirits. Supernatural forces are constantly manifested throughout the midwife's body. The body is sacred and is not separated by a boundary from the moral, social, and supernatural context, but is constantly permeated by these influences (1982:208).

Another example from Sheila Kitzinger's study of Jamaican women's birthing: "Her entry into pregnancy is thus not merely a physiological occurrence but a ritual state and one which involves the spirit world" (1982:195).

Before continuing I should note here that while the word "supernatural" has a traditional usage among anthropologists and is still habitually used, many have parted company with the term. For example, Godfrey Lienhardt says the distinction this word implies between "men" and spirits is one foreign to Dinka thought (1961:28). Morton Klass has critiqued "supernatural" as being "remorselessly" ethnocentric, dichotomous, and ultimately redundant for anthropologists because it assumes that Western science knows what is real and what is not. Nor does he find

⁵ A notable exception is Charles Laughlin's "Womb=Woman=World: Gender and Transcendence in Tantric Buddhism" (1990) but he was not exploring birth-giving as much as the roots of cognitive development.

the use of the terms “extraordinary and ordinary” advantageous; he suggests that these are simply stand-ins for the terms supernatural and natural:

Science investigates the natural world; that which is not amenable to scientific (or at least scholarly/rational) investigation is beyond the bounds of the natural or real. If there were any way to test the particular assertion about the nature of the universe, any way to measure or objectively verify, we would immediately move it to the natural; failing all of that, however, such an assertion belongs to the realm of the supernatural (Klass 1995:25).

Likewise Young and Goulet find no valid use for such terms as “extrasensory” or “paranormal” (I would add “preternatural” and “superstitious”) citing Margaret Mead who said that such categories “exclude scientific research rather than invite it” (1994:299). Nevertheless “supernatural” does point to something and various quotations throughout this study make use of it. I would like to introduce the term *transpersonal* as a potential replacement; the reasons for this reframing will become apparent as the chapter proceeds. My definition follows: the word transpersonal is a purposefully ambiguous term recently introduced into Western culture to account for and legitimise feelings, perceptions, experiences and events of expansive or alternate forms of consciousness. The term is linked etymologically with two Latin words: *trans* – meaning *beyond* or *through*, and *personal* from *persona* – meaning a mask. Transpersonalism does not erase human personhood rather it values states of consciousness beyond and through habitual egoic identifications. The human body, the substantial environment and culture can be disclosed in non-ordinary states of consciousness as ‘transpersonal’ phenomena. Transpersonal states are the human person’s apprehensions of immanent and transcendent spheres of reality and mediate non-dichotomous participatory relationships between human and non-human potentials.

The literature on fathers and birthing is also peppered with potential transpersonal cues; for example, the venerable couvade itself may suggest the possibility of spiritual identification with the foetus via mimetic trance states, or male participation in cycles of cosmic procreativity. Christianity's iconography posits the newborn 'saviour' as something of a transcendental object and while human male biological procreativity is denied in this system (Immaculate Conception and Virgin Birth) such denial could itself suggest transpersonal dimensions.⁶ Soldiers returning from World War II saw the birth of a child as a way of "atoning for one's wartime evils" and the re-creation of "good men" (Benedek 1946 in Richman and Goldthorp 1978). It is possible that this transformational process is also resonant with notions of pollution and purification found in patriarchal religions (see Sered 1994:202 and Douglas 1966). Is such participation with new life and life giving the antidote to participation in culturally sanctioned death-dealing? Frazer explored similar themes in *The Golden Bough* under the title "Manslayers Tabooed" (1911:165-90).

The ensuing post-war baby-boom itself may have followed such an impulse, speculatively, the birth of a generation imbued with transcendental properties? Interestingly enough the baby-boom generation would celebrate and participate in birthing in ways perhaps never seen before – and I find it highly significant that fathers of this trans-national and global generation entered birthing at the height of America's war on Vietnam in the city most recognised for its liberation and anti-war protests, and the birth of the counter-culture – San Francisco. What follows is a telling comment from a male San Franciscan communitarian at the birth of his son in 1968.

⁶ Augustinian Christianity has operated on a dualism between body and spirit fostering a dissociation from the body in the name of transcendental release.

There would be no war if every man received his son onto this planet in this way and had known his wife in this act of ecstasy (Waltzer and Cohen 1971).⁷

Furthermore fathers in early 1980s' research speak of birthing as having "cosmic overtones – there being a 'power' and 'unity' that held sway over their birth outcomes" (Richman 1982:97); and finally, contemporary fathers often describe climactic peak episodes at the birth of their children (Maslow 1964, Tanzer 1976, Jackson 1983, Mehl 1978:94) - the very notion of 'peak experience' issuing from San Francisco's humanist and transpersonal therapeutic counter culture.

At this point an introduction to transpersonal anthropology seems warranted. We begin with a review of the basic premise of the transpersonal movement followed by a critical review of anthropology's research legacy as pertaining to 'reproductive consciousness'. This is not to say that these research epochs are not useful or that should be abandoned outright but when it comes to what I am calling 'transpersonal consciousness' around reproduction these epochs are filled with all kinds of biases which I will point out.

Transpersonal Psychology

The academic disciplines of social anthropology and transpersonal psychology are involved in a deepening reciprocal exchange, with each discipline contributing in significant ways to the other in what could be called a feedback loop. According to Laughlin, "Transpersonalism labels a movement in science toward the acknowledgement and significance as data of extraordinary experiences that go beyond the boundaries of ordinary ego-consciousness" (1994:100). Transpersonal psychology, emerging in the 1960s and carrying out its own academic research into

⁷ This statement also alerts us to the vast political, social and transpersonal agendas alive at the time father's entered birthing sites in the Western world and points to some of the many meanings his presence represents.

transpersonal states, (Grof's phenomenological LSD studies and Maslow's research interests in 'peak experiences' can be seen as historical precedents) had begun to "integrate pragmatic science with spirituality" (Chinen 1996:17). This hybridizing project may "represent a genuinely new development" and an "enduring contribution to American culture" says Allan Chinen (1996:17). Nevertheless, this development is in no way limited to America and it has always had an international flavour and following.

Like Freud's psychoanalytic movement before them, transpersonal psychology also turned to anthropological studies to strengthen its arguments (Freud 1913 and see Kroeber 1927). However, far from seeking a warrant to reduce religious experience to psychopathology, as did Freud and his followers, the so-called 'Fourth Force' in Western psychology (after behaviourism, psychoanalysis and humanism) looked to the discipline of anthropology for clues in its wider ethnographic contexts to further understand the Western person's 'religious experiences', numinous altered states, and peak experience. Rosemary Anderson says that a "distinguishing characteristic" of the movement "has been a keen desire, even an urgency, to integrate learnings and spiritual practices of indigenous and ancient spiritual traditions" (1998:xxi). This was an effort to liberate such phenomena from reductionist Western psychology 'couched', as it were, in a cramping materialist paradigm to which Freud was committed (see Grof 1985, Ferrer 2002).

According to transpersonal psychologist, Roger Walsh, there is a "long history of the conflation [of religious or spiritual specialists with persons deranged and delusional] and pathologising of religious states" by Western psychology (1995:26). He says, "Asian meditative and yogic states were often regarded as pathological and their practitioners were regarded as neurotic at best or psychotic at worst".

Furthermore, he notes a widely observed bias in clinical psychiatry and psychology to pathologise unusual experiences” (1995:27). An example is Franz Alexander, a well-known psychoanalyst who decided that the states achieved in Buddhist meditation were a form of self-induced catatonia (Grof 1985:334). Having observed catatonia first hand when working in a psychiatric institution in New Zealand and observed Buddhist meditators during a stay at a monastery in Thailand, I find it hard to imagine how such an ethnocentric and biased conclusion could be made unless it were driven by a need for ultimate authoritative knowledge coupled with a lack of first-hand ethnographic evidence.

Resistant currents in the humanist and the consciousness-expanding movements toward this bias laid the foundations for what would eventually become transpersonal psychology. Two figures stand out as seminal architects of the early consciousness expanding movement, they are Aldous Huxley (a mystic and novelist) and Allan Watts (a theologian and advocate of Zen Buddhism), who, according to Theodore Roszak, had set themselves a religious task that was “one of synthesis and assimilation” (1969:157). He writes:

In much the same spirit in which Freud had set out to reclaim the dream as a form of evidence that could bear the weight of scientific speculation, Watts and Huxley wanted to recapture the value of *neglected cultural traditions for which no disciplined method of study existed*. The method they proposed was the systematic cultivation of states of abnormal consciousness that approached these traditions by outflanking the discursive, and logic chopping intellect (my emphasis) (1969:158).⁸

The humanist movement would provide the final catalyst that launched the new discipline Watts and Huxley had imagined—transpersonal psychology. In particular,

⁸ A close look at this statement reveals it be one with which to pinpoint the beginnings of transpersonal anthropology in its embryonic form, in particular the cultivation of states ‘abnormal’ to Western culture.

Maslow's positive viewing of peak experiences among healthy subjects and Grof's pioneering LSD research were pivotal to this project. It is important not to underestimate the implications of this watershed - as Stanislav Grof says:

Direct spiritual experiences, such as feelings of cosmic unity, a sense of divine energy streaming through the body, death-rebirth sequences, visions of light of supernatural beauty, past incarnation memories, or encounters with archetypal personages, [were] seen as gross psychotic distortions of objective reality indicative of a serious pathological process or mental disease. Until the publication of Maslow's research, there was no recognition in academic psychology that any of these phenomena could be interpreted in any other way. The theories of Jung and Assagioli [psychosynthesis] pointing in the same direction were too remote for mainstream academic psychology to make serious impact (1985:334).⁹

According to Walsh it came as something of a shock when these "early pioneers turned their attention eastward and found that Asian psychologies, philosophies, religions and contemplative disciplines contained detailed accounts, not just of peak experiences, but of whole families of peak experiences and systematic techniques to induce and sustain them" (Walsh and Vaughan 1993:124). It is also extremely important to note here that transpersonalists deliberately set about to deconstruct the Western pathologising bias and "reduce this cultural myopia and to shift society, psychology and other disciplines from monophasic to polyphasic perspectives" (see glossary) (Walsh and Vaughan 1993:125).

I believe their project is exactly what Peter Berger was speaking about with the process of "cosmization" outlined in *The Sacred Canopy* (1967). According to Berger, cosmization is the "enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established" (1967:25). However Berger also points out the West's divergence from the sacred, "Particularly in modern times there have been thoroughly secular attempts at

⁹ The contemporary transpersonal movement would revitalize Jungian psychology and Psychosynthesis.

cosmization, among which modern science is by far the most important” (1967: 27). We can see the transpersonal project within Western culture as an attempt to re-skein the materialist universe with a more sacred projection, thus, as Anderson tells us, “Transpersonalists seek to sacralize the ordinary” (1998:xxiii). Again, this is strongly resonant with Berger’s comment that in cosmization, “The sacred quality attributed to the ordinary events of life *itself* retains its extraordinary character, a character that is typically redefined through a variety of rituals and the loss of which is tantamount to secularization, that is, to a conception of the events in question as nothing but profane” (Berger 1967:26). Moreover, as Anderson writes:

Ordinary experiences are not typically thought of as transpersonal or potentially transformative in nature. Nevertheless to inquire about their transpersonal nature or potential changes the frame of reference for understanding these ordinary experiences (1998:xxiii).

One of my central arguments is that the presence of fathers at the birth of their children in America is tied to this transpersonally oriented process of re-cosmisation. Furthermore the re-ritualisation of secular birthing beginning in the American counter-culture, which both revitalized and re-visioned birthing as a potential site of ‘peak experience’, spread transnationally and globally and originally *helped seed* similar practices in New Zealand. I feel it is important to examine the pathologising of non-ordinary-states-of-consciousness (and their re-visioning) first, as well as examining how fathers’ presence in Western birth sites has also been pathologised.

Western Colonisation of Alterity-Scapes

Obviously culturally sanctioned extraordinary experiences of consciousness are in no way new to anthropology with its long research legacy into dreaming, ritual, evil spirits, healing spirits, religious practice, spirit possession, communing with

ancestors, sacrifice, conversion, shamanic practices, rites of passage, *communitas*, performance, mimesis, trance states, magic, taboo, psychotropic plant use, and its attempts to understand religion and the sacred. However this research legacy is problematic because anthropology historically emerged as a “bastion of positivist and materialist science” (Laughlin 1988:2) and this is reflected in its studies of human religious activity and consciousness. Inevitably there has been a powerful colonisation of religious practices and their transpersonal offspring by some anthropologists who have assigned theories to sacred experience that are, among other things, strongly reductionist, materialist, meaningless, Oedipal or devilish (Bennett 1996, Lewis 1973, Stipe 1999). Turner (1992:4) has called this problem “intellectual imperialism”; the imposition of Western theory on native cultures, Henry Corbin called it, “spiritual imperialism” - the imposition of one religious style over another (1969:210). I also think of it as the colonisation of alterity-scapes (see glossary), which includes both the destruction of psycho-spiritual landscapes and the creation of hybridized cosmic domains (see chapter 7).

In most cultures, before the rise of Western rationalism and its ethnocentric science, reproductive processes were embedded in ritual systems of religious significance with, as Gottlieb and Buckley remind us, “wide cosmological ramifications” (1988:8). However gendered religious traditions, such as Christianity, Buddhism (and later, spiritual feminism) also place limits on transpersonal knowing. I will now review the way these systems have addressed visionary and religious experience in relation to reproduction. We start with a lengthy and hopefully fruitful review of the Christian legacy; I feel this is justified since Christianity is pivotal in shaping European birthing rituals and the anthropology of consciousness.

Forbidden Fruits

As suggested by many writers in the women's movement, anthropologists, and other researchers, there is a profound relationship between women's unique biological processes and the transpersonal knowing that such biological processes can mediate (see e.g. Paul 1975; Tanzer 1976; Falk and Gross 1980; Buckley and Gottlieb 1988; Spretnak 1982; Kitzinger 1966, 1982; MacCormack 1982; Arms 1975, 1994; McClain et al 1989; Miller-McLemore 1985; Davis-Floyd 1992; Sered 1994 and Wright 1995).¹⁰ They note that menstruation, copulation, conception, gestation and womb-life, labour, birth-giving, breast-feeding and the role of midwife have been central to women's epistemic and transpersonal knowledge, and that they have, in some cultures, represented the very wellsprings of religious knowledge, sacral experience, rite, ritual, dance, social ties, and spiritual training. For example, transpersonal researcher John Heron (paraphrasing) Miller-McLemore (1985) says: "Mothers in particular, through the experience of pregnancy and giving birth, enter a profound spiritual knowledge of divine developmental immanence" (1998:11).

With the emergence of spiritual feminism in the early-mid '70s (Spretnak 1982; Sered 1994) feminists looking back into Western culture showed how strong currents of ambivalence, misogyny and outright violence toward women's bodies and the reproductive function were attempts to diminish female status, charisma, sacral/sexual power, thus diminishing or outlawing woman's epistemological claims. Australian Germaine Greer (*The Female Eunuch* 1970) and theologian Rosemary Radford-Ruether claimed that regaining control of the womb was of central importance to feminism (1980 and see Anne Oakley 1976). Radford-Ruether writes, "Aristotle

¹⁰ This is not to suggest that biological processes are the only domain for women's religious or spiritual knowing, however we can only know through the human body and women's bodies do participate and experience very obvious and dramatic levels of procreative activity. An informant told me that the feeling of a baby coming out of her vagina was like having an "orgasm with God".

proclaims through two thousand years of teachers that woman is a misbegotten male, that man's seed alone provides the form of the child" (1980:260). The idea that a homunculus was deposited by men into the womb survived into the Catholic Church, "the little person, complete with soul ... is simply housed in the woman for nine months, without acquiring any attributes from the mother" (Ehrenreich and English 1973:3). However, the child, after its passage through *mater* (mother) must now enter a spiritual landscape presided over by 'God' through a second birth - a baptismal purification, a cleansing designed and enacted by a male priesthood to deliver the deposit from the 'polluting' mother's body, to separate the child from the realm of women/biology and into a sanctified life in Christ (Radford-Reuther 1980: 260).

Birth activist Susan Arms notes the role of the Church, its style of religious organization, and its impact on the human psyche, culture, and birthing (1994:37-41). In such a design spirituality is rigidly dichotomised with the body, in particular the female body, deemed closer to 'fallen' *mater* or nature (see e.g. Ortner 1974; Merchant 1983:144) and 'fallen' nature was seen as closer to the devil.

Within this dichotomous ideational matrix, humans needed to place evil outside of themselves and so the idea of a scapegoat was developed as something on which sin and blame were heaped - the sacrificial goat was then either killed or cast out ostensibly purging the villagers of their 'sins' (Arms 1994:39, Frazer 1910).¹¹ Eventually both nature and women would become demonized containers for disavowed psychic energy and God himself would shape women's birthing travail as a punishment visited upon women for the sin of being female – a vengeful angst rooted in Eve's taste for forbidden fruit and the 'fall' into materiality (immanent transpersonal knowledge?) (Arms 1975:15).

¹¹ The theme of "transference of evil" onto a scapegoat and the ridding of that evil through sacrifice was explored by Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1911).

Arms points out that the Church Fathers would takeover organise and prescribe what could be known when it comes to transpersonal experience and that this would have horrendous consequences leading to the deaths of thousands of creative thinkers as heretics and eventually the bloodthirsty witch-hunts of the late Middle Ages:

One edict in particular had tremendous impact on the lives of ordinary people and affected women and childbirth for more than a thousand years. The Second Council of Nicaea, in 787 A.D., discarded the concept of personal imagination and individual mystical experience because, it was believed, only church clergy could experience God in a direct way. The church taught that it was impossible for ordinary mortals to experience God directly and to assert that one could do so was blasphemous (Arms 1994:40).

In short, there was an andocentric and hegemonic monopoly on transpersonal knowing. With this statement we see that the Church could not have sanctioned women's transpersonal states catalysed by birthing. Pregnancy, conception, copulation, gestation, and particularly birth-giving can, as has been suggested, trigger powerful transpersonal disclosures and altered states of consciousness. Such changes in consciousness are by definition mystical, sacred and direct bodily experiences. Therefore the so-called "dissociation" (Turner 1992: 90-91) found often among birth-giving women in all likelihood was an organic physiological 'rite' that had (and has) the potential to take some women into a deeper revelation of self and cosmos, and therefore a source of women's transpersonal knowing (no priestly hierarchy stands between a woman and such organic revelations). Mediaeval women's earthy and pagan religious practices included many possibilities for transpersonal experiences - gathering together in circles and folk dances (Wilkie 1994), erotic expression, aiding in birth-giving as midwives and ritual specialists (Oakley 1976), healing in general, and knowledge of psychotropic and herbal plant use (Harner 1973).

However such immanent or indwelling charismas and the status of women healers and midwives participating in magic, erotic practices became threatening, demonised and heretical (Oakley 1976: 25-28). The connection between midwives and witches certainly existed in the elaborate and perversely erotic fantasies of two German Dominicans who wrote the infamous witch-hunting manual, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486). The 15th century friars Kramer and Sprenger pronounced that; “No one does more harm to the Catholic Faith than midwives” (1971:66). This treatise, widely published and sanctioned by Pope Innocent VIII, was an extremely influential text (Sidky 1997:11, 25). Because of their status and association with magical, pagan, sexual and birthing powers, midwives were soon labelled heretics and witches and became the targets of a brutal political, economic and religious annihilation by the Catholic Church’s priesthood coupled with the growing power of a male medical fraternity (Ehrenreich and English 1973, see also Romalis 1981; Oakley 1976, Arms 1975, 1994, Rich 1979).

Possession in *Femina Religiosa*

I suggest that compounding, even driving, the Church’s monopoly on spiritual knowing and its narrowing of the epistemological horizon may have been ancient andocentric ideas that sex, birth, women’s immanent charismas, and transpersonal states were associated with *possession* which, in the Judeo-Christian world, was associated with evil and the demonic (see e.g. Bourguignon 1976:51-52; Bilu1999; Sidky 1997:155).¹² Ancient Hebrew and Greek traditions associated illness with

¹² Occurring in 10 % of all human births, there is some evidence to suggest that the “curse” of preeclampsia and eclampsia, a seizure causing the death of mothers and neonates would have become associated with ‘possession’ (Robillard, Chaline, Chaouat & Hulseley 2003). They write that, “In all human cultures and for 99% of the existence of our species, epilepsy has been associated with possession. Eclampsia appears in the medical literature as early 4,200 years ago” (2003:131). They suggest our ancestors would have recognised the condition and responded with cultural patterns around the dangerous condition such as “myths” (2003:133). It is probable, I believe, that these “myths” would

demons and the “unclean”. The cure for illness qua demonic possession was effected through purification usually by dramatic exorcism (driving out unclean spirits); this healing tradition continued into Mediaeval Europe (Bourguignon 1976:51-52).

Possession, according to anthropologist H. Sidky, was the *sine qua non* of the alleged witchery along with such crimes as copulating with devils, conversing with spirits, giving birth to demons (1997:45,182) and, the offering of newborn children to devils (Ehrenreich and English 1973:10). Interestingly enough such acts were seen as heresies by the Church (Sidky 1997:97-98) whereas Anne Oakley maintains they were in fact “reproductive crimes” (1976:26). These same activities, according to the ethnographic record, when observed cross-culturally, are deemed a “legitimate means of contacting the supernatural world” (Sidky 1997:55 and see Bourguignon 1976, Sered 1994, Lewis 2003). Furthermore such contact is associated with altered states; disassociation, and transpersonalism (Lewis 2003).¹³ I will now parallel these so-called heresies with their cross-cultural variants in contexts freed from demonizing Judeo/Christian prejudices.

Erica Bourguignon has noted this pattern in the anthropological literature i.e. there exists a predominant aptitude for spirit possession among women, and the belief that spirit beings can enter human bodies and that the human host can either share with, or become, deity, ancestor or demon (1976, 1983). Among men it is an altered state of

be enacted in ritual i.e. obstetrical/midwifery manoeuvres designed to ward off the catastrophic condition. They also write “Because of the importance of eclampsia in humans, the association between delivery and seizures should be recorded in one way or another in the human memory (myths, tales). The morals of these stories should be very instructive with regard to their interpretations of these convulsions in childbirth” (2003:133). Perhaps early preliterate homo sapiens encoded their knowledge of eclampsia in ritual.

¹³ Nevertheless Sidky makes no mention of the strong relationship between possession, birthing and midwifery (see Sered 1994; McClain 1989; Kitzinger 1982; Cominsky 1982). He also seems unaware of the relationship between the Church-sanctioned, university educated, male medical takeover of medicine and eventually obstetrics and its relationship to the witch craze. This discourse has been well documented by feminist treatments of the subject see (Ehrenreich and English 1973; Arms 1975 ; Oakley 1976; Rich 1977; Romalis 1981; Merchant 1983; Bordo 1987) among others and is entirely absent in his version.

consciousness - often involving 'spiritual flight' (not usually associated with possession) that predominates.¹⁴ In fact Sered suggests a clear demarcation between a male shaman's transcendently oriented soul flight to different worlds and women shamans' immanent "indwelling" – the difference between "leaving one's body with sharing one's body" (Serend 1994:187 but see Lewis 1986: 85, 92).¹⁵

What the so-called shamans in women's religions seem to do is incorporate into their own bodies other personae (gods, spirits, ancestors, *nats*, etc.).¹⁶ This process is what in the anthropological and religious literature is known as being a medium—a channel for a supernatural being who wishes to communicate with beings in this world. Cross-culturally, there does seem to be compelling evidence to associate women with spirit possession (mediumship) and men with ecstatic flight of the soul (shamanism) (Serend 1994:186).

Judaic tradition did indeed have a socially sanctioned ceremonial category for ecstatic flight (but apparently no complementary process for women). Roger Walsh notes the existence of a spiritual discipline that can be seen as an analogue with what we might consider to be more overtly 'shamanic' cultures. These were the *Merkabah* or chariot practices: "in which practitioners tried to recreate *Ezekiel's* vision of the divine chariot. After rigorous prayer and discipline, practitioners would experience themselves as ascending through the seven heavens and confronting fearful guardians until they were finally granted a vision of the throne of God" (1995:36). This was related to an effort to liberate to 'soul' from the confines of mater. Walsh does not specify the gender of the practitioners of this ritual, but it clearly follows the masculine pattern. Also, as Yoram Bilu notes:

¹⁴ Certainly men in some cultures are possessed and accommodate spirits and powers just as some women engage in ecstatic flight (e.g. see Lienhardt 1961 on male Dinka possession and Potter 1974, Paul and Paul 1975 on female shamanistic flight).

¹⁵ Lewis argues that a shamanistic complex exists which includes both possession and flight. He says that the initial possession can then evolve into spiritual flight and therefore cannot be restricted to either gender (see chapter 7).

¹⁶ A *nat* is a birth spirit.

Unlike many other cultures (Bourguignon, 1973; Crapanzano and Garrison, 1977; Lewis, 1971), Judaism did not possess the positive category of ceremonial possession, in which the dissociative state is not stigmatized but socially approved, and the adept seeks to establish a symbiotic relationship with the possessing agent (Bilu 1999:197).

Within Judaic mystical tradition the transmigration of souls (the dead) occurred at *conception* and *birth* and a woman's body could house a sinner's spirit (*dybbuk*) when fleeing from celestial persecution by angelic or demonic beings. From the 12th century a doctrine was elaborated in which possession was emically equated with "impregnation", "penetration" and "disease" and could occur even *after* a person was born (Bilu 1999:197).¹⁷ A soul caught cosmologically between heaven and hell could only be purged from this liminal housing in the body by harsh exorcistic measures instigated by Rabbinical-healers (Bilu 1999:197). I note with interest that Rabbinical-healers also presided over obstructed births (Romalis 1981:13)¹⁸. There are obvious parallels between respectively: possession with pregnancy (the accommodation of another within the female body); exorcistic rituals with rituals for obstructed birth; and finally the birth of the 'housed' baby with the removal of *dybbuk*.

It is well known that one of the major charges laid against women in medieval times was that of copulating (penetration) with demons, devils, and beasts (possessing agents). Significantly, Sered notes that in wider ethnographic studies, "women are believed to be particularly skilled at, or prone to, possession trance, the indigenous interpretation (emic) is that women are softer, easier to penetrate and that is why gods

¹⁷ According to the *Malleus Maleficarum* "They [witches] infect with witchcraft the venereal act and the conception of the womb" cited in Ehrenreich and English (1973:11).

¹⁸ A pattern exists in the anthropological record of male ritual and trance specialists engaged in the crises of obstructed birthing see i.e. (Romalis:1981:13) on Hindu and Jewish practices; (Gross 1980) on Australian Aboriginals; (Levi-Strauss 1963) on Cuna medicine men; (Bieseke 1997) on Ju/'hoan trance dancers; and see (Nourse 1999) on Indonesian practices and (Hart 1965:23); and (Laderman 1983:40) on Malay *Bomoh*.

or spirits choose them as vehicles” (1994:189). Again the anthropological literature reveals that spirit possession practices are also homologous with both heterosexual intercourse as well as pregnancy (Sered 1994:189; Graham 1976:296). I.M. Lewis observes the widespread belief in the possibility of human sexual encounters with “supernatural” beings, “ecstatic communion is thus essentially a mystical union” implying impregnation (1971:51 and see 2003). The *loa* in Haitian vodou has similar erotic resonance with the possessed women seen as a “horse” that the spirit “mounts” and “rides” (Driver 1991: 68).¹⁹ Here again positive analogues of these exist in socially supported ceremonial categories in both women’s religions and women’s religious cult-groups co-existent with male dominant religion (see Sered 1994).²⁰

Bearing children may well have been fruitful experiential training for possession and midwifery (Sered 1994:196) and possession is seen as a practice combining medical, sacral and community dimensions (Csordas 1987). This pattern follows the “wounded healer” trajectory of the shamanistic career (Halifax 1979). Hart reports that in the Philippines, breech birth, from the foetal standpoint, was a prerequisite for midwifery training in adult life and was related to a logic that inferred such persons were already well versed in dealing with obstruction (1965: 22-23). According to McClain “In the process, [of possession] ties among women are promoted and strengthened, both laterally among cult members and vertically between female ancestors and living female descendants” (1989:15). Recruits to female cult groups among the Luvale of Zambia are women who have previously experienced the devastations of child mortality, cult adepts utilize possession and trance to evoke female ancestors who aid in the rigours of reproduction (McClain1989:12, 15).

¹⁹ The Christian Eucharist also has a deep symbolic relationship to impregnating and reproduction according to Dahlberg (1991). Oral ingestion and accommodation of the transubstantiated body and blood of Christ has a peculiar parallel with female possession practice.

²⁰ Sered employs the terms ‘female dominant religion’ and ‘male dominant religion’ throughout her 1994 study.

Furthermore, within Cantonese shamanism, the female medium's dead children are her spirit guides (Sered 1994:190). Can we say – familiars – disembodied family?

There are many ethnographic reports with transpersonal elements tied to these patterns of recruitment and such elements are thought to emanate from supernal (celestial) realities. Midwives can experience a divine calling to their careers through “special dreams”, illness or finding strange objects (Cominsky 1982:207); the transmission of midwifery training and skills from ancestral spirits through repetitive dreams and visions (Hart 1965:23); the evocation of gendered “supernatural” ancestral spirits to aid in their craft (Cominsky 1982: 208, McClain 1989:15; Laderman 1983:132). Mayan midwives are seen as ritual specialists calling upon the spirits of deceased midwives (*Comadronas invisibles*) and importantly Cominsky says, “During birth they [midwives] are accompanied by these spirits” (1982: 208). In short, the housing (domestication) in the female of powerful spirit ancestors is a transpersonal medical intervention complex that gleans its authoritative knowledge from altered states that appear to evoke a relationship with the realm of the dead.

Jamaican ritual specialists display a hybridization of ritual and cosmology (after Brendbekken 2003) drawn from Christian, African, and women's cult sources. Midwives or “shepherdesses”, according to Kitzinger, use singing and dancing to move into possession states and “speak in tongues”. This activity, she says, is exclusive to women (1982:196):

A lighted candle and beaker are placed on the ground in the centre of the moving circle of women. Candle and water are symbols of the spirit which, since the experience sought is one of rebirth, we may interpret also as representing phallus and amniotic fluid. The women gyrate around these sacred objects with pronounced pelvic movements as they become ecstatic, reiterating “Lahd! Lahd! Jesus! Jesus!” with sharp exhalations of breath followed by quick breaths in. As the tempo increases the speed of breathing also increases so that overbreathing and

subsequent hyperventilation occur. Resulting peripheral anesthesia eliminates consciousness of pain when they become possessed by the spirit and fall and roll on the floor. This may be interspersed with short periods of unconsciousness. The process by which this happens is called 'laboring' (1982:196).

Returning to the European situation, we understand that much time and effort was spent by witch-hunters on extracting tortured confessions from women about their erotic dealings with devils (Ehrenreich and English 1973; Sidky 1997). Compare this with a parallel drawn from the Burmese Buddhist world where *nats* (spirits) were a key figure at birth (Sered 1994:299):

In the Burmese case the difference between the female *natkadaw* and male exorcists is instructive. The women religious specialist works by propitiating *nats*, soliciting their help, asking them to possess her, and acquiescing to their power. The male exorcist combats and attempts to drive away *nats*, using Buddhist power to do so. The *natkadaw* is a person **through** whom the *nats* speak, while the exorcist is one **with** whom *nats* speak. The *natkadaw* shares her body with the *nat*; the exorcist remains separate—confronting the *nat* (paraphrase Spiro 1967:243 in Sered 1994:189).

From the evidence offered here, the 'descent' of spirits into the woman's body is the directional language most befitting the skill of possession. In some cultures women's bodies are seen as gateways that give "her spirits a chance to play around in the human world" (Sered 1994:192). Thus, Jamaican possession specialists intone: "Gwan dahn Savior! Gwan dahn Lahd" (Kitzinger 1982:96) and in Palestine one of Granqvist's informants, Alya, said, "Whilst in pain of childbirth angels are walking up and down" (1947:62). Carol Laderman writes that Malaysian women in "the last extremities" of childbirth can be assisted by beneficent "supernatural presences" known as the "Seven Celestial Midwives" (1983:132) who descend from heaven to attend to the woman.

However, such female connections with the world of spirit are inverted by Tertullian, a Church Father, who called women the “devil’s gateway” (Arms 1975:15). His statement is suggestive of the demonisation of the descent of spirits opposite to masculine ascension and transcendental flight.

What in European culture, influenced by the Judaic/ Christian theologies, was constructed as ‘copulating with devils’, ‘conversing with spirits’, ‘giving birth to demons’, and ‘possession’ lives on, in some non-European cultures, as female religious practice. Thus ‘copulating with devils’ can find an analogy in erotically charged altered states of consciousness; ‘conversing with demons’ parallels the propitiating of ancestral spirits; and even the heresy of ‘birthing demons’ finds something of an analogue in a version of a Christian *Book of Hours* in which we find the “dream of the virgin giving birth to God”.²¹ It seems to me that the bodily ‘agony/ecstasies’ of intercourse, gestation and birth and their disclosures of transpersonal knowledge and altered states of consciousness, including an epistemology associated with immanence, healing and spirit possession—female reproductive consciousness—had become heresies punishable by death and torture.

Spiritus Mechanicus

In Europe women were removed from their magical medico-religious roles, their folk-pagan practices were decimated and birth slowly but steadily became the domain of male physicians and obstetricians. The Western world was also entering into an epoch that would become dominated by Cartesian and mechanistic thinking and where the human mind was ‘purified’ by rationalism and objectivism of anything resembling the ‘feminine’ (Bordo 1987, Tarnas 1991, Merchant 1983, Berman 1981).

²¹ From *R. M. Rilke, Legende und Mythos*. “The Book of Hours” translated by Erich Simenauer (1954:242)

Indeed, according to Susan Bordo this a question of masculine anxiety, “The mystery of the female ... could not be bent to man’s control simply through philosophical means. More direct and concrete means of ‘neutralization’ were required for the project. It is within this context that witch-hunting and the male medical takeover of the process of reproduction and birth, whatever their social and political causes, can be seen to have a profound psychocultural dimension as well” (1987:112).

Francis Bacon is seen as one of the pre-eminent defenders of the scientific revolution and his method of induction by observation and experimentation, then a highly original and valuable contribution to scientific analyses, are still with us today. Some see Bacon as an abject villain because he advocated a project in which nature should be “tortured” of her secrets. There is some doubt as to whether Bacon ever said this, rather it was his admirer Leibniz - but Bacon did use the language associated with the courtroom and torture ‘the rack’ was still in practice in his day.

In *The Death of Nature* (1983), Carolyn Merchant describes the program of Francis Bacon “the father of modern science” and his development of “a new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of nature” and its relationship with the rise of capitalism. This new ethic, she says, was forged in direct relationship to the social events that marked the times; “Much of the imagery he used in delineating his new scientific objectives and methods derived from the courtroom, and, because it treats nature as a female to be tortured through mechanical interventions, strongly suggests the interrogations of the witch trials and the mechanical devices used to torture witches” (1983:164-190).

Medical anthropologists Samuel Osherson and Lorna Amarasingham have explored the ways that cultural preoccupations fire-back on to the body and the development of the ‘body-as-machine’ metaphor. For ancient Egyptians, bodily

conceptions are built on references to floods, droughts and channels of the sacred Nile; Greek Hippocratic medicine worked with a series of different coloured humours; and in some ancient Indian medical texts, the body is likened to a city or fortress, “besieged with disease”. The “King” must pass through the “gate of the mind” and, finding the “inner citadel” of the heart (the innermost chamber of the temple is called *garbha griya* = womb chamber which is where the deity resides)²² in appropriate loving devotion, there Siva (divinity) bestows the “elixir of immortality” and health is restored (1981:218).²³

Anatomy can become the map for cultural fixations and medicinal treatments reflect interventions appropriate to the metaphor, especially in childbirth, which is “inextricably bound up with the production of culture” (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995:2). In mediaeval Europe the increasing complexity and success with simple machines, water mills, clocks, pumps and pulleys coupled with widespread and a growing familiarity and ability to calculate the behaviour of these machines became the cultural backdrop on which the female reproductive body slowly came to be seen as a machine, an individual mechanical pump more or less able to expel a foetus and best attended to by a “technician’s tools” (Martin 1987:54). The image of the world as a machine coupled with an epistemology based on a clockwork cosmos (an anthropomorphic projection of the cosmos as a tool) was applied to women’s bodies and birth came to be constructed as a mechanical process for which a range of routine procedures, tools (forceps) and technologies for the extraction of children by men (homologous perhaps with the mechanics of extracting a confession from a witch).

²² Ellwood (1973:217).

²³ This Hindu healing system alerts us to several important ideas: that persons in Hindu cultures are in psychic possession of an “inner citadel” or a womb and it is by re-entering this womb that brings health. The transpersonal movement was originally built on a fealty to Hindu and Buddhist cosmology and religious practice, which have respectively the *garbha* or cosmic womb. This is important because as we will see transpersonal, cosmisation is womb positive.

This worldview has colonised both the birthing experience and women's religious knowledge (caesarean section is still on the rise in Western cultures).

To summarise: an extremely complex combination of political, psycho-cultural, religious and economic factors coalesced in mediaeval Europe in a way that would impact on women's (and men's) transpersonal knowing and birth-giving for generations. First, it seems to me that the Catholic and Protestant Church's historical misogyny outlined by various feminist writers may have been significantly driven by attempts to diminish what they saw as competing transpersonal knowledge claims emerging through female bodily knowing. Without meaning to rigidly dichotomise or essentialise these styles (and at the same time appreciating the advances of medical science), this situation represents a distortion and imbalance in a system which could have potentially been one of complementarity: male flight (transcendence) is over-valued whereas female incubation (immanence), outside of Christian iconography (Virgin and Child) is demonised. Second, the rise of a male medical fraternity (originally under the aegis of the Catholic Church), its eventual embrace of Cartesian thinking, its eventual fealty to a mechanistic universe, its purification of so-called objective reality, and the construction of minds separate from bodies, can be read as a flight from participatory/transpersonal consciousness and perhaps a flight from the feminine (see Stern 1965; Ehrenreich and English 1973; Romalis 1981; Berman 1981; Merchant 1983; Arms 1975; Oakley 1976; Bordo 1987; Tarnas 1991).

The Missionary Imposition

We will return to implications of rationalism's 'triumph' in a moment but let us note first the Christian influence on tribal cultures where a further attack on religious experience was precipitated through the converting and annihilating legacy of Christian colonial missionaries. Klass and Weisgrau say that while Christian

missionaries were interested in bringing about change in their host cultures, “most of all, they were there to bring European Religion—Christianity in one or another of its European forms—and thus, at least in principle to obliterate completely the indigenous belief system or systems” (1999:9). It is likely that at least some of these indigenous rituals were blended (syncretism/hybridity) with Christian rituals as a survival strategy (e.g. Kitzinger 1982). It has been pointed out by Buckley and Gottlieb, that menstrual/birthing huts²⁴ were early targets for this kind of missionary zeal, “Menstrual huts have widely been among the first of indigenous features to be relinquished by native peoples upon contact with outsiders from the West” (1988:12). They say that ethnocentric missionaries saw these sacred places, sanctuaries and shrines to women’s power and “blood magic” as *evil* and took pride in dismantling them (1988:12). Furthermore Thomas Buckley points out that women’s menstrual/birthing huts are part of a wider complementary system of spiritual practice with parallels to men in their sweat-lodge “training” (*hohkep*) and where a woman was held to be “at the height of her spiritual powers” (Buckley 1988:190).

In an early anthropological study of religious customs, E.B. Tylor offered several examples of male couvade as the father’s bodily identification with the newborn (1878:291-305). He also gives a chilling example of the missionary reaction to participatory father-foetal-infant relations: having noticed a *Maracajuri* Indian fasting on the birth of his child; a Spanish missionary questioned the man as to why he would fast on such a “joyous occasion” when Europeans would tend to eat abundantly. The Indian replied, “The child is ours and proceeds from us”, adding that cooked food, while advantageous to adults, “would now do the little child harm, if we ate it”. The missionary, one Abate (Abbot) Gilij, “observed a sort of identity which he [the Indian]

²⁴ Parturition and menstruation huts can be one and the same (e.g. Ray 1963:158, Knight 1991:462).

supposed to exist between father and son”. Tylor adds, “The missionary goes on to relate how he cured the Indian of his delusion, by showing that to give him a thrashing would have no effect on his child” (1878:294).²⁵

Missionary efforts such as these, while notorious, must be placed within the context of colonising governments and their equally pernicious and determined efforts to eradicate the ceremonies, customs and religious traditions of those colonised. The systematic abuses to traditional cultures have been well outlined in anthropology (Bodley 1990). He says that “special attention” was paid to tribal curers and shamans because they seemed to represent the greatest challenge to Western medicine and Christianity (1990:105). Since ceremony is a hallmark of religion, the situation was summed up as, “every ceremony must go” (Bodley: 94-113). Bodley nowhere mentions birth customs *per se* but he does show the punitive lengths European colonial governments took in their attempts to wipe out local customs and healing procedures. Thus witchcraft, shamanism, native curing, and burial procedures (we can probably assume birthing rituals and the couvade) were forbidden, destroyed or inverted into criminal activities enforced by armed forces or military police. Granqvist (1947:62) reported that the British colonial government in Egypt had prohibited the use of the traditional birthing chair, no doubt forcing the local women to assume the position most favoured by Western medicine and Christian missionaries.²⁶

Rationalist Cosmisation

²⁵ This represents clear attack on male reproductive consciousness on at least three counts, spiritual imperialism, intellectual imperialism (i.e. Tylor’s use of the term “delusion”) and bodily imperialism in the form of the ‘thrashing’. It is also the disruption of the father’s couvade ritual.

²⁶ The birthing stool was made of two stones placed over a pit. A woman in childbirth was thought to be in a life and death limbo i.e. “hanging in the balance” and her suffering had opened “Heaven’s Gate”. The ‘pit’ was homologous with hell and birth was seen as ‘deliverance’ from death and suffering also homologous with Christian notions of Christ’s suffering on the cross (see Granqvist 1947:230-235).

The rise of empiricism and the Enlightenment's philosophy of rationalism in the late 17th century spelled for many the 'Death of God' and Western intellectuals began to dismiss dreams, visions and religious experience as against the advance of 'Reason' (Stipe 1999:17). Indeed, Stipe says that later social anthropologists were urged by Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 155) and Gluckman (1962:14) respectively to focus on the study of ritual or social relations in their religious studies rather than belief systems and that this focus has been traced to the Enlightenment's rationalising project (Stipe1999:17).

Goulet and Young in their discussion of extraordinary experiences in anthropology note that in his *Thoughts Concerning Education*, John Locke (1632-1704), a major proponent of empiricism, was so damning of the effects of the imagination on scientific praxis that he urged parents who "discovered a 'fanciful vein' in their children to 'stifle and suppress it as much as maybe'" (Kearney 1988:164, cited in Goulet and Young 1994:300). They also note that in Europe around 1800 there were "numerous polemical treaties published" with an agenda aimed at the "eradication of the belief in ghosts" (1994:300).

According to them the introduction of the negative use of the term 'hallucination' was related to a "crucial watershed" in the process of rational cosmisation when C.F. Nicholai introduced his paper *Memoir on the Appearance of Spectres and Phantoms Occasioned by Disease, with Psychological Remarks*:

In this essay, the author attributes his experiences of hundreds of daily apparitions over a period of nearly one year to the fact that he had forgone his annual bloodletting. Following C.F. Nicholai, numerous other authors embarked on the search for biological and /or psychological bases for the delusions of the mind. In this context the verb hallucinate and the noun hallucination, from the Latin *alucinari*, "to wander in the mind," became widely used (Goulet and Young 1994:300).

Evans-Pritchard (1965) observes that the early anthropologists (Tylor, Frazer, Malinowski, and Durkheim) had been atheists and agnostics. Their dull religious home lives had led to a strong animosity toward revealed religion, yet they persisted in their study of 'primitive' religion because, "they sought, and found, in primitive religions a weapon which could, they thought, be used with deadly effect against Christianity. If primitive religion could be explained away as an intellectual aberration, as a mirage²⁷ induced by emotional distress, or by its social function, it was implied that the higher religions could be discredited and disposed of in the same way" (1965: 15 and see Stipe 1999:16-17, Goulet and Young 1994:300-302).

Tylor laid the foundations for the anthropological study of religion. It was his view that animism was the essence of "primitive religion"; furthermore, he held that these "mistaken" beliefs originated from "dreams, visions, hallucinations, cataleptic states, and similar phenomena" (Malinowski 1954:18).²⁸ Thus the participatory relationship Tylor spots in the case of the *Maracajuri* Indians' couvade (mentioned above) can only be interpreted by him as delusional. There exists a distinct view, he says, "among the lower races of a mental state hard to trace among those high in the scale of civilisation. The couvade implicitly denies that physical separation of 'individuals', which a civilized man would probably set down as a first principle" (Tylor 1878:295-296).

I find his statement fascinating and pertinent. Recall Susan Bordo's claim that the scientific *revolution* was a male "drama of parturition", a cultural birth, that cut men

²⁷ The word 'mirage' is being used in its Westernized materialist sense stripped of transpersonal meaning. This word originally underscores the very foundation of Islam. During the 'Night of the Miraj' The Prophet Mohammed, was spirited by the archangel Gabriele through nine levels of hell and then up through a sequence of ecstatic heavens culminating in an ego-annihilating encounter with Allah. Each year on 27 Rajab, the seventh lunar month Muhammad's 'Night of the Miraj' is celebrated by Moslems (Armstrong 1991:139).

²⁸ Catalepsy was associated with schizophrenia (Noll 1992:50).

away from a participatory relationship with greenie nature and created separate, alienated “individuals”. Tarnas (1991) argues that the trajectory and evolution of the Western mind was founded upon the repression of the feminine, of the undifferentiated consciousness and its participatory abilities. Again, in Tylor’s opinion, the couvade,

[...belongs, like Sorcery and Divination, to the mental state in which man does not separate the subjective mental connexion [connection] from the objective physical connexion, the connexion which is inside his mind from the connexion which is outside it, in the same way in which most educated men of higher races make this separation (1878:296).

What I believe we are seeing in this thrashing missionary and the culturally ‘evolved’ European is an attempt to cauterise what appears to be some kind of participatory consciousness. In other words, a trans/personal relationship between men, nature and their children is being demonised by Western ‘authorities’ whose mind-worlds, crippled by missionary zeal and Eurocentric-rationalism, fail to grasp. This way of knowing, which implies father-foetal-infant associations of a different order, embeds a divergent bodily relationship – one from which the European cheerfully takes his leave. Yet we see that Tylor, if not explicitly struggling with something here, was at least quizzical. He had recognised “a hard to trace” mind, inappropriate for “educated men”, but a mind still hanging around (so-called survivals) among those not socialised by the scientific revolution - and this participatory mind he called Sorcery, part of primitive religion’s monstrous set of false beliefs (Tambiah 1990:45).

Another notable example of this kind comes from G. Frazer who believed that what was called *totemism* in ‘primitive’ religion was actually the fruit of women’s reproductive consciousness, although he didn’t call it that - he called it, “the sick

fancies of pregnant women” (Frazer 1910: 243) and (slightly less dismissively) “such maternal fancies, so natural and so universal, appear to be the root of totemism” (Frazer 1910: vol. 4, 63). And totemism was seen as the root of religion (by definition less evolved) thus the impregnation of a virgin by a totemic ancestor among the Australian Arunta was supposed to cast suspicion on the Immaculate Conception and Virgin Birth of Christianity by implying that these also stemmed from the “sick fancies of pregnant women”.²⁹ Evens-Pritchard concludes that:

Social anthropology has been the product of minds which, with very few exceptions, regarded all religion as outmoded superstition, suited no doubt to a pre-scientific age and historically justified, like classes in the eyes of Marxists, for a given period, but now useless, and even without ethical value, and worse than useless because it stood in the way of a rational regeneration of mankind and social process (1972:205).

Birth and birth rites have profound cosmological, and therefore religious, significance in most pre-industrial and indigenous cultures with aspects of women’s corporeal bodies often peopled by spiritual beings and forces. Speaking of birth among the Lauje in Indonesia, Nourse says, “the things of birth – placenta blood, umbilicus, and fluids – were not merely substances, but homes for spiritual entities that, like persons, were gendered” (1999:3). However, such spirits (gendered or otherwise), and the realms they occupy face erasure at the hands of materialist science.

For example, Egyptian cosmology holds that upon death, a person’s soul will reunite with his or her *Ka* - a twin-soul or spirit double. This is a belief found throughout Africa, according to Griaule (1965:198). It is interesting to note that Western scholars with a materialist bent suggest that this *Ka* is none other than, and only, the placental sac (see Trevathan 1987:107). The materialist approach is one that

²⁹ Recall the reproductive heresies of birthing women in medieval Europe.

must remove the spirits from the world, to disenchant the world (in Weber's terms) of these entities and relocate them in the imagination. Of course 'just your imagination' is now nothing but an epiphenomenon of materialist brain function and is reduced to the meaningless phantasmagoria (fantasies, hallucinations, mirages) of the naïve, infirm or excitable.³⁰

We should also mention Marxism in this context for which religion was politically blanketed with the famous euphemism, "the opium of the people" (see Lewis 2003:23); spiritual experience and their disclosed spirit worlds are reduced to a pipe-dream. Marxism in various forms has attempted to obliterate everything that resembles religion and magic except of course itself - Stalin's propaganda-driven image of himself as the Siberian shaman's solar deity personified is a technique of erasure and a colonisation of the Siberian native's alterity-scape (Bodley 1990:105). China's forced sterilisation of Tibetan women and annihilation of its male monastic culture comes harrowingly to mind and, with unerring accuracy, strikes at both sides of stratified Tibetan religion. Without birth there is arguably no *Samsara*, without male reproductive consciousness there is arguably no *Nirvana*. Regarding anthropology influenced by Marx, Victor Turner says, "Maybe the neo-Marxist structuralists criticize the Romantics because they themselves are too greedy for these moments and see them as *fata morgana*, a mere will-o'-the-wisp, wishful thinking, opium" (cited in E.Turner 1992:xix).

We will return to the relationship between the *Ka* and the placental sac when we circumambulate the "calving" of spirit entities (after Turner) and the birth, in ritual, of *spirit imaginals*, that, like a single cell dividing, signals the "the process of making manifest an image" (and the creation of alterities) (Lienhardt cited by Turner 1992:xx).

³⁰ An earlier spelling of fantasy is phantasy drawn from the word phantom meaning ghost, or the dead or ancestor.

I hope to show that the project of transpersonal psychology joined with anthropology can provide us with a potential bridge to re-join the worlds torn apart by reductionist Western research trends.

Psychoanalytic Anthropology

Freud is an acknowledged ancestor of the transpersonal psychology movement. However, while Freud may have “made it respectable to study visionary experiences” with *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), his analysing of dreams as unconscious psychological processes and defence mechanisms also “perpetuated the rationalist distrust of the products of the imagination” (Goulet and Young 1994:9). Freud saw religion as an obsessive-compulsive neurosis; *Totem and Taboo* (1913), sub-titled *Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* enshrined this approach.

Some Western psychoanalytically trained anthropologists have regarded religious cosmologies and their rituals as nothing but psychological defence mechanisms (e.g. LaBarre 1970:50). For example Melford Spiro (1994[1965]:145-160) sees Buddhism as such, and for him spirit beings are only the parental left-overs from the ideational feast of early childhood (infantile fantasies) (Spiro 1994:173). We have earlier addressed the way in which Western psychology viewed religious specialists and their altered states both within Western culture and without and these influential ideas were embraced by psychoanalytically oriented anthropologists. Walsh describes how some have regarded shamans:

It is still commonly assumed in both anthropology and psychology that shamanic states and those who experience them are pathological ...Indeed, the “experience of the shaman has been likened to almost every psychopathology”... The shaman has been called, among other things, mentally deranged, an outright psychotic, a

veritable idiot, a charlatan, epileptic, and, perhaps most often, a hysteric or schizophrenic (Walsh 1995:29).

Drawing on the double-barrelled Frazerian concept of magic as contagious or sympathetic (contact and imitation) Freud considered women in child-bed, “unborn infants”, “new-born babies”, “childbirth” as “*uncanny* things” that were “charged with dangerous power, which can be transferred through contact with them, almost like an infection” (Freud 1985[1913]:72-75). For all his genius Freud was fond of using disease-ridden metaphors when it came to describing phenomena with sacred attributes.

Psychoanalytically influenced anthropology with its application of Western categories of neurosis and psychopathology to ‘primitive’ rituals, belief systems and culture has had “considerable impact” (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988:16). The analysis of the couvade (which we see as part of wider cosmological systems), already the interest of our early empirical anthropologists (Tylor, Frazer, Malinowski), was taken up by Freudians who projected a number of unsavoury aspects on to these variegated rituals. Reik for example saw the couvade as a neurotic father’s defensive attempt to control his desire to *eat* the foetus unwarily externalised into a ritual (Heggenhougen 1980:23). This was related to the Greek ‘mythological’ figure Cronus (as in chronological time) who is said to have devoured his children while they were still in utero - in the Freudian labyrinth the foetus somehow also becomes a “phallic competitor”(Richman 1982:92). This idea would eventually be constructed as ‘womb envy’, a trope that several anthropologists (among them Margaret Mead) and various feminists would embrace.³¹ We might say that the couvade was reconstructed as “the sick fancies of pregnant men”. I will address the construct of womb envy in the next

³¹ Margaret Mead used the term “fantasy” to describe male reproductive consciousness and applied the same term, along with “nightmare” to male couvade (1950). These words as I have shown are rooted in research epochs with a bias against a positive viewing of non-ordinary states of consciousness.

chapter. Suffice to say that a transpersonal-anthropological inquiry might reveal realities in the *couvade* that materialists, Freudians and *some* feminists could not, by dint of world-view, possibly imagine.³²

The Polyphasic Challenge

The combined result of these historical research epochs is an uncritical commitment to a “systematic bias born of conditioning to what we call ‘monophasic’ consciousness characteristic of the enculturation of western observers” says Laughlin (1988:5). Such is the bias in our culture according to Laughlin, McManus, and Shearer (1993) that we have created a research orientation in which we fail or refuse to consider other forms of consciousness as possible forms of data gathering. They contrast this research bias with ‘polyphasic’ cultures, citing the example of Tibetan Buddhism, where gathering information in non-ordinary-states was legitimate and culturally sanctioned i.e. dreams, waking state, and meditation are consultative in relating to their native reality and cosmography (1993:191).³³ As I said earlier, transpersonalists seek to reduce this cultural bias. The Western bias may be similar to the kind of prejudice anthropologist Michael Harner points toward when he says that “it is extremely difficult for an unprejudiced judgment to be made about the validity of (non-ordinary) experiences”, from the “contrasting” ordinary state of consciousness. He refers to this judgment as:

³² Freud used the term “fantasy” when his patients described their identification with the fetus in the womb.

³³ While applauding their commitment to exploring polyphasic realities, it must also be noted the Buddhism is a strongly gendered religion and their techniques leading to Nirvana likely complement the exploration of a masculinised alterity by male monastics. Enlightenment was after all disclosed to the Buddha after leaving his wife and newborn child (Spiro 1994). It is not unusual to find statements saying that women needed to be born as men to attain Nirvanic release (Gross 1994). Therefore the final revelatory apex of this alterity is prohibited by gender. Some might say that this represents a kind of gender-driven, women-denying, transpersonal gate-keeping and transcendental sexism of a high degree. I suggest this is a “womb sprung” alterity shaped by male reproductive consciousness. This does not mean that women cannot explore this alterity. It suggests to me that male bodies may create masculine alterities and hedge them off as powerfully as women hedge off birth in many traditional cultures.

The counterpart of ethnocentrism between cultures. But in this case it is not the narrowness of someone's *cultural* experience that is the fundamental issue, but the narrowness of someone's *conscious* experience. The persons most prejudiced against a concept of non-ordinary reality are those who have never experienced it. This might be termed *cognocentrism*, the analogue in consciousness of ethnocentrism (Harner 1980: xvii).

Semiotic Approaches

As Edith Turner has pointed out, there is a tendency, according to many voices in anthropology, for Western researchers to monopolise the spiritual experience with Western anthropological or psychological theories in the guise of a "hierarchy of authority" (Turner 1992b: 4). "Mainline anthropologists have studiously ignored the central matter of this kind of information—central in the people's own view—and only used the material as if it were metaphor, symbol, not reality, commenting that such and such 'metaphor' is congruent with function, structure, or psychological mindset of the society" (Turner 1992b: 4). Turner agrees that "numerous anthropologists have achieved beautiful work on the ritual of the people they studied as metaphor and poetry...since the patterns of ritual symbolism in many societies possess both aesthetic and intellectual as well as symbolic depth" (1992b: 4). However she concludes there is more to it than poetry and disagrees with the treatment of informants' accounts as only 'texts' to be milked for their meaning (1992b: 4-6).

Levi-Strauss is regarded as the great proponent of this semiotic-structuralist approach and he took the view that contemporary birthing, like myth, had been divested of its symbolic meaning:

Levi-Strauss reminds us that birth and death are rich with meanings which have penetrated the whole of social life. But in the West, as part of a process of "scientific praxis", he feels we have emptied birth and death of everything not

corresponding to mere physiological processes, rendering them unsuitable to convey other meanings (1966:264, cited in Kitzinger 1982:195-196).

True enough, but the approach can take more than it gives, according to Goulet and Young, who say that while this refreshing emphasis on meaning is laudable, “it is not as radical a departure from traditional structural-functional analysis as it might seem. Neither the structural-functionalists nor the semiotic-symbolic anthropologists consider viewing their informants’ “stories” as accounts of reality which could have explanatory value for Western culture” (1994:10). The short version is that the emic (insider) perspective of reality is ultimately not considered to be an adequate take on reality when weighed against Western etic science (by Western scientists). Shorter still: what informants are saying is not to be taken too seriously. Short and sharp: the colonisation of spiritual alterity-scapes.

Myths: Raw and Uncooked

Compounding the problem of symbol and metaphor is the question of myth since myths have become effigies (false idols we might say) onto which Western intellectuals can wrongly map Western concepts (think: Zeus’s womb envy). Morton Klass, says, “Let us observe that myth, as usually defined, understood, and used, constitutes a particularly sharp example of the traditional ethnocentric, scientific approach to religion” (Klass1995:124). Following his example, I opened my copy of the *New Collins English Dictionary* and the entry *myth*, “1.a. a story about superhuman beings of an earlier age” and “2.a. a fictitious or unproven person or thing” (the same dictionary defines *Mirage* as a trick of the light, and *Miracle* as “a marvellous event attributed to a supernatural cause” and “a marvellous example of something: a miracle of engineering” ... hmm).

A definition applied to myth by Cassirer reads, “the realm of spooks and demons” (1946:3). This realm issues from a discourse off-limits for scholars, yet here again, the problem is not one of indigenous accuracy but one of Western *acceptability* (Klass 1995:125). We tend to think of myths as “lies” says Turner, that we academic folk aren’t supposed to believe (1992a:13). The reduction of indigenous myth into Western conceptions carefully cooked-up by scholars and rendered into constructs suiting Western scientific tastes is “inescapably ethnocentric” (Klass 1995:125). So how can we go about the study of myth? Klass suggests an eclectic approach, and, following Levi-Strauss’s advice, that we cast a wide net over the ethnographic context when considering the contours of myth (1995:126). Myths can indeed be metaphor, but like ritual, metaphor can have many levels, and one of these levels might well include a transpersonal dimension – another order of reality, another possible realm of consciousness (casting a linguistic net around this dimension will not be easy).

Furthermore myths are mercurial (almost as mercurial as anthropology’s research legacy); they trans/form with the telling. The notion that myths have something very real to do with the body and a felt connection with the environment is close to mythologist Joseph Campbell’s approach. He cuts to the chase in the opening line of his 1990 volume:

[The] woman with her baby is the basic image of mythology. The first experience of anybody is the mother’s body. And what Le Debleu called *participation mystique*, mystic participation between mother and child, and the child and the mother, is the final happy land. The earth and the whole universe, as our mother, carries this experience into the larger sphere of adult experience. When one can feel oneself in relation to the universe in the same complete and natural way as that of the child with the mother, one is in complete harmony and tune with the universe. Getting in harmony and tune with the universe and staying there is the principle function of mythology (1990:1).

Going (Cognitively) Native - Epistemic Slippage into a Great Mother

Let's return to Levi-Strauss for a moment and review the relationship between birthing and shamanism he made famous in "The Effectiveness of Symbols" (1963). Levi-Strauss applied his semiotic-structural method to a transcript originally recorded by Henry Wassen at the event of a Cuna Indian woman obstructed in childbirth. He analysed an 18 page long incantation of a shaman's evocation of the womb/spirit world of *Muu-Igala* during a healing ceremony for the obstructed woman and child. The shaman was thought to enter her body in trance to clear a path for the foetus by releasing the woman's 'soul' from the realm of *Muu-Igala*. This analysis has come under exacting scrutiny from several anthropologists including Carol Laderman (1987), Edith Turner (1992a) and Michael Taussig (1993).

Turner observes that Levi-Strauss was thought to be a "cognitive absolutist", meaning he was committed to a single inclusive version of the human-mind (Littleton 1985: xxxvi).³⁴ This would essentially make him a poor candidate for polyphasic anthropological inquiry because of the cognitive restructuring it requires. Yet as Turner says, "His word 'structure' originally connoted the deep laws of binary discrimination, but in this essay it describes something nearer to the shaman's world". She points out how, in a fascinating departure, Levi-Strauss, "begins to oscillate between two levels of reality". She says he openly acknowledged the shaman's "other order of reality" and then shows how he is in fact moving between these two worlds, "he [Levi-Strauss] seems to be taking the slender bridge to the shaman's own realm, even though he is not a member of the shaman's own culture". She sees Levi-Strauss as having bridged two distinct levels of consciousness, one of which, "educated persons" are not supposed to regard as real (1992b 12-13). This is no small matter for

³⁴ cited in Turner (1992:12).

as Peter Berger warns (tongue in cheek perhaps); there are dangers in going cognitively native:

The penalty for failure in these efforts to remain outside the situation [etic] is 'to go native'. To be sure, cultural anthropologists like to do this behaviorally ('participant observation') and even emotionally ('empathy'). If they 'go native' cognitively, however, they will no longer be able to do cultural anthropology. They will have dropped out of the universe of discourse in which such an enterprise is meaningful or even real (Berger 1967:23).

Rather than slipping into academic anomie, however, according to Turner's account, Levi-Strauss had dropped out of his own universe of discourse and slipped into a counter-universe that "belongs to all" (something like *communitas*) but had covered his ideological tracks with the use of the term "myth" behind which was really the shaman's "other order of reality". He took, she says, the path opened by Levy-Bruhl in 1910, a path that "cleared the way for those anthropologists who have experienced trance" (Turner 1992b:12-13). According to her, Levy-Bruhl's path led to a world that was "prelogical", a world where humankind is "bathed" in an "ambience of mystical meaning" and where "healing is affected in relation to that sense of *participation mystique*" (Turner 1992b:11) (this is the self-same experience that finishes you off as an anthropologist according to Berger). We also could remember that this participation, this harmonising of the relationship between mother and child (self and universe) is, according to Joseph Campbell, the principle function of mythology (1990:1).

The irony of this moment (accepting its accuracy) will not be lost on those familiar with the divergent views of Levi-Strauss and Paul Ricoeur regarding the text. According to Laughlin, Levi-Strauss claimed that "texts can be interpreted independently from the actual experience of living people who tell the myths"

(1988:52), however phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur tabled a counterclaim, “that an accurate interpretation of a native text requires accessing the experiences of living people who are influenced by the text. In other words, true hermeneutics involves a dialogue between a text (e.g. myth, drama, fairy story, dream report, oral history etc.) and *experiences evoked in people participating in the text*” [my emphasis] (Laughlin 1988:52). I suggest that Levi-Strauss *was* participating in the text and (tentatively) this caused him to break with his own school of thought. I also suggest it is the evocation of the womb in the text that opens up another world into which he slipped.

I find a useful complement to all this in Michael Taussig’s analysis of the Cuna shaman, the womb and the magic of mimesis, which may offer a further answer to this curious development. According to Taussig’s account the shaman does not actually enter the women’s body/womb at all - but a mimetic copy, a spirit double of her body (1993:120). The shaman enters the womb of the spirit double of the woman to work on the copy thereby affecting the human body (1993:121). In fact he says there is yet a further set of mimetics simultaneously operating in Cuna cosmology; that of the Great Mother Earth and the woman’s spirit body – he cites Chapin, “during pregnancy a woman’s soul or spirit body is “one with the cosmos itself. The two spiritual realms are fused together in a never ending process of creating offspring and replenishing the Earth’s stock of living beings” (Chapin 1983: 443 cited Taussig 1993:121).

What I am suggesting here is that Levi-Strauss’ engagement with the Cuna womb evoked in him a shamanic simulacrum through mimetic ideation. The shaman’s other world that Levi-Strauss journeys to is that of a spirit woman’s womb – which is now fused with the Great Mother by dint of pregnancy. He is still taking Turner’s “slender

bridge” but the destination is into the *Ka*, so to speak, rather than the physical placenta (I know this is speculating – but wait).

Taussig states, “In these mimetic worlds things connect with their invisible counterpart by virtue of the womb” (1993:112) and the mimetic spirit-world is, according to Taussig, a matter of fact, an everyday occurrence that can be evoked by chant or “merely thought” into being (1993:124) – we try out, in the body, imagery and ideation (1993:46). Could it be that Levi-Strauss entered such a realm? In short, does nearness to the “wondrous portal” (after Klass 1995:131) of the womb even via the text (texts can have numinous properties according to Turner 1992a:14) catalyse these mimetic worlds? As Taussig puts it “the womb is of importance not merely for reproduction but also for the transformation of the level of reality that the chant evokes”, the womb he says, “is the switchboard of the male magician’s reality-control apparatus” (1993:123). The spiritual landscape alters suddenly and we find ourselves lost in a transgressive moment that creates “mimetic slippage” through the “gates of repression of the secretly familiar, the origin of the world, the home of all homes, the (great) mother’s genitals” (1993:122) thereby precipitating a metamorphosis of reality (1993:126).

The instability of consciousness, the “sudden alteration in the plane of reality of the referent occurs precisely at the moment of the evocation of the womb” (1993:123). Thus the womb is the gateway to trans/personal states and even thinking about the unconscious womb is enough to conjure spirit simulacra that are ontological realities in themselves. The audacious notion (recall “sick fancies of pregnant men and women” - what we are calling reproductive consciousness) here is that Levi-Strauss, in his encounter with a textual reproduction of a placenta and a reproduction of the Cuna woman’s body as a shamanic world, somehow joined himself to a similar world.

I am fascinated and excited by Taussig's complex and revealing composition, however, there is one area that I would take issue and that is his emphasis on the repression of what amounts to a Freudian womb. It is well known that Freud abandoned his studies of birth in favour of the Oedipal complex - the sexual inhibition. Indeed Taussig himself notes several times that it is not so much the Oedipal/sexual complex that is the most tabooed and unconscious among the Cuna but the womb:

Given the zealous prohibition of "sexual" matters, more accurately of birth-matters, and the fact that Origin Histories and other originary features of the chants so blatantly, so assiduously, detail by loving detail, overturn this prohibition, thus "returning" the repressed, then surely we are justified in calling attention to the connection between the womb and the magical powers of mimesis (1993:123).

