

Roots of Human Violence
– Psychospiritual Perspective
on the Current Global Crisis

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During the fourteen years when we lived at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, Joseph Campbell was a regular guest speaker in our seminars and a frequent guest in our house. There was one subject about which he spoke with extraordinary passion and enthusiasm in his lectures as well as in our private discussions. It was the tradition of the Eranos meetings – gatherings of a stellar group of European thinkers, in which the main guiding force and chief contributor was C.G. Jung himself. As Joseph shared with us his memories of Eranos, the time of these legendary meetings seemed to look increasingly like a golden era sunk irrevocably into a mythic past like the Arthurian legends and their heroes.

But it clearly was not the destiny of Eranos to be relegated to a mythic realm, I would like to express my profound appreciation to John van Praag and to the Fetzer Institute for resurrecting the Eranos tradition and bringing it back to our time. I feel also very grateful for the invitation, which has

made it possible for us to participate in this renaissance. It is a great honour and pleasure for me to attend this meeting and to share with you observations and experiences from my research of non-ordinary states of consciousness that I have conducted for more than half a century.

The topic of this meeting could not be more relevant considering the situation we are facing in the world. Since time immemorial, proclivity to unbridled violence – combined with insatiable greed – has been one of the most elemental forces driving human history. The number and nature of atrocities that have been committed throughout the ages in various countries of the world, many of them in the name of God, are truly unimaginable and indescribable. Countless millions of soldiers and civilians have been killed in wars and revolutions of all times or in other forms of bloodshed.

In the past, these violent events had tragic consequences for the individuals, who were directly involved in them, and for their immediate families. However, they did not threaten the future of the human species as a whole and certainly did not represent a danger for the eco system and for the biosphere of the planet. Even after the most violent wars, nature was able to recycle all the aftermath and completely recover within a few decades.

This situation changed very radically in the course of the twentieth century due to rapid technological progress, exponential growth of industrial production, massive population explosion, and particularly the development of atomic and hydrogen bombs and other weapons of mass destruction. We are facing a global crisis of unprecedented proportions and have the dubious privilege of being the first species in history that has achieved the capacity to eradicate itself and threaten in the process evolution of life on this planet.

Diplomatic negotiations, administrative and legal measures, economic and social sanctions, military interventions, and other similar efforts have had very little success; as a matter of fact, they have often produced more problems than they solved. It is becoming increasingly clear why they had to fail. The strategies used to alleviate this crisis are rooted in the same ideology that created it in the first place. It has become increasingly clear that the crisis we are facing reflects the level of consciousness evolution of the human species and that its successful resolution or at least alleviation will have to include a radical inner transformation of humanity on a large scale.

This morning, I would like to focus in my presentation on the observations from the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness that provide new insights into the nature and roots of human aggression and suggest effective strategies for working with destructive and self-destructive tendencies in the human species.

Anatomy of Human Destructiveness

Scientific understanding of human aggression started with Charles Darwin's époque-making discoveries in the field of evolution of species in the middle of the nineteenth century¹. The attempts to explain human aggression from our animal origin generated such theoretical concepts as Desmond Morris's image of the 'naked ape'², Robert Ardrey's idea of the 'territorial imperative'³, Paul MacLean's 'triune

1 C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species and the Descent of Man*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Chicago, IL 1952 (originally published in 1859).

2 D. Morris, *The Naked Ape*, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY 1967.

3 R. Ardrey, *African Genesis*, Atheneum, New York, NY 1961.

brain¹, and Richard Dawkins's sociobiological explanations interpreting aggression in terms of genetic strategies of the 'selfish gene'². More refined models of behaviour developed by pioneers in ethology, such as Konrad Lorenz, Nikolaas Tinbergen, and others, complemented mechanical emphasis on instincts by the study of ritualistic and motivational elements³.

However, as Erich Fromm demonstrated in his groundbreaking book *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*⁴, any theories asserting that human disposition to violence simply reflects our animal origin are inadequate and unconvincing. Animals exhibit aggression when they are hungry, compete for sex, or defend their territory. With rare exceptions, such as the occasional violent group raids of the chimpanzees against neighbouring groups⁵, animals do not prey on their own kind. The nature and scope of human violence – Erich Fromm's 'malignant aggression' – has no parallels in the animal kingdom.

The realisation that human aggression can not be adequately explained as a result of phylogenetic evolution led to the formulation of psychodynamic and psychosocial theories that consider a significant part of human aggression to be

1 P. MacLean, 'A Triune Concept of the Brain and Behavior. Lecture I. Man's Reptilian and Limbic Inheritance; Lecture II. Man's Limbic System and the Psychoses; Lecture III. New Trends in Man's Evolution', in: T.J Boag & D. Campbell (Eds.), *The Hincks Memorial Lectures*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, ON 1973, pp. 6-66.

2 R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY 1976.

3 K. Lorenz, *On Aggression*, Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., New York, NY 1963; N. Tinbergen, *Animal Behavior*, Time-Life, New York, NY 1965.

