

H. R. Giger and the Zeitgeist of the Twentieth Century Observations from Modern Consciousness Research

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Stan Grof, Albert Hofmann e H. R. Giger, no Museu de H.R. Giger em Gruyere, Suíça, em Outubro de 2005.

Several years ago, I had the privilege and pleasure to spend some time with Oliver Stone, visionary genius who has portrayed in his films with extraordinary artistic power the shadow side of modern humanity. At one point, we talked about Ridley Scott's movie *Alien* and the discussion focused on H. R. Giger, whose creature and set designs were the key element in the film's success (1,2,3,4). In the 1979 Academy Awards ceremony held at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles in April 1980, Giger received for his work on the *Alien* an Oscar for best achievement in visual effects.

I have known Giger's work since the publication of his *Necronomicon* and have always felt a deep admiration for him, not only as an artistic genius, but also a visionary with an uncanny ability to depict the deep dark recesses of the human psyche revealed by modern consciousness research. In our discussion, I shared my

feelings with Oliver Stone, who turned out to be himself a great admirer of Giger. His opinion about Giger and his place in the world of art and in human culture was very original and interesting. "I do not know anybody else," he said, "who has so accurately portrayed the soul of modern humanity. A few decades from now when they will talk about the twentieth century, they will think of Giger."

Although Oliver Stone's statement momentarily surprised me by its extreme nature, I immediately realized that it reflected a profound truth. Since then, I often recalled this conversation when I was confronted with various disturbing aspects of the western industrial civilization and with the alarming developments in the countries affected by technological progress. There is no other artist who has captured with equal power the ills plaguing modern society – the rampaging technology taking over human life, suicidal destruction of the eco system of the earth, violence reaching apocalyptic proportions, sexual excesses, insanity of life driving people to mass consumption of tranquilizers and narcotic drugs, and the alienation individuals experience in relation to their bodies, to each other, and to nature.

Giger's art has often been called "biomechanoid and Giger himself called one of his books *Biomechanics*." It would be difficult to find a word that better describes the *Zeitgeist* of the twentieth century, characterized by staggering technological progress that enslaved modern humanity in an internecine symbiosis with the world of machines. In the course of the twentieth century, modern technological inventions became extensions and replacements of our muscles, our nervous system, our brain, our eyes and ears, and even our reproductive organs, to such an extent that the boundaries between biology and mechanical contraptions have all but disappeared. The archetypal stories of Faust, the sorcerer's apprentice, Golem, and Frankenstein became the leading mythologies of our times. Materialistic science, in its effort to gain knowledge about the world of matter and to control it, has engendered a monster that threatens the very survival of life on our planet. The human role has changed from that of a demiurg to that of a victim.

When we look for another characteristic feature of twentieth century, what immediately comes to mind is unbridled violence and destruction on an unprecedented scale. It was a century, in which internecine wars, bloody revolutions, totalitarian regimes, genocide, brutality of secret police, and international terrorism ruled supreme. The loss of life in World War I was estimated at ten million soldiers and twenty million civilians. Additional millions died from war-spread epidemics and famine. In World War II, approximately twice as many lives were lost. This century saw the bestiality of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, the diabolical hecatombs of Stalin's purges and his Gulag Archipelago, the development of chemical and biological

warfare, the weapons of mass destruction, and the apocalyptic horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We can add to it the civil terror in China and other Communist countries, the victims of South American dictatorships, the atrocities and genocide committed by the Chinese in Tibet, and the cruelties of the South African Apartheid. The war in Korea and Vietnam, the wars in the Middle East, and the slaughters in Yugoslavia and Rwanda are additional examples of the senseless bloodshed we have witnessed during the last hundred years. In a mitigated form, death pervaded the media of the twentieth century as a favorite subject for entertainment. It has been estimated that in the USA an average child witnesses on television 8,000 murders by the time he or she finishes elementary school. The number of violent acts seen on television by age eighteen rises to 200,000.

The nature and scale of violence committed in the course of the twentieth century and the destructive abuses of modern science – chemical, nuclear, and biological warfare and use of concentration camp inmates as human guinea pigs – gave this period of history distinctly demonic features. Some of the atrocities were motivated by distorted understanding of God and by perverted religious impulses resulting in mass murder and suicide. This century saw the mass suicides of the members of Jim Jones' People's Temple, Marshall Herff Applewhite's and Bonnie Lu Nettles' Heaven's Gate, the Swiss Sun Temple cult, and other deviant religious groups. Violent terrorist organizations, such as Charles Manson's gang, the Symbionese Liberation Army, and the Islamic extremists acted out deviant mystical impulses, This was further augmented by a renaissance of witchcraft and satanic cults and escalating interest in books and movies focusing on demon worship and exorcism.

Yet another important characteristic of the twentieth century is the extraordinary change of attitude toward sexuality, of sexual values, and of sexual behavior. The second half of this century witnessed an unprecedented lifting of sexual repression and polymorphous manifestation of erotic impulses worldwide. On the one hand, it was removal of cultural constraints leading to sexual freedom, early sexual experimentation of the young generation, premarital sex, promiscuity, popularity of common law and open marriage, gay liberation, and overtly sexual theater plays, television programs, and movies.

On the other hand, the shadow sides of sexuality surfaced to an unprecedented degree and became part of modern culture – teenage pregnancy, adult and child pornography, red light districts offering all imaginable forms of prostitution, sadomasochistic parlors, sexual "slave markets," bizarre burlesque shows, and clubs

catering to clients with a wide range of erotic aberrations and perversions. And the darkest shadow of them all – the rapidly escalating specter of worldwide AIDS epidemic – forged an inseparable link between sexuality and death, Eros and Thanatos.

The stress and excessive demands of modern life, alienation, and loss of deeper meaning of life and of spiritual values engendered in many people a consuming need to escape and seek pleasure and oblivion. The use of hard drugs – heroin, cocaine, crack, and amphetamines – reached astronomic proportions and escalated into a global epidemic. The empires of the drug lords and the vicious battle for the lucrative black market with narcotics on all its levels contributed significantly to the already escalating crime rate and brought violence into the underground and streets of many modern cities.

All the essential elements of twentieth century's Zeitgeist are present in an inextricable amalgam in Giger's biomechanoid art. The entanglement of humans and machines has been over the years the leitmotif in his paintings, drawings, and sculptures. In his inimitable style, he masterfully merges elements of dangerous mechanical contraptions of the technological world with various parts of human anatomy – arms, legs, faces, breasts, bellies, and genitals (5). Equally extraordinary is the way in which Giger blends deviant sexuality with violence and with emblems of death. Skulls and bones morph into sexual organs or parts of machines and vice versa to such degree and so smoothly that the resulting images portray with equal symbolic power sexual rapture, violence, agony, and death (6,7,8). The satanic dimension of these scenes is depicted with such artistic skill that it gives them archetypal depth (9).

Giger portrays in his unique way the horrors of modern war, the specter that plagued humanity throughout the twentieth century as part of everyday reality or as a haunting vision of possible or plausible future. We can think here about his *Necronom II* (10), the three-headed skeletal figure wearing a military helmet, which combines in a terrifying amalgam symbols of death, violence, and sexual aggression. Many of Giger's paintings depict the ugly world of the future, destroyed by excesses of technology and ravaged by nuclear winter – a world of utter alienation, without humans and animals, dominated by soulless skyscrapers, plastic materials, cold steel structures, beton, and asphalt (11,12). And in his *Atomic Children*, Giger envisions the grotesque population of mutants, who have survived nuclear war or the accumulated fall-out of the nuclear energy plants (13,14,15). Allusions to drug addiction appear throughout Giger's work in the form of syringes inserted into the veins and bodies of his various characters (16,17).

There is one recurrent motif in Giger's art that at first glance has very little to do with the soul of the twentieth century – the abundance of images depicting tortured and sick fetuses (18,19,20). And yet, this is where Giger's visionary genius offers the most profound insights into the hidden recesses of the human psyche. Adding the prenatal and perinatal elements to the symbolism of sex, death, and pain reveals depth and clarity of psychological understanding that by far surpasses that of mainstream psychiatrists and psychologists and is missing in the work of Giger's predecessors and peers – surrealists and fantastic realists.

Mainstream psychology and psychiatry is dominated by the theories of Sigmund Freud, whose ground-breaking pioneering work laid the foundations for modern "depth-psychology." Freud's model of the psyche, however avant-garde and revolutionary for his time, is very superficial and narrow, being limited to postnatal biography and the individual unconscious. The members of his Viennese circle who had tried to expand it, such as Otto Rank, with his theory of the birth trauma (Rank 1929), and C. G. Jung, with his concept of the collective unconscious and the archetypes (Jung 1959), became renegades; Rank was ousted from the psychoanalytic movement and Jung left it after a heated confrontation with Freud. In official handbooks of psychiatry, their work is usually discussed as historical curiosity and considered irrelevant for clinical practice.

Freud's theories had a profound effect on art. His concepts of the Oedipus complex, mother fixation, and the castrating father became a treasure trove of ideas for novelists and film-makers. Freud's discovery of sexual symbolism and his interpretation of dream imagery was one of the main sources of inspiration for the Surrealist movement. It became fashionable for the artistic avant-garde to imitate the dream work by juxtaposing in a most surprising fashion various objects in a manner that defied elementary logic. The selection of these objects often showed a preference for those that, according to Freud, had hidden sexual meaning.

However, while the connections between the seemingly incongruent dream images have their own deep logic and meaning, which can be revealed by analysis of dreams, this was not always true for surrealistic paintings. Here shocking juxtaposition of images often reflected empty mannerism separated from the truth and logic of the unconscious dynamic. This can best be illustrated by considering the famous Surrealist dictum, which poet-philosopher André Breton borrowed from Count de Lautréamont's (Isidore Ducasse's) *Chants de Maldoror* (Songs of Maldoror). This succinct statement describing the aesthetic of jarring juxtapositions represents a

manifesto of the Surrealist movement: "As beautiful as the unexpected meeting, on a dissecting table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella."

Another important inspiration for Surrealism was medieval alchemy. André Breton came across a medieval image from one of the alchemical texts, representing the synopsis of the first and second opus of the "royal art" (21). The picture was extremely complex and featured all the most important symbols used to portray various stages of the two works of the alchemical process. Breton was fascinated by the fantastic array of seemingly incongruous images that this picture brought together and the shocking surprise it induced in the viewer. As C. G. Jung discovered in twenty years of his intense study of alchemy, the alchemical symbolism – like the symbolism of dreams – reflects deep dynamics of the unconscious and reveals important hidden truth about the human psyche. The same certainly cannot be said about most of surrealist art.

While the combination of a sewing machine, a dissecting table, and an umbrella might provide an element of surprise for the viewer, it would be very difficult to find a meaningful psychodynamic connection between these three images. Similarly, the assemblies of objects in most surrealist paintings would not make much sense to an alchemist familiar with the symbolism of the "royal art." Giger's art is diametrically different in this regard. The combinations of images in his paintings might seem illogical and incongruous only to those who are not familiar with the discoveries of pioneering consciousness research in the last several decades. The observations from the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness have revealed that Giger's understanding of the human psyche is far ahead of mainstream professionals, who have not yet accepted the new observations and integrated them into the official body of scientific knowledge.