Freud's much-maligned follower, Otto Rank, developed the transgressive theme that all art was in fact simulacra of the womb, what he called "auto-plastic imitation". The deepest artistic impulse is in recreating the womb's nourishing energies, "one's own growing and origin from the maternal vessel" (Grof 1985:172) which has a decidedly mimetic ring to it - he was excommunicated from psychoanalysis for his trouble. As another psychoanalytic outcast Luce Irigaray writes on this 'Freudian' womb:

Psychoanalysts take a dim view of this first moment - and, besides, it is invisible. A foetal situation or foetal regression, they say, and there is not a lot to be said about that. A taboo is in the air. If the father did not sever his over-intimate bond with the primal womb, there might be the danger of fusion, death or the sleep of death...But the exclusivity of this law forecloses this first body, this first home, this first love...The social order, our culture, psychoanalysis itself, want it this way: the mother must remain forbidden, excluded. The father forbids the bodily encounter with the mother.

The imaginary and the symbolic of intra-uterine life and of the first bodily encounter with the mother...where are we to find them? In what darkness, what

madness, have they been abandoned? And the relationship with the placenta, the first house to surround us, whose halo we carry around with us everywhere, like some child's security blanket, how is that represented in our culture? (Irigaray 1992:39-40).

History points to the transpersonal movement; in particular the Freudian trained psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, Stanislav Grof, whose LSD research with literally thousands of participants, from the late 1950s to the early '70s, unexpectedly unearthed the tabooed womb in all of its multilayered, multivalenced, dynamic and unstable glory (see appendix 1). Indeed it was Grof who added both a perinatal and a transpersonal (recall the placenta and its secret, transgressive, unconscious relationship to the spirit-double *Ka*) dimension to the Western psyche and this discourse has been the backbone of the transpersonal movement for almost 40 years. The movement (explored in appendix 1) avers that each of us is in possession of (or possessed by) an unconscious perinatal dimension, which is inalienably fused to multiple transpersonal potentials—the Great Mother—for some. Taussig's omission of this large and influential body of perinatal/transpersonal research in favour of a couple of throw-away lines by Freud seems to me a strange favouring indeed.

It is more appropriate to suggest that Levi-Strauss regresses to the womb – the *transpersonal* switchboard of the magician, and following V. Turner and Lienhardt spirit worlds are manifested, “calved” (they were working with religious cattle complex in Africa). If we follow Grof's description of the return of the womb through Taussig's “powerful medley of revelation and concealment exercised by the slippage through the gates of repression” (1993:122) we find the substantial womb is fused with the spiritual cosmos and immediate with other levels of spirit body.

The experience of cosmic unity appears to be a rather important gateway to a variety of other transpersonal experiences such as ancestral memories, elements

of the collective and racial unconscious, evolutionary memories, or archetypal experiences (Grof 1977:158).

In these mimetic worlds things connect with their invisible counterparts by virtue of the womb. Rendering copying synonymous with reproduction, this organ ensures that mimesis fuses a male secret with origins (Taussig 1993:112).

I know this is all highly irreverent and partially speculative and readers might be thinking: “What on earth does this have to do with pro-creative males in New Zealand?” but I engaged with this material in earnest because I think it will shed some light on a narrative (below) I recorded with an informant in New Zealand and one which I take very seriously. Let me first recap on my intention for this chapter: to explore the anthropological research legacy into altered states of consciousness in relation to the womb, what I am calling here *reproductive consciousness* – to outline the ethnocentric and gendered assumptions of these theories – and clear a path toward exploring the potential transpersonal elements in fathers’ reproductive consciousness as precipitated by birthing. Putting it simply: if Levi-Strauss can de-repress his own perinatal dimension and slip into a native, a trans/formed spirit womb, simply by looking at a text, then what is the potential for fathers to slip into such worlds when confronted with a real live event of human womb-sprung life? Especially since whosoever is being reproduced in the substantial womb is something, or rather, someone, of himself.

Conceiving a Cosmogony

The following is from narrative recounted to me by a young man (25 years) of European descent. This story follows his experience on learning that he had conceived a child at the age of 19. From the interview I gathered he had sensitivity to spiritual phenomena. He said that he knew from what “people had said that women in labour

can experience hallucinations, altered states and ‘spiritual emergencies’”

(transpersonal psychology’s reframe of psychosis) and he told me that he and his girlfriend had been experimenting with sexual yoga around the time of their becoming pregnant and that he had “experimented” with psychedelic substances in the past. He referred to birth as “pure magic” but he was troubled by the raw weirdness of reproduction: “was she going to be part of Rosie [his girlfriend] or part of me? (a problem that had also worried Hegel). When she was in the world I understood that she was a whole being”. He then described a state of communion with his partner in which he said “a spirit was coming down into Mali’s [his daughter] body through our communion” [recall the *midwives* and the calling down of spirit ancestors].

“We came close together at that time, we did things together like yoga stretches we got from books and talking to people. It was amazing how her personality changed... it was like a butterfly happening, the whole cocoon thing, her awareness goes straight into herself, into her stomach ... her body became our whole world. It became more obvious that the baby was coming. Our relationship changed because there was this baby between us. It frightened me, I was afraid about forming a relationship with something I did not know. But it was important for me to focus on the baby. It was really like excitement coming up to a climax.

[Interviewer] “Were you aware of any kind of religious, spiritual, transcendental things around birth?”

Kevin: “Oh yeah! I had lots of goings on inside of me that I did not know how to talk to Rosie about. I sort of felt like I was having my own pregnancy in a way. Sort of whole changes happening inside of me, of how I would relate to the world, and having my own theories [ideation?]

about what it means to have a child. My way of trying to reason things out, making it logical, was the baby coming forth from Rosie, although we both create it, we both helped in creation, it was hard for me to understand how the baby becomes separate from Rosie. It is already separate from me from the beginning, sort of, but it is part of Rosie. It grows in her and then it becomes part of the family and then it separates from Rosie. I shouldn't have tried to work it out. It fully fucked with my head - first there was two and now there is three".

(long pause).

"When Mali was a tiny foetus I had this vision that a new universe was being born.

[Interviewer] "Really...when she was really tiny... how beautiful"

Kevin: "It screwed with my mind"

[Interviewer] Were you out of it [stoned]?

Kevin: "No"

[Interviewer] "Dreaming?"

Kevin: "No"

[Interviewer] "It was a vision?"

Kevin: "Yeah. I guess I felt like I knew that it must be a whole new universe. It was like I was walking around inside of her"

[Interviewer hesitantly] "So the world had become Mali"?

Kevin: "Yeah. I was like inside Mali and every body had become Mali...then I had this really weird death experience. We had been working building and we were having a cigarette at the end of the day and some guy came up from next door and, to me, he was another version of my

daughter and I freaked out and blacked out. I fainted. I thought I was dying. But I remember just before that happened the light of the sun changed slightly, it was like a hallucination - looking around everything was slightly different, people became superimposed on their image, it wasn't like a real image any more, it changed slightly. Very unsettling, I did not know what was going on (laughs). That threw me... after that I had a whole series of episodes around life, death and birth. I eventually was hospitalized for psychosis. But it doesn't really matter to me what others have said. That was the most sacred experience I have ever had.

Multi-Framing

What is our frame of reference for this extraordinary narrative? A heresy? Womb envy? We go back to Tylor's discomfort with the primitive father's bodily identification with the foetus in utero and Frazer's notion of sympathy and contact. We can recall Freud's claim that the first home was "uncanny". We recall Levy-Bruhl's participatory communion with the totem, the totem that impregnates, here almost reversed as my informant is impregnated by his "focus" on the foetus (we replace Frazer's "sick fancies", in this case, with "male reproductive consciousness"). We can look again at the Freudian/feminist notion of "womb envy" cooked-up in the interim betwixt and between the revelation of an unconscious but before the revelation of a perinatal/transpersonal unconscious.

Yet in my informant's own words a "whole new universe", a psychic universe, an idiosyncratic alterity-scape, was secretly born. Furthermore he does not quite identify with the child but enters not only into the mother's womb, but also Mali's foetal body, he is inside the body of his unborn child, but now with a trick of the light the geography of consciousness becomes unstable, and we recall Levi-Strauss heretically

oscillating between worlds; “slippage which, once slipped into, skids wildly” to lift a phrase from Taussig (1993:115) - and the phenomenal world is somehow the body of his unborn child - a whole new spiritual landscape has wobbled into existence.

This was how Maslow described the fledgling transpersonal focus which had been gestating throughout the 1960s: “It is equally outside and inside: therefore; it has transcended the geographical limitations of the self. Thus one begins to talk about transhumanistic [transpersonal] psychology” (1969:4).

I am reminded of the wooden Russian folk dolls (*Matryoshka*). Each figure is complete in itself, yet inside and outside are other bodies – suggesting that completeness can reside, also, and paradoxically, in an invisible dimension. Remove one layer and there she is again - Great Cosmic Mother, Mother Earth, Mother, Womb, Foetal person - lift another layer and there is Kevin and he re-members that he was “pregnant” with these “theories”. Yet by some magic what is inside becomes outside, up becomes down. People in the everyday world were now all versions of his spirit child – “superimposed on their image” all disclosed in a “vision”—reproductive consciousness—catalysed, in my informant’s words, by pregnancy.

While in no way purporting to be an exact replica of Taussig’s account of Cuna Indian copies of spirit bodies, there are some disarming similarities at the level of levels. The multi-layered vision he describes almost fits with the Cuna cosmology and its view of the human body, and its spirit copy fused with the Great Mother. The secret, unconscious, transgressive relationship between birth and spirit (the placenta and the *Ka*), well beyond traditional psychoanalysis to Grof and the womb dis-inhibited by LSD, the transpersonal movement and the bothersome counter-culture.³⁵

³⁵ Taussig notes that psychotropic plants were an access to this realm among the Cuna (1993:127).

And we could direct our thought to the fact that the almost universally tabooed female birthing body is now in the Western world encountered by fathers in a culture largely unaware of, afraid of, or ambivalent towards the mimetic magical transpersonal imaginal processes that can follow (or is it? this may be an assumption). Finally we remember that in many (but not all) cultures contact with birth among males was/is permitted only to shamans or trance specialists. Thus we might well wonder about wondrous portals, the shaman's slender bridge to the other world; about male womb-sprung/womb-spun alter-worlds and the transpersonal dimensions in an anthropology of fathers at birth.

Conclusion

In gathering up the threads of this chapter, we might conclude that a profound and only partially explored relationship exists between transpersonal states of consciousness and the womb within the discipline of anthropology. We can also conclude that shifting epistemological positions and evolving research paradigms within the discourses of anthropology, coupled with the extensive changes in the Western world regarding attitudes to the limits of the psyche and the farther reaches of consciousness, have made it possible to revision origin myths, birth, ritual and reproductive consciousness in ways that seemed almost impossible to imagine only 50 years ago.

Women's maternity cults, female shamanistic midwifery, male midwifery, the couvade have not necessarily been *comprehensively* studied as spiritual practices within anthropology. This is partly because of the gender inequalities that beset early anthropology and partly because of the later political imperatives, psychological styles, and epistemological perspectives driving the academy's research priorities (and because no one bothered to do the research). Early anthropology was an exclusively

male endeavour and men were not welcomed in female birthing sites and women's birth magic and midwifery/shamanism remained largely a secret until women anthropologists arrived in the sites. Western medical colonisation has also severely impacted on traditional birth-ways (Laderman 1983, Kitzinger 1982) further marginalising the transpersonal dimensions that may be found in childbirth.

With the rise of the women's movement in the 1970s, birthing became a central concern for feminist researchers although; in my opinion, most (certainly not all) of these researchers have paid scant attention to male birthing rites and reproductive magic, and, like their male anthropological forebears, have perpetrated another gendered set of biases, dichotomies, and blind-spots. It can be said that much of the anthropological reportage of indigenous birthing and its wider cosmological embeddedness and of spiritual/transpersonal midwifery techniques (symbolic obstetrical manoeuvres) cannot be called holistic and, in the main, are rather imbalanced and incomplete. Therefore a revision of these research epochs, as we have seen in this chapter, can bring forth not only their biases but radical new possibilities for the understanding of some male responses to birth-giving.

The Emergence of Transpersonal Anthropology

From the perspective of the borderlands, symbols have emergent qualities; meaning is anything but fixed and arises out of the re-creation and reinterpretation of symbols. In this regard, it is interesting to observe how many words have crept into our vocabulary of late involving the prefix “trans” -- some of them I have already mentioned such as “transnational” and “transcultural.” But there are others like “transracial,” “transpersonal,” “transgender,” “transmodern,” all having to do with crossovers (Wade Roof 1998:4).

Introduction

In the last chapter we were primarily concerned with deconstructing the Western bias pertaining to male and female reproductive consciousness, Levi-Strauss’s alleged slippage, and, as anomalous as it might seem, the emergence of an idiosyncratic spirit/womb-world in, through and around one of my male informants (in relation, I hasten to add, with his pregnant partner, and, their child in utero). I will now turn to a more positive viewing of reproductive consciousness through the sub-discipline of transpersonal anthropology, which, given its theoretical foundations, is likely to lend further explanatory support to my informants’ narratives. My intention here, then, is to explore the historical emergence, and basic premise, of transpersonal anthropology - in particular its’ participatory and hybrid themes.

I will then examine what I see as *the* major innovation of the sub-discipline: the potential for experiential data gathering by anthropologists participating in altered states of consciousness (ASC). As we shall see this practice gives the anthropologist a lived-experience of the (felt to be) autonomous alterity of the host culture. I will call this process transpersonal ‘co-penetration’ after Geertz who says the deeper the

anthropologist penetrates the host culture, the deeper does that culture penetrate the anthropologist (Geertz 1988 cited in Goulet 1994: 17). I see these as liminal moments suggesting a joining between the fieldworker and the culturally constituted hyper-spatial, hyper-temporal mind-world. This moment is akin, I believe, to what Homi Bhabha calls, “‘the unstable element of linkage’, the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions for ‘newness to come into the world’” (1994:227).

By outlining the Western anthropologist’s intentional or accidental ingressions into novel (for the anthropologist) non-ordinary states of consciousness as either overt or tacit ritual participants it is my hope to groove a cognitive matrix that allows the reader a further understanding of how procreative males can also enter such states, since they, like anthropologists, are in sense, also participant/observers in ritual (not an exact fit obviously but a useful parallel nevertheless).

A brief rehearsal of the idea follows: according to Raphael (1975), Kitzinger (1982), Davis-Floyd (1992), among many others, biological birth-giving has all the elemental properties found in rites of passage, indeed there is strong support for a thesis that birthing itself is the original template for rites of passage (Van Gennep 1909, Gross 1980, Biesele 1997). In the context of *women* birthing in hospitals, it has been argued, a further set of ritual dynamics are instituted and can come forcefully into play (see i.e. Davis-Floyd 1988, 1992). In chapter 9 I apply Davis-Floyd’s argument to procreative males.

According to various commentators, procreative men involved in the birthing site can be constructed as participant/observers in couvade-like rituals and developmental rites of passage (Richmond and Goldthorp 1978, Richmond 1982, Lewis 1983), which, I have argued, can precipitate powerful cognitive reordering and intense,

perhaps even novel emotional responses and transpersonal disclosures. Therefore they, like anthropologists, have participated in transpersonal events, and so, may well have gathered important experiential reconnoitre/data on the territory. Now to the strange fruit that is transpersonal science.

Beyond Belief: The Origins of Transpersonalism in Anthropology

Let us begin by turning to some of the early examples of what we are calling transpersonalism found in the anthropological discipline before the existence of the transpersonal movement. We can begin with Levi-Bruhl's "law of participation" described by him as ecstatic "border states", in which the subject is fused to the object - this concept is a forerunner of what we could call *participatory knowing* which, is highly significant among contemporary transpersonal theorists (e.g. Tarnas 1991, McDermott 1993, Heron 1998, Ferrer 2002 and see Skolimowski 1994) and anthropologists (Jackson 1989, Tambiah 1990, Young and Goulet 1994).

Significantly, Levi-Bruhl's theory develops in regard to the totemic relationship - the totem site that is said to impregnate women (Roth 1903, Frazer 1910, Montagu 1937). We see Levy-Bruhl further opened a door on to what could well be an erotic transpersonal participatory relationship and perhaps an early example of reproductive consciousness, he says:

The object is presented to the subject as in a certain sense distinct from himself; except in such states as ecstasy, that is border states in which the representation, properly so called, disappears, since the fusion between subject and object has become complete. Now in analyzing the most characteristic of the primitive's institutions—such as totemic relationship, *intichiuma* and initiation ceremonies, etc.—we have found that his mind does more than present his object to him: it possesses it and is possessed by it. It communes with it and participates in it, not only in an ideological, but also in a physical and mystical sense of the word. The

mind does not imagine it merely: it lives it (Levy Bruhl 1910:362 cited in E.Turner 1992:11)

Bruhl's work was drawn, like Tylor's, in an epoch where a racist cultural evolutionary theory reigned and which saw the 'native' mind as still dwelling in a naïve form that Western minds were to have supposedly out-grown. Bruhl's influence is found in Carl Jung, an important ancestor of the transpersonal movement. In an early example of anthropology's contribution to transpersonalism we see that Jung borrowed Levy-Bruhl's notion of "representation collective" (1910) for his theory of "archetypes of the collective unconscious" (e.g. Morris 1991:169).

Franz Boas also becomes an important ancestor on the transpersonal family tree – he had lived among the Inuit and experienced what he called a "conversion experience" (Morris 1991:162).¹ This experience fuelled his important attack on cultural evolutionary theory and its racist biological determinism and furthered the discourses of cultural relativity, which in turn would influence the Afro-American civil rights movements (followed by world-wide student and civil movements). And civil rights along with similar forms of human flourishing were and are at the heart of the transpersonal movement (Chinnen 1996).

From Ambivalence and Anonymity to Sacred Science

According to Laughlin an alternate history of 'strange events' (strange and esoteric for Westerners perhaps) have been "routinely" reported by anthropological field workers (1988:4). It is likely however, given the secular, positivistic, and medicalizing history outlined in the previous chapter, that many such events have remained intentionally anonymous. Indeed, Turner observes such moments have been literally left at the margins of the anthropological page, and among the writers who

¹ He had participated with the Fool dancers of the *Kwakiutl* Winter Ceremony.

have shied away from representing these extraordinary experiences, she numbers Evan-Pritchard (1937:11), Peter Huber in New Guinea, Romanucci-Ross in Mexico (1979), and Laura Bohannon (1954) (who included her spirit experiences in a novel *Return to Laughter* under a pseudonym “Eleanor Bowen”) (Turner 1992:5).

Young and Goulet suggest this anonymity is/was based on fears of being ostracized by the academic community, “Because of fear of ostracism, an entire segment of cross-cultural experience common to many investigators is not available for discussion and scientific investigation” (1994:8). Young has also suggested that an “existential shock” can accompany such highly unusual experiences, which can take the fieldworker so outside of his/her normal experience that they struggle to find the “relevant explanatory models” that they end up repressing the experience and so consign them to professional anonymity (1994:166-167).

I suggest another model for understanding the difficulty anthropologists have had with representation and anonymity may also rest with our theme that transpersonal co-penetration is also a form of hybridity but that it may also be one verging on blasphemy. Put simply - “Hybridity is heresy” (Bhabha 1994:225). For the Western anthropologist these moments are heretical to secular materialism, yet, for the so-called ‘pure traditional culture’, such anthropological moments can suggest a powerful form of blasphemy threatening to replace that religious and cultural tradition’s “claim on purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and reinscription...it is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular, it

is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation (Bhabha 1994: 225).²

Bhabha's comments relate directly to fundamentalist Islam's deadly reaction to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988). I would imagine that few anthropologists would like to imagine themselves as destroyers of so-called cultural purity by participating momentarily in that culture's spirit-alterity, but more pertinent, did they have the necessary theoretical models to fully understand their position as *religious hybrids* as opposed to 'pure' objectivity or 'going native'. However if hybridity turns out to be the meta process, that is to say, if religious notions of original purity represent hegemonically enshrined edifices of what were originally hybrid forms, now in arrested development, then moments of unstable "in-between-ness" may well reflect a profound meta-cultural process: the ways in which sacred aspects of culture hyphenate and flow subversively across boundaries in the changed mind-worlds of anthropologists. And what of the feedback loop, what does co-penetration do to the spirit-world he or she visited? Did it change it in the way that Mohamed's visit to alterity on the *Night of the Mirage* changed it? Are spirit worlds malleable?

Nonetheless, blasphemy or no, such moments do exist in the anthropological record and are represented; here Laughlin (1988:4) furnishes an early example of spontaneous transpersonal phenomenon in the anthropological field dating to 1935 from Geoffrey Gorer's *African Dances*:

He found himself in a large gathering of people that included a famous Dahomeyan shaman. At one point he met the shaman's gaze: "I felt that for some reason it was necessary for me to meet his gaze and I continued staring at him

². Bhabha also uses the idea of hybridity with which to show "fractures in the sovereign, unified... Cartesian subject at the heart of the colonial enterprise" (Vasquez and Marquardt 2004:58).

across a space of about thirty yards till all the surrounding people and landscape became an indistinct blur and his face seemed preternaturally distinct and as it were detached from his body and nearer to me metaphysically than it was in reality. I wondered whether I was being hypnotized (1935:131).

Lincoln and Denzin, citing Rosalie Wax, note that anthropologists since the early 70's, have spoken of their "confessional tales" and the changes wrought in themselves by their engagement with sacred questions (1998:423). The extraordinary nature of these kinds of changes, conversions, and the process of 'going native' are the focus of *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters* (Young and Goulet 1994).

Even so, only a few anthropologists have intentionally entrained themselves for experiential participation in altered states, yet paradoxically, according to Laughlin, "Anthropological research involving alternate phases of consciousness has been extensive and has, in fact provided much of the cross-cultural material upon which transpersonal theoretical work in other disciplines had been grounded" (1993:190). The following passage from *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* is another example of the feedback-loop between anthropology, transpersonal studies and non-ordinary states of consciousness. In his article "Phenomenological Mapping: A Method for Describing and Comparing States of Consciousness" (1995:25) Walsh observes:

The prevalence and importance of altered states of consciousness (ASCs) may be gathered from Bourguignon's (1973, p.11) finding that some 90% of cultures have institutionalised forms of them. She concluded that this was a "striking finding and suggests that we are, indeed, dealing with a matter of major importance, not merely a bit of anthropological esoteria.

A clear case of anthropological research serving as credential to transpersonal studies, yet we should also note that her work emerged several years after the formal founding of the transpersonal movement in 1968 and concerned itself, in part, with the

phenomenon of the burgeoning psychedelic inquiry of the American counter-culture (Bourguignon 1973, 2004). Another example of this feed-back relationship is found in *Sacred Science: Person Centred Inquiry into the Spiritual and Subtle* in which English transpersonal researcher John Heron outlines his di-polar (as opposed to non-dual) praxis for exploring participatory transpersonal happenings. Citing Lincoln and Denzin's (1994) review of qualitative methods Heron writes,

The human disciplines since the turn of the century have been on a journey to join science and the sacred, citing many writers from Durkheim to Mary Douglas.³ They point to a range of sacred 'happenings and rituals' which suggest that concerns of the spirit are already returning to the human disciplines (Heron 1998: 8).

Once again a clear indication that transpersonal currents run through anthropology's research legacy, in particular, the relationship between rituals and sacred states, its process of hybridity i.e. the "journey to join science and the sacred" and, in the context of Heron's work (and similar qualitative approaches) the potential for researching transpersonal happenings from the insider's orientation (Heron 1996, 1998, and see Reason and Rowan 1981, Reason 1993, Rothberg 2000).

Interestingly, in their survey, Lincoln and Denzin conclude that a "sacred science" (1994: 583) would emerge in the discourses of qualitative research and they include the urgings of Peter Reason (1993) who asks that we "consider the more elemental spiritualities of these [anthropological] inquiry processes" and how "shamanism, magic and the world of spirit" connect with science and our own development as persons (Lincoln and Denzin 1994: 583). In this and later editions they point to the future and a "seventh moment" concerned with the "development of sacred textualities" (2000:3) and the creation of "sacred ethnography" (2000:1055). This

³ They also mention Max Weber and anthropologists Renato Rosaldo, Gregory Bateson, Carlos Castaneda, Bennetta Jules-Rosette, and Rosalie Wax.

seems to me an important direction for anthropology to evolve toward, given their stated ends of ecological survival and human flourishing, but I find Lincoln and Denzin's statements somewhat ill-considered, amounting to a non-sequitur, given transpersonal psychology, as a 'sacred science', had emerged in the late '60s and transpersonal anthropology, as a formal sub-discipline: had emerged in the mid '70s (Laughlin 1988, Lee 1980). In fact in their compendious *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd Ed.) (1994, 2000 and see 1998) they fail to mention transpersonal science whatsoever.

To ignore the offspring of two important parent disciplines: social anthropology and transpersonal psychology, and its intensely reflexive innovations which specifically concerns itself with the way different cultures shape and experience transpersonal consciousness, seems to me to be an extraordinary omission, and in my opinion, one that flies in the face of their asserted support of human and ecological flourishing, given their role as authorities on qualitative methods and information providers to research students and consumers. Whatever *their* reasons for this anonymity (or erasure) they need to upgrade their chapter on their so-called 'seventh moment' to include 35 years of the 'fourth force': transpersonalism.

Various anthropologists are well aware of the feed-back loop between the two disciplines, Michael Winkelman, for example, puts it this way: "The experiences produced within religious traditions were characterized by earlier anthropologists as awe, trance, or ecstasy; now these phenomena are referred to as altered states of consciousness (ASC)⁴ or transpersonal consciousness" (2002:6). This is an interesting development because the many religious cultures, movements, spiritual groups, their rituals, beliefs, world-views, practices and 'numinous' happenings that anthropology

⁴ Altered state of consciousness.

has long concerned itself with, now, potentially at least, can be understood as transpersonal systems or events, and their (ASC) or transpersonal disclosures studied 'empirically'. And right here, at this very juncture, we should note another important and controversial fusion – that of empirical science with spiritual events and experience (Rothberg 1993, Ferrer 2002, Wulff 2000). This hybridizing frame of reference has served to further legitimize and validate the culture and practices in question, (because of the Western valuing of empirical science) which is an almost polar reversal of the anti- 'religious experience' strain in early anthropology and the social sciences in general. The down-side is that 'empiricism' itself rooted in the Enlightenment's dualism. Interestingly, Bhabha also uses the idea of hybridity with which to show "fractures in the sovereign, unified... Cartesian subject at the heart of the colonial enterprise" (cited in Vasquez and Marquardt 2004:58).

An example of this might be Slotkin's study of the Native American Church in which an informant said, "The white man talks about Jesus; we talk to Jesus"(Slotkin 2001[1956]:132). Transpersonalists would tend toward a more generous and informed relationship with visionary states, accepting them as genuine psycho/cultural phenomena and important 'data' bearing events (although, not, as we see, uncritically swallowed). A host of other institutions large and small including movements such as neo-paganism, Alcoholics Anonymous, Southern Baptist snake-handlers, feminist witchcraft, New York/Haitian Voodoo, Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy, underground (illegal) Ayahuasca Churches, or Western phenomenology, can be, and are, viewed as transpersonal systems of healing, knowledge and cradles for the shaping of religious identity.⁵

⁵ The myriad forms and practices that fall under the rubric of 'The New Age' (what some think of as a religion of globalization) (Kapferer 2003, Comaroff and Comaroff 2001) could also be potentially studied as transpersonal events (and examples of cultural and spiritual hybridity), as can more traditional pre-capitalist religious systems. Interestingly, in Young and Goulet's excellent collection of

Some Critical Issues

Transpersonalism, as a movement in Western critical science, is open to revision from all of the major intellectual trends (i.e. depth psychology, philosophy of science, feminism, post-modernism) and is as fiercely self-conscious and self-critical as anthropology has become (see Rothberg and Kelly 1995; Heron 1998; Bache 2002 Ferrer 2000). Transpersonal theorists have elaborated various psycho-cultural pathologies associated with transpersonal transformation and spiritual practice (see e.g. Wilber, Engler, Brown 1986; Scotton, Chinen & Battista et al 1996). Not surprisingly we find many divergent fires burning within the transpersonal camp and many hotly contested issues at the heart of the discipline, issues with which transpersonal anthropology, as sub-discipline, must also grapple.

An example of the territory under contestation would be the historical relationship between the so-called 'perennial philosophy', transpersonal theory, and current participatory revisions in transpersonalism (Heron 1998, Rothberg 1986, Wilber 1995

papers, which deals specifically with extraordinary field experiences, they purposefully distance themselves from New Age cosmologies. They claim that New Age mind-worlds tend to view reality as having "different dimensions, and enlightenment as a movement to ever higher dimensions, either in this life or in lives to come" and have to do with the "ultimate meaning of life" and therefore counts as a religion and that their anthropology of extraordinary consciousness was more about the "social-psychological study of religious experience" rather than religion per se:

"We want to entertain the notion that what was/is seen at first as an 'extraordinary experience' is in fact the normal outcome of genuine participation in social and ritual performances through which social realities are generated or constituted" (Young and Goulet 1994:8-9).

I agree in part, alter-worlds are psycho-socially constituted including multi-dimensional accounts of reality, which are not limited to what is glossed as New Age thinking and can be a central aspect of non-ordinary disclosures in various 'traditional' cultures. Furthermore I would point out, that all of the contributing anthropologists in their volume are dealing with extraordinary moments in non-Western host cultures. Therefore they may have been participating in alterities in which New Age-ism was not a factor and where leaving New Age thought out would be a moot point since it is not operating in the cultures in question. However I suggest this is not a luxury that an anthropologist and insider of New Zealand culture, can afford because what is glossed as 'New Age' thinking and ritual performances have been part of New Zealand culture for many years and are reasonably diffuse (see i.e. Ellwood 1993). We can also mention co-existent Maori beliefs that see the *wairua* or spirit world as just next door and where the skin between the ancestors and this world is considerably thinner than the dichotomy found in Western cultures (see Klass 1995).

Ferrer 2002). Another would be transpersonalism's historical and, according to some, somewhat uncritical fealty to Hindu and Buddhist thought, an issue which has also garnered heated debate among transpersonal theorists because of the gendered, authoritarian, and world-denying aspects of these institutions and their idealized importation into Western culture (Heron 1998; Wilber 1997; Walsh 1995; Morris 1994; Winkleman 1993; Kremmer 1996; Wright 1994).

Another issue might be transpersonalism's womb resonant epistemology (see i.e. Tarnas 1991; Ring 1988; Grof 1977, 1985) and the argument between two of the movement's well known contributors Stanislav Grof and Ken Wilber concerning the underlying relationship between the womb, spiritual experience, transpersonal development and human evolution (Rothberg and Kelly 1998 et al; Bache 2000).

Finally the notion that a "subtle Cartesianism" has historically and uncritically pervaded and distorted the transpersonal movement's vision in the form of "intrapyschic reductionism" (Ferrer, 2002) must be considered by transpersonal anthropologists. In my opinion these areas are where the sub-discipline of transpersonal anthropology can make a further contribution to transpersonal theory especially post-colonial anthropological ideas concerning witchcraft and sorcery and the occult 'mechanics' of *cosmological hybridity* (e.g. Kapferer 2003; Brenderbeken 2003).

Ferrer has pointed out that transpersonalism's early and uncritical commitment to 'experientialism' veils a modernist intrapsychic construction of subjectivity (according to him a cramping import from psychoanalysis and the materialist view of the world) and individual experience, creating a somewhat narcissistic (alienated and inflated) spiritual integration. However by loosening them from their wholly intrapsychic qua individual moorings they become in effect participatory trans-personal

events, which is to say, multi-located and shared social events of consciousness.⁶

Ferrer writes:

The epistemic approach conceives transpersonal phenomena as (1) *events*, in contrast to intrasubjective experience, (2) *multilocal*, in that they arise in different loci, such as an individual, a relationship, a community, or a place (2000:224).

The suggestion here, as I read it at least, is that the “participatory turn” in transpersonal psychology brings us very much back into the traditional stamping ground of anthropology, particularly transpersonal anthropology, since these *sacred* events are now described as partially located in, springing from, or corresponding to, social processes, relationships, and culturally constructed sites of trans/formation (see i.e. Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

And finally, to complete this section, an early expression of the sub-discipline was *Phoenix: The Journal of Transpersonal Anthropology* (see Lee 1980, Laughlin 1988) that eventually became *Anthropology of Consciousness*; a journal and society affiliated to the American Anthropological Association. Hybridized or *Creolized* transpersonal anthropology is most simply defined as: the cross-cultural study of transpersonal states of consciousness. However *the* major innovation pursued by transpersonal anthropologists, and one that completely departs from early anthropology’s monophasic bias (or what Edith Turner has wryly called anthropology’s “Religious frigidity” 1992:7) is their willingness to enter into states of consciousness (multi-local events) anomalous to scientific rationalism as a demanding form of participant/observation and data gathering. We will now warm up to this trend.

⁶ A similar relocation occurred when sociologist Alfred Schutz de-psychologized William James’ important insight into what he called sub-universes by lifting them out of their intrapsychic housing and relocating them in socially active spheres he called “finite provinces of meaning” .

Participant-Observation: Keeping a Janus Face in Alterity

It has been pointed out that participant/observation - the stock in trade of anthropological fieldworkers - binds together two divergent research approaches, or faces. One face, "unobtrusive observation" is "rooted in the positivist tradition" and the emulation of natural science (Young and Goulet 1994:312). This requires "a particular kind of distancing, affective neutrality and abstraction to events in the world" (Tambiah 1990: 105). The observations of natural science *should* take place in a world where a progressive atomization of information *should* break down into molecules and atoms and then atoms into sub-atomic building blocks whose interactions *should* be measurable and predictable (Tambiah 1990:105).

Conversely the participatory face of the anthropologist's inquiry apparatus is "grounded in the phenomenological interpretive tradition in the philosophy of social sciences, [and] is directed towards 'comprehension' (Young and Goulet 1994:312). Tambiah says that "the discourse of participation can be framed in terms of sympathetic immediacy, performative speech acts, and ritual action" and will emphasize "affective communication and the language of emotions" (1990:108).

These two orderings of reality are available *simultaneously* to anthropological fieldworkers, and, when coupled with informed subjectivity (critical subjectivity or intense reflexivity) can lead to what Devereux called the "royal road to an authentic, rather than fictitious, objectivity" (1967:xvi-xvii) ⁷When the anthropologist comes down out of his or her objectivist tree and joins in - no longer satisfied to fill in "the process of interpretation" with alienated "surmises" (Young and Goulet 1994:312) then, and perhaps only then, do different worlds become available.

A Brush with the Lore

⁷ Cited in Young and Goulet (1994: 312).

An example of an anthropologist getting out of her tree (so to speak) was Bennetta Jules-Rosette, who used her personal experience of conversion to the Church of John Maranke as her central ethnographic method in *African Apostles* (1975). This conversion or metanoia, she said, was “dramatic, resulting in a moment of shock in which even the physical terms of existence seemed to alter”. This she called a “reality shaping” procedure that for members (Apostles) was “authoritative and irreversible” admitting them into a “new spirit world” and “another order of reality” (1975:61-67). Victor Turner noted in the book’s foreword that her fieldwork, in a “traditional sense”, ended with her conversion (1975:8).

What begins is a form of observation in deep participation. When describing the Church’s trance inducing chants, which were used to promote “spiritual transcendence”, she cites Charles Tart, an early contributor to the transpersonal movement, who advanced the important and useful idea of ‘state bound’ or ‘state specific’ learning (1971). She says, “It is simple to recognize and understand a trance-chant state when one is experiencing it, but difficult to transmit it in a convincing way outside of the sung medium itself” (1975:152). We can see the difficulty anthropologists have in translating the state (bound, specific, relative) learning into a different, perhaps more everyday cognitive sphere, i.e. ‘book learning’.

Radical Empiricism and Multiple Real-worlds

The participatory approach in anthropology certainly owes much to the American psychologist William James who espoused the influential argument that reality was subjective and that our waking consciousness was one mode of being among other modes, which he called “sub universes”. Thus the worlds of science, art and dreams, the (“idols of a tribe”) even hallucination or madness was each “real after its own fashion; only the reality lapses with attention” (James 1890: 283-325). Furthermore

the “will to attend to what is real within a sub-universe”, as Young and Goulet put it, is a “psychology of belief and disbelief” (1994:316). James in a sense represents the second generation American Romantic movement and his work is also a major influence on the turn of the millennium transpersonalism (see i.e. Taylor 1996; Rothberg 1993).⁸ His oft quoted refrain runs as follow:

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question—f or they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing with our accounts with reality (1902:388).

Sociologist Alfred Schultz (1962), working from James’ basic premise of sub-universes developed the notion of “multiple realities” by placing phenomenology at heart of research into social reality (an idea that would be developed by Berger and Luckmann (1967) in *The Social Construction of Reality*). Schultz unhooked James’ important insight from its restrictive psychological moorings, and, coupled with phenomenology and intentionality, developed his theory of “finite provinces of meaning” (Schultz 1962: 230-23 and see Bellah 1970:242; Tambiah 1990:101-110; Young and Goulet 1994: 404). According to Schultz, pragmatic, everyday, ordinary reality was the prevailing life-world, what he called, “*the epoch of the natural*

⁸ The new England Transcendental movement appears to be the religious expression of several migrant flows, blendings and amalgams between Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, nature worship, Goethe’s German romanticism, Swedenborgism

attitude” (1962: 229). Our belief in this every-day world is maintained by suspending “doubt in its existence” (1962:229), however, when one suspended investment in this world it was possible to intentionally engage in a variety other realities including the “various supernatural worlds of mythology and religion” (Schultz 1962:207).

‘Finite provinces of meaning’ have their own peculiar cognitive styles, accent of reality and specific tensions of consciousness. Each has a unique epoch, specific self-experience and form of sociability, and a specific relationship with cosmic time (Schultz 1962:230-231). Finally, passing from one province to another requires a leap into a new cognitive style (Tambiah 1990:102). Schultz’s word was actually “shock”, he says, “we are not ready to abandon our attitude toward [“the paramount reality of everyday life”] without having experienced a specific *shock* which compels us to break through the limits of this ‘finite’ province of meaning and shift the accent of reality to another one” (Schultz 1973:231). Robert Bellah used Schultz’s ideas to argue for the reality of multiple religious domains (I will use them to argue that procreative males at birth can experience a similar cognitive shock),

Basic to Schultz’s idea is that reality is never simply given, it is constructed. The apprehension of reality is always an active process involving subject and object. Multiple realities arise because of the variety of modes of consciousness and schemas of interpretation that link the two. Schultz pointed out that besides the world of everyday life, which is the social world par excellence, there is the world of dreams, the world of art, the world of science, the world of religion. By showing that these worlds are partially autonomous and irreducible one to the other Schutz gave another powerful argument for the openness and multiplicity of the human spirit (Bellah 1970:242).

To investigate these modes of consciousness and multiple realities James developed his method of *radical empiricism* which states that only that which is directly experienced can be included in one’s account of reality. Thus James introduced a radical strain of research where one’s own experience becomes a valid form of data (a

serious challenge to so called detached objectivity), and an approach applicable to anthropologists, for example, Michael Jackson in *Paths Toward A Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (1989) presses the method:

A radical empirical method includes the experience of the observer and defines the experimental field as one of interactions and intersubjectivity. Accordingly, we make ourselves experimental subjects and treat our experiences as primary data (Jackson: 1989:4).

However in Michael Jackson's hands James' radical empiricism appears to go beyond simple social participation: the "ethnographer's interactions with those he or she lives with and studies" (1989:3). Jackson's participatory anthropology draws in part from theoretical physics which collapsed that boundary between observer and observed in the 1920s: "The physicist participates in the reality under investigation; his or her methods alter or even constitute it. As Werner Heisenberg puts it, 'We can no longer speak of the behaviour of the particle independently from the process of observation'" (Jackson 1989:3).

In a similar discussion on "multiple orderings of reality", anthropologist Stanley Tambiah points out that *participation* in a special sense has been assigned an important role in the modern physics. "In that special sense "participation" has become part of, and incorporated into, the scope of 'scientific rationality' (Tambiah 1990:110). He points out that Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle' and Niels Bohr's 'principle of complementarity' (the wave/particle paradox) "constructs a participatory reality" in which "no elementary quantum phenomenon *is* a phenomenon until it is a registered [observed] phenomenon, and that this act of registration or recording has an inescapable consequence for what you can say about the electron".

All this sounds the death knell of Cartesian-dualism and its clunky alienated universe while giving credence to radical participatory approaches in anthropological

research (we are always already participating). But, as Jackson notes, anthropologists are not studying electrons - they are participating with human beings in an interplay of intersubjective and interactive reciprocal relationships adding infinite degrees of complexity to the task of human research (Jackson 1989:3). Nevertheless, says Tambiah, “participation is very much in place” in the world of qualitative science, and is pre-eminent “as a mode of relating to and constructing reality”, this pre-eminence finds its zenith, “when describing aesthetic or religious orientations” because of its “holistic and configurational grasping of totalities as integral to aesthetic enjoyment and mystic awareness” (1990:106). The “bridge”, to this mystical participation, he says, is to be found in the “interconnectedness between persons” and nature. Tambiah writes:

When the Trobriand Islanders relate their myths of origins in terms of emerging from holes in the ground or being associated to primordial rock...when Americans young and old, terrified by nuclear devastation and industrial waste turn out in droves to protect their environment and their ecology, their flora and their fauna; when Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, waxed eloquent in the presence of, and communion with, nature... in all these instances, we have manifestations of “participation” among, people, places, nature and objects. And people participate in each other as well: the bonding and relation between parents and children, between kinsmen and the ties of blood and amity; the transmission of charisma...between a Buddhist saint and his followers; or between the Thai royal family and their subjects; the Indian concept of *darshan* of a deity whose eyes fall upon the worshipers as much as the worshipers view their deity—all these are intimations of participation (1990:107-108).

To digress for a moment: what I find equally fascinating is that the early Western physicists used Hindu and Buddhist religious imagery to describe their quantum participatory universe. This re-ordering of the Western materialistic universe into a participatory cosmos tinged with a pan-Hindu gloss would drip down into the psychedelic counter-culture and become an important feature of transpersonalism. In

short a quantum holistic participatory universe clothed in oriental mystical terms, knowable through participatory non-ordinary states of consciousness. The following examples are excerpted from Fritjof Capra's best selling *The Tao of Physics* (1975:18), which specifically paralleled (and hybridized) the new physics with Eastern mysticism:

The general notions about human understanding ... which are illustrated by discoveries in atomic physics are not in the nature of things wholly unheard of, or new. Even in our own culture they have a history, and in Buddhist and Hindu thought a more considerable and central place. What we shall find is an exemplification, and a refinement of old wisdom. *Julius Robert Oppenheimer*

For a parallel to the lesson of atomic theory... [we must turn] to those kinds of epistemological problems with which already thinkers like the Buddha or Loa Tzu have been confronted, when trying to harmonize our position as spectators and actors in the great drama of existence. *Niels Bohr*

The great scientific contribution in physics that has come from Japan since the last war may be an indication of a certain relationship between philosophical ideas in the tradition of the Far East and the philosophical substance of quantum theory. *Werner Heisenberg*

Ethnobotanical Inquiry

Another notable participatory innovation emerged in anthropology when fieldworkers began to purposefully ingest the botanical substances their host cultures used in their traditional religious practices. There had long been reports of explorers, ethnobotanists and pharmacologists, engaging in this form of inquiry since the 19th century (see i.e. Furst and Schaefer 1996:506-508). They note that ethnobotanists had begun to explore the relationship between culture and plants, including psychotropic substances, citing the work of Gordon and Valentina Wasson on sacred magic

mushrooms in Mexico (1955) and their study of the Siberian *fly agaric* cult (1956).

Richard Evans Schultes, director of the Harvard Botanical Museum, had done ethnobotanical research on peyote and *ololiuhqui*, the *Nahuatl* word for morning glory seeds (Furst and Schaefer (1996:506-508).

Many of the early reports had centred around the peyote and several anthropologists began to explore experientially the hallucinatory trance and its relationship to myth, symbolism and cosmology; Weston La Barre's *The Peyote Cult* appeared in 1938; J.S. Slotkin joined (or converted to) the Native American Church and published *The Peyote Religion* in 1956; Furst and Myerhoff (1966) explored the rich mythology of the peyote pilgrimage, and, in 1974, Barbara Myerhoff wrote *The Peyote Hunt: The Sacred Journey of the Huichol Indians* in which she described a vision of herself impaled on the Mayan tree of life after she had ingested peyote with the local Huichol. Her shaman friend Ramon, as a "half-man, magic bird" creature, acting as psycho-pomp, introduced her to the following peyote "booth",

He led me to the next episode which presented as an oracular, gnome like creature of macabre viscosity. I asked it *the question*, the one that had not been out of my mind for months. "What do the myths *mean*?" He offered his reply in mucid tones, melting with a deadly portentousness that mocked my seriousness. "The myths signify—nothing. They *mean* themselves." Of course! They *were* themselves, nothing equivalent, nothing translated, nothing taken from another more familiar place to distort them. They had to be accepted in their own terms. I was embarrassed as that as an aspirant anthropologist I had to be told this basic axiom of the discipline (1974:42).

My anthropological self finds it both challenging and invigorating that a respected anthropologist like Myerhoff can gather her data on the nature of myth from an informant fitting the description of a "gnome like creature of macabre viscosity"... speaking in mucousy tones (talk about the Other!). The question for researchers here is not so much 'are such transpersonal informants real' but 'can they be believed' and,

if so 'should they be'? Another work that exemplified and broadened this approach was *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (1973) which studied several different cultures and their religious psychotropic plant use. According to its editor, Michael Harner, the reason anthropologists had long "underestimated the importance of hallucinogenic substances in shamanism and religious experience was that very few had partaken themselves of the native psychotropic materials (other than peyote) or had undergone the resulting subjective experiences so critical, perhaps paradoxically, to the *empirical* understanding of their meaning to the peoples they studied" [my emphasis] (1973: vii). Stanislav Grof (from the psychiatric transpersonal camp) says that the anthropological exploration of the ritual use of psychedelic plants in the 60s and 70s seemed to confirm the belief systems of "aboriginal cultures, while at the same time undermining many of the fundamental assumptions of Newtonian-Cartesian science" (1988:282). In this vein Harner writes:

When I first undertook research among the Jivaro in 1959-57, I did not fully appreciate the psychological impact of the *Banisteriopsis* drink upon the native view of reality, but in 1961 I had occasion to drink the hallucinogen in the course of fieldwork with another Upper Amazon Basin tribe. For several hours after the brew, I found myself, although awake, in a world literally beyond my wildest dreams. I met bird-headed people, as well as dragon-like creatures. I enlisted the services of other spirit helpers in attempting to fly though the far reaches of the galaxy. Transported into a trance *where the supernatural seemed natural*, I realized that anthropologists, including myself, had profoundly underestimated the importance of the drug in affecting native ideology (my emphasis) (Harner 1973:16-17).

Harner points out however, that it was a "surge of interest" in Western cultures regarding these psychotropic plants that generated a renewed interest among anthropologists in the role such substances played in other societies (Harner 1973:vii). LSD had been discovered by Albert Hoffman in 1938 (oddly enough while

investigating ergot bacteria in maize for a cure for post-partum bleeding, see appendix 2). Perhaps it is worth mentioning here the widespread interest in so-called 'shamanic' practices by the early 60s counter-culture (Myerhoff 1974:29; Lewis 1971; Bourguignon 1973; Prince 1974). Lewis writes, that in this sub-culture "far from being dismissed as excessive crudities of questionable religious value, the trance and possession experiences of exotic peoples are seriously considered, and often appropriated as exciting novel routes to ecstasy" (1971:17). In their recent study of peyotism (1996) Furst and Schaefer's explanation for this intense desire to experience another reality (*A Separate Reality* the title of one of Carlos Castaneda's best selling novels about a plant eating anthropologist and his sorcerer friend Don Juan) among youth culture was related to America's war on Vietnam, they write,

But something else was going on in the same decade. There developed a burgeoning interest, mainly among young people, and not only in the United States, in exploring "inner worlds" and "alternate realities" through the use of psychedelic substances.⁹

It was in the 60s, at a time when, coincidentally, America was losing an innocence it may never have possessed but which many people bought into, by involving itself in what was to become its most divisive and unpopular war, that the inner journey and the search for instant chemical Nirvanas became a growth industry (Schaefer and Furst 1996:507).

It is interesting to note how these hallucinogenic peak experiences are axiomatically clothed in Buddhist terms by Furst and Schaefer i.e. "chemical Nirvanas". However Elwood says, "The affinity the 'hippie' counter-culture feels with the American Indian is well known. Its ephemeral psychedelic 'churches' have

⁹ I am not interested in the controversy surrounding Castaneda's work as being or not being authentic ethnography. I am very interested in the cultural hunger for his books (which have sold in the millions), the time-context (late 60's), and their basic premise i.e. that multiple realities exist and can be explored through psychedelics.

posed as recoveries of the spirituality of the Amerindian” (1973:18) (purists gag here - hybridity theorists pause). Yet again, Camille Paglia compares the counter-cultural ferment to the “transnational mystery religions” of the Greco-Roman-Hellenistic period, and roots hippie religious drug use to the Eleusinian mystery cults (2003:21 and see Dodds 1965; Elwood 1973 18-50; and Morris 1994: 23-32). Yet again, Bourguignon suggests an amalgam: Buddhist-Hindu cosmology (already hybridized with the new physics) and American Indian drug use (1973) a fusion between ancient and modern cosmologies and innovative rituals. Again I suggest all this hints at a *cosmological hybrid* sprouted by the psychedelic counter-culture: (to be explored further on) but it is also of some importance to note that it is in this same counter-culture that home birthing would be revitalized and where activists would use a blend of unlike religious symbols (and their religious capital) in an attempt to usurp the western medical authoritative knowledge and the male dominant hegemony inculcated in hospital birth. In this process birthing itself would be shrouded with the religious symbols and vested with the properties of ‘a novel route to ecstasy’ to use Lewis’s words, and the path to a ‘peak experience’ to use Maslow’s. Referring to a study by one of his students he says¹⁰

This started out to be a study of peak experiences in natural childbirth, ecstasies from motherhood and so on...It may have the flavor of the religious conversion experience, or of the great illumination effect, or of the great success experience which changes radically the woman’s self-image, and therefore all her behaviors (Maslow 1971:75).

The unexpected upshot of Tanzer’s early 70’s research was the inference that these procreative fathering males were somehow playing a role that enabled mystical

¹⁰ See Maslow 1964:10 and 1971:75, 169.

experiences in birthing women (1976). However, little attention was paid the male experience.

Biogenetic Structuralism and Symbolic Penetration

Another important participatory research approach in anthropology developed in the early 70's was biogenetic structuralism (e.g. Laughlin and d'Aquili 1974; d'Aquili, Laughlin & McManus 1979; and d'Aquili 1985). This interdisciplinary and experiential approach combines "interpretive anthropology with the contributions of the neurosciences, the cognitive sciences, and transpersonalism" (Young and Goulet: 1994:304). Anthropologist Charles Laughlin is involved with a group who research ritual, altered states; what they call "symbolic penetration" (Laughlin 1988:21) and transpersonal states from a biogenetic structuralist approach (e.g. 1974, 1983, 1988). This group is "interested in how symbolism operates in the neurocognitive mediation of religious experience" (Laughlin 1990:160). From this perspective he has explored Tibetan Buddhist *Dumo* meditation (e.g. 1990b, 1994) and written articles on the methods and training of transpersonal anthropologists (1983, 1988, and 1993).

The basis of symbolic penetration is that "direct experiences may be evoked by the symbolic stimuli in the environment" (Laughlin 1988:21). Furthermore according to him such direct experiences have an important part to play in the ethnographer's understanding the mind-worlds of his or her host culture, indeed he goes as far to say that a, "transpersonal anthropology is required for a full description of the experiences upon which the cosmologies of many non-European cultures are grounded" (1994:102). What he is advocating here is a transpersonal phenomenology whereby the fieldworker "can use his or her own mind as a laboratory experiment with the symbolic processes that appear to be operating in the institution being observed" (Laughlin 1988:22). This group believes that certain universal cognitive structures

lend themselves to this process making it extremely plausible for the ethnographer to experience similar cognitive processes to the 'native' when he or she is engaged in the host's cognitive restructuring practices such as dance, meditation and ritual (1988:22).

Much of biogenetic structuralism concerns itself with the operations and the processes of stimulating the various subsystems in the autonomic nervous system, which appear to accompany many religious/sacred altered states (d' Aquili, Laughlin, McManus 1979). It is of some interest to my thesis that anthropologist and birth activist Robbie-Davis Floyd has deployed many aspects of this research paradigm in her study of contemporary childbirth practices *Birth as an American Rite of Passage* (1992). Her analyses suggest that women birthing engage in the same neurocognitive processes that produce similar states to those found among ritual participants (1992:7-19).

Of some importance is the fact that Davis-Floyd has argued convincingly that contemporary birthing is a site where two major epistemological systems have fought to imprint their divergent symbol systems into its ritual participants. Hyper-technological birthing systems impress their symbolic message into birthing women whereas natural birthing approaches work to imprint or communicate an obviously different set of symbolic messages. Both sides work to secure success in reproduction.

Participant Comprehension

The overall argument presented here is that anthropologists engaged in experiential approaches can experience states of consciousness that are catalysed when they intentionally entrain themselves through a host culture's ritual and healing practices. Greater participation in cultural practices can lead to what Young and Goulet call "[participant] comprehension" (1994:312) or what Laughlin calls "transpersonal

participant comprehension” (1994: 102). Some examples of this approach include: the “big dream” Larry Peters experienced while an apprentice to Nepalese shamanic procedures (Peters 1981) or Carol Laderman’s bodily experience of the ‘Inner Winds’ of Malay shamanism (1991). We can mention again the ingestion of psychotropic substances within a prescribed cultural setting as a form of data gathering (Harner 1973, Myerhoff 1974) also the anthropologist’s active participation in healing rituals and religious practices (Katz 1982; E. Turner 1992) or the unaware and tacit participation in ritual as reported by Grindal (1983); the conversion-as-inquiry experience of Jules-Rosette (1975) and finally the engagement with Buddhist meditation training as a form of phenomenological anthropological inquiry into Buddhist mind-worlds (Laughlin 1994). Anthropologists plying their trade in these fields of ‘waking dreams’ - the participatory alterities of the host culture, include as data what appear to be highly reflexive moments of trans-rational co-penetration by a host culture’s (felt to be) autonomous imaginal world and the anthropologist’s novel penetration of the host’s alterity. Price-Williams writes on this matter, “The imaginative world is experienced as autonomous” and that he or she is “getting involved in an already created process (1987:248).

To sum up: There has been a gradual shift in the recognition and value of researching such phenomenon by participating in the experience. This trend is concomitant with sweeping changes in Western notions of reality (Laughlin 1988). A growing cadre of anthropologists have moved a long way from discounting or pathologizing such states, and Peter Berger’s ironic caution to the would be visionary or emic anthropologist on the dangers of going ‘cognitively native’ (Berger 1969:23) has become largely redundant.

Conversely the penalty for not 'dropping out' of the modernist mind-world is to restrict oneself to the slimmer pickings of information gathered in one cognitive sphere, the suspension of which, offers us participation in other realities and perhaps (after a shock of some description) access to vital ethnographic information, insights into transpersonal realities, and perhaps a reassessment of the boundaries of the human, and the more-than-human condition. As we see most of these experiential approaches (purposeful conversion, plant ingestion, ritual participation, meditation and or shamanic training) emerge with what Bourguignon calls the "psychedelic revolution" (2003:4). The transpersonal movement within the Western world certainly played its part by providing a legitimizing academic forum for the research of such states from a user-friendly standpoint while at the same time critiquing the shortcomings of the Eurocentric materialist mind-world.

Womb Envy: The Hell of the Hungry Ghosts

There is much more continuity between intra-uterine life and earliest infancy than the impressive caesura of the act of birth would have us believe (Sigmund Freud 1926:138).

What then are these embodied yet latent possibilities which are realized during initiations? Some, such as the grieving behaviours, are phylogenetically given. Others, such as the entranced and dissociated rocking of the mimetic dancers, suggest a hypnotic element, the basis of which is a conditioned reflex whose origins are probably intrauterine (Michael Jackson 1989:92).

The element of womb envy in patriarchal oppression must be discussed along with the feminist call for shared parenting (Charlene Spretnak 1982:130).

We might chart the itinerary of womb-envy in a production of a theory of consciousness (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 1988:81).

Introduction

My intention for writing this chapter is to further clear a path to legitimate the father's presence at the birth of his children and to recover his history of positive agency. Chapter 3 was something of an extended critique of reductive research epochs in anthropology and their ethnocentric, cognicentric, and andocentric biases in relationship to birthing rituals and reproductive consciousness. In it I touched on psychoanalytic authoritative knowledge and its so-called 'womb-envy' syndrome - here I will develop the critique adding the 'centrisms' of materialism, psychoanalysis, and feminism to the list.

I will critique several strains of thought in the literature that have inferred serious psycho/social pathology in the father's act of being present at birth. In particular I will

explore what I see as one of the major attacks on male procreativity and reproductive consciousness and that is the Western construction of womb-envy. This idea has seeped into the research legacy through psychoanalysis and has been deployed, particularly by some feminist researchers, to further de-legitimise male involvement in birth on the basis that *all* men hunger after women's birth-giving powers. Unfortunately, by attempting to universalise this poorly researched (and somewhat ghostly) psycho-sexual aberration, the father's presence is also implicated (the unproved and indeed un-provable idea that all males everywhere are busy trying to abscond with birthing or women's birthing status).

I am certainly not attacking feminism or feminist researchers *per se* (given that some male commentators joined up with this theory including, I might add, transpersonal theorist Ken Wilber see 1981:132). However, I am suggesting that it was feminist commentators who attempted to universalise this idea – as the literature suggests. I *am* interested in deconstructing a certain viewpoint held by these writers and this viewpoint has not been contested (as far as I am aware) by feminist thinkers – which can suggest at least tacit support for these theories by feminism in general. Given the gender politics of the times I think their silence is understandable. Nevertheless, my stated meta-purpose is to explore the biased accounts pervading the literature pertaining to, or obscuring what I am calling reproductive consciousness.

The 'couvade' is perhaps *the* ritual complex where male reproductive consciousness is likely to be most obvious. Thus a negative reading of the couvade and the changing of it into a gendered pathological syndrome requires, in my opinion, at least an attempt at a revision (as I did with Christian missionaries and early anthropologists in chapter 3). I like to imagine that most contemporary feminists would not hold these views, but I don't see that view stated in the literature. However,

as we shall see, what may be happening here is yet another unrecognised form of magic, witchcraft and sorcery at the site of birth and what I think of as a ‘demonic rumour’, and it is this process of demonisation that interests me.

Historical Research

Fathers’ psychological experience of birth has received growing attention since the mid ‘70s. According to Joel Richman, research into fathers’ presence was primarily an accidental by-product of research into women’s experience (1981:90-91). Furthermore this research was often related to birthing as a ‘medical event’ (Lewis 1982:60). Therefore most of this research was concerned with hospital birth or carried out in tiny study groups with narrow psychological research designs in clinical environments inquiring into so-called ‘abnormal’ reactions to birth. Early research into fathers’ experiences of birth by psychologists was focused on assumed male pathology arising around pregnancy and/or post-partum, and several researchers have thoroughly reviewed this material (Lamb et al 1976, Richman 1981; Richman and Goldthorp 1978; C. Romalis 1981; Lewis 1982; Beail 1982).

For many, at first glance, fathers’ presence at the birth of their children is such a given of New Zealand culture that its social ordinariness belies its complex political history. Nowadays a man would most likely face social approbation for exercising a choice not to be present, or so several informants told me. Men in New Zealand may not even consider it a choice at all since their presence is now such a norm – but it wasn’t always like this. Allow me to re-state four ideas here. 1) In most (but not all) cultures, fathers have been excluded from the moment and sight/site of parturition. 2) In the past 35 years around 90% of fathers in the New Zealand and other Western countries have become involved at the site of birth. 3) This represents a staggering cultural change in a site that was once largely taboo for fathers. 4) There is to my

knowledge little or no anthropological literature dealing directly with the phenomenon of *why* fathers included themselves into birthing sites. The lack of research concerning why so many men took this action is noted by Charlie Lewis: “Perhaps the most surprising feature concerning men’s attendance at birth is that they have arrived in the delivery room without the reasons for their presence being adequately documented” (Lewis 1982:60).

This is an interesting phenomenon given, as Brian Jackson says, that the biggest change in birth design after the “colonisation of birth by hospitals” was the “presence of the father at birth” (1983:77).¹ Several researchers have asked the question, ‘what was it that brought men into the birthing site so rapidly?’ They also note that no satisfactory reason has been given as yet (Lewis 1982:60, Jackson 1983:77). Even with the diminishing of sexual taboos in the Western world, write Richman and Goldthorp, little is known about the “sociological overtones of fatherhood” (1978:161).

Various movements, groups, and trends have claimed responsibility for the father’s recent presence at birth. These movements include the early natural birth movement, Bowlby’s ‘bonding’ or attachment movement in psychoanalysis, feminism, the medical establishment, and the awkward, but highly contagious rumour that it is ‘womb envy’ that unconsciously drove men toward the womb. While I see each of these currents as having contributed in some way to the change (except womb envy), they are also easily problematised (as seen in chapter 1, pp. 6-13). Furthermore such claims are almost always made without reference to the 1960s therapeutic and political/religious counter-culture which was in full flamboyant rejoinder to Christo-

¹ The medical colonization and ‘medicalization’ of birth has been well researched (e.g. Star 1982, Martin 1987, Ehrenreich and English 1973, Arms 1994, S. Romalis 1981, Wertz and Wertz 1977, Oakley 1980, Leavitt 1986, Merchant 1983, Bordo, 1987, Davis-Floyd 1992, Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997) and many others.

Capitalism when the male birth revolution really begins. I believe that these claims are erroneous when set against the backdrop of this marginalised but “clamorously assertive” (Lewis 1971:21) and custom-reordering resistance culture and have led to distortions regarding the motivations of procreative fathering males engaged in participatory birthing (see chapter 6). However my intention here is to explore the *couvade* and what I will refer to as ‘a rumour of demons’.

Couvade: The Anthropological Legacy

The historical research legacy surrounding fathers at birth divides into two major strands, one coming from 19th century anthropology, which focuses on the ‘exotica’ of the ‘*couvade*’ or male birthing rituals (Richman 1981). The other strand has focused on the psychological side of the male response to female pregnancy, birthing, and fatherhood. This strand is heavily weighted in the direction of psychoanalysis with its obsessive investment in psychopathology (Richman and Goldthorp 1978; McClain 1982; Richman 1981; Lewis 1982). *Couvade* rituals symbiotically bound these two early research paradigms together at the site of birth (e.g. Bettelheim 1955), where, for many researchers of this ilk, the father’s presence came to be seen as driven by pathological womb-envy.

These research legacies are important because as Lewis states, “anthropological considerations of the *couvade* have provided much of the background material for existing psychological theory on men’s reactions to pregnancy in our own culture” [Britain] (1982:44). Furthermore several writers have suggested that the father’s engagement in contemporary birthing can be seen as a type of *couvade*, among them Sheila Kitzinger (1964 and see Lewis 1982:45; Trethowan and Conlon 1965; Lomas 1966; Richman and Goldthorp 1978:167; Richman 1981:97; Davis-Floyd 1992:33). I

agree, in part, with the view that contemporary male participation in birth could be construed as 'couvade', but only after several important modifications.

The problem with this idea is that the couvade has been soundly 'spanked' by anthropologists, psychoanalysts, and feminists over the past 90 years. According to these researchers, couvade rituals represent nothing more than pathological womb-envy enacted by delinquent or juvenile cultures. They see these rituals as having a singular, albeit camouflaged, purpose; the appropriation and theft of women's birth-giving powers as a symptom of that envy. So before using this word we must consider its modernist underpinnings and submit 'couvade' to a reconstruction.

I would first point out that to study couvade in its pre-industrial sense is not to study the actual birth-giving moment, hospitalised birthing, contemporary 'home-birthing' or the contemporary Western father at birth. It is the study of a ritual implicating fathers, mothers, the born (half of which are male-children), society, and cosmos at the edge of a colonisation process from which have emerged highly erroneous theorems concerned with the nature of reproductive rituals (e.g. Powers 1999, Pendersen 2002). These rituals were often studied as discrete 'objects' disassociated from their wider social and cosmological surrounds (Buckley & Gottlieb et al 1988).

These mistaken views alert us to the possibility that we may also need to desensitise ourselves to the assumption that men have little to do with birthing or if they do, that it is only out of envy. To paraphrase Priya: Westerners assume that in traditional cultures, where the activities of women are primary and figural, that the fathers play no significant role in the birthing process. This assumption, however, is

far from the mark; “in no society is the man absolved completely from action which will help his wife give birth” (1992:44).² The following carefully weighted comment from Ginsburg and Rapp speaks to a generalized view that procreative males’ experience at birth in most Western cultures is somewhat erased:

Finally, we should mention another erasure. Perhaps because in our own social categories we disassociate men from domestic domains... little research has been done on men’s involvement with children... While the recovery of female centred accounts of reproduction is central to this book and much of contemporary feminism, we in no way intend to perpetrate a more widespread and pernicious effacement of men’s participation in and concerns about reproduction (1995:5).

I have already pointed out in the previous chapter that some of the formative researchers in early anthropology (Tylor, Frazer, Durkhiem) were of an anti-religious temperament with a vested interest in de-sacralising indigenous religious sites (Evans-Pritchard 1965:15 and see Stipe 1999:16-17, Goulet and Young 1994:300-302). I also suggested that Christian religious and European governmental colonisation of non-Western religious sites and their rituals (including the *couvade*) were reconstructed by early materialist anthropologists with strong anti-religious agendas. The result was a glossing of birth-rituals and reproductive processes with uncritical Euro-Americentric abstractions which were then appropriated by psychoanalysis, which, in turn, warped male procreative rituals into an *intra-psychic* or *intra-subjective* psychopathology (these terms carry with them the medicalised Cartesian assumptions guiding the

² There is an important distinction to note here. According to the literature (Ford 1945, Jordan 1978, Trevathan 1987, Laughlin 1989) fathers are not in *most* cultures present in the actual birthing room or site at the moment of parturition. Therefore it seems somewhat anomalous that the Western world has taken this course i.e. placing fathers along-side their partners in the birthing room (home or hospital) during labour and birth-giving, however, similar activity by fathers *is* found in some cultures (Heggenhougen 1980). The distinction is this: according to several researchers lack of proximity in space and time does not mean that fathers do not participate in birthing. According to these researchers fathers are deeply implicated in birth through symbolic action (Heggenhougen 1980, Aijmer 1992, Priya 1992, Bates and Turner 2003). So the simplistic idea that men have nothing to do with birth, or that the *couvade* is an aberrant pathological system, seem to be born out of ideas that have not paid enough attention to the meaning of ritual action.

structure of modernity e.g. Ferrer 2002:22) originally based on the male's alleged repressed desire to cannibalise the foetus (after Riek 1914).³

Bloodthirsty Demons

Let me deliberately amplify this train of thought so it may become starkly figural: collectively, the celebrations, rituals, and symbolic enactments of male procreativity were and *are still* consigned to a hell-world of *the* envious male historically (and ethnocentrically) rooted in the darkest hearts of cannibalistic males who are depicted as either 'unconsciously' salivating over the foetus or jealously making off with women's (so-called) inherently superior powers (see Kitzinger 1964:61, Ruzek 1978, Lomas 1978, Gross 1980, Spretnak 1982:xxiv, Mander 2004).