4 E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Holt, Rinehart & Winson, New York, NY 1973.

5 R. Wrangham & D. Peterson, *Demonic Males – Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York 1996.

learned behaviour. This trend began in the late 1930s and was initiated by the work of Dollard and Miller¹.

Biographical Sources of Aggression

The authors of psychodynamic theories made attempts to explain the specifically human aggression as a reaction to various psychotraumatic situations that the human infant and child experience during the extended period of dependency – physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, lack of love, sense of insecurity, inadequate satisfaction of basic biological needs, emotional deprivation, abandonment, and rejection.

However, explanations of this kind fall painfully short of accounting for extreme forms of individual violence, such as serial murders of the Boston Strangler or Geoffrey Dahmer. They also do not have plausible explanation for 'running amok', indiscriminate multiple killing in public places followed by suicide (or killing) of the perpetrator. 'Running amok' was long considered to be an exotic culture-bound syndrome limited to Malaysia. In the last several decades it has been repeatedly observed in the West, including among teenagers on school campuses. There also is no plausible psychodynamic explanation for religiously motivated combination of violence and suicide, such as the behaviour of the Japanese kamikaze warriors or of the Moslem fundamentalist suicide bombers.

Current psychodynamic and psychosocial theories are even less convincing when it comes to bestial acts committed by entire groups, like the Sharon Tate murders, the My Lai massacre, or atrocities that occur during prison uprisings. They fail completely when it comes to mass societal

1 J. Dollard, L.W. Doob, N.E. Miller, O.H. Mowrer & R.R. Sears, *Frustration and Aggression*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 1939.

phenomena that involve entire nations, such as Nazism, Communism, bloody wars, revolutions, genocide, and concentration camps.

Perinatal Roots of Violence

There is no doubt that traumatic experiences and frustration of basic needs in childhood and infancy represent an important source of 'malignant aggression'. However, in the last several decades, psychedelic research and deep experiential psychotherapies have revealed additional significant roots of violence in deep recesses of the psyche that lie beyond postnatal biography¹. Thus feelings of vital threat, pain, and suffocation experienced for many hours during the passage through the birth canal generate enormous amounts of murderous aggression that remains repressed and stored in the organism. As Sigmund Freud pointed out in his book *Mourning and Melancholia*, repressed aggression turns into depression and self-destructive impulses². Perinatal energies and emotions thus by their very nature represent a mixture of murderous and suicidal drives.

The reliving of birth in various forms of experiential psychotherapy is not limited to the replay of the emotional feelings and physical sensations experienced during the passage through the birth canal; it is typically accompanied by a variety of experiences from the collective unconscious portraying scenes of unimaginable violence. Among these are

1 S. Grof, *Realms of the Human Unconscious – Observations from LSD Research*, Viking, New York 1975; Id., *Beyond the Brain – Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy*, SUNY, Albany, NY 1985; Id., *Psychology of the Future – Lessons from Modern Consciousness Research*, SUNY, Albany, NY 2000.

2 S. Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), SE 14.

often powerful sequences depicting wars, revolutions, racial riots, concentration camps, totalitarianism, and genocide.

Spontaneous emergence of this imagery associated with the reliving of birth suggests that the perinatal level might actually be an important source of extreme forms of human violence. Naturally, wars and revolutions are extremely complex phenomena that have historical, economic, political, religious, and other dimensions. My intention here is not to offer a reductionistic explanation replacing all the other causes, but to add some new insights concerning the psychological and spiritual dimensions of these forms of social psychopathology that have been neglected or received only cursory attention in earlier theories.

The images of violent sociopolitical events accompanying the reliving of biological birth tend to appear in very specific connection with the four basic perinatal matrices (BPMs), which is my name for complex experiential patterns associated with the reliving of the consecutive stages of the birth process. While reliving episodes of undisturbed intrauterine existence (BPM I), we typically experience images from human societies with an ideal social structure, from cultures that live in complete harmony with nature, or from future utopian societies where all major conflicts have been resolved. Memories of intrauterine disturbances, such as those of a toxic womb, RH incompatibility between the maternal organism and the foetus, imminent miscarriage, or attempted abortion, are accompanied by images of human groups living in industrial areas where nature is polluted and spoiled, or in societies with insidious social order and all-pervading paranoia.

Experiences associated with the first clinical stage of birth (BPM II), during which the uterus periodically contracts but the cervix is not yet open, present a diametrically different

picture. They portray oppressive and abusive totalitarian societies with closed borders, victimising their populations, and 'choking' personal freedom, such as Czarist or Communist Russia, Hitler's Third Reich, Eastern European Soviet satellites, South American dictatorships, and the African Apartheid, or bring specific images of the inmates in Nazi concentration camps and Stalin's Gulag Archipelago. While experiencing these scenes of living hell, we identify exclusively with the victims and feel deep sympathy for the down-trodden and the underdog.