By seeking the source of his own nightmares and disturbing fantasies, Giger discovered independently from the pioneers of modern consciousness research, the paramount psychological importance of the trauma of biological birth. The existence of a fascinating and important domain in the human unconscious, which contains the powerful memory of our passage through the birth canal, intuited by Giger and reflected in his art, has not yet been recognized and accepted by official academic circles. Intimate knowledge of this deep realm of the psyche is also absent in the work of Giger's predecessors and peers – surrealists and fantastic realists. Giger's artistic skills and his talent to portray the Fantastic match those of his models – Hieronymus Bosch, Salvador Dalí, and Ernst Fuchs, but the depth of his psychological insight is unparalleled in the world of art.

Critics have described Giger's work as being simultaneously a telescope and a microscope revealing dark secrets of the human psyche. Looking into the deep abyss of the unconscious that modern humanity prefers to deny and ignore, Giger discovered how profoundly human life is shaped by events and forces that precede our emergence into the world. He intuited the importance of the birth trauma not only for postnatal life of the individual, but also as source of dangerous emotions that are responsible for many ills of human society. He said about the tapestry of babies he painted: "Babies are beautiful, innocent and, yet, they represent an uncanny threat and beginning of all evil. As carriers of all kinds of plagues, they are predestined to represent the psychological and organic harms of our civilization."

One could hardly imagine a more powerful representation of the terrifying ordeal of human birth than Giger's Birth Machine (22), Stillbirth Machine (23), or his Death Delivery Machine (24). Equally powerful birth motifs can be found in Biomechanoid I (18), featuring three fetuses as heavily armed grotesque Indian warriors with steel bands constricting their foreheads, in Giger's self-portrait Biomechanoid (19) on the poster for the Sydow-Zirkwitz Gallery, and in Landscape XIV (20) that portrays an entire tapestry of tortured babies. The symbolism of Landscape X (25) is more subtle and less obvious; here Giger combines the uterine interior, symbolizing sex and birth, with black crosses in the shape of targets for shooting practice of the Swiss army that signify death, as well as violence. Echoes of birth symbolism can also be easily detected in his Suitcase Baby (26), Homage to Beckett (27), and throughout his work.

Clinical work with various forms of powerful experiential psychotherapy and with psychedelic substances has brought incontrovertible evidence that the Freudian image of the psyche is extremely superficial (Grof 1975, 2000). The great American mythologist Joseph Campbell expressed it very succinctly by saying that "Freud was fishing while sitting on a whale." People experiencing deep psychological regression with the use of these new techniques very rapidly move beyond the memories from childhood and infancy and reach the level in their psyche that carries the record of traumatic memory of biological birth. At this point, they encounter emotions and physical sensations of extreme intensity, often surpassing anything they previously considered humanly possible. The experiences originating on this level of the psyche represent a strange mixture of a shattering encounter with death and the struggle to be born (71).

This intimate connection between birth and death in our unconscious psyche is logical and easily understandable. It reflects the fact that birth is a potentially or actually life-threatening event. The child and the mother can actually lose their lives during delivery, and children might be born severely blue from asphyxiation, or even dead

and in need of resuscitation. The birth process also involves violent elements in the form of the assault of the uterine contractions on the fetus, as well as the fetus' aggressive response to this situation (72,73). This reaction takes the form of amorphous fury of a biological organism whose life is seriously threatened. Suffering and vital threat engender in the fetus a sense of vital threat and overwhelming anxiety.

The fact that the reliving of birth is typically associated with violent and terrifying experiences abounding in images of sacrifice, death, and evil makes good sense in view of the emotional and physical ordeal of the fetus. More surprising is the fact that individuals involved in this process regularly experience intense sexual arousal (74). It seems that the human organism has a built-in physiological mechanism that translates inhuman suffering, and particularly choking, into a strange kind of sexual excitement and eventually into ecstatic rapture. This is responsible for the fact that, in the depth of the human unconscious, sexuality is inextricably linked to fear of death, physical pain, claustrophobic confinement, suffocation, and encounter with various forms of biological material, such as amniotic fluid, vaginal secretions, blood, feces, and urine.

The spectrum of perinatal experiences is very rich and is not limited to the elements that can be derived from the biological and psychological processes involved in childbirth. The perinatal domain of the psyche also represents an important gateway to the collective unconscious in the Jungian sense, both in its historical and mythological aspects. The intensity of the suffering can be so extreme that it can bring identification with victims of all ages and evoke archetypal images of evil – the Terrible Mother Goddess (75), scenery of Hell (76), and various demonic beings (77, 78).

The reliving of the consecutive stages of biological birth results in distinct experiential patterns, each of which is characterized by specific emotions, psychosomatic sensations, and symbolic imagery. I refer to them as Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPMs). The connections between the stages of birth and various symbolic images associated with them are very specific and consistent. The way in which various elements are brought together makes little sense in terms of ordinary logic. However, far from being erratic and arbitrary, these associations have a meaningful order of their own. They reflect what can be called "experiential logic;" various constituents of the BPMs are brought together not because they share some formal characteristics, but because they are connected with the same or similar emotions and physical sensations.

First Basic Perinatal Matrix: BPM I (Primal Union with Mother)

The first perinatal matrix (BPM I) is related to the intrauterine existence before the onset of the delivery. The experiential world of this period can be referred to as the “amniotic universe.” The fetus in the womb does not have an awareness of boundaries and does not differentiate between the inner and the outer. This is reflected in the nature of the experiences associated with the reliving of the memory of the prenatal state.

During episodes of undisturbed embryonal existence, we typically have experiences of vast regions with no boundaries or limits. We can identify with galaxies, interstellar space, or the entire cosmos (79). A related experience is that of floating in the sea, identifying with various aquatic animals, such as fish, jelly fish, dolphins, or whales, or even becoming the ocean (80). This seems to reflect the fact that the fetus is essentially an aquatic creature. I refer to this experience as oceanic or Apollonian ecstasy. Positive intrauterine experiences can also be associated with archetypal visions of Mother Nature – safe, beautiful, and unconditionally nourishing like a good womb (81). We can envision fruit-bearing orchards, fields of ripe corn, agricultural terraces in the Andes, or unspoiled Polynesian islands. Mythological images from the collective unconscious that often appear in this context portray various celestial realms and paradises as they are described in mythologies of different cultures.

When we are reliving episodes of intrauterine disturbances, memories of the “bad womb,” we have a sense of dark and ominous threat and often feel that we are being poisoned (82). We might see images that portray polluted waters and toxic dumps. This reflects the fact that many prenatal disturbances are caused by toxic changes in the body of the pregnant mother. Sequences of this kind can be associated with archetypal visions of frightening demonic entities or with a sense of insidious all-pervading evil. Experiences of a hostile womb feature vicious animals and fierce demonic entities (83). Those people, who relive episodes of more violent interference with prenatal existence, such as an imminent miscarriage or attempted abortion, usually experience some form of universal threat or bloody apocalyptic visions of the end of the world. This again reflects the intimate interconnections between events in our biological history and the Jungian archetypes.

Second Perinatal Matrix: BPM II (Cosmic Engulfment and No Exit or Hell)

While reliving the onset of biological birth, we typically feel that we are being sucked into a gigantic whirlpool (84,85) or swallowed by some mythic creature (73,86). We

might also experience that the entire world or cosmos is being engulfed. This can be associated with images of devouring or entangling archetypal monsters, such as leviathans, dragons, whales, vipers (87), giant snakes (88), tarantulas (89,90), or octopuses (91). The sense of overwhelming vital threat can lead to intense anxiety and general mistrust bordering on paranoia. Another experiential variety of the beginning of the second matrix is the theme of descending into the depths of the underworld, the realm of death, or hell (92). As Joseph Campbell so eloquently described, this is a universal motif in the mythologies of the hero's journey (Campbell 1968).

In the fully developed first stage of biological birth, the uterine contractions periodically constrict the fetus, and the cervix is not yet open. Subjects reliving this part of birth feel caught in a monstrous claustrophobic nightmare; they experience agonizing emotional and physical pain, and have a sense of utter helplessness and hopelessness (93). Feelings of loneliness, guilt, absurdity of life, and existential despair can reach metaphysical proportions. A person in this predicament often becomes convinced that this situation will never end and that there is absolutely no way out. An experiential triad characteristic for this state is a sense of dying, going crazy, and never coming back.

Reliving this stage of birth is typically accompanied by sequences that involve people, animals, and even mythological beings in a painful and hopeless predicament similar to that of the fetus caught in the clutches of the birth canal. This can be a medieval dungeon, a torture chamber of the Inquisition, a smothering and crushing mechanical contraption (94), a concentration camp, or an insane asylum. Our suffering can take the form of pains of animals caught in traps or even reach dimensions that are archetypal. We may feel the intolerable tortures of sinners in hell, the agony of Jesus on the cross (95), or the excruciating torment of Sisyphus rolling his boulder up the mountain in the deepest pit of Hades. Other images that have appeared in sessions dominated by this matrix include the Greek archetypal symbols of endless suffering, Tantalus and Prometheus, and other figures representing eternal damnation, such as the Wandering Jew Ahasuerus or the Flying Dutchman.

While under the influence of this matrix, we are selectively blinded and are unable to see anything positive in our life and in human existence in general. The connection to the divine dimension seems to be irretrievably severed and lost. Through the prism of this matrix, life seems to be a meaningless Theater of the Absurd (96), a farce staging cardboard characters and mindless robots, or a cruel circus sideshow. In this state of mind, existential philosophy appears to be the only adequate and relevant

description of existence. It is interesting in this regard that Jean Paul Sartre's work was deeply influenced by a badly managed and unresolved mescaline session dominated by BPM II (Riedlinger 1982). Samuel Beckett's preoccupation with death and birth and his search for Mother also reveal strong perinatal influences. Going deeper into this experience seems like meeting eternal damnation. And yet, this shattering experience of darkness and abysmal despair is known from the spiritual literature as the Dark Night of the Soul. It is an important stage of spiritual opening that can have an immensely purging and liberating effect.

Third Perinatal Matrix: BPM III (The Death-Rebirth Struggle)

Many aspects of this rich and colorful experience can be understood from its association with the second clinical stage of biological delivery, the propulsion through the birth canal after the cervix opens and the head descends into the pelvis. In this stage, the uterine contractions continue, but the cervix is now dilated and allows gradual propulsion of the fetus through the birth canal. This involves crushing mechanical pressures, pains, and often a high degree of anoxia and suffocation. A natural concomitant of this highly uncomfortable and life-threatening situation is an experience of intense anxiety.

Besides the interruption of blood circulation caused by uterine contractions and the ensuing compression of uterine arteries, the blood supply to the fetus can be further compromised by various complications. The umbilical cord can be squeezed between the head and the pelvic opening or be twisted around the neck. The placenta can detach during delivery or actually obstruct the way out (placenta praevia). In some instances, the fetus can inhale various forms of biological material that it encounters in the final stages of this process, which further intensifies the feelings of suffocation. The problems in this stage can be so extreme that they require instrumental intervention, such as the use of forceps or even an emergency Cesarean section.

