

## **The Visionary World of H.R.Giger**

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Several years ago, I had the great privilege and pleasure to spend some time with Oliver Stone, American Academy Award-winning movie director and screenwriter. In his films Stone has portrayed the shadow side of modern humanity with extraordinary artistic power. During our conversations we discussed Ridley Scott's movie "Alien," especially the creature and set designs by H. R. Giger, which were key elements in the film's success (1, 2, 3, 4) (Giger 1979). For this work Giger had received an Oscar for best achievement in visual effects during the 1979 Academy Awards ceremony held at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles in April 1980. (Giger's work also represented a critical inspiration for all four sequels of this movie, although this contribution was not officially acknowledged.)

I had known Giger's work since the publication of his *Necronomicon* (Giger 1977) and had always admired him deeply – 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 himself turned out to be a great admirer of Giger. Stone's comments about Giger and his place in the world of art and in human culture were 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 talk about the twentieth century, they will think of Giger."

### **Humanity in the Twentieth Century: Technology, Violence, Sex, and Drugs**

Although I was momentarily taken aback by the extreme nature of Oliver Stone's statement, I quickly realized that it reflected a profound truth. Since then, I have often recalled my conversations with Oliver Stone when I encountered various disturbing aspects of the industrial civilization and some of the alarming developments in the countries affected by technological progress. No other artist has so powerfully captured

the ills plaguing modern society – rampaging technology overshadowing human life, suicidal destruction of our planet’s environment, violence reaching apocalyptic proportions, sexual excesses, mass consumption of tranquilizers and narcotic drugs, and the underlying alienation individuals experience in relation to their bodies, each other, and nature.

Giger’s art has often been called “biomechanoid,” and Giger himself titled one of his books *Biomechanics* (Giger 1988). This term perfectly captures the Zeitgeist of the twentieth century, characterized by staggering technological progress that entangled modern humanity into a symbiotic relationship with an increasingly mechanical world. During this period modern technological inventions became extensions and replacements of our arms and legs, hearts, kidneys, and lungs, our brain and nervous system, our eyes and ears, and even our reproductive organs – to such an extent that the boundaries between biology and mechanical devices have all but disappeared. The archetypal stories of Faust, the Sorcerer’s Apprentice, Golem, and Frankenstein have become the leading mythologies of our times. Materialistic science, in its effort to understand and control the world of matter, has engendered a monster that threatens the very survival of life on our planet. The human role has changed from that of demiurge to that of victim.

The twentieth century was also characterized by unbridled violence and destruction on an unprecedented scale. Internecine wars, bloody revolutions, totalitarian regimes, genocide, torture, and international terrorism all prevailed during this time. In World War I alone an estimated ten million soldiers and twenty million civilians perished. Additional millions died from war-spread epidemics and famine. Approximately twice as many lives were lost during World War II. This century saw the bestiality of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, the diabolical hecatombs of Stalin's purges and his Gulag Archipelago, the onset of chemical and biological warfare, the development of weapons of mass destruction, and the apocalyptic horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We must add further 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 wars in Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East, and the slaughters in Yugoslavia and Rwanda are additional examples of the senseless bloodshed that took place during those hundred years.

In a mitigated form, death pervaded twentieth century's media as a favorite subject for entertainment. According to some estimates, the average American child witnessed 8,000 murders on television by the time he or she finished elementary school. The number of violent acts seen on television by age eighteen rose to 200,000.

The nature and scale of violence and the destructive abuses of modern science – chemical, nuclear, and biological warfare and brutal experiments performed on concentration camp inmates – gave this period of history distinctly demonic features. Some of the atrocities were motivated by a distorted conception 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. Many violent terrorist organizations acted out deviant mystical impulses, among them Shoko Asahara's cult Aum Shinrikyo that carried out sarin gas attacks on Japanese subways, Charles Manson's gang, the Symbionese Liberation Army, and the Islamic extremists. This trend was further augmented by the renaissance of witchcraft and satanic cults and heightened interest in books and movies focusing on demon worship and exorcism.

Yet another important characteristic of this period was the extraordinary cultural transformation regarding sexuality: a profound change in attitude, values, and behavior. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented shift as sexual repression was cast aside and polymorphous manifestation of erotic impulses occurred worldwide. On one hand, the removal of cultural constraints fostered a general loosening of sexual repression – sexual freedom of adults, early sexual experimentation by the younger generation, premarital sex, popularity of common law and open marriage, gay liberation, and overtly sexual theater plays, television programs, and movies. But at the

same time, the shadow sides of sexuality surfaced to an unprecedented degree and became part of modern culture – excessive promiscuity, 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 the worldwide AIDS epidemic – forged an inseparable link between sexuality and death, Eros and Thanatos.

For many people, the stress and excessive demands of modern life, alienation, and loss of deeper meaning and spiritual values engendered 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 narcotics black market contributed significantly to the already escalating crime rate and brought violence to the underground and streets of many modern cities.

### **Giger’s Art: A Mirror of the Shadow Side of the Industrial Civilization**

Giger’s biomechanoid art encompasses all these essential elements of twentieth century’s Zeitgeist in an inextricable amalgam. The entanglement of humans and machines has consistently been the leitmotif in his paintings, drawings, and sculptures over the years. 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 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 sexual rapture, violence, agony, and death with equal symbolic power (6, 7, 8). The satanic dimension of these scenes is depicted so skillfully that an archetypal dimension emerges (9).

In his unique way Giger portrays 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. His “Necronom II,” for instance, the three-headed skeletal figure wearing a military helmet, combines symbols of war, death, violence, and sexual aggression in a terrifying amalgam (10). 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, concrete and asphalt (11a, b) (Giger 1981). And in his “Atomic Children,” Giger envisions the grotesque population of mutants who have survived nuclear war or the accumulated fallout of nuclear energy plants (12a, b, 13). The theme of drug addiction is suggested throughout Giger’s work by syringes inserted into the veins and bodies of his various characters (14, 15).

### **Giger’s Visionary World and Depth Psychology**

One recurrent motif in Giger’s art seems at first glance irrelevant to the soul of the twentieth century – the abundance of images depicting tortured and sick fetuses (16, 17, 18). And yet this is where Giger’s visionary genius offers the most profound insights into the hidden recesses of the human psyche. Combining the prenatal and perinatal elements with the symbolism of sex, death, and pain reveals a depth and clarity of psychological understanding that far surpasses the model of mainstream psychiatry. This crucial dimension that we see in Giger’s images is also missing from the work of his predecessors and peers, the surrealists and fantastic realists.

Psychology and psychiatry today are dominated by the theories of Sigmund Freud, whose groundbreaking work laid the foundation for modern “depth-psychology.” Although revolutionary in its day, Freud’s model of the psyche is very superficial and narrow because it is limited to postnatal biography and the individual unconscious. The members of his Viennese circle who tried to expand this model became renegades, notably Otto Rank with his theory of the birth trauma (Rank 1929) and C. G. Jung, who developed the concept of the collective unconscious and the archetypes (Jung 1990). Rank was ousted

from the psychoanalytic movement, and Jung left it after a heated confrontation with Freud. In official handbooks of psychiatry, the work of these renegades is usually discussed as historical curiosity and considered irrelevant for clinical practice.

Freud's theories had a profound effect on art. His discovery of sexual symbolism and his interpretation of dream imagery were major sources of inspiration for the surrealist movement. In fact, Freud was called the "patron saint" of surrealism in the 1920's. It became fashionable for the artistic avant-garde to imitate Freud's model of dream work by juxtaposing what seemed to be unrelated objects in ways that defied elementary logic. According to Freud, the selection of these objects often showed a preference for those that had hidden sexual meaning.