The experiences accompanying reliving of the second clinical stage of delivery (BPM III), when the cervix is dilated and continued contractions propel the foetus through the narrow passage of the birth canal, feature a rich panoply of violent scenes – bloody wars and revolutions, human or animal slaughter, mutilation, sexual abuse, and murder. These scenes often contain demonic elements and repulsive scatological motifs. Additional frequent concomitants of BPM III are visions of burning cities, launching of rockets, and explosions of nuclear bombs. Here we are not limited to the role of victims, but can participate in three roles – that of the victim, of the aggressor, and of an emotionally involved observer.

Reliving of the third clinical stage of delivery (BPM IV), the actual moment of birth and the separation from the mother, is typically associated with images of victory in wars and revolutions, liberation of prisoners, and success of collective efforts, such as patriotic or nationalistic movements. At this point, we can also experience visions of triumphant celebrations and parades or of exciting post-war reconstruction.

In 1975, I described these observations, linking sociopolitical phenomena to stages of biological birth, in my book *Realms of the Human Unconscious*. Shortly after its publica-

tion, I received an enthusiastic letter from Lloyd de Mause, a New York psychoanalyst and journalist. De Mause is one of the founders of psychohistory, a discipline that applies the findings of depth psychology to the study of history and political science. Psychohistorians explore such issues as the relationship between the childhood of political leaders and their system of values and process of decision-making, or the influence of child-rearing practices on the nature of revolutions of that particular historical period. Lloyd de Mause was very interested in my findings concerning the trauma of birth and its possible sociopolitical implications, because they provided independent support for his own research.

For some time, de Mause had been studying the psychodynamics of the periods immediately preceding wars and revolutions. It interested him how military leaders succeed in mobilising masses of peaceful civilians and transforming them practically overnight into killing machines. His approach to this problem was very original and creative. In addition to analysis of traditional historical sources, he drew data of great psychological importance from caricatures, jokes, dreams, personal imagery, slips of the tongue, side comments of speakers, and even doodles and scribbles on the edge of the rough drafts of political documents. By the time he contacted me, he had analysed in this way seventeen situations preceding the outbreak of wars and revolutionary upheavals, spanning many centuries since antiquity to most recent times¹.

He was struck by the extraordinary abundance of figures of speech, metaphors, and images related to biological birth that he found in this material. Military leaders and politicians of all ages describing a critical situation or declaring

¹ L. de Mause, 'The Independence of Psychohistory', in: Id. (Ed.), *The New Psychohistory*, The Psychohistory, New York, NY 1975.

war typically used terms that applied equally to perinatal distress. They accused the enemy of choking and strangling their people, squeezing the last breath out of their lungs, constricting them, and not giving them enough space to live (Hitler's *Lebensraum*).

Equally frequent were allusions to dark caves, tunnels, and confusing labyrinths, dangerous abysses into which one might be pushed, and the threat of engulfment by treacherous quicksand or a terrifying whirlpool. Similarly, the offer of the resolution of the crisis had the form of perinatal images. The leader promised to rescue his nation from an ominous labyrinth, to lead it to the light on the other side of the tunnel, and to create a situation where the dangerous aggressor and oppressor will be overcome and everybody will again breathe freely.

Lloyd de Mause's historical examples at the time included such famous personages as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Samuel Adams, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Hitler, Khrushchev, and Kennedy. Samuel Adams talking about the American Revolution referred to 'the child of Independence now struggling for birth'. In 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm stated that 'the Monarchy has been seized by the throat and forced to choose between letting itself be strangled and making a last ditch effort to defend itself against attack'.

During the Cuban missile crisis Khrushchev wrote to Kennedy, pleading that the two nations not 'come to a clash, like blind moles battling to death in a tunnel'. Even more explicit was the coded message used by Japanese ambassador Kurusu when he phoned Tokyo to signal that negotiations with Roosevelt had broken down and that it was all right to go ahead with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He announced that the 'birth of the child was imminent' and asked how things were in Japan: 'Does it seem as if the child

might be born?' The reply was: 'Yes, the birth of the child seems imminent.' Interestingly, the American intelligence listening in recognised the meaning of the 'war-as-birth' code. The most recent examples can be found in Osama bin Laden's videotape, where he threatens to turn United States into a 'choking hell' and in the speech of US State Secretary Condoleezza Rice, who described the acute crisis in Lebanon as 'birth pangs of New Middle East'.

Particularly chilling was the use of perinatal language in connection with the explosion of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. The airplane was given the name of the pilot's mother, Enola Gay, the atomic bomb itself carried a painted nickname, 'The Little Boy', and the agreed-upon message sent to Washington as a signal of successful detonation was 'The baby was born'. It would not be too far-fetched to see the image of a newborn also behind the nickname of the Nagasaki bomb, Fat Man. Since the time of our correspondence, Lloyd de Mause collected many additional historical examples and refined his thesis that the memory of the birth trauma plays an important role as a source of motivation for violent social activity.