BPM III is an extremely rich and complex experiential pattern. Besides the actual realistic reliving of different aspects of the struggle in the birth canal, it involves a wide variety of imagery drawn from history, nature, and archetypal realms. The most important of these are the atmosphere of titanic fight, aggressive and sadomasochistic sequences, experiences of deviant sexuality, demonic episodes, scatological involvement, and encounter with fire. Most of these aspects of BPM III can be meaningfully related to certain anatomical, physiological, and biochemical characteristics of the corresponding stage of birth.

The titanic aspect of BPM III is quite understandable in view of the enormity of the forces operating in the final stage of childbirth. When we encounter this facet of the third matrix, we experience streams of energy of overwhelming intensity, rushing through the body and building up to explosive discharges. At this point, we might identify with raging elements of nature, such as volcanoes, electric storms, earthquakes, tidal waves, or tornadoes (97). The experience can also portray the world of technology involving enormous energies – tanks, rockets, spaceships, lasers, electric power plants, or even thermonuclear reactors and atomic bombs. The titanic experiences of BPM III can reach archetypal dimensions and portray battles of gigantic proportions, such as the cosmic battle between the forces of Light and Darkness, angels and devils, or the gods and the Titans.

Aggressive and sadomasochistic aspects of this matrix reflect the biological fury of the organism whose survival is threatened by suffocation, as well as the introjected destructive onslaught of the uterine contractions. Facing this aspect of BPM III, we might experience cruelties of astonishing proportions, manifesting in scenes of violent murder and suicide, mutilation and self-mutilation, massacres of various kinds, and bloody wars and revolutions. They often take the form of torture, execution, ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice, bloody man-to-man combats, and sadomasochistic practices.

The experiential logic of the sexual aspect of the death-rebirth process is not as immediately obvious. It seems that the human organism has an inbuilt physiological mechanism that translates inhuman suffering, and particularly suffocation, into a strange kind of sexual arousal and eventually into ecstatic rapture. This can be illustrated by the experiences of the martyrs and of flagellants described in religious literature. Additional examples can be found in the material from concentration camps, from the reports of prisoners of war, and from the files of Amnesty International (Sargant 1957). It is also well known that men dying of suffocation on the gallows typically have an erection and even ejaculate.

Sexual experiences that occur in the context of BPM III are characterized by enormous intensity of the sexual drive, by their mechanical and unselective quality, and their exploitative, pornographic, or deviant nature. They depict scenes from red light districts and from the sexual underground, extravagant erotic practices, and sadomasochistic sequences. Equally frequent are episodes portraying incest and episodes of sexual abuse or rape. In rare instances, the BPM III imagery can involve the gory and repulsive extremes of criminal sexuality – erotically motivated murder, dismemberment, cannibalism, and necrophilia. The fact that, on this level of the psyche, sexual arousal is inextricably connected with highly problematic elements –

physical pain, suffocation, vital threat, anxiety, aggression, self-destructive impulses, and various forms of biological material – forms a natural basis for the development of the most important types of sexual dysfunctions, variations, deviations, and perversions.

The demonic aspect of BPM III can present specific problems for the experiencers, as well as therapists and facilitators. The uncanny and eerie nature of the manifestations involved often leads to reluctance to face it. The most common themes observed in this context are scenes of the Sabbath of the Witches (Walpurgi's Night) (98), satanic orgies and Black Mass rituals, and temptation by evil forces. The common denominator connecting this stage of childbirth with the themes of the Sabbath or with the Black Mass rituals is the peculiar experiential amalgam of death, deviant sexuality, pain, fear, aggression, scatology, and distorted spiritual impulse that they share. This observation seems to have great relevance for the recent epidemic of experiences of satanic cult abuse reported by clients in various forms of regressive therapy.

The scatological aspect of the death-rebirth process has its natural biological basis in the fact that, in the final phase of the delivery, the fetus can come into close contact with various forms of biological material — blood, vaginal secretions, urine, and even feces. However, the nature and content of these experiences by far exceed what the newborn might have actually experienced during birth. Experiences of this aspect of BPM III can involve such scenes as crawling in offal or through sewage systems, wallowing in piles of excrement, drinking blood or urine, or participating in repulsive images of putrefaction. It is an intimate and shattering encounter with the worst aspects of biological existence (99).

When the experience of BPM III comes closer to resolution, it becomes less violent and disturbing. The prevailing atmosphere is that of extreme passion and driving energy of intoxicating intensity. The imagery portrays exciting conquests of new territories, hunts of wild animals, challenging sports, and adventures in amusement parks. These experiences are clearly related to activities that involve "adrenaline rush" – car racing, bungee-cord jumping, dangerous circus performances, and acrobatic diving.

At this time, we can also encounter archetypal figures of deities, demigods, and legendary heroes representing death and rebirth. We can have visions of Jesus, his torment and humiliation, the Way of the Cross, and crucifixion, or even actually experience full identification with his suffering (100,101). Whether or not we know intellectually the corresponding mythologies, we can experience such mythological

themes as resurrection of the Egyptian god Osiris, or death and rebirth of the Greek deities Dionysus, Attis, or Adonis. The experience can portray Persephone's abduction by Pluto, the descent into the underworld of the Sumerian goddess Inanna, Quetzalcoatl's journey through the chthonic realms, or the ordeals of the Mayan Hero Twins of the Popol Vuh.

Just before the experience of psychospiritual rebirth, it is common to encounter the element of fire. The motif of fire can be experienced either in its ordinary everyday form or in the archetypal form of purgatorial fire (pyrocatharsis) (102). We can have the feeling that our body is on fire, have visions of burning cities and forests, and identify with the victims of immolation. In the archetypal version, the burning seems to radically destroy whatever is corrupted in us and prepare us for spiritual rebirth. A classical symbol of the transition from BPM III to BPM IV is the legendary bird Phoenix who dies in fire and rises resurrected from the ashes.

The pyrocathartic experience is a somewhat puzzling aspect of BPM III, since its connection with biological birth is not as direct and obvious as is the case with the other symbolic elements. The biological counterpart of this experience might be the explosive liberation of previously blocked energies in the final stage of childbirth or the overstimulation of the fetus with indiscriminate "firing" of the peripheral neurons. It is interesting that this encounter with fire has its experiential parallel in the delivering mother who at this stage of delivery often feels that her vagina is on fire.

Several important characteristics of the third matrix distinguish it from the previously described no-exit constellation. The situation here is challenging and difficult, but it does not seem hopeless and we do not feel helpless. We are actively involved in a fierce struggle and have the feeling that the suffering has a definite direction, goal, and meaning. In religious terms, this situation corresponds to the image of purgatory rather than hell. In addition, we do not play exclusively the role of helpless victims. At this point, three different roles become available to us. Besides being observers of what is happening, we can also identify with both the aggressor and the victim. This can be so convincing that it might be difficult to distinguish these three roles from each other. Also, while the no-exit situation involves sheer suffering, the experience of the death-rebirth struggle represents the borderline between agony and ecstasy and the fusion of both. It seems appropriate to refer to this type of experience as Dionysian or volcanic ecstasy in contrast to the Apollonian or oceanic ecstasy of the cosmic union associated with the first perinatal matrix.

Fourth Perinatal Matrix: BPM IV (The Death-Rebirth Experience)

This matrix is related to the third clinical stage of delivery, to the final expulsion from the birth canal and the severing of the umbilical cord. Experiencing this matrix, we complete the preceding difficult process of propulsion through the birth canal, achieve explosive liberation, and emerge into light. This can often be accompanied by concrete and realistic memories of various specific aspects of this stage of birth. These can include the experience of anesthesia, the pressures of the forceps, and the sensations associated with various obstetric maneuvers or postnatal interventions.

The reliving of biological birth is not experienced just as a simple mechanical replay of the original biological event, but also as psychospiritual death and rebirth. To understand this, one has to realize that what happens in this process includes some important additional elements. Because the fetus is completely confined during the birth process and has no way of expressing the extreme emotions and reacting to the intense physical sensations involved, the memory of this event remains psychologically undigested and unassimilated. Our self-definition and our attitudes toward the world in our postnatal life are heavily contaminated by this constant reminder of the vulnerability, inadequacy, and weakness that we experienced at birth. In a sense, we were born anatomically but have not caught up with this fact emotionally. The “dying” and the agony during the struggle for rebirth reflect the actual pain and vital threat of the biological birth process. However, the ego death that precedes rebirth is the death of our old concepts of who we are and what the world is like, which were forged by the traumatic imprint of birth and are maintained by the memory of this situation that stays alive in our unconscious.

As we are clearing these old programs by letting them emerge into consciousness, they are losing their emotional charge and are, in a sense, dying. But we are so used to them and identified with them that approaching the moment of the ego death feels like the end of our existence, or even like the end of the world. As frightening as this process usually is, it is actually very healing and transforming. However, paradoxically, while only a small step separates us from an experience of radical liberation, we have a sense of all-pervading anxiety and impending catastrophe of enormous proportions. What is actually dying in this process is the false ego that, up to this point in our life, we have mistaken for our true self. While we are losing all the reference points we know, we have no idea what is on the other side, or even if there is anything there at all. This fear tends to create enormous resistance to continue and complete the experience. As a result, without appropriate guidance many people can remain psychologically stuck in this problematic territory.

Experiential completion of the reliving of birth takes the form of psychospiritual death and rebirth, giving birth to a new self (103,104). When we overcome the metaphysical fear encountered at this important juncture and decide to let things happen, we experience total annihilation on all imaginable levels – physical destruction, emotional disaster, intellectual and philosophical defeat, ultimate moral failure, and even spiritual damnation. During this experience, all reference points – everything that is important and meaningful in our life – seem to be mercilessly destroyed. Immediately following the experience of total annihilation – hitting “cosmic bottom” – we are overwhelmed by visions of white or golden light of supernatural radiance and exquisite beauty that appears numinous and divine (105,106,107).

Having survived what seemed like an experience of total annihilation and apocalyptic end of everything, we are blessed only seconds later with fantastic displays of magnificent rainbow spectra, peacock designs, celestial scenes, and visions of archetypal beings bathed in divine light. Often, this is the time of a powerful encounter with the archetypal Great Mother Goddess, either in her universal form or in one of her culture -specific forms (81,108,109). Following the experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth, we feel redeemed and blessed, experience ecstatic rapture, and have a sense of reclaiming our divine nature and cosmic status. We are overcome by a surge of positive emotions toward ourselves, other people, nature, and existence in general.

Giger has been in touch with the perinatal domain of his unconscious since his childhood. He has always been fascinated by underground tunnels, dark corridors, cellars, and ghost rides. Many of his nightmares spawned by his memory of the birth trauma have given him a deep understanding of the symbolism of the perinatal process, particularly its difficult and challenging aspects. He knows intimately the agony of the embryo in a hostile or toxic womb, as well as the suffering of the fetus during the arduous passage through the birth canal. And he is fully aware of the fact that the source of this knowledge is his own memory of birth. The following is his description of one of his nightmares, involving the sense of terrifying engulfment characteristic for the onset of the birth process (BPM II):

“Again horror took control of me. Harmless passersby who my mind turned into insane murderers had to be avoided by making wide detours around them. Everything seemed evil to me. The houses, the trees, the cars. Only water could placate my spirit. I felt as if I was about to be swallowed by a hole. The sidewalk became so steep that I was always about to fall off it and into the adjoining gorge.