However it is interesting to note that instances of foetus-eating by less concrete (but equally envious and demonic) spirits are reported in a wide variety of indigenous cultures, which, in some cases, are associated with women who died in childbirth (Laderman 1983:124 and see Lomas 1978:181). In the Philippines, evil spirits, the rapacious *aswang*, attracted to the sweet-smelling blood at birthing and menstruation are known to suck foetuses prematurely from the wombs of women or "suck the blood of pregnant women, or eat the livers of unborn infants" (Hart 1965: 49-50). Thus it is evil spirits that cause mortality in childbirth. In Bali a *Leyek* (demon) also drawn by the smell of blood, was thought to frequent birthing rooms waiting for an opportunity to devour the newborn (Aria 1991:99). Also Balinese evil spirits (*bhuta kala*) are "drawn to death, blood, and to the placenta and fluid by-products of childbirth" (Pedersen 2002:306). During Malaysian birthing, their demons/ghosts (*hantu*), are still much in the reckoning, and are attracted by the "sweet blood of parturition

³ Talal Asad writes that those who have bred a "religious based identity" into their bones are prone to a process of "medicalization" by the modern state, secular scientists and psychoanalysis, who categorize such an identity as a "condition of individual or collective pathology requiring curative treatment" (1993:280).

dripping through the floorboards” (Laderman 1983:125), also *bajang* (a spirit of non-human origins) are known to “eat fetuses” and drink the milk of lactating females (Laderman 1983:128). In Australia it was the post-birthing blood from one of the ancestral Wawalik sisters that attracts the mythic ‘Snake’ figure, “intent on swallowing the sisters” (Gross 1980:286. See also Eliade for further dangerous and demonic images abounding at birth 1958).⁴ Thus, what the Western bio-medical system conceives as post-partum haemorrhage (dangerous blood), miscarriage, still birth, eclampsia, and psychological fears leading to dystocia, obstruction, spontaneous abortion, and death, are often, among indigenous peoples, equated with malevolent evil spirits, slighted ancestors, or blood-thirsty demons (the main form of treatment being ritual purification, couvades, possession, and other forms of spiritual midwifery and symbolic midwifery/obstetrics).⁵

This pattern of inverted nurturing or nourishment is not limited to Austro-Asian cultures. In ancient Greek creation mythology Cronos, as the god of time, was known to devour his children at birth (see also Lomas 1978: 181)⁶ a family trait followed by his surviving son Zeus, who then swallowed his pregnant wife *Métis* (Kitzinger 1964:61).⁷ An equivalent image of a devouring monster is to be found in the Biblical Revelation of St John. In this overtly perinatal vision, extended into cosmic proportions, a pregnant woman crowned with the stars and standing upon the moon in

⁴ This is also where male ritual complex, taboo system and symbolic separation and bleeding of males begins and not, I would argue, because women are either defiling or dangerous to men, and not because they are collectively manifesting womb envy, or even imitating women’s reproductive powers to appropriate their status – their imitation may be deeply embedded in magical obstetrics worked through at a distance to separate the demonic dangers of death from birth - see below.

⁵ For example Kitzinger notes that among Jamaicans the Western medical condition of “eclampsia is seen as spirit possession” by ancestor spirits (1982:191), obstructed birth among the Cuna Indians of Panama is seen as spiritual interference by Mu and her sisters (Levi-Strauss 1963), and according to Victor Turner the *Isoma* ritual among the *Ndembu* of West Africa where a women’s procreative power was thought to be “tied up” by an offended female ancestor (1969:12) and this caused stillbirth, spontaneous abortion and miscarriage.

⁶ It is possible that the beginning of earthly time, mortality and death are all linked to the womb. In one sense it is time that kills.

⁷ These myths are extremely complex and merit a much deeper inquiry before stampeding toward a conclusion of womb-envy.

the travail of birthing the 'saviour' is set upon by the great red demon (Satan) who seeks to devour the Christ child (Revelation 12: 1-2). Men and women accused of devilry and witchcraft in medieval Europe were also charged with natal cannibalism, the "eating of unbaptized babies" (Ehrenreich and English 1973:12 and see Apps and Gow 2003:111).⁸ Jews, Cathars, Albigensians, Protestants and Catholics have been accused, at various times, of "killing babies and ingesting their blood" (Klass 1995: 94-95).

This pattern does not easily disappear and recently re-emerged in a contemporary witch-hunt for an apparition-like, globally-spreading, satanic-abuse network (also accused of foetus-eating and carrying off newborns) in the early 1990s in the Western world. Serious research has failed to provide any concrete evidence of such a monstrous cult according to anthropologist J. La Fontaine (1998). Demonic rumour campaigns *are* powerful as the European witch-hunts attest and demonic, satanic and devilish rumours have been used in post-modern times by consumers to attack the "incorporeal presence of corporate power" (Coombe 1997:250 and see Taussig 1980).

Some feminist commentators during the mid '70s (and currently), in their understandable and justified desire to regain women's power in reproduction and regain control of their wombs, applied the new pathology of womb envy to *all* males *everywhere* (see e.g. Kitzinger 1964:61, Ruzek1979:93-97) with some success. Lomas writes for example, that the envy of maternity, once consigned to witches and jealous old women, is now confined to men (1978:181). These uncritical assumptions linking the couvade with womb-envy have shaped Western attitudes to the father's presence at birth and are certainly alive in some contemporary feminist writing on the subject (e.g. Ruzek1979, Kittay 1980, Spretnak 1982, Spivak 1987, Mander 2004).

⁸ We might mention here some of Europe's best-known folk stories in which pacts and propitiations are made with witches, sprites, and demons involving pregnancy and conception and who attempt to carry-off the first-born e.g. Rumpelstiltskin or Rapunzel (and see chapter 3 on women's possession cults).

The rituals of fatherhood have long been the historical province of anthropology, indeed, these so-called hatching rituals were first studied at the inception of anthropology by E.B.Tylor (1865) and later by Frazer (1910) as a form of sympathetic magic enabling the father to identify with the foetus (Lewis 1982:44), or “a magico-protective rite transferring pain from the mother and deflecting evil spirits from the baby” (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:162)⁹.

Wanda Trevathan points out early male ethnographers were not permitted into birth sites and so resorted to studies of male ritual and couvade (1987:36). Even so, these male anthropologists have still been criticized for their “excessive concern with the male’s role in childbirth ritual” (McClain 1982:47). Indeed, the Freudian Bettelheim suggested that male anthropologists had not been able to perceive the supposed womb envy driving male initiation rites, inferring that male anthropologists share in the same scotomacised psychopathology (1955:110).

Interpretations of the couvade are classically defined as, “The custom by which the father, on the birth of his child, makes a pretence of being the mother, being nursed and taken care of, and performing other rites such as fasting or abstaining from certain kinds of food or occupations, lest the newborn should suffer thereby” (Tylor 1881: 254 cited in Rival 1999:8). In fact many of Tylor’s examples (drawn from Christian missionaries) show that fathers are miming the foetus rather than the birth-giving mother – this would suggest that the womb envy theory does not have enough explanatory power to cover this important aspect of the couvade. Some feminist scholars simply favour the notion that men are always imitating women e.g. McClain (1982:47) says for example, “Childbirth ritual was pondered by 19th century scholars in order to discover the significance of the couvade, the husband’s assumption of the

⁹ Malinowski (1927) believed the couvade’s function was to legitimate the child’s need for a father (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:162).

symptoms and behaviour of his wife during pregnancy, delivery, and the post partum period” – here McClain disappears the possibility that men may also be imitating the successful neonatal journey through the dangers of the birth canal (suggestive of a symbolic obstetrical manoeuvre designed to increase successful birth outcomes based perhaps on homeopathic principles).

Another basic version is that *couvade* behaviours are a kind of prophylactic mimesis (a protective performance) where the father acts out the woman’s labour pain and birth of the child, he writhes in agony in an attempt to propitiate the spirits; to attract the dangerous blood-thirsty and death-dealing spirits (mentioned above) and lead them *away* from the birthing mother (Bates and Turner 2003: 91, and see Richman and Goldthorp 1978:162) - in my opinion, to assist in the symbolic (spiritual-obstetrical) separation of death from birth.

Tylor and Frazer characterised such behaviours as homeopathic or sympathetic magic; “one of the great merits of homeopathic medicine” writes Frazer, “is that it enables the cure to be performed on the person of the doctor instead of that of his victim, who is thus relieved of all trouble and inconvenience, while he sees the medicine man writhe in anguish before him (1922:21). This may help explain Victor Turner’s observation that among the Ndembu in the *Isoma* ritual (in which a woman is ritually made fertile again after miscarriage) men dance the swaying *kupunjila* that “mimes the contractions of an abortive labor” (1969:37). However let us contrast this with Margaret Mead’s somewhat caustic reading of *Arapesh* males, who writhe in pain during their obstetrical performances:

In societies where men have never been allowed to witness childbirth, their fantasies about its terrible nature may be unbounded. *Arapesh* men give pantomimed accounts of childbirth in which women are conceived as writhing in screaming agony. Whereas in actuality the women of the tribe give birth quietly

and matter-of-factly, in difficult and uncomfortable circumstances, on the damp ground of a steep slope, in the dark, with no one to help except one other woman...The contrast between men's nightmares and the actuality is striking (Margaret Mead 1972 quoted in Susan Arms' *Immaculate Deception* 1975: 11).

It is Mead's dichotomous version of men and women, and something about her emotive tone that I find striking: the women, alone, in the dark, damp, uncomfortable ground filled with dignity while the men-folk writhe about with their nightmares and abounded fantasy worlds. But why are they writhing? Mead seems to suggest an odd mixture of terror and fantasy.

However, if the men's performance is a culturally embedded method for dealing with the pain of childbirth then she has missed a vitally important set of mutually reinforcing behaviours forming a co-operative psycho-obstetrical manoeuvre. She pronounces that such behaviours were merely concoctions, exaggerated misconceptions, "fantasies" or "nightmares" bearing no relation to the "actuality" of women's birth-giving (Mead 1972 cited Arms 1975:11).¹⁰ But I would argue that we may not be talking about the "actuality" of women's birth-giving as if it were some isolated ritual. We are quite possibly talking about the actualising of a complementary obstetrical system embedding male participatory responses to generation and parturition geared to aid women birth without the contraction of terror. Mead's presumption that such male symbolic performances should not exaggerate and dramatise the "actuality" of women's birthing in the first place seems to me a somewhat blinkered position.¹¹ The mimetic logic here suggests that the males have

¹⁰ We can recall that the word "fantasy" and "nightmare" carry with them the reduction of the Freudian and positivistic era and are seen as dissociated objects of consciousness.

¹¹ There is an irony here; when men's reproductive behaviour does resemble birth-giving it is seen as womb envy (e.g. Gross 1980, Ruzek 1978) and when it doesn't it is seen as inane, which is conveyed by such terms as: "pantomimes", "fantasies about its terrible nature ... unbounded" and "men's nightmares". Male anthropologists also walk a shifting edge around birthing; too near and they are seen as appropriating thieves (I have had the bony-finger of womb envy pointed at me three times by locals; four if I include the person who suggested I was closet gynaecologist, which does suggest the idea has

taken on the pain of the birth so that women may go about birthing with dignity. The ‘hysterical’ (I use this word with caution knowing its relationship to the uterus) performance of the men is to occupy the ‘demonic’ attributes of fear (see also chapter 6).

We have already explored the colonisation of birthing rituals and the medicalisation of reproductive consciousness (chapter 3). Mead’s account promotes an equally belittling, ethnocentric, and misandrous view. The above passage was used in birth activist Susan Arms’ influential book *Immaculate Deception* to popularise her version of womb-envy (1975:11-12). In it she also represents birth as a woman-only affair and all males involved in birth in traditional cultures are depicted as intruders, envious, confused, aggressive and controlling, whereas women, “dealt with it matter-of-factly, instinctively and without fear. She did not expect what we call ‘pain of childbirth’” (1975:11) (and it may be that she did not expect it because others operating on her behalf were busy with it). Here Arms is echoing not only Mead’s rigidly dichotomous version of Arapesh men and women at birth but also Mead’s idea that the pain of childbirth itself was the product of “male myth”. Wertz and Wertz observe that:

In her writings she urged other women to overcome the “male myth” of pain in birth, for as she remarked in her autobiography ‘I have never heard primitive women describe the pains of childbirth. But in societies in which men were forbidden to see birth, I have seen men writhing on the floor, acting out their conception of what birth pangs were like (1977:180).

Thus Mead promulgates the notion that men are responsible for women’s labour pains, which, as I have shown above, were in many traditional cultures, associated

some currency in New Zealand culture). Male anthropologists who keep their distance, according to the taboos of the host culture, are then charged with perpetrating andocentric disinterest in women’s business (e.g. Jordan 1978: 6-7, Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997:1).

with demonic influences – and so called “male myth” may have been important metaphors to canalise the dangerous and painful passage of birth.

Mead was a true pioneer in anthropology, anthropology of human sexuality and birth, the women’s movement, and birth reform, however, perhaps her ethnography could have been a less biased when it came to the father’s performances. We should note that Mead also had “reputation and prestige” enough to demand an anesthesia-free birth after consulting with Benjamin Spock and prepping the nurses with films of women’s birth-giving in New Guinea. However she was not able change the routine separation of mother and child after birth (Werzt & Wertz 1980-181).

While it appears to be correct that most fathers in most pre-industrial cultures are not at the actual scene of birth (Ford 1945, Jordan 1978, Trevathan 1987, Laughlin 1989) but they are, according to Heggenhougen, very busy with definitive symbolic performances, “believed to bear directly on the outcome of the birth of his child” which have great social and psychological significance (1980:21-22).¹² A common behaviour among men is to ritually fool the evil spirits attendant at birth “leaving the woman free and unobstructed in her delivery” (which is almost the picture Mead paints of male ritual performances). Husbands diligent in their performance were seen to be integral participants in birthing as his suffering symbolically relieves the woman’s fear in proportion to which he can perform the suffering (Heggenhougen 1980:23). It is this prophylactic method that men “everywhere” enact in the service of reproductive success (Aijmer 1992:8 see also Bates and Turner 2003:91) and this is what I think the Arapesh pantomime suggests: a complementary symbolic birthing

¹² Birth in Western medicalised sense is limited to a labour room and a mechanical body whereas birth in traditional cultures is an event implicating a much wider social and cosmic landscape. Thus the site of birth may be multi-located with ritual and symbolic action done at a distance from the actual birthing body. Because the birthing body extends beyond materialist notions of ‘body’ it may incorporate a social birthing body and cosmic birthing body. The features of the surrounding environment, trees, rocks, rivers, oceans, houses, are also implicated as the human body is embedded in a greater participatory ensemble (e.g. Laderman 1983).

system at work. I have suggested that we may need to detach ourselves from the rumours (and their embrace) that men have traditionally little to do with birthing. To understand the contemporary entrance of males into birthing sites in Western societies we must also conceive of a more expanded view of their procreative performances beyond the limited scope of Western pathological diagnostics or the bewitching rumours that have turned fathers into idiots or demons:

Childbirth in virtually all traditional societies is structured according to the religious beliefs of that society concerning birth. There is a widespread belief in the vulnerability of the woman to malevolent influences during pregnancy and especially during childbirth. Numerous customs and rituals have developed to ensure the safety of the woman during her time of weakness. These usually consist either of appeasing the appropriate spirits or attempting to distract them away from the labouring woman and are usually performed by the father or other relatives (Bates and Turner 2003:91).

Carol Laderman's accounts of Malay shamanism and ethno-physiology regarding conception, pregnancy and childbirth offers important insights into their traditional midwifery/obstetrics which are woven thoroughly into the core concepts of their culture (1983, 1987, 1991). "Childbirth in Merchang", she writes, "is not only a physiological event necessitating medical care, but a stage in a rite of passage as well, requiring spiritual prophylaxis and ritual expertise. A competent midwife knows how to ease her charge's way into the world and protect the vulnerable mother and child from attacks by envious spirits" (1983:124).

Also some researchers also point out that the *couvade* is often interpreted as having cosmic, magical, religious, mystical, spiritual and transcendental significance and was enveloped in a ritual complex designed to ensure the safety of the foetus and mother and create a "special tie, often of a 'spiritual' kind, between the father and the unborn/newly born child" (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:170; see also Richman 1981;

Lewis 1982:43; S. Romalis 1981:10). Such ideas suggest these rituals can have psycho-spiritual symbolic dimensions of a transpersonal and participatory nature.

However Paige and Paige see it differently:

Reproductive rituals then, are attempts to gain political advantage in conflicts over women and children rather than mechanisms for satisfying the psychological needs of individuals or for symbolically reducing social conflict and tension. Reproductive rituals are motivated by self-interest; their sentimental and religious symbolism merely cloaks their true objectives (Paige and Paige 1981:50).

I do not see everything in these political terms. I would suggest that this blanketing theoretical statement offers up only a couple of scapegoats e.g. reducing social tension may not be the point, and no mention is made here of the obstetrical/medicinal objectives of “reproductive rituals” found in many cultures which are often cloaked in collective religious expressions (Laderman 1983, Kitzinger 1982, Taussig 1993, Bates and Turner 2003) . Indeed, I would argue that such religious symbolism may well be unrecognised obstetrical systems, that they represent powerful symbolic pathways designed to give meaning to the rigours of childbirth, including the very real possibility of death, the devastations of childbirth mortality, the intense pain and injury, psychological dissociation/dismemberment and trauma. Therefore I do not think it is useful to reduce *all* reproductive ritual (as Paige and Paige do) and their religious symbolism to a mere political cloaking device. The evidence offered above would appear to contradict and perhaps refute the absolutism of their position.

Also the picture my informant Kevin (chapter 3) paints of his visionary state could be used to refute their position. His ‘psychosis’ is not a political event (until it gets into this study) indeed, such states tend to severely marginalise people in Western cultures (Peters 1994:5). For Kevin it is a psychologically transgressive and sacred

episode that marks his passage into fatherhood and a shift in consciousness that brought him into imaginal and participatory contact with a new spirit world blended with his unborn foetus *in utero* – in fact it looks to me as if he somehow identified with his sperm.

We can also note that returning to the condition of semen is a pattern in initiation found in Pan-Hindu cultures (Eliade 1958: 54-58) also *Baraka* (spiritual essence) is passed in semen to children in utero among Moroccan Arabs (Crapanzano 1973: 49). So this could suggest sanctified ‘ownership’ or control of child and mother, or, some deeper participatory process, only accessible in states of reproductive consciousness that Western culture denies. There are also some close associations to be made from his experience and the *Tukano* experience of trance and conception as a form of primordial cosmic ‘incest’ (Lewis 2003:26 and see Eliade 1958:58 see below).¹³ Such factors seem to suggest a much more complex situation than ownership and could suggest a transpersonal relationship with increase and fertility rites.

The Demonic Ideology of Womb-Envy

According to Trevathan, the birth moment, in terms of a social science, should probably have been the traditional territory of anthropologists, but that somehow, in the Western world, the moment fell into the hands of psychologists (Trevathan 1987:36). This is partly because early male anthropology was busy with its ‘exotic’ cultures (off-shore) and partly because within Western culture the hospital’s medical colonisation of birth-giving has constructed pregnancy and birth as a pathological biological crisis (Romalis 1981:9). This ‘crisis’ was seen as having an almost contagious and polluting effect on the psychological state of the fathers, reminiscent

¹³ Lewis, for example, claims that non-ordinary states of consciousness contain much sexual imagery (2003), and Grof reports that participants in high-dose LSD research can identify with sperm, ovum and other reproductive processes (1988:77).

of earlier religious childbirth pollution and defilement (see e.g. Freud 1985[1913]:72-75).

Much of the research on fathers emerged out of clinical sites dominated by this Freudian authoritative knowledge (Lewis 1982). Freudians argue that “childbirth always has a psychological effect on the father; pregnancy precipitating a shift in the mental equilibrium of his psyche” (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:161). These ‘effects’ were invested with the Oedipal complex (with the child seen as a phallic competitor) and with womb-envy, and locked into the intra-psychic Freudian labyrinth (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:161, Richman 1981:92).

It is also important to assess the intra-psychic or intra-subjective mind-world of early Freudians; they had to receive medical training *before* undergoing psychoanalytic training, and Freud (himself an M.D.) was strongly invested in fitting psychoanalysis into the Procrustean Bed of a strict materialist paradigm (Grof 1985:143-144) thereby accruing for his new science the much-needed prestige equated with empirical science.¹⁴ Medical anthropologists Lock and Scheper-Hughes point out that Western science and clinical medicine is “committed to a fundamental opposition between spirit and matter, mind and body, and (underlying this) real and unreal” (1987:8).

Thus Freudian thinking reflects a materialist mind-world and Tylor and Frazer’s sympathetic magic paradigm was given a further pathological and ‘intra-psychic’ spin by psychoanalysts Reik 1914, 1931; Bettelheim 1955; Boehm 1930; Suttie 1935; who now argued that couvade was externalised psychoneurosis — male envy —

¹⁴ The notion of hysteria or the ‘wandering womb syndrome’ is rooted in early Greek Hippocratic medicine. Young Greek women were seen as manifesting this condition as their wombs wandered about seeking moisture. Marriage was the prescribed cure (Demand 1994:103). The syndrome was also called the ‘mother’ and up until the 20th century European physicians believed ‘the womb is part of every illness of the female sex’ (cited in Greer 1970:55). Hysteria was eventually transformed into a psychoneurosis and with Freud became a repressed emotional conflict converted into a physical malady becoming therefore socially acceptable (Demand 1994:104).

catalysed in their patients by pregnancy (see Lewis 1982: 43-45, McClain 1982; Richman 1987; Kitzinger 1964:61). This has been termed respectively vaginal-envy, womb-envy, uterine-envy, parturition-envy, pregnancy-envy, and Zeus-jealousy (e.g. Richman 1981:92, Tanzer 1976:205; Suttie 1935). The suggestion, later popularised in Sheila Kitzinger's widely read birthing manual under the heading, "The Husband's Jealousy of the Unborn Child" stated that couvade rituals were enacted primarily because:

Men might envy women their power of birthing children... that the practice of 'couvade' known in many primitive societies where the husband is treated as if he and not his wife were having a baby, and goes into labour instead of her...it is a jealousy not of the new baby but of the woman's ability to be with child, Suttie calls 'Zeus jealousy', since Zeus swallowed his pregnant wife in order to bear her child himself" (Kitzinger 1964:61).

I am not sure if we know conclusively what Zeus was playing at and as I said men often imitate the foetus and not the mother. Nevertheless, according to psychoanalytic theory the tribal practitioners of couvade were now simply "deluded neurotics" (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:163). They say that it is not possible to transpose the so-called intra-psychic 'neurosis' of a small group of European males on to the social rituals of other ethnic groups (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:163) and ritual, as Van Gennep (1960[1908]) pointed out, can have multiple meanings.

According to Michael Jackson, anthropologists along with psychoanalysts have "fetishized" the unconscious to their advantage by undermining the "immediate self-understanding and praxis of others" through an insinuated "objectivity" into the consciousness of the "disturbed patient or ignorant savage". The personal origins of this so-called "objectivity" within the analyst remain "masked and scotomacised" (1989:47). I will explore this idea further on. Analyst Karen Horney's (1932) insinuation of womb envy into the unconscious psyches of men (a kind of reverse

hysteria) was tabled as a contestation and reversal of Freud's penis envy and, according to Janet Sayers, her "celebration of women's mothering and her account of men's desire for it — their womb envy" won for her a strong feminist following (1991:100). Horney describes here what she believes males might envy:

At this point I, as a woman, ask in amazement, and what about motherhood? And the blissful consciousness of bearing a new life within oneself? And the ineffable happiness of the increasing expectation of the appearance of this new being? And the joy when it finally makes its appearance and one holds it for the first time in one's arms? And the deep pleasurable feeling of satisfaction in suckling it... (1974[1926]:10 cited in Anne Oakley 1980:68).

Some anthropologists also adopted Horney's theories according to Sayers (1991:102). Mead devoted several chapters to the subject of womb envy and she suggested that birth-giving is at the heart of the division of labour, the subjugation of women and the reproduction of culture by womb-jealous males (1949:90-111). This is a familiar trope in later feminist writing where commentators suggest or imply that culture itself is a domain born of a *compensation* for male inability to give birth (cf. Mead 1949; Ortner 1974; and see Gross 1980; Paglia 1991), or as spiritual feminist Charlene Spretnak writes it, "At the moment this awe [of women] turned to envy, resentment and fear, Patriarchy was born" (1982: xxiv). Mead writes that:

Women, by virtue of their ability to make children, hold the secrets of life...Man has hit upon a method of compensating himself for his basic inferiority...They can get the male children away from the women, brand them as incomplete and themselves turn boys into men. Women, it is true, make human beings, but only men can make men (1949:103).

This piece, while an interesting study in ethno and gyno-centricity, is interesting because, in a cloaked and opaque way, it alerts us to what I believe is an overlooked function of some male initiation rites: the symbolic performance of children emerging

from women's bodies - which I will address in chapter 6. Mead's overtly sexist pronouncement of male inferiority will, as I will show, become another familiar trope in some strands of feminist literature, which are, at best, specifically geared to accrue cultural territory in the battle for reproduction rights.

This trope maintains that all men, everywhere, believe they have nothing to do with physiological reproduction and therefore they feel themselves to be inferior, sterile, and impotent (see below) - it is this (insinuated and alleged) lack and the feelings of sacral inferiority that are said to beget womb-envy. Ruzek also reminds us that "a theme running through feminist analyses of sexism in medicine is that medical misogyny stems in part from men's awe, fear, and envy of female procreative powers" (1978:93). This was the same theme taken up by popular birth activist Susan Arms (1975) and influential feminist Adrienne Rich (1979) who "attributed male-dominated obstetrics' expropriation of women's traditional control over childbirth to men's envy and wish to divest women of their power in mothering" (Sayers 1991:102).

What I object to is the uncritical universalising and fetishising of so-called *men's* womb-envy and the insinuation of it into the unconscious minds of the male gender. I have already pointed out that the hegemonic appropriation of parturition and midwifery by a politically powerful male medical fraternity does not need to rest upon a flimsy foundation of womb-envy but rather a complex lattice-work of psycho-cultural, religious, transpersonal, economic, and political processes (see chapter 2). Nevertheless womb-envy, in feminism's hands, becomes a potent demonising fetish aimed at undermining the power of the Western medical hegemony's authoritative knowledge - but it must implicate all males (including fathers) to do so. Ruzek observes:

Many contemporary feminists argue that secretly and unconsciously, obstetricians and gynecologists wish to usurp these childbearing functions that they, and presumably all men, envy (Ruzek 1979:95).

Psychoanalyst Peter Lomas, working from the theories of Bettelheim and Reik, had earlier developed this scenario, and, by using the generic 'male envy,' subtly tars and feathers contemporary fathers at birth with the same brush (1978).

If we "chart the itinerary of womb-envy" (as Spivak suggests 1988:81) then we chart the colonisation of the father's unconscious and the Western medicalisation of the 'male' relationship to birthing. First the couvade is colonised by the spiritual imperialism and assumptions of Christian missionaries (the work of the devil). This is followed by the reductive analyses of anti-religious, materialist and social evolutionist anthropologists. This is followed by the insinuation of a pathological symptomology, which emerged in cognicentric (intra-psychic) European psychoanalytic clinics, where demonised womb-envy was first assigned to the pre-industrial couvade. This notion was then transferred to the modern obstetrical situation because it could be associated with its takeover of birth and was a useful pathology to assail it with. Finally it is insinuated to the contemporary father's presence (Kitzinger 1964:61, Arms 1975, Lomas 1978, Oakley 1980, Mander 2004) demonising the father's attendance or erroneously making him an appendage of the male medical takeover of birth from European and American women and midwives and implicating the contemporary father into that institution's legacy of violence toward women's bodies.

In chapter 3 we explored the demonisation of midwives and the usurpation of birth by the medical system - the targeting and counter-demonising of the medical system with womb envy by feminism is one thing (their moral outrage at men's domination of women justifiable) – *but conflating the birthing woman's male partner*

with the medical system is a whole other story (see chapter 6). The inference by Lomas follows:

In couvade the husband is significant: in our society one sometimes has the impression that it is the doctor; and the degree by which he takes control of her function - even in the details of procedures such as ritual shaving and periotomy - put one in mind of female circumcision and Bettelheim's interpretation of this, as an attempt on the part of the male to master his envy (Lomas 1966:212).

Following Lomas, Ruzek writes, "the de-humanizing medical treatment of childbearing women in American society is related to male envy [as a universal] of female creative achievement in childbirth" (1978:97). Lewis, for example, assumes that the role taken by procreative fathers at birth is a further product of male medical control saying:

[regarding birth attendants] even though the cross-cultural evidence suggests that women take that role. This disregard of tradition has led some (e.g. Oakley 1980) to suggest that the inclusion of fathers is an example of how the 'male' medical profession has taken over one of the few aspects of women's lives where they have traditionally been independent from the male-oriented socio-political system (1983:61).

This statement has some subtle flaws. First of all it can be refuted that the fathers were included by the male medical profession (see chapters 1 and 6). Second, as I have shown in chapter 4, birthing was (and is) a far more culturally and religiously shaped event in any 'tradition' (including the European tradition) than they give it credit for here, and therefore it would never have been independent from the socio-political system. And three, if Oakley and Lewis are going to play the 'disregard of tradition' as a trump-card then the widespread traditions of complementary male

reproductive rituals and supportive action cannot be denied either (which I have touched on here but will address fully in chapter 6).

I point this out because as Browner and Sargent say, “Oakley’s extensive writings ... have had an enormous impact on the field” (1990:218). Kitzinger’s work has been extremely important in bringing anthropological understandings of birth to a wide international audience and “popular consciousness”(Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997:7) not to mention Mead’s biased accounts of traditional male obstetrical rituals which represent another distorted but prestigious and authoritative cornerstone of this suspect trend among some feminist writers to erase and warp *all* masculine participation in reproduction, which in effect changes imitation (mimesis, homeopathic magic, ritual obstetrical manoeuvres, or emotionally supportive behaviours) into envy. Imitation does not automatically beget envy – to use the word ‘beget’ does not automatically turn the male author into a hungry ghost craving women’s birth-giving powers - as some commentators have suggested (e.g. Ruzek 1979: 97, Kittay 1983:96).¹⁵

Potent Impotent Rumours

One of the rumours aimed at monsterfying witches in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) was that “they deprive man of his virile member”. An interesting foundation of the ‘universal’ womb-envy construct rests on a somewhat similar rumour – the ‘universal’ notion that all males (and females) understood that all males were impotent, and therefore not implicated in the human reproductive process – universal impotence. Thus male rituals enacting birth are simply a way to assuage their sense of

¹⁵ I might add that since beginning this research I have heard it suggested on several occasions that I have womb envy; I really want to be a gynaecologist, that I am crazy, homosexual, not minding my own business, and, wasting the government’s money! These demonic rumours are still alive.

sacral inferiority and an attempt to inflate themselves over their miserable and sterile existential condition.

Another important critical issue then, in the deconstruction of womb envy, is the use of Australian and Melanesian examples, e.g. Malinowski (Trobriand Islands) (1927), and Montague (Australia) (1937), by some feminists to proclaim that 'primitive man' became awed and envious because the procreative abilities and roles of fathers are denied or unknown and that all procreative energies therefore rest in women (Spretnak 1982: xxiv; Ruzek 1979:94; Arms 1975:12, Gross 1980, Porter 2003:113, Mander 2004). Such writers use these 'primitive' examples as evidence that contemporary Western culture is also suffering from the same malady.

Arms, for example, deduces that, "Men, who in many cultures did not understand the connection between sexual intercourse and childbirth, deduced that only women could create life in her own body" (1975:12); or Ruzek, "Men's imitation or appropriation of women's reproductive functions in primitive societies give credence to the theories of womb envy. Fear and envy is particularly understandable, since the man's role in procreation is unknown in many primitive societies" (1979:94). Yet, speaking of the Arapesh of New Guinea (whom she cites as suffering from womb-envy), she writes on the same page, "The father is seen to be as necessary as the mother in creating babies; during early pregnancy, the male deposits large quantities of semen into the woman because the baby is believed to consist of male sperm and female blood (1979:94). She can't have it both ways. According to her basic womb-envy aetiology, if he contributes to the pregnancy he should not then show the behaviours attributed to womb-envy, which according to her, he does (1979:94) (this also suggests these ritual behaviours must mean something else).

Spiritual feminism also took up this idea. According to Menon and Shweder, spiritual feminism is made up of “ecological feminists and Goddess worshippers who argue that men and women are essentially different and unequal and that women are superior beings” (2000:151) (again I like to imagine that many contemporary spiritual feminists do not hold such ideas). Sered, in her study of women-dominated religions offers a similar account of this fundamental view held by the movement (1994:199). Carol Christ’s suggestion that *all* life-giving powers are feminine seems to fit with this dichotomous project: “The Goddess as mother is sometimes depicted as giving birth, and giving birth is viewed as a symbol for all the creative, life-giving powers of the universe” (1979:281) Since men do not give birth, is this not to suggest that *all* the creative powers of the universe reside exclusively with the female form? Charlene Spretnak writes that, “Since paternity was not recognised for a long, long while (well into the twentieth century, the native Australian still believed that women are impregnated by spirits of the wind) (1982: xxiv see also Sered 1994:206) or Nancy Porter who says;

Early humans were unaware of the exact role of the male in procreation ... this generated profound respect, and at the same time, a kind of terror in the face of this unfathomable mystery ... When elementary agricultural techniques succeeded hunting and gathering and raising herds replaced hunting wild animals, observation of animal behaviour and herd propagation seemed to promote the realization of the male contribution to reproduction. The male once considered sterile and useful only for hunting and war, now achieved a previously unfelt importance he did not know before (2003:113).

However, as Melford Spiro concedes, the issue is confused in the Australian and Melanesian examples and some anthropologists describe conflicting data about the procreativity of male semen, and, in fact, women in some tribes, are seen as having absolutely no part in conception either, since ‘conception’ is totally the business of

ancestor spirits (1994[1968]230-231). Here women are not seen as generative either (Montagu 1937:67). The thesis of universal womb-envy is, therefore, untenable. Furthermore Spiro notes, “Most people seem not to be ignorant of physiological paternity, it seems somewhat difficult to understand why the Australians, too, have not discovered the causal link between sexual intercourse and conception” (1994:243). These statements suggest that the attempt to universalise the Australian Aboriginals’ and Trobrianders’ experience to *all* ancient, indigenous, and contemporary males is, at very best, an unwarranted distortion, and at worst, a demonising rumour campaign.

We are directed to believe that, globally, observations of the instances of human and animal copulation over millennia have not alerted indigenous peoples to the necessity of masculine procreative activity. We are also asked to swallow the notion that indigenous peoples, some of whom are known to show an extremely sensitised understanding of natural environments and seasonal processes, the movement of game, and the creative use of plants for medicines or poisons (some of them for their contraceptive properties), had not worked out that copulation and male orgasm was a required course in pregnancy - just as it was recognised that menstruation is a reproductive necessity dividing women in to pre and post-reproductive categories (Besilie 1997:483, Gross 1980:285, Pendersen 2002:304).

The following illustration from a girl’s puberty rite among the Native American *Oglala* seems to show a sophistication concerning male procreativity that those in the male-impotent = womb-envy camp would need to account for. We might also note, contra Porter (above), that buffalo were not domesticated animals, which problematises her position that men had to wait around for the domestication of animals to figure out that they were involved in reproduction:

Then the shaman prayed that the young woman would be industrious like the spider, wise like the turtle, and cheerful like the meadow lark. With these attributes she would be chosen by a brave man who would provide well for her. Then he began to act like a buffalo bull toward the initiate, saying, "I am the buffalo bull and you are the buffalo cow". He bellowed and red smoke (like the dust emitted by a buffalo giving birth to a calf) came out of his mouth. He blew smoke on the girl until the tipi was filled with it. He danced toward the young woman like buffalo during the rutting season. He repeatedly sidled up to her like a buffalo performing a mating ritual ... The shaman placed the wooden bowl filled with chokecherries and water on the ground to simulate a water hole on the Plains and bade the young woman get on her hands and knees and drink like a buffalo with him.

The young woman was then told to remove her dress, and her mother was instructed to arrange her hair so that it fell in front like a woman's. The shaman painted the part of her hair and the right side of her forehead red like the buffalo skull and said, "Red is a sacred colour. Your first menstrual flow was red. Then you were sacred. This is to show that that you were akin to the buffalo god and are his woman. You are now a buffalo woman — you are entitled to paint your face in this manner (Powers 1999:89).¹⁶

There appears to be here an explicit understanding that female menstruation and copulation with a male are biological processes required for reproduction. Alma Gottlieb notes that in several cultures it is a mixture of blood and sperm that constitutes the foetus, the "shared substance" of reproduction are associated with symbolic joint pregnancy and shared birthing expressed as *couvade* (1988:33, 38-40 and see McClain 1982:30). Where foetuses are seen as wholly menstrually constituted, intercourse is seen as vital in strengthening the foetal condition or the female pregnancy career. According to Jacqueline Priya, sexual intercourse among the Trobrianders "is an important source of nourishment for the child" (1992:47).

¹⁶ A similar menstruation initiation ritual is observed by Beisele (1997:487) among the Ju/'oansi of the Kalahari Desert in which the women imitate Eland cows and the men imitate the bulls. Their performances are directly linked to fertility and child-bearing. If procreation was a women-only affair surely there would be no need for an Eland bull to join the ritual.

Montagu also notes that among Australian Arunta Aboriginals, intercourse serves to prepare the women for the entry of a spirit child into her body (Spiro 1994: 231), thus intercourse is one aspect that makes operational the factor that creates pregnancy (Montagu 1937:63-65). Aijmer writes that, "The Tukano know that during the sexual act the male semen fertilizes the female organs and that this union produces a new life. Only by a mixture of secretions can the embryo be procreated ... she can never be 'sweetened' by just one coitus" (1992:9). He then gives this example, "The Melpa of the New Guinea Highlands, for instance, believe that several acts of intercourse are necessary to conceive and then mould the foetus. It is from blood from the mother's womb and the father's semen that the child is formed (M. Strathern 1972:42-43) (1992:9).¹⁷

According to Aijmer, "theories of conception may link a child's conception to both parents; or they may rather place emphasis either on the father, or on the mother, or on neither" (1992:9). For example feminist theologian Rosemary Radford-Ruether writes, "Aristotle proclaims through two-thousand years of teachers ... that man's seed alone provides the form of the child" (1980:260). Yet we see the reverse in the Chinese society of Taiwan where, "the woman is actually the creatrix, the male contribution being merely to activate the woman" (Aijmer 1992:9 paraphrasing Ahern 1975). However implicit in Ahern's original discussion is the requirement of semen, "you need both the mother's blood and the father's semen" (Ahern 1975:196).¹⁸ Van Beek writes, "Conception for the Dogon implies that the male supplies the life to the woman, and she in turn nourishes and shelters it (1991:47).

¹⁷ I do not have to prove universal beliefs in male procreativity to counter the notion of universal male impotence. I only have to show that the construction of womb-envy, the universalising of it, and the construction of male impotence as womb-envy's foundation (as another universal) has holes in it sufficient, I believe, to render the theory implausible.

¹⁸ This is a widespread pattern in Polynesia according to Ortner 1996.

Similar conception themes are found in a *jampi* (a spiritual verse recited to ease women in difficult labour by linking male and female procreativity to the divine principle) among the Malay where life begins in the vastness of unimaginable space and light (Laderman 1983:145), where the angel Gabriel places the “seed of life” in the father’s brain. The seed accumulates the father’s properties; the brightness of eye, the happy feelings associated with the heart and navel and then falls into the “big toe, King Phallus is its name” where the spermatic fluid *di wadi mani manikam* (earth, water, fire and air) resides 40 days, “Then you are thrust into the mother’s womb”. According to village midwives, once thrust into the womb “the dark matrix of our animal nature ... the baby finds a resting place, like a seed planted in the nourishing earth”, the child, formed from the seminal fluid containing the four elements that make the world, emerges from the darkness of the mother’s body “like a flower into the light” (Laderman 1983:75-76).

Interestingly Laderman says that it is the *bomoh* or male shaman who partially disagrees with this more female theory (again, contrary to Porter’s view that the domestication of animals alerted males to their reproductive powers, in this case it is the domestication of animals that allows *women* a greater stake in the reproductive process):

The baby is incomplete as it makes its way through the father’s body, and awaits the addition of the mother’s earth, air, fire and water before it develops into a human being. The *bomoh*’s wife confirmed her husband’s statements by referring to her chickens. The hen lays an egg, she pointed out without the help of a rooster, but it takes both of them together to bring life to the egg. If everything depended on the male, and the female was just a source of nourishment, the hen, she felt, would not be able to lay even a sterile egg. Inside the egg must be the female’s *di wadi mani manikam* (Laderman 1983:76).

These cross-cultural examples suggest male procreative abilities, even if secretly veiled in larger cosmological and religious imagery or simply indirectly symbolized, were nevertheless acknowledged (see also Taussig 1993:123; Aijmer 1992:17). We can say that some form of male participation in reproduction *does* appear to be widely known cross-culturally and that ‘primitive’ males *are* known to have participated in fertility even if not associated with Western bio-medical beliefs regarding spermatozoa. This would appear to represent a strong thesis against the notion of a universal belief in male impotence and therefore universal male womb-envy. This also overturns the thesis that womb-envy is the root of ‘male domination’ and the driving force behind the rise of the patriarchy, and against womb-envy as the unseen agent driving contemporary fathers into birthing scenarios, not the least because it may not exist at all except perhaps as ‘a rumour of demons’.

Some readers might imagine that such rumours have disappeared long ago, but these ideas live on in the literature, and let me give a current version of the way that the father’s presence is being skewed. In a recent publication *Men and Maternity* the author says that “the man who was the father was successful in pursuing his medical brothers into the birthing room” (Mander 2004:8). My research shows (see also chapter 6), however, that fathers originally had to force themselves into the reckoning and were involved in a bitter contestation against their so-called “medical brothers” which included supporting women in birthing *outside* of the hospital system altogether (Reid 1989, Kitzinger and Davies 1978, Gaskin 1977). This fact alone suggests that they hardly “pursued” these fictitious “medical brothers” anywhere. Some informants in New Zealand told me that this generation’s performance at birth was aimed at protecting their partners against routine and at times abusive medical interventions – the father as guardian, protector and grounded-ego. A young woman

of 26 years told me that her father had acted this way; (she was born in a house-bus) she carries an ancestral voice and image of a father/protector. The guardian role for fathers had historically developed from the natural birth movement which arose in response to the widespread use of the hallucinogenic scopolamine - 'the twilight sleep' (demanding the use of 'scope' was an issue spearheaded by early feminists who, wanting to free themselves of physical pain, handed over the reins of pain control to the medical profession) (Wertz and Wertz 1989:150, Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997:9, Leavitt 1986:131-133). As the medical profession established legal control of this chemical intervention a further dependence on the hospitals was created because physicians refused to administer the new chemical pain-control method outside of the hospital. At that time the marginal 'natural' birth-reform movements *had* to remain within the confines of the hospital system to be in the reckoning at all, with the father the only support-person the medical system would tolerate - and that in an atmosphere of vehement resistance (Davis-Floyd 1992:163, 167, Priya 1992:77, Coney 1993:61).

This continued promulgation of the procreative fathers' involvement as a further example of male domination of women (e.g. Oakley 1980: 42-43, Lewis 1982:68, Mander 2004) is problematised by looking at the original 'natural birth' movement and the later 1960s' counter-cultural 'alternative birthing' movement which enacted vastly divergent reality systems (Davis-Floyd 1992:17 see chapters 6,7 and 8). However Mander would have us believe that fathers simply "pursued their medical brothers" into birthing sites because (here it comes) men are "totally dependent on a woman or women to achieve procreation". Her pronouncement, that his "dependence, even impotence" might explain "man's wish for involvement in the process of childbearing" (2004:7) smells like the ghost of womb envy to me. She concludes with a statement that, by now, we can recognise as routine: "men's underlying fear that, at

the birth, women are doing something that men are unable to do” and that “the man does not really seek involvement ... but neither does he wish to be excluded on terms that are not of his own making” (2004:9).

This bizarrely lopsided construction says nothing of women’s desire to have their partners present, it also negates the father’s affective relationships (that old devil called love), and neglects the protective intention (the reaction to medical abuse) of the natural health movement or of growing consumer demands. Nor does she mention the reciprocal dependence on male procreative powers to achieve female procreativity (to bluntly turn her statement around) - the obvious impotence of the womb without male sperm (a hair-raising level of denial on her part). The point being, women cannot bear children without male procreativity.

If we stay blunt for a moment and take the finger pointing to ‘universal’ womb-envy, and point it back on its genitors, it could look like some feminists *desire* to be ‘universally’ envied by men, and are insinuating into male psyches a sense of lack and inferiority to achieve this grandeur. Indeed this is how ‘projective identification’ works (Kremmer 1996:46) the ownership of the desire is split-off and others are made to feel the conflicted material as if it were their own. Here is not the place to review the psychoanalytic theory of projection - the unaware expelling of feelings, thoughts, and desires onto others (e.g. Lambek 2002), nevertheless, we might well ask if the claim to superiority over men made by some feminists (and not questioned by others) (see e.g. Menon and Shweder 2002:141, Gross 1980:276, Sered 1994:199, Porter 2003:113, Mead 1949:103) has fuelled this situation, for surely, if I am superior, am I not to be envied?

However, there is another important possibility that warrants consideration: as materialist cosmisation (Berger 1967) replaced the world of demons and spirits, and

as medial science (including psychiatry and psychoanalysis) replaced demons and spirits with unconscious complexes and psychopathology (and replaced sorcerers with psychoanalysts) - new demons were found and locked in an intra-psychic psyche especially around the 'uncanny' (Freud's 1913 term) nature of birth. What I find fascinating is that, according to Heggenhougan, midwives, in various cultures, are known to have *transferred* the pain of labour (associated dangerous demons) into fathers or even animals (1980:23). This magical action appears to be recognisable as a culturally specific variation on a number of cultural expressions of 'folk' obstetrical manoeuvres or symbolic midwifery and links it with couvade practices. Thus the husband may well have become 'possessed' by the evil spirits associated with the dangers of child-birth¹⁹ (a magical healing system in this context). It is interesting to note that during the 1970s demonic/envy was assigned to fathers.

According to Klass, "The witch may be gone, but the stereotype remains, and any group may be assigned it ... Anyone who is not of us, anyone who is not fully human, any threatening alien" (1995:95). Historically, in Europe, the figure of the witch was a repository for such projections: "The witch serves as a vehicle for anti-social urges or unmet needs, notably excessive and inappropriately directed aggression and sexuality" (Lambek 2002:199-200). But, and this is important, it has been pointed out, that a turn-around of this situation has occurred within Western culture: as mentioned; the envy of maternity, once consigned to witches or jealous old women, is now confined to men (Lomas 1978:181). Thus men and fathers have come to occupy an ancient cultural locus on to which rumours of demonic envy are cast.

The psychoanalytic notion of womb-envy was hit upon in a materialistic world drawn from a Cartesian epistemological paradigm (the dominant paradigm driving

¹⁹ I have not yet found instances of this particular midwifery/father couvade system in medieval Europe, nevertheless, the situation *does* parallel perhaps *the* major charge against witches *qua* midwives, that of causing possession in others (Sidky 1997).

Western medicine) (Lock and Schleper-Hughes 1987) which feminism has deconstructed (e.g. Jaggar and Bordo 1989, Martin 1987). Without a 'feminised' i.e. a transpersonal or participatory worldview, Western research epochs can only imagine men's relationship to the womb as an intra-psychic psychopathology. Therefore it must emerge within the male as a psychological aberration from the internal psychic sublimation of certain Freudian-type urges.

Freud's relationship with the womb was always problematic. He never found a place in his scheme for the so called "oceanic feeling" that one of his clients experienced in relation to mystical states. After struggling with this feeling that he admitted not being able to feel, he eventually consigned it to a pathological regression to the breast (Epstein 1996:32). Perhaps this is why when it came to the womb imagery arising in his patients he was only able to consign such material as "fantasy" (Grof 1985:157, Jones 1949). The words 'fantasy', 'jealousy' or 'envy' disavow and deny any legitimate male relationship to the womb. Freud's death instinct was a compulsive return to an *inorganic state* and not the living foetal/womb condition (1964). That men themselves sojourned in the womb, indeed, *as* the undifferentiated foetus/womb, as an extension of the mothering body and the bi-unal human reproductive system is somehow strangely ignored by these writers.

A Transpersonal Spirit

Transpersonal anthropology can offer a different approach to male birthing behaviour. This application shows that those psychoanalysts and feminists who favour the womb-envy thesis are close to something here. There are of course several non-pathological relationships between procreative fathering males and the womb (his natal home and his original *rite de passage* into the world), and this relationship, I believe, must also problematise the thesis of womb-envy and can add to a further

revalorisation of male birthing rituals as symbolic participatory obstetrical manoeuvres.

Another way to explore men's experience of birth and relationship to the womb is from the standpoint of the birth-doer. Laughlin, in his review of perinatal anthropology notes that language acquisition is a central factor in the researching of human foetal experience. An 'anthropology *in utero*' is problematic because, as yet, no one has interviewed a foetus - at least not using traditional anthropological methodologies (1989:271). Therefore, since foetuses can't talk, our accounts of birth from the vantage point of the birth-doer must come from adult recollections (memories) of birth from experiential psychotherapy, hypnosis, LSD research, meditation and NOSC²⁰ (see e.g. Bache 2000; Chamberlain 1988, Cheek 1975, Grof 1975, 1977, 1985; Janov 1970; Laughlin 1990, 1994; Verny and Kelly 1982; Verny 1987, Wambach 1981).

This research is problematic for a strictly materialistic epistemology because, as transpersonal theorist Jenny Wade points out, such recollections or 'memories' are gathered in altered (holotropic) states of consciousness that "a purely materialistic epistemology is inadequate to address" and these experiences are therefore "anomalous" to Cartesian-Newtonian assumptions (Wade 1996:23).²¹

However from transpersonal qualitative and phenomenological perspectives the notion of 'memory' is greatly expanded and the potentials for memory retrieval are enlarged to include holotropic data (see e.g. Grof 1988, Bache 2000, Wade 1996 for

²⁰ Non-ordinary state of consciousness.

²¹ She also points out that such holotropic states and their perinatal content can be elicited by "traditional psychoanalysis; Rolfing, acupuncture and other bodywork; hypnosis; rebirthing and other kinds of breathwork; sensory isolation; controlled drug therapy" (1996:29). These 'holotropic states' or transpersonal states are what anthropologists have traditionally thought of as trance, ecstasy, awe, possession. Grof has pointed out that "medical theory denies the possibility that the experience of biological birth is recorded in the child's memory; the usual reason given for this in medical handbooks is the immaturity of the cerebral cortex of the newborn (incomplete myelination of the sheaths of cerebral neurons) (1985:23).

transpersonal overviews, and Laughlin, 1989, 1990, 1994 for several anthropological discussions).

There is also the role of psychic intuition and the recovery of transpersonal data to consider found in the NOSC of many cultures. For example, I.M. Lewis, citing the work of Reichel-Dolmatoff (1973), says that the Amazonian Tukano shamans, “state that their creator deity, the Sun — father, committed incest with his own daughter at the time of creation” (2003:26). The offspring of this act was the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine (used for brewing ayahuasca) and access back to this cosmic incestuous knowledge is bestowed through drinking the hallucinogenic brew. Creation or origin myths often have similar incestuous motifs in them (e.g. Knight 1991, Best 1982, Kahukiwa & Grace 1984, Eliade 1958). This can suggest that male reproductive capacities are known but are consigned to a different, perhaps taboo, realm of consciousness. The womb is very difficult to represent because it biologically overlaps gender, generation, and three individuals: mother, father, and child. It can also suggest that in NOSC the human mind can participate in a (felt to be) undifferentiated reality and its reproductive capacities, the first ‘incestuous’ creative spasms of cosmogony.²²

In this context I.M. Lewis, a respected anthropologist who has written much on trance states, ecstasy and charisma, also mentions Grof’s work with LSD and other psychotropic compounds (2003:26, 1971) which are associated with the dis-inhibition or de-repression of what appear to be transpersonal experiences involving actual memory of conception, foetal, and womb life, collective representations or archetypal recollections involving sexuality, death and birth. It is possible for males to experience their consciousness identified with birthing mothers, and females to

²² That they are intentionally repressed following initiation and may not therefore become cognitively niched is certainly a possibility (Spiro 1994:230, 244).

identify with male sperm. Particularly prominent was the reliving of the difficult passage through the birth canal (see Grof 1977, 1988, 1998). The point here is that these mind-realms accessed by NOSC and catalysed by ritual, rites of passage, ritual use of plant hallucinogens and meditation practices are suggestive of something other than envy.

Pointing the Bone

Rita Gross arrives at the notion, from her reading of Australian religious materials, that *all* male religions and their rebirth symbolism belong to a pattern of appropriation and envy on the part of men. The introduction to her paper “Womb Envy: Male Domination and Women’s Power” sets the scene and introduces the notion that it is women who have the “greater sacral power” (Falk and Gross 1980: 276) who men must imitate, appropriate, and steal from, to gain similar spiritual status. She writes, “Achieving the sacred state of maleness occurs through mythic and ritual appropriation” (1980:289). Gross expands her theme into religion in general:

It is difficult to imagine an initiation that does not involve rebirth symbolism. Therefore, in an abstract way, any initiation is a kind of duplication of birth. It should also be noted that duplication of birth occurs in almost every religiocultural context, and not just among the Australian aborigines (Gross 1980:287).

Although usually not so graphic and explicit as in Aboriginal religion, the equation of birth and initiation is relatively common in religions around the world (Gross 1980:288).

While agreeing with her wholeheartedly that initiation is full of rebirth imagery, I believe these materials betray a profound, if unrecognised, religious obstetrical complex. First of all we should remain alert to fact that magical midwifery/obstetrics figure largely in the material Gross examines. Thus, “pregnancy and childbirth are

mythically grounded” (Gross1980:282) and, “The old woman examined her and then would sing. The woman said it would make birth easier and charm the pelvis and genital organs ... During labor, songs were sung to facilitate delivery and prevent haemorrhage” (Gross 1980:283 citing Kaberry 1939) or, “the women also have myths that establish the ritual method for extracting the placenta and naming the child” (Gross1980: 284 citing Ursula McConnell 1957). Finally we read that mythology also dictates supportive obstetrical/midwifery ritual behaviour for the fathers. These supportive and symbolic gestures include classic couvade themes; i.e. dietary restrictions and silence (in some cultures modelling stillness or sobriety) when the mother enters childbirth seclusion until the child is born (Gross1980:284).

I believe the Arunta male ritual complex, while undeniably imitating cosmic dream-time ancestors, is less envious than Gross supposes - possibly in the extreme. I would argue that their ritual (at least from my ‘armchair’ or rather ‘desktop’ study of Gross’s work) shows all the hallmarks of symbolic midwifery and spiritual prophylaxis, and there is much anthropological evidence to support these ideas. In the following section I will introduce some basic traditional healing/midwifery concepts and compare these with Gross’s ‘womb-envy/spiritual-envy’ paradigm.

Contra Mead’s demonising rumour that pain in childbirth is constructed by men, several researchers have reconstructed hominid childbirth as having been painful, dangerous and life-threatening. Biological anthropologist Wenda Trevathan writes that 3-5 million years ago it was the shift from quadrupedalism (four-legged locomotion) to bipedalism (upright two legged walking) that narrowed the pelvis and twisted the birth canal, creating a situation where the foetal person “has to undergo a series of rotations in order to pass through the birth canal without hindrance” (2003:36). This situation is further complicated because of the “increasingly large

head size associated with the evolutionary transition from *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens*” (McClenon 2002: 49); the tight fit, they say, became dangerously tighter. Bigger brains and the narrow pelvis drove the evolutionary selection of a kind of premature birth (smaller brain size) and the continuation of brain swelling and foetal development outside of the birthing body for an elongated and *helpless* period of time that defines birthing among the genus *Homo* (Trevathan 2003:37).

Thus, writes McClenon, with growing head-size, a narrowing pelvis and premature and helpless babies, we can speculate that childbirth must have become a dread-filled phenomenon, a potentially fearful, stressful, and very real encounter with death and death-dealing spirits. These evolutionary pathways may well have increased the likelihood of psychosomatic infertility, spontaneous abortion and miscarriage, post-partum haemorrhage, childbirth complications and obstructed labour (McClenon 2002), e.g. “fear results in muscle tension, which inhibits the normal dilation of the cervix” (McClenon 2002:53) which in turn obstructs normal labour and increases the duration of the labour and its associated pain. Indeed, according to Carol Laderman, “The prolongation of labor because of fear is associated with much higher than normal perinatal mortality rates” (1983:149). Birth Kills (can kill).

Traditional midwifery/obstetrics, sometimes manifesting as culturally embedded ideals embodied by women such as dignity and fearlessness (e.g. Shostak 1981, Biesele 1997) were geared to alleviate such fears (recall the dignity of the Arapesh women see pp. 99). Marjorie Shostak who studied birth among the Kalahari Ju/'hoan reports:

Fear of childbirth is thought to be dangerous, causing tension that makes delivery more difficult. It brings on an even greater danger; however: God, interpreting a woman's apprehension as indicating that the child is not wanted, may kill the

child and “take it back to the spirit world”. In such cases, the mother may also be taken away (Shostak 1980:180).

In other situations the problems fear created were ameliorated through complex symbolic enactments that operate as waking suggestions to birth-giving mothers (McClenon 2003:46-57, Bates and Turner 2003: 87-95, Laderman 1983: 124 -152). In some cultures medicine men and women, groups, cults, or even whole societies act out various dance, dramaturgical, mythological and imaginal scenarios designed to aid and increase the spirit power of fertility and women birthing, either transmitting potent symbols in trance or in symbolic actions transmitting waking suggestions (Van Gennep 1908, Lévi-Strauss 1963, Turner 1969, Kitzinger 1982, McClenon 2002, Bates and Turner 2003). This process of relating birth to the environment, to universal, mythic and cosmic principles is “a crucial process in childbirth practices of all cultures” (Bates and Turner 2003: 93) including our Palaeolithic epoch where female statues and other artefacts may well suggest the symbols of fertility and childbirth were important (McClenon 2002:48). The image of the Great (child-bearing) Goddesses may have functioned as an early obstetrical image canalising the ambiguous life-giving and death-dealing nature of female physiology. This passage by Laderman is suggestive of the importance and efficacy of such actions:

The medicine man’s incantation, by reducing the laboring woman’s anxiety may thereby reduce her epinephrine production. With her fears under control, her uterine inertia may be counteracted and the normal functioning of productive contractions restored ... the medicine man’s incantations may also change his patient’s biochemistry by encouraging her body to produce higher levels of endogenous opioids than ordinarily occur in the course of normal labor (Laderman 1987:300).

According to McClenon, Post-partum haemorrhage was probably one of *the* major causes of childbirth-mortality in Palaeolithic times, “ancient peoples often bled to

death from wounds or childbirth complications, but rituals were a method of treatment” (2002:56) and magical “blood-stopping” (blood-clotting) was an important traditional (folk) obstetrical intervention (2006:56). I have already mentioned a variety of traditional belief systems in which evil bloodthirsty presences, demons, spirits, or witches, are associated with blood and the destruction of foetuses and mothers during birth - in Australia ‘Snake’ may well characterise this dangerous complex - death from perinatal complications, particularly eclampsia, spontaneous miscarriage, obstruction, and haemorrhage (the copious loss of a valuable substance).

Gross tells us that men carry out their blood rituals in private, away from women, and interestingly enough, according to McClenon, ritual blood-stopping has an “almost magical quality” (2003:55) that can reduce haemorrhage (blood-flow): “Some informants describe blood-stoppers who apparently affect bleeding from a distance, a phenomenon that cannot be attributed to suggestion” (2002:57). This is something well beyond simple hypnosis; they “exceed the limitations of normal hypnotic explanation” (McClenon 2002:57). This may well suggest a kind of shamanising “a form of extra-sensory perception” and an ability to tinker with the universe. Turner says something similar about the magic she witnessed in Africa among the *Ndembu*, when she saw an evil spirit leave the body of an ill person: “There is no mild hypnotic voice telling Nyakanjata what to fill her mind with. The work is done by ritual action itself, resulting in actual effects (1992:73). This magic was associated always with the metaphors of parturition, of “coming out”.

I will now attend to the 9000 year old myths Gross cites in building her ‘envy’ paradigm and will quote and paraphrase her in this section. The Northern Australian myth of the *Djanggalwul* brother and his two sisters are used to explain men’s response to women’s physiological events. The mythic sisters are perpetually

pregnant and giving birth. The brother helps the sisters in their delivery - thus originally, at least according to the mythic inference-interpretation, males are involved therapeutically in birthing from ancient times. However, a separation between the man and the women occurs, yet, even though separated, a complementary relationship with birthing is maintained. Separation is marked when “the brother steals the religious paraphernalia from the women”. Gross attributes this not to womb-envy but to a transition from mythic to post-mythic conditions, “what was mythically an undifferentiated complementary became in post-mythic times two mutually exclusive, but still complementary, spheres” (1980:286).

Next Gross amplifies the notion of male appropriation with the mythology of the Wawalik sisters. The two Sisters also from Northern Australia are travelling about (see Pendersen below). The elder sister (*gungman*: bleeding afterbirth blood) is pregnant, and, after she has her baby, they walk on again while the afterbirth blood is still flowing. They camp near a sacred well and Snake (*julunggul*) dwelling there is “attracted” by the smell of their blood (Berndt 1951:22) and comes, intent on swallowing the sisters.

The younger one (the *wirkul*: younger sister non-bleeding) dances and through her dance (spiritual midwifery ritual) stops Snake in her tracks and is able to keep Snake at bay (magical protection from a dangerous death-dealing spirit), but she becomes tired and asks the older sister to help her by dancing too.²³ The older sister dances but she cannot keep Snake away because the odour of her post-partum bleeding keeps attracting Snake. Eventually the younger sister’s intense dancing causes her to start menstruating, and, at this point, she too can no longer ward off Snake and they and their baby are all swallowed. This passage alerts us to the way that ritual dancing is

²³ Berndt (1951: 22-23) writes that dancing was to “hinder snake’s progress ... the Julunggul [Rainbow Snake] stopped in her course, and watched the dancing. Thus the religious dancing of the men must also be associated with stopping the snake.

used to distract Snake (ward of perinatal death) – but because all women menstruate they become categorically vulnerable to snake (entrance into reproductive potential and its impending encounter with death).

Men, on the other hand, can be seen as the obvious ritual choice since they are not in any real danger of actual menstrual or post-birth bleeding, or, more importantly, any risk of actual perinatal death. If men imitate this dance and women's bleeding then it can mean that they have taken on the role of keeping Snake at bay — this suggests an magical midwifery device — not imitation for envy's sake nor because “women actually have the greater inherent spiritual power” which men must then strive to appropriate (as Gross suggests 1980:276).

It strikes me as equally fascinating that even male ‘dreaming’ is construed as stealing from women. I wonder how it is, from my admittedly Western perch, that men's dreaming can be conceived as theft? We read: “the [ancestral, mythic] sisters [and therefore not women per se] then *revealed these events to men in dreams* and such events represent the mythic basis of the men's ritual cycle” (1980:286).

However, this is also to suggest that it is in fact these *dreams*, these revelations or visions [potentially transpersonal events] that represent the mythic basis of men's ritual cycle and not women's rituals - so can they be said to be ‘appropriating’ their own dreams? Furthermore, the word ‘reveal’ does not suggest ‘theft’; it can suggest the ‘giving’ of revelation (revelations being equated to visionary states of ‘grace’ in the Western world). We are thus told that the dreams are revealed to men by the ancestral sisters but then this becomes somehow, “[men] stole religion from the

women” (Gross 1980:289). It is important, I think, that the ancestresses reveal/give the religious stuff to men in dreams.²⁴

So I wonder what ‘stealing’ really means in this context and if it really has anything to do with womb envy? My concern is that the word ‘stealing’ may have been dislocated from its original meaning and suffered a subsequent de-traditionalisation, the original meaning carried off like a dilly-bag. However, an Aborigine of more recent times (1957) appears to agree that some kind of “stealing” has occurred, nevertheless what is not clear is the function of the theft - the ‘why’ are they ‘stealing’ the women’s religious paraphernalia:

But we have really been stealing what belongs to them (women) for it mostly all women’s business; and since it concerns them, it belongs to them. Men have nothing to do really, except copulate [in this context this can only mean awareness of male input], it belongs to women. All that belonging to those Wauwalek, the baby, the blood, the yelling, their dancing, all that concerns the women; but every time we have to trick them. Women can’t see what men are doing, although it really is their own business, but we can see their side. This is because all the Dreaming business came out of women — everything; only men take “picture” for that Julunggul [snake]. In the beginning we had nothing because we men had been doing nothing; we took these things from women (Warner 1958:278 cited in Rita Gross 1980:289).

I should point out, however, that the only thing the men appear to be stealing/taking is ‘picture[s]’, dreams, and revelations (transpersonal artefacts?) that “come out of women”. This could well suggest a culture specific version of male reproductive consciousness - visions and dreams rooted to the perinatal and transpersonal dimensions of the psyche (which *are* rooted in foetal existence **conjoined** with

²⁴ The English word ‘dreaming’ or ‘the dreaming’ is the nearest approximation to the Australian word *alcheringa* used by the Aranda or Arunta people. There appear to be two kinds of dream potentially confused in Gross’s work. These are individual dreaming and dream-time, and, according to Douglas Price-Williams, confusion is not unusual since the “psychological status of the dream-time has always been a puzzle” (1992:250) to Western researchers.

women's bodies) – again not unlike the Tukano Indians, Grof's LSD participants, or the visions of several of my participants.²⁵

Next the men start to imitate the ancestors and Gross is keen to have us believe that this is because men want to appropriate and steal women's "greater inherent sacral power"- but it is conceivable that this stealing is a part of the ruse to fool Snake, it is a mock-up, a psycho-dramatic trick (after all there is a magical logic to the idea that men must get the women's blood to successfully attract Snake and that the ruse must be believed and culturally supported to give it power) before they can bait snake away from the women – which will help allay the women's fears of evil spirits during birth. Thus the statement: "only men take 'picture' for that Julunggul [Snake], suggests that their imitation, their taking a picture *of* the Walwalik sisters, "*for that Julunggul*" is primarily a simulated sacrifice where they use themselves as snake bait. It bears repeating: dangerous blood and baby eating spirits the world over are thought to be attracted to the blood of birth-giving women (because of the association with perinatal mortality); men the world over propitiate spirits and attract dangerous spirits to themselves in their obstetrical/midwifery]]p] manoeuvres (Bates and Turner 2003:87-95). Gross cites the Berndts to press her argument: "Many of the rites which men carry out themselves, away from women, imitate, symbolically, physiological functions peculiar to women. The idea is that these are natural to women, but where

²⁵ This idea of 'stealing' may suggest some kind of psychic transgression and a relationship with taboo and unconscious perinatal or transpersonal dimensions of the psyche. The theme of 'theft' as a process of transpersonal consciousness is a common thread in trickster cycles (Campbell 1949). Maui the trickster god of the Pacific, for example, enters the birth canal of his great ancestress in an attempt to bring a child back from the dead (Best 1982: 377-380) which is seen as an "overreaching crime" (Alpers 1985:66). Themes of transgression abound in Taussig's account of a Cuna obstetrical manoeuvre, "the way of Muu" (1993:111). Here the male shaman enters a magical birth canal to release mother and child from the obstructions of the dangerous spirit Muu. Taussig writes that in Cuna culture, birth matters and matters of the womb are shrouded in secrecy and, when spoken of, then only in a coded language. In the healing ritual for obstructed birth, this culturally enforced repression is transgressed and de-repressed and a male secret revealed i.e. "the return of the repressed, of the secret, the great secret, the Great Mother's secret" (1993:125) his relationship to his original home of homes – the multivalent womb.

men are concerned, they must be reproduced in ritual form” (Berndt and Berndt 1964: 221 cited in Gross 1980:287). However, imitation does not automatically equate with appropriation of status or womb-envy, there may simply be a better reason for imitating bleeding ancestral figures which ultimately concerns individual, cultural and species survival.