The relationship between nuclear warfare and birth is of such relevance that I would like to explore it further using the material from a fascinating paper by Carol Cohn entitled 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of the Defense Intellectuals'¹. The defence intellectuals (Dis) are civilians who move in and out of government, working sometimes as administrative officials or consultants, sometimes at universities and think tanks. They create the theory that informs and legitimates US nuclear strategic practice – how to manage the arms race, how to deter the use of nuclear weapons,

¹ C. Cohn, 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of the Defense Intellectuals', in: 'Journal of Women in Culture and Society', N. 12, 1987. pp. 687-718.

how to fight a nuclear war if the deterrence fails, and how to explain why it is not safe to live without nuclear weapons.

Carol Cohn had attended a two-week summer seminar on nuclear weapons, nuclear strategic doctrine, and arms control. She was so fascinated by what had transpired there that she spent the following year immersed in the almost entirely male world of defence intellectuals (except for secretaries). She collected some extremely interesting facts confirming the perinatal dimension in nuclear warfare. In her own terminology, this material confirms the importance of the motif of 'male birth' and 'male creation' as important psychological forces underlying the psychology of nuclear warfare. She uses the following historical examples to illustrate her point of view.

In 1942, Ernest Lawrence sent a telegram to a Chicago group of physicists developing the nuclear bomb that read: 'Congratulations to the new parents. Can hardly wait to see the new arrival.' At Los Alamos, the atom bomb was referred to as 'Oppenheimer's baby'. Richard Feynman wrote in his article 'Los Alamos from Below' that when he was temporarily on leave after his wife's death, he received a telegram that read: 'The baby is expected on such and such a day.'

At Lawrence Livermore laboratories, the hydrogen bomb was referred to as 'Teller's baby', although those who wanted to disparage Edward Teller's contribution claimed he was not the bomb's father, but its mother. They claimed that Stanislaw Ulam was the real father, who had all the important ideas and 'conceived it'; Teller only 'carried it' after that. Terms related to motherhood were also used to the provision of 'nurturance' – the maintenance of the missiles.

General Groves sent a triumphant coded cable to Secretary of War Henry Stimson at the Potsdam conference reporting the success of the first atomic test: 'Doctor has just returned

most enthusiastic and confident that the little boy is as husky as his big brother. The light in his eyes discernible from here to Highhold (Stimson's country home) and I could have heard his screams from here to my farm.' Stimson, in turn, informed Churchill by writing him a note that read: 'Babies satisfactorily born.'

William L. Laurence witnessed the test of the first atomic bomb and wrote: 'The big boom came about a hundred seconds after the great flash – the first cry of a new-born world.' Edward Teller's exultant telegram to Los Alamos, announcing the successful test of the hydrogen bomb 'Mike' at the Eniwetok atoll in Marshall Islands read, 'It's a boy.' The Enola Gay, 'Little Boy', and 'The baby was born' symbolism of the Hiroshima bomb, and the 'Fat Man' symbolism of the Nagasaki bomb were already mentioned earlier. According to Carol Cohn, 'male scientists gave birth to a progeny with the ultimate power of domination over female Nature'.

Further support for the pivotal role of the perinatal domain of the unconscious in war psychology can be found in Sam Keen's excellent book *The Faces of the Enemy*¹. Keen brought together an outstanding collection of war posters, propaganda cartoons, and caricatures from many historical periods and countries. He demonstrated that the way the enemy is described and portrayed during a war or revolution is a stereotype that shows only minimal variations and has very little to do with the actual characteristics of the country and its inhabitants. This material also typically disregards the diversity and heterogeneity characterising the population of each country and makes blatant generalisation: 'This is what the Germans, Americans, Japanese, Russians, etc. are like!'

¹ S. Keen, *Faces of the Enemy – Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, CA 1988.

Keen was able to divide these images into several archetypal categories. Sam Keen's theoretical framework does not specifically include the perinatal domain of the unconscious. However, the analysis of his picture material reveals preponderance of symbolic images that are characteristic of BPM II and BPM III. The enemy is typically depicted as a dangerous octopus, a vicious dragon, a multiheaded hydra, a giant venomous tarantula, or an engulfing Leviathan. Other frequently used symbols include vicious predatory felines or birds, monstrous sharks, and ominous snakes, particularly vipers and boa constrictors. Scenes depicting strangulation or crushing, ominous whirlpools, and treacherous quicksands also abound in pictures from the time of wars, revolutions, and political crises. As we will see, juxtaposition of pictures from holotropic states of consciousness that focus on reliving of birth with the historical pictorial documentation collected by Lloyd de Mause and Sam Keen represents strong evidence for the perinatal roots of human violence.

According to the new insights, provided jointly by observations from consciousness research and by the findings of psychohistory, we all carry in our deep unconscious powerful energies and emotions associated with the trauma of birth that we have not adequately processed and assimilated. For some of us, this aspect of our psyche can be completely unconscious, until and unless we embark on some in-depth self-exploration with the use of psychedelics or some powerful experiential techniques of psychotherapy, such as the holotropic breathwork, primal therapy, or rebirthing. Others can have varying degrees of awareness of the emotions and physical sensations stored on the perinatal level of the unconscious.