However, while the connections between seemingly incongruent dream images had their own deep logic and meaning which could be revealed by analysis of dreams, this was not always the case in surrealist paintings. Here shocking juxtaposition of images often reflected empty mannerism missing the truth and logic of the unconscious dynamic. This can best be illustrated by considering the famous surrealist dictum that 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 of images represents a manifesto of the surrealist movement: "As beautiful as the unexpected meeting, on a dissecting table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella."

Medieval alchemy was another important source of inspiration for surrealism. André Breton discovered a seventeenth century alchemical text, *Musaeum Hermeticum*. One of its illustrated pages, extremely complex and enigmatic, featured a wild array of bizarre figures and creatures – a visual synopsis of the first and second alchemical opus that brought together all the most important symbols used to portray various stages of the "royal art" of alchemy (71). Breton was fascinated by the fantastic display of seemingly incongruous images that this picture includes and the shocking surprise it induces in the viewer. C. G. Jung, who studied alchemy intensely for 20 years, discovered that the alchemical symbolism, like the symbolism of dreams, reflects deep dynamics of the

unconscious and reveals important hidden truths about the human psyche (Jung 1993). Johannes Fabricius has shown in his comprehensive study of alchemy that the symbolism used to portray different stages of the alchemical process reflects the findings of different schools of depth psychology (Fabricius 1994). The same certainly cannot be said about most of surrealist art.

Combining the images of a sewing machine, a dissecting table, and an umbrella might provide an element of surprise for the viewer, but establishing a meaningful psychodynamic connection between these three images would be very difficult. 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 completely 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 recent discoveries of pioneering consciousness research. Observations from psychedelic therapy and experiential psychotherapy have confirmed that Giger’s understanding of the human psyche far surpasses that of mainstream professionals, who have not yet accepted the new findings and integrated them into the official body of scientific knowledge.

### **Giger’s Insights into the Trauma of Birth**

Giger spent many months analyzing his dreams, and this focused self-exploration provided the inspiration for his collection of drawings entitled *Feast for the Psychiatrist* (*Fressen für den Psychiater*) (Giger 2000). To work with his dreams, Giger used the technique invented by Sigmund Freud and described in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1953). However, Giger’s self-analysis reached much deeper than Freud’s model typically led. By seeking the source of his own nightmares, visions, and disturbing fantasies, Giger discovered, independently from the pioneers of modern consciousness research and experiential psychotherapy, the paramount psychological importance of the trauma of biological birth.

Psychoanalytic renegade Otto Rank, who wrote *The Trauma of Birth*, focused primarily on the “paradise lost” aspect of birth – the unfavorable comparison of the prenatal and postnatal state and craving to return to the maternal womb (Rank 1929). However, Giger emphasizes the various forms of distress associated with the torturous passage of the fetus through the birth canal. Interestingly, during the very short period when Sigmund Freud considered that biological birth might be psychologically important as a possible source of all future anxieties, he came closer to Giger’s understanding of birth than Rank. Freud emphasized the difficult emotions, physical sensations, and innervations generated by the passage through the birth canal, rather than the loss of the intrauterine paradise (Freud 1975).

But Giger goes far beyond Freud’s relatively tame description of the passage through the birth canal – he captures the torturous ordeal the fetus has to endure in the grip of the “death-delivering machine” of the uterus. Head-crushing steel rings and vises, mechanical cogwheel devices, compressing pistons, and sharp spikes are featured abundantly in his paintings. Giger’s art displays other elements that typically accompany the emotions, physical feelings, and visions experienced by individuals reliving their entry into the world – grotesque, repulsive, terrifying, and demonic creatures, sadistic archetypal figures, vomit, and other scatological motifs.

The very term used for Giger’s art – biomechanoid – reflects the nature of human birth. Birth takes place within a biological system, the female reproductive organs, and is governed by anatomical, physiological, and biochemical laws. But the birth process also has distinctly mechanical features, which it shares with the world of machines: powerful uterine contractions that oscillate between fifty and hundred pounds and push the fetus against the narrow opening of the pelvic opening and its hard surfaces, forceful torques, and the hydraulic quality of the entire experience. It is thus not far-fetched when Giger uses the name “birth machine” for his paintings and portrays the birth mechanism as a system of cylinders and pistons (19).

This fascinating and important domain in the human unconscious which contains the shattering memory of our passage through the birth canal, intuited by Giger and reflected in his art, has not yet been recognized and accepted by mainstream psychiatry. Likewise, intimate knowledge of this deep realm of the psyche is absent from the work of Giger's predecessors and peers – the surrealists and fantastic realists. Giger's ability 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.

Some critics have described Giger's work as giving simultaneously a telescopic and microscopic revelation of the human psyche's dark secrets. Looking into the deep abyss of the unconscious that modern humanity prefers to deny and ignore, Giger has discovered how profoundly human life is shaped by events and forces that precede our emergence into the world. He has intuited the importance of the birth trauma not only for the postnatal life of the individual, but also as source of dangerous emotions that are responsible for many ills of human society. Regarding the tapestry of babies he painted (16) Giger said, "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 terrifying representation of the ordeal of human birth than Giger's "Birth Machine" (19), "Stillbirth Machine I and II" (20, 21), or his "Death Delivery Machine III" (22). Equally powerful birth motifs occur in "Biomechanoid I" (17) – where three fetuses are portrayed as heavily armed grotesque Indian warriors wearing tight steel bands around their foreheads – and also in Giger's self-portrait "Biomechanoid II" on the poster for the Sydow-Zirkwitz Gallery (18), and in "Landscape XIV" (16), which portrays an entire tapestry of tortured babies. The symbolism of "Landscape X" (23) is more subtle and less obvious. Here Giger combines the uterine interior, symbolizing sex and birth, with the black crosses used by the Swiss army for target-shooting practice and signifying both death and violence. Echoes of birth symbolism can also be easily detected in his "Suitcase Baby" (24), "Homage to Beckett" (25), and throughout his work.

Two motifs of Giger's art do not explicitly involve fetal images but represent important perinatal symbols – the spider and the volcano. The spider is an image that often appears in the context of psychedelic therapy or holotropic breathwork sessions dominated by the reliving of the onset of delivery. Usually these spiders take the form of giant terrifying tarantulas (88, 89). This image is highly relevant because spiders terminate the freedom of insects flying freely in space by trapping them and inflicting life-threatening constriction on them; this is very similar to the experience of the fetus at the onset of delivery. As C. G. Jung correctly described in *Symbols of Transformation*, spiders often symbolize the archetype of the Devouring Feminine (Jung 1956). And the explosive liberation during the final stages of birth often takes the form of experiential identification with a volcano (102). Both spiders and volcanoes are among Hansruedi Giger's favorite themes (26, 27, 28).

Once we have recognized the prenatal and perinatal roots of Giger's art, it is easy to understand why he incorporated the motif of syringes, toxic substances, and drug addiction into his drawings, paintings, and sculptures (14, 15, 54). Most of the disturbances of prenatal life result from toxemia of the mother. For many of us the anesthesia administered at our birth represents our first escape from pain and anxiety into a drug state. It is no accident that the generation afflicted by the current drug epidemic was born after obstetricians started using anesthesia routinely and indiscriminately in delivering mothers.

### **Modern Consciousness Research and the New Cartography of the Human Psyche**

Clinical work with various forms of powerful experiential psychotherapy and psychedelic substances during the twentieth century had profound implications for the fields of psychology and psychiatry. It opened access to vast domains of the human unconscious psyche unrecognized and uncharted by Freudian psychoanalysis and academic psychiatry. Most LSD researchers came into this work equipped with the traditional map of the psyche, limited to postnatal biography and the Freudian individual unconscious.