We must also account for the fact that the male does not identify with women but with creatures of the origin mythology – a different category of being. This is another common motif in traditional obstetrics/midwifery e.g. the original birth/creation is re-enacted and where each human birth and the female birthing body is conjoined with the powers of the sexually active and procreative universe, e.g., among the Dogon, “when a child is born in any of the eight families, the whole of creation went into action” (Griaule 1965:129). The ritual identifies males with the bleeding ancestral Wawilak sisters: (one in menstruation and one post-partum) exactly at the original moment when the birth-giving ancestresses were attacked by Snake. We note also that Snake emerges from her “own womb-like water-hole” (Knight 1988:235) causing a great storm (Gross 1980:286) - this seems to suggest the stormy nature of birth, and birth/cosmogogenesis as we have seen was known to be a dangerous cosmic/spirit event, life-taking, and requiring, after Laderman, “spiritual prophylaxis”, culturally prescribed ritual actions for the reduction of fear (1983:124). The following passage *can* be read as a diligent male obstetrical performance:

The blood that runs from an incision and with which the dancers paint themselves and their emblems is something more than a man’s blood—it is the menses of the old Wawilak women. I was told during the ceremony: ‘that blood we put all over those men is all the same as the blood that came from that old woman’s vagina. It isn’t blood anymore because it has been sung over and made strong. The hole in the man’s arm isn’t that hole anymore. It is all the same as the vagina of that old woman that had blood coming out of it ... When

a man has got blood on him, he is all the same as those two old women when they had blood (Warner 1958:268 cited by Gross 1980:288).

Gross interprets this as men's attempt to identify with the ancestress and thereby accrue, through mimesis, the sacred status of women; "By duplicating menstruation and childbirth and by identifying men's blood with women's blood, [there is still a question as to their imitating of actual women or ancestors] men transcend the ordinary and become 'sacred.' They become the mythic models themselves" (1980:290). But this enactment of becoming one with the ancestors may also suggest symbolic prophylaxis since 'ancestor' is another way of saying 'the dead'. Mary Douglas following Webster (1957), noted that, "a voluntary embrace of the symbols of death is a kind of prophylactic against the effects of death; the ritual enactment of death is a protection" (1966:177).²⁶ A century ago anthropologist Leo Frobenius wrote that initiation was about the assimilation of the initiates to the realm of spirits and that this encounter with death served as psycho-spiritual prophylactic. By entering into the condition of the spirits, by a "death-like trance which, the savage hardly distinguishes from death ... the power appertaining to the dead may be obtained" (Webster 1908:46-47).

The Australian materials suggest that the male initiation or imitation of female birth is also about absorbing the powers of death. These menstruating men, mimetic with ancestral women, replicating the original outpouring of blood (not unlike the way the Catholic Mass is recapitulated in charismatic time replete with themes of male sacrifice, suffering pain for others, blood-drinking, the appeasing of an angry spirit and the cosmological triumph of good over evil) are fusing themselves with the ambiguous and dangerous processes of birth and death – birth as a ritualised

²⁶ This logic may be operating in the traditional Zulu way of giving birth: if a woman bleeds too much post-partum, "The witchdoctor orders a red calf to be sacrificed and she is made to drink some of its blood" (Kitzinger 1978b:133).

encounter with death.²⁷ Their performance may be likened to a lived trance, an hypnotic waking dreaming that manipulates the universe and signals to the women that they are safe from the cosmic powers of snake, that death will not come for them because it has been attracted, assimilated and transformed by men – ultimately that they need not fear.²⁸

Thus write Buckley and Gottlieb on the transmuting behaviours associated with menstrual blood, “The logic appears simple enough: potent, negatively valued substances such as menstrual blood may be manipulated for positive ends by those who are themselves spiritually potent enough to reverse the valence and make it positive” (1988:37). The blood has been sung over, transmuted - it is no longer ordinary blood but the original ancestral birthing blood. By way of comparison, the following passage from Pedersen’s study of menstrual blood in Bali parallels many of the Australian themes:

Menstrual blood, like the blood of childbirth, is polluting because it is a kind of death, a death that also signifies the possibility of procreation. In this way, and in keeping with the Balinese principle of dual complementarity, menstrual cycling parallels the cycles of life and death, purity and impurity; there is not one without the other. Women, correspondingly, are linked to both the goddess Pretiwi, the mother earth of germinating life, and to Durga, the goddess of death. Like the goddess of earth, women are fertile and vulnerable. They are rendered so by their blood. This becomes one reason why a woman has to be restrained in her movements during menstruation. If she were not evil spirits would be at her heels in desire of her blood. She could get sick; it could be dangerous for her. This is similar to the precautions taken after birth to guard the baby from dangers, at a time when the mother and child are said to smell of blood and raw meat, providing dangerous bait for evil spirits.

²⁷ “The Catholic Church for instance teaches the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated host: the communicant actually consumes the body and the blood of Christ” (Dahlberg 1991:47).

²⁸ I think an argument could be brought that could suggest the roots of blood sacrifice and the anthropological notion of scapegoating might be here (see Pedersen 2002). However such an argument will not be explored in this thesis.

Balinese ceremonies do include blood sacrifices ... Since the onset of menarche involves blood, the ceremony to mark it involves symbolic effort to appease the bhuta kala [evil spirits] to leave the woman. For major temple ceremonies, the sacrifice of cock's blood, specifically the blood resulting from cock fighting, is prerequisite ... It is precisely to avoid having bhuta kala interfere with humans, including women, that people strive to satiate them with other bloods (2002:313).

The following excerpt from Lois Paul's study also captures many of the themes that we have been exploring. This time, however the blood-sacrifice is not performed by men but a village midwife, the themes of hungry post-partum spirits, scapegoating (in the form of a chicken) and blood-sacrifice are prevalent:

A more dramatic ritual is one performed by the midwife to protect certain newborn babies from the destructive spirit of an older sibling. If one child in a family thrives but subsequent babies repeatedly die, the spirit of the older child may be suspected of devouring the spirits of its infant siblings. If the midwife or shaman confirms this suspicion, the midwife, a week after delivering still another baby in the family, takes steps to prevent it from falling victim to the hostile spirit of its older sibling.

She wraps a pullet in a cloth and makes the older child carry the bundled chicken while accompanying the midwife as she tours the four corners of the room to offer prayers. Then privately and out of sight of the new infant, she beats the chicken to death on the back of the older child. After this act of punishment, the sacrificed chicken is cooked in a savoury broth and served exclusively to the older brother, who must eat it all even if it takes several meals to finish the task. The midwife lectures the child as he eats, seated behind closed doors or beside the hammock containing the week-old infant: "Now that you have another little brother (or sister) you are not to eat him; eat this chicken instead; its meat is like the flesh of your little brother (Paul and Paul 1975:709).

Once again the blood and body of another is served up as spirit bait.²⁹

²⁹ It is interesting to reconsider Riek's 1914 account of couvade as externalised psychoneurosis – an attempt to assuage his desire to eat the foetus. In these situations males are transmuting the demon/spirits related generally to birth and infantile ill health.

My reading of Gross's analysis of the Aboriginal ritual complex shows many examples of what in some other cultures would relate less to the counterfeit Western construction of womb-envy but more to an ambiguous sacrificial/appeasement process combining life-taking and life-giving. Men become so ritually associated with death, according to Kaberry's example, that if the men find the carefully hidden placenta the *child* may sicken and die, or, both mother and child (no matter what sex) for several days after birth would be harmed by contact with a male (Gross 1980:183). This suggests not that blood is dangerous to men, but that men are now dangerous to the things of birth ... the placenta, mothers and new-born babies and this can suggest that men are now associated with death – with the realm of the ancestors/spirits. The complementary and necessary segregation is exactly because men are drawing death to themselves – away from reproductive women and the newly-born.

Again, there may be a logic associated with this miming magic that is far more in keeping with traditional obstetrics/midwifery the world over rather than the spell (not that I have anything against spells) cast by a small group of psychoanalysts and feminists, a highly contagious spell that, strangely enough, would turn all fathers everywhere into envious demons. However, I have already argued in several different ways that birth sites are the original locus of much magic, sorcery, shamanism, demons, guardians and witchcraft. The high tide of colonial and rationalist thinking swamped magic and childbirth magic with demonising Western beliefs - but as this tide recedes it has uncovered the bleaching bones of sorcery (a sorcery liberated from European hubris) and we see these bones somehow come newly alive in many contemporary scenarios in a rebirth of magic (Tuassig 1993, Coombe 1997, Kapferer et al 2003, Comaroff and Comaroff 1997).

Therefore, we should not perhaps, be overly surprised, to discover again the practices of witching and un-witching, demonising and exorcism, in the 'savage minds' of we post-moderns. In a sense, I too have tried my hand at a little friendly exorcism by attempting to separate the demonic from contemporary procreative fathering males. Traditionally it was the birth attendant's role (roles far broader than Western constructions) to keep the evil spirits at bay, and some feminists, activists and anthropologists seem to have manifested this role in themselves and mistaken husbands, fathers, and procreative males for alien, evil spirits, the demons and hungry ghosts that haunt birthing sites the world over.

According to Menon and Shweder, the version of *Mahakali*, the Indian Goddess *Durga*, that spiritual feminists on the West Coast of California like to imagine, is an image that shows a wrathful and powerful Goddess armed, hung with a necklace of male heads, standing 'triumphant' on a yogi (the God *Shiva* in his male form) (2000). While undoubtedly a useful image for the rise of spiritual feminism, or a sex positive model for *Tantric* feminists, or giving others an affirmation of prehistoric female domination, it is also an image that has almost nothing to do with its original meaning in its original cultural setting, say Menon and Shweder in their essay '*Power in Its Place: Is the Great Goddess of Hinduism a Feminist?*' (2000).

Like the figure of demon-slaying Kali, I believe Gross has inscribed the complementary birthing complex of the Australian aboriginal world with a set of uncritical Euro-centric assumptions hatched out of a long line of uncritical assumptions reticulating into hoary psychoanalytic authority.³⁰ Perhaps as women began to seek out more potent female images to contain and translate female

³⁰ A Zulu witchdoctor prior to the colonization of birth by Western medicine and hospitals would have delivered his own child so that it would inherit his spirit. Western doctors and nurses he says "do not realize that the forces that activate birth are much older than humanity itself. They turn birth into a spiritual nightmare" (Kitzinger 1978:133).

transpersonal knowing (outside of more dutiful and domestic Christian images) some of the early pioneers imbued indigenous symbol systems with the Western hopes of female superiority, male inferiority, and universal womb-envy. Gross has also suggested on the strength of her reading of the Australian materials that *all* andocentric religion follows similar patterns.

I have placed considerable emphasis on these topics because I believe it is crucial for understanding this point - if it can be shown that men were not, and are not, creating their major religious rituals out of womb envy - then their religious rituals must suggest something else. Although we don't have a sophisticated or exact language for what this might be e.g. 'couvade'. I believe male reproductive consciousness crosses over with all of the following: male ritualised midwifery, male rites of passage, traditional obstetrics/midwifery, man-making ceremonies, spiritual prophylaxis, symbolic fertility rites, shamanism, sacrifice, and perhaps - hyper-masculinised soteriological religion.

Running the Gauntlet: Re-cognising Male Reproductive Manoeuvres

The Carib couvade of the West Indies ... When the forty [fasting] days are up they invite their relations and best friends, who being arrived, before they set to eating, hack the skin off this poor wretch with agouti-teeth, and draw blood from all parts of his body ... they often make a real patient of him ... they take sixty or eighty large grains of pimento or Indian pepper, the strongest they can get, after well mashing it in water, they wash with this peppery infusion the wounds and scars of the poor fellow, who I believe suffers no less than if he were burnt alive; however, he must not utter a single word if he will not pass for a coward or a wretch. This ceremony finished, they bring him back to his bed, where he remains some days more, and the rest go and make good cheer in the house at his expense (E.B. Tylor 1878: 292).

Introduction

This bloody account is a description of action taken by a father in regards to the birth of his offspring. Westerners, as we have seen, can assume that males in other cultures traditionally have little to do with birthing; perhaps in the same way that medical ‘science’ assumes it has little to do with transpersonalism. Both assumptions are further challenged in this inquiry into indigenous symbolic reproductive manoeuvres. Against this cross-cultural backdrop the Western procreative male’s symbolic embodiment of counter-cultural values during the father’s birth revolution in the late 1960s early 1970s can be re-cognised as a form of ‘transpersonal medicine’ (after Achterberg 1992). In this light I offer a father-friendly revision of Davis-Floyd’s *Birth as an American Rite of Passage* (1992) which completely voids procreative fathering males as integral participants in contemporary birthing.

Thickening My Skin

While attending a New Zealand Anthropological Association meeting four years ago a senior female anthropologist asked what I was presenting on. I said I was going to give a paper, my first, on birth as an analogue of a rite of passage for fathers and that I was appropriately nervous. She said (in a way that I think was meant as a kind warning), “You know there are some quarters who would say that as a man you have no right to study birth at all!” After a moment’s wishing I had stuck to my other project (the curative effects of ritual vomiting in a Thai Buddhist monastery), I decided to categorise her comment as an interesting field experience and made a mental note to write it down to be regurgitated at some opportune moment.

I then reasoned with her that since in most Western countries around 95% of fathers are now attending the births of their children (Pengelley 1999) perhaps this justified an examination of their perceptions and experience in the site of birth and that as participants in the ritual of birth their standpoint might be of social, psychological and anthropological interest. “Well then,” she said, “you’ll need to grow a very thick skin”.

A rhinoceros trotted through my mind but I didn’t say anything, thinking the better of it. I imagined that because fathers at birth are sometimes conflated with the dominant Western medical system, rooted in patriarchal hierarchical power structures with professionals over lay people, doctors over patients, and men over women - that she was alerting me to this fact. However I was well aware that technocratic, medicalised and authoritative knowledges are assumed and wielded by powerful (historically male) hegemonies. I was already mindful of the medical system’s long and dubious history in the Western world starting with the male medical takeover of birth, the purposeful economic and legal debilitating of midwifery, the colonisation of

traditional European and non European birth-ways (including male symbolic obstetrical action) by hospitals and Christian missionaries - in short the dismantling of female potency (and male partners' roles) in the birthing scenario.

To study the Western father at birth without negotiating his place against this historical backdrop of male privilege would indeed lack merit and I have sought in chapter 3 to clearly acknowledge this history (albeit from a transpersonal psycho-cultural perspective). However, the rites and rituals of fatherhood in traditional cultures (like the man who has his skin flayed by agouti fish teeth among the Caribs) have all but been erased by the same two powerful arms of the colonisation process e.g. Christianity and the medical system. Having located myself in transpersonal anthropology, I was aware that the same systems of power and authoritative knowledge that have colonised birthing, have also medicalised and colonised spiritual consciousness, consigning its participatory epistemology to the illegitimate basket (e.g. Young and Goulet 1994 and see Comaroff and Comaroff 2002).¹

As I have suggested in chapters 3 and 4 the transpersonal psychology movement arose in sharp critique of modern medical and psychoanalytical conceptualisations of the psyche and body during the 1960s (Grof 1985) seeing them as constricting and debasing versions of the human condition. Transpersonalism is certainly sympathetic to the de-medicalising reforms in childbirth (e.g. Davis-Floyd 1992: 295) as it is to the de-medicalised research of alternate states of consciousness. If we agree, after Jeanne Achterberg, that ritual is the "foundation of transpersonal medicine" (1992:158) then what happens if we bring this notion to bear on the father in the contemporary 'ritual' of birthing. If we view birth (as many do) as a ritual process or a rite of passage then

¹ Talal Asad says that those who have bred a "religious based identity" into their bones are prone to a process of "medicalization" by the modern state, secular scientists and psychoanalysis, who categorise such an identity as a "condition of individual or collective pathology requiring curative treatment" (1993:280).

we might also wonder what kind of transpersonal medicine is he making - good medicine or bad? This is the nature of my interest in this chapter.

The Privileged Voice

As recently as 1975, only 31 years ago, the anthropological study of women was judged by Edwin Ardener “to be on a par with the study of the barnyard fowls that rural women so often owned” (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998:14). Thirty years ago Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) noted the places that women occupied in society were consistently ignored by social science, resulting in one-sided and male-biased ethnographic accounts. Since then there has been a veritable explosion or blossoming of feminist anthropology concerned with the cultural shaping of indigenous and contemporary childbirth practices. In this research field fathers seem to get about as much airtime as Ardener’s fowls.

Within the discipline of anthropology, starting in the mid to late ‘70s, it was feminists who became, according to Kuper “the most influential cultural activists” and who “insisted that the hitherto muted voices of women should be granted a privileged hearing” (1994:538). Sheila Kitzinger, following Mead’s example, was one of a cadre of feminist anthropologists spearheading an ‘academic as activist’ movement bent on critiquing the Westernised medicalised hospital system and emancipating women and women’s lived childbirth knowledge from the hegemony of the clinic and its constructed authoritative knowledge (Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997: 7-8, 25, Biesele 1997:476, and see Ginsburg and Rapp 1995:9-12). As part of this project they studied the cross-cultural variations of childbirth and their more holistic wisdoms in a project geared to validate and normalise emotionally and intuitively based, less technologically bound forms of birth assistance (Romalis 1981:11). Childbirth ethnography was therefore offered as a potent cultural critique (McClain 1989:1).

Challenged was the 'exotic' nature of Western hegemonic techno/birth rooted as it was (according to some) in masculinised Christian religion (see e.g. Romalis 1981, MacCormack 1982, Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1999). Thus Klassen writes:

Especially in the case of research on Asian and African women, anthropologists have considered the complex relationship between women's bodily experiences of pregnancy and childbirth and their negotiation of official theology, andocentric religious and familial authority, and personal beliefs and practices (Klassen 2001:35).

For example, Brigitte Jordan, the author of *Birth in Four Cultures* (something of a classic in the literature) describes birthing in this way:

Elsewhere, as in the Yucatan, the mystery of birth has always been a woman's mystery, though the business of managing birth, at times and places has been taken over by men. Thus it is that the problems and joys raised by anthropological investigations of birth are, in a deep sense, most typically and appropriately experienced by a woman anthropologist (Jordan 1981:183).

Her statement can be used to gain some insight into the activist project and it begins to show how the *idea* that birth is an exclusive women only affair is shaped ... and I admit that as an insider, a male anthropologist, a participant in birth's mystery, a father, a son, a birthing partner ... and a natal aboriginal, I have "problems" with it. "Elsewhere" (we are not told where) the mystery of birth has "always" been a woman's mystery (a possessive claim that seems improvable). Beyond biology, birth (an undeniably intense and profound physiological process) is also an existential and cultural phenomenon that weds all persons to family, kinship systems, generation, origins, eternity, mortality - a place in cosmic time and space. Life itself is wedded to birth and therefore death. Birth and reproductive processes transcend ownership and possession by any one individual or gender since both rely on another's reproductive

powers to create little ones - the mystery of birth is surely a mystery that all persons partake in - not unlike participating in a sunrise.

But then Jordan's statement becomes more pointed and we can see, where males are concerned, she uses the kind of language that might be better suited in describing an aggressive corporate take over - "business", "management" and "take over" conjure, if subtly, strong corporate imagery. The statement apportioned all birth mystery to females and birth's ill-gotten 'management' to males. There is a subtle but potent dichotomy being laid into the reader's mind, weighted for political ends, which I interpret as being geared and deployed, to contest the hegemony of the Western medical system – and the authoritative power and routinised charisma of the males in it (this seems to echo similar dichotomies fielded by Mead, Arms, Mander and others in the previous chapter). It is ultimately the marking-out of birthing territory as a women-only site, the creation of a taboo, and the erasure and disassociation of males from so-called 'female' domains (see e.g. Ginsberg and Rapp 1997:12). As a male anthropologist with an interest in birth I have to transgress the taboo of her 'privileged' construction and the non-too-subtle battle-lines it draws. But let us consider another of Jordan's statements, from an earlier publication, which looks to be in direct contradiction to the one above:

In the Yucatan, the woman's husband is expected to be present during labour and birth. They say he should "see how a woman suffers." This rule is quite strong and explicit and we heard of cases where the husband's absence was blamed for the stillbirth of a child (Jordan 1978:33).

By applying Jordan's first statement (e.g. birth = women's mystery and therefore = female anthropologist's territory) to the statement above, then revealed is something about her approach to the anthropological 'object' of birth and the themes of

possession and *exclusiveness* that can be found in some feminist birthing literature.² Obviously, according to her own writing, the experiences of birth *are not* exclusively nor always appropriately and typically women only events ... at least in the Yucatan where birth embeds fathers into a relational psycho/cultural milieu – not the least as a symbolic obstetrical contributor of life and death significance e.g. (stillbirth = absentee father). Furthermore we might ask whether this man's cultural reality, his perception of his partner's suffering, his sentiments and emotional responses, his reproductive roles, obstetrical importance, and relationship to the requirements of the given belief system, or transgression of that belief system, are *really* the exclusive territory of female anthropologists?

After all it does pertain specifically to the 'mysteries' of childbirth yet also specifically to male lived experience. According to Jordan's essentialist logic the answer would be no. I suggest that Jordan's opening statement is a subtle form of gate-keeping, myth-making, and the construction and political fetishising of birth as *only* 'women's business'. A privileged voice (and rightfully so) but one, at least on this point, that seems to lack ethnological validity and one ultimately harmful to the project of researching birth as a holistic phenomenon.³ I can perhaps understand Jordan's position given the gender politics of the time she was writing, but it is disappointing that her sentiments still echo 20 years on in the comments made to me at the conference by the woman academic.

I will now offer a review of the way fathers *are* involved in making transpersonal birth medicine in some traditional cultures.

² An example is found in *Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge* (Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997) where the father's standpoint is not represented.

³ Brigitte Jordan's work *Birth in Four Cultures* (1978) is something of a classic and pioneering work in the field of feminist reproductive anthropology. In it she outlined the beginnings of a framework of analysis that she called authoritative knowledge. A symposium was held in her honour in the late nineties and a book of papers (mentioned above) *Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge* (1997) dedicated to her contribution to birthing anthropology.

'Primitive' Obstetrics

Sociologist James McClenon says, "All over the world spiritual healers claim that fertility can be enhanced by magical ritual" (2002:46) and Van Gennep pointed out 100 years ago that whole societies were involved in the rituals that increase fertility (1908:49). In many cultures ritual specialists engage in what Spencer (1950) called "primitive obstetrics"⁴ or what Kitzinger (1982) and Laderman (1983:124) have perhaps more correctly called, ritual or spiritual "prophylaxis"; protective symbolic rites and rituals geared to aid women and children in birthing. Fathers, relations, midwives, medicine men and women, groups, cults, and whole societies act out various dance, dramaturgical, or imaginal scenarios designed to aid and increase the spirit power of fertility and women birthing (Van Gennep 1908, Lévi-Strauss 1963, Turner 1969, Kitzinger 1982, McClenon 2002).

As discussed, most fathers in most pre-industrial cultures are not at the scene of birth (e.g. Ford 1945). However, I would emphasise an important distinction here, and that is that fathers are, according to Heggenhougen, very busy with definitive *symbolic performances*, "believed to bear directly on the outcome of the birth of his child" which have great social and psychological significance (1980:21-22). A common behaviour among men is to ritually fool the evil spirits attendant at birth "leaving the woman free and unobstructed in her delivery"; husbands diligent in their performance were seen to be integral participants in birthing as his suffering

⁴ The use of the word obstetric and its derivations is admittedly problematic because it is historically related to the development of the male midwife in Europe and eventually the professional obstetrician. The 'rise' of this profession is seen by many to have been a forceful economic appropriation of the position of the female 'midwife' by the 'manwife'. The term itself is etymologically linked to Latin *obstetrix* meaning a midwife, from *ob* before + *stare* to stand. Robert Spencer 1950 introduced the term 'primitive obstetrics' which I find useful because it suggests earlier symbolic ministrations at childbirth. However the phrase comes with its own baggage since 'primitive' denotes the assumptions on which colonisation rowed its boat. The term 'symbolic midwifery' is also problematic because it is also gendered. I will stay with the term 'symbolic midwifery obstetrics' since part of my interest is to show how ritual and transpersonal processes under-gird modern medical practice.

symbolically relieves the woman's fear in proportion to which he can perform the suffering (Heggenhougen 1980:23). Bates and Turner write:

Childbirth in virtually all traditional societies is structured according to the religious beliefs of that society concerning birth. There is a widespread belief in the vulnerability of the woman to malevolent influences during pregnancy and especially during childbirth. Numerous customs and rituals have developed to ensure the safety of the woman during her time of weakness. These usually consist either of appeasing the appropriate spirits or attempting to distract them away from the labouring woman and are usually performed by the father or other relatives (2003:91).

According to Bates and Turner, in almost all parts of the world there also exists "simulative imagery" found in childbirth practice concerned with symbolically and psychically transmitting images concerned with "release, opening up, and expulsion" (2003:89). It appears that some of these ritual enactments and symbolic manipulations could be done at a distance or even at different times. Thus birthing women and the ritualists could occupy different time/space coordinates. Bates and Turner write that, "The manipulations performed may not always be within the perceptual field or even the presence of the parturient woman and must thus be assumed to transmit their impact through the stimulation of images through the woman's mind" (2003:88). Such transpersonal manipulations and performances can affect women's physiological response (see Bates and Turner 2003, Laderman 1987, Kitzinger 1982, Levi-Strauss 1963, McClenon 2002). This does not suggest that women are not actively participants in this process.

Shedding the Skin: Our Pelvic Pathway

According to Achterberg, the serious study of how humans help each other in times of illness "is sobering, humbling, and sheds any mantle of arrogance that holds

effective treatment to be a modern invention” (1992:158). McClain writes that in most cultures before the industrial revolution and Western/Christian colonisation of traditional cultures and their birth-ways it was:

Recognized that certain inherent biological risks accompany reproduction in most societies. This recognition may be responsible in part for the near universality of ritual observances surrounding childbearing in traditionally oriented societies. Birth rituals not only dramatize status changes [usually associated with rites of passage] for the infant, the mother, the father and the family, but significantly also celebrate a successful birth (McClain 1982:36).

The reason for this ritual activity resides in the dangers tenaciously associated with childbirth, which, as we have shown, in many cultures is associated with the activities of malevolent spirits. An example of this close relationship between birth, death, spirits and ritual obstetrics/midwifery is described by Turner translating the language associated with the *Isoma* ritual among the *Ndembu* of West Africa where a woman’s procreative power was thought to be “tied up” by an offended female ancestor (1969:12):

A woman who is “caught in *Isoma*” is very frequently a woman who has had a series of miscarriages or abortions. The unborn child is thought to “slip out” before its time has come to be born ... *Ku-fwisha* [to die] ... means “to lose relatives by death,” specifically “to lose children.” The noun *lufwisha* means both “to give birth to a dead child” and the “constant dying of children.” One informant told me: “If seven children die one after the other, it is *lufwisha*.” *Isoma* is thus the manifestation of a shade [spirit entity] that causes woman to bear a dead child or brings death on a series of infants (1969:16).

As outlined in the previous chapter, the evolutionary transition from *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens* compounded the two important factors (bigger heads and smaller pelvic opening) and increased the potential for perinatal danger, injury and mortality (McClenon 2002:49). Failure to progress or, labour dystocia, due to shoulder

hindrances or too large a head is still with us today and post-partum haemorrhage is a very real concern for developing countries.

From these factors we can assume that pregnancy would be borne by the community with the worrisome idea that an inevitable and *predictable* life-crisis could occur at parturition. Obviously, most births in contemporary Western cultures do not end in fatalities.⁵ But all births have at least the very real potential to kill - and no one can tell if the birth will become fatal or not until it is happening. Thus when a woman and child go into labour there is no telling that both will survive the trial and its potential encounter with death. Furthermore, all births have a quality of pain and suffering about them and even a normal labour can still push a woman into the perception that she is in a life-threatening situation. She and her helpers can often feel death's door near at hand. Childbirth therefore would have come to be understood as a potential encounter with death. Our evolutionary pathway (the need or desire to go about on our two hind legs) seems to have come at a cost with fetuses and newborns paying the highest price in mortality. Indeed Robillard, Chaline, Chaouat (2003:133) speculate that it is possible that our ancestors, *H. Neanderthalensis*, disappeared because of this evolutionary hike. Fear of pain and death, is also a major factor which in turn obstructs normal labour and increased labour duration, the failure to proceed, is associated with much higher than normal perinatal mortality rates. Birth can obviously kill – but birth (and therefore death) can also be ritually manipulated in an attempt to tip the balance.

⁵ Nevertheless, according to statistics provided by Judy Cottrell (head of midwifery training at New Zealand's National Women's Hospital) up to 15% of clinically recognised pregnancies end in spontaneous abortion. Miscarriage can occur in up to 40% of pregnancies, and a further 10% of women experience eclampsia which is life-threatening, still birth occurs in 1% of women. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that up to 515,000 die each year from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. The single most important cause of maternal mortality worldwide is post-partum haemorrhage accounting for up to half of the maternal deaths in developing countries from the proceedings of the 27th Congress of the International Federation of Midwives held in Brisbane, Australia.

For example, a symbolic manoeuvre designed to ward off the spirit of fear (reported by Malinowski in the Trobriands) has the men in the birth-giving woman's family standing vigil *outside* of the birthing hut with their spears at the ready to ward off the malevolent forces assembling at birth (he is out there with them, by the way). This custom he says:

Is associated with the strong fears that surround a woman at childbed, and which are conceived to be due to a form of evil magic, which is called *vatula bam* (the chilling or paralysing of the uterus) (Malinowski 1929:193).

It is the 'chilling' paralysis of female physiology that must somehow be assuaged and a sense of opening and 'flow' brought into the psycho-physiology of the parturient. Traditional midwifery/obstetrics also manifest as culturally embedded ideals embodied by women such as dignity, fearlessness, will (Biesele 1997:479), or generosity and honesty (Granqvist 1946) were geared to alleviate such fears. The following passage highlights this process:

Physical response to emotional support has been repeatedly demonstrated. Bantu women of South Africa, for example, have very small pelvises which in our society would necessitate Caesarean sections. They manage, however, to give birth vaginally due to forceful contractions which mold the fetal head sufficiently to enable it to get through the pelvic opening. Comparing the European to Bantu women, one doctor says 'In the European there is an unfavorable emotional background which has an inhibitory effect on efficient uterine action ... simple distocia due to contracted bony passages can almost be eliminated by *fostering the will in the parturient to deliver herself*' (Hyns, quoted in Newton and Newton 1972:168) (Romalis 1981:11).

According to d'Aquili, rituals promoting dissociation and altered states of consciousness are found almost universally (1985:21 see also Bourguignon 1973). Because fertility and reproductive success were so crucial to our species' early

survival we could surmise that the ritual practices of midwifery and ‘shamanism’, rites of passage and the *couvade* in all likelihood developed in close association with our ancestors’ birthing bodies and perhaps the altered states of consciousness related to labour (see e.g. Arms 1994, Biesele 1997, Lewis 2003). Birth is a predictable crisis - what is not dependable is the outcome of the labour. And it is here, because of the predictable timing, and dependable crisis of pregnancy and birth, I would argue, that the roots of ritual and indeed religion could be found – especially since the biological themes of birth, death and sex also overlap and can be compressed into complex multivalent ritual forms.

Trevathan has argued that obstetrical teams developed millions of years ago (2003) and McClenon has recently suggested that ritual and religion may have evolved in this same evolutionary matrix because the healing powers of ritual (relaxation and a sense of connection) was such that it could increase fertility and reduce childbirth mortality among our hominid and even pre-hominid ancestors (2002:46-50). He goes as far as to suggest that the forces of genetic selection might have even tilted our species toward its ability to experience non-ordinary states of consciousness – and did so in close association with reproductive demands (2002:45-57). Ritual as transpersonal medicine has ancient roots.

Anatomic Cosmos

Childbirth, in more traditional indigenous settings, is meshed with wider cosmological belief systems and therefore cannot be studied as an isolated event without considering this mesh and its relationship to cosmo genesis (e.g. MacCormack 1982:100). Cosmic landscapes among indigenous cultures have to do with origin myths, which explain how the universe and its people came into being. Such worlds are holisms after their own logic and are viewed as numinous psychic

constructs that empower the people's actions with rhythm and meaning, which are embedded in the people's experience, and then re-enacted in ritual (Kalu 2001:228-239). Examples of symbolic midwifery, which suggest the magical manipulation of origin myths (cosmologies fused with women's birthing bodies and male reproductive imagery), have been recorded by anthropologists all over the world from Siberian and Eskimo peoples (Spencer 1950) to Malaysian birth specialists (Laderman 1983), Cuna Indian Shamans (Levi-Strauss 1963), Cantonese midwife/shamans (Potter 1974), Guatemalan midwives (Paul and Paul 1975), and Afro-Jamaican childbirth cults (Kitzinger 1982).

Child and mother mortality has been, throughout collective human history, a universal reality and the human family has responded to this problem with symbolic midwifery manoeuvres, which are extended into what Kitzinger has called "body cosmologies" (1982:198). This process of relating birth to the environment, to universal, mythic and cosmic principles is "a crucial process in childbirth practices of all cultures" (Bates and Turner 2003: 93). The very cosmos itself may be manipulated by ritual magic in attempts to midwife children into the world. Bates and Turner, referring to Levi-Strauss's analysis of a Cuna woman obstructed in childbirth, say, "By providing the woman with a symbolic context for her experience, her pains can 'assume cosmic proportions.' ... The song emphasizes her place within a cosmic order" (2003:93). Or as Laderman says, childbirth rituals are to bring mother and child into a more, "harmonious relationship with the Universe" ... and "keep her mind on holy matters instead of the pain" (Laderman 1987:296).

Rites of Passage as Symbolic Reproductive Manoeuvres

Cosmological systems are supported by ritual systems. Van Gennep noted that rites of passage can have multiple functions and although he favoured the idea that these

rites “were the symbolic markings of transitions in the social statuses of individuals” (McClain 1982:46-47) there are other possible functions to consider. Van Gennep also noted that such rites had a profound association with pregnancy and birth-giving (see Klassen 2001: 85-86). As noted ancient Aboriginal origin myths tell of ancestral ‘brother’ aiding his birthing sister/ancestors and later male initiation rites (enacting those myths) suggest a complementarity to female birthing (Gross 1980:286). A similar complementarity was found among the Kalahari Ju/’hoan between male trance dancing and female birth-giving - both of which function as rites of passage (Biesele 1997).

It is interesting to contemplate the relationship between Van Gennep’s rite of passage template; e.g. separation, transition and incorporation - and the foetal person’s journey through the chaotic ‘gauntlet’ of the perinatal passage. The child is separated from the ‘good womb’ passing into a state of constriction, followed by an ordeal-like and laborious transition and finally emerges from the dangers associated with the birth passage into the world and a new social status (see Grof 1977, 1985). It is not hard to imagine that rites of passage also mime this primordial biological passage and therefore may at some symbolic level be participating in, celebrating, and increasing birth outcomes by symbolic enacting of the successful passage of birth. Laderman writes that the Malay *bomoh* and Cuna shaman “provide a rationale for the woman in protracted labour which puts her pains into a meaningful context with a promised satisfactory ending, rather than allow them to be felt as unproductive and chaotic torment” (1987:300). Rites of passage may do the same.

True, the dominant discourse regarding rites of passage is that they are to do with the transitioning of persons, via a thematic replay of birth-giving, signifying a neophyte’s dangerous movement into a new social status (e.g. Douglas 1966). But

suppose such enactments *also* operate as obstetrical manoeuvres designed to simulate reproductive processes - a form of symbolic birth geared to help power-up women's reproductive capacities (e.g. Turner 1969:20-21) and mimetically escort neonates through the dangers persistently associated with the birth canal and the woman's body as anatomic cosmos. Van Gennep described the following as a 'rite of passage':

He goes down into a pit, and the blood of a sacrificed bull poured over him covers his whole body; then he comes out of the pit, bloody from head to foot. During several days he is fed only milk, like a newborn child ... and it seems to me that the rite originally had a direct and physical meaning: the neophyte came out of the pit covered with blood like the newborn child emerging from its mother's body (Van Gennep 1960 [1908]: 93).

It is therefore conceivable that embedded within some tribal ritual complexes are multivalent symbols (usually associated by Western researchers with rites of passage and initiation ceremonies), which in some cases seem to imitate the child's passage into the world of light. These enactments may also function as symbolic obstetrical imagery designed to embed successful simulative and psycho-physiologically stimulative pathways into the *habitus* and into minds of women (see Bates and Turner 2003, Kitzinger 1982, Laderman 1983, Aijmer 1992, McClenon 2004). This would suggest that birth has almost always, with many cultural variations, been an event tied to spiritual concerns such as ritual, rites of passage, ritual specialists, altered states of consciousness, alterity-scapes, numinosity, charisma, and religion. And "Religion", writes French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, "may pacify anxiety, suffering and maternal expectations" (1997:364). Women need not be seen as passive in this system but active participants in receiving and co-generating trance and symbolic forms. Every successful birth brought to completion by a woman must also generate a powerful symbolic system.

Shedding Samsara's Skin

The basic imagery found in rites of passage is also often suggestive of an encounter with death (Grof and Halifax 1977) during the dangerous passage through female genitalia and this imagery, morphology and symbolism seems to permeate all rites of passage (e.g. Van Gennep 1908, Eliade 1958, Douglas 1966). One of the principle features of male rites of passage consists of “the boy leaving his mother’s keeping” followed by erasure of his previous existence and “admission into the secret society of men and introduction to their mysteries and mythologies ... By giving up his former childish, *mother-bound* self in this “death,” he then becomes identified with a totemic self and is thus an integral member of the male group who share the same ‘soul’” (Perry 1953:117). In short, the dissociation of males from the mother’s domain.

An example of the complex relationship between cosmology and initiation-as-obstetrical manoeuvre is portrayed in the *Theravada* Buddhist tradition. In his ethnography of Buddhist cosmology and spirit cults, Stanley Tambiah, said this rather extraordinary thing - that there is an “ethical and spiritual force”, in Buddhist lore, “bursting out of the universe altogether” (Tambiah 1970:34).

His statement is made in relation to the panhuman process of ordering the cosmos and then placing ourselves within that order and wrapping ourselves in time (mortality), space, matter, motion and causality (1970:34). It is this enveloped and embodied condition from which the Buddha models his ultimate escape from materiality, in Buddhist terms, *karma* (causality) *dukka* (suffering), *samsara* (the wheel of death and rebirth) through *nirvana* (final extinction). Tambiah also writes that there is a “close connection between cosmology and ritual ... in the rituals we see cosmology in action” (1970:35).

Cosmologies, as noted, in many cultures are blended with women's birth-giving bodies either overtly or secretly in birthing rituals (e.g. Taussig 1993:122-125). Viewing Buddhist cosmology through Tambiah's intriguing motif of "bursting out of the material universe altogether" suggests that its ritual complex may also model, at some tacit level, the 'escape' of children from the mother's genitals/body and is recapitulated in ritual and honed through dissociative meditation practice aimed at decathection from what Laughlin calls "womb, woman and world" (1990) and the destruction of what is aptly called "clinging" (*tanha*) (Spiro 1994:152) or attachment.

The *Angulimala paritta* is a potent chant designed to ward off dangers and ease the pain of childbirth (Tambiah 1970:221). The following is a summary of the 'myth' associated with "the killer of men, Angulimala". This man had killed 999 victims "causing great fear and depopulation" [I am interested in the fear of depopulation] and was in "mortal danger of killing his own mother" [matricide via perinatal death?]. The Buddha at this point intervened; converted Angulimala and ordained him as a monk [initiation, status change]. "One day when returning from his own natal village ... [he] saw a woman in severe labour pains and, being helpless and full of piety, reported the event to the Buddha, who said to him: "Go to the place and say, 'I have never knowingly put any creature to death since I was born; by virtue of this observance may you be free from pain'". On remonstrating that this was untrue of his own life, Angulimala was told by the Buddha that since becoming a monk he was indeed reborn and that his new life was virtuous. Angulimala "did as he was directed and the mother gave birth with as much ease as water falls from a vessel" (Tambiah 1970:222).

Clearly, the initiation or spiritual rebirth of Angulimala not only provides him with a new status (he enters the mind-world associated with monk-hood) but his initiation,

his “bursting out of the universe altogether” also symbolically operates on the labouring woman bringing her and her obstructed child to physiological salvation. We can perceive a profound multi-layered relationship between the foetal passage, initiation (rite of passage) spiritual rebirth (enlightenment) and actual physical birthing - symbolic midwifery/obstetrics operating in the structure of initiation and the charisma associated with the Buddhist mind-world. A patriarchal religious system is paradoxically geared to assist women in obstructed childbirth.⁶

Ritual Echoes in Contemporary Obstetrics

Several medical researchers have noted that symbolic and so-called ‘ritual’, or ‘magical’ qualities usually associated with what were thought (by the materialist medical fraternity) to belong to more ‘primitive’ times and ‘superstitious’ or uneducated cultures are ironically very much still in the reckoning in the Western world’s medical system. These hidden ritual patterns lend tacit but potent symbolic power to its technological wizardry and ‘heroic’ interventions endowing obstetricians with something akin to the religious charisma usually found in rituals such as baptism or weddings (Myerhoff and Larsen 1968, Roth 1957, Romalis 1981). These magico-religious powers can also be used to control participants (Lomas 1978) and reinforce the “established social system” (Kitzinger 1982:182).

Similar themes were brought to bear on the Western hospital birth situation by Robbie Davis-Floyd. She asserted that the ritual structure was serving to imprint into the minds of women, opened by the ordeal of labour, the value system associated with Western technocracy and its ‘body as machine’ mythology (1992). She writes:

⁶ It could be argued that andocentric soteriological religious systems evolved from symbolic reproductive manoeuvres, but the topic is too complex for this chapter so I address it in chapter 8.

A common tenet of modern thought holds that the transfer of the birthplace from home to hospital which has taken place in American [and Western] society represents the deritualization of what in other, more “primitive” societies has traditionally been a process laden with superstition and tabu ... however I suggest that the removal of birth from the home to the hospital has resulted in a proliferation of rituals surrounding this natural physiological event more elaborate than any heretofore known in the “primitive” world (1992:1-2).

However, while not mentioned in her book, Peter Lomas had earlier developed this theme (albeit from a psychoanalytic perspective) in “An Interpretation of Modern Obstetric Practice” in *The Place of Birth* (Kitzinger and Davis 1978). He writes that many features found in modern obstetrical practice are actually also found in anthropological studies of ritual such as Van Gennep’s formulation of rites of passage, pollution and purity taboos, the lessening significance of church rituals such as baptism and marriage and the priestly powers assumed by the doctor. He also writes that researchers “are now ‘rediscovering’ in modern society the existence and significance of an endless array of patterns of symbolic behaviour that have been for long associated exclusively with ‘primitive’ society” (Lomas 1978:177). He suggests that these rituals may have been unrecognisable to us because we had been so hypnotised by the “apparent rational assumptions behind them that we do not even begin to seek a further explanation”, he then asks, “What might these hidden patterns be in relation to obstetrical method” (Lomas 1978:177) – the reader might ask the same question!

Also not mentioned in Davis-Floyd’s account were Joel Richman and W. Goldthorp who, in “Fatherhood: The Social Construction of Pregnancy and Birth” under the heading, “The conspiracy against fathers”, write for example, that “pregnancy for the woman is matrixed in a pattern of ritual forms and sequences. The

mathematical calibrations indexing her obstetric progression imprint heavy, cultural tattooing (1978:158). They also write that, “The delivery can be conceptualised as the rites of transition”, and, following Van Gennep’s formulation, “in the life crises of birth. The mother has undergone the prior preparation of the rites of separation, namely the compulsory shaving to transform her everyday status”. This, they say, is done in an atmosphere of “sacredness” where the everyday is “reversed” (1978:167).

Roth (also not mentioned by Davis-Floyd) had earlier asserted that although recently forged modern medicine was founded on scientific principles, it nevertheless contained many elements of magic (1957). In this vein Richmond and Goldthorp write, “obstetrics contains a powerful continuity of folklore” (1978:167). It has also been observed that there exists a “high mystical esteem of medicine” (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:168) that serves to empower medical authoritative knowledge. Myerhoff and Larson have explored what Weber called the “routinization of charisma” and the construction of the “doctor as a cultural hero” (1965:188). They also write that “the continuity between magic and technical competence and the use of magic by the modern physician are explicitly ignored in our society” (1965:190).

Now returning to Achterberg’s premise that ritual is the foundation of transpersonal medicine; she says that what appears to be the missing element in health care [and therefore modern childbirth] “is not ritual per se’ but the awareness of participation in ritual’s transpersonal functions” (1992 158-159).

Fathers: Patriarchal Tools or Procreative Phallic Symbols?

In some cultures ‘primitive midwifery/obstetrics’ specifically utilises symbolic and actual sexual union, fertility rites, and sexual imagery shrouded in religious symbols to stimulate the physiology of the birth-giving woman (Bates and Turner 2003: 88-89). Erotic simulative and stimulative reproduction magic is often discrete or indirect,

however, even when translated into other symbolic forms can still evoke impregnation and birthing (Aijmer 1992:17). A symbolic complex related to this kind of impregnation exists in Reichel-Dolmatoff's exploration of the Amazonian Tukano symbolic world:

The *maloca* [communal house] is the uterus ... and as such its structure corresponds to that of the Cosmos ... The inclined poles that form the framework of the roof are called *vahsuni* and are phallic elements ... being phallic symbols they are exposed to much magical aggression and therefore should be protected with great care ... It is imagined that there is an invisible cape or shell covering the entire *maloca* 'like a placenta' ... the *maloca* is a uterus and therefore a place at whose entrance a fundamental transformation operates. The act of a man in bringing an animal to the *maloca* is equivalent to a sexual act, fertilization of the uterus by the male factor (1971:106 -232 cited Aijmer 1992:18-20).

We could recall Levi-Strauss's example of obstructed childbirth among the Cuna where the shaman evokes in his chants the rhythmic strokes of a penis (1963:194). Bates and Turner write on sexual practices in traditional midwifery/obstetrics:

The stimuli used in such practices are symbolic of the man who fathered the child and, in particular, of his sexuality. They may thus inculcate some form of sexual imagery in the woman, albeit at the preconscious level, which then stimulates the physiological responses normally elicited by sexual stimuli—the release of hormones and contractions of the uterus which serve to aid the birth process (2003:89).⁷

The doyenne of the English home birth movement, feminist anthropologist Shelia Kitzinger, certainly set a place for fathers at the table of birth ... she has been an unequivocal champion for the procreative father at birth in the Western world and has fought to bring partners into the site in the name of completing a holistic *emotional-*

⁷ Kitzinger notes that a man's sweaty shirt was brought to obstructed Jamaican woman in labour - human sweat contains prostaglandins which can stimulate uterine inertia (1982:192). Prostaglandins were originally thought to reside in human semen and the prostate gland.

sexual gestalt, a gestalt thought to promote humanistic outcomes for the typical birthing partnership and child, and aid in the physiology of birth (1964).

No one, I think, would argue that fathers could, should or would be the primary gestalt of birth (at least without the risk of being hospitalised) but it has been argued for a long time that birthing mothers when given familiar emotional support and a felt connection to lovers, husbands, families and friends are more likely to experience positive birthing outcomes (Romalis 1981:11). Not long ago in the Western hospital birthing system women were routinely isolated from familial support, which is, by most accounts, an anathema to traditional birth-ways. According to Achterberg, isolation from loved ones, family, environment, self and spirit world, in many cultures is seen as a *primary* cause of illness requiring transpersonal rituals for its amelioration (1992:159).

Migration had isolated many women from the close bonds of extended family and kinship systems, which also meant the father (as partner) was a likely choice as favoured birth attendant (Romalis 1981:11). He was in fact the only attendant the hospital would allow and even then he often met with vehement resistance from staff (Priya 1992:77). However not all quarters have welcomed the 'partner' role in birth and some, like Anne Oakley, have depicted the father as an appendage of the medical takeover of birth claiming that 'traditionally' birth attendants were women (Lewis 1982: 61,68, Oakley 1980: 43; and see Mander 2004:7). However, as Goran Aijmer writes:

Men are tied to the event of birth – whether by actual presence in the same place and at the same time, which is perhaps not so common, or by way of simultaneity only, or by employing other symbolic devices. Separation in space between husband and wife is often mandatory, but this necessary division can be bridged

by togetherness in time and by simultaneous symbolic imagery of male birth (1992:8).

This brings us again to the widespread phenomenon of *couvade* or male birthing rituals. Found all over the world and in a great many traditional cultures (including European ones) their actions seem to suggest obstetrical support.

Nevertheless fathers among some traditional cultures *do* accompany their partners during birth (Ford 1945) therefore they cannot be said to be universally excluded. Among these he lists the Andamese, Copper Eskimo, Kwakiutl, Lepcha, Toda, Tubatulabai, Tupinamba, Yakut, and Yukaghit. In other cultures he is *often* present, among these Ford lists the Ainu, Chuckchee, Hopi, Ifugao, Lakher, Maori, Maricopa, and Masai (Heggenhougen 1980:22 and see Laughlin's 1989 review). Similar childbirth arrangements are found among the Maya (Jordan 1978:33), the Karen of Thailand (Priya 1992:76), the Catiguan of the Philippines, in some Guatemalan Ladino communities, Javanese (according to Hildred Geertz), and some European communities such as Denmark where it was believed that it would be impossible for a wife to give birth to her baby without the partner being in attendance (Heggenhougen 1980:22).⁸

In the previous chapter we saw how Mander (2004) also links Western fathers to the medical system; writing for example, "the man who was the father was successful in pursuing his medical brothers into the birthing room" (2004:8). What we see here the subtle 'partnering' of the father with the medical system. However there are many examples of men as partners resisting and contesting Western medical hegemony

⁸ There is also a widespread pattern of male ritual and trance specialists (so called 'shamans') engaging in the crises of obstructed birthing to consider: among others, Hindu and Jewish practices (Romalis:1981:13 and see Bilu 1999); Australian Aboriginals (Kabbery 1936); Cuna medicine men (Levi-Strauss 1963, Taussig 1990); Ju/'hoan trance dancers (Biesele 1997); Indonesian practices (Nourse 1999) Philippines (Hart 1965:23); Malay *Bomoh* (Laderman 1983:40). In some cultures, such as Samoa, so an informant told me, midwifery is a family tradition practiced by *either* gender.

from the outset. In San Francisco reports emerge of couples handcuffing themselves together in the late '60s so as not to be routinely separated by hospital strictures (Gaskin pers.com). In England in the early 1980s after an obstetrician tried to deny women the right to deliver in alternate positions "5,000 women and their partners demonstrated outside the hospital" (Flint 1988:34). Such statements would suggest that fathers/partners were pursuing something other than obstetricians into the hospitals. Sonja Jackson sees such claims as somewhat "eccentric" (1987:38) but they are perhaps best understood in the light of the feminist project of expropriating birth from 'patriarchal' control.

Others have argued, rightly, I think, that the so-called natural birth reform movements instigated by male physicians Grantly Dick-Read *Natural Childbirth* (1932), *Birth without Fear* (1959), Fernand Lamaze (*Painless Childbirth: The Psychoprophylactic Method* (1956), Richard Bradley (*Husband-Coached Childbirth* 1965) which all included a role for the father and originally operated heretically and marginally inside the hospital institutions (to be in the reckoning at all) indeed *were* co-opted by the medical hegemony and therefore can be criticised since they reinforce male power over female (Romalis 1981:26). Furthermore they remain rooted in biological thinking, Cartesian dualism and traditional gender roles: strong, rational male and weak, irrational female (Reed 2005:106).⁹

However these arguments do not take into account, and therefore powerfully obviate, the impact of the wider social revolution that was laying siege to the American 'establishment', its customs and institutions during the 1960's and 1970's (a counter-public so fervent that it almost toppled the government). This statement from the introduction to Turner's famous work on anti-structure captures the moods

⁹ The same arguments have been levelled at nurse-midwives (Romalis 1981).

and motivations of a culture at a social threshold and the highly charged atmospheric context from which the fathers' birthing revolt sprang in the Western world,

The Ritual Process was published in 1969, at the historical moment when students throughout the West were questioning the relevance of the educational project in the face of momentous disruptions of social upheaval and war of those years. Turner's prescience in relating the inversive and sometimes subversive element of "the savage mind" of simpler societies to the violent and playful politics of the present enabled teachers of culture to argue the relevance of their studies to the concerns of contemporary students.

Political movements took to the streets and a whole generation became entranced with alternative life-styles and the open possibility of opting for social marginality. Turner's discussion of the "betwixt and between" states became a way to teach about cultures radically different from the West in terms relevant to the present American [Western] situation. This approach to the intense experience of other cultures fed that generation's drift toward education through experiencing different ways of life (foreword to Turner 1969: viii).

In the context of this anti-structural counter-culture, many men and women 'radicals' performed their affections and sentiments, and their political-religious enactments, their fealty to another reality, by birthing *together*, as a partnership, either alone in non-hospital settings such as communes (sometimes without professional or even non professional aid) or in the company of friends and other non-patriarchal configurations (Reid 1989: 226). Therefore these 'alternate' activities should not be reduced to, nor conflated with, the earlier 'natural birth' movements. This movement (and the men in it) also encouraged and revitalised non-hospital birth by supporting 'lay' midwives and home birth (Reid 1989:227) representing a historical watershed for direct entry midwifery. My attention is arrested by Reid's description of this movement as orientated by a more "natural" lifestyle, coupled with political activism and "Eastern religious zeal" (Reid 1989:226). On this subject Newton and Newton wrote in the early '70s:

A protest against the taboo on open childbirth may be developing in the United States ... not only is there a strong minority agitating for permission for husbands to be permitted to witness the birth of their babies, but the hippies in communes in Northern California are patterning birth as a social home event (1972:12)

The point I would raise here is that fathers as performers of the radical humanist and transpersonal values e.g. equality, emotional support, connection, ecological concerns, persons as co-creators of life – may embody and represent a contesting transpersonal symbol system with its attendant values and meaning. Nor were these sentiments limited to hippies, and Turner has shown how performances cooked up in the margins of society can affect the dominant structure. A 1974 study of 300 home-birthers in the San Francisco Bay Area revealed a set of “average people” with a “hard to define level of self awareness which manifested itself in an individual concern for nutrition, philosophy, positive health, humanistic psychology, ecology, the survival of mankind as a whole ... most couples found the experience of labour a peak experience ... most expressed deep anger at the medical profession for what they felt was usurpation of the management of normal labour” (Mehl 1978:94).

The Altered States of America

During the mid-seventies and perhaps somewhat paradoxically (given the womb-envy theory or the notion that fathers involved in birthing were simply agents of the patriarchy) some feminist literature was also urging fathers *into* birth sites as a way of breaking down gender asymmetry (e.g. Dinnerstein 1976, Chodorow 1978). Spretnak writes: “The element of womb-envy in patriarchal oppression must be discussed along with the feminist call for shared parenting” (1982:130).

However prior to these urgings fathers had begun to accompany their partners into birthing sites in a response to the abuses related to the use of the hallucinogen scopolamine (twilight sleep) in the 1940s (this would suggest that fathers entered

hospitals to perform protective obstetrical roles) (Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997; Gaskin 1988:52). Also, as noted, an alter-native culture of home-birthing was underway in communes in the late 1960's (Newton and Newton 1972, Reid 1989, Waltzer Cohen 1970, Kitzinger and Davis 1978).

It was during this historical period that fathers as part of wide health consumer movements and globalizing counter-cultural resistance with religious (read *transpersonal*) overtones began participating in birthing. The Vietnam War raged, and in San Francisco, home-birthing was revitalised in the same time and place that the transpersonal psychology movement was launched. There is a connection - it is to be remembered that "peak experiences" (religious highs) (c.f. Abraham Maslow 1962, 1964, 1970) were much in vogue among counter-cultural activists. "Chemical Nirvanas" (Schaefer and Furst 1996:507) and other "novel routes to ecstasy" were sought and prized (Lewis 1971:17 and see Harner 1973: vii; Myerhoff 1974:29; and Bourguignon 1973) by a sub-culture described as "defiantly devotional" (Fields 1992:248) and "clamorously assertive" (Lewis 1971:21).

I suggest the 'religious' capital and charisma associated with such states was utilised by the counter-culture in its resistance to techno-birth. Childbirth was being patterned as a social event, as Newton and Newton suggest above, but also as a spiritual event where transpersonal experiences were thought to contribute to successful parturition (Cohen and Waltzer 1970, Tanzer 1976, Maslow 1964, 1970).¹⁰ Kitzinger's psychosexual emotional approach, "that birth could be conceived as the climax of a couple's relationship, a crowning passionate and creative act" (Valvanne 1988:229) fits smoothly into the symbolic milieu generated by the 'love generation's' transpersonal re-ritualising project.

¹⁰ Recall also the relationship between *Angulimala*'s transpersonal state, his rebirth operates on a woman severely obstructed in childbirth.

As the general attack on hegemonic systems ensued a downturn in marriages and baptisms was reported in Christian churches in New Zealand - about the same time that procreative males entered birthing sites.¹¹ These factors point to the tacit ceremonial underpinnings of childbirth and its potential as a multivalent symbolic ritual. It may also be that the so-called 'bonding',¹² experience at birth provided the kind of deep social and psychological wedding that the Church was no longer providing for - but at a far more visceral, primal level providing 'peak' transpersonal states of consciousness, charisma, and *communitas*.

It appears that several remarkable shifts have occurred in the Western world pertaining to birth: 1) the removal of birth from the home to the hospital and 2) the shift of religious charisma from the church to the hospital accompanied by the appropriation of spiritual power by the obstetrician. 3) The heretical arrival of fathers in the medicalised birthing theatre - an arrival that appears to be predicated on counter-cultural values and resistance to the medical hegemony. 4) The revival of 'home' birthing and 5) the rise of feminism and the resurgence of professional midwifery. Taken as a whole these shifts would suggest that the birthing event in a hospital environment is one steeped in the contestations of power and resistance (Foucault 1973) that would place birthing partners in a blurry ritual/political situation.

Contemporary Birth as Rite of Passage

Van Gennep's tripartite morphology has been used much by feminist anthropologists to describe the process of childbearing.¹³ According to some commentators, contemporary procreative males involved in the birthing site can also

¹¹ This information was collected by Associate Professor of History Peter Lineham of Massey University.

¹² It had also become recognised that foetal persons and newborns had greater cognitive and emotional capacity than had previously been thought possible (Romalis 1981:27-28).

¹³ (Kitzinger 1982, Gross 1980, Romalis 1981, Davis Floyd 1992, Biesele 1997, Klassen 2001)

be construed as participants in couvade-like rituals and developmental rites of passage.¹⁴ No research, to my knowledge, has been carried out specifically on the cognitive restructuring that can occur for fathers during birth, nor, and perhaps more importantly, in terms of the women's birth 'gestalt', the symbolism fathers can *embody*. It is the father as 'procreative symbol' that I will concern myself with here.¹⁵

Turner extended Van Gennep's schema and his work on the *Ndembu* ritual complex expanded into a famous anthropological theory built on ideas of *liminality* and *communitas* (Turner 1969). As noted he saw the counter-culture engaged in anti-structural rituals, and some have represented this culture itself as a movement into *liminality* and anti-structure as a way of challenging the dominant structure (e.g. Prince 1974). Transpersonal anthropologist, Larry Peters, comments: "communitas ... is an ecstatic feeling of oneness beyond all categories and hierarchies" (Peters 1994:7). For partners to join women in birthing, from this point of view, is to symbolically challenge *all* dominant structures.

Fathers as birth-attendants then, and as a multivalent symbol system, can be historically linked to a counter ethos characteristic of Western cultures and the following overlapping movements, moments, ideologies, trends and sentiments; these include the civil rights movements, pacifism and the anti-war movement, natural health and organic food movement, the alternate birth movement, protective and supportive roles, anti-hegemonic and anti-hierarchy principles, cooperative participation, counter-cultural revolution, contestation, transgression, subversion and protest. They are related to alternate reality, indigenous birth practices, the hippie movement, the consciousness-expanding movement, humanism, self-actualism, gestalt and Reichian movements, transpersonalism, Eastern religious zeal, LSD use

¹⁴ (Kitzinger 1964; Richmond and Goldthorp 1978:167; Richmond 1982:92; Lewis 1982:45; Davis-Floyd 1992:33; Mander 2004:11 and recently Reed 2005).

¹⁵ I will address these dynamics in the following chapters.

and cosmology, peak experience, neo-shamanism, ecological concerns, holism, and the return to nature movement, emphasis on community, emotional and sentimental qualities, marriage, family and kinship, friendship and companionship, emotional bonding and care, the rise of consumer power, folk medicine, contestation of medical authoritative knowledge, personal authority, choice and autonomy, feminism and its call for gender asymmetry. They are participants in the co-creation of life and mortality through shared substance, sexual potency, sexual revolution, and finally partnership.

Birth as an American Rite of Passage

Perhaps the most comprehensive (but significantly gender-biased and therefore potentially flawed) study to date concerning ritual and contemporary Western birth is Robbie Davis-Floyd's *Birth as an American Rite of Passage* (1992).¹⁶ Hers is a penetrating anthropological study of Western childbirth, and in some respects her basic thesis can serve as a model for my own study. She argues that contemporary hospital birthing can be constructed as a rite of passage geared to indoctrinate *females* to its biomedical mythology by enacting its 'body as machine' system of authoritative knowledge in a ritualised technological apotheosis: birth *as* operation.

Using elements of biogenetic structuralism as a model (Davis-Floyd 1992:317) (one strongly bound to transpersonalism see Laughlin 1988, 1990, 1994) her analysis suggests that women birthing engage in the same neuro-cognitive processes that produce similar states to those found among ritual participants (1992:7-19).¹⁷ She argues that the climaxes and peaks found in ritual and meditation (e.g. d'Aquili 1979, 1985) when neuro-physiological subsystems fire simultaneously in the autonomic

¹⁶ Davis-Floyd's work was briefly mentioned in chapter 1 and 2 however since it pertains especially ritual I will introduce it more comprehensively here.

¹⁷ See d'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus (1979); d'Aquili (1985), and Laughlin (1994).

nervous system, are also found in birthing women (1992:11,15). Once these ritual dynamics 'kick in' the human cognitive system can become open to gestalt perception (d'Aquili 1979:173-174), and what is called "symbolic penetration", that is, the ingression of symbols in the environment and their meaning into the opened mind of the ritual participant - moving toward a peak, climactic experience resulting in a state known as "transpersonal comprehension" (e.g. Laughin 1988:21 and see 1994:104) and "long-term storage" (Davis-Floyd 1992:15). This is often accompanied by a sense of oneness or unity, d'Aquili writes:

Probably the sense of oneness and the vagueness of boundaries, which are experienced at certain nodal points in ritual, are what allow symbols used in ritual to be experienced as that for which they stand (1985:23).

Davis-Floyd's argument presses hard the notion that it is the symbols of the Western technocratic medical system in all its hegemonic glory that are impressed into women's minds at childbirth serving to reinforce its power and status over women - it is a compelling argument. However, it is also important to note here that Davis-Floyd largely fails to include procreative fathering males as ritual participants in her contribution (see also Reed 2005:9), and while I agree with much of her otherwise comprehensive study - this seems a problematic omission, even a crucial one. She does not explore what the father symbolically stands for, or rather, when she momentarily does, he is seen largely as a co-opted appendage, a tool of the patriarchal system (linked to the co-opted natural birth movements) or, symbolic of a society structured by capitalism's market relations and used for its reinforcement (1992:79-81). While her claims are convincing, I have suggested that the father's presence is, nevertheless, also symbolically linked to broader counter-hegemony genealogies. It is known that contemporary birthing consumers have had more options since the '60s

(Davis-Floyd 1992:17) and negotiate the power relations inculcated in the hospital system against this historical shift in consumer power (see also Romalis 1981:8 & 1981: Jackson 1987: 34, Oakley 1980:248-249).

Furthermore, in Davis-Floyd's model of the 'technocratic versus the holistic' models of birth (see 1992:160-161) fathers are not mentioned ... at all, which is not a very holistic perspective. Her model insists that the "male perspective" is the technocratic one and the "female perspective" is a holistic one; (recall Jordan's earlier dichotomy) but in her model fathers are not located in either category - fathers are simply disappeared.

Here are two of my male informants who were present at birth, the first in 1973 and the second in 1982: "I felt like my role was that of a wild-man, like the pagan Green-man. To an extent, I was 22 at the time, just under 23, I saw myself as Janet's champion, standing for a reverent sense of life and connection, ready if necessary to challenge the Lords of the Birth Factory in their lair. Certainly I was tested in that way". He went on to say that he won a victory for his partner by challenging the staff's rushed assumption that his partner was not in labour. The man confronted the staff and they changed their opinion.

The second man, Jack, said this, "I held her hand through the birth and kept telling her that I loved her. I had to go home that night after baby was born. I wanted to bring her some flowers but I hated the idea of anything packaged, I didn't want to give them anything that resembled the great grey capitalist stamping machine. So I went and gathered this huge pile of green and silver fern fronds, and long flax stems and flowers, and great big bushy toi tois and took them to her. I remembered feeling proud when I saw the raised eyebrows of the staff. I wanted to somehow show them that they were part of a world that was natural, earthy, wild and free. It was such a

strong feeling”. What do such enactments mean to the ideas presented by Davis-Floyd?

Also under-represented in Davis-Floyd’s account is the father’s potential for catalysing ‘transpersonal medicine’ among birth-giving mothers - experiences which may mean more affectively, cognitively and symbolically to the mother than a short-lived encounter with an impersonal hospital system (Tanzer 1976, Entwisle and Doering 1980, Beail 1982, Klassen 2001 see below). This seems a profound erasure to be sure, given the way she appears to champion the holisms of counter-cultural birthing mythologies. Davis-Floyd, for example writes,

Since the 1960s childbirth activists have been involved in efforts to transform many of the technocratic rituals through which hospital birth is conducted into rituals that enact a more humanized view of birth and the female body. At the same time, advocates of home birth have been working to create entirely new rituals for birth — rituals that enact profoundly alternative beliefs about the nature of both birth and reality itself. Often operating in conflict with the use of ritual by those in positions of control to maintain the status quo, such groups are actively engaged in tapping the alternative power of ritual to effect social change and expand our options for cultural diversity in both practice and belief (1992:17).

Thus the ‘60s humanist movements fall into her rubric of the ‘female holistic model’ but the fathers in them don’t. Are we to imagine then, the counter-culture as an all female affair? If her account of birthing and biogenetic structuralism holds true then the father/partner should be admitted as an important alternate symbolic milieu, one that could easily penetrate the birthing mother’s cognate system. After Geertz, (whom she quotes) a symbol is, “any object, act, event, quality or relation that serves as a vehicle for conception — the conception is the symbol’s meaning” (1973:93). Certainly this would make the situation at least more ritually ambiguous than she

describes. If we insert this 'missing link' into her account then the question of which symbolic gestalt becomes figural (in terms of contesting symbolic mythologies), which internalised symbol complex will the "individual's entire cognitive structure ... organise itself around" (1992:16) begs for more research.