Activation of this material can lead to serious individual psychopathology, including unmotivated violence. Lloyd de

Mause suggests that, for unknown reasons, the awareness of the perinatal elements can increase simultaneously in a large number of people. This creates an atmosphere of general tension, anxiety, and anticipation. The leader is an individual who is under a stronger influence of the perinatal energies than the average person. He also has the ability to disown his unacceptable feelings (the Shadow in Jung's terminology) and to project them on the external situation. The collective discomfort is blamed on the enemy and a military intervention is offered as a solution.

Richard Tarnas' extraordinary book *Cosmos and Psyche – Intimations of A New Worldview* added an interesting dimension to de Mause's thesis. In this meticulously researched study, Tarnas was able to show that throughout history the times of wars and revolutions showed correlation with specific astrological transits¹; his findings strongly suggest that archetypal forces play a critical role in shaping human history.

War and revolution provide an opportunity to disregard the psychological defences that ordinarily keep the dangerous unconscious forces in check. Freud's superego, a psychological force that demands restraint and civilised behaviour, is replaced by 'war superego'. We receive praise and medals for murder, indiscriminate destruction, and pillaging, the same behaviours that in peacetime are unacceptable and would land us in prison or worse. Similarly, sexual violence has been a common practice during wartime and has been generally tolerated. As a matter of fact, military leaders have often promised their soldiers unlimited access to women in the conquered territory to motivate them for battle.

¹ R. Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche – Intimations of a New World View*, Viking, New York, NY 2006.

Once the war erupts, the destructive and self-destructive perinatal impulses are freely acted out. The themes that we normally encounter in a certain stage of the process of inner exploration and transformation (BPM II and III) now become parts of our everyday life, either directly or in the form of TV news. Various no exit situations, sadomasochistic orgies, sexual violence, bestial and demonic behaviour, unleashing of enormous explosive energies, and scatology, which belong to standard perinatal imagery, are all enacted in wars and revolutions with extraordinary vividness and power.

Witnessing scenes of destruction and acting out of violent unconscious impulses, whether it occurs on the individual scale or collectively in wars and revolutions, does not result in healing and transformation as would an inner confrontation with these elements in a therapeutic context. The experience is not generated by our own unconscious, lacks the element of deep introspection, and does not lead to insights. The situation is fully externalised and connection with the deep dynamics of the psyche is missing. And, naturally, there is no therapeutic intention and motivation for change and transformation. Thus the goal of the underlying birth fantasy, which represents the deepest driving force of such violent events, is not achieved, even if the war or revolution has been brought to a successful closure. The most triumphant external victory does not deliver what was expected and hoped for – an inner sense of emotional liberation and psychospiritual rebirth.

Since most of the clients with whom I worked in Prague had experienced the Nazi occupation and the Stalinist regime, the work with them generated some fascinating insights into the relationship between the perinatal dynamics and the institution of concentration camps and into perinatal roots of Communism. Time consideration does not allow me

to explore this fascinating material; those readers who are interested can find the full discussion of these subjects in my book *Psychology of the Future*¹.

Transpersonal Origins of Violence

The research of holotropic states has revealed that the roots of human violence reach even deeper than to the perinatal level of the psyche. Significant additional sources of aggression can be found in the transpersonal domain, such as archetypal figures of wrathful deities and demonic entities, complex destructive mythological themes (such as that of Ragnarok, the Doom of the Gods, or of the Apocalypse), and past-life memories of violent nature.

C.G. Jung believed that the archetypes of the collective unconscious have a powerful influence not only on the behaviour of individuals but also on the events of human history². From his point of view, entire nations and cultural groups might be enacting in their behaviour important mythological themes. Jung believed that many aspects of the German Nazi movement could be understood as possession of the German nation by the archetype of Wotan, 'an ancient god of storm and frenzy'. James Hillman amassed in his brilliant book *A Terrible Love of War* convincing evidence that war is a formidable archetypal force that has irresistible power over individuals and nations³.

In many instances, leaders of nations specifically use not only perinatal, but also archetypal images and spiritual symbolism to achieve their political goals. The medieval crusaders were asked to sacrifice their lives for Jesus in a war that

1 S. Grof, *Psychology of the Future*, cit.

2 C.G. Jung, *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (1935/1954), CW 9i.

3 J. Hillman, *A Terrible Love of War*, Penguin, New York, NY 2004.

would recover the Holy Land from the Mohammedans. Adolf Hitler exploited the mythological motifs of the supremacy of the Nordic race and of the millennial empire, as well as the ancient Vedic symbols of the swastika and the solar eagle. Ayatollah Khomeini and Osama bin Laden ignited the imagination of their Moslem followers by references to *jihad*, the holy war against the infidels. American presidents Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as the Evil Empire and George W. Bush used in his political speeches references to the Axis of Evil and Armageddon.