They quickly discovered that the experiences of their LSD subjects sooner or later transcended the narrow confines of this model. It became obvious that the Freudian image of the psyche was extremely superficial and incomplete (Grof 1975, 2000).

Talking about his discovery of the unconscious, Freud once compared the psyche to an iceberg. He announced that what we had thought was the totality of the psyche – the conscious ego – was only its tip. Psychoanalysis, according to Freud, revealed the hidden part of the psyche, the individual unconscious. Taking Freud's simile further we can say that classical psychoanalysis discovered only the tip of the iceberg, while psychedelic research uncovered depths of the human psyche that had remained concealed even to traditional psychoanalysts. As the great mythologist Joseph Campbell whimsically put it, "Freud was fishing while sitting on a whale."

In the early 1960s after several frustrating years of trying to explain my psychedelic experiences and those of my clients in Freudian terms, I was forced to vastly expand the cartography of the psyche by adding two new domains to the traditional biographical model – perinatal and transpersonal (Grof 1975, 2000). This expanded model was a creative synthesis of the maps outlined by Freud and his various renegades – Rank, Reich, Jung, and Ferenczi – complemented, revised, and enriched by observations from psychedelic and holotropic breathwork sessions. Despite the mass of clinical evidence supporting this new cartography, mainstream clinicians and academics have not yet acknowledged the urgent need to expand their model.

### *The Perinatal Domain of the Unconscious*

People who use the new powerful techniques of psychotherapy typically experience deep psychological regression and tend to move very rapidly beyond the memories from childhood and infancy to 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 that often surpass 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 (72).

This intimate connection between birth and death in our unconscious psyche is logical and easily understandable. It reflects the fact that birth is potentially or actually a life-threatening event. The child and the mother can actually die during delivery, and children may be born severely blue from asphyxiation, or even dead and in need of resuscitation. The birth process also involves violent elements – the assault of the uterine contractions on the fetus and the fetus' aggressive response (73, 74). This fetal reaction takes the form of the amorphous fury experienced by a biological organism whose life is seriously threatened. This experience of intense suffering and vital threat engenders a sense of overwhelming anxiety in the fetus.

In view of the emotional and physical ordeal of the fetus, it is not surprising that the reliving of birth is typically associated with violent and terrifying experiences accompanied by images of sacrifice, death, and evil. But the experience of intense sexual arousal that is also often experienced is more surprising. The human organism seems to have a built-in physiological mechanism that translates inhuman suffering – particularly choking – into a strange kind of sexual excitement that can eventually become ecstatic rapture. Consequently 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 lead to identification with victims of all ages and evoke archetypal images of evil – the Terrible Mother Goddess (75), various demonic beings (76, 113a), and even scenery of hell.

The reliving of the consecutive stages of biological birth results in four distinct experiential constellations, each of which is characterized by specific emotions, psychosomatic sensations, and symbolic imagery. I refer to these characteristic experiential patterns as basic perinatal matrices (BPMs). The connections between the stages of birth and various symbolic images associated with these matrices are very specific and consistent. Although the way in which various elements come together makes little sense in terms of ordinary logic, these associations are far from erratic and arbitrary and have a meaningful order of their own. They reflect what can be called “experiential logic” in that 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 associated with the intrauterine existence before the onset of the delivery. The experiential world of this stage can be referred to as the “amniotic universe.” The fetus in the womb has no awareness of boundaries, nor any sense of the distinction between inner and outer. These characteristics are reflected in the nature of experiences people have when they relive the memories of this prenatal state.

During episodes of undisturbed embryonal existence, we typically experience vast regions with no boundaries or limits. We may identify with galaxies, interstellar space, or the entire cosmos (77). Or, reflecting our fetal origin as an essentially aquatic creature, we may find ourselves floating in the sea, identifying with various aquatic animals – such as fish, jellyfish, dolphins, or whales – or even becoming the ocean (78). 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, the “good womb” (79). 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 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 (80). Typical images might portray polluted waters and toxic dumps, since 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 (81). 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. Such experiences again reflect 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 (82, 83) or swallowed by some mythic creature (74, 84). We might also sense that the entire world or cosmos is being engulfed. Such experiences can be associated with images of devouring or entangling archetypal monsters – leviathans, dragons, whales, vipers (85), giant constrictor snakes (86, 87), tarantulas (88, 89), or octopuses (90). Our sense of overwhelming vital threat can lead to intense anxiety and general mistrust bordering on paranoia. The beginning of the second matrix can also be experientially associated with the theme of descending into the depths of the underworld, the realm of death, or hell (91). As Joseph Campbell so eloquently described it, this is a universal motif in the mythologies of the hero’s journey (Campbell 1968).

In this 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 (92). 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. A sense of dying, going crazy, and never coming back is an experiential triad characteristic of this state.

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 – medieval dungeons, torture chambers of the Inquisition, all kinds of smothering and crushing mechanical devices (93, 94), concentration camps, or insane asylums. We may feel the suffering of animals caught in traps or even reach the archetypal level of this kind of experience, such as the intolerable tortures of sinners in hell, the agony of Jesus on the cross (96, 97), or the excruciating torment of Sisyphus rolling his boulder up the mountain in the deepest pit of Hades. Other images in sessions dominated by this matrix include the Greek archetypal symbols of endless suffering, Tantalus, Prometheus, and other figures representing eternal damnation, such as the Wandering Jew Ahasuerus or the Flying Dutchman.

Through the prism of this matrix, we are selectively blinded and unable to see anything positive in our life and in human existence in general. Our connection with the divine dimension seems to be irretrievably severed and lost. Life is a meaningless Theater of the Absurd (98), a farce featuring 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. The work of the famous existentialist Jean Paul Sartre, for instance, 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 exhibit 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 – 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, when the cervix has opened and the head descends into the pelvis. The uterine contractions continue, and because the cervix is now fully dilated, the fetus is gradually propelled through the birth canal. This experience involves crushing mechanical pressures and often significant anoxia and suffocation. Intense anxiety is a natural concomitant of this painful and life-threatening situation.

Beyond the compression of uterine arteries caused by uterine contractions, 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 previa). In the final phase of the delivery, the fetus sometimes starts breathing prematurely and inhales various forms of biological material. This can result in severe choking and further complicate the already terrifying situation. 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 convey themes of titanic fight, aggressive and sadomasochistic sequences, deviant sexuality, demonic episodes, scatological involvement, and encounter with fire. Such 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, for instance, reflects the enormity of the forces operating in the final stage of childbirth. When we encounter this facet of the third matrix, we experience overwhelmingly intense streams of energy 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 (102). The experience can also portray enormous energies from the technological world – 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 – scenes of violent murder and suicide, mutilation and self-mutilation, massacres of various kinds, and bloody wars and revolutions. Typical scenes often take the form of torture, execution, ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice, bloody one-on-one combats, and sadomasochistic practices.

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

Sexual experiences occurring during BPM III typically display enormous intensity of sexual drive; a mechanical and unselective quality; and an exploitative, pornographic, or

deviant nature. They involve scenes from red light districts and the sexual underground, extravagant erotic practices, and sadomasochistic sequences. Equally frequent are episodes portraying incest and acts of sexual abuse or rape. In rare instances, the BPM III imagery can manifest the gory and repulsive extremes of criminal sexuality – erotically motivated murder, dismemberment, cannibalism, and necrophilia. Sexual arousal on this level of the psyche is inextricably connected with highly problematic elements – physical pain, suffocation, vital threat, anxiety, aggression, self-destructive impulses, and various forms of biological material. This forms a natural basis for developing 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. While the uncanny and eerie nature of the manifestations often leads experiencers to resist the process, the therapists and facilitators must have sufficient understanding to encourage the person to face it fully. Typical themes in this context include scenes of the Sabbath of the Witches (Walpurgi's Night) (99, 100), 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 is highly relevant to 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 a very straightforward natural biological basis. In the final phase of delivery, the fetus can come into close contact with various forms of biological material – blood, vaginal secretions, urine, and even feces. Even so, the nature and content of these relived experiences can greatly surpass what the newborn might have actually experienced during birth, including 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 (101).