With tears streaming from my eyes, I clutched onto Li (his girlfriend at the time) without whom I would have been lost.”

Experiences of this kind have not been limited to Giger’s dream life: they have occasionally occurred in the middle of his everyday life. Horst Albert Glaser made the following comment about this aspect of Giger’s life: “The artist has always been interested in what might be called the cracks in a seemingly smooth daily life. Places where the dreamer steps into a bottomless abyss and the sleeper contorts his body – this is what captures the artist’s frightened inner child. What seems to be the road to freedom is a plunge into black nothingness.”

The motif of the engulfing vortex that transports the subject into a terrifying alternate reality appears in several of Giger’s paintings (28). I mentioned earlier that another experiential variety of the beginning of birth, is the theme of descending into the depths of the underworld, the realm of death, or hell. This immediately brings to mind Giger’s childhood fantasies of monstrous labyrinths and spiral staircases that served as inspiration for his Shafts (29,30) and Under the Earth (31). The claustrophobic nightmarish atmosphere of a fully developed BPM II dominates many of Giger’s paintings. He portrays with extraordinary artistic power the torment, anguish, and hopeless predicament of the fetus caught in the clutches of the uterine contractions and the ordeal of the delivering mother (32). But his masterful depictions of the no exit situation reach beyond the ordeal of the fetus to other situations involving similar desperate ordeals. Clinically, this is the domain of the unconscious that underlies deep depression.

His art features torture chambers, in which various eerie creatures are tied, stabbed, mutilated, crushed, and crucified. Giger’s incisive probing vision traces this suffering to its sources in the archetypal depth of the psyche, where it assumes hellish dimensions. Giger’s gallery of bizarre mutants represents a category of its own. These strange creatures are not like Frankenstein, who was composed entirely of heterogeneous human parts, nor are they android robots, lifeless automatons only remotely resembling people and imitating human activities. Giger’s biomechanoids are strange hybrids between machines and humans, surrounded by a world that itself is biological and mechanical at the same time. This is the same combination that characterizes childbirth. Delivery is a mechanical process, involving hard surfaces, extreme hydraulic pressures, and forceful torques. But it involves a biological system – the mother, her body, and her reproductive organs.

I mentioned earlier that individuals tuned into BPM III see the world as it is portrayed in existential art and philosophy – meaningless, absurd, and even monstrous. They

made frequent references to authors, who captured the atmosphere of this domain with particular artistic power – J. P. Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, and Ingmar Bergman, all of whom belong to Giger's favorite or even provided direct inspiration for his paintings (27,33).

Unique and unparalleled are Giger's insights into the dynamics of BPM III. The rich array of symbols characteristic for this matrix plays a particularly important role in his art. Images of birth and death, horror and violence, sexual organs and activities, mechanical contraptions that can constrain and crush, sharp objects that can hurt, body excretions and secretions, satanic figures and symbols, and religious scenes and objects appear side by side or merge into each other. This otherwise incomprehensible aggregate of elements appears very logical when we understand its connection to the final stages of biological birth.

Here the fetus experiences a violent assault coming from the uterine contractions, which is painful and anxiety provoking, and responds to it with amorphous biological fury. A long or complicated delivery can take the mother and the fetus, as well as its mother, to the threshold of death. The extreme suffering and particularly suffocation generates a strong sexual arousal and various forms of biological material create a natural part of birth. The fact that reliving of birth is a process that is not only biological, but also psychospiritual, accounts for the numinosity of the experience and the religious symbolism involved. The collective unconscious contributes to this experience visions of archetypal figures representing death and rebirth. Nothing except the perinatal domain of the unconscious reflecting this stage of birth can bring these seemingly incongruous elements into a meaningful and logically consistent gestalt.

The work with non-ordinary states of consciousness has shown that BPM III plays a very important role in individual, as well collective psychopathology. On the individual scale, it is responsible for a variety of clinical conditions from extreme violence through various psychosomatic disorders and a wide array of sexual dysfunctions and aberrations to messianic delusions. Here again, Giger's nightmares are sources of invaluable insight, as exemplified by the following account of one of his terrifying dreams. In it the toilet bowl turns into a combination of Freud's vagina dentata that can castrate and the life-threatening female genitals of delivery that can engulf.

The first sign of anxiety came when I suddenly had to piss and went to the lavatory. The edge of the bowl grew slowly toward my penis like a wide-open vagina as if to castrate me. At first, the idea amused me. But suddenly the whole room began to

grow narrower and narrower, the walls and pipes took on the aspect of loose skin with festering wounds, and small, repellent creatures glared out at me from the dark corners and cracks.

The toilet bowl, the most ordinary and humble object of everyday life has for Giger deeper levels of meaning and appears in several of his paintings (34,35). We can speculate here that the toilet bowl points to the scatological aspect of birth and that the deeper source of Giger's fear is the memory of cutting the umbilical chord. He thus seems to be aware not only of the obvious relation of the castration complex to the loss of the penis, a motif that clearly fascinates him (36,37), but intuitively also the perinatal roots of the castration fears. Many individuals involved in experiential self-explorations have confirmed independently Giger's insight concerning deep psychodynamic link between Freud's concept of vagina dentata and the perils of birth (110) and between his famous castration complex and cutting of the umbilical cord and separation from the mother (111).

On the collective scale, the dynamics of BPM III seems to be the deep source of some extreme forms of social psychopathology, such as wars, bloody revolutions, genocide, and concentration camps (Grof 1985). It engenders and feeds such societal plagues as Nazism, Communism, and religious fundamentalism. In a more mitigated form, BPM III accounts for insatiable greed and acquisitiveness characteristic of the human species. In everyday life, it seems to account for the excessive attention that the media and audiences worldwide give to forms of entertainment that draw inspiration from this level of the psyche. For many years, the triad sex, violence, and death has been the favorite formula of the Hollywood industry, responsible for box office success of many blockbuster movies. Incisive psychological insights of Giger's work thus have extraordinary social relevance.

The scatological dimension of BPM III finds its expression in Giger's art in his fascination with toilet bowls, garbage trucks, and refuse collection and his sharp awareness of the erotic overtones these objects and activities have for him (34,38). It also seems to account for the inclusion of the motif of offal, decomposition of corpses, repulsive worms and insects, excrement, and vomit in his paintings (39,40).

Satanic motifs, intimately interwoven with fetal and sexual elements and images of violence, suffering, and death, form an integral part of many of Giger's most powerful paintings. Giger has a profound understanding of this aspect of the perinatal domain of the unconscious. He is fascinated by Eliphas Levi's picture of Baphomet, a mysterious, obscurely symbolic figure combining human, animal, and divine features (41). This creature, appearing in medieval manuscripts of the Templars, served for

him repeatedly as a source of artistic inspiration. Giger intuitively grasps the full range of meaning of this archetypal figure and its connection with the perinatal domain; his rendition of Baphomet includes not only elements of violence, death, and scatology, but also sexual and fetal symbolism (42).

In some of his works, the satanic represents the main thematic focus. This is particularly true for Satan I and II (43,44) and the paintings of the Spell series – the Kaliesque female deity flanked by phallic condom fetuses (45) or Baphomet with a female figure resting with her mons pubis on his horn (42). Departure for Sabbath (46), Witches' Dance (47), Satan's Bride II (48), Vlad Tepes (49), and Lilith (50) are additional salient examples.

Giger's extraordinary art has been difficult for an average person to understand and for many years, it has been the subject of heated controversy. Giger has been the target of many angry reactions from lay persons and vicious attacks of art critics, including those that used moral judgments and psychiatric labels, questioning his character, integrity and sanity. However, he also received highest admiration and praise from many prominent figures of cultural life, including Ernst Fuchs, Salvador Dalí, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Ridley Scott, Oliver Stone, Albert Hofmann, Timothy Leary, and many others. And, of course, he received for his art an Oscar, the highest award from the Los Angeles Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for excellence in cinema achievements.

Freud, trying to understand the role of the artist in human society wrote that the artist has withdrawn from reality into his Oedipal fantasies, about which he feels guilty and finds his way back to the objective world by presenting them in his work. The acceptance for his work means for him that the public shares his guilt and this relieves him from his own guilt. The public, harboring similar unconscious material of its own, admires the artist for the courage to express what they have repressed and thus relieve them of their guilt feelings. According to Freud, a pseudoartist needs applause for himself, be accepted as a person. A true artist needs specific fantasies of his to be accepted, he needs applause for his work.

For Freud, the forbidden fantasies revealed in art are related exclusively to the Oedipus complex and the pregenital libidinal drives. The intensity of the controversy surrounding Giger seems to be related to the fact that his art reaches much deeper, to deep, dark recesses of the human psyche, which in our culture have remained subjected to deep repression even after Freud's work succeeded to lift to a great extent the taboo of sexuality. The perinatal domain of the unconscious is perceived as particularly dangerous, because it represents an emotional and instinctual inferno

associated with the memory of an actually or potentially life-threatening situation – biological birth. It also harbors the deepest roots of the incest taboo – memory of the intimate contact with the mother’s genitals. And the fact that Giger portrays the perinatal domain in the form in which we would experience it in deep self-exploration – using powerful symbolic images rather verbal means – is a particularly effective way of lifting the repression that normally keeps the perinatal material from emerging into consciousness.

Those who recognize the deep truth in Giger’s art and his courage in facing and revealing this problematic aspect of the human psyche, which is responsible for many ills in the world, admire his art. Much of the hostility against him comes from determined denial of the existence and the universal nature of the perinatal domain of the unconscious. It is easier for many people to see Giger’s images as an expression of his personal depravation, perversion, or psychopathology, rather than recognize in his art elements that we all carry in the depth of our psyche. The world would not see phenomena like Nazism, Communism, murderous religious extremism and fanaticism, if all we had to deal with would be adverse consequences of unsatisfactory nursing, dysfunctional family dynamics, and strict toilet training.

To avoid misunderstanding, it is necessary to mention that not all admirers of Giger are individuals, who appreciate his art for its mastery and the depth of psychological understanding. His museum in Gruyère also attracts many visitors from the Goth culture, recognizable by their black clothing, white make-up, unusual hair-styles, body piercing, and bondage items, and other individuals, who are attracted to Giger’s art because of its dark themes and the provocative and shocking effects it has on conservative circles. They tend to see him as a black magician indulging in the elements he portrays in his paintings – occultism, deviant sexual practices, and satanic worship. They would be very surprised if they had a chance to get to know Hansruedi personally and find out that he is a shy, gentle, and amiable person, who has used his art to struggle with his anxieties, insecurities, and inner demons.