Carol Cohn discussed in her paper not only the perinatal but also the spiritual symbolism associated with the language used in relation to nuclear weaponry and doctrine. The authors of the strategic doctrine refer to members of their community as the 'nuclear priesthood'. The first atomic test was called Trinity – the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the male forces of creation. From her feminist perspective, Cohn saw this as an effort of male scientists to appropriate and claim ultimate creative power¹. The scientists who worked on the atomic bomb and witnessed the test described it in the following way: 'It was as though we stood at the first day of creation.' And Robert Oppenheimer thought of Krishna's words to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: 'I am become Death, the Shatterer of Worlds.'

Psychology of Survival

Let us now explore how the concepts that have emerged from consciousness research and from transpersonal psychology could be put to practical use in alleviating the crisis we are facing in modern world. This work has thus shown that the roots of human violence are much deeper and

¹ C. Cohn, *op. cit.*

more formidable than traditional psychology ever imagined. However, this work has also discovered extremely effective therapeutic strategies that have the potential to assuage and transform human proclivity to violence.

Efforts to change humanity would have to start with psychological prevention at a very early age. The data from prenatal and perinatal psychology indicate that much could be achieved by changing the conditions of pregnancy, delivery, and early postnatal care. This would include improving the emotional preparation of the mother during pregnancy, practicing natural childbirth, creating a psychospiritually informed birth environment, and cultivating emotionally nourishing contact between the mother and the child in the postpartum period.

The circumstances of birth play an important role in creating a disposition to violence and self-destructive tendencies or, conversely, to loving behaviour and healthy interpersonal relationships. French obstetrician Michel Odent has shown how the hormones involved in the birth process and in nursing and maternal behaviour participate in this imprinting. The catecholamines (adrenaline and noradrenaline) function in evolution as mediators of the aggressive/protective instinct of the mother at the time when birth was occurring in unprotected natural environments. Oxytocine, prolactine, and endorphins are known to induce maternal behaviour in animals and foster dependency and attachment. The busy, noisy, and chaotic milieu of many hospitals induces anxiety, engages unnecessarily the adrenaline system, and imprints the picture of a world that is potentially dangerous and requires aggressive responses. This interferes with the hormones that mediate positive interpersonal imprinting. It

is, therefore, essential to provide for birthing a quiet, safe, and private environment¹.

Much has been written about the importance of child rearing, as well as disastrous emotional consequences of traumatic conditions in infancy and childhood. Certainly this is an area where continued education and guidance is necessary. However, to apply the theoretically known principles, parents themselves must reach sufficient emotional stability and maturity. It is well known that emotional problems are passed like a curse from generation to generation; it is not unlike the well-known problem of the chicken and the egg.

Humanistic and transpersonal psychologies have developed effective experiential methods of self-exploration, healing, and personality transformation. Some of these come from Western therapeutic traditions, others represent modern adaptations of ancient and native spiritual practices. Besides offering emotional healing, these approaches have the potential to return genuine experiential spirituality into Western culture and remedy the alienation of modern humanity. There exist approaches with a very favourable ratio between professional helpers and clients and others that can be practiced in the context of self-help groups. Systematic work with them leads to an inner transformation of humanity that is sorely needed for survival of our species.

As the content of the perinatal level of the unconscious emerges into consciousness and is integrated, it results in radical personality changes. The level of aggression typically decreases considerably and the individuals involved become more peaceful, comfortable with themselves, and tolerant of others. The experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth

1 M. Odent, 'Prevention of Violence or Genesis of Love? Which Perspective?', presentation at the Fourteenth International Transpersonal Conference in Santa Clara, California, June 1995.

and conscious connection with positive postnatal or prenatal memories reduce irrational drives and ambitions. It causes a shift of focus from the past and future to the present moment and enhances the ability to enjoy simple circumstances of life, such as everyday activities, food, love-making, nature, and music. Another important result of this process is emergence of spirituality of a non-denominational, universal, all-encompassing, and mystical nature that is very authentic and convincing, because it is based on deep personal experience.

The process of spiritual opening and transformation typically deepens further as a result of transpersonal experiences, such as identification with other people, entire human groups, animals, plants, and even inorganic materials and processes in nature. Other experiences provide conscious access to events occurring in other countries, cultures, and historical periods and even to the mythological realms and archetypal beings of the collective unconscious. Experiences of cosmic unity and one's own divinity lead to increasing identification with all of creation and bring the sense of wonder, love, compassion, and inner peace.

What began as psychological probing of the unconscious psyche automatically becomes a philosophical quest for the meaning of life and a journey of spiritual discovery. People who connect to the transpersonal domain of their psyche tend to develop a new appreciation for existence and reverence for all life. One of the most striking consequences of various forms of transpersonal experiences is spontaneous emergence and development of deep humanitarian and ecological concerns and need to get involved in service for some common purpose. This is based on an almost cellular awareness that the boundaries in the universe are arbitrary

and that each of us is ultimately identical with the entire web of existence.