When the experience of BPM III comes closer to resolution, it becomes less violent and disturbing. The prevailing atmosphere becomes one of extreme passion and intoxicating, driving energy. The imagery features 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 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 may see Jesus, his torment and humiliation, the Way of the Cross, and crucifixion – and even actually experience full identification with his suffering (97, 103, 104). Whether or not we intellectually know the corresponding mythologies, we can encounter such sequences 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 moment of psychospiritual rebirth, we may be faced with the element of fire. This motif can appear either in its ordinary everyday form or in the archetypal form of purgatorial fire (pyrocatharsis) (105, 106). We may feel 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 that dies in fire and rises resurrected from the ashes (107).

The pyrocathartic experience is a somewhat puzzling aspect of BPM III, since its connection with biological birth is not as direct as that of 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 notable that this

encounter with fire has its experiential parallel in the delivering mother, who at this point 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 again extremely challenging and difficult – but it does not seem hopeless, and we do not feel helpless. We are actively involved in a fierce struggle and feel 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 exclusively play the role of helpless victims; instead we now have three different roles available to us. Besides being observers of what is happening, we can also identify with both the aggressor and the victim. These can all be so convincing that it might be difficult to distinguish one role from another. Also, while the no-exit situation is about sheer suffering, the experience of the death-rebirth struggle represents the borderline between agony and ecstasy and the fusion of both. Consequently this type of experience can more appropriately be described 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)

The fourth perinatal matrix refers to the third clinical stage of delivery, including the final expulsion from the birth canal and severing of the umbilical cord. In this matrix, we complete the intensely difficult process of having been propelled through the birth canal, achieve explosive liberation, and emerge into light. This is often accompanied by concrete and realistic memories of various specific aspects of this stage of birth, such as the experience of anesthesia, pressures of the forceps, and the sensations associated with various obstetric maneuvers or postnatal interventions.

The reliving of biological birth is not merely a simple mechanical replay of the original biological event; it is also psychospiritual death and rebirth because what happens when we relive birth includes some important additional elements. 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, and consequently the memory of this pivotal event remains psychologically undigested and unassimilated. Our self-definition and 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, although we have been born anatomically, we 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, forged by the traumatic imprint of birth and maintained by the memory of this situation that stays alive in our unconscious. 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.

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 ego death feels like the end of our existence, or even like the end of the world. As frightening as this process usually seems, it is actually very healing and transforming. But 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. 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 (108, 109), giving birth to a new self (110, 111). 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. Everything that is important and meaningful in our life seems to

have been mercilessly destroyed – we have hit “cosmic bottom,” the apocalyptic end of everything.

Yet immediately after this experience of total annihilation we are overwhelmed by visions of white or golden light of supernatural radiance and exquisite beauty that appear numinous and divine (107, 108). Often at this point we are blessed with fantastic displays of magnificent rainbow spectra, peacock designs, celestial scenes, and visions of archetypal beings bathed in divine light (112). We may have a powerful encounter with the archetypal Great Mother Goddess, either in her universal form or in one of her culture-specific manifestations (79, 113b). After this experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth, we feel redeemed and blessed. We are flooded with a sense of ecstatic rapture and we feel that we have reclaimed our divine nature and cosmic status. In this state we are overcome by a surge of positive emotions toward ourselves, other people, nature, and existence in general.

### *The Transpersonal Domain of the Psyche*

The second transbiographical domain that I had to include into the new cartography of the psyche can best be called *transpersonal*, because it contains matrices for a rich array of experiences in which consciousness transcends the boundaries of the body/ego and the usual limitations of linear time and three-dimensional space. This results in experiential identification with other people, groups of people, other life forms, and even elements of the inorganic world. Transcendence of time provides experiential access to ancestral, racial, collective, phylogenetic, and karmic memories. Yet another category of experiences can take us into the realm of the collective unconscious that the Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung called archetypal. This region harbors mythological figures, realms, and themes of all the cultures and ages, even those of which we have no intellectual knowledge (Jung 1990).

### *COEX Systems and Their Dynamics*

For a more complete understanding of this new cartography, I must introduce another important concept – the existence of dynamic memory constellations in the psyche, which I refer to as COEX systems (or systems of condensed experience). These phenomena have consistently emerged in the work with a variety of powerful experiential forms of psychotherapy involving holotropic states of consciousness – clinical research with psychedelics, holotropic breathwork, and psychotherapy with individuals undergoing psychospiritual crises known as “spiritual emergencies.”

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. These memories become linked into a COEX system because 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. Another common motif is characterized by feelings of rejection and emotional deprivation that impair our ability to trust men, women, or people in general. Other typical examples are 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. Particularly important are COEX systems that contain memories of encounters with situations endangering life, health, and integrity of the body.

The relationship between the BPMs and emotionally relevant postnatal events works both ways. When the memory of birth is close to the surface, the person is overly sensitive 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 interfere with the creation of a buffering zone of positive memories that would protect the individual from the influx of painful perinatal emotions and physical sensation into consciousness. These would then have a strong influence on the person in everyday life by coloring his or her perceptions of the world.

This extended cartography is critically important for any serious study of such phenomena as shamanism, rites of passage, mysticism, religion, mythology, parapsychology, near-death experiences, and psychedelic states. But it is much more than a matter of academic interest. This new model has deep and revolutionary implications for understanding emotional and psychosomatic disorders, including many conditions currently diagnosed as psychotic, and offers new revolutionary therapeutic possibilities. It also opens completely new perspectives for appreciating art and the creative process.

### **Perinatal and Transpersonal Motifs in Giger's Art**

Since his childhood, Hansruedi Giger has been in touch with the perinatal domain of his unconscious. He has always been fascinated by underground tunnels, dark corridors, cellars, and ghost rides. His memory of birth trauma has spawned many vivid nightmares that have given him a deep understanding of the symbolism of the perinatal process. 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 that the source of this knowledge is his own memory of birth, as shown here where he describes 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."

Such experiences have not been limited to Giger's dreams; they have also occasionally arisen in the middle of his everyday life. As Horst Albert Glaser has commented about Giger: "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."

Several of Giger's paintings depict the motif of the engulfing vortex that transports the subject into a terrifying alternate reality (29). This is closely related to another experiential variety of the onset of birth – the theme of descending into the depths of the underworld, the realm of death, or hell, known from the initiatory visions of the shamans and from the mythology of the hero's journey, described by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell 1968).

This theme played an important role in Giger's childhood fantasies of monstrous labyrinths and spiral staircases that served as inspiration for his *Shafts* series (30a, b, c, d, e). The claustrophobic nightmarish atmosphere of a fully developed BPM II dominates many of Giger's paintings where he masterfully portrays the torment, anguish, and hopeless predicament of the fetus caught in the clutches of the uterine contractions and the ordeal of the delivering mother (21, 22, 31).

Such intense depictions of the no-exit situation reach beyond the suffering of the fetus and mother to other images portraying similarly desperate ordeals. For instance, Giger's art features torture chambers, in which bizarre creatures are tied, stabbed, mutilated, crushed, and crucified. With probing vision he incisively traces this suffering to its sources in the archetypal depth of the psyche, where it assumes hellish dimensions.