The discovery of the paramount importance of the perinatal and transpersonal levels of the unconscious – the domains of the human psyche as yet unrecognized by mainstream psychiatrists – does not make the postnatal experiences in infancy and childhood irrelevant. Freud’s insights concerning infantile sexuality, the Oedipus complex, and various psychosexual traumas still have their place in psychology, but instead of being the primary sources of emotional, psychosomatic, and interpersonal problems, they are conditions for the emergence of deeper emotions and physical sensations from the perinatal and transpersonal levels of the psyche.

The work with powerful experiential forms of therapy involving non-ordinary states of consciousness, such as clinical research with psychedelics, holotropic breathwork, and psychotherapy with individuals undergoing psychospiritual crises (“spiritual emergencies”), revealed the existence of dynamic memory constellations in the psyche that I call COEX systems, or systems of condensed experience. A typical COEX system consists of emotionally strongly charged (cathected) memories from different periods of the individual’s life – prenatal existence, birth, infancy, childhood, and later life. What links these memories into a COEX system is the fact that they share the same quality of emotions or physical sensations. Deeper roots of a COEX system reach into the transpersonal domain to past life experiences, archetypal motifs, and phylogenetic sequences.

The layers of a particular system can, for example, contain all the major memories of humiliating, degrading, and shaming experiences that have damaged our self-esteem. In another COEX system, the common denominator can be anxiety experienced in various shocking and terrifying situations or claustrophobic and suffocating feelings evoked by oppressive and confining circumstances. Rejection and emotional deprivation damaging our ability to trust men, women, or people in general, is another common motif. Situations that have generated profound feelings of guilt and a sense of failure, events that have resulted in a conviction that sex is dangerous or disgusting, and encounters with indiscriminate aggression and violence can be added to the above list as characteristic examples. Particularly important are COEX systems that contain memories of encounters with situations endangering life, health, and integrity of the body.

There exists a two-way relationship between the BPMs and emotionally relevant postnatal events. When the memory of the birth is close to the surface, it tends to make the individual oversensitive to situations that involve similar elements, such as dark and narrow places and passages, confinement and restriction of movement, conditions interfering with breathing, exposure to blood and other biological material, enforced sexual arousal, or physical pain. By their association with birth, these situations become more traumatic than they would otherwise be and the memories of them constitute new layers of a COEX system. Conversely, layers of such postnatal traumatic imprints prevent creation of a buffering zone of positive memories that would protect the individual from the influx of painful perinatal emotions and physical sensation. These would then have a strong influence on the individual in everyday life by coloring his or her perceptions.

This dynamics can be clearly demonstrated in Hansruedi Giger’s life, since many of his traumatic experiences in childhood and later in life were deeply connected with

his memory of birth; in this form, they found their way into his nightmares and through them into his art. For example, the inspiration for his series of paintings entitled *Shafts* came from terrifying dreams, the sources of which were in the memory of birth and related memories from his childhood. One of these memories involved a secret window in the stairwell in the house of his parents in Chur, which lead to the interior of the neighboring Three Kings Hotel. In reality, this window was always covered with a dingy brown curtain and Hansruedi never saw what was behind it. But in his dreams, it was open and revealed gigantic bottomless shafts with treacherous wooden stairways without banisters leading down into the yawning abyss.

The second memory was related to a cellar in Hansruedi's parents' house. Hansruedi heard from the hotel proprietor that there were two subterranean passages in Chur, which lead from the bishop's palace beneath the town. This hotelier also told him that their cellar was allegedly part of one of these passages. The idea of these underground corridors had an enormous impact on Hansruedi's imagination. Again, the exit leading from their cellar to the hotel had always been closed, but in his dreams it opened into a monstrous, dangerous labyrinth with a musty spiral stone staircase. He felt great ambivalence toward this image – both attraction and fear. An additional trigger for Hansruedi's nightmares which inspired his *Shafts* was the memory of an abyss in the environment of Chur (called Tamina?) with formations, to which Hansruedi referred as "crazy rocks."

The motif of a journey into a dangerous labyrinth is one of the standard themes in the sessions of people reliving their birth in a therapeutic context or during a spontaneous psychospiritual journey. It is also an important part of the initiatory visions of novice shamans, of the hero's journey as described by Joseph Campbell, and of mythological stories of gods and demigods involving death and rebirth, as exemplified by the underworld adventures of the Assyrian king Gilgamesh, the Sumerian goddess Inanna, the Thracian bard Orpheus, the Aztec Plumed Serpent Quetzalcoatl, and the Mayan Hero Twins Xbalanque and Hunahpu. The association between the above three places from Hansruedi's childhood and his memory of birth would explain how he responded to them in his childhood and why they figured so strongly in his nightmares and subsequently in his art.

Another example is Giger's extreme reaction to anything related to torture, mutilation, dismemberment, and impalement. These again are themes that appear regularly in psychedelic and holotropic sessions of people reliving the trauma of birth. In these sessions, the physical and emotional suffering associated with the reliving of biological birth per se is further augmented by the fact that perinatal experiences

often come interspersed with images of extreme suffering and torture from the historical domain of the collective unconscious. When Giger attended the Zürich School of Applied Art, a fellow student showed him a 1904 photograph, depicting the tortures inflicted on the murderer of the Emperor of China. The assassin was impaled on a stake and his limbs were cut one after the other. Having seen this photograph, Hansruedi was not able to sleep for a number of weeks. The images from the Nazi concentration camps had a similar impact on his imagination and sleep.

The most powerful aspect of the photograph depicting the Chinese torture was for Hansruedi the image of severed limbs. He encountered amputated limbs also during a visit to the Civic Museum (in Chur?), where the Egyptian exhibition featured parts of dismembered mummies. He also had a strong emotional reaction to the scene from Jean Cocteau's film *La belle et la bête* with Jean Marais, where arms protruding from the walls hold candelabras. The motif of arms and legs separated from the body imprinted itself deeply into Hansruedi's mind and has figured prominently in his paintings and sculptures until this very day. Salient examples are the painting *Preserving Life* (51), the sculpture *Beggar* (52), and all the astrological signs on one of his masterpieces, the *Zodiac Fountain* (53). Beings created by connecting arms with contralateral legs represent the central theme in *The Mystery of San Gottardo*, Giger's concept for a movie that currently exists only in the form of a book and accompanying sketches. It is interesting to mention that the theme of dismemberment is an archetypal motif, which plays an important role in the death rebirth experiences of novice shamans.

Giger also responded strongly to another prominent aspect of the Chinese photograph, the motif of impalement. He encountered it also in the story of the Transylvanian prince Vlad Tepes (literally Vlad the Impaler), whose preferred way of executing his enemies was to impale them on stakes (49). He was known to have his breakfast amidst the heads of his enemies displayed on poles. Vlad was initiated by Sigismund, the Holy Roman Emperor into the prestigious Order of the Dragon and took on the nickname Dracula (son of the Dragon). Under this name, he became the model of Bram Stokes famous horror story of the same name and for countless vampire books and movies.

Giger even responded strongly to a local fairy-tale about a scarecrow impaled on a stick and asked his mother to read it to him again and again. When he later thought about this episode in his life, the scarecrow became for him a powerful symbol of the meaninglessness of life. He wrote: "I think this stake-bound life, for whom redemption meant death as soon as possible, showed me the senselessness of existence, an existence better never began." As I mentioned earlier, preoccupation

with meaninglessness of life, existentialist philosophy and literature, and the Theater of the Absurd is very characteristic for individuals who are under the influence of the second perinatal matrix (BPM II). Giger's interest in Samuel Beckett and particularly his *Waiting for Godot* belongs to this category (27,33).

The motif of torture also played an important role in Giger's interest in the story of Madame Tussaud and her wax museum, particularly the "Chamber of Horrors" and the "Chamber of Torture," He was intrigued by the fact that she used the heads of criminals executed by guillotine on Place des Grèves during the French Revolution. Giger even attempted to build a guillotine himself and employ it to behead plastic figures. In his mind, the image of the guillotine was connected to his memory of the "Try Your Strength Machine," which he experienced as a child at the annual mart (Chilbi) in Chur. One year, many people attending this fair experienced food poisoning by sausages made by butcher Lukas. The following year, the machine was adapted in such a way that it featured a fork piercing the effigy of a sausage made by Lukas. In Giger's drawing entitled "Hau den Lukas," the strength-testing machine became a castrating guillotine, a perfect representation of Freud's *vagina dentata* (36). Giger's nightmares with the motif of castration and his interest in guillotines also inspired castrating devices and condoms in Giger's sketches for the movie *Kondom des Grauens* (37).

Giger has repeatedly written about his childhood obsessions, to which his parents referred as "Fimmel;" it is a term, for which the closest translation would probably be "craze." One of these was obsession with trains and ghost rides. Hansruedi encountered his first ghost ride when he was six years old as one of the attractions at Chilbi, the annual fair held on the main square in Chur. He mentions that one of the reasons for his interest in this attraction was that he liked to observe the naughty behavior of the operators, who often feigned a blown fuse and used the ensuing darkness to grope and kiss terrified women. He liked the ghost ride so much that he got depressed when the show left after three weeks.

Later, at the age of twelve, Hansruedi created his own ghost ride, for which he charged the neighborhood kids five rappen. It was a dark corridor full of skeletons, monsters, and corpses made of cardboard and plaster. The ghosts, villains, hanged men, and the dead rising from their coffins were manipulated by Hansruedi's friends. He liked to watch his masked assistants to take advantage of the girls and experienced vicarious pleasure, but he was too shy to participate in these naughty activities himself.

The work with non-ordinary states of consciousness has shown a deep psychodynamic connection between trains and the memory of birth. Individuals suffering from phobia of trains typically discover in their self-exploration that in their unconscious the experience of being carried by a powerful mechanical force through on a trajectory that includes tunnels, without having any control over this movement, is closely linked to a memory of biological birth, which involved similar elements. The importance of loss of control as a factor in this fear can be illustrated by a related phobia involving cars. The same people, who have problems being driven by a car, feel quite comfortable when they sit behind the wheel and are in charge of the car. Fascination with trains thus might be a counterphobic reaction to the trauma of birth. This is even more plausible in case of a ghost ride, where the shocking emotional impact is deliberately amplified by terrifying props.

Hansruedi's fascination with rides continues to this day. He constructed in his house in Oerlikon a small railroad that winds its course through the garden and the corner of one of the ground-floor rooms and allows the passengers on a little train to admire a rich array of his sculptures and the remarkable Zodiac Fountain. He even seriously considered building a similar ride in his museum in Château St. Germain in Gruyère, but had to abandon his plan because of technical difficulties and the costs involved.

Another of Hansruedi's childhood obsessions was his passion for collecting suspenders (54). He preferred those, which had severely damaged silk-bound rubber loops and traded them for new ones with his schoolmates. According to Hansruedi, one of the fantasies underlying this obsession was the image of the rubber breaking and the pants falling down. He also felt that his fascination by the damaged rubber loops was connected to his loathing for worms and snakes. These creatures are among the elements that repeatedly appear in Giger's paintings (42,43,44,55). According to his own admission, to find a worm in excrement is the most terrifying thing he can imagine and even mechanical objects resembling worms or snakes, such as hoses and tubes, make him feel uncomfortable.