It is suddenly clear that we cannot do anything to nature without simultaneously doing it to ourselves. Differences among people appear to be interesting and enriching rather than threatening, whether they are related to sex, race, colour, language, political conviction, or religious belief. It is obvious that a transformation of this kind would increase our chances for survival if it could occur on a sufficiently large scale.

Many of the people with whom we have worked saw humanity at a critical crossroad facing either collective annihilation or an evolutionary jump in consciousness of unprecedented proportions. Terence McKenna put it very succinctly: 'The history of the silly monkey is over, one way or another.'¹ We seem to be involved in a dramatic race for time that has no precedent in the entire history of humanity. What is at stake is nothing less than the future of life on this planet. If we continue the old strategies, which in their consequences are clearly extremely destructive and self-destructive, it is unlikely that the human species will survive. However, if a sufficient number of people could undergoes the process of deep inner transformation, we might reach a level of consciousness evolution where we would deserve the name we have so proudly given to our species: *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

¹ T. Mc Kenna, *Food of the Gods – The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge*, Bantam, New York, NY 1992.



Figures 1 a-c. The reliving of the onset of biological delivery in holotropic states is typically experienced as an engulfment by a giant whirlpool or a terrifying archetypal creature.

Figure 1 a. A painting portraying the beginning of the death-rebirth process in a high-dose LSD session

experienced as descent into the Maelstrom. The skeleton in the boat symbolizes the imminence of death.

Figure 1 b. A drawing of an engulfing whirlpool experienced in a high-dose psychedelic session of Harriette Francis, a professional painter. A mandala made of skulls and ribcages, like the boat with a skeleton in the above picture, heralds an imminent profound encounter with death.

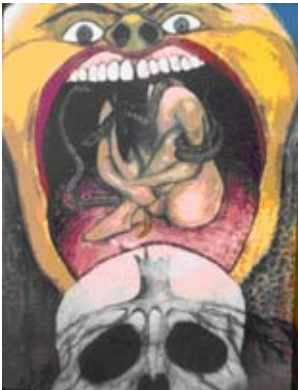


Figure 1 c. A painting depicting an experience of engulfment from a holotropic breathwork session. Snakes are common perinatal symbols, the skull suggests impending encounter with death, and the tree is an allusion to the placenta.



Figure 2 a.

Figures 2 a-d. Four cartoons in which political and economic crises are depicted as engulfment, in the first two by a giant whirlpool, in the third one by a devouring skull, and in the fourth one by a dragon, a common symbol for the elemental forces involved in the birth process.



Figure 2 b.



Figure 2 c.



Figure 2 d.



Figures 3 a-b. Experience of crushing pressures are common concomitants of the reliving of biological birth.

Figures 3 a. In this drawing, the artist Harriette Francis represented a scene from her birth experience in a high-dose LSD session, where she felt crushed under a giant boulder with the face of her mother.

Figures 3 b. A painting representing an experience from a high-dose LSD session that involved reliving of birth. The female reproductive system was perceived as a combination of a giant press, a prison, and a torture chamber.



Figures 4 a-c. Political cartoons using the image of squeezing and crushing.

Figure 4 a. Problems with the American budget portrayed as a giant vise.



Figure 4 b. President Ronald Reagan puts a squeeze on American economy.



Figure 4 c. President Jim Carter strangled by financial crisis.



Figure 5 a-c. Visions of giant tarantulas symbolizing the devouring feminine are very common in perinatal sessions governed by BPM II.

Figure 5 a. A monstrous Devouring Mother-Spider exposing helpless fetuses to diabolical tortures. A vision encountered in a high dose LSD session.

Figure 5 b. A similar motif from a holotropic breathwork session. The image of the subject as a tightly swaddled mummy emphasizes the element of confinement and constriction experienced during uterine contractions.



Figure 5 c. Drawing of a giant tarantula representing the Devouring Mother from a holotropic breathwork session experienced during professional training.

Figures 6 a-b. Political cartoons representing the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein as a dangerous spider.

Figure 6 a.

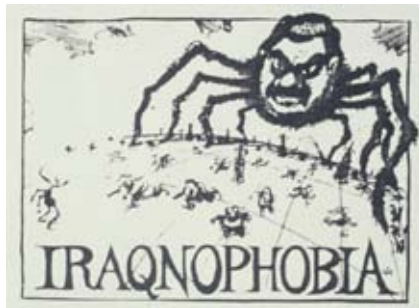


Figure 6 b.

Figure 7. The aggressive spider of American imperialism invading Western Europe and using it as a base for its atomic expansion; a cartoon from a Soviet journal.



Figure 8. The onset of the delivery is often experienced in holotropic states as an attack by an archetypal octopus. Painting from a high-dose perinatal LSD session representing an episode during which the uterine contractions were experienced as strangling tentacles of an octopus-like creature.

Figures 9 a-d. The motif of a dangerous octopus is also a frequent motif in political cartoons representing a powerful and dangerous enemy.

Figure 9 a. A political cartoon in which Czarist Russia is depicted as a giant octopus representing a great danger for the rest of Europe.