Giger's gallery of strange mutants represents a unique category. These weird creatures are not like Frankenstein, 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, reminiscent of the Cyborgs from the Star Trek space odyssey, and they are surrounded by a world that is itself both biological and mechanical. As we have seen, this same combination characterizes childbirth.

Individuals whose psychedelic or holotropic sessions are strongly influenced by BPM II see the world as it is portrayed in existential art and philosophy or in the Theater of the Absurd – meaningless, absurd, threatening, and even monstrous. They often refer to those creative geniuses who render this atmosphere with particular artistic power – Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, and Ingmar Bergman, who are among Giger's favorite authors and served as sources of inspiration for some of his paintings (25, 32).

Giger offers unique insights into the dynamics of BPM III. The rich array of symbols that characterizes this matrix plays a particularly important role in his art. Images of birth and death, sexuality, torture and other forms of violence, bodily excretions and secretions, satanic motifs and religious themes appear side by side or merge with each other. This otherwise incomprehensible aggregate of elements appears very logical when we understand its connection with the final stages of biological birth.

During this phase of the process the fetus experiences the uterine contractions as a painful and terrifying assault and responds with amorphous biological fury. A long or complicated delivery that involves extreme emotional and physical suffering can bring fetus and mother to the threshold of death – a realm replete with satanic and hellish archetypes. The physical pain and suffocation generate a strong sexual arousal. Moreover, various forms of biological material (blood, urine, and even feces) are natural constituents of birth. But reliving birth is a process that is not only intensely biological, but also profoundly psychospiritual. This accounts for the numinosity of the experiences

and for the religious symbolism involved. Only the perinatal domain of the unconscious reflecting this final stage of birth can bring these seemingly incongruous elements into a meaningful and logically consistent gestalt.

Research with non-ordinary states of consciousness has demonstrated that BPM III plays a critical role in individual as well as collective psychopathology. On the individual scale, BPM III provides the template for a variety of clinical conditions ranging from deep agitated depression and aggressive tendencies through various psychosomatic disorders and a wide array of sexual dysfunctions and aberrations to messianic delusions. Here again, Giger's nightmares provide invaluable insights, as shown by his account of one of his terrifying dreams where the toilet bowl turns into a combination of Freud's castrating vagina dentata and the engulfing, life-threatening female genitals of delivery:

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 deeper levels of meaning for Giger and appears in several of his paintings (32, 33, 34). From the way he deals with this theme, we can reasonably conclude that the toilet bowl symbolizes for him the scatological aspect of birth and that the deeper source of his fear of castration is his memory of having the umbilical cord severed. He not only seems to be aware of the obvious relation of the castration complex to the loss of the penis, a motif that clearly fascinates him (35, 36), but also intuits the perinatal roots of his castration fears. Many people involved in experiential self-explorations have independently confirmed this deep psychodynamic link between Freud's concept of vagina dentata and the perils of birth (94) and between his famous castration complex and cutting of the umbilical cord and separation from the mother (95).

On the collective scale, research with non-ordinary states of consciousness strongly suggests that the dynamics of BPM III is the deep source of extreme forms of social psychopathology – such as wars, bloody revolutions, genocide, and concentration camps (Grof 2000). Convincing evidence indicates also that unresolved material from this birth matrix engenders and feeds the atrocities of such societal plagues as Nazism, Communism, and religious fundamentalism (deMause 1975, 1982; Grof 1977, 2000). In a more mitigated form, BPM III accounts for the insatiable greed and acquisitiveness characteristic of the human species. In everyday life the experiences of BPM III explain 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 of sex, violence, and death has been the favorite formula of the movie industry, responsible for box office success of many blockbuster films. Incisive psychological insights of Giger's work thus have extraordinary social relevance.

Giger expresses the scatological dimension of BPM III in many different ways. He is fascinated by toilet bowls, garbage trucks, and refuse collection. And he is very aware of the erotic overtones these objects and activities have for him (37). He frequently depicts offal, decomposition of corpses, repulsive worms and insects, excrement, and vomit in his paintings (38, 39, 40). These scatological motifs are most fully expressed in Giger's sketches for the imagery in the movie "Poltergeist" and in his description of Harkonnen that he wrote for Alejandro Jodorowski., who had invited him to submit his designs for the movie "Dune" (Giger 1977). Giger's vision for Harkonnen features a rich array of other perinatal motifs as we can see from the following excerpts:

Harkonnen stands on rising ground, a sort of hill, and consists of jagged bones and excrement which slowly crumble into dust. More bones and excrement are continually being ejected from Harkonnen, which crumble and are swept away by the eternally raging storms. A sort of staircase leads up the hill to the castle, defended by spears built into the bones on either side of the entrance, which have an independent existence and often impale the citizens just for fun ...

... The two walls of the drawbridge can be brought together hydraulically, crushing visitors who are hostile to the castle. The enemy's remains are scraped off by so-called wall cleaners when the bridge is in the raised position and fall into a conversion paint. Harkonnen is a gigantic Moloch, which functions by converting living beings into energy. Every visitor is materially or spiritually exploited (as I was for this film project). Whoever enters the castle stays there for the rest of his life, which in any case can only last a few seconds ...

... Opposite the entrance is the ejector system. Here, from time to time, but particularly during attacks, gigantic quantities of charred bones and shit are hurled into the surrounding area, accompanied by thunder and fire.

Many of Giger's most powerful paintings feature satanic motifs intimately interwoven with fetal and sexual elements and images of violence, suffering, and death. These renditions forcefully convey how deeply Giger understands 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, has repeatedly been a source of artistic inspiration for Giger, who 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 Giger's works, the satanic element represents the main thematic focus, as in his "Satan I and II" (43, 44) and his paintings from the *Spell* series – the Kaliesque female deity flanked by phallic condom fetuses (45) or Baphomet pictured with a female figure resting her mons pubis on his horn (41). "Departure for Sabbath" (46), "Witches' Dance" (47), "Witch" (48), "Satan's Bride" II (49), "Vlad Tepes" (50), and "Lilith" (51) are other salient examples.

### **Giger's Art and the Taboos of Western Society**

Giger's extraordinary art has been difficult for many people to understand and has been the subject of heated controversy for many years. Giger has been the target of numerous angry reactions from lay persons. Art critics have attacked him viciously with moral judgments and psychiatric labels questioning his character, integrity and sanity. Yet he has also received highest admiration and praise from many prominent figures of cultural life, including Ernst Fuchs, Roberto Venosa, Martina Hofmann, Alex Grey, Salvador Dalí, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Ridley Scott, Oliver Stone, Albert Hofmann, Timothy Leary, and others. And, of course, he received an Oscar for his art – the highest award given by the Los Angeles Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for excellence in cinema achievements.

Attempting to explain the role of the artist in human society, Freud 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 these fantasies in his work. The forbidden fantasies revealed in art are, according to Freud, related exclusively to the Oedipus complex and the pregenital libidinal drives. But Giger's art penetrates much further than this, and consequently it arouses even much stronger controversy. Giger probes the dark, deep recesses of the human psyche that have remained firmly repressed, despite the breakthroughs resulting from Freud's work which greatly diminished 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 intimate contact with the mother's genitals. And Giger portrays the perinatal domain in the form we would encounter it in deep self-exploration – with powerful symbolic images rather than verbal means. This is a particularly effective way to lift the repression that normally keeps the perinatal material from emerging into consciousness.