Any alternately enacted birthing custom is a symbolic challenge to the established medical hegemony and its traditional assumptions (Romalis 1981:28) - the father's presence is such. Following Laughlin, "The presence of a symbol is the intentionality (roughly speaking, "meaning") of the symbol, an intentionality that may take the form of *direct experience* [my emphasis] (1988:21). Given previous arguments about the father's linkage to protective, emotionally supportive, familial, historically transgressive and heretical roles – then what impact might procreative fathering males - as humanistic and transpersonal symbolic agents - have on the process of imprinting of messages and symbol systems for "long term memory storage" (Davis-Floyd 1992:15) in their female partners? Perhaps another important question here is "what is the pay-off for engineering father's historically transgressive position out of the picture"?¹⁸

¹⁸ New Zealand's "partnership model" was instituted by feminist midwives (Guilliland & Pairman 1995). This project, on the surface, models the Treaty of Waitangi and New Zealand's bi-culturalism and is supposed create a 'partnership' between the midwife and the birthing mother and drive a wedge between her and the male obstetrician. However the term 'partnership' in New Zealand has a historical and common law use relating to couples who had entered into a sexual relationship and had joined their economic base in a more business-like partnership rather than the marriage relationship with its heavy patriarchal baggage. Thus it could be argued that, at another level, the partnership model is a professional appropriation of the couple's relational power base and a further obliteration of the father's role as partner and support person. One midwife in New Zealand told me that this dynamic, while never mentioned in the literature, was recognised by some midwives. Fathers are not part of this 'partnership' and several women I have spoken with during the course of this research have expressed real discomfort with the way their partners are left out of negotiations. Many women want their partners to be supportive, present, nurturing and engaged in the process. Yet the situation of birthing, with the charisma attached to the medical profession coupled with professional violence (passive or aggressive) can easily tilt the father toward anomic feelings, psychological and physical isolation and a sense of uselessness and he can disappear as an active and intelligent agent in the birthing scenario. He is constructed as a 'witness' or an 'observer' not as the 'partner' in birth, not as a person with his own experience, ultimately not as part of the obstetrical/midwifery team. I suggest the partnership model, while an important advance, needs to be redrafted to include a triadic 'partnership' including fathers as important support persons and that antenatal classes would need to reflect this shift.

“Jesus with a skin on”

Deborah Tanzer, in her study of childbirth, claimed that among her research participants whose partners were present at hospital births in the early '70s there was a marked “experience of rapture or ecstasy or near mystical bliss” and, following Maslow, that, “the elation of the peak-experience enters permanently into the psyche”. Indeed she concluded, “It is the husband’s presence at delivery that is critical to a woman’s linking of childbirth and ecstasy (1976:165-167).

In the early '70s when Tanzer conducted her research the counter culture was in full retort and this may account in some way for the women’s experience. Hybridized Eastern religious symbolism was popular at the time and used to pattern the birthing event (see e.g. *Childbirth Is Ecstasy* Waltzer and Cohen 1970 and Kitzinger 1964, Leboyer 1976, Gaskin 1977), and religious symbolism, as noted, contains sexual imagery, which, while clothed in religious or spiritual terms, is especially related to the sexuality of the father, and is used to stimulate oxytocin and uterine contractions (see Bates and Turner 2003, Kitzinger 1982). Thus it could be argued that the father’s presence in a re-sacralised birthing site (at the height of the sexual revolution) can be symbolic of the couple’s sexual potency and therefore an obstetrical manoeuvre.

Evidence of the importance of including the partner’s symbolic presence in a biogenetic structural account of birthing comes from a New Zealand woman of about 28 years who had a child in 2001. She told me that when she was in the deepest throes of a long and arduous labour (21 hours) in a hospital she began to feel that she might die. She also said that she felt in those moments she might have to give up her life in the service of her struggling child (this may also suggest cognitive breakdown). At that moment she said that her recently deceased grandmother came to her in a vision and somehow her familiar loving presence helped to guide her safely through

her labour, the presence of her grandmother was blended with that of her male partner who (in this case) was deeply attuned to her.¹⁹ This father/partner had somehow helped catalyse a positive symbolic system connecting her to family, ancestors, and perhaps the charismatic and authoritative power invested in the deceased-as-divinity. Such moments of *communitas* may suggest symbolic transcendence of all earthly power structures - I would argue, contextually speaking, that this is good transpersonal medicine.²⁰

In this context I should mention Klassen's aptly titled *Blessed Events: Religion and Home Birth in America* (2001), which unfortunately also suffers from the same voiding of fathers: e.g. "Birth is a passage that brings into being two new identities: a baby and a mother" (Klassen 2001:84). However she does, if briefly, note that the majority of women in her study held their husbands to be their "greatest supports" and in some cases they were thought by birthing mothers to be "participants in the pain" (2003:196). She also mentions fathers' participation in women's "visionary pain" during the "peak of transition" (2003:178) from the women's standpoint, describing for example, a Christian woman's altered perception of her husband, as Jesus with skin on:

But one time he came into the shower, and it was literally Jesus with skin on. He just stood there and it was Christ. I know he dwells in me, and I know he is omnipresent. I know he's there. I know that the presence of God was there. I knew that but it was literally like having him in bodily form, standing right next to me, and it was just strengthening at a time you really need it (2003:198).²¹

¹⁹ Trance states or visions themselves are often equated with the erotic coupling with a deity or spirit (see Lewis 2003).

²⁰ *Communitas* can be "a potent sacred state", according to Turner (1969:129). It is also a boundary dissolving and mystical moment of cultural transition where human beings can come into contact with "preternatural" (read transpersonal) beings, deities, and powers (1969:105) who bestow charisma usually in liminal phases.

²¹ Klassen points out that not all men have the ability for this kind of attunement (2003:199).

Another of her informants beheld an image of her husband as a tree: “I felt we were united. We were birthing this baby together; he was holding me up, he was like a tree ... that image of him as a tree, and I was just holding on to him and bringing this new life ... It’s one of those over used words today, but the *connection* was so intense and deep, very powerful, that he was there with me the whole time” (2003:197-198).

Perhaps his presence is translated into a symbol of life’s earthy rootedness, or the family (ancestral) tree to which she was ‘connected’ as she birthed.

It is this kind of important data-bearing transpersonal comprehension, emerging in tandem with procreative fathering males, that Davis-Floyd, on the other hand, has perhaps not considered, or consigned to the margins. While agreeing with her that women are participating in a rite of passage and in ritual’s neuro-cognitive processes, and the potential for a technocratic imprinting; the symbolic meaning of partners or significant others, and the impression of the partner’s ‘symbolic conception’, may be of far more importance than Davis-Floyd has given. Her thesis suffers from the voiding of fathers, and in doing so also refuses any claim to a holistic study.

To conclude: I have shown in this chapter that men *do* participate in the mysteries of childbirth and that rites of passage can be linked to symbolic obstetrical/midwifery manoeuvres. If procreative fathering males are participating in such rites at birth then it can be argued that they may be echoing patterns of male ritual response to reproduction found in many traditionally oriented cultures. Fathers’ presence can imply a more holistic symbolism and they are also potentially engaged in making vital transpersonal birthing medicine.

The Father's Shore: Transpersonal Comprehensions at the Site of Birth

There were intimations in even the earliest anthropological accounts of a kind of nascent “cultural relativism” – of a suggestion that perhaps all cultures and thus all religious systems, European and non-European, constituted equivalently complex and sound adaptations to diverse environments (Klass and Weisgrau 1999:7).

Granted that alternative [to American technocracy] comes dressed in garish motley, its costume borrowed from many and exotic sources — from depth psychiatry, from the mellowed remnants of left-wing ideology, from the oriental religions, from Romantic Weltschmerz, from anarchist social theory, from Dada and American Indian lore, and, I suppose, the perennial wisdom (Roszak 1968:xiii).

One major area remains ambiguous or poorly assimilated, however—the new religious vision, which for a tantalising moment in the American sixties brought East and West together in a progressive cultural synthesis ... But the depth and authenticity of that spiritual shift need to be more widely acknowledged (Paglia 2003:57).

Introduction

In the previous chapters I connected father's presence to anti-hegemonic movements and genealogies; here I will connect the father's presence to a socially imagined *Creolized* cosmology. I will continue my exploration of the relationship between the 1960s therapeutic counter-culture and the presence of fathers at the birth of their children as a form of embodied transpersonal resistance to the Western biomedical model and disenchanting secular materialism.

This chapter will explore some fathers' so-called ‘peak experience’ around the birth of their children from the perspectives offered through transpersonal anthropology.

Several unexplored categories of transpersonal disclosure emerged from my participants' narratives and these will be fleshed-out and connected to the cosmology of the times. As we saw in the previous chapter, birth, when shaped or performed in a transpersonal idiom, also implies the living of counter-belief systems and their cosmological umbrellas, bringing them into the contestations at the ritualised site of reproduction. As a consequence of this link between sacred cosmology and performed fealty to realities 'outside of all reason' these lived countering practices will be related to the concept of *cosmological hybridisation* which has been seen as a form of subversive sorcery (Kapferer et al 2003).

I will explore a relationship between this form of sorcery, (emerging from post-rationalist studies) in transpersonal theory making. I will then show how the construction of the so-called 'perennial philosophy' can be conceived as a form of post-modern sorcery designed to subvert Western secular materialism. I feel this exploration is justified because to locate myself in transpersonal anthropology is to grapple with the problems and paradigms of the transpersonal legacy as outlined chapter 6.

Birth and Cosmological Hybridity

Birth sites, as I have shown, can be a hot-bed of contesting realities and I have found several instances in the anthropological record where birth becomes the site of hybridisation at the cosmological level. Sheila Kitzinger's study of Jamaican birthing rituals (1982) and Carol Laderman's (1983) study of Malaysian birth-ways are instructive here. Laderman's study shows how the dominant patriarchal Islamic paradise is reconfigured by magical female performances, altered states of consciousness and (after Bahktin 1985) 'linguistic hybridity' to reveal a cosmic order more attuned to the needs of the indigenous women and the rigours of female birth-

giving. Rather than the more andocentric Islamic heaven (filled with 72 *houris* - heavenly virgins often depicted as restrained for men's sexual pleasure), an earlier Hindu heaven is evoked. The Hindu alterity-scape is historically and cosmologically populated with more potent female dieties (such as the demon slaying-Kali, now a popular figure in the post-Christian West) than the more recent and now dominant Islamic cosmology. Indigenous women have converted the *Apsaras* (the dancing girls in the Hindu paradise) into seven stately (but smiling) midwives - and this can be seen an act of cosmological Creolization. The benign celestial women are known as *bidandari*, a hybrid word that organically meshes two similar sounding words. The Sanskrit *bidadari*, which refers to the beautiful nymphs, the heavenly dancing girls who inhabit *Indra's* paradise ... is fused with the rural Malay word *bidan*, which refers to *bidan kampung* or midwife. Laderman writes,

The Indian temptresses have become heavenly *bidan kampung* concerned with the welfare of women in childbirth. A woman in her last extremities, deserted by mortal helpers, can be delivered by these heavenly midwives (1983:132).

In effect by adding the letter *n* a linguistic merger magically reconfigures spirit personages at the level of cosmology and creates a new hybrid form: the heavenly midwives [collective] in *kayangan* (etymologically) Siva's heaven. The "beautiful smiling ladies" descend, then deliver, wash and tend mother and child and then ascend once again to a Hindu heaven, distinct from *Syurga*, the Muslim paradise (1983:132). Interestingly Islam is the state religion of Malaysia and has been so for more than 500 years. This followed from centuries of Hindu-Buddhist influence (Laderman 1991:16).

Kitzinger's Jamaican example shows the ritual process itself as a cultural *mélange* blending themes suggestive of a ancestor possession/maternity cult and a

Christian revivalist tent meeting. Jamaican midwives, as ritual specialists, also appear to be specialists in the magic of hybridity and who are able to bind seemingly alien spirits and aspects of ritual and cosmology together (after Brendbekken 2003) drawn from Christian, African, and women's cult sources. These sources are blended in a way that offers maximum charismatic support for the labouring woman.

Midwives or "shepherdesses", according to Kitzinger, use singing and dancing to move into possession states and "speak in tongues" (1982:196) and fall to floor a trance known as "labouring". There is an ambiguity as to what spirit the women are host to when possessed, I am not exactly sure if the guest is the spirit of Christ, or the *duppie* (an ancestor spirit), or a hybrid of the two. From my reading of Kitzinger's work it does look a lot like the 'nanas', the guardians of birth in Jamaica's highlands, are also mimetically enacting the convulsions (eclampsia) seen to be caused by the dangerous *duppie* spirit in an obstetrical manoeuvre designed to temper the dangerous spirit. Women in these groups, marginal, and bound to a legacy of slavery, may well have concealed their African possession/maternity ritual within the folds of a more acceptable Christian frock. I argue here that similar hybridising cosmology is reflected in the 'natural' birthing rituals in the late 1960s and that "peak experiences" are (at one important level) the ethical and subversive lived aspect of that cosmology.

Peering Into Peaks

The sub-discipline of transpersonal anthropology offers several useful categories for exploring fathers' "peak experience" at birth. Peering into the peak as an anthropological "object" places it alongside such anthropological objects as "waking dreams", "wondrous events" or post-rational disclosures of "spirit worlds" explored through participant "comprehension", elaborated by Young and Goulet (1994:312).

These momentarily disclosed realities variously labelled within Western culture as: peak-experiences (Maslow 1962, 1964, 1971), altered states (Tart 1971), shamanic states of consciousness (Harner 1982), holotropic consciousness or non-ordinary-states-of consciousness (Grof 1985), wondrous events (McClenon 1994), extraordinary events (Young and Goulet 1994), transpersonal disclosures (Wilber 1995), charismatic states (Heron 1998), anomalous events (Cardena, Lynn and Krippner 2000), psychedelic (Bache 2000), multi-local transpersonal events (Ferrer 2002) can all fall under the rubric of transpersonal anthropology. Such disclosures evoked in a participatory anthropology occur with a deeper level of the anthropologist's usual method of participant/observation and are seen as a legitimate form of data gathering (Laughlin 1994).

The notion of peak experience is historically rooted to the formulation of transpersonal psychology and therefore questions of epistemology must inherently accompany its study. This "pivot to non-ordinary states" of consciousness is ultimately a question of "what experiences it is possible for human beings to have" (Bache 2000:7). Birth shaped or performed transpersonally also immediately implicates cosmology and the knowledge of worlds beyond the grasp of the Enlightenment's philosophy of reason. Such "unreasonable" states fall in to the rubric of the occult, and the occult (with its fellow categories of sorcery, witchcraft and magic) has long been at the epistemological heart of anthropology. Bruce Kapferer writes:

If reason (now a thoroughly relativized reason and implicated in the excesses and devastations of power) is at the apex of the systems of authority and domination, it is the unreason of this reason that has attracted much recent anthropological attention. Occult metaphors – magic sorcery and witchcraft highlight these processes (Kapferer 2003:3).

This research suggests that the wider transpersonal movement influenced birth rites/sites in New Zealand; indeed the current configuration (father's presence) finds an important ancestral predecessor in the '60s counter-culture. Therefore in studying the peak experience as a culturally relative artefact, it may then become possible to comprehend the level of cosmological design informing the social context out of which the counter-medicalised birth movements evolved. Counter-medicalised birth rituals, found originally in the natural birth movement, bloomed in the anti-materialist beat/hippie movements, then in the wider therapeutic counter-culture, and thus represent (in some cases) a lived practice of transpersonal resistance.

Sociologist Paul Starr has written: "The women's movement fought a bitter battle with the medical institutions. The developments in feminism were related to a broader revival of a therapeutic counter-culture with political overtones. Folk, non-Western and entirely novel therapies gained not only a clientele but also surprising respectability, in part because they belonged to a broader cultural and political movement. Much of the new counter-culture went under the rubric of holistic medicine and presented itself as a humane alternative to an overly technical, disease-oriented, impersonal medical system" (Starr 1982: 391). And fathers, as I have pointed out, battled alongside their partners in the border-lands arising between a new religious consciousness and Western medicalised mind-world.

According to Rayna Rapp, "A multiplicity of knowledge forms currently lays deconstructive claim to the monopoly created by the Western biomedical system" (Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997:12). However, because fathers are generally left out of the account when it comes to "knowledge forms" in the battle for authoritative knowledge of birth, I think it is important to revalorise the cultural moment when

fathers involved themselves in countering secular materialism and consumerism through complex forms of charismatic expropriation.

Ritual enactments and performed narratives suggest the mutual reinforcing of a novel cosmology drawn from a mixture of religious sources and hybridised into 'cosmic unity'. This cosmology's correlate 'connectedness' implies a powerful social imaginary with which to subvert medical, religious, political, gendered, and economic hegemonies and their embeddedness in Cartesian metaphysics.

Whispering Cosmologies

Invariably the conversations between my participants and I engaged a quotient of mystery that birthing seems to evoke – this has been called a climactic and ecstatic peak in the literature concerned with the father's standpoint (Jackson 1983:169).

Conversations *about* peak experience are explored here as important social artefacts and reality-shaping performances, whereby "individuals engage in the creation of social realities" (Young and Goulet 1994: 304) including the many spirit real-worlds of alterity. Such worlds are sensitive to language, intention, imagination, participation, and, so it would appear, labouring women. Among the Cuna Indians of Panama, according to Michael Taussig, their spirit alter-world and cosmic domain is a reality spun into being by men "chanting and whispering its origin" (Taussig 1983:113). He calls attention to the "connection between birth and the magical powers of mimesis" (1983:125); the mimetic creation of alterity-scapes. These origin histories have an inalienable yet secret relationship with the womb – and these "womb-sprung worlds" are reproduced in alterity.

Several of my informants - fathers, mothers midwives and physicians who birthed or were involved during the '60s and '70s either directly or generally – associated their experience and conduct to influences in the '60s counter-culture. Therefore it

seems that experiences of connectedness, ecstasy, oneness, and altered perceptions of community, cosmos and nature may be (at one level) historically embedded by an Orientalised social imaginary - a lived cosmology of cosmic unity drawn from the “womb-sprung” religious systems of the world. Male and female voices, sometimes years after birthing, are found “whispering” (so to speak) their worldviews into being. One of my informants, Ben, recalls his experience from 1976 in the following terms:

Birth was just the most amazing thing ... I just felt so bonded and I have had a few experiences ... I have had another experience like it and that was with LSD. I felt this rushing feeling and then I was out of my body, sort of floating. The next was saying goodbye to my grandmother in Chartres Cathedral in Notre Dame it just ... whoosh ... and then I had another at a Buddhist temple in Shanghai in China. I went in and there was this Goddess. I looked at her and whoosh ... same rush, exactly the same, and the last one was at a Krishnamurti weekend here in New Zealand. After chanting for about three hours I got the same rush. I fell over and the others ran up laughing saying what happened to you? And birth was up there with them all. And do you know what that taught me? [Interviewer: What?] That's there's just one truth!

“Just one truth”, as many in the field of transpersonal studies understand, is related to an idea popularised by Aldous Huxley (1945). Indeed, as I heard it, my informant's narrative closely resembles the perennialist claim that all spiritual paths lead up the same mountain, or that all rivers lead into the same cosmic ocean (e.g. Schuon 1984, Smith 1976, Nasr 1993, Wilber 1995, and Grof 1998). Interestingly, in this case, it is birth, death, LSD, chanting, and proximity to authoritative religious structures that evoke these peak experiences.

I suggest that these bear a relationship to the womb. I will not suggest here that this “one truth” is to be found in all traditions or will eventually by dint of

evolutionary telos (Wilber 1995). I will suggest a hybridised cosmological design culturally relative to the alter-world of a generation. I will suggest that when my informant stands on the shore of this worldview “whispering and chanting” it into being, that it becomes not only a meaningful lived social imaginary but that its cosmological design is echoed in the spirit other-world of alterity.

Resistance is Fertile

This research shows that the historical enactment of the fathers can trifurcate into at least three broad patterns of transpersonal participation. I call these respectively; “boundary transgression”, “associative comprehension” and finally what I think of as “natal charisma”—and these appear to be able to constellate one another simultaneously. Firstly, it is evident that being present at the birth of one’s child, especially in the mid ‘60s and early ‘70s, was an enactment reflecting a transpersonal ethic embodied in a culture of resistance. Such enactments can be held to be similar in kind to the ethical actions evinced by some practitioners of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* or Martin Luther King’s civil rights workers (among many other ecological, social and political efforts) as their transgressive altruism suggests transpersonal levels of functioning (Scotton 1996:4). Rosa Parks’ famous boundary transgression (sitting in a prohibited ‘whites only’ part of the bus) triggered the civil rights uprising in America. There are also parallels reported from Christian women’s perspectives, for example, Wertz and Wertz say:

Natural childbirth which avoided potential damage to the baby’s brain by anesthesia appeared to some women as a “heroic” Christian act. In these days before the civil rights movements made social action a viable choice for Christians, having a natural birth was perhaps the only ethical action that many women could take (1977:187).

Ina May Gaskin author of *Spiritual Midwifery* (1977) and midwife of the renowned counter-cultural community, The Farm, says that in those vivid and flamboyant days in San Francisco (before they left for Tennessee) a labouring couple had handcuffed themselves together in the late 1960s resisting the hospital's hegemonic control over the design of birth (which routinely separated partners). The hospital in question changed its policy after this action and others soon followed (pers. com). Gaskin writes:

A boost to the budding childbirth reform movement came with a startlingly new phenomenon that began in the mid-1960s in Northern California, the *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s was already characterised by the widespread questioning of authority by the generation that was coming of age. Hundreds of thousands of young people saw the need to take a radical departure from an unquestioning acceptance of the ideas and edicts that came from what they called the establishment (Gaskin 1988:52).

Disrupting the medical system's control of women's bodies was, at the same time, to transgress the hospital-enforced taboo that regulated the father's presence, and also, perhaps to break with more ancient religious taboos, which, in some cultures separated male and female on religious grounds. One of my informants, Neil, said he was an active participant in the New Zealand protest movements of the times:

It was 1974 and I had to write to the hospital here in Auckland to get permission to be there and they turned me down. But I had a friend on the nursing staff and when her mother [his child's mother] went in, she got me a white coat and a mask and I just went in anyway, pretending to be a nurse or something and it was all go and after a while they knew it was me there, but it must have been the look in my eye, "there's no way you're getting rid of me" and they knew I wasn't going anywhere.

Associative Comprehension

The second category has to do with the transpersonal disclosures and altered states of consciousness (e.g. Tart 1972, d'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979). Some of these states bear a striking resemblance to what Stanislav Grof calls "holotropic consciousness" (1985) and indeed, I think they can be safely categorised as such. Grof has found that women can experience such states in labour (1977). Nevertheless that birthing could catalyse holotropic states in fathers appears to be an uncharted shore in the current cartographies of the transpersonal mind. We can also liken these ideas to those of Erica Bourguignon who believed that dissociation in trance was a "dissociation in the service of the self" and similar to what psychologists call "regression in the service of ego" (Peters 1996:209).

However, the sense of re-connection was so frequent among my interviewees that I decided to call them 'associative' rather than 'dissociative' comprehension because the word 'dissociative' leans toward psychopathology. Also, Jurgen Kremmer has suggested that the Euro-centred ego is "constructed dissociatively (from nature, community and ancestors)" (1998:252). Therefore such comprehensions, which appear to 'rejoin' these disassociated potentials, can be seen as health-making transpersonal medicine.

Cultural anthropologists argue that birthing, when studied in more traditional ethnic settings, is embedded within wider cosmological belief systems and therefore cannot be studied as an isolated event without considering this embeddedness and the cosmic landscape (MacCormack 1982:100). I have heard from Maori over my lifetime that the word *whenua* means both 'womb' and 'land' and that a child is born from the mother's *whenua* (womb) becomes associated with the *whenua* (land) and when he or she dies is seen as returning to *whenua* (land/womb). As a Tongan friend,

Opeti, told me “the child goes back to the whenua, the womb, which is also the grave”. This participation not only overlaps the child’s identity with the landscape and the people’s history but also blends a spiritual landscape and ancestral lineage into an expression of eternity. These overlapped dimensions of birth, kinship, landscape, death, and the spirit-world animate rituals and mind-worlds in which the womb and death are blended in “beautiful completeness” (Aijmer 1992:7).

Several of my informants made reference to an illuminating sense of being connected to ancestors, the world, the universe, all persons born, all women birthing, to partners, to divinity, to death, and to a hard-to-define perception connecting them to cosmic procreativity.¹ My research suggests a re-association to these wider categories of being. Since these states occur outside of traditional contexts specifically concerned with traditional forms of spiritual practice, then this may well suggest the possibility for novel transpersonal disclosures to emerge. By virtue of context, new transpersonal territory may have been opened in alterity and disclosed through a participative transaction between human beings and a (felt) autonomous imaginal world (see Price Williams 1987:248).

An aspect of the human condition rendered available for symbolic elaboration would be something akin to what Aijmer has called, “symbolic construction of generation” (1992:1) and we will encounter this thematic in the narratives below. It is the themes of *generation* and *connection* that seem to become figural during the altered states of consciousness precipitated by the ‘rite’ of birth. There appears to be a visionary logic at work here since certain fundamental biological processes lend themselves to symbolic elaboration, in particular ‘generation’ (with its themes of time,

¹ Death was a frequently mentioned experience among my informants and requires a far more comprehensive treatment than I can offer here. I will devote the next two chapters to the ritual/death aspect of fathers at birth.

re-generation, mortality and death) and 'connection' (with themes of relationship and belonging) to the greater cosmos through reproduction.

According to Aijmer, "A prerequisite for any kinship system is a notion of time" which serves to construct notions of "continuous community" (1992:4). Ideas of circular time and human recycling "nourish ideas of reincarnation" and lead to the adoption of world-views grounded in these ideas. Aijmer believes that kinship is a way of talking about time and that the notion of kin needs the idea of history. Thus kinship can be seen as a "system of representations" involving time, history, and relations which can link "one particular person to other persons, those long dead, those not yet born" (1992:4). Another way of saying this is that a theme of regeneration is operating in the moment of birth. Fathers are participating in a moment of regeneration with its themes of death and rebirth – with the new generation comes the sense the older generation's demise. Indeed, death is a passageway into another kind of regeneration in many cultures. Thus most pre-industrial cultures and their people are embedded in a symbolic cultural memory combining birth, death, and sex — generation, degeneration and regeneration.

What I find interesting in the following narratives is their linkage to something beyond familial kinship or even tribal kinship systems. We can perceive something like *universal* kinship, a kind of *communitas* with the whole of existence in their narratives, which I believe is further evidence that the symbol system reinforcing a perennialised cosmos was being enacted - serving the need, on one level, for community with the universe.² Neuro-theologist, Eugene d'Aquili, has spoken to this form of *communitas*:

² Huxley's perennial philosophy was published at the end of World War II at the time that atomic bombs were used in Asia. The notion that all religions share a common 'ground of being' and the desire for unity at this level may well suggest a religious style reflecting the practical need for peace on a global scale.

Indeed, in some religious ritual the defined meaning of the *communitas* achieved is of an even greater scope, being a sort of *communitas universalis* or a unity of all things, whether animate or inanimate. This sense of unity, which is at the heart of all mystical traditions within the world's great religious traditions, is the most antithetical to any sort of aggression (d' Aquili 1985:28).

One of my interviewees, Gordon, a schoolteacher, recalls from his birthing experience in 1968 and touches on the theme of cosmic procreativity. A subtle theme in his account is his reconnection to ancestors (and therefore the long dead) and participation in creation, as an instrument of creation, as if recruited by the sexually active cosmos:

I haven't actually thought about this much but becoming a father is a universalising experience. We come from thousands of generations before us and suddenly I experienced this primal condition of fertilising an egg, of becoming a father of a new child, a child that's never been in the world before ... suddenly you feel connected to the whole universe. You suddenly understand ... and it changed me in a blinding ... in an illuminating second forever because of this extraordinary feeling of connectivity. Now that I didn't anticipate, I never said to myself "you're going to experience connectivity with the whole world."

Another one of my informants, Dustin, a carpenter of about 50 years of age, describes his child's birth. His son was born in 1998 and I interviewed him in 2002. Again we see similar themes of 'connection' that, when taken at face value, appear to transcend his identification with his body-ego and indeed, imply the transcendence of temporality. In Dustin's words:

And then there is the mystery I could never say what it is.

Interviewer: "have a go"

There's that tiny ... it's like that little first breath in the turning of the blue to the pink [baby's skin colour] there is something as big as the Grand

Canyon. In that fraction it becomes its own autonomous being. It was huge for me. Autonomous but still connected through the cord ... a huge contradiction. The strength of the child to fight through and to survive that crushing experience ... and for the mother to survive ... and yet the fragility ... you are right on the edge of life and death, you are on the brink, on the edge. I was also experiencing that edge of life and death. If they had died a part of me would die. A part of me was connected to every birth of every human being at that time, just in that moment. It was something I felt, there was universality there, linking me to every human being born at that time but also every one in the past and the future. Like a commonality, a synchrony, that I knew every other human being on the planet has experienced this, exactly this. It brought me in from the cold.

The fact that he somehow experiences himself as participating with the foetal life of all humanity and human history (past and future) is an epistemological challenge for a strictly Cartesian universe and a classic theme in Grof's research into holotropic states of consciousness, their connection to uterine life, and what he calls the perinatal level of the psyche. He writes:

The feelings of cosmic unity ... are identical with "peak experiences"... this phenomena functions as an important gateway to a variety of transpersonal experiences ... the transcendence of time and space can assume a rather concretized form and be illustrated by a number of specific images. An individual may experience a sequence of visions that allows for interpretation in terms of regression in historical time. This involves a variety of embryonal sensations, ancestral memories, elements of the collective unconscious and evolutionary experiences (1975:107).

I would now like to add two further associative comprehensions from women that show extraordinarily similar themes to my male informants. I find it intriguing that both men and women appear to be capable of similar visionary experiences. I am intrigued because whereas women's birth-giving is a major physiological event,

men's participation in birth obviously is not. I interpret this as further evidence that birthing has the power to catalyse the kind of cognitive restructuring found in ritual - for both women and men. I have suggested that there is a visionary logic associated with the universal process of birthing, however, as we shall see, their respective narratives also show how gender seems to play a critical role in organising that logic. One account is from a woman informant here in New Zealand, the other is from Jungian analyst, Jean Shinoda Bolen, who, in the film documentary *The Goddess Remembered* (1989) said this:

And somehow my experience of a woman giving birth to a child put me in touch with the women's movement. Up until that time I was a real medical student, intern, resident, kind of a person, who felt quite different from other women because my path was different from most women's. But once I was in labour and delivery and was experiencing at the deepest ritual level and at the deepest life level, what it is to be a woman and how it hurt ... and how it was also a miracle and how none of my training prepared me for this and what I was doing at that moment was what every woman who had ever given birth to a child has been doing through all time. I felt linked horizontally and through time with every woman that ever was.

Bolen's account shows marked parallels to Dustin's story (above). Yet we see that whereas he identifies with the foetus and then all human foetal life in its primal struggle toward to light, she becomes continuous with all birth-giving women beyond the boundaries of time and space in their struggle to bring life into the world - both holotropic experiences, both catalysed by the ritual/event of birth, yet both displaying essential differences in who they identify with. I suggest that Bolen's and Dustin's accounts show that their respective birth experiences have connected them to the perinatal level of the psyche. As Grof writes:

The perinatal phenomena represent a very important experiential intersection between individual psychology and transpersonal psychology or, for that matter, a bridge between psychology (and psychopathology) and *religion*. If we think about them as related to the individual's birth, they would belong to the framework of individual psychology. Some other aspects, however, give them a very definite transpersonal flavour. The intensity of these experiences transcend anything that is usually considered to be the experiential limit of the individual. They are frequently accompanied by identification with other persons, groups of persons, or struggling and suffering mankind" [my emphasis] (Grof 1977:153).

It is important, I think, to mark this juncture. We are now, according to these accounts, in the realm of religion, or rather, religious experience. Next, this account from Frieda, an informant who chose to have her babies outside of the hospital system all together and who was accompanied only by her husband and an older woman:

She put out her hands and feeling her older hands was like feeling a connection with a whole line of women, you know generations of women. I am sure if we were in our natural circumstances we would have older women with us. I remember her coming around and that was wonderful that she came and held my hand. It was almost like her hands ... I was giving birth to my first daughter but I did not know that at the time. She was not breathing ... not energetically so I breathed into her energetically ... you are going to live! It's like I'm getting a vision. It's not a physical vision but a sense of this line of women back through eons almost. It's like connecting in with a line of all women. It had to do with the family of women through time like a line. Like her hands connected me in.

Interestingly enough her visionary state parallels some of the features in Bolen's account and some of the first of my male informant's narratives in this section. Again, whereas he experiences an "illuminating" peak experience of procreativity generations deep, she experiences "generations of women ... back through eons ... a line of all

women ... the family of women through time". Her visionary state emerges precisely at the moment she encounters the potential death of her child, as she attempts to transfer her life substance into the struggling child through her breath: "She was not breathing ... not energetically, so I breathed into her energetically...you are going to live! It's like I'm getting a vision ... a sense of a line of all women etc".³ I would also draw the reader's attention back to Dustin's account and that fact that his visionary logic also fires at the time when he encounters death via an awareness of the potential death of his partner or child.

In previous chapters I explored the relationship between some traditional forms of midwifery in which women and men in various cultures called upon, imitate, or are possessed by, ancestor spirits, deceased children and midwives, or the spirits of wise women to help empower their ritual efforts and therefore increase the likelihood of a successful parturition. The functions of such visions are manifold and important (and will be pursued in the following chapters). Not only is the sense of alienation reduced in these transpersonal disclosures by providing connections to the widening cosmic gyre, entities (often relations) occupying spatial coordinates outside of mortal time become figural suggesting connections to Aijmer's notion of 'continuous community'. Perhaps the ultimate reality that we cannot shield our children from is time (mortality) thus stepping out of time itself is also a form of protection. Also, and I think this important, the authoritative knowledge vested in 'supernaturals' and persons associated with the posthumous condition can also be harnessed in the service of child-bearing. In some cultures such visionary states are seen as evidence of "divine election" the "wandering of the future practitioner's [midwife's] spirit into the realm of the supernatural" (Paul and Paul 1975: 712).

³ See chapter 7 for a male version of the theme of life-transfer.

Indeed such transpersonal visions assume a form of divine authoritative knowledge which provides a vital salve to the fears of the birth-giving mother and midwife (while at the same time providing a boundary-less and oceanic state of relaxation (e.g. d'Aquili 1985). Lois Paul, writing on Guatemalan midwives says: "Belief in supernatural assistance at childbirth gives midwives and their patients an extra measure of assurance in the face of danger and uncertainty. It also provides evidence that a deeper layer of meaning lies beyond the seemingly capricious tragedies and inequities of the existential world" (1975:466). The word "belief" however can belie the experiential power, the sense of numinosity, and the hyper-reality of such visions. Paul and Paul (1975) show examples of what Mircea Eliade (1964) called the "ecstatic journey" among neophyte Guatemalan midwives - an example follows: "Once she was walking along a path to the neighbouring village ... she suddenly found herself in a huge carpeted chamber inside the hill. On a dais sat a number of deceased midwives completely white from head to toe. 'Their hair, clothing, everything was white, white, white'" (1975:712). The midwives then instruct her on the ethics and morality required for her practice. Connection, or participation in cultural concepts of divinity, what Paul (1975:465) calls "transcendent authority figures", not only strengthen 'belief' in the midwives' divine election but in the Western context examined here, it is also to place authority beyond the grasp of Western medicalised charisma.

Natal Charismas

The third category (after boundary transgression and associative comprehension) I perceive has to do with the expropriation of charisma and combines the previous two categories. We observed in the previous chapter that it has been observed that there exists a "high mystical esteem of medicine" (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:168) that

serves to empower authoritative medical knowledge. Working from Weber's classic definition of charisma (1947) - as a gift of God vouchsafed to an extraordinary individual, Myerhoff and Larson have explored what Weber called the "routinization of charisma" and the construction of the "doctor as a cultural hero" (1965:188).

Cultural heroes, they say, become a socialising model showing people how to behave at life-crises such as birth and death (1965).

As we observed in chapter 1 historically the charisma, status and magic (sacral power) long associated with childbirth and the art of midwifery was stripped from European women, healers and midwives in the Middle-Ages. From the Middle-Ages onward, birthing was legally and politically appropriated to hospitals in most of Europe and America. By the early 1960s in New Zealand birthing was a medically controlled affair with all authoritative and charismatic knowledge resting in the medical profession, and the small percentage of fathers inclined to participate totally excluded (see Carbines 2003: 6, Papps & Olssen 1997:19, Arms 1975, Romalis 1981).

Victor Turner in 1969 associated global *communitas* with various religious movements, among them Franciscans, Zen Buddhists, folk Christians, and what he referred to as the "beat generation" and the "hippies" (1969:112-113). Furthermore, Turner writes that for the hippie movement "the ecstasy of spontaneous communitas is seen as *the* end of human endeavour" (1969:139). Following Turner then; what greater enticement for participating in birth than an experience that signifies "the end of the human endeavour"? And what greater leverage for contesting the Western medicalised hospital regimen? The father's presence, by dint of his boundary-transgressing act, and his peak experiences, subtle or potent, can therefore be constructed as an expropriation and contestation of medicalised charisma.

Keith, one of my informants who now works in mental health, suggested that he was embodying in 1972 at a hospital birth, a “pagan Green-man ... a reverent sense of life and connection”. I have heard of a young Anglican minister whose partner recently gave birth. He was present and (so he told his congregation) had a wondrous vision in which the male obstetrician turned into an angel! Unfortunately I haven’t been able to interview him (because as a locum he has moved on) and I heard the story from a parishioner, but nevertheless his vision raises some interesting possibilities. The minister, from the perspective offered here, could be seen as subverting the medicalised birthing site by incorporating it into his spiritual geography. By insinuating the professional personnel into a transgressive cosmology he is expropriating the already routinised charisma appropriated from birthing women and midwives. However, obstetrical practice was born out of a hybrid of Christianity and privileged male education in the first place (Ehrenreich and English 1973, Merchant 1983, Arms 1975, 1994) so he could also be seen as setting his seal of approval upon the obstetrician.

A woman informant, Kristin, about 50 years old, told me this story: she had been in labour for many hours. “I was out of it” she said, when a woman with “deep blue eyes” appeared alongside her and talked her through her birthing process. My informant said her presence was reassuring and calm and that “she just knew”. A few days after birthing she inquired among the staff and her husband about this woman so she could thank her. No one else had seen her and she was not to be located among the staff. At one level this wise woman’s presence at birth announces a transcendence of the medical model including (in this case) the embodied staff. I am not suggesting that this is nothing but a rumour of angels (or risen ancestral midwives for that matter); rather, I am concerned with the historicities of epistemological imperialism

and complex performances of contesting knowledge claims in world-making at the site of birth.

Below I offer a brief cross-cultural sample of the triad of ritual, birthing and charismatic events. There is much anthropological evidence to support a thesis that transpersonal disclosures (as Grof has long indicated) directly or secretly trace their origin to birthing and the womb. We can mention: Kitzinger's study on female Jamaican birth specialists and how their charismatic rites parallel the rhythms and sounds of birthing women (1982:102); Beisele's conclusion that male trance-doing was complementary to female birth-giving among the Ju/'hoan of the Kalahari Desert (1997:475); Butler's comparison with Yurok women's menstrual/birthing huts and male sweat lodge practice as complementary spiritual practices (1988:190); Rita Gross's assertion that male Australian Aboriginal rites are complementary to women's birth-giving (1980); Frazer's belief that the *couvade* was a form of homeopathic magic (1910); Granqvist's report that the "heaven's gate is open" when women labour in Palestine (1947); Laderman's 1983 account of Malaysian birth-giving and how it can bring women into experiential contact with deities in the Hindu heaven, Potter's (1974) study of Cantonese female shamans who fly into a heavenly uterine world, Taussig's view that alterity of the Cuna Indians of Panama is a "cosmology of wombing" (1993:125); Bilu's study of Judaic exorcism relating the ritual to conception and birthing (1999); Levi-Strauss's famous account of a male shaman's trance-world in direct relationship with obstructed birth-giving (1963); Eliade's trope of birth and rebirth symbolism - including a Taoist practice of "embryonic breathing" (1958:57); Laughlin's reliving of a birth tunnel during Buddhist *anapanasati* meditation (1990:156); Van Gennep's theory that rites of passage follow women's birthing pattern (1909); Victor Turner's claim that the altered-state of *communitas* was

connected to the uterine and the womb (1969:114); Jackson's view that the hypnotic rocking dances of African Kuranko initiation is a mimetic rooted in the uterine (1989:92); Douglas' claim that initiates are categorically related to the womb (1966:34); Edith Turner's account of the Ihamba healing ritual among the Ndembu of Africa, suggesting a powerful enactment of birthing (1992:90).

We can also mention several transpersonal theorists who make this connection: Grof (1975, 1977, 1985), Maslow (1964), Bache (2000), Heron (1998), Christina Grof's ideas in relation to "spiritual emergency" (1990) and finally Bolen, already mentioned, states that birth-giving took her to the deepest level of ritual and connected her to all women who had ever given birth (1989). My participants, also previously quoted, said much the same thing. The anthropological evidence clearly suggests charisma and *communitas* have perinatal roots, and perhaps by virtue of a mimetic with biological gestation (an experience that men share in as foetal persons) the mystical ultimates found among religious traditions also spring (even if in dissociated flight) from these same wombs.

Peaking Man

Abraham Maslow, one of the founding fathers of humanistic and later transpersonal psychology, introduced the construct of "peak experience" into Western culture (1962, 1964, and 1971). I want to flesh this out. Maslow lists 24 different kinds of transcendence that he melded into what he calls peak experience.⁴ These are aggregated to his universalising core religious experience where, for example, the polarities of say, deeper and higher, are resolved in an experience of what he calls "unitive consciousness" (1964:59-68). 'Peak' does not necessarily mean high; it can

⁴ Interestingly Grof relates Maslow's peak experience to cosmic unity which for Grof is rooted in but not reducible to the undisturbed uterine existence (see pp. 225).

paradoxically suggest humility in the apprehension of something greater than oneself (Katz 1976:283). Either way the peak experience is related to states of intense arousal of the physical body and nervous system (e.g. Laughlin 1994).

Maslow had argued throughout the '50s, '60s and early '70s that traditional religious contextualizations of what he called the core religious experience served not only to legitimate, but to also distort and suppress the potential of the peak experience. He was concerned with the study of this core outside of authoritarian traditional religious contexts. Transpersonal psychology then, as a discipline, was founded upon experiences that were felt to be numinous but could occur outside of traditional religious mediation or contextualisations (Wulff 2000:423). Peak experience is now commonly used in the English language and researchers note that peak ecstatic emotional events can emerge via a constellation between women, men and birthing (see Maslow 1971, Tanzer 1976, Beail 1982, Mehl 1978). Brian Jackson describes the phenomena in his 1983 study of 100 fathers at birth:

Almost all the fathers who attended the birth reached an ecstatic peak of emotion: a personal Everest. Often this was at the birth itself, sometimes it came an hour or two later as the shock passed through their system. Then for some while afterwards, their behavior was manic, disordered, high. "I felt like an astronaut who had landed on the moon." Even the more withdrawn ones became voluble, often drawing total strangers into eager conversation (Jackson 1983:69)

Maslow's work is deeply embedded in Western educational psychology. It is therefore notable when considering the connections between the transpersonal movement, the counter-medicalised birth movement and natal charismas, that in the closing pages of *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (1964) he makes a strong plea for the reappraisal of women's biological processes as basically sacred.

Menstruation, he claimed was, “a profound biological rhythm of reproduction and life and death”, a “holy ceremony” (1964:112) and he said this:

The truth is that at some moments she will flip into her goddess-like aspect, most especially when she’s fulfilling those biological functions that men see as basically female: nursing, feeding, giving birth (1964:110).⁵

Although this can be seen as an essentialising statement, it is nevertheless important for my study, because Maslow (some 10 years before Goddess spirituality springs into action) has indicated that birthing could be seen as a holy ritual where male consciousness could alter and where Goddesses could be revealed – an epistemological shift of some magnitude and a profound shift in cultural imaginary that places value on the perception of a female deity. For a culture that could be defined by its interests in altered states, liberation, social action, self-actualisation, protest, broader definitions of sexuality and unity (see Chinnen 1996) - such a statement cannot be underestimated, nor, given the popularity of the humanist movement, can its reality-shaping power be dismissed. One of my informants, Rod, is an artist of about 30 years old and his child was born in 1997. He said this:

I was awe-inspired by what the body could do ... what her body could go through. I will completely maintain the single idea ... after seeing that ... that each and every woman at the moment of birth is capable of complete, one hundred per cent, spiritual awareness.

The varied, but persistent, peak experiences reported in my interviews in New Zealand seem to be in general agreement with Maslow’s descriptions. But more importantly, for the sake of my argument, an experience of ‘peak’ was originally aggregated to his hybridised construct of ‘core unity’ or ‘cosmic consciousness’. Thus

⁵ This statement suggests that it is the beholder of the birthing woman who flips or slips into a new province of meaning and a radical epistemological knowledge claim and thus gains access to transpersonal knowing.

in a theurgic sense, these counter-medical birth actors may be practicing and enacting the cosmology of the times—cosmic unity—the perennial notion that all is one. Simply put (and I will explore this further), Maslow’s core religious experience may have been enacted – and, following the unreason of theurgy (magic), reproduced in alterity. Furthermore (and worryingly for some) this construct, connected to a cosmology with perennialism as part of its basic design, is also reproduced in alterity. This is an interesting quandary because for some, such a core experience of religious unity does not really exist and there is no perennial tradition (Katz 1979) nor should there be given its philosophical and ethical flaws (Ferrer 2002), whereas for others, it’s the only thing that does exist (Wilber 1995).

An Ocean with Many Shores

My meta-purpose here is the revalorisation of the father’s performance at birth and the linking of that *ethical* performance to the transpersonal re-cosmisation of the secular materialistic mind-world in the 1960s. Transpersonal theorist Jorge Ferrer has suggested that “peak-experiences may be seen, at their best, as *secularized spiritual phenomena*, and at their worst, as temporary gratifications for an always hungry-for-heights Cartesian ego” (2002:38). So much as I appreciate Ferrer’s work I will problematise his point of view, while at the same time understanding the sentiments of his argument. Ferrer concludes in his remarkable *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* (2002) that a new image for transpersonal theory was needed and suggests: “An Ocean with Many Shores” (2002:133). According to him, the common realm shared by religious traditions is not some penultimate perennial spiritual state but rather “the overcoming of self-centeredness” leading to “a liberation from

corresponding limiting perspectives”.⁶ This he calls the *Ocean of Emancipation* – entry into this ocean may well be accompanied by one of a multiplicity of transpersonal disclosures and/or transconceptual cognition.

These disclosures can be of traditional (read culture-specific) spiritual shores that have had many visitors (Buddhist *sunyata* or emptiness, Hindu *samadhi* or absorption, Christian *apatheia*, or childlike trust in God, Persian *alam al mithal*, an imaginal world where one encounters *Kidhr*, or the Ju’hoansi [Kalahari Bushmen] *Kai* - an ancestor bearing trance - or they can disclose an entirely new and novel shore (outside of religious tradition i.e. Maslow?) - and this is crucial. Keeping with the oceanic metaphor - I could paddle my canoe into an uncharted cove on his Ocean of Many. Importantly, Ferrer (perhaps following Heron 1996, 1998) believes that such new disclosures can be enacted through a participatory transaction – and the more lovingly and imaginatively I paddle, the more is disclosed.⁷ Thus, writes Ferrer: “The *Ocean of Emancipation* has many spiritual shores, some of which are enacted by the world spiritual traditions, others of which ... may not have emerged yet (2002:149).

The Fathers’ Shore

I believe that the recent arrival of fathers at birthing sites in America and New Zealand (and potentially elsewhere in some Western societies) represents a novel and enacted shore in the Ocean of possibilities, and is traceable to spiritually subversive currents within the ‘60s counter-culture (see Waltzer and Cohen 1971; Mehl 1978; Gaskin 1988; Kitzinger and Davis 1978; Anderson & Bauwens 1982:289; Odent

⁶ Jorge Ferrer (2002:144)

⁷ Participatory epistemology holds that: “The human spirit does not merely prescribe nature’s phenomenal order; rather, the spirit of nature brings forth its *own* order through the human mind when that mind is employing its full complement of faculties – intellectual, volitional, emotional, sensory, imaginative. In such knowledge the human mind lives into the creative activity of nature. Then the world speaks its meaning through human consciousness. Then human language itself can be recognized as rooted in a deeper reality, as reflecting the universe’s unfolding meaning (Tarnas 1991:435).

1982:40; Mander 2004: 4; Tanzer 1976; Maslow 1964; 1971; Hazell 1974:7 and Reid 1989:226-227). However, this shore falls into the gap in Ferrer's sentence above (and indeed there is an intriguing gap in his model which I will attempt to address).

The problem is that the phenomenon of fathers at birth is not regarded as a traditional spiritual shore; nor is it a shore waiting to emerge via enactment. This research suggests it *has* emerged as the lived end of a cosmology. Moreover, I believe its historical emergence implicates a significant relationship to a cultural imaginary of Oceanic cosmic consciousness, evoked and enacted by what anthropologist Erica Bourguignon called the "voraciously syncretistic ... psychedelic movement" (Bourguignon 1973:349) - which presaged the transpersonal movement.

While I am in agreement with much of his insightful account, I do find Ferrer's gap perplexing. Throughout his treatment of transpersonal psychology and its relationship to perennial philosophy, he refuses to accord Maslow's core religious experience a legitimate shore on his ocean of many, from my reading anyway. This is an interesting omission – indeed he makes several dismissive statements regarding the status of the peak and the core. He writes:

To *lump* together these different awarenesses into one spiritual liberation or referent reachable by all traditions may be profoundly distorting (2002:148).

Likewise once spiritual openings are divorced from wider ethical and social contexts, their sacred and transformative quality substantially diminish. As a result, spiritual realizations become *merely peak-experiences* (2002:38).

This spiritual consensus could only be found [by transpersonalists] in an *artificially constructed* core-religious experience (a la Maslow) (2002:110).

First: Maslow's core has now a substantial history of enactment and literature (which I will show) and thus it is possible to argue that his perennialised core (I believe hybridised is a better term but we will come to that) represents part of a nascent

tradition of enactments culturally relative to Northern California's social climate and context. Furthermore as we have shown, for this culture, peak experiences (at least those catalysed at birth) were all about the performance of a counter-ethical standpoint. While I agree that to pronounce that all traditions reach this core may well be ethnocentric, there is nevertheless nothing new in traditions old or new making such universal claims when living from a culturally constructed cosmological design. Also as d'Aquili points out, religious experience can include something like *communitas universalis*: a unity with *all* things "which is at the heart of all mystical traditions within the world's great religious traditions" (1985:26). We also saw in the section on associative comprehension that several of my informants experienced something like this in their visionary states. Thus, from within this experience of *communitas universalis*, unity is unity - including a unity of disparate spiritual ultimates.

Second: Ferrer's own participatory and theurgic claims avow that novel enactments of new spiritual shores are possible and that such enactments have genuine repercussions in the worlds of alterity (including, I would argue, Maslow's peak and core since it is these experiences that reinforce their sense of cosmic consciousness). Among theurgic mystics he says, "Human religious practices have a profound impact not only on the outer manifestation of the divine, but also in its very inner dynamics and structure" (2002:153). Given that, as he says, transpersonal psychology has embraced and maintained a perennialist vision of spirituality for decades (2002:10), wouldn't that suggest similar repercussions in alterity? Could this transpersonal universe, including its postulate of being reachable in all traditions, be disclosed? That still does not mean it's the only cosmology in town, let alone the worlds of alterity or again, that it *would* be disclosed in another tradition. It only suggests a universalising

postulate concomitant with the internal geometry built into its cosmological design - a cosmological gestalt predicated on environmental demands.

Third: Surely, as culturally relative artefacts, the peak and the core are only as *artificial* a construct as any other cultural object or religious ultimate, for example, the culture-specific constructs of *devekut*, *unio mystica*, *nirvana*. Buddha's take on the universe was an impossible, novel and anomalous feat at one time as well, and religious traditions have, I think, to start somewhere. Finally, Ferrer appeals to an external authority (the Dalai Lama) and "spiritual traditions" with their so-called (and I think highly debatable) wider ethical contexts, which he uses to chastise the (as he puts it) "lumped together" and "profoundly distorting" ultimate of another culture's venerated religious symbol. However, he then seems to recant saying: "I believe that Heron (1998) rightfully criticizes certain authoritarian tendencies of many spiritual traditions. Once we accept that new shores can be enacted, traditional spiritual ... paths ... can no longer be regarded as prescriptive or paradigmatic for all individual spiritual development" (2002:151-152).⁸ This seems like sleight of hand to me: on the one hand we may enact traditional shores which have been shown to be anything but ethical, but are rather, in many instances, authoritarian, dichotomizing, sexist, world/women/womb denying, sexually abusive and charisma-appropriating (Heron 1998), or we may enact new shores, but if we do (due to lack of said authority and tradition) our spiritual realisations become "*merely peak experiences*". Ferrer's claim that peak-experiences lose their validity once dissociated from 'ethical' spiritual traditions does not, for example, hold much water for feminism's basic view on andocentric religion. Furthermore the peak-experiences examined among my participants around birth-giving *were* the en-action of a protesting ethical stance.

⁸ Heron (1992, 1998) forcefully critiques what he calls an authoritarian blight in Eastern religions and examines the constructed nature of spiritual authoritative knowledge and its abuses in particular those related to Buddhism.

Some of Ferrer's own theurgic (magical) arguments paradoxically lend themselves to an enacted shore that he might have overlooked.⁹ As anomalous as it might seem, the so-called perennial 'tradition' itself must also be seen as a well-enacted shore from Ferrer's position. And this shore, or Ocean, depending on one's point of view, is one that, for many, has much psychological appeal, and socio-political significance.

Hybridising Cosmologies

However, I suggest that the anomalies in Ferrer's model and the arguments between two transpersonal camps - participatory revisionists (religious pluralists) and supporters of a 'great perennial tradition' and its perennialised cosmos may well point to a third possibility, a "Third Space of Enunciation" to use Homi Bhabha's phrase (1994:209).

I would argue that there is long unrecognised dimension in the meta-dynamics of transpersonal theory-making. And that is the already mentioned process of *cosmological hybridisation* associated with post-rationalist theories in anthropology concerned with the resurgence of magic, witchcraft and sorcery arising in the borderlands between rationalism and post-rationalisms (Kapferer et al 2003). Whereas Ferrer believes that transpersonalists were "bewitched by objectivist spells" (2002:10) I think it remains yet to be seen who was really bewitching who. I will stress here that *there may really be a form of sorcery at work* and that the presence of sorcery is deserving of sensitive, and as Klass points out, "continued anthropological" inquiry (1995:97) in the aftermath of the European Enlightenment and the Christian and colonial (including anthropological) demonisation of such powers and practices.

⁹ Roget's II: The New Thesaurus, Third Edition (1995) Lists 'theurgic' as "Having, brought about by, or relating to supernatural powers or magic: fey, magic, magical, talismanic, thaumaturgic, thaumaturgical, theurgical, witching, wizardly".

Of importance then, is a consideration of the wider transpersonal movement's perennialised cosmos and its historical fealty to that cosmos, as an ongoing history of *unrecognised* unconscious, organic and intentional hybridisation at the cosmological level and its related lived practices and enactments (after Brenbekken 2003).

A recent example of cosmological hybridisation is found in Marrit Brendbekken's account of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy and Haitian Vodou (2003). Hybridisation is seen here as a process in which "two cosmological systems are brought into contact" and broken and joined simultaneously in a bizarre binary operation (Brendbekken 2003:38). Both Vodou and Anthroposophy are themselves already hybrids, subversive responses to colonialism and modernity, yet products of the same essentialising forces. Fealty to cosmos and magical enactment of such impossible spirit worlds at the level of practice, shocks, explodes, challenges, and co-opts what Bahktin (1981) called the mono-glossia of the authoritarian voice (Brendbekken 2003:38). This may be because such systems generally reticulate back to tropes of culture-bound territories and religious purity - thus blending these often patriarchal systems can appear to be a blasphemous, even erotic, mingling (as in the American South's post-Civil War prohibition of miscegenation: white and black sexual blending). This lengthy passage from Bruce Kapferer offers many insights into cosmological hybridity:

The cosmologies that are implicated in much that is recognized as magical practice, sorcery and witchcraft are part of their contemporary force. They are often practices of cosmological fusion, in which all that is brought together has intensified or enlarged their innate potency in the potencies of that to which they are joined. In such fusion, cosmologies are frequently reconfigured and achieve their force in such restructuring. By cosmology I refer to a process whereby events, objects and practices are brought into a cosmological unity, are conceived and patterned as existing together, and are in mutual relation. In this sense,

magical practices and the conceptions and practices of sorcery and witchcraft constitute metacosmologies, that is, methods of patterning or bringing together acts, events or practices that may normally be expected to exist in different or separate cosmological frames. Their metacosmology is one that bridges or crosses different registers of meaning and practice (their hybridizing energy) and frequently is a dynamic of negation. Much sorcery, for example, gathers its force by systematically negating dominant cosmological forms (the terror of its destructive agency) or else by breaking apart elements of other cosmological schemes in order to effect unions and crossovers that might otherwise be impossible (Kapferer 2003:20-21).

With hybridity in mind, I suggest that Maslow and other early transpersonal activists, when casting their divergent hybrid cosmologies, are in fact following (perhaps unawares) the meta-patterning suggested above. The question becomes, from this post-rational and post-colonial perspective, less about the philosophical divisions between participatory revisionists (e.g. Ferrer 2002) and the staunch adherents of perennialism (e.g. Wilber 1995), but more: ‘are we dealing with a strange kind of magic and a form of unconscious wizardry’? I suggest that this is a question worthy of serious consideration. Not the least because, this thesis has been all about magical, charismatic, demonic and wizardish interventions at birth; ancient, modern and post-modern. I will argue that this hybrid magic empowered fathers’ presence at birth. Another question is how does cosmological hybridity work? The concept of mimesis is useful here – it copies “in magical practice, affecting the original to such a degree that the representation shares in or acquires the properties of the represented” (Taussig 1983: 48). This is a physiological process whereby the image of the Other is tried out in the musculature of one’s own body (recall natal charisma and the deep connection to the womb). This “active yielding” includes ideational activity (imagery) and not only perception, in an act of imitation brought about through *contact* (Taussig 1993:46). Similarly, according to Schoun (1975:34) spiritual universalism is

activated only after contact with another civilisation (cited in Winkelman 1993:8).

The following quotes illustrate the hybridising of spiritual ultimates by some of the early contributors to the transpersonal movement:

The Dharma-body of the Buddha is another way of saying Mind, Suchness, the Void or the Godhead [note here the fusion of Godhead with Void] (Aldous Huxley 1945:40).

As I conceive it, Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy. That final psychic act that takes place when religious consciousness is heightened to extremity. Whether it comes to pass in Buddhists, Christians or philosophers, it is in the last analysis incidental to Zen (D.T.Suzuki early 1950s cited in Fields 1992:205).

This private religious experience is shared by all the great world religious traditions including the atheistic ones like Buddhism, Taoism, Humanism, or Confucianism (Abraham Maslow 1964: 28).

I have drawn on the insights of Vedanta, stating them, however, in completely modern and Western style – so that this volume makes no attempt to be a textbook on or introduction to Vedanta in an ordinary sense. It is rather a cross-fertilization of Western science with an Eastern intuition (Alan Watts 1966:9).

Transcendental Ancestors

Let us, with hybridisation in mind, examine this process in relation to the notions of cosmic unity found in the consciousness-expanding movement. We can pick up the threads of this project with the American transcendentalists. Anthropologist Fredrick Turner notes that Thoreau stood at that “point in American intellectual history when the prerequisites for the birth of anthropology [and transpersonal psychology] had begun to fall into place. Through immigration, economic expansion, the influence of Europe and forces inherent in its own constitution, the narrow puritanism of New England had given way among the intellectuals to a variety of lofty theisms” (Turner 1987:85).

In fact Swedenborgianism, pantheism, Emerson and Whitman's Romantic nature worship were mixed with Eastern constellations (see Prince 1974 and Paglia 2003). The Hindu *garbha* (luminous oceanic cosmic womb) was impossibly joined with the Buddhist Void imported into America by early Hindu and Buddhist missionaries coupled with 100 years of South East Asian migrant labourers, and later returning soldiers from Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (Damon 1996:144). Later Tibetan diaspora would seed the *tathagatagarbha* (Buddha womb) in California. This movement not only pre-figures the Beat and hippie interests in Hinduism, Buddhism, community living, vegetarianism and nature-worship, but also the joining and breaking of cosmologies (Brendbekken 2003) visible in the following poem by Walt Whitman:

The Song of Myself (cited in Fields 1992: 65):

My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths.
Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern,
Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five thousand years,
Waiting response from oracles, honoring the gods, saluting the sun,
Making a fetish of the first rock or stump, pow-wowing with sticks in the circle of obis,
Helping the lama or brahman as he trims the lamps of the idols,
Dancing through the streets in a phallic procession, rapt and austere,
 in the woods a gymnosophist,
Drinking mead from the skull cap, to Shastas and Vedas admirant,
Minding the Koran...

It was in Edward Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879), "more than any other book that Americans first learned the story and the teachings of the Buddha" (Fields 1992:69). The book was immensely popular, going through 80 editions and selling up to a million copies. In this work the story of the Buddha, as Romantic hero, was retold popularising an attractive version of *nirvana*,

he is one with life
Yet lives not. He is blest, ceasing to be
OM MANIPADME, OM! The Dewdrop slips
Into the shining sea!

Fields reminds us, this imagery does not really fit with traditional Buddhism, rather, he says, it sounds more like a mixture of Hinduism and Christianity (Fields 1992:69). Two important works appear with the next generation: William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)¹⁰ and Richard Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) which suggested a category of consciousness shared by certain religious luminaries. This tradition's flair for spontaneous mystical apprehensions would powerfully reiterate in the consciousness-expanding movements that followed. Turner again:

For the first time since the Renaissance, when the societies of pagan antiquity had come to serve as models in the initiation of the elite, the West had grasped alien cultures as being possibly exemplary or superior to its own. The *profound Orientalising* of our poetry, architecture, religion, and cuisine and our attempt to imitate imagined Amerindian virtues in our personal relations, dress and recreation, is a consequence of this remarkable nineteenth-century movement. Castenada's Don Juan has New England ancestry (1987:86).¹¹

Peaking into the Void

Camille Paglia, commenting on the 1960s says, "One major area remains ambiguous or poorly assimilated, however—the new religious vision, which for a tantalizing moment in the American sixties brought East and West together in a progressive cultural synthesis" (2003:1). She points out that the hippie rubric of the '60s was all about "opening the mind" which would lead to "cosmic consciousness" and an eventual "melting into the Void" (2003:2). We need then to peek into this void – its origins and its imaginal reality. To do this we will also need to look into the

¹⁰ James first used the term "transpersonal" in written English in 1905 (see Chinen 1996:9).

¹¹ The term 'Orientalising' used here is different to that of Edward Said's (1978) terminology.

psychedelic revolution and its battle with secular materialism for the production rights to reality.

The introduction of drugs as a means of attaining altered states, as practiced in the drug cults among the American young, *constitutes a major innovation* on the American scene. It is an innovation derived, interestingly enough, from American Indian sources. Indeed the psychedelic movement has *combined* American Indian drug usage with a Hindu-Buddhist ideology in the context of an apparently secular, rational, technological twentieth-century American society (Bourguignon n.d.). Thus, like American Indians, and in some instances borrowing from them, they use drugs. Like some oriental religions, they may employ techniques of meditation. Leary and some of his associates combined the two by *adapting* texts from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* for meditations to structure the drug experience [my emphasis] (Bourguignon 1973:347).

After Brendbekken: “Two cosmological systems are brought into contact, both of which comprise hybrid constructions that historically have served to subvert authoritative discourses and practices” (2003: 38). Certainly there is subversive history to the religions mentioned by Bourguignon (see Morris 1994 on *Advita Vedanta* as caste-negating; see Gross 1993 on the *tathagatagharba* (Buddha womb) as a gender-neutralising postulate; see La Barre 1972 on the relationship between peyotism and the subversive *Ghost Dance*).

Hybridisation is a process of breaking and joining at the same time, in the same place, difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity (Young 1995: 26-27 in Brendbekken 2003:38). These impossible cosmologies and their practices are evoked also to subvert authoritative voices within each cosmology. Moreover “unconscious organic mixings and cross-fertilizations ... provide a foundation upon which new perspectives on the world arise and from where [the ‘60s counter-culture in this case] build aesthetic hybrids ... to shock, change, challenge, revitalize or disrupt

through deliberate, intended fusions of unlike social languages and images” (Werbner and Modood 1997:5). The counter-culture would effect the transgressive reality-shaping act of fusing not two but multiple cosmologies. Elwood, in his classic study of magic in modern America, confirms that while they drew from archaic symbols, the charismatic leaders in the psychedelic movement described an “innovative constellation with a life of its own” (1973:18). The point is we are no longer dealing with ancient culture-bound traditions but a new breed of cosmic order. Thus, writes Alan Watts:

For the clear direction of their thought is toward the revelation of a unified cosmology, no longer sundered by the ancient irreconcilables of mind and matter, substance and attribute, thing and event, agent and act, stuff and energy. And if this should come to be a universe in which man is neither thought nor felt to be a lonely subject confronted by lonely and threatening objects, we shall have a cosmology not only unified but also joyous (1962:100).

The psychedelic context standing behind the founding of transpersonal psychology reveals a process of continual hybridity and Creolisation. The Beats, an artistic subterranean movement beginning in the late ‘40s, defined itself by a search for beat(ific) visions through plant hallucinogens, and an attempt to restore a relationship with “the great unknown and undiscovered peoples” (Philips 1996:28). Cannabis smoking became a way of life for many, originally drawn from Afro-American jazz and blues musicians (with a history involving hybrids of Catholicism and Vodou practices). We note that peyote-eating was fused with Zen Buddhism by the Beats. This movement has also been called Neo-Transcendentalism (Prince 1974) and Romantic-shamanism (Lee and Shlain 1985).

Another contributor was the anthropologist J.S. Slotkin (1955) and the Native American Church, a religion that fused ritual peyote-eating with a blend of Aztec and

Christian elements (Burkholder 1974:37). One of Slotkin's informants told him that instead of talking about Jesus, peyote eaters could talk with Jesus (1955) – an epistemological shift of some importance and one deeply rooted to the subverting of authority and the accommodation process of the colonised. Slotkin basically said that peyote was a sacrament that could induce mystical awareness for hours rather than moments. His work was glowingly incorporated into Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954). In it Huxley fused mescaline-eating with the cosmological postulate *Dharmakaya* - the Void of Tibetan Buddhism and the perennial philosophy:

In this book, Huxley unequivocally equated the drug-induced experience with the mystical states in the Perennial Philosophy. This doctrine, perhaps because the times were ripe, spread rapidly throughout the American intellectual world. Many were launched on their psychedelic adventures by this little book (Prince 1974:261).