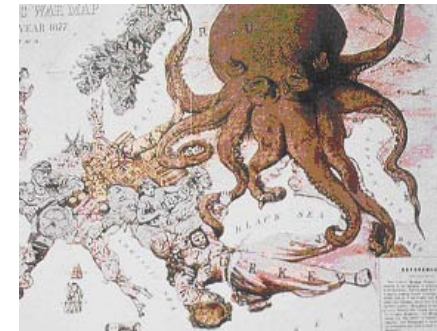


Figure 9 b. A Dutch political poster that portrays Japan as a monstrous octopus threatening to devour Indonesia controlled by Holland.



Figure 9 c. A cartoon depicting Slobodan Milošević as an octopus attempting to control Yugoslavia.

Figure 9 d. A cartoon in which President Carter's multiple problems assume the form of an octopus.



Figures 10 a-c. Political cartoons illustrating the deep unconscious connection between pregnancy, birth, and atomic weapons.

Figure 10 a. A cartoon showing Saddam Hussein pregnant with atomic weapons.



Figure 10 b. A drawing portraying Saddam Hussein as sitting on an atomic egg.

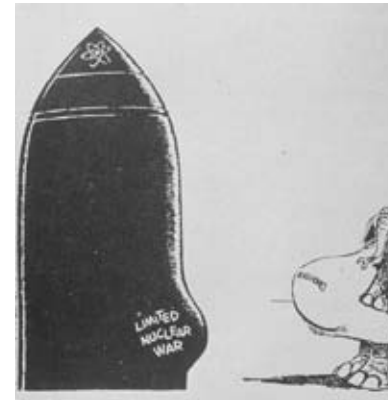


Figure 10 c. A cartoon linking the Republican concept of "limited nuclear war" to pregnancy.



Figures 11 a-c. Serpents – both poisonous vipers and giant boa constrictor-type – are frequent motifs appearing in psychedelic and holotropic sessions focussing on reliving birth.

Figure 11 a. A painting portraying the experience of the birth struggle as a fight with a giant constrictor snake.

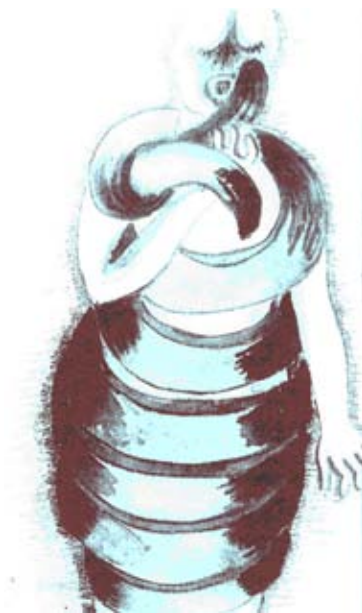


Figure 11 b. A drawing representing an experience of birth in a psychedelic session, in which the contractions of the uterus took the form of a crushing constriction by a python.

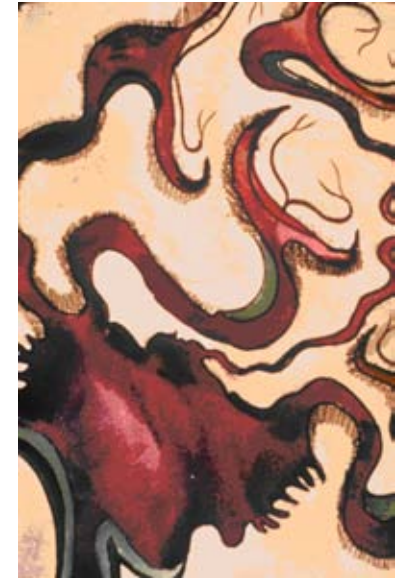


Figure 11 c. A painting from a high-dose LSD session focussing on reliving of birth, during which the delivering uterus was experienced as a snake pit.



Figures 12 a-d. Poisonous vipers and constrictor snakes are also favourite motifs in political posters and cartoons.

Figure 12 a. American political situation in the Middle East portrayed as a snake pit.



Figure 12 b. A cartoon portraying Theodore Roosevelt's struggles with his political enemies as the fight of infant Hercules with the giant snakes sent by the goddess Hera to kill him.

Figure 12 c. A Nazi cartoon, in which the heroic Powers of the Axis – Germany, Japan, and Italy – are destroying a multi-headed serpent representing the Allies.



Figure 12 d. A Communist newspaper from pre-war Germany showing the Nazi German National Socialist Workers Party (NSDAP) as a dangerous viper.



Figure 13. A political cartoon, in which American people's call for leadership is represented as reflecting the need to find the way out of a tunnel.



Figure 14. A painting representing victorious emerging from the birth canal as it was experienced in a holotropic breathwork session.

Color images from
Using Art in Ethnographic Research and Representation
 by Lydia Nakashima Degarrod (text pp. 173-191)



Figure 1



Figure 15. A cartoon depicting Bill Clinton's political victory.



Figure 2



Figure 3