Giger's art is greatly appreciated by those who recognize the deep truth he is expressing and admire his courage in facing and revealing a highly problematic aspect of the human psyche that is responsible for many ills in the world. Much of the hostility towards him results from determined denial of the existence and universal nature of the perinatal domain of the unconscious. It is certainly more comfortable to see Giger's images as an expression of his personal depravation, perversion, or psychopathology, rather than recognize elements that we all carry in the depths of our unconscious psyche. And yet it is impossible to explain such phenomena as Nazism, Communism, murderous religious extremism and suicidal fanaticism merely in terms of the adverse consequences of unsatisfactory nursing, strict toilet training, and dysfunctional family dynamics (as Sigmund Freud suggested).

However, not all admirers of Giger are those who appreciate his art for its mastery and depth of psychological understanding. His museum in Gruyères also attracts many visitors from the Goth culture and other people who are drawn to Giger's art because of its dark themes and provocative and shocking effects. Some 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 to learn that Giger is actually a shy, gentle, amiable, and loving person who has used his art to struggle with his anxieties, insecurities, and inner demons. As he confides to his friends, the reason why he portrays hellish domains of the psyche in his art is not because he indulges in them, but because of the intense fear the denizens of these realms evoke in him.

### **Giger's Childhood Experiences and the Trauma of Birth**

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, these

situations represent conditions that facilitate the emergence of deeper emotions and physical sensations from the perinatal and transpersonal levels of the psyche into consciousness.

Many of the traumatic experiences in Hansruedi's childhood and later in life were deeply connected with his memory of birth. This connection became the bridge that allowed the perinatal material to find its way into Hansruedi's nightmares and through them into his art. For example, his series of paintings entitled *Shafts* (30a, b, c, d, e) was inspired by terrifying dreams rooted in his memories of birth and related episodes from childhood. One such memory was of a secret window in the stairwell in his parents' house in Chur, which led 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, the door was open and revealed gigantic bottomless shafts with treacherous wooden stairways leading down into the yawning abyss.

Another childhood memory involved a cellar in Hansruedi's parents' house. As a child Hansruedi learned from the hotel proprietor that there were two subterranean passages in Chur that originated under the bishop's palace. This hotelier also told Hansruedi that his family's 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. The association between these 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 of the link with the perinatal dimension is Giger's extreme reaction to anything related to torture, mutilation, dismemberment, and impalement. These themes again appear regularly in psychedelic therapy and holotropic breathwork sessions of people reliving the trauma of birth. In this context the physical and emotional suffering

associated with the reliving of biological birth is intensified because perinatal experiences are often interspersed with images of extreme suffering and torture from the historical domain of the collective unconscious. The motif of dismemberment is especially significant as a major archetypal theme that characterizes the experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth in the initiatory visions of novice shamans.

These motifs have played an important role in Giger's biography and in his art. When he 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 off one after the other. After seeing this photograph, Hansruedi was not able to sleep for a number of weeks. The images from the Nazi concentration camps affected him in a similar way.

The image of severed limbs was the most powerful aspect of the Chinese torture photograph. Giger also saw amputated limbs during his visits to the Civic Museum in Chur, where the Egyptian exhibit featured parts of dismembered mummies. At the ages of six and seven, he spent many Sunday mornings there, all alone, in a subterranean, musty hall with huge vaults, poorly illuminated only by light that came through shafts from above. Apart from the fascination, this place represented a "test of courage" for him, because it terrified him so much. He felt compelled to go there again and again. The motif of severed limbs also played an important role in Hansruedi's strong emotional reaction to the scene from Jean Cocteau's 1946 film "The Beauty and the Beast" (*La Belle et la Bête*) with Jean Marais and Josette Day, where candelabras of a large hall are supported by arms protruding from the walls.

The image of severed arms and legs imprinted itself deeply into Hansruedi's mind and has figured prominently in his paintings and sculptures until this day. Salient examples include his painting "Preserving Life" (52), the sculpture "Beggar" (53), and the astrological signs on one of Giger's masterpieces, the "Zodiac Fountain" (54). 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 (Giger 1998).

Giger responded strongly to another prominent aspect of the Chinese photograph, the motif of impalement. He also encountered this theme 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 (50). 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 became fascinated by a local fairytale about a scarecrow impaled on a stick and asked his mother to read it to him again and again. When he thought later about this episode in his life, he saw the scarecrow as a powerful symbol of the meaninglessness of existence. Echoing the advice Silenus gave to King Midas in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1961), Giger 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 begun." 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 work *Waiting for Godot* belong to this category (25, 32).

The motif of torture also was a major focus of 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 especially intrigued that for models she had used the heads of criminals executed by guillotine on Place des Grèves during the French Revolution. Giger even attempted to build a small guillotine himself and use it to behead plastic figures. The image of the guillotine recalled Giger's memory of the "Try Your Strength Machine," which he had experienced as a child at the confederate riflemen festival held

shortly after the end of World War II in Chur. Many people who had attended this event the previous year had experienced food poisoning from sausages made by the butcher Lukas. At the next year's celebration, the machine was adapted to include a fork piercing the effigy of one of Lukas' sausages. In Giger's drawing "Hau den Lukas" (Strike Lukas), the strength-testing machine became a castrating guillotine, a perfect representation of Freud's vagina dentata (35). Giger's castration nightmares and his interest in guillotines also inspired the castrating devices and condoms in his sketches for the movie "The Condom of Horror" (Kondom des Grauens) (36).

Giger has repeatedly written about his childhood obsessions, to which his parents referred as "Fimmel," a term meaning "craze." One of these was his obsession with trains and ghost rides. Hansruedi encountered his first ghost ride when he was six years old at Chilbi, the annual fair held on the main square in Chur. He describes how 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 felt depressed when the show left three weeks later.

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

Giger's fascination with rides continues to this day. He constructed a small railroad that winds its course through the garden and the corner of one of the ground-floor rooms of his home in Oerlikon. Passengers on the little train can admire a rich array of his sculptures, many featuring perinatal themes, and the remarkable Zodiac Fountain (54). He even seriously considered building a similar ride at his museum in Château St.

Germain in Gruyères, but had to abandon his plan because of the technical difficulties and costs involved.

Research with holotropic states of consciousness has shown a deep psychodynamic connection between fear of trains and the memory of birth. During self-exploration, people who suffer from this phobia typically discover that in their unconscious the experience of being carried along by the powerful mechanical force of the train and passing through tunnels is closely linked to the memory of biological birth, which involves similar elements. The critical role that the factor of losing control plays in this situation can be illustrated by a related phobia involving cars. The same people who have problems being driven in a car feel quite comfortable when they are in the driver's seat. Fascination with trains thus might be a counterphobic reaction to the trauma of birth. This is even more plausible in the case of a ghost ride, where the shocking emotional impact is deliberately amplified by terrifying props.

Another childhood obsessions was Hansruedi's passion for collecting suspenders (55). He preferred suspenders that had severely damaged silk-bound rubber loops and traded new ones for them with his schoolmates. According to Hansruedi, one of his fantasies underlying this obsession was an image of the rubber breaking and the pants falling down. He also saw his fascination with the damaged rubber loops as connected to his loathing for worms and snakes. These creatures feature prominently in Giger's paintings (38, 39, 42, 56). He reports that finding a worm in excrement would be the most terrifying thing he can imagine – 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 Hansruedi's life. One of its layers is a traumatic memory from his visit to the island Mauritius. One morning after an evening swim in the Indian Ocean, he discovered that what in the darkness he had thought was 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. Hansruedi thought, "My God, that's part of my grandmother!" Horrified, he dropped the spade and ran out of the graveyard.

The perinatal root of this COEX system could be Giger's memory of the umbilical cord being severed, or an even older episode from prenatal life. Both worms and snakes represent important perinatal symbols. Images of worms appear often in the scatological phase of BPM III, along with scenes of decomposition and putrefaction of corpses. Boa constrictors symbolize the crushing uterine contractions during birth (86, 87) and are also symbols of pregnancy, because of the way their bodies bulge after they swallow their prey whole. Vipers represent imminent death (85), but also initiation, as exemplified by the frescoes in Villa dei misteri in Pompeii that depict a Dionysian initiation ritual. Both vipers and constrictor snakes figure prominently in Giger's art.