In 1957 *Life* magazine printed a 17-page promotion of the visionary magic mushroom called by the Aztecs *teonanacatl*, “Flesh of the Gods”, hinting that the visions of Romantic poet William Blake would become available to all (see Lee and Shlain 1985). Theologian Allan Watts in his *Joyous Cosmology* (1962) specifically related the suspension of the subject/object dichotomy in LSD use with the immediate awareness promoted in Zen Buddhism as commensurate with “the void” (1962:91) and with Bucke's notion of “cosmic consciousness” (1962:17). Timothy Leary in *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964) equated the peak of the drug experience to the Clear Light or void of Tibetan Buddhism (I was told by a member of New Zealand's commune culture that “every self-respecting hippie had those books on his shelf”).

Gestalt psychologists were also involved in psychedelic therapy, among them Claudio Naranjo (see Wulff: 2000) and Fritz Perls. California had seen a boom in

Zen Buddhism in the '50s and '60s (Fields 1992) and was also home to the Esalen Institute, Gestalt's seat of practice and the counter-culture's global therapeutic centre. It is widely acknowledged that gestalt was strongly influenced by *Mahayana* Buddhism in the form of Zen (Clarkson 1989:12) and the 'ground of being' in Zen is *dharama-sunyata* or the void, thus *integration* of the whole *personality* (not really a Buddhist pursuit) in gestalt practice is ultimately, albeit subtly, tied to the multivalent uterine at the experiential and cosmological levels, emptiness and the void became the 'fertile or pregnant void' in gestalt parlance (see Perls, Hefferline, Goodman 1951:358-359 and Van Dusen 1975:90).¹² These hybrid womb-sprung worlds!

Stanislav Grof, an émigré from Czechoslovakia and one of the co-founders of transpersonal psychology, paralleled LSD cosmology and ontology with *Kashmir Shaivism* and evoked the concept of the *Sacchidananda* which he says is the best "approximation" (1998:117) to describe what he also calls the void, absolute consciousness, cosmic emptiness, supreme principle, void, and also the pregnant void. Grof's description of undisturbed intrauterine life follows:

This matrix [Basic Perinatal Matrix 1: Primal Union with the Mother - Intrauterine Experience before the Onset of Delivery] manifests itself as the experience of cosmic unity. Its basic characteristics are transcendence of the subject-object dichotomy, exceptionally strong positive affect (peace, tranquility, serenity, bliss, a special feeling of sacredness, transcendence of time and space, experience of pure being, and richness of insights of cosmic relevance). This type of tension-free melted ecstasy can be referred to as oceanic ecstasy ... It is basically this

¹² Ultimately personality does not exist in Buddhism. What divides Buddhism from the Godheads embedded in Brahmanical Hinduism and Mahivarian Jainism is the concept of *anatta* "According to the Buddha ... nothing really exists in the universe but desire and the manifestation of desire, since all of these offer nothing but continued suffering, each person should strive to relinquish desire in all its forms and by doing so achieve nirvana, which, for the Buddhist, means the blessedness of nonexistence" (Klass 1995:52). Rita Gross writes, in her treatment of Buddhism post-patriarchy, that "Philosophically, the teachings about ego-lessness deny that there is any permanent, abiding, unchanging essence that is the 'real person,' whether the essence denied is the Hindu *atman* ... or the more familiar Christian personal and eternal soul (1994:159).

experience which is described by Walter Pankhe's mystical categories and which Abraham Maslow refers to as the peak experience (1977:158).

Grof links Maslow's peak to a multivalent womb. We could also remember that Maslow's peaking theory emerged in tandem with psychedelics and he makes several references to LSD and psilocybin as portals to his core religious experience (1964: 27, 80). In Ram Dass's best-selling *Be Here Now*, access to cosmic consciousness (which hybridised the Kingdom of God, the Sat Chit Ananda, and the Void) could be realised through various catalysts among them "turning on [and] bearing a child" (1971:16).

Somewhere in this hybridising milieu, birth became a target of re-appropriation by this holistic counter-culture. Alternative birthing can be seen as one edge of this healing movement (see appendix 1). Here the transcendent would be joined with the immanent – the human body (that hybrid of hybrids) the site of multiple cosmological registers of meaning – the body/cosmos re-mapped. In particular the image of oceanic cosmic consciousness is fused with the fleshy newborn. At this point a multivalent holism is insinuated into technocracy's materialist fetish and its site of ritual operation is re-ritualised and saturated with mystical meaning – this transgression was empowered by a direct claim to authoritative transpersonal knowledge. In an excerpt from a handbook for a birthing ceremony in 1968 *Childbirth is Ecstasy*, two male authors Walzer and Cohen, offering advice to father as birth assistant, state:

Remember the ocean of bliss, wisdom and existence [*Sacchidananda*] which we are and have always been and will always be and prepare for childbirth in that light with your loved ones (1971:71).¹³

¹³ This statement is important. It shows that men are locating themselves in the peak experience equated with the Hindu concept of enlightenment. We could also recall chapter 4 where we explored the relationship between birthing and religion in the *Angulimala paritta*.

Other useful examples are Leboyer's de-medicalised method of birthing into dark rooms, with soft music and massage for the baby, and Igor Charcovsky's method of birthing into water to replicate the nurturing emotional conditions and amniotic fluids of the womb. The famous French obstetrician Michelle Odent, perhaps the successor of Leboyer, commented that the precursors of Leboyer's radical approach included, "takers of LSD, those who practice bio-energy and followers of traditional Eastern methods" (1982:40).¹⁴ And did all this impact locally? A male obstetrician in New Zealand told me this:

In the early seventies some flower-children¹⁵ asked if we could do a water birth. So I bought a tub and away we went. There was some friction from the nurses – the older ones did not like any change.

Counter-Birth

Furthermore we see that this cosmology influenced the Western father at birth at the social level and at the level of site as a subversive act. Interestingly enough both the alternate-birth movement and transpersonal psychology have their roots in San Francisco and both emerged at the same time. Aspects of these movements were specifically rooted, according to some, within the so-called drop-out culture and alternate community scene, itself largely a product of psychedelic cosmology and it is here where we begin to see the fathers' shore coming into being. Kitzinger and Davis note:

The home birth movement in the United States started on the West Coast and was then picked up on the East Coast. It began with drop-outs and those living in the alternate society of communes, but quickly spread so that now more and more ordinary middle-class Americans are asking for home births (Kitzinger and Davis 1978:93).

¹⁴ Leboyer had visited India in 1959 and began working out his ideas in 1966 (see *Birth Without Violence* 1974).

¹⁵ Note the hybridity between flowers and children (see appendix 2).

It is to be remembered that there numbered between 3000 and 4000 alternate communities in America in the late '60s and early '70s (see Musgrove's *Ecstasy and Holiness*, 1974 and Rigby's *Alternative Realities* 1974). These communities reflected the counter-culture's deep disaffection with the modern nuclear family and an attempt to resist Western hegemonic technocracy by dropping-out of it. In England, according to Rigby, the commune culture was the equivalent to drop-out culture in America (1974:62). Experiments with open living, marriage, child raising and sexual arrangements were common in an effort to unbind the illness of possession and power that were seen as the pathological glue holding the construct of the nuclear family together. This experimentation bore a deep relationship to the use of LSD (Musgrove 1974:87; Rigby 1974:77). Sociologist Rigby nods to the influence of Aldous Huxley in this project in England:

Huxley's own experience with hallucinogenic drugs, which he interpreted in terms of mysticism, meant that he became one of the first public figures to present such drugs as mescaline and lysergic acid (LSD) as chemical aids to the attainment of oneness with what he termed the Divine Ground and Ultimate Reality. In fact many tenets of the mystic's view of the nature of life and the divine are shared by the drug-using members of the contemporary underground movement who have been instrumental in the formation and expansion of a number of communes in contemporary Britain (Rigby 1974:30).

Huxley's ultimate reality, according to these writers, has influenced social reality and social practice.

Michael, a 58-year-old informant, and man who left a higher paying job to take up bee-keeping in New Zealand said this:

Remember this was 1971 and there was no home birth in those days.
[Interviewer: No?]

You had to be living on a commune somewhere to get away with that
(laughs)

[Interviewer: So that was happening?]

I think that was probably happening somewhere. And certainly we were aware of them happening in places like the States in San Francisco. We were aware of the movement ... humungous movements and changes sociologically just things like I guess experimenting with drugs, experimenting with relationships, experimenting with moral codes, sexuality, nudity, dress, music. It was like being a kid in a toy store there were so many new things going on. We had the long hair and we were eating organic food. There was just this massive sense of transition. The Beatles ... their music was so attractive and beautiful and the Stones I mean they got right down and dirty. They were very in their bodies very sexual ... just beautiful. One of the things the Beatles did was to challenge authority. John Lennon saying to the Queen "you in the cheap seats just rattle your jewellery" and saying "we are bigger than Jesus" and everything just exploded after that.

Hazel's 1974 ethnographic study of 300 home-birthers in San Francisco, revealed that they were a set composed of average people whom she characterized with this telling statement, [she noted] ... "a hard to define level of self-awareness which manifested itself in an individual concern for nutrition, philosophy, positive health, humanistic psychology, ecology and the survival of mankind as a whole". She also notes that this same culture, "expressed the idea that hospital birth had disadvantages from a psychological standpoint" (cited in Mehl 1978:94).

Another of my informants, Peter, a performer, who had participated in the protests of those years said this:

Fathers there at the birth of their children were conscious that this was a new development in New Zealand society. Hitherto we were left behind closed doors, left to smoke cigarettes and pace nervously. We were

definitely aware that we were the wave of the new and that there was a new consciousness in the air. In 1967 I remember listening to the song and realizing something was happening in San Francisco [sings] “Be sure to wear some flowers in your hair” and I thought hmmm, something’s happening over there (laughs). We were aware there was a consciousness change and it affected us and it allowed for us to be present at birth.

A Mother’s Shore

I interviewed a woman, Frieda, who had engaged in the commune culture in New Zealand and had called herself a ‘lay midwife’, delivering several babies on her own. She describes her birthing in 1974. I have included this lengthy narrative because of its richness and its many connections to the subjects in hand:

I had been into exploring and on the edge of that culture. I was reading Ouspensky and Gurdjieff and the odd guru and things like that. I was quite into all that. I had an IUD taken out to do the natural method but I got pregnant. I had been doing yoga. I had used acid quite a few times and loved it. I stopped about a year before I got pregnant. I used it mostly on my own and specifically to explore myself and any other realms that I could tap into. I found it incredibly powerful and moving. It felt to me that it confirmed a lot of my senses about my reality and the world. As a teenager I never wanted to travel out there in the world but travel inward. I would explore what was beyond my body and what I felt was beyond this ordinary reality. It was very significant in terms of certain beliefs.

[Interviewer: Was the wider culture significant?].

We were reading all those books you know Ram Dass - *Be Here Now*. I remember one of the most full-on experiences. I went on a fast for a week and read *Be Here Now* and then took an acid trip. I was using these people who weren’t in New Zealand. I was brought up a Christian and was disillusioned with that. I used to think where is the love? I mean I loved the atmosphere of the church. I had contact through reading Sai Baba and stayed in an ashram in New Zealand. *So I had all that before I got pregnant.*

[Interviewer: All that?]

All that ... Tim Leary, what was it, *Maps To Ecstasy?* R.D. Laing. So I knew I didn't want to have birth in a hospital so we headed down to a commune that had been going for quite a few years.

There was a home birth culture internationally and a couple of women had had babies there at the commune. I had read a magazine about a community in the states where people were birthing there and I read Grantly Dick-Read *Birth Without Fear*. I didn't want any trips put on me. A public health nurse came and I just ran off into the bush. I wanted to stay in my own process and have it fully. We had no power or phone but I found out later that a friend on a neighbouring property had his car at the ready. I thought that maybe one of us would die. In hindsight it seems a bit of a stupid thing to do but I was prepared to die because I was determined to have my own experience and to trust the baby.

[Interviewer: Tell me about that]

I was very attuned to him. I spent a huge amount of time on my own outside in nature in the garden, so I was very attuned to the baby ... it was very much a spiritual practice ... I really believe being a mother and a parent and particularly for a woman carrying a baby is such a deeply spiritual experience and giving birth is the ultimate spiritual orgasm ... you tap into that greater energy, that greater consciousness.

[Interviewer: How was your partner?]

He was amazing, he just totally supported what I wanted ... he didn't put anything on me and let me have the power.

All this points to an ongoing hybridisation process at the level of cosmology that gathers momentum with the introduction of psychedelics into Western culture and its issue into lived practice, community and enactment. Its aim was not to colonise world religion, but to subvert materialism's disenchanted universe and perhaps tacitly negate the authoritarian and essentialised forces within these religious traditions while using their authority and religious capital at the same time. Contra Jorge Ferrer's dismissal as a mere artificial construct, Maslow's core religious experience, when approached

from this perspective, can be seen as a culturally relative artefact of an unrecognised organic and intentionally hybridizing pattern, and as such, a cosmological adaptation to environmental demands for a greater sense of universal connection – cosmic unity. Furthermore Ferrer’s conceptual clarity does not necessarily rob this lived social imaginary of its place in alterity,¹⁶ nor its historical and current practices of enactment and reproduction, nor the mimetic and socially imagined space of cosmic consciousness carried in people’s bodies. Evidenced enactment suggest that a culture’s venerated cosmology of cosmic unity even if linked to Huxley’s perennial philosophy (perhaps especially given its long history of hybridisation) is indeed a farther shore of the human potential.

¹⁶ The Other-world of spiritual reality (Taussig 1983)

Skulls at the Banquet: Birth and the Human Encounter with Death

Let sanguine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange power of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet (William James 1902: 121).

Introduction

This chapter concerns a spectrum of psychological encounters with death reported by my participants, encounters that appear to be catalysed by their nearness to the birth of their perinatally engaged children and labouring partners. Among my participants I found a high yield of what psychiatrist Stanislav Grof and anthropologist Joan Halifax have termed the human 'psychological encounter with death' (1977).

This is important because, according to the general literature in the area of psycho/spiritual death and rebirth, the encounter with death appears to precede transpersonal comprehensions. This would seem to suggest that birth-giving can promote a psychological encounter with existential mortality and therefore transpersonal events may accompany such encounters. I have already provided some evidence of the connections between birth, death, time, and transpersonal comprehension in chapter 7, in both individual experience and cultural formulations.

In this chapter I link these experiences to selective anthropological literature and show how male participation in birthing can trigger dynamic perinatal sequences which have been shown to play a central role in transpersonal comprehensions and the near-death-experience (Grof and Halifax 1977, Halifax 1979, Grof 1985, Ring 1994,

Bache 1996). Perinatal experiences have also been associated with existential crisis and spiritual emergencies.¹

This chapter further outlines contemporary encounters with death around birth and links these experiences to Grof's perinatal matrixes, COEX² systems and the NDE.³ The following chapter examines the connections between perinatal experiences, the NDE and the careers of shaman, midwives, trance specialists and what we have been calling 'primitive midwifery/obstetrics'. I will show how perinatal templates when combined with ritual operate as a form of obstetrical enactment ultimately modelling and empowering the 'escape' from the obstructed female birthing body.

Birthing, as a biological, psychological, cultural, political, ecological and cosmological nexus is a meeting-house in every sense of the word, and as such, combines and crosses several disciplines including some relatively recent ones (30-40 yrs old) such as thanatology, transpersonalism, medical anthropology, women's studies and NDE studies. As paradoxical as it might seem to some, birth can be a 'human encounter with death' for many fathers and mothers, and Grof's perinatal/transpersonalism can serve as a useful vehicle to contextualise these anomalous and often 'secret' male narratives.

Realms of the Unspeakable

For various reasons, obvious and subtle, ancient and modern, the experience of procreative fathering males tends to be marginalized and overlooked. Their stories

¹ Procreative fathering males may also be candidates for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder as outlined by the DSM4: 309.81 "the development of symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's personal integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person" (1994:424). Given the spiritual emergency quality of some experiences, procreative fathering males might also utilize the V62.89 category, "Religious and Spiritual Problems" (1994: 685).

² A system of condensed experience.

³ Near-death experience.

often remain muted, secret, and taboo, more at home in the tacit dimension than the explicit, the repressed rather than the expressed, inhibited rather than disinhibited. It was a common occurrence that the males I interviewed had not articulated certain ‘unfathomed’ aspects of their birthing experience to anyone before the conversation with me. One possible reason, among others, may be because their procreative experience blends with pre-linguistic memories of their own birth and therefore teeters at the edge of the unspeakable.⁴

Feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva has noted the difficulties we have in casting the nets of language over the cycle of human reproductive memory. This ancient cycle, she says, has a “spasm of a memory belonging to the species” as it perpetuates “the eternal return of the life-death biological cycle” (1997:303). And she asks, “How can we verbalise this prelinguistic, unrepresentable *memory*?” Her answer is interesting because she appears to locate this collective memory in, (what I take to be, predominantly, male mystical or transpersonal experience): “Heraclitus’ flux, Epicurus’ atoms, the whirling dust of cabalic, Arab, and Indian mystics, and the stippled drawings of psychedelics” (1997:303). This statement can also suggest that the male experience of reproductive reality and their lived experience in, and *as*, their portion of the reproductive cycle, is articulated and symbolically codified as mystical or religious experience (another classically unspeakable dominion). The point is that these religious mysteries, experiences, rituals, practices and symbolic systems appear to have a direct relationship to birth, sex and death, and cultural constructions of cosmic causality, procreativity and eschatology.

⁴ Women’s transpersonal experience at birth can be equally muted. This is partly because as Kitzinger writes: “Meanings of birth are expressed in a symbolic medium of language, but in the West a gulf exists between the language birth professionals’ use and that used by ordinary people” (Kitzinger 1982:195). Also transpersonal phenomena are often believed to be ineffable and beyond the grasp of language. One simple reason might be that no one has bothered to ask mothers about transpersonal experiences around birth-giving, let alone fathers.

The following statement by cognitive anthropologist Douglas Hollan captures another important aspect of cognition which can be applied to the male birth experience – what he calls cognitive starvation:

Much experience is lost and forgotten not because it is actively repressed (as a result of intrapsychic conflict) or dissociated (as a result of trauma or socialization experiences) but because it never finds its way into culturally and familial mediated schemas and “cliches” that give form, structure and persistence to self-related memory. That is, while our families and cultures encourage us to remember certain types of experiences by providing us with the cognitive and linguistic resources necessary to capture and encode them, many other of our experiences do not receive such memory enhancing resources. As a result they are forgotten. Like traumatic experiences, linguistically and cognitively ‘starved’ experiences are never integrated into higher order, conscious levels of self-organization (Hollan 2000:540-541).

We can observe an example of this phenomenon in the narrative of one of my informants. Brian (28 years old), describes his encounter with death at transition:

Her waters broke naturally, she dilated naturally, she laboured and birthed naturally. For me it was quite emotional just seeing her in so much pain. I couldn't ... I was standing there and she was screaming ... that was very hard to stomach. You know women vocalise ... quite guttural ... primal moaning and groaning ... I've never seen her in pain before ... **we've never had accidents.** That was very hard for me to handle. That was the hard part. I felt helpless it was really quite emotional. If I think back ... I mean I love her very, very, very much and just to see her in that much pain ... I don't know how to describe the emotion. It wasn't fear ... just whenever she screamed the tears and emotions would well up. Helplessness ... it wasn't really screaming, it was something more primitive, it tugged on all sorts of emotions. **I guess if it reminded me of anything ... it was like being at an accident scene but I had no hands,** I couldn't make her feel any better, you can encourage and all that ... but

the pain ... definitely helplessness. I couldn't help her. **I felt like someone in the middle a bad accident who couldn't do anything.** We're getting down to it now. But this is the first time I've talked at this depth.

Brian places himself and his partner symbolically at a car accident. An encounter with death as a witness to the brush with death his partner may be having. Finally, lifting a phrase from Michael Polanyi, it may well be a truism to say that as procreative males, "We know more than we can tell" (1966:4). It is my hope that by speaking the unspeakable this research will help to create a much-needed cognitive niche for further explorations of the male and female birthing epistemic, and performance. That said I also believe this research has wider implications for transpersonal theory, midwifery, perinatal psychology and anthropology, psychotherapy, anthropology of religion and consciousness studies in general. I will outline here some anthropological reference points before moving on to the contemporary male encounter with birth and death through an extended Grofian construction.

Birth and the Encounter with Death

Some might find the notion that death could intrude upon, or even pervade the experience of birth for males somewhat anomalous to the celebratory nature with which a birth is generally greeted in Western culture. Perhaps to talk about a brush with death is to simply appear morbidly fascinated in stereotypical sanitised Western society where birth might seem to be the very antithesis to death. Thus we might recoil from the notion that birth could have us knocking on heaven's door. However in many traditional or pre-industrial cultures birthing has a profound, even intimate association with death, where birthing is often seen as an interface between the living and the ancestors, and where "supernatural forces are at work" (Newton and Newton

1972:15). Indeed the link between birth and death in anthropology is something of a given.

Death in some cultures can also have a celebratory or promotional side associated with religious belief systems stemming from worldviews that incorporate a pre-after-life dimension. According to Ernst Becker, in *The Denial of Death*, “primitives often celebrate death ... *because* they believe that death is the ultimate promotion, the final ritual elevation to a higher form of life” (Becker 1973: ix).⁵ Furthermore we see that that buried within death symbolism are the symbols of birth and rebirth, therefore, says Aijmer, the “symbolism encountered within the duration of birth is frequently also activated at funerals” (1992:16 and see Van Gennep 1908).⁶ Another consideration is the fact that the near-death experience is also, fundamentally, an encounter with death (see the following chapter). Several women I interviewed during the course of my research also had similar experiences and the encounter with death was quite well-known to some of the midwives I spoke to.

Various dynamics of the birthing process have already been significantly related to the human encounter with death, transpersonal events and NDE's by Stanislav Grof in many ground-breaking works (1975, 1980, 1985, 1994, and 1998); Grof & Halifax (1979), Grof & Grof (1980, 1989) and see Bache (1996, 2000). Grof has comprehensively explored the overlapping interface of *birth, sex and death* in the human unconscious from the perspectives offered through depth psychiatry, experiential psychotherapy, inner exploration mediated by religious practices, LSD

⁵ The use of the word “primitives” is obviously problematic because it can indicate a modernist Western categorisation of those who have bred what Talal Asad calls a “religious-based identity” into their bones and which is prone to a process of “medicalization” by the modern state, secular scientists and psychoanalysis, as a “condition of individual or collective pathology requiring curative treatment” (1993:280).

⁶ Aijmer's argument that birth is an extended phenomenon in many non-western cultures is invaluable to this chapter. He extends the child's reception, animation, and incorporation throughout the life cycle and shows how birth is recapitulated at different junctures in that cycle up to, and including, death (1991).

psychotherapy, and holotropic research (1975, 1980, 1985, 1988, 1998, and 2000).

From the Grofian perspective (sourced from a many-voiced multi-gendered transpersonal inquiry over 40 years) the perinatal level of the psyche (itself a product of human sexuality) is closely interwoven with a dynamic existential/death constellation and is meaningfully related to women giving birth, the dynamics of psycho-spiritual death-rebirth, and with the near-death experience. An example follows:

Suzanne started feeling nauseous ... she clearly associated it with pregnancy; she experienced herself as the pregnant mother, but simultaneously identified with the baby in the womb. She was hypersalivating and experiencing the water in her mouth as the amniotic fluid ... She started experiencing sequences of dying and being reborn in many variations, a strange mixture of the agony of dying and the ecstasy of birth. She oscillated between feelings of being trapped and desperate attempts to escape and free herself ... She felt a deep identification with all of the mothers who had ever given birth and all of the children who had ever been born; then she subjectively became them. Through birth and death, she appeared to be connected with all of suffering humanity, millions and millions of people crying in pain. She was crying with them at the same time *was* them, experiencing the ecstasy of this union in agony ... In a final sequence of being born and dying, her adult ego died while a new, baby self was born. As she became all these mothers and all these children, she felt that she was growing inside of herself and trying to give birth to herself (Grof & Halifax 1977:86-87).

Following in their wake (but not conducting research), Rabuzzi has reiterated the possibility that women are capable of NDEs during birth-giving. She states, “at the deepest level ... the transformation occasioned in a woman by childbirth is death” (1994 :xiv-xv). She quotes an Italian peasant woman to illustrate the point, “Every time one of my babies was about to be born I’d think to myself, You’re going to die! This time you’re going to die! Then it’d come out. Somehow—I don’t know how to explain it but somehow it was like I had been born again” (1994: xiv).

Several women I spoke to during the course of my research told me emphatically that birth was “about death really” or “I was sure I would die” or “I really was dying” or “I could feel myself going”. Some of these women (including two who had become midwives because of the experience) told me that at the peak of their crisis they were prepared to die and saw themselves participating in a profound enactment of human sacrifice - dying as new life was born. Such statements, perhaps revealing Christian “traces” in their psychic “inventory” (after Gramsci, cited Said 1978:25) and its relationship with physical pain and religious practice which we moderns greet with “suspicious disapproval” (Asad 1993: 83), seem also to support what anthropologists have long noticed: the deep association between birth and death (Laughlin 1990:156, Eliade 1958). For example, as a young Ju’/hoansi (Kalahari !Kung) woman told anthropologist Marjorie Shostak, “I say childbirth is about death” (Biesele 1997:488).

An Angel at Her Table

In chapter 6 we included a narrative of a young woman who said that she felt in those moments prepared to give up her life in the service of her struggling child. At that moment she said that her recently deceased grand-mother came to her in a vision and somehow her presence helped to guide her safely through her labour, the presence of her grandmother was blended with that of her male partner. Another woman I spoke to said she was assisted by a woman whose earthly or unearthly status she was unable to define but who had appeared at her bedside dressed like nun and who guided my informant through her difficult labour.

Another woman, a psychologist, who I will call Mary, told me that during the peak of a very strong contraction she went to a “dark place, like a vault, where a man in suit appeared before me. I couldn’t work out why it was a man and why he was in a suit. So I asked him if he was my dead grandfather, or a relative, or God and he

replied 'No'. I asked him if he was a 'part' of myself and he replied 'no'. I came through the contraction and sort of back to normal consciousness. When the next contraction came I found myself in the same black space and I called out for him and he came. I questioned him a few more times about what he was doing here and eventually he said, 'I am here to help you birth this baby'. And my baby was born as he said those words. I felt really fragmented after the birth and I thought I might have been a bit psychotic and so I didn't tell anyone about this experience. I know it sounds a bit 'funny', but I thought I was so open I might be possessed or something". We could also recall the Anglican minister who saw the male obstetrician turn into an angel while attending to his wife's birth-giving. Another woman, Mandana, of Iranian background described birth as a holy place filled with God's light. Meetings with angels, ancestors and other inhabitants of the pre-or afterlife are a classic signature of the NDE and transpersonal events (Strassman 2001). Again, this is in close association with women and children birthing.

I suggest that my informants' contact with a female ancestor, and or, their encounters with angelic forms, spirit-guides, generations (ancestors) of women during labour, points to a variety of NDE and an encounter with death largely unrecognised in Western contemporary culture (but see Grof and Halifax 1977:86; Greyson and Bush 1992; Bache 2000:115-116; Strassman 2001:75, Ring 1989:16). However it is of some significance that the cross-cultural ethnographic record shows that women's marginal maternity cults, religious mysteries, and ritual activity (often with physiological and cosmological birth-giving at its foundation) display intimate connections with spirit worlds, altered states of consciousness, and spirit-possession involving encounters with an intriguing roster of ancestral spirits (read: the dead) including deceased children who died from perinatal complications, ancestral

midwives, or mothers who died in childbirth, all in relation to aiding and abetting in the trial of birth-giving (Potter 1974, Paul and Paul 1975, Bourguignon 1976, Graham 1976, Gross 1980, Laderman 1983, Kitzinger 1982, Sered 1994, I.M. Lewis 2003). Studies of these groups, while showing great cultural variability, do display several similar patterns which, when combined, are suggestive of a women's transpersonal healing complex operating in close association with the dead *qua* ancestors.⁷

The ethnographic record reveals that in various cultures midwives are known to evoke these "supernatural" ancestral spirits to aid in their craft (Cominsky 1982:208 and see McClain 1989:15; Laderman 1983:132). Importantly it is often the devastations of child mortality (an encounter with death) which initiate a woman's transformational crises into a midwifery or shamanistic career. Examples are found among the Cantonese (Potter 1974: 226), Korean (Harvey 1980), and Guatemalan (Paul and Paul 1975) see also McClain (1989:12, 15). Similar patterns are found among British and American Spiritualists (Sered 1994:90-100). Charismatic Shaker leader Anne Lee's visionary experience and mission followed on from the deaths of her four children (Sered 1994: 95), and the career of Doris Stokes, Britain's best-known contemporary medium, followed this pattern. After the deaths of her children she gained access to a spirit-world where she could see them being nursed back to health in a heavenly hospital (from a BBC radio report). Thus the shaman/midwife

⁷ I am not suggesting that all contact with spirit ancestors etc is necessarily an NDE but I think women who report these phenomena while encountering death in the throes of birth is very much an NDE. Furthermore these contemporary women's experiences suggest strong parallels to women's religious cult groups, which, appear to have shaped and refined their religious practice in direct relationship to their devastating encounter with child mortality. Furthermore it is possible that such encounters may trigger women's own unconscious perinatal memories, thus creating a multifaceted obstetrical healing system combining collective and individual experiences of birth, death, rebirth, spirit birth, and spirit possession, to evoke and enhance successful birthing. To find germinal instances of these phenomena among contemporary New Zealand women may suggest that the seeds of female maternity religion were sprouted in this same fertile ground.

elect is drawn into her career often through an initiatory encounter with death. Writes

Halifax:

Those who have nearly died, through an accident or severe illness, or who have suffered a psychological or spiritual trauma ... the encounter with death and dying and the subsequent experience of rebirth and illumination are the authentic initiation for the shaman ... Although this process frequently takes the form of an inner experience, the symbolism and feelings have many unusual parallels in the experience of actual biological birth. Furthermore, it provides a very different perspective on so-called psychopathological states, whether they be "culture-bound reactive syndromes" such as "Arctic hysteria" or "acute schizophrenia" in the West (1979:5).

Mayan midwives are seen as ritual specialists calling upon the spirits of deceased midwives '*comadronas invisibles*' and importantly Cominsky tells us, "During birth they [midwives] are accompanied by these spirits" (1982: 208). A similar pattern operates in Cantonese women's shamanism (Potter 1974: 220). This suggests an interface with the spirit-world in which encounters with the dead are purposefully evoked and embodied – thus the encounter with death in this midwifery/healing context has a function ... the support of the birth of the living. I believe this is a form of NDE/transpersonal event unexplored in the literature.

However, for this chapter, the importance of the female encounter with death at birth and its association to obstetrical success is significant because it means, at the very least, that some procreative fathering males may be encountering, empathising with, or dissociating from, partners who experience themselves (and believe themselves to be) in the throes of death.

The Secret Life of Men: HED Hunting.

Of the men I spoke with almost all attested to an encounter with death that seemed to lie in wait at the birth experience in one form or another. The moments I heard about run along a continuum of HED (Human Encounter with Death). The frequency of death imagery and the timing (the moments when this imagery would emerge into our conversation) were quite uncanny. These statements would seem to emerge in feeling-toned moments like the “I-thou” experience of Martin Buber (1958) which I found myself anticipating after a while by a feeling in my body. Equally interesting were the variations in the kinds of ‘death’ they referred to: certainly there was a suggestion of the end of the pregnancy; there is the death of the waiting; the death of the single man; the death of the pre-parent person. As one man told me, “The way to weaken the ego is to have a child. It’s not just me any more”.

All these suggest psychological dying to old roles and images of themselves. We can, observes Heggenhougen, find in the anthropological record the idea that, “the birth of a child is occasionally seen as the death of a father” which he says, “can be interpreted as the destruction of the parent’s previous identity” (1980:24). The custom of teknonymy; the loss of the parent’s name and the calling of the parent by the name of the child appears to be a practice that aids in the dissolution of the parent’s previous social condition. The symbolic destruction of previous identity is central to rites of passage (Campbell 1968, Peters 1994).

The Petite Mort

At one end of the scale were off-hand intimations of death seemingly not more than allusions, theatrical asides, or Freudian slips. For example, I asked my father if he was present at the moment of my birth, and he said “yeah I was there”. I questioned him further: “I mean right there in the room”, and he replied, “do you mean at the death?”

(this is an old pig hunting term meaning to be present when an animal is killed). My father (indeed a one-time pig hunter) went on to tell me that he waited outside the bedroom (where I was born) because “you did not interfere in those days” - those days being 1960 before the flood of males into birthing sites.

On another level ‘death’ seems to be one pole of an unconscious binary system after Levi-Strauss (1963). For Levi-Strauss human thought operates on universal binary structures - to contemplate birth or life is to simply polarise death - it is this structural system of “binary opposites” that structure the human mind. Several times fathers referred to traditional masculine idioms of hunting, fishing, sport and warfare to describe the event of birth, which again, in many traditional cultures would have been the polar opposite yet binary equivalent to female birth-giving - possibly binding themes of gender stratification with death and birth in a psycho-cultural structural complementarity.

One man while attempting to describe his partner’s birth-pain told me of how he had badly sprained his ankle while wind-surfing a couple of miles off-shore. He then described swimming back to shore and the excruciating pain which almost turned to a kind of pleasure. An important structural complementary can also be found among the male *Ju’hoan* of the Kalahari Desert where young males enter a trance state called *xiao* (little death) to track down over many miles and kill a large animal risking their lives in the attempt. He shoots arrows into the beast and his killing of it is paralleled with courtship and marriage. Trance-dancing is also seen as a complement to women’s daring death and altered-states in birth (Beseile 1997).

Another man, when I asked about his birth story, told me that his close friend in his mid 20s deliberately went fishing when his wife went into labour and that he had drowned. With all caution and due respect for this tragic circumstance - it does seem

to follow an uncanny structural logic i.e. female labour = male hunting/death dealing, and female birth = male death. After hearing this story I started to notice not only men's 'ritual' behaviour around birth but also the way my male informants' body/minds seemed to organise these incidents of death to illustrate their meanings of birth.

Women daring the mortal peril of childbirth and men facing death in battle was also a theme in early Greek civilisation and parallels are found in the funerary monuments and tomb stones of fallen warriors and women who died in childbearing (see Demand 1994). A line from Euripides reads, "I would rather stand three times in front of battle than bear one child" (*Medea* 250-51: trans. Rex Warner cited in Demand 1994:121). A similar theme is found among Aztec materials, "And when the baby had arrived on earth, then the midwife shouted; she gave war cries, which meant that the little woman had fought a good battle, had become a brave warrior, had taken a captive, had captured a baby.—Sahagun; translated from the Aztec by Dibble and Anderson 1969" (McClain 1989:1).

Another of my informants told me that while his partner laboured he was taking a break in a waiting room and was watching a television when a newsreel of the then Vietnam War was shown. The man (now in his 50s) described an incident where he was watching images of a young male Vietnamese who had died in a battle and had on his person a photograph of his girlfriend - at the same time my informant reminded me his partner was in labour and giving birth in 1972. This experience seems to have been extremely meaningful and poignant for him. I was intrigued with the way he selected this narrative with its imagery of war and death and that he had so profoundly linked these themes to his birth experience.

Symbolic Gender-Death

It was during the Vietnam war that long-haired pacifist, anti-war, protesting males first began participating in birthing in America (perhaps seeking the refuge of female status and release from male-as-war-maker status) which seems to signify, at one level, a transgressive exploding and mockery of the structural boundaries that stratify gender into two binary, yet mutually exclusive realms - equivalent to male death-dealing and female life-giving. Turner noted in the late '60s that the hippie culture was a liminal one, busy with *communitas* i.e. boundary-breaking activities leading to states of oneness (1969) including breaking into, or breaking away from, hegemonically controlled birth sites. *Communitas* is a feeling of ecstatic unity beyond *all* categories and hierarchies.⁸

There is also the symbolism of this historical transgression to consider since such blurry sexual enactments threaten any society which is based on rigid binary divisions with a kind of death. There are several interesting cultural expressions of gender-death and its sexually disjunctive and paradoxical force, for example, Nanda's study of Hindu 'not man not woman' *Hijras* of Northern India (1999) or Halifax's study of 'soft-men' the hypersexual shamans of Siberia (1979). These transgressions into sexual hybridity also call to mind Turner's notion of *liminality*; a man in the birthing site in the '60s becomes a *liminal persona* and therefore, anti-structurally speaking, a man who has joined the ranks of the dead. "Thus liminality," writes Turner, "is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality ... in a symbolic milieu that represents both the grave and the womb" (Turner 1969:96).

⁸ An argument could be made that *communitas* itself represents ritualised release (not only from structure) but from the structure of women's birthing bodies and may be linked to collective obstetrical manoeuvres.

Halifax has noted instances of gender androgyny, “bi-unity”, and the creation of “soft-men” found among Siberian peoples whose transformation into a shaman “terrified” the locals (1979:24). Perhaps such terror resides in the shaman’s deconstructive agency, and because certain Siberian soft-men were so potent that they were even held to be able to give birth to human children and animals (1979:24). Halifax, in regard to shamanic episodes, says that various cultural and psychological divisions such as life-death, dark-light, male-female are collapsed in these experiences signalling “the dissolution of the contraries” (1979:22). The late ‘60s form of playful spiritual ‘terrorism’ has, therefore, deep heretical symbolic meanings linked to protest and the counter-cultural contestation of structure, hyper-masculinity, war-making, and perhaps, reality itself.

A Momentary Lapse of Dualism

At this end of the spectrum of death among procreative males in New Zealand seemed to be descriptions suggesting all-encompassing trans-conceptual and transpersonal states of consciousness fully laden with birth, death and rebirth imagery. In the following statements the polarities of past and future, life and death, are exploded in what appears to be a transcendental experience similar perhaps to Eastern religious expressions of non-dualism i.e. the *gharba*; the luminous oceanic cosmic womb of Hinduism (Porter 2003:110) or the *tathagatagharba*; the Buddha womb or Buddha embryo of Tibetan *Vajrayana* Buddhism (Gross 1993:186). This man, Les, recounts a story of what he called a “hippie birth” and a “happening” at a festival in New Zealand in the mid ‘80s. They had their child in a tepee drawn with Tibetan Buddhist symbols and attended by two midwives while attending a spiritual gathering of 300 persons mostly drawn from New Zealand’s commune movement:

I heard afterwards from people camped right throughout the valley that everyone thought it was just the most AMAZING thing seeing this softly glowing reddish maroon tepee and candles and all these people surrounding it and giving their love and prayers **and protection to the birth**. And yeah it was very 'altered-state' for me. It could not have been more perfect. **You know you have perfect births and perfect deaths** and it just worked into my idea of perfection... things unfolding as a matter of course. I look at it like a high celebratory state. Not sort of totally blissed-out where our whole energy is being ... um (thinks) it was more subtle ... an intense subtle feeling of well-being, grounded-ness, and **oneness**. And a very celebratory feeling basically we had all these people around us helping out, it was just before sunrise. We relaxed, slept, mellowed out with the baby, and next evening we are sitting around the fire playing, singing and drumming ... you know that was quite trippy. What are the chances eh of being born and going straight into a party? Not otherworldly but it was definitely the non-ordinariness of the thing, you know, in Buddhism they say it's so extra-ordinary that it becomes ordinary ... this is very, very ordinary, this is the way it should be.

Penultimate religious states are often felt to be concomitant with the after-life state, "the Buddha, a human being, is dead, and has reached *nirvana*" (Tambiah 1970:44) and see Ring (1990: 208-209); Evans-Wentz (1963); Grof (1980:80). According to neuro-theologist, Eugene d'Aquili, polar opposites can be experienced as unified and distinct simultaneously in what he calls the "oceanic" experience found in ritual, "During intense meditation or ritual experiences ... the experience of the union of opposites...is expanded to the experience of total union with self and other, or, as expressed in the Christian tradition, the union of the self with God" (1985:26). The momentary collapse of polarities was a frequent theme among my interviewees. Comparisons were also frequently made with the LSD experience - I heard often the earnest explanatory epithet "birth was just like tripping". This language suggests, at

the very least, something in the realm of the ineffable and strangely echoes Kristeva's earlier statement regarding Arab mystics and psychedelics (1997:303). According to some researchers the rigid polarity of subject/object which has shaped the Western mind-world is dissolved with LSD use (Watts 1962, Grof 1985, Tarnas 1992). My informant, Ken, is in his mid fifties with children born in the '80s:

In the moment of birth, life and death became the same thing. What I experienced was a knife edge where they were actually the same thing - there wasn't any time element involved at all ...and **even if I say the words, "in death there is life"** you know, like when a tree decays and then a new life comes out of the tree, well, that doesn't fit at all. There's a kind of holy instant where they are totally the same thing. The holy instant that I think of is the concept of the past meeting the future in that moment where the two meet and then it opens to something else. Like there's another dimension in there. That 'being in the now' has another meaning ... being in the now is an infinitesimally small place ... it's actually a huge place ... The whole of the past stops and the whole of the future disappears. There's that moment where you suddenly see ... I don't know how to describe ... it was more than I have had on LSD ... although some elements were the same ... and the same as birth it had the same knife edge about it. I suppose that's what people mean by being in the now.

Contemporary Birth as Ritual

According to various commentators, contemporary procreative males involved in the birthing site can be construed as participants in couvade-like rituals and developmental rites of passage (Richmond and Goldthorp 1978:167; Richmond 1982:92; Lewis 1982:45; Davis-Floyd 1992:33; Mander 2004:11). The comparison made, these researchers have paid scant attention to ritual dynamics from a male's perspective, which, I would argue, can precipitate powerful cognitive reordering and intense, perhaps even novel emotional responses and transpersonal disclosures. We

can say that procreative males, like those anthropologists who have participated experientially in 'native' rituals and trance, have also participated in a culturally shaped ritual event and have therefore reconnoitred the ritual territory and its impact on male cognition from an insider's standpoint gathering important experiential data in the site (see also chapter five).

Consider this conversation between two New Zealand males talking about birth; such narratives I believe, reflect powerful psychological, symbolic and ritual-like processes, i.e. the destruction or death of identity, the reshaping of identity to include the 'other', the narrator's own underlying perinatal patterns catalysed by birth - are some interpretations:

David: I heard of a story about a Maori guy who suffered the birth pangs of all his seven children as they were being born.

Tom: He just locked into that, eh. Really, you know I can believe that happened very much because at the point of the birth you and your partner are almost one. If you are there, right in there ... locked in ... you become one ... you become so ... in that intimate second the baby is born and you are virtually one person you know ... and it's the closest you'll ever be to that person.

However, according to C. Lewis the above would represent (following Trethowan 1972) "an introjected, almost schizophrenic identification with both the wife and child, as a result of a jealousy of the woman's ability to bear children". He then says that these ideas are "undoubtedly true" and "valid" (1982: 46). Again, I would like to introduce a little post-modern doubt into this double-edged diagnosis and make a transpersonal anthropological re-appropriation of the couvade.

Marla Powers, and others, have shown us that to study the rituals pertaining to reproduction (such as menstruation) in isolation rather than situated within a dynamic

cultural whole is to risk Euro-centric interpretations of those rituals (1999:87). No research, to my knowledge, has been carried out specifically on the ritual aspects and transpersonal experiences of procreative fathering males in Western societies nor their encounters with death that often presage or accompany such transformation (Grof 1975, 1977, 1980, 1985).⁹ Nor have Western birth sites been identified as places where ritual-like dynamics could trigger profound cognitive reordering, conversion, metanoia, NDEs, OBEs, transpersonal awareness – among procreative fathering males. In the following quotation, Steve, a 27-year-old, new-born father, speaks of his participation at birth - it is this kind of masculine experience, this leaving the body at birth (that appears to be both a mimic of the birthing woman and a replay his own birth).

Steve: But I would put it on a par with a spiritual experience ...such a physical experience...that would just shift your body ...where your mind **stays out of your body** just because it comes to point...**like a death really I suppose**...my body is about to give up and my mind has to take over and my brain also gave up so something else had to kick in.... yeah, it's like a spiritual experience but it was really induced by the presence of the physical-ness of Tanya birthing.

My study of contemporary males engaged in participatory birthing cycled around the following curiosities (which were not asked explicitly) i.e. are procreative males at the birth of their children in contemporary Western culture in a ritual vessel similar to those engaged in rites of passage in different cultures and epochs, and if so, would 'spiritual' (read: transpersonal) consciousness emerge in the process? As Grof and Halifax wrote in their research with moribund cancer patients:

⁹ Davis-Floyd's *Birth as An American Rite of Passage* (1992) does not address men's experience nor women's encounters with death.

In all ages and in many different cultures, ritual events have existed in which individuals have experienced a powerful symbolic encounter with death. This confrontation is the core event in the rites of passage, of temple initiations, mystery religions, and secret societies, as well as in various ecstatic religions. According to descriptions in historical sources and anthropological literature, such profound experiences of symbolic death result not only in an overwhelming realisation of the impermanence of biological existence but also in an illuminating insight into the transcendent and eternal spiritual nature intrinsic to human consciousness. On the one hand they mediate a deep process of transformation in the initiate who then discovers a different way of experiencing the world (1977:5).

In the quote that follows, Alex, describes his version of a home-birth in 2002. I would maintain that his statement (and several others like it) suggests that he is describing a psycho-social deconstruction in which he has a “dissociation in the service of self” [‘and other’ I would add] (see i.e. Bourguignon 1965:55) and is reoriented to primary perception (after Merleau-Ponty 1964), the *lebenswelt* or ground of being associated with the feminine and the womb which lies unconsciously beneath the dominant cognitive structures historically associated with the masculine (see Laughlin 1990:149). In this sense this death could also be seen as a ‘return to the womb’:

It’s like ... I suppose it’s like a boat sinking and you’re cast adrift on a raft and having to survive together. You bond ... you have had this huge experience in your life and you have to come together to actually fulfil it. **It’s so close to death at that point it’s incredible.** And that medical model kind of took it away when it was introduced. And I didn’t want to say anything about it because it might seem so far fetched.

I suggest that this breakthrough to primary perception is, after Grof, an “ego-death” (1975) and that his boat (cognitive structure/egoic-self) sinks, breaks down, in an

experience that is “intense and dramatic” enough to bring his “cognized self into question and bring about a change in ego-structure” (Laughlin 1994:2). While this represents only one way in which death was spoken about during the course of this research (I heard a number of nuances in these deaths) we can speculate that this diversity represents the surface novelty of deeper universal structures of consciousness. I suggest these structures reflect the universal perinatal stencil, the unfolding dialectical pattern of birthing as outlined by Grof (1977, 1985). I will have more to say about perinatal dynamics and COEX systems below. Here is an account by Jake, a 30-year-old school teacher describing his participation in birth. Those familiar with ritual dynamics and Grof’s observations of the four basic perinatal matrices may perceive them ordering this narrative (for those not familiar with this pattern an outline is offered in appendix 2 under the section *The Passion of the Western Mind* and see below).

Last year we were living in Australia but we came home for the birth because Karri had a strong feeling about being at home. While we were here (at home in NZ) things were a lot more natural ... home environment ... it’s a beautiful place around here, there are the trees and there were people supporting us. I suppose my perception was more normal here.

As soon as we went to the birthing centre, even though it’s a nice place, it’s not a hospital, things changed. We went there at night and we were under the lights, I think they were flashing lights and it’s a place I haven’t been to before and all of a sudden I’m spending all my time there. And I think that’s when it started to change my perception of things. That I was in a much more artificial environment, that I was under lights, it felt quite cramped because we were spending time in the same area. There was no longer a night or day because we went right through the night and the birth didn’t happen. And then came next morning still hadn’t happened so there a blurring of what was day or night or even whether it mattered ... the

lights, the different environment, the cumulative affect of what was happening ... and then one of the things that triggered the emotion for me was ... you see Karri had a very, very, long labour, she dilated to about seven centimetres and then it didn't go any further and we had this period of hours and hours when there was just nothing happening and then we thought she was in transition and then we weren't sure ... so its getting to that stage when you're really clinging to hope and you are not sure what's going on.

She's a really good singer, very vocal, and she started doing this sort of deep moaning noise to try and help during the contractions. The ones I remember were in the bathroom which had the biggest echo and they were really resonating and for some reason ... she was making this real primal sound, like an animal ... that went in and really touched me and went straight to some part of my emotional being and really affected me. Those sounds triggered something. That was the only time I went away ... to a separate bathroom and cried ... and that was the first time that I had cried in years and years ... it definitely brought up a lot of emotion in me. It's funny the sounds she was making ... It almost sounded like ... sort of songs I've heard ... some songs ... I don't know ... I am thinking African or something, a real wail, **almost like a funeral song**... a real wailing sound ... it really triggered that image in me and that triggered off a feeling of sadness in me even though that was not the dominant thing I was going through. There was a feeling of sadness and I couldn't explain why that's what welled up.

Procreative NDEs?

So far we have covered the way death comes at birth for the males and females in this study. We have also explored some ritual dynamics and the male birth experience. I found two fathers who described almost 'classic' accounts of near-death experiences. I suggest these are understandable as perinatal *acting out* – meaning roughly, a kind of self-inflicted, or attempted, rite of passage without the container of ritual, context, mythology, or others as intentional participants (see Bateson 1972,

Grof & Grof 1989, Lukov & Evans 1985, and Peters 1994, 1996). Two fathers seemed to describe transpersonal events that follow the prototypical signature of an NDE and did allude to marginal cultural narratives when describing their experience. These will be explored in depth in the following chapter.

The Perinatal Unconscious

As previously noted various dynamics of the birthing process have already been significantly related to transpersonal events by Grof. He says for example, “delivering women and people participating in the delivery can experience a powerful spiritual opening” (1998:135). There is an obvious and simple connection to be made here: if procreative males, by virtue of their participation in conception or with birthing women and their perinatally engaged neonates, constellate their own unconscious perinatal psyche then they are also, by all accounts, in contact with the near-death aspect of the psyche (Grof 1975, 1977, 1985; Ring 1994; Bache 1996, 2000). Conversely if they experience a brush with death while participating in co-birthing they can also, according to COEX logic (see below), dynamise their unconscious perinatal matrices.¹⁰ As religious scholar Christopher Bache says:

In Grof’s paradigm, the perinatal process is said to culminate in ego-death. Ego-death is presented as a definitive transition from personal to transpersonal identity. Just as birth represents a definitive transition from the womb to the world (2000: 295).

As an anthropologist, my analysis of these themes is tilted toward the cultural aspect of Grof’s COEX systems and what he calls the “biographical level of the psyche”, which include both life-enhancing and traumatic events in the social life-world (see 1975). Social actors engaged at the *site of birth* are participating in an

¹⁰ This may also include midwives ancient and modern and again this might be another fruitful research area.

event which can be traumatic and has everything to do with birth, sex and death. Furthermore, as noted, procreative males and females are participating in the very biological, social and cosmic event (in time and space) where perinatal patterning is laid down in the human psyche.

It seems to me clear that we procreative males (enter the anthropologist as father), while participating in the real-time drama of the birth from conception to the actual parturition of biological children, are prime candidates for a symbolic and unconscious confrontation with our own archaic perinatal dimension (and everything that entails). At the same time, we are also being woven more deeply into kinship systems which inexorably connect us with the realm of kinship and ancestry, our entrance into the river of time, our ageing, and eventual encounter with mortality (Aijmer 1992). The perinatal skeletons in our unconscious closets are surely rattled at this site.

COEX Systems

Procreative fathers engaged in participatory birthing, I would suggest, are also engaged in what Grof calls a *system of condensed experience* or, a COEX system - a dynamic governing system in the human psyche which is closely linked to the passage of birth (perinatal matrices). If we utilize this COEX theory, we can see the fathers' emotional experience and social engagement in the existential drama of birthing can either add, or correspond, to his own COEX systems depending on the emotional atmosphere or 'flavour' of the birthing. Grof writes:

A COEX system is a dynamic constellation of memories (and associated fantasy material) from different periods of the individual's life, with the common denominator of a strong emotional charge of the same quality, intense physical sensation of the same kind, or the fact that they share some other important elements ... Most biographical COEX systems are dynamically connected with

specific facets of the birth process. Perinatal themes and their elements, then, have specific associations with related experiential material (1985:97).

Following COEX logic, if the birthing scenario matches the positive expectations of the procreative person it will tend to be organised as part of his positive COEX system rooted in (but not reduced to) positive perinatal matrices and their biographical and transpersonal dimensions. Accordingly, he might experience feelings of oneness with partner and child, peak experiences of joy, relief, love, awe, cosmic unity, the sense of cosmic procreativity, a positive connection to generation. Conversely if the birth scenario *is* life-threatening or *felt* to be frightening, unsuccessful, or traumatic it can become meshed into his 'negative' perinatal matrixes and COEX systems, at the base of which is a primitive existential encounter with death. Accordingly, he will feel trapped, alienated, victimised, abused, traumatised, and threatened unto death – at birth. Here is how my informant, Geoffrey, describes his birth participation at age 22, 20 years ago in a classic 'skull at the banquet' episode:

Geoffrey: His arrival was forceful, it had impact. In that same moment of his issue into life came the realisation that **this child was mortal and would die**. When I did not know, hopefully after me. And suddenly I was impacted by **my own mortality and his mortality** ... and I was tottering on freaking out about this. I remember thinking or feeling '**well it's ok if I die**, but not him, not this object of adoration, not this life. **I could not bear it if he died.**' I was **overwhelmed with death as my son emerged - birth is death. Or it comes with death trailing right behind.** I freaked out. I knew then **I could not protect him from death.** It was like a shock.

Geoffrey's experience suggests a metanoia; the shock of a spiritual conversion or surrender and a fundamental shift in "province of meaning" (Shultz 1967) as he experiences himself as powerless before life's resolute fullness. Death has become undeniable - this is what William James meant with his image of a grinning skull at

the celebration; an acute experience, an awe-filled realisation, because to imagine birth in its totality is also to consider its eventual endpoint. The child has entered the river of time which, as we know, flows toward a mortal end and, what's more, as parents, we flow before her. The experience seems to waken in some men the connection with the cycle of generation, regeneration and degeneration and can evoke statements like this one from Danny, a man in his late 40s with two teenage children: "Birth was a mortality check. I had to think about how I was next in line for death."

I want to use Grof's description of persons working therapeutically with these levels - here we can bear in mind how closely the procreative male's biographical birthing situation reflects these dynamics:

On the biographical level only those individuals who have actually had a serious brush with death must deal during their self exploration with vital threats, on this level [perinatal] of the unconscious the issue of death is universal and entirely dominates the picture ... Experiential confrontation with death at this depth of self exploration tends to be intimately interwoven with a variety of phenomena related to the birth process ... although the entire spectrum of experiences occurring on this level cannot be reduced to a reliving of biological birth, the birth trauma seems to represent an important core of the process (1985:9).

Participation in co-birthing (from the perspective of fathers and mothers), as we have outlined, can easily be seen as a brush with death and there are a host of ways in which a birth can become registered and filtered by the human psyche as traumatic, which again, adds another coat of paint to the negative COEX systems. For example, an informant told me this, "My daughter's heart stopped and I just freaked. I was just pacing in the corner, you know, terrified." Another motif I heard several times was the description of birth as a bloody accident, a car crash, others included the slaughter of animals, and butchery, or a description of the woman as "a gutted pig" or "on a

torture rack” or a “slab of meat”. The following two descriptions can also suggest that some fathers can somatically empathise with the foetal struggle and suffocation:

James: Just as her head was starting to present at the end...yeah it was quite ... quite horrific ... at one stage when the baby was *actually trapped in the tunnel and the heartbeat went right down you see*. And I could see the midwife starting to panic a little bit ... a couple of minutes and the heart just about stopped. I am thinking **‘Oh my God! We could actually lose this child. Oh my God!’ It’s like going to a car crash and there’s someone there dying in front of you and you’ve got to do something**. The head presented itself ... I could see the little head all blue...oh my god **she’s not breathing at all! You do get very close to death when the baby’s born. It’s not alive till you actually see it moving around. I couldn’t take a breath**. I was covered in sweat.

Joe: I was going to move down to where the baby was emerging but when I looked and saw the top of the head I had these **really strong feelings of suffocation** and I pulled back and put my feelings on hold and tried to support Julie (laughs).

Psychological impingements can also stem from hegemonic and psychologically insensitive or even abusive hospital routines and situations or authoritarian and autonomy-denying decision making practices (my brother expressed his distress when his partner was told to “shut up” and if she did not stop screaming she would not receive any pain-killing medication). Another woman who birthed without a male partner had her mobile phone with her so she could phone her mother. This was confiscated by the nursing staff which triggered a frightening somatic crisis - cut off from her electronic umbilicus she fell into a state of panic and began to vomit (this stopped when they handed back the phone connection). According to Richman, hospitals maintain their ascendancy and authoritative knowledge over fathers by

creating “anomic” conditions for them and meshing them into the lowest level of status (1982:102) where they feel “powerlessness, disorientation, and isolation” (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:168). We can also mention routine procedures that injure the bodily integrity and bodily knowing of procreative males, their partners and offspring. Neil, a television camera operator related this story about his shock and dissociation during birthing - the way that death is seemingly plucked from the air is striking:

A Samoan doctor came in and he just got a pair of scissors and just went whack and cut her straight down. And I am sort of sitting there watching this, and I mean normally I would keel over and faint at the sight of blood. It was shocking, you ah ... switch into ah ... you know ... **you take yourself out of reality type mode ...** being a TV camera man I can face most things through a viewfinder ... **like that guy in Chile shooting himself getting shot ... he’s pointing the viewfinder watching the guy shoot him.**

The atmosphere of the hospital can easily tilt toward negative COEX inscription. The site is overtly related to illness, accidents, crises, emergencies, death and dying and what Mary Douglas called disordered and dangerous biology (1966) i.e. blood, faeces, mucus and urine.¹¹ Obviously the birth itself can be laborious, ordeal-like and life-

¹¹ Feminist researchers and transpersonal theorists have shown that the Western medical system, operating on Cartesian principles, sees the body as an objectified machine (Merchant 1983, Grof 1985, Davis-Floyd 1992:48). Interestingly, it has also been persuasively argued that the dissociated and dualistic Cartesian mind-view strongly reflects the problematic perinatal situation around which negative COEX systems correspond. Richard Tarnas in *Passion of the Western Mind* (1992) boldly argues that the whole trajectory of the Western scientific mind-world from Plato to the post-post modern epoch can be interpreted as following an archetypal structure closely resembling that of birth and culminating in an era marked by a rebirth in participatory ways of knowing and being.

In his stunning epilogue Tarnas, working from Grof’s experiential research, has argued that Cartesian epistemology represents an outworking of the constricting and contracted aspects of unconscious perinatal dynamics at a collective and cultural level. Thus our cultural crisis finds an analogue as an obstructed foetal consciousness struggling for life in the birth canal (1992). A similar view was put forward by Susan Bordo in *The Flight to Objectivity* (1987). She shows how the historic masculine flight to objectivity and its attempts at purification from the (so-called) defiling feminine ‘irrational’ is related to the structure of birth and claims that the Cartesian mind-world as a male “drama of parturition: cultural birth out of the mother-world of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and creation of another world – the modern” (1987:5). While there are substantial differences in Tarnas’ and Bordo’s

threatening (to mother and child) at times requiring radical intervention because of negative biological influences in utero (Piontelli 1992) or the constricting passage of the birth canal (Grof 1977, 1985) due to the narrowed pelvis and increased brain size driven by the impersonal forces of natural selection toward bi-peadalism (Trevathan and McKenna 2003, McClenon 2002). Grof does not in the following instance specifically mention birthing which is also seen as an operation in Western societies:

As a memory matrix, BPM11 [basic perinatal matrix two] represents the basis for the recording of all unpleasant life situations in which an overwhelming destructive force imposes itself on the passive and helpless subject. The most typical and frequent examples are situations endangering survival and bodily integrity. Thus, the recollection of sensations connected with various operations, such as appendectomy, tonsillectomy, setting of broken extremities and difficult tooth extractions or even the complex reliving of the circumstances of such procedures, occurs quite regularly in this context. The same is true for injuries, excessive muscular exertion and exhaustion ... (1977:162).¹²

A further complication could arise if a procreative male's negative COEX system is projected into a relatively benign birth-giving situation in a process similar to therapeutic transference. For example, this man's claims while at a birth in New Zealand can be seen as such: "I just had to get out. I left her there. I felt so powerless. I couldn't stand watching the woman I love dying in front of me. I thought she was dying" (Pudney and Cottrell 1998: 101). Getting out of there, fleeing the scene of

models to be reconciled, it is still of great interest that two researchers have located the Cartesian mind world in birth.

Modern technocratic birthing then can be seen as an expression of a psycho-cultural COEX system: a powerful clustering of emotionally constricting Eurocentric worldviews, cultural practices and institutions, rooted both in birth and in culture, extending perhaps from Neanderthal brain development and the narrowing of the female pelvis and the growth of the human brain (McClenon 2002, Trevathan & McKenna 2003) to the creation of oppressive feminine-denying religious systems with strong pollution taboos and rituals for the expulsion of children from 'defiling' women's bodies into secular mind-worlds which adumbrate narrowed masculine medical hegemonies hell-bent on purging children from the uterine 'pump' (Martin 1987:54). Embedded at the core of this system are the hegemonically constructed (birth of the clinic), the objectifying medical gaze (Foucault 1994) and its mechanical birthing rituals (Davis-Floyd 1992): perinatal dynamics to the bone.

¹² Grof includes women's labor pains within the negative perinatal matrices (1977:163,167).

death may well suggest a complex transference scenario with perinatal roots. Indeed the sense of helplessness and powerlessness were named a number of times, although with varying shades of intensity. Several men felt the situation was constructed in a way that they would feel helpless and fought to overcome such feelings by engaging more fully with the process.

A related area where procreative males might psychologically encounter death is in the ego-deflating, 'loss of control' experience that men often speak of around the event of birth. Again this kind of experience is suggestive of an 'ego death' and it seems to represent a deep existential encounter with the impermanence of life and surrender as nature and biology overwhelm their grasp on psychological security and they are forced to relinquish control as they are confronted with a biological process that is intimately related to death (Grof 1975, 1979, 1980, 1985). The following statement from Steve gives an insight into his emotional exhaustion, losing control, falling apart, and breaking down:

Steve: The midwife said, 'Ok this isn't happening, we are going to have to go to the hospital' ... and that was the point there. *'Oh my God this is being taken out of our control and now we are going down a tunnel'*. The ambulance turned up. Belinda was just like (puffing) ... I was gone just into complete like gone mode ... lost ... 'Oh my God I'm losing control ... I'm losing control ... I am out of control.' The pain of watching the fact that we are going to hospital. Initially those dreams of how it's supposed to be in the tub, at home ... falling apart.

Then just watching this body of Belinda, become a body. And watching her almost lose herself. Then get lost. Here we are and we can converse and you know what's going on and you have an awareness. And then seeing her just engulfed into this complete like [identifying and speaking from her position] "I'm going to give birth and I have no choice in it. My physical body is just taking over and my mind is just going to leave. My

idea of decision is gonna leave. My idea of choice is going to be gone because I have no choice. My body is going to take me into that space,” and so just being aware of Belinda and watching her slip into that space and watching her be bundled into an ambulance like a gutted pig. I am sat in the ambulance with her. Everything is still and there is this van rushing along. I’m not really like ... I’m in a place of being completely stunned. Once we got to the hospital it was obvious that the nurses and doctors were in control. They just came in and gave her an epidural. The point when Belinda was rolled on her side and I was watching them put this needle in Belinda’s back. And I was looking into her face and seeing how exhausted she was, feeling my own exhaustion and that was the point when I really broke down and I started crying. I was going through it emotionally, supportively ... not so much physically but I was just gone.

Summary

We have explored here many ways in which procreative fathering males can experience ego-death over the perinatal episode including conception and post – partum. Some of the interviews suggest a complex participatory and projective relationship between the father’s own birth and the birth of his child. Several men structured their narratives (especially around birth) in a dialectical fashion cognisant with perinatal patterning and rites of passage. From the interviews a number of associations to death, impermanence and mortality, and ancestry were made. Several reports of OBE¹³, leaving the body, dissociation, trance, ordeal, and comparisons to LSD use were also made, as were comparisons with spiritual states of consciousness in which the Western dichotomy between life and death was collapsed. Still others appeared to participate in what is called a *spiritual emergency* (Grof and Grof 1989, Peters 1996) and showed self-initiation behaviours (after Bateson 1972 and Peters 1994) and two reported classic NDEs. Others suggested that cosmic forces were at

¹³ Out of body experience.

work in which they were participants. The basic conclusion thus far, is that some procreative fathering males at birth have their own unconscious perinatal psyche constellated and transpersonal states of consciousness ensue including what could be called holotropic experiences.¹⁴

¹⁴ I would assume that the successful birth of the child in some sense allows the male's own perinatal energies to be projected onto the sequential passage of the new-born. Positive perinatal matrixes BPM1 and BPM4 will activate with successful birth and positive transpersonal experiences would tend to follow.

Spiritual Emergency: Three Male Reproductive Crises

White man got no dreaming, Him go 'nother way. White man, him go different,
Him got road belong himself (Stanner 1956:51).

Introduction

The previous chapter began with the encounter with death; however, its relationship with transpersonal states ('religious' states) can take us beyond this. The basic conclusions concerning death and transpersonal states can also lend themselves to a comparison with a wider pattern of male reproductive consciousness found in the anthropological record – i.e. the close relationship between culturally promoted NDE and (so-called) 'primitive' midwifery/obstetrics in which males also participate. Men can enact successful birth and the encounter with death in various ritual forms and these have been associated with women's birth-giving as a form of symbolic cosmological simulation and labour stimulation (Aijmer 1992, Bates and Turner 2003).

Aspects of this widespread pattern, as we have seen, are found in women's midwifery cults, but they are also found in various ancient religious practices from shamanism among the Cuna Indian (Levi-Strauss 1963), the trance dancing of the Ju'/hoan (Biesele 1997), and the ancestor-imitating dance of Aboriginal Aranda men (Gross 1980). Indeed some andocentric religious experience itself may well have shaped itself around what Kristeva has called the "natural psychosis" of pregnancy (1997:364) and our species ancient memory of birth, death and rebirth; coded into the whirling dust and the dancing feet of Cabalic, Arab and Indian mystics (Kristeva 1997:303).

Grofian perinatal-transpersonalism is obviously the cornerstone of the previous chapter, and, to quote and paraphrase religious scholar Richard Bache, if we may advance Grof's discussion at all, it is only because we live in an intellectual environment that his work has so importantly fostered (1996:116).

In this chapter Kenneth Ring's descriptions of prototypical NDEs are compared with the 'spiritual emergencies' of three males during their 'pregnancy careers'. Their experiences show significant similarities to the classic NDE pattern outlined by Ring (1989). Moreover, following Grof (1985) and recently Bache (2000) these 'NDEs' appear to unfold in a perinatal sequence, adding weight to the notion that a "deep structure" lies behind such phenomena shamanic initiations, near-death and UFO encounters (Ring 1989:14). I will explore these anomalous male birth/death/rebirth experiences and draw some parallels with what Western researchers have dubbed 'the shamanic crisis'. What is important about this category of experience is that it seems to transport some fathers into what is generally thought of as 'religious' experience.

Birth and the NDE

NDEs can have multiple causes among Westerners (Carr 1993:61-64) but, as far as I am aware, they have not been linked to fathers and childbirth. An example especially pertinent to this realm of study would be the area of women's NDEs catalysed by labour and birthing. The editor of the *Near Death Studies Journal*, Bruce Greyson, has on file some 60-70 cases of women who have reported NDEs during labour and birth giving (pers. com) and reports of NDE have surfaced from women who birthed while under anaesthesia (Greyson and Bush 1992:102). Ring, in an article addressing shamanic initiations, included what he calls a prototypical shamanistic initiation-type NDE from a birth-giving mother (1989:16 see also Grof and Halifax 1977:86-87; Grof 1998:136; Bache 2000:105).