This aversion seems to be the central theme of an important COEX system comprising memories from different periods of Giger's life. One of its layers is a traumatic memory from his visit to the island Mauritius. In the morning after an evening swim in the Indian Ocean, he discovered that what in the darkness he had considered to be kelp were actually giant ugly sea worms about five feet long. An older layer of the same COEX system is a childhood memory of a visit he and his mother made to his grandmother's tomb. As they were turning over the earth, a thick worm crawled out and Hansruedi thought: "My God, that's part of my grandmother!" He dropped the spade and ran out of the graveyard in horror.

It is conceivable that the perinatal root of this COEX system is the memory of cutting of the umbilical cord or an even older one from prenatal life. Both worms and snakes also represent important perinatal symbols. Images of worms appear often in the scatological phase of BPM III in connection with images of decomposition and putrefaction of corpses. Boa constrictor snakes, because of their ability to twist their body around their victims and crush them, symbolize the crushing uterine contractions during birth (88). Constrictor snakes are also symbols of pregnancy, because of the bulging of their bodies after they swallow their prey whole. Vipers are symbols of imminent death (87), but also initiation, as exemplified by the frescoes in Villa dei misteri in Pompeii, depicting a Dionysian initiation ritual (112). Both vipers and constrictor snakes feature prominently in Giger's art.

The connection between worms, scatological material (slime, vomit, offal), and birth is evident in one of a series of vivid unpleasant dreams Giger had in February 1970:

I was lying on my bed watching Li dancing in a yellow dress, which sprayed sparks of yellow light across the room. The space was interwoven with red geometric shapes and the pictures on the wall were coming away in layers. The walls pulsed in step with my heartbeat. The first sign of anxiety came when I suddenly had to piss and went to the lavatory. The edge of the bowl grew slowly toward my penis like a wide-open vagina as if to castrate me. At first, the idea amused me. But suddenly the whole room began to grow narrower and narrower, the walls and pipes took on the aspect of loose skin with festering wounds, and small, repellent creatures glared out at me from the dark corners and cracks.

I turned and hurried toward the exit, but the door was infinitely far away and very narrow and tall. The walls hemmed me like two paunchy lumps of flesh. I leapt for the door, drew the bolt, and rushed into the corridor, gasping for breath. Rid of the specter, I went to Li's room and lay down. Little Boris (son of Li's friend Evelyne) was also in the room and wanted to play with me. He began to trample on the bed beside me, kicking me. I was as helpless as a small child and could not defend myself. Li finally rescued me from my diminutive tormentor, who had by now turned into a little violet-green devil with an offensively mean and aggressive expression. Li took Boris to his mother, who was hanging around in the kitchen.

But the couple of kicks in the stomach had been enough. I felt sick. The air in the room was stifling. My only thought was to throw open the window and escape to the garden, for the room was at ground level. But at the last minute, I noticed a woman looking at me strangely. The vomit already in my mouth, I turned round, rushed into

the corridor and suddenly stopped dead – I was afraid to go into the narrow lavatory again. In the kitchen, I noticed Evelyne with her son, both staring at me. The only sanctuary was the small bathroom and the rusty blue bathtub with its flaking enamel. So I grabbed Li by the hand and dragged her into the bathroom, where I vomited into the bathtub. The vomit spewed endlessly from my mouth in the form of a thick, gray, leathery worm turning into a kind of primeval slime, and once into the living intestines of a slaughtered pig.

During this whole performance, I had held Li firmly by the left wrist. She had been struggling to free the clogged waste pipe by poking at it with a ballpoint pen. Finally, she could no longer stand the repulsive garlic-impregnated smell and we both vomited together into the bathtub, hand in hand, while the gas water heater glared at us malevolently” (Toward the end of the dream)... “the fear of losing control of my senses made me more and more confused in my actions. Suddenly I felt I could not stand the torment any more! I had to kill myself. Now the loaded revolver became highly dangerous. I asked Li to empty it and throw the ammunition away. But as she did not know how, I had to take hold of the revolver to do it myself and, in doing so, suddenly became aware of the ridiculousness of my fear. My horror vanished and – thanks God – I awoke.

Another of Hansruedi’s obsession was strong passion for weapons. His uncle Otto taught him the art of lead casting and working in wood and metal, necessary for making home-made weapons. Hansruedi returned from his holidays laden with bows and arrows, lead axes, handcuffs, flintlocks, knuckledusters, knives, and daggers. Uncle Otto also taught him how to fish and hunt fowl and animals. One day in Chur, Hansruedi got to know Goli Schmidt, an extravagant antique dealer and began to spend most of his free time with him. Goli lived in a hut cluttered with objects almost to the ceiling. He believed in ghosts, could touch a wire carrying 220 volts without blinking his eye, and sprinkled petrol in his coffee as tonic. He taught Hansruedi how to handle weapons and provided many weapons for Hansruedi collection.

The first lecture Hansruedi gave at the gymnasium was on the history of the revolver. Some of his experiences with weapons went beyond just a hobby. On afternoons when there was no school, he took his collection of weapons and his friends to a piece of terrain reserved for military maneuvers. There they shot with barrel and breechloaders at the targets set up for the military and blew up abandoned cars with trotyl (trinitrotoluene). During these plays, he was twice nearly shot dead. According to Hansruedi, so far four people in his life shot at him and he shot at one person; in two cases, the cartridges were dud and three bullets missed him “by a hair’s breadth.” He was also nearly killed by a stranger in his bedroom. Hansruedi’s

practical interest in firearms disappeared completely when he was drafted and experienced firsthand the hardships of military life and abuse from the officers. His interest in weapons as esthetic objects has survived this ordeal.

An interesting example of how deeply Hansruedi's perception of everyday life has been influenced by his easy access to the perinatal level of his unconscious was his reaction to a scene of garbage collection. In 1971, on the way to London, he saw in Cologne a German refuse truck in front of the Floh de Cologne house. He was fascinated by it and it became the subject of a series of his paintings, in which it appears in numerous variations. For Hansruedi, the refuse truck has multiple meanings, all of which have important perinatal connotations. Besides the obvious connection to impermanence, decay, scatology, and death, it represents for him also a Freud's vagina dentata, a female organ that can castrate, as well as the dangerous engulfing and devouring reproductive system of the delivering woman. Giger made this connection quite explicit in some of his paintings, in which he transformed the opening into the rear of the truck into a vulva (38). By its resemblance to the ovens of the crematoria of the Nazi concentration camps, the back of the refuse truck also became for Hansruedi the symbol of sacrificial murder.

Many of Giger's paintings depict tight headbands, steel-rings held together by screws, heads in vices, and bodies fettered with cords and straps (45). On a deeper level, these are clearly echoes of the memory of birth, which involves hours of life-threatening confinement. This connection is particularly obvious in pictures featuring constrained fetuses (18,19). However, Giger also remembers childhood situations that seemed to have helped to keep the perinatal memory alive. When he was three years old, he and his mother participated in a carnival procession. His mother dressed him for this occasion as an elevator boy; he had to wear long trousers and a dark red satin jacket with silver stripes. The costume included a velvet-covered pillbox held by a tight elastic band, which cut into his chin. He felt ashamed to appear before the other children in this outfit, rather than wearing a costume of one of his childhood heroes, but he had to put on a pleasant face.

When Hansruedi was about four years old, emotionally more important layers were added to the COEX system, the core element of which was confinement. His mother made him an overall, which was fastened by a row of little buttons running from his neck down his back and between his legs. Whenever he tried to have a bowel movement, he also needed to pee. Since the buttons made it impossible to do both at the same time, he would inevitably pee in his pants. He was unable to convince his mother to change the arrangement of the buttons and solved this problem by waiting until bedtime when he could get out of this straitjacket and relieve himself.

A psychiatrist or psychologist trying to analyze Hansruedi's art using the traditional Freudian approach limited to postnatal biography and the individual unconscious would assume that he came from a highly dysfunctional family and would expect to find major psychotraumatic influences in his infancy and childhood. However, unless Hansruedi's traumatic memories have been subjected to complete repression or his account is not accurate for some other reasons, the family in which he grew up was relatively normal. We do not find anything that would come close to the childhood of one of Hansruedi's heroes Edgar Allan Poe, whose erratic, intractable, and alcoholic father left the family when Edgar was eighteen months old and the death of his frail mother suffering from tuberculosis left the little boy in the care of an unloving foster father. There is nothing in Hansruedi's history comparable to Toulouse Lautrec, whose fractured legs did not heal and grow because of a genetic defect and left him crippled for the rest of his life, or Frida Kahlo's car accident that forced her to use her art as an escape from intolerable pain and confinement to bed.

Hansruedi described his childhood as "beautiful;" he appreciated that his parents let him play, but he disliked the domestic helpers who tried to discipline him. He referred to his mother Melly as being a wonderful, kind, and supportive mother and an object of envy of his friends; he felt that he was her "beloved." It would be difficult to see her as a model for Giger's women, most of whom radiate dangerous sexuality or seem to be demonic and sadistic dominatrices. It seems that this motif came from levels of the psyche, which lies beyond postnatal biography – from the perinatal and the transpersonal domains of the unconscious. The same is true for the problems Giger has had since childhood in relating to women.

According to Hansruedi's account, his father Hans-Richard Giger, was very introverted and upright. He helped everybody who got into trouble and commanded respect as a doctor, pharmacist, and President of the Pharmacists' Association and of the Alpine Rescue Service. Hansruedi describes him as strict and authoritarian. Their relationship clearly was not very close and intimate; Hansruedi complains that his father was difficult to read and that he hardly knew him. But again, we do not get the image of a towering brutal and tempestuous bully described in Kafka's famous letter to his father, who made Kafka identify with the impotent and insecure victims portrayed in his books *The Trial* and *The Castle*.

Hansruedi's father never hit him, except once during a major confrontation, when his anger appeared to be justified. At that time, Hansruedi stole from a street construction power cables made of copper and lead and covered with bitumen. When he was burning the cables in the cellar of his parents' house in order to get lead for

making bullets, the smoke polluted and almost destroyed his father's pharmacy, covering everything with black, sticky, oily film. The cleaning was very tedious, took long, and was very expensive.

Hansruedi's father did not seem to have great ambitions for his son. Following the common practice of his time, he expected him to take over his pharmacy. He certainly did not have much interest in Hansruedi's artistic talent and did not show great understanding and support for it. He shared the opinion held by the citizens of Chur, where "the word artist was a term of abuse, combining drunkard, whore-monger, and simpleton in one." He tried very hard to steer Hansruedi to a respectable profession – if not a pharmacist, then at least an architect or a draftsman. Responding to his father's opinion that art was "unprofitable," Hansruedi went to Zurich, to study architecture and design at the College of Arts and Crafts, and graduated three years later. Before his interest in painting surfaced fully and took over his life, he also worked with designer Andreas Christen at Knoll International,

From the very beginning, Hansruedi showed very little interest in formal school education. Reading about his educational environment, it is hard to tell whether he was disinterested, unteachable by conventional educational methods, or victim of incompetent teachers and poor school system. His Marienheim Catholic kindergarten at Chur was run by an elderly nun, who kept in her desk as an educational tool a series of pictures of Jesus, which showed him in various degrees of suffering, ranging from a few drops on the thorn-crowned head to his face fully covered with blood. Depending on how disobedient the children were, she showed them the appropriate picture, suggesting that the amount of his suffering reflected how bad they were. This experience seems to have contributed to the fact that Jesus and the motif of crucifixion often appear in Giger's paintings and sculpture, the examples being the Blood Glass (56), Jesus candelabrum (57), Jesus table (58), Satan I and II (43,44), The Crucified Serpent (55), The Spell I (59), and Tide (60).