The connection between worms, scatological material (slime, vomit, offal), and birth is evident in Giger's full description of one of his nightmares that was briefly mentioned earlier:

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 Evelyn) 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 Evelyn 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.

Hansruedi was also very obsessed with weapons. His uncle Otto taught him the art of lead casting and working in wood and metal, skills required to make homemade 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. One day in Chur, Hansruedi became acquainted with Goli Schmidt, an eccentric 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 bare 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 his collection.

The first lecture Hansruedi gave at the gymnasium (European equivalent of high school) was on the history of the revolver. But his relationship with weapons was more than a passing interest. 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 where they shot at the targets set up for the military and blew up abandoned cars with TNT (trinitrotoluene). Twice during these escapades, he was nearly shot dead. According to Hansruedi, so far in his life he has been shot at by four people – and he has fired at one person. In all instances the cartridges were either duds or the bullets missed “by a hair’s breadth.” Once 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 abuse from officers and other hardships of military life, although his interest in weapons as esthetic objects has persisted.

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 how he reacted to seeing garbage being collected in Cologne in 1971, when he saw a German refuse truck in front of the Floh de Cologne house. He was fascinated by this truck, which

became the subject of a series of his paintings, where it appears in various guises. The refuse truck has multiple meanings for Hansruedi – all with important perinatal connotations. Besides the obvious connection to impermanence, decay, scatology, and death, it also represents Freud's castrating vagina dentata, 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 where he transformed the opening of the truck's collection bin into a vulva (37). The back of the refuse truck also reminded him of the ovens of the crematoria of the Nazi concentration camps and thus became for him the symbol of sacrificial murder.

Many of Giger's paintings depict figures with tight headbands, steel rings held together by screws, heads in vices, and bodies fettered with cords and straps (7, 45). These images recall an important aspect of the birth experience – hours of life-threatening confinement. This connection is quite obvious in pictures featuring constrained fetuses (17, 18). However, Giger also remembers childhood situations that seemed to have intensified his perinatal memories of constraint. When he was three years old, he walked with his mother in a carnival procession. His mother had dressed him as an elevator boy for this occasion, and he was forced to wear long trousers and a dark red satin jacket with silver stripes. The costume included a velvet-covered pillbox hat held in place by a tight elastic band that cut into his chin. He would have far preferred to wear a costume resembling one of his childhood heroes and felt ashamed to appear before the other children in this outfit. But he had to put on a pleasant face.

When Hansruedi was about four years old, more important layers were added to this COEX system, again because of constricting clothes his mother forced upon him. She made him a set of overalls, 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 wet 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 analyzing Hansruedi's art from the traditional Freudian perspective 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 completely repressed or his account is inaccurate for some other reason, the family in which he grew up was relatively normal. There is apparently nothing in his experience that even begins to resemble the childhood of Edgar Allan Poe, one of Hansruedi's heroes. Poe's erratic, intractable, and alcoholic father left the family when Edgar was eighteen months old. Only months later his frail mother died. She had been suffering from tuberculosis since before Poe's birth, and the little boy was left in the care of an unloving foster father when he was less than three years old. There is nothing in Hansruedi's history comparable to Toulouse Lautrec, whose legs, fractured in a riding accident, did not heal and grow because of a genetic defect and left him crippled for the rest of his life, or to Frida Kahlo, who suffered serious injuries during a bus crash and used her art as an escape from intolerable pain and confinement to bed.

Hansruedi describes his childhood as "beautiful," although he disliked the domestic helpers who tried to discipline him. He refers to his mother Melly as wonderful, kind, and supportive. He felt that he was her "beloved," to the extent that his relationship with her was envied by his friends. It is very difficult to see her as a model for the women portrayed in his art – female figures that radiate dangerous sexuality or appear as demonic and sadistic dominatrices. This motif seems to originate in levels of the psyche that lie beyond postnatal biography in the perinatal and the transpersonal domains of the unconscious. These same deeper sources must also account for the problems Giger has had since childhood in relating to women.

According to Hansruedi, 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 certainly was not close and intimate – Hansruedi complains that his father was difficult to read and that he hardly knew him. But this image of Hans-Richard Giger does not approximate the kind of towering brutal and tempestuous bully described in Franz 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 his son, except once during a major confrontation when his anger seems to have been justified. At that time, Hansruedi stole some power cables from a street construction project. The cables were made of copper and lead and covered with bitumen. Hansruedi then burned the cables in the cellar of his parents’ house to get lead for making bullets. The smoke polluted and almost destroyed his father’s pharmacy, covering everything with a black, sticky, oily film. The cleanup was very tedious and quite 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 demonstrate any significant understanding and support for it. According to Giger, his father 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 Zürich to study architecture and design at the College of Arts and Crafts and graduated three years later. Before his interest in painting blossomed fully, he also worked with designer Andreas Christen at Knoll International, a global manufacturer of office furnishings.

From the beginning, Hansruedi showed very little interest in formal education. From what is known about his educational environment, it is hard to tell whether he was disinterested, unteachable by conventional educational methods, or the victim of

incompetent teachers and a poor school system. His Marienheim Catholic kindergarten at Chur was run by an elderly nun, who kept a series of pictures of Jesus in her desk as an educational tool. The pictures depicted Jesus in various degrees of suffering, ranging from a few drops of blood on the thorn-crowned head to his face fully covered with blood. The particular picture that the nun selected depended on how disobedient the children were being. She would show them the appropriate picture and suggest that the amount of Jesus' suffering reflected how "bad" they were being. This early experience partially explains why Jesus and the motif of crucifixion often appear in Giger's paintings and sculpture, as in the "Untitled" (57), "Jesus candelabrum" (58), "Jesus table" (59), "Satan I and II" (43, 44), "The Crucified Serpent" (56), and "The Spell I" (60). On a deeper level, Jesus is a powerful perinatal symbol associated with the process of psychospiritual death and rebirth.

In elementary school, pupils of different ages shared the same classroom. Hansruedi was the only boy in a class of seven. The girls wanted to play kissing games, but he found them embarrassing. He preferred to play horses and enjoyed putting harnesses on the girls and whipping them. He remembers often masturbating at school during the classes. School toilets signified for him places of forbidden sex. His favorite fantasies often featured 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."

### **Transpersonal Sources of Giger's Inspiration**

Based on what we know about Giger's childhood, the problems he was struggling with likely reflected more his inner life than any objectively difficult external circumstances. We can refer here to the Jungian psychologist James Hillman. In his interesting book *The Soul's Code: On Character and Calling*, Hillman argues that character and calling result from "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 (Hillman 1996). Although Hillman does not speculate further about the possible factors involved in this scenario, modern consciousness research has shown that deeper influences shape our lives, including perinatal, prenatal, karmic, archetypal, and even astrological determinants.

Giger's art clearly comes from the depth of the collective unconscious, especially when we consider his prolific creative process. He reports that he often has no a priori concept of what a painting would look like. When creating some of his giant paintings, for instance, he started in the upper left corner and aimed the airbrush toward the canvas. The creative force was simply pouring through him, and he became its instrument. And yet the end result was a perfect composition and often showed remarkable bilateral symmetry.