Various dynamics of the birthing process have been related to NDEs by Grof (e.g. 1977, 1985, 1998; Grof and Halifax 1979; Grof and Grof 1980, 1989 and see Bache 1996, 2000). NDEs then have been linked to birthing - generally from the birthed or the birthing woman's perspective which of course is not at all surprising given the dramatic nature of women's birthing-giving physiology, the cognitive restructuring that can occur from the ordeal of labour, and, in principle, the encounter with death that birth can represent. Men's experience of birth, on the other hand, tends to be culturally submerged and in many ways rendered invisible. He is professionally constructed as the mute 'observer' or 'witness' of women's birth-giving and divorced somewhat as a participant with his own experience. Again, an understandable situation when weighed against the rigours of the female birth gestalt and the hyper-medicalised context of most Western births.

Interview with a Vampire

An example from my fieldwork comes via a 40-year-old American diplomat and an émigré to New Zealand describing his first night with his child during which he kept a vigil over his son to make sure, he told me, that his son did not stop breathing – in other words to somehow make sure he did not die. He said he was awake most of the night in what he described as an “exhausting 12-hour peak experience” that “wrecked me” and from which he needed to recover. Michael's description follows:

At the time I put this down to jet lag and extreme tiredness or just adrenalin but there was something like a **semi-out of body experience** ... It's like I knew I was still in my body but getting up on my elbow to look at my son breathing wasn't like I'm doing it now. It was like my **consciousness was rising up** not my body. And saying it like that does not satisfy me as it comes out of my mouth ... it's like ... I don't know if you ever read *Interview with a Vampire*. It might sound like I digress but

there's a passage in there where Lestat, the original vampire in that story, creates ... makes Lewis into a vampire. And there's this process of drawing blood, putting blood back, making him take blood and that starts **a process that lasted through the night of his body dying**, in other words he doesn't need to eat any more and the shit he has is the last shit he'll ever have and he goes into the forest and essentially his old self gets flushed out of him, it's kind of an interesting passage, better than I can recall it, but at the same time his other-worldly body takes over where he's got these extra senses, better sight, better hearing, stuff like that. I'd say my experience was kind of like that. It's kind of a **semi out-of-the-body experience where the body seemed to be dying away**.

It is not hard to spot the death-rebirth imagery throughout his narrative. This image of blood-sucking vampirism, transformation, transference of life-substance, of the "body dying away" as it is replaced by "other-worldly" powers, bears a striking resemblance to classic descriptions of the dismemberment, demonic encounter, and resurrection sequences found in Siberian shamanic initiations. The shaman-to-be having come close to death somehow enters a visionary world filled with demons where he/she can have the flesh torn from their skeletons, their entrails removed, their blood drained, and their organs replaced with precious stones (Eliade 1964).

According to anthropologist Joan Halifax, the neophyte-shaman is drawn into his/her career often through an initiatory NDE, "those who have nearly died, through an accident or severe illness, or who have suffered a psychological or spiritual trauma ... the encounter with death and dying and the subsequent experience of rebirth and illumination are the authentic initiation for the shaman" (1979:5). Halifax has also connected *biological birth* to shamanism's initiatory NDE. She writes, "Although this process frequently takes the form of an inner experience, the symbolism and feelings have many unusual parallels in the experience of actual biological birth" (1979:5).

Three fathers I interviewed appeared to participate in what is called a *spiritual emergency* (Grof and Grof 1989) and showed ritual activity and self-initiation behaviours (after Bateson 1972 and see Peters 1994). These three men described experiences that contain several elements found in prototypical NDEs. Their experiences were potent and life changing - one man joined a Christian charismatic church afterwards fearing he had been possessed by the devil, another was hospitalised for a time in a psychiatric unit ... the other gave up surfing.

I will focus first on two of these experiences comparing them with what Ring has called prototypic NDEs (1989) paying attention to the elements of shamanic initiation and the UFO encounter which they each in turn appear to approximate. I think it is important to reiterate here that it is a brush with death, and certain thematic resonances, certain similarities in structure, symbolism, and pattern that these men experience rather than the 'classic' NDE. Yet this is also what makes them so compelling – that, and their relationship to birthing. While this archetypal pattern may be familiar to some a review is warranted. Ring writes:

This pattern is made up of such elements as (1) a psychological sense of separation from the physical body; (2) a feeling of overwhelming peace and well-being; (3) a sense of movement through a dark but not frightening space, sometimes described as a "tunnel"; (4) a perception of brilliant white or golden light by which one is (5) gradually encompassed and from which one (6) feels a sense of total love and unconditional acceptance; (7) an encounter with a "being of light" or other spiritual entities who (8) may afford the occasion for a panoramic life review following which (if it occurs) one (9) may decide or be told to "return to one's own body," thereby (10) termination of the NDE. Such experiences tend to cohere in a highly meaningful way for the individual, are almost always said to be 'hyper-real;' (i.e. not like a dream or hallucination), and usually have a profound transformative effect on the survivor (1989:14).

Hyper-Real Alterity-Scapes

Ring has claimed that NDE researchers are “virtually unanimous in insisting that these experiences do not and cannot suggest the existence of an afterlife” (1990:204). Or as Bache has said “[Ring’s] articulation of the parallels between transcendent NDEs and the mystical experiences that emerge in various meditative disciplines demonstrated that nearly dying is but a trigger that catapults persons with some consistency into higher states of consciousness that can also be cultivated through any number of consciousness-expanding techniques” (2000:110). Therefore the human encounter with death is a catalyst to transpersonal events and vice versa.

Like these researchers, in my world-view such encounters and the spirited-worlds they disclose are *real* and not fantasy. They belong to a category of ‘culture’ and ‘reality’ that I think of as ‘alterity-scapes’ - *alterity* after Taussig (1993)¹ and *scape* after Appadurai (1996)². Henri Corbin called these mind-worlds the *mundus imaginalis* (after the Persian *alam al mithal*) (1969, 1976), psychedelic anthropologist Terrence McKenna “hyper-space” (1982), Michael Grosso, “the next environment for the psychosocial evolution of man” (1985), and the post-modern Jungian, James Hillman (1975), has also argued for the irreducible reality of autochthonic imaginings (Ring 1989:19).

Anthropology has long noted the existence of such worlds (albeit from shifting epistemological standpoints). In a report (almost 150 years old) E.B. Tylor observed that the “land of *Torngarsuk*” to where a Greenlander’s soul travels at death, after sliding down a bloody slide for five days, is a place of perpetual summer with “good water, birds, fish and seals and reindeer without end” that are to be caught without trouble, or are found already cooking in a huge pot (1878: 296). This suggests an

¹ I am using the term in the sense of an otherworld, or alter-world, a cosmic land-scape, one that is either associated with a culturally embedded belief system or disclosed in a transpersonal state.

² Adapted from Appadurai’s list of global flows he calls: ethnoscapas; financescapas; technoscapas; mediascapas and ideoscapas (1996: 33-37).

alterity-scape well meshed to the desires of the locals; it is an after-life which, when paired down, shrouds the deceased in the best of her/his beloved environment and gives unending warmth, light, nourishment, and leisure - a pattern many cultures ascribe to their heavenly abodes. Tylor, like all of us, was a product of his times, and saw in these systems no truth-value for mankind, believing they belonged to what he called the “whole monstrous farrago” of primitive religion (cited in Stanley Tambiah 1990:45).

Times have changed. Contemporary transpersonal anthropologists interested in the field of ‘waking dreams’ make efforts to penetrate the alterity-scape of their host culture, seeing the experience as an essential form of data gathering and research (e.g. Laughlin 1994). My personal experience of two such spiritual landscapes is paradoxical; they ‘feel’ as if they are supra-ordinated (already existing), and so I experience myself participating in a mind-world that has some sort of pre-given, a priori status, *and yet* these alterity-scapes seem also to be in a condition of co-creation with the human participatory imagination (see e.g. Tarnas 1991, Heron 1998, Ferrer 2002), where I find myself a central creative actor in the cosmic landscape. Corbin referred to this phenomenon as the *imaginal* world, which does not reduce to mechanistic notions of *imagination* but rather what Ring calls the “cumulative product of imaginative thought itself” (1990:209) unfettered by Cartesian dualism. At death, he says, we are liberated into this form of imagination.

Ancestral Alterity

Let me furnish this chapter with the first of my participant’s accounts of an experience with perinatal *and* near-death overtones. Again I am not suggesting that these are NDEs but I think they are near enough to be of scholarly and practical import. This story is from a young man (late 20s) of European and Maori decent who

has only recently had a child. In the first trimester of his child's foetal existence the man who lived by a beach went surfing - as he often did. During his sport he was dumped under the waves and thrown beneath some large rocks and seaweed, where he was somehow dangerously entangled. He told me that he had an acute sense that he might die as he struggled to free himself, and then, at a point of near-drowning, a "vortex" opened in his mind in which he beheld his "ancestors slowly circling in a golden funnel" – these ancestors communicated to him knowledge of how to become a "good man". He then had to tear himself out of his wetsuit to struggle free; he emerged out of the sea naked. This 'accident' was extremely meaningful to him and he recounted it in direct relation to his child's conception and her movement toward birth. I had a sense that in the invisible communication he was trying to tell me that his ancestors had orchestrated the moment and that his frightening spiritual flashpoint had something to do with readying himself and the cosmos for the child's entrance into the world.

Ken Ring in "Shamanic Initiation, Imaginal Worlds, and Light After Death" (1990:209), observes that there is a "substantial phenomenological overlap" with shamanic initiation and NDEs obvious to students of the field. The story above contains many such initiatory themes. Particularly potent is the shedding of his skin, which has the hallmark of shamanic dismemberment and rebirth. Clearly undergirding the story is a perinatal template e.g. the child leaves the good womb, suffers constriction and struggle culminating in an encounter with death followed by liberation, which fits the template proposed by Grof.

This man identifies as Maori and Maori culture embeds an ancestor-bearing cosmology of multiple dimensions. Original creation is the template for all creation and specifically recapitulates at the birth of children. Thus a brush with his luminous,

all-knowing ancestors in a “golden funnel” may be, in part, contextually mediated by cultural imagination and heritage. Sir James Henare, a Maori elder and orator; describes the Maori oral tradition as:

A veritable treasure-house of genius, wit, condensed wisdom and silent telepathy in the storied souls of our ancestors calling across the ages to their descendants struggling toward the light (cited in M. Henare 2001:199).

Students of mythology may also be familiar with the figure of Maui, the trickster demi-god of the South Pacific, who, in his great “overreaching crime” (Alpers 1985:66) transforms himself into a “caterpillar that glistens” (Alpers 1985: 70) and enters the vagina of Hine Nui Te Po, a Goddess related to death. One version reads: “What you see there is Hine Nui, flashing where the sky meets the earth. Her body is like a woman’s, but the pupils of her eyes are greenstone and her hair is kelp. Her mouth is that of a barracuda and in the place where men enter her she has sharp teeth of obsidian and greenstone” (Alpers 1985:67).³

In the story, the little birds accompanying Maui on his quest begin to laugh as he wriggles into her in the place “where man enters the world” (Best 1982: 378) and she awakens and crushes (throttles) him to death in the rocks and kelp of her cosmic genitalia (tawhito), heralding the birth of mortality by way of rebirth.

Angels n’ Aliens: Hyphenating-Alterity

This New Zealand father, a medical technician, of European descent told me this rather poignant story: he had recently gone through a painful marital separation after his partner became pregnant to another man. He had moved to a new house with

³ In one interesting version Maui enters the birth canal of his great ancestress in an attempt to close the door of death because a grandchild has been “carried away on the path of Hine-nui-te-po”. The grandchild’s death occurs in relation to a transgression of a taboo around buried umbilical cords (Best 1982: 377-380).

several acres of land with his two children and a week away from the birth of his ex-wife's new child he had the following experience. One night he awoke to what he thought was the sound of angel's wings beating above his head and at the end of bed. Startled, he panicked and ran outside naked with only a blanket pulled around his shoulders. He fled across a field in the middle of the night to a small cave his two children had hollowed out in a bank. He told me that he crawled inside the hole and drew himself into a foetal position with the blanket wrapped around him. As the first light of morning began to dawn and the birds began to sing he said that he was finding it increasingly difficult to breathe and he believed he was going to suffocate to death, "I thought I was dying". He told me that he could now hear the sound of a fleet of alien spacecraft landing all around the cave area and he imagined a group of luminous alien beings had come to escort him to another level. As this was occurring he was also running out of breath and at the moment of his "death" he threw off the blanket and threw himself out of the mouth of the cave into the light of the UFOs. He said he was shocked to realise, in that split second, that the spaceships and aliens (in true Quixotic fashion) were not there - and that he would not die (I am only telling you what he told me).

Granted, this not a full-blown NDE, nor yet an alien 'abduction', rather it appears to be an emotional crisis or *spiritual emergency* induced by his marital loss and its challenging circumstance – nevertheless, the 'deep structure' is telling.⁴ Again

⁴ This man is not implicated biologically in his newly ex-partner's pregnancy, nevertheless the structural similarities to the first man's experience are pronounced. Birth could be one of the catalysts here and he does appear to 'act out' the perinatal pattern. Transpersonal theory has advanced several categories of anomalous experience (see Grof 1988 for categories). Ferrer has recently put forward the notion of "transpersonal events" as being multi-personed and multi-located (2002). Some of Grof's participants have enacted spiritual events that defied 'contextual mediation' (1988:39) events that Ferrer has offered as a strong refutation of the contextualist position (2002:150). Following Grof, Ferrer writes "once a particular spiritual shore has been enacted, it becomes potentially accessible—to some degree and in special circumstances—the entire human species" (2002:150). Bache has recently advanced Sheldrake's theory of morphogenetic fields in his study of NDEs and writes that the individual can partake in the collective suffering of what he called the "species mind" (2000:80) We

anyone familiar with perinatal dynamics would recognise his journey through the four birth matrixes. And indeed several commentators have linked UFO abductions to the sequential unfolding of unconscious perinatal memories (see Lawson 1987, Thompson 1989). The aftermath appears to have been even more frightening for this man because he didn't understand the experience. He told me he went to his local library and found two possibilities there: either he was psychotic or he was possessed by the devil. He opted for joining a local charismatic church, which could offer him an opportunity for exorcism (by way of full baptismal immersion) a sense of cosmological safety in Jesus Christ, and the anchor of human community.

I am interested in the way that both angels and aliens make an appearance in his experience. He seems to be caught between two symbol systems and conflicting cultural narratives for describing his event - yet they may not be as disparate as they appear. Terrence McKenna has pointed out some of the similar patterns associated with angels and aliens (1982). Angels like aliens are related to hyper-real dimensionality. Angels like aliens are hard to get hold of and won't be pinned down like tropical butterflies, yet they inhabit the pathways of belief in so many cultures and populate the sky of so many minds where they seem to hover at the breach between this world and another one. Aliens like angels are seen as light beings, harbingers of the Other-real, intermediaries, saviours, bearers of advanced technological wisdoms enabling them to slip from one dimension to another with lightening speed ... chariots of fire ... techno-angels. According to McKenna, in our technocratic culture, angels must come clothed in a technological apotheosis so as to be recognised (1982).

will also see in this thesis that shamans (not only husbands) in some cultures specifically enter these "spiritual shores" on behalf of suffering birth-giving women. Applying transpersonal theory to our species' ancient history of birth rituals can account for this man's experience and its relationship to his past wife's birth-giving.

There is also an ancient Judaic spiritual practice whose mention seems germane to this discussion; it is one that can be seen as an analogue with what we might consider to be more overtly 'shamanic' cultures - these were the *Merkabah* or chariot practices. According to Roger Walsh, its "practitioners tried to recreate *Ezekiel's* vision of the divine chariot. After rigorous prayer and discipline, practitioners would experience themselves as ascending through the seven heavens and confronting fearful guardians until they were finally granted a vision of the throne of God" (1995:36).

Concentrative prayers were known as *kavvanah* (S. Katz 1978:34), "The Jewish mystic performs his special mystical devotions and meditations ... in order to purify his soul, i.e. to remove the soul from its entrapment in the material world in order to liberate it for its upward spiritual ascent culminating in *devekuth*" (1978:38) which is ultimately depicted as "a loving intimacy, a clinging to God" (1978:35).⁵

To summarise: while these two fathers' frameworks vary in surface content they show a logical consistency that parallels the perinatal stencil. They both appear to shape their respective pre-birth crises with language, symbols, and cultural formulations that fit closely with the unfolding perinatal matrices through, in and around the human psyche. Furthermore these meaningful pre-birth enactments and ritual-like behaviours include a symbolic, imaginal or real encounter with death and the use of environmental surfaces that are symbolic of the womb (under the sea and in a cave) to mediate their crises which then opens out on to an other-worldly alterity-scape, 'peopled,' respectively, by illumined ancestors and aliens. We can discern in these narratives close parallels to some of Ring's prototypical patterns of non-ordinary experience (NDEs) from both the shamanistic and UFO categories.

⁵ A pattern also observed in the Mohammed's 'Night of the Mirage' where the Prophet was dismembered and purified by angels and flown through hell and up through seven layered heavens into a final self-annihilating encounter with the Throne of Allah (see Eliade 1964:377, Armstrong 1991: 138-141, Grof and Grof 1980:41)

These male narratives would appear to suggest that conception, gestation and birth can, for some men, catalyse their own perinatal psyche in what is known as a *spiritual emergency* – a phenomenon which is known to have a near-death component (see Grof and Grof 1989:8, Bragdon 1988:51-52, Bache 2000). Is it possible then, that their own perinatal memories, which, according to Grof and Bache are linked with collective representations of birth, death and rebirth, can be activated when participating in procreation and its inherent status change i.e. becoming a father. Then, by force of their dynamism, these energies find their way into the world through the spontaneous ritual-making activity and ‘religious’ encounters that the anthropologist Gregory Bateson called, “self-initiation” (1972:328 and see Peters 1994 and 1996). Bateson believed that such instances were not conventionally pathological but “trans-contextual” experiences (1972:272) meaning that they could also be artistic and performative but had transcended any one context.

This is not to romanticise nor aggrandise psychopathology. But these anomalous male experiences could be read as primal responses to participation in the reproductive cycle with its generative autonomic symbolic processes, its potential replay of the birthing father’s own perinatal matrices, its symbolic or real encounter with death, its potential for participatory and transpersonal disclosures, and, full-blown, what Bateson called an “endogenous rite of passage” (which do not have exogenous social support and strong validating belief systems) (Bateson 1961 cited Peters 1994:6).⁶

The appraisal of the procreative male’s more anomalous psycho-spiritual experiences can become radically transformed when viewed through perinatal stencils and compared with the prototypical NDE pattern. By placing these experiences within

⁶ An interesting research project would be the relationship between NDEs and the reproductive cycle, exploring connections made at status-changing rituals such as marriage, conception and pregnancy career, birth and birth trauma and post-partum. NDEs could also occur some time after the fact.

the greater transpersonal context, they can be legitimated in a fundamental way: they may now be appraised against a backdrop that extends conventional psychiatric nosology to encompass spiritual emergencies and NDEs. This would re-orient their experiences as part of a more positive transpersonal developmental framework.

Midwives in Hyper-Space

However, there is another interesting parallel, which, while potentially contentious, should be mentioned because of its pertinent data. The following comes largely from my reading of traditional and indigenous midwifery techniques found in the anthropological record (e.g. Levi-Strauss 1963, Potter 1974, Paul 1975, Paul and Paul 1975, Cominsky 1982, Kitzinger 1982, Laderman 1983, McClain 1989, Sered 1994, Taussig 1993, Bates and Turner 2003, Lewis 2004). Many of these examples have transpersonal features in them, which I believe have a bearing on my informants' stories, the last of which will conclude this segment.⁷

I began this chapter by saying that women's birth-giving has been related variously to the NDE, and that Ring has described one woman's NDE in childbirth as paralleling a shamanic initiation. I would like to develop his theme from a midwife-as-shaman perspective. As is well known it is the business of the shaman to enter and exit transpersonal alterity-scapes while in ecstatic trance or shamanic flight (thought to be concomitant with the worlds of death by the locals). Michael Harner, a Western

⁷ For example, I find a fascinating parallel in Lois Paul's (1975) study of Guatemalan midwives and my participant's narratives. She says this of the neophyte midwife's visionary journeys: "Her visions assume cosmic proportions as they take shape in the iconic form of supernatural beings. Through these culturally available symbols — the transcendent authority figures — cosmic mysteries are brought under control. They are reduced to the level of domestic tasks by the reassuring lessons in obstetrics imparted by the spirit midwives. In her dreams the nascent midwife does the role-playing that substitutes for apprenticeship. Struggling during her own 'rebirth' to overcome her fright and passivity, to mobilize her inner resources and actualize her predestined role, the woman accomplishes for herself what the Cuna shaman does to facilitate a difficult childbirth, expressing 'otherwise inexpressible psychic states' (Levi-Strauss 1963) in the symbolic forms of her culture" (1975:465). Levi-Strauss must be read here with caution. See chapter 2 and Edith Turner's comments on his term 'myth'.

shaman and anthropologist, has also noted the overlap between spiritual practice and death:

The shaman's journey starts with an experience of going through a tunnel of some kind, usually with a light at the end, and this is very similar to descriptions of the so-called near-death experiences. But the shaman goes all the way through the tunnel and explores the world that people feel themselves passing into at the time of death (1987: 5–6).

What is perhaps less well known is the profound and complex relationship between female midwife/shamans, birth, death and alterity-scapes found in many cultures. Midwives too can fly into hyper-space in the service of birth-giving women (e.g. Potter 1974, Paul and Paul 1975). Initiation-like experiences can come through the encounter with death in the psychic and biological 'dismemberment' of labour, which opens a culturally imagined alterity-scape to them and where they establish psychic connections with ancestor spirits during their abortive or near-abortive reproductive crises. An example of this kind of phenomenon is noted by Carol Laderman who writes that Malaysian women in "the last extremities" of childbirth can be assisted by beneficent "supernatural presences" known as the "Seven Celestial Midwives" (1983:132). She tells of a woman alone suffering days of labour when:

Suddenly seven beautiful smiling ladies descended from the sky. They eased her pain, delivered her baby, and washed the mother and child. When they had finished, they ascended once more to *kayangan* (etymologically) Siva's heaven (1983:132).

Women's birthing here is a cosmological event linking her labour to a Hindu heaven (contact with 'heaven' is generally reserved for the posthumous condition). Importantly it is most frequently the devastations of child mortality (an encounter with death for the surviving mother), which initiate women into their careers as

midwives, ritual specialists, or shamans. The “possession sickness” observed by Harvey among Korean female shamans began with a series of stillbirths (1980) and Paul and Paul (1975) describe similar patterns among Guatemalan midwives. Potter writes that three Cantonese *mann seag phox* (shamans) began their careers after the deaths of up to six children:

In each case the woman became a shaman only after a severe crisis — the death of several children, of her husband, or both. After her traumatic loss, each of the women was visited in her dreams by her children’s spirits, who urged her to become a shaman. [Deceased children, who mediate between their mother and the supernatural world, are essential to the career as a spirit medium] ... Usually the struggle between the unwilling woman and her insistent children goes on for some time. As the pressure on the woman increases, she suffers attacks of seeming madness, during which she jumps around the house, leaps on top of tables, answers questions nonsensically, and so on. Finally the reluctant candidate appears to die, and she must choose between becoming a spirit medium and dying permanently (1974:226).

I.M. Lewis, following the classic work by Shirokogoroff (1935), has asserted that the shaman’s career begins with an unsolicited, unpredictable, and uncontrolled “initial traumatic experience” (1986: 88). Shirokogoroff called this uncontrolled possession state a psychosis that eventually had to be “mastered” (1935:366). For Lewis, this initial traumatic connection with a spirit-world then *evolves* into the capacity for intentional “mystical flight and other ‘out of body experiences’” (Lewis 1986:88).

Therefore we can say that what starts out as a birthing-giving crisis (e.g. loss of children, near-death, dissociation, intense pain) can include a recapitulation of her own birth trauma, which can approximate an NDE or, the ‘shamanic crisis’ (see also Grof 1977, 1998). The chaotic ‘shamanic crisis’ is then honed over time into a therapeutic manoeuvre which combines access to a cosmological alterity-scape via spiritual flight and/or the capacity of the shaman to “permanently” incarnate her

spirits (Lewis 1986:85).⁸ These ideas give further credence to Ring's alignment of mystical consciousness provoked through meditative practices with the NDE. Indeed from the perspective offered here it is possible to argue that consciousness practices developed from the complex overlap between perinatal trauma and NDEs.

The following, from Potter's study of Cantonese shaman/midwives, shows the integral elegance of a culturally shaped, and well-honed shamanistic complex, a condensed experience, fusing actual reproduction, perinatal dynamics, 'shamanistic crisis', and *imaginal* alterity into beautiful symmetry, all three levels of what Grof calls the holotropic mind.⁹ Thus, "She jerked spasmodically and mumbled incoherent phrases. Then she started to sing a stylized, rhythmic chant, as her familiar spirits [the souls of her own dead children] possessed her and led her soul upward, away from the phenomenal world into the heavens. Their destination was the Heavenly Flower Gardens" (1974:208). In the Cantonese paradise there are four Heavenly Flower Gardens, which are linked to earthly women's uteri. Every living person is represented by a potted flowering plant tended by two female deities; it is they who strengthen children or allow them to die. "When a woman conceives a child, a heavenly flower is planted in one of the small gardens, and a seed is sent down from heaven into the uterus of the woman" (1974:13). The shaman flies into this culturally prescribed alterity-scape specifically to "inspect the flowers", (1974:214) to reconnoitre the condition of her earthly client's uterus and its reproductive potential.

Thus shaman/midwives can utilise culturally refined altered states of conscious to engage the (felt to be) autonomous spirit-world of their ancestors; human birthing bodies fused with generative cosmic bodies.¹⁰ These worlds are concomitant with the

⁸ In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition the current Dalai Lama is said to be an incarnation of *Avolokiteshvara*, a form of *Amitabha*, one of five *Tathagata* Buddhas.

⁹ The three levels in Grof's cartography are biographical, perinatal and transpersonal (1992)

¹⁰ After Kitzinger's "body cosmologies" (1982:198).

posthumous landscape - a theme portrayed succinctly in the title of Alma Gottlieb's recent work: *The Afterlife Is Where We Come From* (2004). These perspectives suggest that the realm of death and the living womb somehow interpenetrate. The psychic reach of the shaman/midwife could extend into another world, the realm of the ancestors, in an effort to ensure the near-born a place in the touchable world. Again there are some parallels between this complex and my participants' events.

Slipping into the Great Mother

There is also a widespread pattern of male ritual and trance specialists (shamans) engaging in the crises of obstructed birthing to consider (in this chapter I would also like to reconsider Tausigg 1993 and Kevin's account from chapter 2). These practices have been reported in many cultures on all continents from India to Australia, the Middle East to South America, Africa to Siberia; they are found in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and New Zealand. The following is Laderman's description of the magical reproductive manoeuvres of the Cuna Indians of Panama (originally made famous by Claude Levi-Strauss in his analysis of a chant sung by a male Cuna shaman to a woman dangerously obstructed in birthing):

The labouring woman is sick because Mu, the power that forms the fetus, has captured her soul. The shaman must send his own soul into the spirit-world to wrest the sick woman's soul from Mu and her daughters. The battleground is neither in the sky nor in some invisible dimension, but within the pregnant woman's uterus, a world peopled with threatening animals and powerful spirits. Thus, in the Cuna song, the macrocosm has become the microcosm, the unseen universe is contained within a woman's genitals (Laderman 1983:145).

However, according to Michael Taussig, the shaman does not actually enter the women's body/womb at all - but a mimetic copy, a spirit-double of her body (1993:120). The shaman enters the womb of the spirit-double of the woman to work

on the copy thereby affecting the human body (1993:121). In fact, he says there is yet a further set of mimetics simultaneously operating in Cuna cosmology; that of the Great Mother and the woman's spirit body (fused with her earthly body). He cites Chapin, "during pregnancy a woman's soul or spirit body is one with the cosmos itself" (1993:121). This also gives the impression of layered spirit worlds, the *Matryoshka* (Russian nesting dolls), the three bodies or sheaths (*koshas*) of Vedantic lore (causal body, subtle body, and gross body) sometimes described as onion rings (Wilber 1998) or perhaps the Buddhist *Dharmakaya*, *Sambhogakaya*, and *Nirmanakaya*.

As Taussig puts it "the womb is of importance not merely for reproduction but also for the transformation of the level of reality that the chant evokes". The womb he says, "is the switchboard of the male magician's reality-control apparatus" (1993:123). The spiritual landscape alters suddenly and we find ourselves lost, he says, in a transgressive moment that creates "mimetic slippage" through the "gates of repression of the secretly familiar, the origin of the world, the home of all homes, the (great) mother's genitals" (1993:122) thereby precipitating a metamorphosis of reality (1993:126).

The instability of consciousness, the "sudden alteration in the plane of reality of the referent occurs precisely at the moment of the evocation of the womb" (1993:123). The womb can be seen as the gateway to trans/personal consciousness and alterity-scapes, which are in effect *imaginal* womb worlds - spirit simulacra, luminous body cosmologies; heavens that are ontological realities in themselves.

Buddha's Luminous Womb

A similar, and perhaps more familiar, cultural motif of the male 'spiritual-midwife' doing business with a cosmic womb is found in Tibetan Buddhist Lamaism (Tibetan

cosmology, because it specifically links its consciousness practices to the afterlife and reincarnation has been a religious tradition of great interest to transpersonalists and NDE researchers alike (Grof 1994,1998:199-213, Bache 2000, Carr 1995). According to the *Bardo Thodol* or the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* meditation practice reaches its experiential zenith in the experience of the *Dharmakaya* (primary clear light) also known as *Tathagatagarba*, which is translated variously as *Buddha Mind*, *Buddha Womb* and *Buddha Embryo* (Gross 1994:186-189), which can equate to the posthumous condition, even if achieved in life through meditation (e.g. Carr 1995).

Religious scholar Christopher Bache, who has explored the perinatal relationship with NDEs in some experiential depth, writes that, “Vajrayana Buddhism provides us with a striking example of a spiritual tradition choosing metaphors of the womb to describe the textures of spiritual awakening” (2000:293). He then asks the question, “Is calling enlightenment the “Buddha womb” or the “womb of the mother consort” devoid of psychological significance? Doesn’t the choice of these powerful images reflect the perception that a deep natural (and nonreductionistic) connection exists between birth and spiritual awakening?”

Likely it does, I think, but it also strongly affirms our present investigation into the relationship between NDEs, shamanic crisis, body-cosmologies and shamanistic midwifery. Here I will draw attention to some similar patterns in Cuna and Cantonese midwifery with that of Tibetan Lamaism (a hybrid of indigenous Bon shamanism and Indian Buddhism). Permit me to develop the theme with a few points: as noted in many cultures the shaman figure begins his/her career with an initiatory crisis. The shaman having survived death by accident and initiation has explored the demonic underworld realm and the sky-world and learned from the experience the cause and cure of illness. It is well known that demonic hosts set upon the Buddha himself just

before his enlightenment and this constitutive enactment is reiterated in ritual throughout the Buddhist world (e.g. Kapferer 1986:193). Halifax observes that, “shamanic motifs, such as dismemberment, being devoured by demons, supernatural ascents and flights” are commonly found in the practice of Tibetan Lamaism (1982:37) and that shamanistic crises have a relationship to biological birth (1979:75).

Indo-Tibetan cosmology comes fully laden with both intrauterine and death imagery; indeed some Tibetan texts (Sgam.po.pa 1971:63-66) elaborate in great detail the challenges of prenatal development and birth (Grof 1998:92 and see Gross 1994: 83 for a feminist perspective). Transpersonal anthropologist Charles Laughlin, a Buddhist monk of seven years, demonstrates how perinatal experience, related to shamanism and NDEs, can arise in *Vajrayana* practices:

It has not yet been generally recognized the experience of the womb and birth scenes spontaneously arise during meditation, particularly when the meditation is carried out in an intense retreat situation. The author recalls once meditating on the breath (*anapanasati*) in a straight-backed chair when a tunnel arose in the visual field at the end of which was a light which grew brighter and more intense (accompanied by a flow of energy in his body). When the climax of the experience had passed, he found himself lying on the floor in a fetal position with arms and legs twitching and in a state of confusion (1990:156).

In Tibetan cosmology birth is located as one of the six intermediate states or *bardos*, which exist after death and before rebirth (Evan-Wentz 1960 but see Carr 1995). The lama works to magically ‘midwife’ the recently deceased but now incarnating person, into a birth among benevolent parents. The deceased has entered the “door of the womb” (located in alterity), after being drawn toward his/her copulating parents and thus has taken rebirth (e.g. Evans Wentz 1960:175-179 and see Campbell 1990:186).

Here again we see an interpenetrating amalgam of perinatal memory, shamanic crisis, and spirit-wombs, which may well suggest that the highly refined consciousness expanding practices of Tibetan Buddhist Lamaism reflect yet another cultural expression of the similar psychic amalgam found in the Cantonese and Cuna examples, which condense perinatal traumata, shamanistic crisis, and the NDE, into their sacred mind-worlds. Compare, for example, the similarities between the following statements, the first from Taussig's study of Cuna shamanism and the second from Anna Klein's study of the *Great Bliss Queen* in the Tibetan/Bonpo tradition:

The mother's vagina was transformed into a golden tunnel through which the genipa people would travel when called by the medicine men, and her breath became a golden wind to speed them on their canoes made from the lips of her vagina (Taussig 1993:113).

The womb expresses the ultimate spiritual discovery ... In Buddhist traditions, for example, the womb "expanse of reality" is a ubiquitous matrix, participating in and pervading all that is born from it (Klein 1995:178).

In these trans/formed perspectives, the world is a luminous womb continuous with women's bodies. We have already shown how, in the Cuna Indian example, the woman's body is sheathed by several Other luminous spirit bodies, and in the Cantonese and Malaysian versions the female uterus extends all the way to Paradise.¹¹ 'Shamans' in all three examples, with some cultural variation, utilise non-ordinary states of consciousness that suggest a system of midwifery which has compressed biographical trauma (traumatic birth-giving and child-mortality) with perinatal trauma (the woman's own perinatal memories) and transpersonal spirit worlds into their culture specific variations. Again, Grof's perinatal transpersonalism overlaps, in a

¹¹ In the Malay version Paradise also extends to the womb.

similar way, all three levels and would suggest that these 'levels' coexist in a complex condition of interpenetration.

A Zygotic Alterity

At this juncture I would like to re-present (after a long re-visionary journey) an excerpt from Kevin's story (chapter 2) and his brush with alterity. The following is from a narrative recounted by a young man (25 years) of European descent. The event he describes occurs soon after the conception of his child - he was 19 at the time.

“When Mali was a tiny foetus I had this vision that a new universe was being born.

[Interviewer] “Really ... when she was really tiny ... how beautiful”

Kevin: “It screwed with my mind”

[Interviewer] Were you out of it [colloquialism for 'stoned']?

Kevin: “No”

[Interviewer] “Dreaming?”

Kevin: “No”

[Interviewer] “It was a vision?”

Kevin: “Yeah. I guess I felt like I knew that it must be a whole new universe. It was like I was walking around inside of her”

[Interviewer hesitantly] “So ... the world had become Mali”?

Kevin: “Yeah. I was like inside Mali and every body had become Mali ... then I had this really weird death experience. We had been working building and we were having a cigarette at the end of the day and some guy came up from next door and to me he was another version of my daughter and I freaked out and blacked out. I fainted. I thought I was

dying. But I remember just before that happened the light of the sun changed slightly it was like a hallucination - looking around everything was slightly different, people became superimposed on their image, it wasn't like a real image anymore, it changed slightly. Very unsettling ... I did not know what was going on (laughs). That threw me ... after that I had a whole series of episodes around life, death and birth. I eventually was hospitalised for psychosis. But it doesn't really matter to me what others have said. That was the most sacred experience I have ever had".

In my informant's own words a "whole new universe", an idiosyncratic alterity-scape, was secretly born, with a trick of the light the geography of consciousness becomes unstable and we oscillate between worlds as an *imaginal* world begins to superimpose its image onto the 'ordinary' one. Furthermore, he does not quite identify with the child-in-utero but enters the mother's womb *and* his daughter's foetal body, he is now sheathed within the body of the unborn, sheathed by the mother, where he sits pregnant with images – worlds en-wombed. And suddenly the whole phenomenal world flips-out and somehow becomes the body of his unborn child in whose body he now wanders alongside other versions of his unborn daughter - a hatchling spiritual landscape has wobbled into imaginal existence - a "vision" - catalysed, in my informant's words, by pregnancy.

Ends

Clearly these three fathers have experienced spiritual emergencies with NDE, UFO and shamanic properties. I agree that 'shamanism' (as a Western category) is wed to NDEs, however, if we are going to compare the "deep structure" of shamanistic crisis with NDEs, then we should not bypass 'women's business' in this regard. I think we

must also explore shamanism and its functions against its wider cosmic, ritual and gendered landscapes. Moreover bringing the culturally submerged transpersonal states of fatherhood and male procreativity into the picture as a category of transpersonal psychology and NDE studies could have interesting implications for both disciplines. In particular this research could contribute to the arena of transpersonal developmental schemas; and the controversies between Grof and Wilber or Washburn and Wilber (see Wilber 1998, Rothberg and Kelly *et al* 1998 and Bache 2000:287-294). The untidy amalgam of birth, sex and death, conjoined with their biographical, perinatal and transpersonal attributes and the interpenetrative nature of these phenomena suggest remarkable similarities to Grof's observations (1985, 1998).

Certainly these men's stories have created many questions for me, and call for more research and a further exploration of NDEs or NDE-like experiences generated around birthing. What is it that catalyses this kind of experience in some fathers and not others? Are they environmentally mediated, or beyond culture, and, is there such a thing as 'beyond culture'? Can they be weighed in terms of intensity; should they be? Are these experiences isolated events or are there more of them out there? Are they the first peel of the onion or the last; are they a complete gestalt or part of a greater unfolding system? Are they 'regressions' to archaic levels of the psyche, psychotic reactions, or healing events in the species mind (e.g. Bache 2000)? Are these happenings to be deemed shamanic NDE events or something else?

Questions aside, there is still, I would argue, an intriguing relationship between birth and 'death' observed in Cuna, Tibetan, Cantonese, Malay, and Guatemalan spiritual midwifery practices that, in a fledgling way, some of my participants' experiences seem to parallel, and this *is* significant. Perhaps in a more transpersonally sophisticated world, (or a small-scale tribal culture) one with adequate cultural and

linguistic niches to welcome, hold generously, and pile reflection, language, and artistic rendition upon these moments, then these experiences could be re-cognised as a form of 'initiation' - a potentially dangerous but transformative NDE-like moment which could, with the right exogenous support, be honed into a fruitful transpersonal practice.

NDE studies and transpersonal psychology have been linked together by Ring (1976), Grof (1985) Bache (2000) and many others. Ring has asserted that NDEs are not proof of an after-life and that they relate to the mystical experiences and consciousness-expanding techniques of various cultures. These mystical experiences, as I have shown, are profoundly related to psycho-socially constructed origin 'mythologies' and the vast array of origin mythologies specifically relate birth and death to cosmic bodies e.g. Buddha's womb. If we are not researching the other side of life (when we peer into the NDE) then we are perhaps researching the ceiling of consciousness — alterity-scapes — and their socially imaged spaces. This research would suggest that the study of enlightenment-as-alterity and its deep but largely hidden relationship to birth-giving, perinatal traumas and ecstasies, NDEs and shamanism calls, at least, for further inquiry.

Conclusions

To study transpersonal events in consciousness among fathering males is a 'state specific' research aim. I have shown in chapters 3 and 4 that earlier research epochs in anthropology were not epistemologically capable of researching what I am calling transpersonal phenomena because, basically speaking, transpersonal states of consciousness were removed from the field of study in the modernist epoch. Psychoanalysis is useful to a degree especially when it is re-evaluated to take into consideration the perinatal and transpersonal dimensions of the psyche.

Feminists who have studied the field of birth have not specifically been interested in the fathers' experience and show a bias in their accounts against male birthing rituals. I believe that I have amassed enough evidence to overturn the thesis of universal womb envy and universal male impotence, and the idea that fathers entered birthing sites because of womb envy as some feminists feared.

The narratives of some local birthing fathers, mothers and midwives coupled with library research show that the 1960s counter-culture did influence birthing attitudes and practices in America and among *some* New Zealanders and that this was concomitant with sweeping spiritual and political movements of the times. Several statements in chapter 7 by local people attest to the counter-cultural ethos among a sub-group of New Zealanders.

Given that mine was a relatively small research group, I should note that it was not difficult to collect information pointing in this direction, especially from people of the baby-boom generation. This is not to say that earlier birth reform movements, like the

efforts of the Parents Centres, did not play their part, but these efforts were certainly swelled by the political and religious ethos of the times (see chapter 1 and appendix 1). A study of generation X or Y and their relationship to death and birth would be another specific research area to pursue, and one that could use this thesis as a resource and basis for comparison.

When the father's 'peak experience' itself became a politicised sign of counter-cultural values (which I have argued it was), then it becomes difficult to ascertain whether its symbols exist a priori or are multi-levelled, self-generated, healing systems – autonomic symbol-making predicated on environmental demands and needs. The peak experience may simply be a natural response to birth-giving among *some* people but the 'peak experience' as a linguistic device, as a reality-shaping transpersonal and counter-cultural artefact, carries with it a historical impulse to radically break down the egoic structures of modernity and as an attack on what some researchers call the 'separate Cartesian ego'. I would also conclude (see chapters 1 and 8) that fathers' presence at birth in New Zealand and America was tied in some way to the Vietnam War and the strong protest movements of those times.

This thesis has shown that fathers can and do have transpersonal experiences at birth. Furthermore, imaged socio-political and hybridizing spiritual spaces such as 'cosmic unity' did play a role in the process of contesting birth and this issued directly from the natural/therapeutic sub-culture. It appears that birth can somehow catalyse psychological processes found in ritual or meditation for some mothers and, perhaps more surprisingly, some fathers – as noted in the sections on *death* and *associative comprehension*. Why

others do not experience these ritual effects would, again, call for another comprehensive research project.

Clearly for *some* men, transpersonal phenomena were part of their experience, while for others transpersonal events actually defined their birthing experience. Not all fathers spoke of transpersonal phenomena. More than half of the forty men did. However almost *all* fathers spoke to me, in one way or another, of a meaningful brush with death evoked over the duration of the pre and perinatal episode. An encounter with death can be a doorway into existential and transpersonal insights.

To briefly review: a lot was said about death in chapters 8 and 9. From the interviews and anecdotal material I gathered, a number of associations to death, impermanence, mortality, and ancestry were made. Some men described their experiences of being present at birth as having a similar “energetic” feeling to that of being with a loved one at death. Several reports of out-of-body experience, dissociation, ordeal, and comparisons to LSD use were made, as were comparisons with spiritual states of consciousness and “peak experiences” in which the dichotomy between life and death was felt to be momentarily erased. Some transpersonal comprehensions seemed to occur in this encounter with death. Several men had NDEs triggered by a powerful sense of dying and being reborn.

Another possible way of interpreting this death experience (although I feel I have touched on this in various ways) is that birth simply awakens in some men an experience of acute or primary *fear* and helplessness that is so overpowering that it is felt and experienced by fathers to be an encounter with death.

Because chapters 5 and 6 re-evaluate the couvade practices of Western fathers, it may also be possible to re-evaluate more traditional ritual practices as attempts by fathers to magically assuage death and protect their partners and children. I agree strongly with Reed (2005) that the concept of couvade has been used by Europeans to distance themselves from what they saw as 'primitive' and that these biases have coloured the research on the couvade by psychoanalysis, anthropology and feminism.

Two further hypotheses emerged from my research. The first has four assumptions: A) Birthing awakens in men a confrontation with their own perinatal and transpersonal dimensions of the psyche. B) This would mean that 'spiritual emergencies', encounters with death or psychopathology could emerge around reproduction with some observable repetition. C) Over time, if this was recognised as a recurring theme, in various cultures, then those cultures might create rituals to protect men from this overwhelming psychological process. D) This would suggest that couvade rituals were a way of canalizing/channelling these energies around the event of the birth of children, or, as a way to protect men and fathers from the 'magical' forces of dangerous spiritual 'pollution'. This is to ask, "Is the assault on the male-ego a possible explanation for the widespread taboo on men's presence at birthing...a cultural mechanism to protect men's sense of self and ego? Do the couvade rituals then marshal and engender a sense of power in men, a belief that they are somehow in control of the birth? This almost harkens back to psychoanalytic theories that couvade rituals and the religions they are embedded in are defence mechanisms. My problem with this is that ego-death in many religious formations is seen as a positive and useful happening although admittedly dangerous and psychologically taxing. These are questions that deserve greater attention.

Another pertinent hypothesis might be this: because perinatal and transpersonal/participatory events emerge for fathers (something like a spiritual emergency or shamanic crisis) and are construed as 'healing', 'empowering', or charismatic powers 'vouchsafed by god' then again, this could conceivably contribute to male rituals that utilise this imagery and reproduce this charisma as part of the magical performances and increase ceremonies surrounding reproduction.

I imagine that to study transpersonal events among fathering males would certainly not be the prime interest of many researchers. I have openly acknowledged that there are many ways to study fathers-at-birth and that transpersonal anthropology is only one of them. Because childbirth, like death, is such a contested and sensitive issue among human beings I know that my research interests will not match up with all ideas around birth. I am also aware that not all fathers would have such events and not all researchers would be interested if they did. Nevertheless this research has shown that such events do occur, therefore, such events should not be ignored. Since transpersonal events are, in fact, the focus of my research then I cannot ignore the grounded research produced by academics interested in the field of transpersonal psychology. Again transpersonal psychology and anthropology may not be the best tool for researching fathers-at-birth but it is an important research tool and body of literature (if at times problematic) when it comes to transpersonal states. Finally I surmise that this research has done two things: that it has modestly advanced the field of transpersonal studies and, in some way, furthered the study of fathers at birth.

Appendix 1

The Attack of the 'Flower People'

In a decade devoted to excess and oddity, LSD and the movement it spawned stood apart as one of the oddest and most misunderstood episodes ... you could sense the confusion that LSD had created in the scientific community, when, using it as a deep probe into the unconscious, it had stirred up something that looked very much like their arch enemy, the mystic religious experience. What did it mean if all it took was 300 millionths of a gram of LSD and you could produce the most profound sort of religious experience in carpet salesmen and dentists? The real problem wasn't that the science story had turned into a religion story, it was that religion had somehow turned into a cultural revolt (Stevens 1987:18-19).

On October 21, 1967, the Pentagon found itself besieged by a motley army of anti-war demonstrators. For the most part, the fifty thousand protestors were made up of activist academics and students, men of letters ... New left and pacifist ideologues, housewives, doctors ... but also in attendance, we are informed (by the *East Village Other*) were contingents of "witches, warlocks, holymen, seers, prophets, mystics, saints, sorcerers, shamans, troubadours, minstrels, bards, roadmen, and madmen"— who were on hand to achieve the "mystic revolution". The picketing, the sit-down, the speeches, the marches: all that day was protest politics as usual. But the central event of the day was a contribution by the "superhumans", an exorcism of the Pentagon by long-haired warlocks who "cast mighty words of white light against the demon controlled structure," in hopes of levitating that grim ziggurat right off the ground (Roszak 1968:124).

Most dramatic were the political protests that began with the civil rights crusade, expanded into student opposition to the Vietnam War, and diversified later into movements for ecology, women's liberation, ethnic diversity, and gay rights. Beneath these political movements ran a strong spiritual current (Chinnen 1996:14).

Mind-world as Hermeneutic

The complex relationship between the religious aspect of the counter-culture, the father's participation in birthing, LSD, and the transpersonal movement has not yet been articulated. It is a macrocosm to microcosm relationship that I will attempt to outline here - a story of worldviews. Worldviews among West African peoples are often depicted as a sacred egg, a womb-like world that envelops and gives life and rhythm to the people in their eternally returning journey through time and space (Kalu 2001). Kalu says that such worldviews are "precarious" visions that are at once "fragile, enfolding and nurturing". Grounded in sacred origins, they imbue an almost numinous order which, when properly followed and understood, can "ensure a miracle, namely that this seemingly fragile frame has the capacity to sustain so many and so much activity" (2001:228-29).

"Worldview", he says "is the hermeneutic". Following this idea I will draw attention to the cultural context surrounding the birth of a sacred mind-world - the transpersonal cosmos as macrocosm and father's birth enactment as its 'proper' microcosmic activity. I will explore a group of overlapping cultural currents that are bound together in their commitment to reality/s beyond modernity. First the social context, Jorge Ferrer (2002:5-6), writes that:

Historically, the transpersonal orientation emerged out of the encounter between Western psychology — psychoanalytic, Jungian, humanistic, and existentialist schools in particular — eastern contemplative traditions — especially Zen, Advita Vedanta, and Taoism — and the psychedelic counterculture of California in the 1960s ... The coming to the West of these and other Eastern traditions, together with the interest in consciousness and altered states triggered by the widespread use of psychedelics, paved the way for the birth of the transpersonal movement in the California of the late 1960s.

I believe the same currents that gave birth to transpersonal movement also paved the way for the counter-medicalised birth movement, which includes the father (now in New Zealand sometimes fathers, grandparents, sisters, mothers, brothers, uncles, friends, children) the same social forces alive in the counter-culture found *one* expression in the father joining the birthing woman. This co-operative, at times communal, and participatory movement is co-emergent with a hatchling transpersonal vision, which, while not strictly religious in a traditional sense, certainly carried the “moods and motivations” (after Geertz 1973) of religion, but more, it was at the same time, outrageously ‘religious’. I believe couples birthing *together* was a very obvious choice motivated by, and a way of reinforcing, this transpersonal sensitivity.

Rosemarie Anderson, in *Transpersonal Research Methods* (1998) writes:

Experimenting with psychedelics was commonplace. American culture rocked with voices of conflict and derision. Fresh, even fabulous, perspectives rushed in, as if replacing a vacuum. Ancient spiritual lineages, notably those from the East, were openly discussed and explored, and young people went particularly to Asia to explore things for themselves. In the context of this vigorous sorting out and shifting of new ideas and values, the field of transpersonal psychology began in rather humble ways ... this transpersonal vanguard was ‘epicentred’ in northern California (Anderson 1998:xix).

Anderson speaks of a cultural religious revival, triggered by psychedelic use and the embrace of Eastern spiritual lineages. These are the very same lineages the transpersonal movement aligned itself with in its effort to reframe the meaning of civilisation. However, Robert McDermott, in *Transpersonal Worldviews: Historical and Philosophical Reflections* (1993) draws our attention to the way in which the transpersonal orientation is also “intelligible and significant within the context of Romanticism” and the participative ethos of Goethe, Coleridge, Emerson, William James and Rudolf Steiner (McDermott 1993:206 see also Tarnas 1991, Heron 1996

and Ferrer 2002). In what follows McDermott acknowledges the central point - which I believe is a question of blended worldviews, in particular, the blending of Romanticism and Buddhism.

While the transpersonal movement has been informed and inspired by peak experiences of virtually all religious traditions, it not surprisingly has drawn most comfortably from Buddhist theory and practice. With almost all forms of Buddhism, transpersonalism tends to value healing practices in response to *dukkha* (the pain of existence) without attachment to a particular ontology (1993: 208). The transformative power of all forms of Romanticism — and the potential transformative power of its latest expression, turn-of-the-millennium transpersonalism — resides primarily in this commitment to the practice of thinking that is essentially artistic and reality-shaping. (1993: 210).

Such was the zeal of the reality-shaping, anti-modernity sentiments in health and in therapeutic psychology that the ‘transpersonal’ domain of research and education blossomed. It follows that there must have been enough grass-roots interest to create such a movement. Seen through this transpersonal lens, the birth of a child is an act of the cosmos in a non-dichotomous partnership with human beings which renders birth irreducible to either. Birth is a product of a mysterious conjunction between women, men, offspring and the cosmos – it is a holistic process. Generalising; this ‘coming into being’ then, is a transpersonal concern that has pre-incarnate origins often depicted as the ‘ground of being’ and linked to a project that involves the evolution of consciousness (e.g. Heron 1992, Wade 1996, Bache 2000, Washburn 2004, Wilber 1998, Grof 1998).

Origins, Kalu suggests, define appropriate ritual activity (2001). Transpersonalised birth then, requires fealty to proper activity so that the miracle of sustainability (life) occurs. ‘Who will’, and ‘how to’ correctly support the birthing mother, ‘how to’, and ‘who will’, greet and touch the child, and ‘how’ and ‘what’ are the proper ‘obstetrical

manoeuvres' that will sustain life and the ongoing cycles of life? As we will see an opposition between 'the Enlightenment' of dominant modernity and a subaltern culture paying enthusiastic homage to a Romantic/Buddhist enlightenment made birth (as the locus of origin and cultural reproduction) a precarious site indeed.

Ergot's Long Strange Trip

I have argued that contemporary fathers did not arrive at birthing out of so-called womb envy. Did then, their arrival suggest an obstetrical manoeuvre? If we follow the logic I have presented and the logic of the 'natural birth' movement, and later, the larger and more politically muscular 'alternate birthing' movement – then the answer, I suggest, is yes. As noted by several commentators, the alternate birth movements place fathers as part of an emotional, physical, sexual, psychological, symbolic and/or spiritual obstetrical team whose presence was thought to help to alleviate distress and relax birthing mothers (e.g. Kitzinger 1964, Tanzer 1976, Gaskin 1977, Heggenhougen 1980, Romalis 1981:26-28, Bates and Turner 2003).

In this section I will define this process as yet another example of post-modern sorcery and yet another subtle demonisation at the site of birth. I will show how the Western medical system was inverted into the position of the 'demonic' and how this was also related to the introduction of LSD-25 into the Western world, its relationship to Buddhist principles, the 'nature movement' and the father's birth revolution. I will argue here that the religious category of 'purity' is ascribed to a new hybrid religious system which claims superior status over demonic technology.

We have explored in chapter 3 how anthropologists became interested in how certain plant hallucinogens and their psychotropic properties converged in, and informed, the religious mind-worlds of the cultures they studied (e.g. Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971, Harner et al 1973, Myerhoff 1974). In the same way I think it is of

some anthropological significance that such substances were introduced into Western culture and that the widespread use of psychedelics among the youth-culture seemed to have catalysed an unabashed fealty to radical, novel, and profoundly somatic forms of 'religious' experience including a re-sacralised somatic relationship to 'mother-nature'. I want to get under the skin of LSD ontology, and show three things 1) its relationship with Eastern religion, 2) its relationship with Romantic nature worship, and, 3) when these are combined, their relationship to paternal birthing rituals. I will first explore the botanical dimension, the Buddhist mission, chart the itinerary of LSD and its psychotropic action, and finally, explore the massive shift in values reflected in what is commonly called the counter-culture.

Ethno-Botanicals

Some of the earliest known drugs used in childbirth by medical obstetricians included opium or laudanum to accelerate cervical dilation and ease women's suffering. Tobacco infusions were also used for dilation and ergot (*Claviceps Purpurea*), a fungus-derived drug, to stimulate contractions and stop post-partum haemorrhage (Leavitt 1986:44,144-147). Wertz and Wertz write: "Ergot also quickens the expulsion of the placenta and stems haemorrhage by compelling the uterus to contract" (1977:66). Anne Oakley points out, following Mead and Newton (1967), that long before the rise of male medicalised obstetrical practice, midwives had been intervening in the hazardous aspects of childbirth with various herbal remedies and their ability to stimulate the uterus have been recognised by many traditional cultures, "as have the oxytocic effect of breast stimulation, orgasm and human semen".

According to Oakley, the most widely used of nature's oxytocins in midwifery was ergot which was used as *magica materia* by "wisewomen across Europe for centuries" (1984:194-195). Ergot was been associated with medieval European witchcraft in a

number of different ways, for example, out-breaks of ergot poisoning, or ergotism, were a widespread occurrence since ergot bacteria grows on the rye grasses whose grains were stored and used for making bread. Whole villages were ravaged by ergot poisoning from infected bread leading to rumours of possession and witchery. *St Anthony's Fire*, as it was called, was related to ergot's hallucinatory powers which were often attributed to witches (midwives). St Anthony became the patron saint of ergot affliction because of his hallucinatory ordeals with demons (Sidky 1997:170).¹ Midwives are known to have administered ergot orally to labouring women as a magical blood-stopper, as a cure for post-partum bleeding (which as we have shown in chapter 5, is associated with the demonic realms in many traditional cultures).

Indeed, chemical agents early play an important role in the male birth revolution. In the first half of the 20th century, ether, chloroform and scopolamine had become the drugs of choice in obstetrics - the liberation from pain and suffering the reason (Wertz and Wertz 1989:150-154). Women could be liberated from the dictates of biology through the use of 'scope' and in a sense, divorce themselves from their bodies by handing over the reigns of responsibility to the doctor and his technological wizardry (Wertz and Wertz 1989, Leavitt 1986, Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997:10-11). However, while scopolamine² induced a kind of dissociative amnesia, it did not immobilise the women nor render them unconscious. They could scream, bite, run, and act like "wild animals", and horror stories spread of cruelty and physical violence (slapping, gagging, humiliations, strapping down) perpetrated upon them when 'under the influence' by hospital staff (Davis-Floyd & Sargent 1997:10-11). Fathers began to accompany their wives in an attempt to stop such abuses in the guise of the

¹ Sidky however makes no links to midwifery and witchcraft, which is strange, since ergot and midwifery are strongly associated and medieval midwives have been strongly linked to witchcraft (see chapter 3).

² A psychoactive alkaloid found in *Belladonna*.

'natural' birth movement. But this was only a trickle - the flow would come from the '60s and the hippies.

The Strange Seeds of Revolution

With the medical takeover, ergot's medicinal properties were appropriated from midwifery's 'folk' pharmacopoeia and relabelled by obstetricians (Oakley 1984:194). Indeed research into ergot's placentally interactive properties continued and, in the first half of the 20th century, a young Swiss research chemist, Albert Hoffman, in the search of a manageable cure for post-partum haemorrhage (ergot dosage was always risky, at times causing foetal death by premature placental clamping, a situation perhaps leading to charges of foul play made against midwives/witches) was engaged in isolating active alkaloids from ergot (he is also engaged in the age-old human process of aiding women in birth, through blood-clotting or, blood-stopping). Several years of research had elapsed when Hoffman had a *dream* (transpersonal event) telling him that he should re-test a compound isolated several years earlier, and one that had been gathering dust on the laboratory shelf ever since. Although he did not know it yet, the compound he had labelled as LSD-25 (*lysergic acid diethylamide*) was to become one of the most powerful psychoactive (and socially hyperactive) compounds known to human-kind. The chemical, as it happens, that was used by hippies to burn away the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy (Watts 1962) and the not very sexy spiritual imperialism of the Judeo-Christian patina (Stevens 1987), the chemical that empowered the counter-cultural uprising of the 'psychedelic '60s' – coincidentally, the same uprising which saw fathers refusing to be dichotomously and authoritatively separated from their sexual partners during childbirth. This passage is from Jay Stevens' aptly titled *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*:

The more thoroughly you study the sixties, the more comforting becomes a concept like *zeitgeist*. Strip away the decade's thick impasto of sex, drugs, rebellion, politics, music and art, and what you find is a restless imperative to change, a 'will to change,' if you will, and one that could be as explanatory for the latter half of this century as Nietzsche's 'will to power' was for the first. (1987:393).

In this counter-public's attack on the American Dream, a dream that itself was revolutionary, messianic, and unquestioned (Bellah 1976: 334) the 'heroic' American industrial war complex was recast as the "demonic", a technocratic nightmare on an apocalyptic bummer. Susan Sontag (1966), for example, was vehemently scathing toward American "power" calling it "indecent in scale", "barbarous", "lethal and outsized" having built itself on a "genocide" of the "resident ... colored population" and "the most brutal system of slavery ... which did not, in a single respect, recognise slaves as persons".

She says that the American hegemony threatens the lives of "countless millions" built on a "firmly installed *national psychosis*, founded, as are all psychoses, on the efficacious denial of reality" (my emphasis) (Sontag 1966:196). However, she then adds this statement:

I do find much promise in the activities of the young people. About the only promise one can find anywhere in this country today is the way some young people are carrying on, making a fuss. I include both their renewed interest in politics (as protest and as community action, rather than as theory) and the way they dance, dress, wear their hair, riot, make love. I also include the homage they pay to Oriental thought and rituals. And I include, not least of all, their interest in taking drugs (Sontag 1966:199).³

³In many traditions what counts for metaphysical order, is completely out-of-order for another system of thought. For example, Karen Armstrong writes that Muhammad's *miraj* or 'night journey', celebrated each year is of particular significance to the mystical Sufis. They felt that the Prophet's apotheosis or, "supreme vision", where Muhammad was guided by the archangel Gabriel through heaven and hell, marked the threshold of human knowledge. This transpersonal experience, held to be a defining one for Islam, enters the Western literary and religious history through Dante's *The Divine*

The Passion of the Western Mind

So what was it about LSD that was so compelling and why did it lend itself so easily to ‘Oriental’ mysticism? We can turn to the research of Dr Stanislav Grof for some of the answer. Grof’s psychedelic research is perhaps the most persuasively articulated body of work that we can draw from at this time (due to the American government’s panicked and draconian counter-measures - its ban on further research is now 40 years old). His extensive experience and research with literally thousands of volunteer participants and access to several thousand records of clinical LSD sessions can be used as a useful road-map to describe the basic kinds of things people in the counter-culture were experiencing.

Grof’s research is important on several counts for my arguments. His was legal, clinical, and long-term work with LSD; it also represents the most sophisticated perinatal research and exegesis available thus far. This research was also fundamental in co-creating the transpersonal movement and Grof’s career spans five decades and crosses several disciplinary boundaries from psychoanalysis, medicine, psychiatry, psychotherapy, anthropology and transpersonal philosophy. His research findings also have major implications for the study of epistemology, according to several transpersonal writers who have complemented his work with their own (Tarnas 1991, Bache 2000, Ferrer 2002).

Grof was on the ground floor of LSD research in 1956, as early as 1966 he presented his concept of ‘COEX systems’ to the International Congress of LSD Psychotherapy in Amsterdam (Grof 1985:186). His LSD cosmology is found in the 1972 *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, and an anthropological text, *Studies in Symbolism* (Lewis 1977) published by the London School of Economics, carried a

Comedy. However in an act “typical of Western schizophrenia” Dante places “the Prophet himself in the lowest circles of hell”! (1991:139).

chapter titled “The Implications of Psychedelic Research for Anthropology: Observations from LSD Psychotherapy”. I will devote this section to his research because of the implications for my overall arguments, but also as an academic researcher, a phenomenologist, and a professor of psychiatry at John’s Hopkins School of Medicine, his claims are harder to dismiss than some of the more flamboyant figures in the counter-culture.

Grof had been working in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s so the consciousness-expanding movement was well under way in California and New York by the time he immigrated to the USA in 1967. He was invited at the time to fill the position of Chief of Psychiatric Research at Maryland National Institute for Mental Health where he directed a programme for moribund cancer patients. A book written by Grof and co-researcher anthropologist (and now Buddhist teacher) Joan Halifax, outlines this profound and poignant work.⁴ Another research protocol was run with artists, teachers and health care professionals.

In the present context there is no better way to introduce Grof’s work than through Richard Tarnas’ *The Passion of The Western Mind* (1991) who in his epilogue, suggests that Grof’s findings may be the most important advance in the field of depth psychology since Freud and Jung and have far-reaching repercussions for the study of epistemology (what we can know). In the following he describes the birth sequence as it emerges in the psychedelic experience:

First, the archetypal sequence that governed the perinatal phenomena from womb through birth canal to birth was experienced above all as a powerful *dialectic* - moving from an initial state of undifferentiated unity to a

⁴ *The Human Encounter with Death* (1977) The book explores the psychedelic healing and research program instituted by the Spring Grove State Hospital later a part of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Centre. The program began its work to alleviate the suffering of dying patients in 1965 and Joan Halifax joined the program as co-therapist and anthropological consultant in 1972.

problematic state of constriction, conflict and contradiction, with an accompanying sense of separation, duality, and alienation; and finally moving through a state of complete annihilation, an unexpected redemptive liberation that both overcame and fulfilled the intervening alienated state - restoring the initial unity but on a new level that preserved the achievement of the whole trajectory.

Second this archetypal dialectic was often experienced simultaneously on both an individual level and, often more powerfully, a collective level, so that the movement from primordial unity through alienation to liberating resolution was experienced in terms of the evolution of an entire culture, for example, or of human kind as a whole - the birth of Homo sapiens out of nature no less than the birth of the individual child from the mother. Here personal and transpersonal were equally present, inextricably fused, so that ontogeny not only recapitulated phylogeny but in some sense opened out to it.

And third, this archetypal dialectic was experienced or registered in several dimensions - physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual - often more than one of these at a time, and sometimes simultaneously in complex combination. As Grof has emphasised, the clinical evidence suggests not that this perinatal sequence should be seen as simply reducible to the birth trauma; rather, it appears that the biological process of birth is itself an expression of a larger archetypal process that can manifest in many dimensions. Thus:

- In physical terms, the perinatal sequence was experienced as biological gestation and birth, moving from the symbiotic union with the all-encompassing nourishing womb, through a gradual growth of complexity and individuation within that matrix, to an encounter with the contracting uterus, the birth canal, and final delivery.
- In psychological terms, the experience was one of movement from an initial condition of undifferentiated pre-egoic consciousness to a state of increasing individuation and separation between self and the world, increasing existential alienation, and finally an experience of ego death followed by psychological rebirth; this was often complexly associated

with the biological experience of moving from the womb of childhood through the labour of life and the contraction of ageing to the encounter with death.

- On a religious level, this experiential sequence took a wide variety of forms, but especially frequent were the Judeo-Christian symbolic movement from the primordial Garden through the Fall, the exile into separation from divinity into the world of suffering and mortality, followed by the redemptive crucifixion and resurrection, bringing the reunion of the divine and the human. On an individual level, the experience of this perinatal sequence closely resembled — indeed, it appeared to be essentially identical to — the death-rebirth initiation of the ancient mystery religions.
- Finally, on a philosophical level, the experience was comprehensible in what might be called Neoplatonic-Hegelian-Nietzschean terms as a dialectical evolution from an archetypal structured primordial Unity, through an emanation into matter with increasing complexity, multiplicity, and individuation, through a state of absolute alienation — the death of God in both Hegel's and Nietzsche's senses — followed by a dramatic *Aufhebung*, a synthesis and reunification with self-subsistent being that both annihilates and fulfils the individual trajectory.