In elementary school, pupils of different ages shared the same classroom and Hansruedi was the only boy in a class of seven. Since early age, he was fascinated by women but, because of his extreme shyness, he had difficulties relating to them. The girls wanted to play kissing games, but he found them embarrassing. He preferred to play horses and enjoyed putting harnesses on girls and whipping them. He remembers often masturbating at school during the classes. School toilettes signified for him places of forbidden sex. Among his favorite fantasies was the theme of "damsel in distress," in which he played the role of the heroic rescuer. Many of these fantasies about liberation from the claws of a vicious enemy revolved around a girl

who lived in Villa Saflisch. This villa reminded Hansruedi of his favorite film, Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*.

From the data we have available about Giger's childhood, it seems that the problems he was struggling with reflected more his inner life than objectively difficult external circumstances. We have to think here of the Jungian psychologist James Hillman, who in his interesting book *The Soul's Code* (Hillman 200) argues that character and calling are the result of "the particularity you feel to be you" and criticizes the tendency prevailing in contemporary psychology and psychiatry to blame childhood difficulties for all the problems in life. He gives numerous examples of prominent individuals, who seemed to intuit from early childhood the role they were destined to play and pursue it with unswerving determination. Although Hillmann does not speculate any further about the forces that might be involved in this scenario, modern consciousness research revealed deeper influences shaping our life, which include perinatal, karmic, archetypal, and even astrological determinants.

As the ultimate master of the nightmarish aspect of the perinatal unconscious, which is the source of individual and social psychopathology and of much of the suffering in the modern world, Giger has no match in the history of art. However, the perinatal dynamics also has its light side and harbors great potential for healing and transcendence, for psychospiritual death and rebirth. In the history of religion, a profound encounter with the Shadow in the form of the Dark Night of the Soul or Temptation has often been a prerequisite for spiritual opening. The arduous ordeals of Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Anthony, as well as similar elements in the story of The Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed testify to that effect.

It has been repeatedly noted that for many great artists finding creative expression for the stormy dynamics of their unconscious represented a safeguard for their sanity or even an effective method of self-healing. The great Spanish painter Francisco Goya, who was haunted by terrifying hallucinations, felt that painting them gave him a sense of control and mastery over them. Marie Bonaparte, Greek princess and an ardent student of Sigmund Freud, wrote in her brilliant three-volume study, entitled *The Life and Work of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytical Study*, that the unconscious of this tortured genius was extremely active and full of horrors and torments. She suggested that had he not had his extraordinary literary talent, he would probably have spent his life in a mental institution or in a prison. For a period of about fourteen years, Jean Paul Sartre used his writing to overcome adverse aftereffects of a poorly managed self-experiment with mescaline that had left him stuck in a difficult domain of his perinatal unconscious (Riedlinger 1982).

Giger's determined quest for creative self-expression is inseparable from his relentless self-exploration and self-healing. Occasionally, critics suggested that Giger's art, like the Greek tragedy, can provide powerful emotional catharsis for those who are open to it. In analytic psychology of C. G. Jung, integration of the Shadow and the Anima, two quintessential motifs in Giger's art, are seen as critical steps in therapy and in what he calls the individuation process. And Giger himself experiences his art as healing and as an important means of maintaining his sanity. Like Goya, who struggled to harness his terrifying visions by portraying them, Giger tries to overcome in his paintings his scary claustrophobic nightmares. He describes this process while talking about a series of dreams that provided the inspiration for a collection of his paintings called Passages:

"Most of the time in those dreams I was in a large white room with no windows or doors. The only exit was a dark metal opening which, to make things worse, was partially obstructed by a giant safety pin. I usually got stuck when passing through this opening. The exit at the end of a long chimney, which could be seen only as a small point of light, was to my misfortune blocked by an invisible power. Then I found myself stuck as I tried to pass through this pipe, my arms pressed against my body, unable to move forward or backward. At that point, I started to lose my breath and the only way out was to wake up. I have since painted some of these dream images in the >Passages< series and, as a result, have been freed from recurring memories of this particular birth trauma. But the Passages, which for me became the symbol of becoming and ceasing to exist, with all the degrees of pleasure and suffering, have not let me go until this very day."

However, Giger's personal quest does not end here. It seems that he intuitively not only the healing, but also the spiritual potential of a deep experiential immersion in the world of dark perinatal images. As I have already mentioned earlier, he is intrigued by the motif of crucifixion and uses it often in his paintings. Jesus also appears in his sculptures, such as in the candelabrum and the table support, each made of identical figures of crucified Jesus (57,58). Visions of Jesus appear often in psychedelic and holotropic breathwork sessions of people experiencing BPM III. (95,100,101). Giger's image of the staircase to the Harkonen Castle (61), lined with dangerous phallic death symbols, appears to lead to heaven and his Magus (62) and Death (63) have definite spiritual overtones.

It is also important to mention in this context the extraordinary series of paintings created in the early 1980s that he Giger's called Victory (64). They depict demonic female figures painted in fluorescent red color. The combination of biomechanoid elements with fierce sexuality and death symbolism gives them awesome archetypal

power. The radiant fiery quality of these paintings is suggestive of the pyrocathartic aspect of the psychospiritual death/rebirth process (transition from BMP III to BMP IV). The comment that Giger made about these paintings reveals that he was himself aware of the perinatal origin of these visions. He said of his Red Women paintings: "This must be the kind of perspective a newborn has when looking back after being forced out of his mother's body." We can also speculate that the title Victory alludes to the experience of the neonate, who is still very much in touch with the memory of his demonic power of the delivering mother, yet feels the triumph of escape from the clutches of the birth canal and a sense of liberation.

The paintings mentioned above suggest that, at times, Giger's exploration of the deep unconscious approaches the realm of psychospiritual rebirth (BPM IV). However, the most dramatic illustration of Giger's awareness of the transformational potential of the perinatal process is the Passage Temple, one of his masterpieces created between October 1974 and May 1975. The paintings decorating the temple show all the essential aspects of perinatal dynamics. In Giger's original conception, the entrance into the temple consisted of a sarcophagus-like opening padded with two down-filled leather bags. Every visitor thus had to painfully force his or her way into the interior with outstretched hands, thus reenacting the sensations of birth.

The temple's interior consisted of four paintings, fading into a diminishing perspective at the edge. The entrance, which was also the exit, showed a cast iron wagon, also in the form of a sarcophagus, moving on rails through primeval slime, containing a strange amalgam of organic and technological material, one of the signatures of Giger's art. According to Giger, it represented impermanence, the passage of all becoming and dissolution (65).

The painting on the right side of the temple, entitled Death, featured prominently the symbolism of the second perinatal matrix (BPM II). It depicted a mechanism on the back of a refuse truck, "the perfect gate of hell, through which passes everything that has outlived its usefulness." (66) It had for Giger a very powerful symbolic meaning and was clearly overdetermined. As we can infer from his other paintings (38), the opening in the garbage truck also represented female genitals, vagina dentata. Giger also mentioned himself the association with the ovens in the crematoria of the Nazi concentration camps. This archetypal garbage truck was flanked with bizarre figures of corpse-robbers rising from a sea of bones.

The painting on the left side, entitled Life, had all the essential characteristics of the third perinatal matrix (BPM III), bringing together elements of birth, death, sex, and aggression (67). Giger depicted these fundamental aspects of nature in a

symbolically stylized way revealing the brutality of the life process, The central focus of the painting was a giant phallic object penetrating a massive metal pelvis and appearing in a mandorla lined by an oversized zip fastener. This phallus was composed of pairs of sickly children with raised fists, placed above each other, who were shown in various stages of birth and death.

The last painting, facing the entrance, could be seen as portraying the transition between BPM III and BPM IV – emergence from the world of mechanical tensions and pressures, suffering, death, and deviant sexuality into the transcendental realm (68). Giger depicted here a throne bathed in diffuse light, standing at the top of seven steps decorated by symbols of death. The throne was flanked by biomechanoid virgins, two of whom were supported by hydraulic mechanical contraptions. Giger confirmed the spiritual connotation of this painting by describing it as “the way of the magician that has to be taken to attain man’s most desirable goal and become on a level with god.”

Ernst Fuchs, Giger’s friend and kindred visionary genius, seems to have intuited the spiritual potential in Giger’s art when he wrote: (When we experience Giger’s art)“despair and craving for manifestation of new heaven and new earth have begun to fight for our soul. Yes, even the hope that we will once again see the celestial blue of the sky becomes a complementary wishful image, as if in this negative had to be hidden a positive. I have long suspected the existence of this element and believe that I have discovered traces of it in Giger’s art.” And further: “Giger’s journey into the depth leads him into the present and into the future He is the reporter of the underworld and archeologist of the menacing future.”

Timothy Leary, Harvard psychology professor turned psychedelic guru, whose knowledge of the deep recesses of the human psyche attained in many hundreds of his LSD experiences gives him a unique perspective on Giger’s art, seems to share Ernst Fuchs’s opinion. He wrote in his preface to the book www.HRGiger.com: “In Giger’s paintings, we see ourselves as crawling embryos, as fetal, larval creatures protected by the membranes of our egos, waiting for the moment of our metamorphosis and new birth..... Here is the evolutionary genius of Giger: Although he takes us far back, into our swampy vegetative, insectoid past, he always propels us forward into space.”

And Horst Albert Glaser wrote about this aspect of Giger’s work: “What can be said about the fact that, as a boy, the artist had already decorated his bedroom like an Egyptian crypt? Perhaps it expressed the longing for a state of Nirvana by a pubescent boy who had, haplessly, turned within. Consequently, he often assumed a

Buddhist meditative pose and even had himself photographed in that position in the “Black Room” as a young artist” (69).

How close Giger’s art can come to the transcendental domain can best be illustrated on a series of his paintings entitled Pump Excursion (70). At first sight, these paintings seem to feature a musician absorbed in deep meditation. However, closer inspection reveals that we are witnessing an act of self-destruction. What appears to be a musical instrument is actually a deadly weapon inserted in the protagonist’s mouth. A beautifully configured lower part of a nude female body then suggests sex and birth. This scene is illumined from above by light that has clearly a numinous quality. These paintings thus bring together the motifs of aggression, self-destruction, sex, birth, and divine light – essential elements of a psychospiritual death-rebirth experience.

In general, however, the transcendental potential of the perinatal process has so far received little of Giger’s attention. It would be interesting to speculate about the possible reasons for it. The great American mythologist Joseph Campbell once commented that the images of hell in world mythology are by far more intriguing and interesting than those of heaven because, unlike happiness and bliss, suffering can take so many different forms. Maybe Giger feels that the transcendental dimension has been more than adequately represented in western art, while the deep abyss of the dark side has been avoided. It is also possible that Giger’s own healing process has not yet proceeded far enough to embrace the transcendental dimension with the same compelling force with which it has engaged the Shadow.