From the perspective suggested by this evidence, the fundamental subject-object dichotomy that has governed and defined modern consciousness — that has constituted modern consciousness, that has generally assumed to be absolute, taken for granted as the basis for any 'realistic' perspective and experience of the world — appears to be rooted in a specific archetypal condition associated with the unresolved trauma of human birth, in which an original consciousness of undifferentiated organismic unity with the mother, a *participation mystique* with nature, has been outgrown, disrupted and lost. Here, on both individual and collective levels, can be seen the source of the profound dualism of the modern mind: between man and nature, between mind and matter, between self and other, between experience and reality — that pervading sense of a separate ego

irrevocably divided from the encompassing world. Here is the painful separation from the timeless all-encompassing womb of nature, the development of human self consciousness, the expulsion from the Garden, the entrance into time and history and materiality, the disenchantment of the cosmos, the sense of total immersion in an antithetical world of impersonal forces. Here is the experience of the universe as ultimately indifferent, hostile, inscrutable. Here is the compulsive striving to liberate oneself from nature's power, to control and dominate the forces of nature, even to revenge oneself against nature. Here is the primal fear of losing control and dominance, rooted in the all encompassing fear of death — the inevitable accompaniment of the individual ego's emergence out of the collective matrix. But above all, here is the profound sense of the separation between self and world (1991:429-431).

Yet full experience of this double bind, of this dialectic between the primordial unity on the one hand and the birth labour and subject-object dichotomy on the other, unexpectedly brings fourth a third condition: a redemptive reunification of the individual self with the universal matrix. Thus the child is born and is embraced by the mother, the liberated hero ascends from the underworld to return home after his far-flung odyssey. The individual and the universal are reconciled. The suffering, alienation, and death are now recognised as necessary for birth, for the creation of the self ... a situation that was fundamentally unintelligible is now recognised as a necessary element in a larger context of profound intelligibility (Tarnas 1991:433).

I should mention here that I lived for over 10 years at Esalen Institute in Big Sur California, where I was director of programs, and in the course of those years virtually every conceivable form of therapy and personal transformation, great and small, came through Esalen. In terms of therapeutic effectiveness, Grof's was by far the most powerful; there was no compassion. Yet the price was dear — in a sense the price was absolute: the reliving of one's birth was experienced in a context of profound existential and spiritual crises, with great physical agony, unbearable

constriction and pressure, extreme narrowing of mental horizons, a sense of hopeless alienation and the ultimate meaninglessness of life, a feeling of going irrevocably insane, and finally a shattering experiential encounter with death — with losing everything, physically, psychologically, intellectually and spiritually. Yet after integrating this long experiential sequence, subjects regularly reported experiencing a dramatic expansion of horizons, a radical change of perspective as to the nature of reality, a sense of sudden awakening, a feeling of being fundamentally reconnected to the universe, all accompanied by a profound sense of psychological healing and spiritual liberation. Later in these sessions and subsequent ones, subjects reported having access to memories of prenatal intrauterine existence, which typically emerged in an association with archetypal experiences of paradise, mystical union with nature or with the divine or with the Great Mother Goddess, dissolution of the ego in ecstatic unity with the universe, absorption into the transcendental One, and other forms of mystical unitive experience (Tarnas 1991:426-427).

If we generalise this profound shift in consciousness to the counter-culture we see several important phenomena. First: ingesting LSD can be (with the appropriate intention in an appropriate contextual milieu) a deeply religious experience saturated with archetypal numinosity. Second: the experience can be a dialectical process where the ingestee experiences a kind of healing metanoia and then a reunification with nature and cosmos as the Western subject/object dichotomy is dissolved or suspended. Nature is re-sacralised as is one's participation with it. Third: it can profoundly re-orientate our unconscious relationship to the womb and the related traumatic aspect of birth by making these conscious. With these factors in hand let us now take a closer look at two interwoven strands: Buddhism and Romanticism, as they emerge in the counter-culture.

Acid Reign

Much has been written about the impact of the baby-boomers on contemporary Western religion and the impact of LSD on the baby-boomers (e.g. Heelas 1996, Glock and Bella et al 1976, Prince 1974, Bourguignon 1973, Furst and Schaefer 1996, Paglia 2003). Religious scholar Wade Roof has called it, rightly I think, “A widespread spiritual awakening” (1999 cited Lalich 2004:32). It is well known, for example, that the complexities of the New Age movement were also rooted in this 1960s spiritual awakening, as were the natural food and health movement, and the transpersonal psychology movement, and the birth of spiritual feminism (see Glock and Bellah 1971, Bourguignon 1973, Heelas 1996, Roof 1993, Lalich 2004, Spretnak 1982, Sered 1996). As Stevens observes:

Certainly the variety of interests that groups itself under the rubric ‘the New Age’ is largely an outgrowth of the psychedelic movement, although just as an oak is much more than the seed it springs from, the New Age is far more complex and impressive than anyone could have guessed back in 1967, when the hippies thought they were creating a new world with nothing more than Love and LSD (Stevens 1987:495).⁵

The hippies, if fact, were preceded by the ‘Beat generation’, an artistic subaltern culture with which Bob Dylan was identified, and the counter-culture really begins to simmer in the ‘50s with them. Beatniks (from the expression ‘beatific vision’)⁶ were deeply tied to what would become known as ‘American’ or ‘Beat’ Zen.

⁵The charismatic civil rights leader Martin Luther King had been assassinated, as were John Kennedy and Malcom X. Rioting Berkeley students were tear gassed by Governor Reagan and his 10,000 national guardsmen. The first ‘human be in’ had been staged in Golden Gate Park with 30,000 ‘high’ hippies in attendance. Flowers had been pushed into the barrels of the guns held by National Guardsman outside the Pentagon. Cassius Clay on becoming world heavyweight boxing champion had transfigured himself overnight into Mohamed Ali – and was quickly jailed for his public defiance and refusal of the draft and a ‘tour’ in Vietnam.

The new religious consciousness was reflected in the music of the times: “All you Need is Love” to quote Beat-le John Lennon. ‘Beatle-mania’ followed their new priests to India, Folk Bob Dylan became pro-chemical and electric, Jimi Hendrix; psychedelic (Purple Haze), Janice Joplin; cosmic (Kozmic Blues), Jim Morrison; shamanic (Shaman’s Blues), and the Gratefull Dead; skeletal (Blues for Allah). Even the musical *Hair* (structured around the LSD experience) had been released and banned.

⁶ Raymond Prince (1974:264).

Zen, a form of Mahayana Buddhism (associated with Japan, Korea, and China) came to America largely due to the efforts of philosopher D.T. Suzuki (Fields 1992). Importantly Suzuki spread the seeds an anti-modernity form of Zen, according to Cunningham (2004) (who has also written about the connection between Buddhism and psychedelics in post-war America). He notes that the “demilitarized Zen” of Suzuki was a pacified version of its more aggressive predecessor: “imperial way Zen” used in the service of Japanese militarism in its project of “overcoming modernity”:

Zen was part of a Japanese philosophical struggle to overcome the modern world, both as a religious consciousness that was used to justify Japan's aggression in the Pacific War, and also as the basis of a modernity-transcending historical dialectic that offered a vision of how the Pacific War might lead to the establishment of a new world order (2004).

Suzuki’s post-war Zen has an almost Romantic-nature-worshipping element to it that was linked to the philosophy of the *Nashida* School, “By adapting William James’ theory of ‘pure experience’ to the Buddhist concept of nothingness, or *sunyata*, Nashida gave James’ radical empiricism a decidedly ‘Zen’ twist. Like James, Nashida argued that experience was not merely a one-way event in consciousness between an experiencing subject and an experienced object, but rather, the encompassing ground in which all events in consciousness, in both their subjective and objective modalities, took place” (Cunningham 2004).

Medical anthropologists, Margaret Lock and Nancy Schleper-Huges write that Suzuki “contrasted Eastern and Western aesthetics and attitudes toward nature” suggesting that whereas Buddhists might, for example, behold or commune with a flower, Western medicalised science would rip the plant apart in the analytical manner of vivisection – not unlike Francis Bacon’s desire to “torture nature’s secrets

from her” (1987:13) (it has been contested that Bacon ever said these words see chapter 3, pp. 72). Suzuki was, pragmatically perhaps, something of a non-traditional Buddhist (Morris 1994:66) and suggested, for example, that *satori* (the transpersonal height of Zen consciousness) was “at the heart of genuine spiritual traditions” (Ferrer 2002:129-130). This, in my book, is an act of cosmological hybridity (Heron and Lahood 2007).

But most importantly, it was Suzuki who inspired many of the Beats and intellectuals who would push American Zen as an anti-establishment revolution. This movement pre-figures the counter-culture in several important ways and carries forward the hybridizing tradition of their Romantic forebears. Its literary heroes, Allan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Alan Watts were concerned with pushing the limits of consciousness with a blend of Buddhism and rebellion - the Beats were religious blenders- scramblers of sacred eggs. Ginsberg had wanted to create a form of “American compassion” according to Fields (1992) and “a Western *sadhana* or ‘way’” (Heelas 1996:50). Stevens writes:

The Beats set about creating their own *sadhana* from a dozen different sources. For Ginsberg, who claimed to have experienced *satori* in 1954, it was a regimen of Judaism, Zen and Mahayana Buddhism; for Kerouac, it was all that plus an overlay of Catholicism: he later told a television interviewer that he prayed nightly to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Buddha (Stevens 1987:164).

The Beats, however, had in their possession (or were possessed by) an important botanical dimension with which to potentate their ‘way’ - the use of the hallucinogenic peyote cactus to catalyse their beat-ific visions (De Ropp 2001:144). Their Romantic/shamanism was linked to the Native American Church and the sacred

‘peyote road’ - the path opened by direct experience. Zen Buddhism also offered a ‘here and now’, direct, felt, experience.⁷

What bound psychedelic use and Buddhism together is not only the Creolized *satori* or ‘peak’ experience but, according to Cunningham, “the phenomenon that seems to link modern Zen to psychedelics is their shared property of anti-modernism. In other words, both Zen and psychedelics have been used by critics of modern bourgeois culture to contest the absolutism of the Enlightenment model of modernity, and to suggest that a more authentic vision of human experience might be found outside the confines of time and space, as these phenomena have been constructed in modern scientific models” (2004). Or, as Rudolf Otto said, “Despite the great variety that exists among religions, one thing binds them together: the religious character and impulse as such and a common antagonism to materialism and irreligion ... a silent sympathy attracts the religious to the religions” (Rudolf Otto, cited in Bennett 1996:92).

The bottom line of this new religious culture is “all is one” and it emerges out of powerful social forces; immigration, America’s vaporising of two Japanese cities Nagasaki and Hiroshima at the end of WWII with atomic weapons, 1950s’ cold-war paranoia and the very real threat of all-out nuclear war between the USSR and the USA, the ‘hot’ wars in South East Asia, Korea, the Chinese invasion of Tibet, and particularly the Vietnam war (the New Zealand government supported the USA). There is I believe a set of potent relationships between Vietnam, San Francisco and some of New Zealand’s young people in the impetus toward male birthing (see Tim Shadbolt’s *Bullshit and Jelly Beans* 1970). Shadbolt, now Honourable Mayor

⁷ Slotkin writes that: “All that really matters is what one has directly experienced — what he has learned himself from Peyote. This concept of salvation by knowledge, to be achieved through revelation ... through Peyote ... rather than through verbal or written learning, is a doctrine similar to that of early Middle Eastern Gnosticism (cited in De Ropp 2001:131).

Shadbolt, was arrested 37 times during the New Zealand protests of the times. Medicalised birth was, at one level, simply another site of protest another arbitrary brick in a social wall to break down. Jock Phillip's locates the demise of the stereotyped Kiwi Bloke to around 1965. Here, he says, was when the beer swilling colonial warrior, rugby playing, and unemotional hard- man/soldier began to falter, "from the mid-1960's a series of social changes took people's experience so far from the image that the image itself began to evaporate" (Phillips 1996:267).

Chemical Nirvanas: Peaking In Babylon

Interestingly enough not only Zen Buddhism but Tibetan Buddhism would also become almost inseparable from psychedelics. The term for LSD actually became known as 'Clear Light', named after Buddhism's *Dharmakaya* the immaculate luminous non-dualistic state available in death and depth meditation (and a batch of 'acid' by the same name). 'Clear Light', came to have much cultural currency in the late '60s, where according to Schaefer and Furst, in their study of peyote, "Chemical Nirvanas" became a growth industry. They link this to the war and Western youth's attempt to regain "innocence" [purity?] (1996:507). I suggest their identity was tainted by the American nation-state's involvement in Vietnam and like the Huichol, who they structurally identified with, they "should not be seen as trying to escape the reality of their condition, but as positing an alternative reality, one which was much closer to their own senses of themselves than to the image imposed on them by others" (Cohen 1994:38).

How does this link to the *Dharmakaya* develop? Again Carl Jung plays a role; perhaps because of his own near-death experience (see chapter 7), he had "recognized the extraordinary value of the *Bardo Thodol*" for understanding the posthumous condition (Grof and Halifax 1977:175) and this was mapped as part of a hybrid 'self-

realization' project. However, what seems to have had greater impact, was the widely read *The Doors of Perception* (1954) Huxley's account of his eating of peyote/mescaline. In it he made several references to the Buddhist Void but in a very concrete way. During the psychotropic experience Huxley found himself in a psychological confrontation with "madness", "schizophrenia", and what he calls, "cosmic malevolence calling for desperate counter-measures" (1954:47). It appears that the gates of insanity were beckoning and he was about to take the road to madness when his wife, Maria, asked him this question:

'So you think you know where madness lies?'

My answer was a heart-felt , 'yes.'

'And you couldn't control it.'

'No, I couldn't control it. If one began with fear and hate as the major premise, one would have to go on to the conclusion.'

'Would you be able,' my wife asked, 'to fix your attention on what *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* calls the *Clear Light*'

"I doubt it" (Huxley 1954: 47-48).⁸

Tim Leary, Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner (1963) were less doubtful than the humble Huxley and, dedicating it him, re-wrote the *Bardo Thodol* or *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, originally written as a text for negotiating the posthumous landscape replete with instructions on how to merge with the Clear Light the 'pure' Buddha Womb - as a spiritual, and indeed, cultural manifesto. The *Psychedelic Experience* (1963) or 'psychedelic manual' as it was called was to show 'peakers' how to negotiate the demon realms, the wrathful and blissful deities, and merge with the luminous Ocean of Dharma thought to reside at the 'peak' of the LSD experience.

⁸ "When Maria, Huxley's wife of more than 30 years, lay dying of cancer he read to her the reminders of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, reducing them to their simplest form and repeating them close in her ear" "let go, let go. Go forward into the light". He continued after she had stopped breathing. "tears streaming down his face" (Fields 1996:47).

According to Fields, “it was fairly easy to recast it as a guide in which physical death was reconfigured as the death of the ego during a psychedelic trip” (Fields 1996:49). However it is harder to estimate how far and on what level this psychedelic dharma was disseminated. Fields, in *A High History of Buddhism* (1996:49) says the tripper’s manual went through 16 editions and was translated into seven languages.⁹ Eventually the name ‘Clear Light’ became synonymous with taking LSD (Stevens 1987) and transcending the ‘demon realms’. Maria Huxley’s insight would prove pivotal: the counter-cultural counter-measure to the demonic/ schizophrenic realm was to fix attention on the Clear Light.

It is pivotal because the Zen Buddhism embedded by Suzuki had called for a similar counter-measure at the level of culture; the overcoming or transcendence of modernity - a process that categorically links the mind-world of modernity to the Buddhist psychological demonic realm. Indeed, this is similar to what Tarnas suggests, that our schizophrenogenic double-bind (he uses Gregory Bateson’s famous analogy), the subject-object split that dominates the alienated modern mind-world, can be overcome in the LSD experience but only in a shattering confrontation with death and the resolution of an almost psychotic episode. This occurred on “both an individual level and, often more powerfully, a collective level, so that the movement from primordial unity through alienation to liberating resolution was experienced in terms of the evolution of an entire culture” (Tarnas 1991).¹⁰

⁹ In 1995 when Jerry Garcia died, the “Dead Buddhists of America” (an allusion to his band the Grateful Dead, long associated with LSD) held a meditation for him, that of Chenrezi, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. In the middle of the meditation everyone was instructed to see Jerry as the bodhisattva, “merging with the lights of the Buddha-mind in the journey through the bardos” (Fields 1996:46-47).

¹⁰ According to Lalich, Bateson’s *Leaning III* is his version of a peak experience and he was also an influential figure in the counter-culture. Bateson’s concept of an ‘ecology of mind’ could happen when the human mind broke through into a meta-pattern that connects every living thing on the planet. Bateson suggested “a world in which personal identity merges into all the processes of relationship in some vast ecology or aesthetics of cosmic interaction” (Bateson cited in Lalich 2004:39).

Some of the leading activists on the spiritual side of the ledger were influenced by Hinduism/Buddhism and the counter-culture was exposed to a psychedelic brand of Pan-Hinduism through figures such as Kerouac, Ginsberg, Watts, Huxley, Leary, Ram Dass, Lama Anagarika Govinda, Shunru Suzuki, Gary Snyder, Chogyam Trungpa, and Jerry Garcia, the guitar player of the Grateful Dead who President Clinton honoured as “an American icon” when he died. This was something of an irony considering (the soon to be impeached) President Nixon had called Tim Leary “the most dangerous man in America”.

The Children of the Revolution

San Francisco of the mid ‘60s late ‘70s also became the home of the human potential movement which spawned the ‘encounter group’. An important predecessor of the movement, again, was Jung who (from the perspective of post-colonial hybridity theory) is also something of witchdoctor – let us observe one of his most audacious cosmological fiats. Drawing from religions East and West, Jung *bound* their holisms together in a concept he called the ‘self’ (Heelas 1996:46). “When we speak of man we mean the indefinable whole of him, an ineffable totality, which can only be formulated symbolically. I have chosen the term “self” to designate the totality of man, the sum total of his conscious and unconscious contents ... I have chosen this term in accordance with Eastern philosophy” (Jung cited in Heelas 1996:46). Jung’s ‘self’ is a Western/Eastern hybrid!

Important figures in the humanist movement such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls and Rollo May would advance a set of ego-burning, psycho-technologies, aimed at bringing about a change in the psyche/soma and attain this sense of self. Encounter groups, neo-Reichian techniques, Gestalt awareness training, sensory awareness, bioenergetics, primal therapy, massage, psychosynthesis,

transcendental meditation, psychic healing, biofeedback, yoga and a plethora of other powerful experiential techniques and styles were popularised.¹¹

According to Stone: “rather than taking direct action to change political structures or setting up an exemplary counter-society, members of these groups seek to transcend the oppressiveness of the culture by transforming themselves as individuals”(1976:93). This movement had at its core what Stone calls gestalt consciousness - a form of awareness training (with a foot in Zen Buddhism) that advocated ‘here and now’, ‘present centeredness’ and a non-judgmental attitude that allowed a fuller experience of the objects of attention. The gestalt attitude was the basic foundation of human potential groups as it enabled bodily awareness and personal insight. However, its powerful techniques were also capable of opening to transpersonal awareness and the human potential movement soon evolved into the transpersonal movement. Thus Stone notes: “Participants in these ‘transpersonal’ disciplines report experiences of tapping into cosmic energy, of being at one with the universe, or of realizing the true Self ... to the extent that this movement increasingly provides experiences of transcendence, cosmic consciousness, the Self beyond the self, or of nothingness, it may be considered religious”. He also pointed out that the descriptions of consciousness pervading this movement were similar to psychedelic experiences that the early innovators had “conducted research on” (Stone 1976:104-105). The use of such drugs was sacralised in this culture which in a sense bound together closely two “erupting trends” - Eastern religion and psychedelic ingestion (Lalich 2004:34) (we can also add to this blend the human potential movement and the pulse coming from embryonic religious feminism). She writes that:

¹¹ *Psychology Today* (1970:54) estimated up to 6 million Americans had participated in encounter groups alone.

During encounter sessions, and eventually in many milieus, great importance was placed on peak experiences, a term coined by Maslow, a humanist psychologist. Peak experiences are states of high arousal. Reaching such heights was purported to enable a person to transcend the limitations of everyday life and tap into cosmic consciousness. Peak experiences were characterized by “blissful feelings; focused attention on the here and now; freedom from anxieties and doubts; spontaneous, effortless functioning; and a sense of being merged and harmonized with one’s environment ... attaining a state of what Jung had first identified many years before as self-realization. Maslow called this state self-actualization.

Maslow admitted that someone who was not especially self-actualized could have peak experience through the use of psychedelic drugs” (Lalich 2004:36).

Here is another interesting point and it is one where Eastern religion, the self-realisation movement, the nature/ecology movement, feminism, pacifism, the sexual revolution, and psychedelic ontology come together in an anti-modern gestalt: birthing came to be seen as a place where sexual partners could have the highly valued peak experience as an extension of their sexual relationship (Kitzinger 1964, Maslow 1964:110, Ram Dass 1971:16) and the peak experience is linked to a bewildering array of humanist, religious, and transpersonal tropes – a hybridising agent that binds together, engenders and informs a grass-roots Romanticised Hindu-Buddhist attack on modernity. In the *Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1971), Maslow describes the work of one of his students, Dorothy Tanzer, and at one level, this can be seen as the outcome of the movement I am describing:

A dissertation will soon be published which will show that out of this humanistic science, has come, I would say, one of the real childbearing improvements since Adam and Eve. It is a dissertation on peak experiences in natural childbirth. And this can be a potent source of peak experiences. We know just how to encourage peak experiences; we know the best way for women to have children in a fashion that the childbearing mother is apt to have a great mystical experience — an illumination, a revelation, an insight. That is what they call it, by the way, in the interviews (1971:169).

Murder of Desire

The fevered pitch of the 'sexual revolution' in the late '60s and early '70s was partly a reaction to the war in Vietnam behind which loomed the ominous threat of nuclear war as the forces of capitalist/Christian and communist/Buddhism clashed yet again.¹² A series of ritual suicides by Vietnamese monks attest to the extreme passion of the times and some readers will remember the gruesome images of monks ritually immolating themselves and burning to death in protest against American involvement in that war.

The antithesis to these extreme life-denying forces was found in the "free love" movement, for the youth culture, the conditions that promoted both celibacy and war were seen as expressions of sexual repression with orgasm the salve for malignant aggression. These ideas stemmed in part from a popularised view of Wilhelm Reich's theories - that inhibited sexuality, rigidly held as "character armour", was the driving force of such aberrations as mass fascism and capitalism (Reich 1942).¹³ The ideologies driving totalitarian capitalism, communism, religious fundamentalism, and male domination had become linked to sexual repression.¹⁴ The "establishment" was perceived as an oppressive construct created by oppressed sexual flow; it was something that therefore, that could be changed. Because of ancient religion's rigid sex taboos and inhibitions, the erotic powers of birth, sex and death, now congealed

¹² The notorious summer of love, an all-out reaction to the US military bombing campaign of Cambodia and the slaying of four students by National Guardsmen in 1970, was perhaps the peak show of resistance by the flower power movement (Lee and Shlain 1985, Stevens 1987, Glock and Bellah 1976).

¹³ Reich had been a brilliant follower of Freud who used physical manipulations and breathing to access the flow of what he called the orgasm's function, which, when not able to flow, was held in the body as rigid character formations. Reich believed that neurosis could not survive in people able to achieve this flow.

¹⁴ At the time I was writing this a situation arose in Nigeria where Amina Lawal, a woman who was raped was then condemned to death for having a child out of wedlock. If the men of her community enforce the conviction she will be buried up to her neck and stones thrown at her head until death (after the weaning of her child). How understandable then was the counter-culture's enactment and contestation of sexual freedom when compared with this kind of ritualised oppression which has its horrific climax in the brutal killing of a woman for a sexual transgression by men.

toxic rage was discharged through the psychotic ritual of the Vietnam War.

“Straight”, “uptight” culture had shaped it thus and “loose”, “laid-back” hippie culture was going to un-shape it. This placed the revolution in the newly deified bodies and sexual acts of the revolutionaries – this was not simple promiscuity, this was counter-religion, “Make Love Not War” the well known counter-imperative. The revolution was partly enacted by overriding the prohibitions do with birth, sex, death and gender – and was not without its fair share of success, excess, opportunists, and casualty.¹⁵

Reich’s ideas (and his ‘vegetative’ therapy) seem to fit with William Blake’s ‘sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse an unacted desire’ a Romantic injunction that combines easily with spontaneity of Zen Buddhism. Moreover, hippie culture equated sex outside of marriage as not only a challenge to the social order but also as a “mystical experience and a return to paradise” (Musgrove 1974:53) back to innocence, pre-diluvium purity — Eros and Thanatos as a Rousseauian return to the ‘ground of being’, back to the Garden.

Arboreal Metaphysics and ‘Flower Power’

I.M. Lewis, in his well known work on possession, points out that the, “1960s manifestation of flower-people” had a Fijian precursor whose members were “possessed by forest and water spirits”. This possession had very real political capital (1971:101). We should also remember that the counter-culture was consumed by a tremendous fascination for ‘sacred’ plants; cannabis (THC), peyote (mescaline), magic mushrooms (psilocybin), LSD (derived from maize ergot) ayahuasca (DMT).

¹⁵ Another example of this celebratory ‘coming out’ mood around human sexuality was *Life* magazine’s 1965 spring edition featuring Lennart Nilsson’s stunning photographic images of intrauterine development and birth. The run of eight million copies sold in four days and was published in tandem with a hugely popular book *A Child is Born* which was translated into 18 languages - suggesting some kind of a hunger for the womb. The pictures took the viewer inside the woman’s body, into the uterus (albeit technologically ... reproductively even) and was a far cry from the ‘uptight and out of sight’ image of the previous decade. Author of *The Making of the Counter-Culture* and *Eco-Psychology*, Theodore Roszak, comments that in the ‘50s the words “pregnant or virgin” could not be spoken on the public media (Roszak 1992: 286).

This consummation ate away at the subject/object dichotomy in the Western mind (after Tarnas) creating a participatory relationship with nature – we become nature. As Turner said at the time: “Today’s hippies, like yesterday’s Franciscans, [he included Zen Buddhists] assume the attributes of the structurally inferior in order to achieve *communitas*” (Turner 1969:133). In a sense, this can be seen as an affirmation of Ortner’s argument that nature was related to the feminine and structurally inferior to ‘culture’ (1972) but we see here a cultural disruption and reversal of this position. According to Turner’s theorem, hippies and beats challenged by ‘dropping out’ of structure into sacredness – into (I would argue) sanctified nature. There is certainly nothing unprecedented in cultures claiming sacredness for themselves from this position of marginality, poverty and contempt (Cohen 1994:41).

The movement was also shaped partly from a sense of sacred morality embedded in a cosmology based in the soil and foliage metaphors that Lisa Malkki has called “sedentary and arboreal metaphysics” (1997:56-57).¹⁶ This nature cosmology, which had ancient roots in pre-industrial European and Mediterranean mythologies of “the all nurturing Earth Mother, source of all fertility, was deeply rooted in the minds of people of earlier generations” (Gelis 1991:3). Native American/shamanic cosmologies, with which the counter-culture also identified itself in its struggle against what it saw as rampant abuses of technology and consumerism, were also lauded as righteous (Stevens 1987:411).

The clarion call to ‘get back to your roots’, ‘back to the garden’, ‘back to the land’ was also about shifting the axis of identity and power, and because “uprootedness” according to Malkki, is seen as social and internal “pathology”. She writes: “Violated,

¹⁶ Malkki’s article does not touch directly on the subject of 1960s ‘flower power’ and she is writing about the imprisonment of indigenous people with such conceptions. However she does say this, which I think is highly pertinent: “But a moral lesson is drawn from this : the restless, rootless ‘civilization’ of the colonizing ‘West,’ too, urgently needs to root itself ... a rooting that is simultaneously moral and literally botanical, or ecological (1997:60).

broken roots signal an ailing cultural identity and a damaged nationality (1997:65). Flower children, flower power, return to the 'ground of being', mother earth, all sprang from a fertile soil that claimed the moral 'high/low ground' over runaway, and therefore uprooted, technology. Malkki says, "This sedentarism is deeply metaphysical and deeply moral ... sinking "peoples" and "cultures" ... into "mother earth" (Malkki 1997:61).

A morality built on sinking into mother earth (the polar opposite of masculine religious flight e.g. Ortner 1972); the human body is fashioned of that mater, yet women's bodies seem to take us deeper into the stratigraphy of mother earth. Human sexuality, reproduction and birth are also deeply embedded in sedentary and arboreal metaphors; caves, earthiness, ploughing, fruit of the loins, earth-mother, de-flower, red flower, embryo and seed, rising sap, bad seed, seed bed, fertile field of womanhood, virgin forests, and the blushing rose are linked to this metaphysic (Gelis1991:8).

The family tree is another example, Deleuze and Guattari write: "It is odd how the tree has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought, from botany to biology and anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, all of philosophy...the root foundation, *grund, racine, fondement*. The West has a special relation to the forest and deforestation" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:23 cited in Malkki 1997:57). America, it will be remembered, was busy trying to *defoliate* Cambodia with Agent Orange, made in New Zealand by Dow Chemicals (so an informant told me – in a discussion related to why he was at the birth of his child) during the Vietnam War.

The construction of nature as spirit stems from mythologies the world over where gods and heroes are born of plant life: Attis from an almond, Adonis from a tree (Frazer: 1922:463); St Francis of Assisi had a zany follower named Brother Juniper,

the Green Man, and the wild man of paganism (Roszak 1992:262). These images connect to a deeper cosmogony of the trees of life, the vine of Dionysus, and later, Jesus, the Garden of Eden, trees of good and evil, the shamanic world tree, the axis-mundi, the Hindu and Buddhist lotus, yoni and lotus born, the Mystic Rose, Nature as Divine. Therefore participation in sexuality and birth were ways of identifying with immanent divinity, Mother Earth, the immanent, embodied womb of sacredness. And sacredness, according to Turner, is the *sine qua non* of communitas.

Communitas, (a well trod idea) was about getting “stripped,” “levelled,” “naked,” “natural” and “humble,” (Turner 1969: 94-113) a word etymologically linked with *humus*, meaning - of the ground. To get grounded was to get humbled, to drop out of structure, techno-capitalism, and rejoin the real, wild, free world of nature – therefore to return to the dissociated womb. By identifying with Mother Nature, the ‘60s counter-culture hoped to uproot technology and thereby render it, following Malkki, immoral and “pathological” (1997:64). She says: “Clifford (1988:338) observes ‘common notions of culture are biased toward rooting rather than travel’” (Malkki 1997:65). Western colonisation, capitalist expansion, the war in Vietnam and the ‘space race’ all fit into the category of “travel”. Bob Dylan, who Turner claimed was the spokesman for the “structurally inferior” (Turner 1969:164) sang, “Man has invented his doom, first step was touching the moon” (Dylan: Infidels 1983). How far from the good earth can you get?

Dylan has inverted America’s technological high (its 1969 moon landing) and turned it into uprooted immoral sin. At the same historical time, the offshore war, the aerial bombing of Vietnam, the spraying of Cambodia’s jungle with agent orange, the transplanting of (drafted) American and New Zealand soldiers to ‘foreign soil’,

the hyper-technological American war machine is ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 1966) dangerous, demonic and polluting.

Contact and Revolt

Jill Dubisch’s study, “You Are What You Eat: Religious Aspects of the Health Food Movement” (2001) can show how the men’s birth revolution was part of a grass-roots, sub-altern religious culture. Using Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion as a “system of symbols” Dubisch argues that the health food movement can be seen as a religious movement. While rooted, perhaps, in the 1830s Popular Health movement and combined with “a reaction against professional medicine”, it combined social concerns such as feminism with a class struggle. Nevertheless, she says that this movement, in its present form, can be traced to:

The late 1960s, when it became part of the ‘counter culture’. Health foods were ‘in’ and their consumption became part of the general protest against the establishment” and the “straight” life-styles. They were associated with other movements centering around social concerns, such as ecology and consumerism (2001:74).¹⁷

Dubisch points out that converting to this movement required the acceptance of the basic principles of the health food worldview. “There is a great concern”, she says, “as there is with many religions, with purity, in this case the purity of food, of water, of air” (2001:75). As we will see the concepts of purity, in the natural health movement, are extended to medicine and birth.

A Gestalt boom in California spread the teaching of theorist and therapist Fritz Perls which built on the notion that ‘eating’, what one allowed into one’s mouth, and the healthy aggression it takes to chew something over, was a site of environmental

¹⁷ Hippie communes were instrumental in setting up vegetarian and vegan networks based on concepts of purity (Rigby 1973, Musgrove 1974).

'contact'. Contact could be healthy and organic or controlled and coercive and the site of eating became one of psychological resistance, rebellion and 'revolt' (Perls 1942).¹⁸ This was extended to all points of contact between the human body and her environment. Within this system, as 'consumers', women's contact with the technocratic (impure) system, would become a site for the mobilisation of aggression and revolution (see Perls, Hefferline and Goodman 1951). In a wider sense 'toxic ideology', would also leave a foul taste in the organism/environment and therefore should not be psychically consumed or encouraged. For many the non-consumption of capitalist culture was a form of revolt – a kind of civil disobedience.¹⁹ I will include this large segment of Dubisch's article because it is significant to my argument – not the least her concern with cosmology and its contesting power which ends, interestingly enough, in a overt connection with childbirth:

In the health food movement, the basis of purity is healthfulness and 'naturalness'. Some foods are considered to be natural and therefore healthier; this concept applies not only to foods but to other aspects of life as well. It is part of the large idea that people should work in harmony with nature and not against it. In this respect, the health food cosmology sets up an opposition of nature (beneficial) versus culture (destructive), or, in particular, the health food movement against our highly technological society. As products of our industrialized way of life, certain foods are unnatural; they produce illness by working against the body. Consistent with this view is the idea that healing, like eating, should proceed in harmony with nature. The assumption is that the body, if allowed to function naturally, will tend to heal itself. Orthodox medicine, on the other hand, with its drugs and surgery and its non-holistic approach to health, works against the body. Physicians are frequently criticized in the literature of the movement for their narrow approach to medical problems, reliance on drugs

¹⁸ This attempt to achieve healthy contact with the environment through a kind of anarchy places gestalt therapy as the first of the ecologically oriented approaches.

¹⁹ For example Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), a journal of his experiment in monastic living in the woods near Boston became a canonical text for the sixties counterculture (Pagalia 2003). Thoreau develops an almost St Francis-like relationship to nature in his ability to commune with the animals and plants there.

and surgery, lack of knowledge of nutrition, and unwillingness to accept the validity of the patient's own experience in healing him self. It is believed that doctors may actually cause further health problems rather than effecting a cure. A short item in *Prevention*, 'The delivery is Normal — But the baby Isn't,' recounts an incident in which drug-induced labor in childbirth resulted in a mentally retarded baby. The conclusion is "nature does a good job, and we should not, without compelling reasons, try to take over" (*Prevention* 1979:38). (Dubisch 2001: 75-76).

We see in this statement that the doctor (as cultural hero) is inverted by this movement to a category of *obstruction* (see also Kitzinger 1964, Hazel 1974, Klaus and Kennel 1976, Mehl 1978). Obstruction in childbirth, in many cultures, is associated with the action of malevolent demons, organised around the notions of pollution and purity. Categorically, he and his ministrations are inverted and become associated with the category of the impure – the demonic.

Robbie Davis-Floyd has described the alternate birthing movement as a way of enacting a 'paradigm shift' (after Thomas Kuhn's 1962 theory of scientific revolutions) and that humanist culture attempted to re-ritualise birth and contest the nature of reality itself. (1992: 17, 293-294). The space into which the child was born, and the generative human body was saturated with 'folk religious' and transpersonal meanings, the baby (after the poet Coleridge), 'trailing clouds of glory'.

But let me remind the reader, again, about the nature of the drug experience, alive and driving the counter-culture at this time and its subjective psychotropic movement toward rebirth, which I am suggesting has everything to do with this paradigm shift. Remembering that the *satori* offered by Suzuki (to overcome modernity) was joined with peyote by the Beats to overthrow the Establishment. The 'peak' experience offered by the humanists was joined with an Orientalised

psychedelic experience to overthrow *suffering* and this was joined with ‘natural birthing’ to overthrow modern obstetrics – a powerful arm of the American industrialised war complex. Again, using Grof’s research and generalising it to the nature of the psychedelic experience and rebirth among the counter-culture:

The symbolism typical for the experience of rebirth involves visions of radiant light that appear to come from a divine source (“clear light”), vast spaces filled with heavenly blue haze, beautiful rainbows or rainbow spectrum and displays of peacock feathers. Rather frequent are also nonfigurative images of God perceived as pure sources of energy (“cosmic sun”, Brahma), or personified visions, images of God as an old man sitting on a richly decorated throne and surrounded by Cherubim and Seraphim in radiant splendor. Others experience the union with the archetypal Great Mother or more specific versions thereof from various cultures, such as the Egyptian Divine Isis. An interesting variation of the same is the symbolism of entering Valhalla or being admitted to the feast of the Greek Gods on Mount Olympus and enjoying the taste of nectar and ambrosia. Also images of various deities representing seasonal changes of nature and vegetable cycles can occur in this context (e.g. Demeter and Persephone or Attis). Other typical visions involve gigantic halls and richly decorated columns, huge marble statues and crystal chandeliers, and beautiful scenery such as luscious landscapes at springtime, panoramas of snow capped mountains, breathtaking visions of oceans calmed after a storm, idyllic pastures and flourishing meadows. Frequently there are visions representing the final victory over a powerful enemy, such as the killing of a dragon, Hydra, Chimaera, Medusa, Sphinx or other mythological creature, the overthrowing of a despotic and tyrannical ruler, or the defeat of a repressive totalitarian political regime (Grof 1977:169).

Demon Controlled ‘Structure’

Feminist researchers and transpersonal theorists have shown that the dominant Western medical system, operating on the mechanistic-Cartesian mind-world sees the body as an objectified machine (Merchant 1983, Grof 1985, Davis-Floyd 1992:48). I have charted aspects of this development in several chapters so here I will outline the process with a few broad brush strokes. 1) The pelvis dangerously narrows by natural

selection as our proto-hominid ancestors evolve from four to two-legged locomotion. 2) The creation of rituals around the predictable crises of birth that combine perinatal dynamics of the psyche/soma as primitive symbolic obstetrical manoeuvres. 3) This seems to have developed into the creation of oppressive feminine/womb-denying religious systems running an imperative to expel children from 'defiling' women's bodies and strong taboos around death/blood pollution. 4) The rise of a mechanised mind-world which adumbrated a narrowed, masculine, Christianised-medical hegemony hell-bent on purging children from the 'mechanical' uterine 'pump' (Martin 1987:54). Embedded at the core of this system are the hegemonically constructed (birth) of the clinic, the objectifying medical gaze (Foucault 1994) and its clockwork birthing rituals and routines that serve capitalist clock time, which assume authoritative knowledge and power over women's bodies (and over 'nature') (Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997). What's more women, during the 1960s, are routinely separated from husbands, family, friends, and significant others (see chapters 4 and 5).

In *Romanticism Comes of Age* (1966), Owen Barfield, says this of the opposition between modernity and the participatory mind:

The arch fallacy of their age [Goethe and Coleridge] and our own, the fallacy that mind is exclusively subjective or, to put it more crudely, that mind is shut up in a box called the brain, the fallacy that the mind of man is a passive onlooker at the process and phenomena of nature, in the creation of which it neither takes nor has taken part, the fallacy that there are many separate minds, but no such thing as Mind (Barfield: 1966:147-148 cited in Rothberg 1998:210).

Tarnas argues (above), that the dissociated Cartesian mind-view strongly reflects the problematic perinatal situation; not as much trapped in box but in an archetypal birth canal. He argues that the whole trajectory of the Western scientific mind-world from Plato to the post-post modern epoch can be interpreted as following an archetypal

structure closely resembling that of birth and culminating in an era marked by a rebirth in participatory ways of knowing and being. He maintains that Cartesian epistemology represents an outworking of the constricting and contracted aspects of unconscious perinatal dynamics at a collective and cultural level. Thus our cultural crisis finds an analogue as an obstructed foetal consciousness struggling for life in the birth canal (1992) (these restrictions and obstructions, as I have shown in chapter 3 and 4, are thought to be to the activity of demonic spirits in many cultures). The child in its separating urge is in a dangerous condition prone to demonic influence, a situation recognised by anthropologists (e.g. Douglas 1966). Grof writes for instance that:

There exists some evidence that the visions of various demons and wrathful deities which appear in these sessions [LSD psychotherapy] and seem to separate the subject from the blissful universe are also closely related to intra-uterine disturbances and embryonal crises experienced on a primitive level of the psyche ... some individuals experience in this context monstrous distortions of the world that strikingly resemble the descriptions of schizophrenic patients (1977:159).

Kapferer's study of Sinhalese demonic exorcism is useful in emphasising this aspect of my argument. Buddhist culture enacts the logic of its cosmology within its rituals and demonic exorcism bears key performative enactments traceable to the Buddha's original performance. Kapferer notes that those related to the ritual can and should "*commune in the one experience*" (1986:191). This participation in the 'one' is elevated to a position of dominance in Oriental religions. Phenomena seen as not participating in 'oneness', which has its hierarchical zenith in the primordial womb of the Buddha-Nature, are to be seen as subordinate demonic influences. Furthermore the proper relationship with the 'demonic' to the 'human' is one of subordination

within the cosmic scheme. Exorcism is required when the demonic gets the upper hand (1986:194).

What interests me is that Kapferer links Buddhist thought to Goethe's participatory thought (mentioned here as two of the primary orientations of the transpersonal psychology movement), which was also a major contributor to American transcendentalism and which, as we note in chapter 5, was perhaps *the* seminal ancestor of the counter-culture. He says,

In Sinhalese cultural understandings a demonic victim approximates what I refer to as an existential state of solitude in the world. The demonic as conceptualised by the Sinhalese is similar to that which Goethe recognised from within the worldview of European culture as ultimately everything that is individual and separates one from others. Demons attack individuals who are understood to be in a state of physical and mental aloneness. Solitude and its correlate, fear, are among the key essences of the demonic (Kapferer 1986:195).

Now here is the crux of the matter: the European worldview as spelled out by Tarnas (1992) and Bordo (1987) described as a problematic phase of birth, is very much a state of physical and mental aloneness. Our "cosmological estrangement ... ontological estrangement [and] epistemological estrangement [results in] "a threefold mutually enforced prison of modern alienation" (Tarnas 1991:419) and therefore, according to Kapferer's Buddhist/Goethe formulation – "demonic".

The picture Tarnas paints of the Cartesian, Kantian, Copernican triad which defines modernity, is one of absolute solitude - cut off from the rest of the universe I am separated from all others. I am separated through the rise of scientific rationalism from the participative universe; I am separated from sensual perception by the structures of language and cognition (Merleau-Ponty 1964). My universe has been 'purified' of all things 'feminine' (Bordo: 1987) and my participation in nature

severed and monsterfied (Roszak 1992). I am said, by Western science, to have been formed by an accident – I am a meaningless cardboard cut-out in a meaningless universe among other cut-outs (see Grof 1977, Roszak 1992). I am separated into the rigid dualisms of subject and object, self and other, and ultimately I am alone in a haphazard universe of vast and terrifying spaces signifying...nothing.

The separate Cartesian mind-world, which some commentators believe is a fundamental distortion of reality bordering on psychosis (or at least arrested development) is the operating system upon which American/Western technocratic industrialism runs – including its powerful medical system. This can suggest that the Cartesian mind-world, its medical system and, indeed, its physicians and their technocratic interventions are part of (when set against the counter-cultural holistic values, and to use Roszak's term) "a demon-controlled structure" (1970:124).

Seen from the Buddhist/Goethe-standpoint presented here - the European mind-world has fallen prey to a demonically flawed image of the universe – an obstructed mind-world in sore need of exorcism. What's more we have mistaken this illusory separate (demon haunted) vision and crowned it King by relegating the participatory universe to the realms of fairy tale and psychopathology. The mystery of nature is demystified through 'objectivity' and we are severed from the sacred worlds of our ancestors.

The answer to the illness caused by the demon of separation and the dread-filled universe it inspires? Reconnection, unity, relationship, and participation in embodied somatic life, the transcendence of the alienated modernity-mind followed by an appropriate fealty to the participatory potential of Buddhist/Goethe unity. All of these values come together and are played out in the couple's ritual of birth: the exorcism of the past, the iteration of cosmic

significance, and the ecstasy of the new are co-present in the contesting spiritual act of the father at birth, of partners birthing (heretically) together.

Purity and Danger

The *Pali Canon*, “characterizes the Buddha as omniscient and pure” (Tambiah 1970:43), thus ‘purity’ is related to the Buddha-mind, everything out of its order can be consigned to the category of demonic (Kapferer 1986) or, in Douglas’s terms ‘pollution’ (1966). Consistent with the changeling religious ethos of these times the new consciousness was invested with a ‘higher’ more ‘pure’ morality and reality and expanded beyond the ‘establishment’; beyond rigid Christian precepts and modernity’s mindset.²⁰ According to Fields: “The spiritual atmosphere of the new generation was eclectic, visionary, polytheistic, ecstatic and defiantly devotional” (1992:248). This defiance, I have argued, carried over into a confrontation with medicalised birth.

In summation, of central importance here, is that a hyphenating Romantic-‘Buddha-mind’ is advanced as ‘pure’. Any interference/obstruction to the emergence of this hybrid Buddha-mind can therefore be seen as a pollutant, a hindrance. Modernity is inverted and falls from its structural position as supreme ‘order’ and ‘purity’ into a position of a pollutant, transitional, impermanent, demonic – it is categorically related to the interrupting of the organic function of the female-as-cosmos birth canal, a culture in arrested, and obstructed, development - obstructing and arresting the development of others.

²⁰ Bourguignon has written that for established America, altered states of consciousness and the “drug culture” itself were seen as expressions of a kind of psychopathology (1973:3). Yet for the literati at the educated tip of psychedelic research (Alan Watts taught a paper in the psychedelic experience at Berkeley University), the reverse was true. Ordinary Euro/American consciousness is seen as a solipsistic construct shaped on the dissociation from nature and cosmos. These dissociations bury the participatory mind creating a Western ego trenchantly defending its sense of separate existence (see Tarnas 1992, Skolimowski 1994, Heron 1992, 1996, 1998, Ferrer 2002).

It is in the late 1960s' religious counter-culture where modernity's medicalised birthing ritual was challenged (Reed 2005:104) and saturated with its hybrid religious meanings (see Waltzer and Cohen 1971, Reid 1989, Gaskin 1977).²¹ It is also where spiritual feminism and the nascent ecology movements begin to come to the boil. The act of procreative fathers/couples engaged in participatory birthing 'alternative birthing' is only 35 years old - one generation starting, as noted, at the height of the Viet Nam war and the psychedelic era (see Waltzer and Cohen 1971; Mehl 1978; Gaskin 1977, 1988; Kitzinger and Davis 1978; Anderson and Bauwens 1982:289; Odent 1984:40; Mander 2004: 4; Tanzer 1976; Maslow 1964; 1971; Hazell 1974:7 and Reid 1989:226-227).

Among the ironies is that the presence of a procreative male (as husband or partner) in late '60s America and New Zealand was to transgress a strongly enforced 'modernist' taboo also built on notions of purity and pollution. The twentieth century's medical confinement of birth by a powerful professional hierarchy also banished fathers in New Zealand (Papps and Olssen 1997:19). This issued from a quasi-Christian religious/medical regimen in which fathers, mothers and couples were placed in a low status, germ-ridden (polluting) rung of the status ladder and therefore antithetical to germ-free, white-coated, highly paid, medical charisma (purity) (Richman and Goldthorp 1978:167). This construction served to maintain the physician's charisma, authoritative knowledge, technological interventions, and performative monopoly of the site and control over mothers, fathers and offspring (e.g. Myerhoff and Larson 1966, Lomas 1978, Reed 2005).

The spiritual counter-culture, attempted to re-ritualise birth with its values, belief systems, and worldview, replete with peak experiences and cosmic consciousness, and

²¹ That this culture ultimately fails in its attempt to completely re-ritualise birth (Reed 2005: 104) is not my concern here. What is important to me is how fathers came to be there.

its cultural inversion of pollution and purity – was parodied as the ‘filthy’ hippie. Once the baby is invested with a Romantic-Hindu Buddhist holism, any habitual intervention can be seen as demonic. Reid, in her study of lay midwives writes this:

The roots of the present-day U.S lay midwifery movement can be traced to the late 1960s and the broader “counterculture” that emerged at that time on the West Coast (Hazell 1974). The counter cultural movement was primarily composed of middle class women and men who rejected main-stream American institutions in favor of a return to a more natural style of living that embraced values and beliefs that were the antithesis of those of achievement-oriented culture. Their approach to food and clothing, as well as their lifestyle, appeared to have emerged from a combination of political radicalism and an attraction to Eastern religious zeal. Couples wishing to live by their principles had home birth (Reid1989:226).

In a similar example of this re-alignment one of the Beat’s favoured Buddhist poets, Pulitzer Prize-winning, Gary Snyder, writes that:

[Those people] who think a great deal about the wisdom traditions [perennial traditions], have remarkable results when they take LSD. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Hindu Mythologies*, the *Serpent Power*, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *Upanishads*, the *Hevajra Tantra*, the *Mahanirvana Tantra* __to name a few texts — become, they say finally clear to them. They often feel that they must radically reorganise their lives to harmonise with such insights (Snyder 1957:109 cited in Fields 1992:249).

The sites of our lived experience become the sites for transformative moral praxis – birth as site, mid ‘60s, was scrutinised from this standpoint and was found wanting.

Significantly, and also in the early mid ‘60s, Shelia Kitzinger begins her campaign to revitalise Western birthing as a holistic process and a “peak of joy” for both parents. She was certainly abreast of the humanist psychology of the times (1964:202). I also suggest that it is of some significance that she embellished her early

popular work (in particular labour and the 'climax' of birth) with Eastern religious themes drawing from Rabindranath Tagore's poems *Gitanjali* and *Sadhana* thus:

Waves rise, each to its individual height in a seeming attitude of unrelenting competition, but only up to a certain point; and thus we know of the great repose of the sea to which they are all related, and to which they must return in a rhythm which is marvelously beautiful. In fact, these undulations and vibrations, these risings and fallings, are not due to the erratic contortions of disparate bodies, they are a rhythmic dance. Rhythm can never be born of the haphazard struggle of combat. Its underlying principle must be unity not opposition.
(Kitzinger 1964).

This is not, in my opinion, simple flowery esoterica, importantly; Kitzinger is using this imagery to connect birthing women's bodies to a holistic symbol system (it can therefore be read as a symbolic obstetrical manoeuvre). This statement, combined with the one following, shifts the paradigm from the techniques of the male obstetrician to a tropism, an imaging of a sacred tidal flow operating in women's bodies conjoined with the cycles of a participatory universe:

Birth cannot simply be a matter of techniques for getting a baby out of one's body. It involves our relationship to life as a whole, the part we play in the order of things; and as the baby develops and can be felt moving inside, to some women annunciation, incarnation, seem to become facts of their own existence (1964:25).

Davis-Floyd and Sergeant have said that it was Kitzinger who did "the most to bring anthropological awareness of the cultural variability of birth practices into popular consciousness" (1997:6). However, as far as "popular consciousness" goes, the times were more than ripe for her oceanic Eastern symbol system. The following lines sung by John Lennon of Beatle-mania fame on their album *Revolver* (1966) give a clue.

Turn off your mind relax and float down stream

it is not dying, it is not dying
Lay down all thoughts surrender to the void
It is shining, it is shining (1966 John Lennon).²²

Subversive Cosmological Hybridity

A combination of forces triggered procreative fathering males to force themselves into birthing sites or participate in birthing outside of the medical system. But here I should point out an interesting problem - this apparent fealty to Eastern religion raises a curious paradox since, as we have shown, traditional Eastern religions have strong 'pollution' taboos that categorically separate procreative males from birth (i.e. Ford 1945, Jordan 1978, Sered 1994, Gottlieb and Buckley 1988 and see Gross 1980) so if anything, fealty to 'traditional' Eastern religion would have reinforced the father's removal from birth's proximity rather than empowering them to be present. As noted these religious cultures field strong systems of taboo, which, in their elaboration, keep men and women in their distinct gendered spheres, and which, as I have tried to convey, have wide religious and cosmological significance.

While it is often noted in the literature that "men are almost universally excluded from the scene of birth" (1945: 56) (e.g. Mead and Newton 1967:149, Jordan 1978:4, Heggenhougen 1980:21, Aijmer 1992:8) it is largely unacknowledged that the recent performance of procreative males in birthing sites in Western cultures represents a major psycho-cultural transgression of wide ranging and ancient patterns of religious taboo that separate procreative males from birthing women (e.g. Dumont 1972, Rozario 1992:96-102).

Post-colonial literature offers one answer to this enigma which has everything to do with the way conventional cultural forms "become separated from existing practices

²² Originally titled 'The Void', this song was inspired by Leary's *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and was to be backed by 1000 chanting monks (Lee and Shlain 1985:180-181).

and recombine with new forms in new practices” (Rowe and Schelling 1991:231). What we see is the translocation and reinscription (after Bhabha 1994) of various non-western cultures’ significant ultimate religious states of consciousness assimilated into Western constructs during the 1960s; e.g. Suzuki’s *satori*, Jung’s Self (Heelas 1996:46), Huxley’s ‘perennial philosophy’ (Huxley 1945) and Maslow’s “peak experiences” (1962, 1964, 1970) by the humanist and psychedelic/transpersonal movements. We can observe Roger Walsh do this — “early pioneers turned their attention eastward and found that Asian psychologies, philosophies, religions and contemplative disciplines contained detailed accounts, not just of peak experiences, but of whole families of peak experiences and systematic techniques to induce and sustain them” (Walsh 1993:124). We can observe a similar linking in the following statement, from Robert McDermott:

The transpersonal movement has been informed and inspired by *peak experiences of virtually all religious traditions*, it has not surprisingly drawn most comfortably from Buddhist theory [my emphasis](1993:210).

Transpersonal psychology has, perhaps, not yet recognised that it is a hybrid science. The notion of ‘peak experience’ goes quietly unnoticed doing its subversive work. Thus according to these theorists all religions have “peak experiences” but more, “peak experiences” as a Western construct could occur outside of religious tradition. Thus, the construct “peak experiences” can be seen as word magic, a binding spell, a linguistic device with occult powers - what post-colonial theorists are now calling cosmological *hybridity* (Kapferer et al 2004) which, has to do with the way cosmological designs are *detraditionalised* and reconfigured, Creolised – in acts of sorcery and deployed as subversive devices. Detraditionalized religious systems function as radical breakdowns of hegemonic structure, subversive hybridisations

enabling participants to draw on 'traditional' religious capital "whilst bypassing their explicit authoritative doctrines, dogmas and moral codes" (Heelas 1996:28) The Eastern religious systems are able to blend, fuse, and magically bind because they share some fundamental characteristics which allow for cosmological Creolisation - they are each holisms after their own logic, they each have transpersonal practices, at their apex they model culture specific forms of wholeness and they are each 'therapeutic'. For now we can say that these holistic paradigms of consciousness adumbrate into protection and health care for birthing women, children and men.

These acts of disjunctive playful spiritual terrorism, use the subversive wisdom that demands the recognition of devotion to something beyond ego, beyond secular, technocratic, materialism, beyond religious conflicts, and beyond the 'Great Satan' of the industrialised war complex and its technocratic medical arm. The demand for the recognition of devotion is an unruly, subversive fealty to a transpersonal, trans-religious, and trans-substantial paradigm. Furthermore this is a hybrid cluster of so-called peak experiences and holisms has the disorienting ability to negate *any* essentialising voices, or gendered authority by merging its symbols. Birth becomes the multivalent contesting ritual context *par excellence*.

I suggest that what is operating in the psychedelic counter-culture is a hybrid religious symbol system born out of complex colonisation processes which fused Eastern religious holisms and Romantic nature worship, Amerindian peyotism with the beat generation, civil rights values and depth psychology with widespread LSD use, pacifism, feminism, and a welter of other influences (see Lewis 1971, Bellah and Glock 1974, Roszak 1969, Ellwood 1973) into a Creolised religious/political therapeutic counter-culture in the days when the Grateful Dead meant something other than happy, well fed spirits.

Appendix 2

1) Original Research Proposal

What follows is a slightly edited version of my original research proposal. I reproduce this here to give the reader a background and an introduction to my study and to give an outline of the way I was thinking about the project four years ago. It will also give the reader a sense of what I learned and how this differed from my initial intuitions, ideas, and hypothesis. This outline does not include my original 7000 word review of transpersonal issues which I wrote to show my supervisors that there was a sub-discipline in transpersonal anthropology and a way of meshing anthropology and transpersonalism together at the site of reproduction. The bulk of this material is found in chapter 2 and appendix 1. This was always going to be a fairly dense project because transpersonal psychology itself developed out of an encounter with the perinatal unconscious - *perinatal* meaning, around birth.

Title: Birthing Men: Ritual Reunion and the Deep Other: Transpersonal¹ Dimensions in an Anthropology of Fathers at Birth

Hypothesis: The current situation involving the presence of men in a conjoined birth ritual betokens a complex system of healing. It is an attempt to reunite men and women as equal partners in the making and shaping of culture; in the reproduction of offspring; and in participation with life-giving powers of nature.

Background: This project develops directly out of *Conceiving Men: Changing Identity at the Site of Birth* my B.A. honours research project at Massey 2001. I completed a preliminary study of New Zealand men and their experience of being present at the birth of their children. My argument linked this shift in birth practices with the counter-cultural, feminist and deconstructive movements in the Western World. I construed birth as a ritual and linked the process to a rite of passage for men

¹ **Definitions:** *Transpersonal experiences* may be defined as experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos. *Transpersonal Anthropology* is the cross cultural study of transpersonal phenomena and the relationship between consciousness and culture. *Transpersonal sociology* is the study of the social dimensions, and implications, expressions and applications of transpersonal phenomena (Walsh and Vaughan 1993:199). See also chapters 4 and 5.

culminating in a shift of consciousness, perception and relationship to women, community and cosmos.

Death was also a central theme with all men interviewed touching on the topic of death in some way. This theme of death quickly became a central topic of my study. The relationship between birth, death and sex remains a compelling area of inquiry. Running tangential to the theme of death, was the idea that a complex relationship between the pattern of biological birth and pattern of ritual death-rebirth and the presence of men at birth were somehow inter-related (see chapter 7). I concluded that this was/is a ritual employed in the reshaping of gender – of reproducing culture differently. This area of ritual is one of the themes that can take birth into the realm of transpersonal studies - since it is in ritual where transpersonal states of consciousness traditionally and readily occur. These conclusions laid the foundations for a more comprehensive study of the male experience of birth in our society that will, for the most part, elaborate on the themes mentioned above.

Aims: My aim is to incorporate a transpersonal perspective with anthropology in a broad analysis of the site of birth. I aim to analyse the birth act as an important post-modern ritual of signification – with particular regard to the subaltern narrative of the newly incorporated (but unrepresented) male at birth. A third aim is to contribute to the field of anthropological literature of males and birth.

Significance: Having done at this stage over a year's formal anthropological study into the area of men at birth, I have come to believe that this study is of some significance. The most obvious area I think of is the afore mentioned lack of anthropological writing and research into the male experience of birth – in any culture – here is a clear case for representing an unheard voice and researching an almost virginal territory. Secondly I am writing from an insider's perspective as a birthing male, as 'the born' and as a member of the transpersonal community. These are subaltern voices in a highly contested site in one of the most deeply defining acts of the human condition – giving birth is the reproduction of human existence and thus lays us bare to all of life's novelty, drama, and ultimate demise. Reproduction is significant in 'division of labour' that seemed to have historically divided women into different stratifications of culture. The potential of this study is to make a contribution to both anthropology and transpersonal studies by offering a further attempt at understanding of the roots of sexism, rites of passage

and their complex relationship to human birth, culture and transcendence within a contemporary Western society – New Zealand.

Programme of Intended Research:

1) **Library Research:** The following four categories are the central areas of study.

- (a) A comparative study of the ethnographic literature on men and birth.
- (b) Anthropological studies of consciousness and transpersonal anthropology.
- (c) Anthropological/feminist studies of ritual and their relationship to birth and consciousness.
- (d) Popular and medical literature aimed at new parents.

Literature Review: In my provisional year I will complete a comprehensive literature review. The literatures I will familiarise myself with over the course of my provisional year include the following:

- Anthropological studies of religion
- Anthropology of consciousness
- Transpersonal Studies of consciousness and relationship to anthropology
- Cultural background of transpersonal movement
- Transpersonal ways of knowing and relationship to anthropology
- Works to do with bodily knowing, phenomenology
- Shamanism, possession, rites of passage
- Feminist birth literature
- Feminist literature on male separation and flight to objectivity/transcendence
- Insider/outsider literature (I am a procreative male and I am committed to transpersonal values)
- Psychoanalysis
- Historical and ethnographic accounts of birth
- Ritual studies
- Popular literature on birth and male participation

2) **Ethnographic Fieldwork:** I will include the following in my ethnographic research:

- (a) A phenomenological study of the experience of birth from the male standpoint.
- (b) My involvement with an antenatal group.
- (c) Interviews with midwives and doctors about their perceptions of fathers at birth.
- (d) Anecdotal material.

Research Methods

1) *Record conversations with men who have attended birth (primarily) and women..*

I intend to tape record up to 70 [I taped over 52 interviews in the end] interviews with males alone or with partners depending on the situation: at times women may wish to join in the conversation. I have found in my previous study that this was an interesting inclusion. These would be 45-minute interviews. I have chosen 70 [40] as a formal number to give me a reasonable spread. I will use a snowball approach to find participants. I will transcribe only those parts of the recording that seem relevant to my study as I imagine there will be a certain amount of repetition. I will mark relevant passages on the recordings for reference.

2) *Take part in an antenatal group.* I will get permission from an antenatal group to attend a six or ten week antenatal class. I will contact several midwives that I know and or go through a maternity hospital to achieve my inclusion. I will observe and attempt to understand how men are shaped to participate at birth, i.e. what are the roles assigned to men, the expectations, the givens if any, what practices do they participate in. My preliminary study revealed an ambivalent relationship between fathers and midwives, obstetricians and other professionals. So I am hoping that as I go through an antenatal class I will get a better grasp on what men are being taught about the roles they could fulfil and if this matches what fathers might like for themselves. The role I am committed to is very much an observer. So I will keep my research brief generalized to the observation of men at birth. I don't wish to tell them that I am observing 'spiritual emergencies' (see theoretical considerations) as an ethical concern.

3) *Interview midwives* Again taped interviews 45 minutes duration. Enter into conversation with 10 professionals to add another voice and see how fathers are perceived from the professional standpoint.

4) *Ethics*

I am in ongoing contact with John Heron, who has written several books on transpersonal philosophy and research. He affords me the opportunity for many useful discussions on various transpersonal issues. Also Lea Holford, a clinical psychologist, who has a Ph.D. in transpersonal studies, has made herself available in an advisory role. Stanislav Grof, one of the original founders of the transpersonal movement, has kindly offered advice on several chapters. I feel I have in these people a strong professional container from which the ethical considerations can be forged.

3) **Theoretical Considerations**

- (a) I believe that the inclusion of fathers in the birthing situation was driven by several factors. Among the most significant and obvious are the women's movement and the 'counter-cultural' movement both of which arose in '60s which is also the time that men were engaged in the birthing room.
 - (b) A major theoretical consideration of this study is the link between transpersonal studies and anthropology at the site of birth with regard to men. Transpersonal anthropology can be seen as movement in consciousness studies that was initially part of the counter-cultural impulse. I believe there is a complex and important relationship between the rise of the transpersonal movement and the concomitant inclusion of the male at birth.
 - (c) Explore a relationship between birthing, ritual and transpersonal views.
 - (e) Explore and critique religious assumptions in anthropology.
 - (f) Explore the rise of the transpersonal paradigm and its intersection with anthropology.
 - (g) Explore transpersonal notions of personhood and identity.
- Explore the anthropological situation with a combination of anthropological research methods and transpersonal ways of knowing.



Birthing Men: An Anthropology of Fathers at Birth

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Introduction

You are invited to participate in a study of fathers' experience at the birth of their children. This is an anthropological study of fathers at the birth of their children. The inclusion of fathers at the site of birth is a recent phenomenon in Western societies. I am interested in the historical impetus in Western culture that incorporated fathers into the birthing room. I am also interested in birth as an important transition ritual and the complex set of taboos around male knowledge of birth. There is very little written about fathers' experience of birth of their children. The antenatal class is obviously an important part of preparing for birth. I understand that birth is both a profoundly private event and a deeply social event, I feel both privileged and grateful to be included in the antenatal class.

Employment Status

I am a doctoral student in Social Anthropology at Massey University.

Participant Recruitment

The antenatal class is one component of the study. Others include interviewing men individually, a male focus group, and 12 interviews with midwives and doctors about their perceptions of men.

Potential Risk factors:

I do not believe there are any risk factors in this aspect of the project. Participants will be simply going through the antenatal process. I would imagine that amongst the trepidation and excitement about birth giving, fatherhood and motherhood, that there will be also a certain amount of joy and human adventure. So I think it will be a rather enjoyable occasion and that we are participating in a life affirming process.

Project Procedures

- The data will be used for my Ph.D thesis and potentially for articles and journal publications.
- Data will be stored in notebooks and then used to analyse the birth phenomenon for men.
- Notebooks will be stored in a locked drawer at my desk and computer files are kept safe through codes that only I have access to.
- Participants can contact me if they want to see a summary of the project findings.
- Persons described in notebooks will be given an alias and all finished documentation will carry pseudonyms.

Participant involvement

As a researcher I will be attending an antenatal class alongside people participating on that class. I will be sitting in for the duration of that class observing the process of antenatal education. I will not be interviewing people but simply observing, listening and taking notes.

Participant's Rights

You have the right to:

- Ask the researcher to withdraw from the class either for a period of time or altogether.
- Ask that anything that takes place in the class be struck from the study.
- withdraw from the study before December 1, 2004.
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Support Processes

I consider that there is little possibility of harm in this research. Participants are in a safe atmosphere engaged in an antenatal class. The researcher will assume a passive role. The antenatal class is already a supportive environment. My input will be at an absolute minimum as I am wishing only to observe what happens at such a class.

Project Contacts

Participants may contact the researcher(s) and/or supervisor(s) if they have any questions about the project.

Participants may contact the Health Advocates Trust 0800555050

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, ALB Protocol NO/NO (02/082). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Kerry P Chamberlain, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Albany, telephone 09 443 9700 x9078, e-mail K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz.



Birthing Men: An Anthropology of Fathers at Birth

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date: 10.12.2002

Full Name - printed

Christopher Harris (Chris)

ph (09) 361 2061

Glossary of Terms

Perinatal: meaning pertaining to birth or around birth. Perinatal here refers to a psychodynamic dimension in the psyche.

Holotropic: is a term coined for a state specific type of consciousness. It is an altered state of consciousness.

Non-ordinary states of consciousness: can be a trance state, ecstasy awe, *communitas* (after Turner 1969) and an altered-state of consciousness.

Hybridity: is a term that has replaced syncretism in anthropology. Researchers are now speaking of cosmological hybrids – the joining of cosmological designs together. This is most often related to colonisation processes.

Sorcery: post-colonial studies relate the practice of joining cosmic designs together as an enactment that empowers the accommodating culture or group. It is seen by recent theorists in anthropology as an act of subversive magic - a newly recognised form of magic.

Peak Experience: is a heightened state of awareness often compared to religious ecstasy. It can mean either high or humbled and is often depicted as a collapse of polarities.

Shamanistic: a form of performance and magic often called shamanism. This refers to tribal curers and 'medicine' men and women. The term shamanism is likely a Western construct.

Monophasic: refers to data collected in the normal Eurocentric state of consciousness it would deny trance states as a legitimate form of research gathering.

Polyphasic: is the gathering of data in different modes of consciousness i.e. waking state, sleeping state, meditation state or ecstatic state.

Alterity-scapes: meaning an imaginal transpersonal land-scape accessed in trance or meditation.

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