I personally hope that the last alternative is closest to the truth. I would love to see Giger’s genius to use his incredible imagination and masterful free-hand airbrush technique to portray the transcendental beauty of the imaginal world with the same mastery, with which he has captured its “terrible beauty.” I have heard this comment from many others from the circle of his admirers. But Giger has always pursued his own inner truth and has disliked taking orders from his customers. It is unlikely that the wishes of his fans, however sincere and passionate, would be more successful in this regard. He will follow the inner logic of his Promethean quest, wherever it takes him, as he has always done, and those of us who love his art will continue enjoying the extraordinary products of this process as they keep emerging into the world.

To prevent misunderstanding, I would like to emphasize that I am aware of the fact that any attempt at psychological analysis of the work of a great artist – whether it uses the observations from psychoanalysis or modern consciousness research – can only attempt to contribute to the understanding of the content of his or her creations.

The origin of the genius, of the creative talent itself, continues to be shrouded in mystery.

Stanislav Grof, Mill Valley, California, October 2005.

Illustrations

1. Work # 373. Alien III, 1978. 70 cm x 100 cm (frontal view). Acrylic on paper.
2. Work # 372. Alien III, 1978. 140 cm x 100 cm (side view). Acrylic on paper.
3. Work # 377. Alien. Cockpit, 1978. 70cm x 100 cm. Acrylic on paper on wood.
4. Work # 380. Alien. Pilot in Cockpit, 1978. 100 cm x 140 cm. Acrylic on paper on wood.
5. Work # 487. Anima mia, 1980/81. Triptych 240 cm x 420 cm. Acrylic on paper/wood.
6. Work 423b. Erotomechanics VIII, 1979. 70 cm x 100 cm. Serigraph.
7. Work 428. Deification XI, 1979. Acrylic on paper.
8. Work 422b. Erotomechanics VII. 1979. 70 cm x 100 cm. Serigraph.
9. Work # 251. Li II. 1974. 200cm x 140 cm.
10. Work # 301. Necronom II. 1974. 70 cm x 100 cm. Acrylic on paper on wood.
11. Work # 453, New York City VIII. 1980. 100 cm x 70 cm. Acrylic on paper.
12. Work 478. New York City XXVIII. 1981. 100c x 70 cm. Acrylic, ink on paper.
13. From the cycle We the Atom Children (Wir Atomkinder, 1963.
14. From the cycle We the Atom Children (Wir Atomkinder, 1963.
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29. Shafts.
30. Shafts.

31. Work 87b. Under the Earth. 1968. 170 cm x 110 cm.
32. Work # 313. Stillbirth Machine I. 1976. 200 cm x 140 cm. Acrylic on paper/wood.
33. Work # 28. Waiting for Godot. 1965. From: Feast for the Psychiatrist.
34. Work 211. Bathroom door. 1973. 200 cm x 75 cm. India ink on paper/wood.
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44. Work 325. Satan II. 1977. 100 cm x 70 cm.
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66. Work # 263. Passage Temple: Death. 1975. 240 cm x 280 cm. Acrylic on paper/wood.

67. Work # 261. Pasage Temple: Life. 1974. 240 cm x 280 cm. Acrylic on paper/wood.
68. Work # 264. Passage Temple: Way of the Magician. 1975, 240 cm x 280 cm. Acrylic on paper/wood.
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70. Work # 621. Pump Excursion IV. 1989. 100 cm x 70 cm. Acrylic on paper/wood.
71. A drawing by Harriette Sherana Frances from a series depicting her experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth in a high-dose LSD session. It shows how intimately a profound encounter with death and the reliving of birth are connected on the perinatal level of the unconscious.
72. An experience from a high-dose LSD session, in which the uterine contractions take the form of archetypal predatory birds.
73. A painting depicting reliving of the onset of delivery in a high-dose LSD session; while experiencing engulfment by a mythic being, the subject responds with fierce aggression that is transforming her into an evil being.
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75. A painting from a high-dose LSD session, representing the total surrender of the subject to Mahakali, the Terrible Mother Goddess of the Tantric tradition, at the moment of reliving the moment of birth. The head of the newborn can be seen emerging from the bloody vagina of the goddess. The turtle and the nine elephants pierced on her spear represent in Hindu mythology the foundation of the universe.
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77. Painting of a demonic being encountered in a high-dose LSD session focusing on BPM III.
78. Painting portraying an evil being encountered in a perinatal high-dose LSD session.
79. Amniotic universe. A painting representing the reliving of a blissful episode of intrauterine life (BPM I) in a high-dose LSD session. Regression to prenatal life mediates access to the experience of oneness with cosmos. The shape of the galaxy resembling a female breast ("Milky Way") suggest simultaneous experiential connection with the memories of the "good breast."
80. Oceanic womb. A painting representing reliving of a blissful episode of intrauterine life (BPM I) in a high-dose LSD session. Regression to prenatal existence opens the gate to authentic experiential identification with aquatic animals.
81. A painting from a holotropic breathwork session representing an encounter with the Great Mother Goddess (Mother Nature) at the moment of reliving birth.
82. A painting representing an episode of toxic intrauterine disturbance experienced in a high-dose LSD session. The toxicity of the womb is experienced as a painful ordeal in a diabolical laboratory full of insidious demons. This experience is also accompanied by simultaneous identification with fish in polluted water and with a

chicken embryo in advanced stage of development when the inside of the egg is contaminated by toxic metabolic products.

83. A painting representing the experience of a “bad womb” in a psychedelic session. The hostility of the womb is represented as vicious attacks by animals and archetypal beings.

84. A drawing by Harriette Sherana Frances from a series depicting her experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth in a high-dose LSD session. The onset of birth is experienced as a giant whirlpool sucking her into the underworld. The mandala of skulls and ribcages suggests that she will undergo an encounter with death.

85. A painting representing the onset of delivery in a high-dose LSD session (BPM II) experienced as engulfment by a giant Maelstrom. The little boat with a skeleton suggests the impending encounter with death.

86. A painting portraying an episode from a holotropic breathwork session, in which the onset of the process of psychospiritual death and rebirth was experienced as being engulfed by a grotesque archetypal figure. The skull represents the imminence of death, the root system and the snake the placental circulatory system.

87. Painting from a perinatal LSD session in which the delivering uterus was experienced as a dangerous snake pit with no exit. Vipers symbolize on the perinatal level of the unconscious the imminence of death, but – because of their regenerative molting – also the possibility of rebirth.

88. Giant constrictor snakes belong to very common perinatal symbols. Pythons swallow large prey, which makes them look pregnant. They also twist their bodies around the prey and crush it, resembling uterine contractions. a. A painting from an LSD session, in which the confinement of birth was experienced as entanglement by a giant boa constrictor. b. Painting from an LSD session portraying the birth struggle experienced as fight with a python.

89. A painting from a holotropic breathwork session dominated by BPM II. It depicts an encounter with the Devouring Mother Goddess in the form of a giant tarantula (by Jarina Moss).

90. A painting from a high-dose LSD session governed by BPM II. The archetypal figure of the Devouring Mother Goddess in the form of a giant spider exposes fetuses to diabolical tortures.

91. A painting portraying an episode from a high-dose LSD session dominated by BPM II. The uterine contractions are experienced as an attack by a giant octopus.

92. A drawing by Harriette Sherana Frances from a series depicting her experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth in a high-dose LSD session. It shows her in the underworld, the realm of death, impaled on a rack and exposed to painful tortures.

93. Painting from a holotropic breathwork session depicting a fetus trapped in the womb during the birth process.

94. A drawing by Harriette Sherana Frances from a series depicting her experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth in a high-dose LSD session. The boulder crushing her has human features; it represents on a superficial level her husband and her "oppressive marriage," on a deeper level her mother and the crushing she experienced when her mother was giving birth to her.
95. A series of paintings from an LSD session dominated by BPM III, depicting an angry Jesus on the cross surrounded by a hostile mob.
96. "Life as a Trip from Nowhere to Nowhere in a Rainy Day." Painting from an LSD session dominated by BPM II, reflecting a deep existential crisis during which life appears utterly meaningless and absurd.
97. Painting from a holotropic breathwork session, in which the author relived birth. It depicts experiential identification with a volcanic eruption (Tai Hazard).
98. Two paintings from high-dose LSD sessions representing scenes from a Sabbath of the Witches (Walpurgi's Night). a. Ritual kissing of the anus of "Meister Leonard," the Devil in the role of the president of the Sabbath. b. Participants in the Sabbath shown flying through the air.
99. Painting from an LSD session governed by BPM III depicting the experience of drowning in a cesspool.
100. A series of drawings from a high-dose LSD session, in which the theme crucifixion was defiled by elements of what the patient called "obscene biology." This seemingly blasphemous combination had its roots in the final stage of birth, during which the sacred process of giving and receiving life is inextricably connected with sexuality, genitals, and various forms of biological material (vaginal secretions, amniotic fluid, and even urine and feces).
101. The final picture of the preceding series, depicting the emergence from the birth canal. The figure of "Purified Christ" is separating from the birth canal and the realm of biology. The patient's hands are reaching for the "Black Sun," symbol of the divine without any form, the creative principle of the universe, transcending any specific forms of mainstream religions.
102. a, b. Paintings depicting encounters with fire in the final moments of the death/rebirth experience.
103. "Out of Darkness." A painting representing the combined experience of being born and giving birth in a session of holotropic breathwork. Experiences of this kind typically result in a sense of giving birth to a new self and can be very transformative and healing (Jean Perkins).
104. A painting representing the experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth in a holotropic breathwork session. The old personality structure disintegrated and out of it emerges a new Self, which has a spiritual connection. The inscription at the bottom says Liberation (Jarina Moss).

105. A death-rebirth experienced in a holotropic breathwork session, which took the form of being torn to pieces and devoured by a pack of wolves.
106. A death-rebirth experienced in a holotropic breathwork session; the goose is an ancient Siberian shamanic power animal.
107. A painting from an LSD session depicting the experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth. The patient's naked body rises from the realm of death – symbolized by a cemetery, a coffin, and a burning candle –and merges with transcendental light.
108. The experience of Moloch, a destructive deity encountered in the final stage of rebirth in a high-dose LSD session. The fire in Moloch's belly can also be seen as the head of the baby coming through the birth canal, with Moloch's claws inflicting the pain.
109. Continuation of the previous experience. The body of the newborn is still in the birth canal, but its head emerges into a peacock heaven of the Great Mother Goddess.
110. Painting from an LSD session representing the delivering female genital as a combination of a prison, a torture chamber, and a giant press.
111. A drawing depicting an experience from a perinatal LSD session, which provided insight into the castration complex and its roots in the birth trauma. It combines feelings of constriction of the body with painful umbilical and genital sensations.
112. Temptation of St. Anthony (Hans Baldung Grien).
113. Jesus tempted by the devil during his stay in the desert.
114. Buddha tempted by the daughters of Kama Mara and threatened by his army.
115. Villa dei misteri – Dionysian initiation.