Listening to Hansruedi describe his work, I recalled Jung's discussion of the work of genius – particularly the example of Nietzsche that Jung uses. Nietzsche describes his state of consciousness during his creative process in this way:

Has any one at the end of the nineteenth century any distinct notion of what poets of a stronger age understood by the word "inspiration?" If not, I will describe it. If one had the smallest vestige of superstition left in one, it would hardly be possible to set aside the idea that one is mere incarnation, mouthpiece, or medium of an almighty power. The idea of revelation, in the sense that something, which profoundly convulses and shatters one, becomes suddenly visible and audible with indescribable certainty and accuracy, describes the simple fact. One hears – one does not seek; one takes – one does not ask who gives; a thought suddenly flashes up like lightning, it comes with necessity, without faltering – I never had any choice in the matter (Nietzsche 1992).

Willis Harman and Howard Rheingold demonstrated in their book *Higher Creativity: Liberating the Unconscious for Breakthrough Insights* that Nietzsche was not an exception in this regard; they described several artists and scientists whose creative inspiration came from transpersonal sources (Harman and Rheingold 1984).

### **Therapeutic and Spiritual Potential of Giger's Art**

In the history of art Giger is unparalleled as the ultimate master of the nightmarish aspect of the perinatal unconscious – the source of individual and social psychopathology and of much of the suffering in the modern world. But the perinatal dynamics also 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. We see this theme in the arduous ordeals of Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Anthony, and similar elements in the story of The Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed. Religious scholar Christopher Bache has found many difficult perinatal experiences involved in the mystical states of Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross (Bache 1985, 1991). Perinatal themes also feature prominently in *The Play of Consciousness*, the spiritual autobiography of the late head of the Siddha Yoga lineage Swami Muktananda Paramahansa (Swami Muktananda 2004).

Finding creative expression for the stormy dynamics of the unconscious has been a very effective way for many great artists to maintain sanity and even work through much of this unresolved material. The great Spanish painter Francisco Goya, who was haunted by terrifying visions, felt that painting them gave him an important sense of control and mastery. Marie Bonaparte, Greek princess and an ardent student of Sigmund Freud, wrote in her three-volume work *The Life and Work of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytical Study* that the unconscious of this tortured genius was extremely active – full of horrors and torments (Bonaparte 1934). She suggested that without his extraordinary literary talent, Poe would probably have spent his life in a mental institution or in a prison. Jean

Paul Sartre used his writing for a period of about fourteen years to overcome the 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. In the analytic psychology of C. G. Jung, integration of the Shadow and the Anima, two quintessential motifs in Giger's art, are seen as critical therapeutic steps in what Jung calls the process of individuation. Giger himself experiences his art as healing and as an important way to maintain his sanity. His art can also have a healing impact on those who are open to it because, like a Greek tragedy, it can facilitate powerful emotional catharsis for the viewers by exposing and revealing dark secrets of the human psyche.

As Giger says: "Since I have taken the path of art, it is like a kind of LSD trip with no return. I feel like a tightrope walker; I see no difference between work and free time. Suddenly, I became aware that art is a vital activity that keeps me from falling into madness." Like Goya, who struggled to harness his terrifying visions by portraying them, Giger paints to overcome his scary claustrophobic nightmares. He describes this process while talking about a series of dreams that inspired the 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 (Giger 1974).

Giger's personal quest has another very important dimension. He seems to intuit not only the healing but also the spiritual potential of deep experiential immersion in the world of dark, perinatal images. For instance, the crucifixion theme often appears in his paintings. The prime example is his painting "Untitled," clearly portraying an experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth (57). Giger also uses this theme in his sculptures, as in the "Candle Candelabrum" and the "Table Support," each made of identical figures of crucified Jesus (58, 59). Visions of Jesus appear often in psychedelic and holotropic breathwork sessions involving the final stages of the birth process (96, 97, 103, 104). Other examples of the spiritual dimension in Giger's work include his image of the staircase to the Harkonnen Castle for Alejandro Jodorowsky's film "Dune," lined with dangerous phallic death symbols (61) and appearing to lead to heaven, as well as his "Magus" (62) and "Death" (63) images.

In the early 1980s Giger created the extraordinary series of paintings called *Victory* (64), which depicts demonic female figures painted fluorescent red. These images combine biomechanoid elements with fierce sexuality and death symbolism, and the resulting effect is one of awesome archetypal power. Their radiant fiery quality evokes the pyrocathartic aspect of the psychospiritual death/rebirth process. Giger's comment about these paintings reveals that he was very aware of the perinatal origin of these visions. He said, "This must be the kind of perspective a newborn has when looking back after being forced out of his mother's body." The title "Victory" suggests the experience of the neonate, who still vividly remembers the demonic power of the delivering mother and also feels the triumph and exhilarating sense of liberation of having escaped the clutches of the birth canal.

Giger's awareness of the transformational potential of the perinatal process is most dramatically illustrated by his masterpiece "Passage Temple," created in the mid 1970s. The paintings, which formed the inner walls of the temple and at present can be seen as

separate exhibits in the H.R. Giger Museum, 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 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, featured a cast-iron wagon, in the form of a sarcophagus, moving on rails through primeval slime and containing a strange amalgam of organic and technological material – a signature of Giger's art. According to Giger, this sarcophagus represented impermanence, the passage of all becoming and dissolution (65). Giger's preoccupation with this theme – the unrelenting nature of time resulting in aging and decay – also accounts for his fascination with watches, which found its expression in his collection *Watch Apart* (Deviant Art of Watches) (Giger 1993).

The painting on the right side of the temple, "Death," prominently displayed symbolism of the second perinatal matrix (BPM II) in the form of a mechanism on the back of a refuse truck, "the perfect gate of hell, through which passes everything that has outlived its usefulness" (66). This image had a very powerful symbolic meaning for Giger and was clearly overdetermined. As we can infer from his other paintings, the opening in the garbage truck also represented dangerous female genitals, *vagina dentata* (37). Furthermore, Giger mentioned that for him the opening of the garbage truck was closely associated 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, "Life," had all the essential characteristics of the third perinatal matrix (BMP III) – motifs related to birth, sex, death, and aggression (67). The painting featured a massive metal pair of pants whose oversized open zipper revealed a gigantic erect phallus. This powerful male symbol appeared against the background of

stylized hair and was composed of pairs of sickly looking children stacked and shown in various stages of birth and death. In the upper left corner of the painting was a young woman holding in a firm grip an infant trying to attack her and kill her. A skeletal creature, two humanoid beings and armed figures completed the composition. Although this was not the artist's conscious intention, it would be easy to see in the painting also a stylized pelvis penetrated by a large penis.

Giger depicted these fundamental aspects of nature in a symbolically stylized way revealing the brutality of the life process.

The fourth painting, which faced the entrance, portrayed 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). Here Giger showed a throne bathed in diffuse light, placed at the top of seven steps decorated by symbols of death. The throne was flanked by biomechanoid virgins. 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, intuited the spiritual potential in Giger's art when he wrote about it:

... 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.

Timothy Leary, Harvard psychology professor-turned- psychedelic guru, has also written about Giger's art. Leary's knowledge of the deep recesses of the human psyche attained in his several hundred LSD experiences gave him a unique perspective on Giger's art, and he seems to have shared Ernst Fuchs's opinion. In his preface to the book *H.R. Giger/N.Y.C.* Leary wrote:

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 (Giger 1981).

And Horst Albert Glaser wrote about the intimation of transcendence in 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 closely Giger's art has approached resolution of the perinatal process can best be illustrated by the series of his paintings *Pump Excursion* (70). At first sight these seem to feature a musician absorbed in deep meditation. 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 clearly has a numinous quality. These paintings thus bring together the essential elements of a psychospiritual death-rebirth experience – aggression, self-destruction, sex, birth, and divine light.

Even the darkest and most chthonic aspects of Giger's art, such as his *Shafts* series (33a, b, c, d, e) and the *Spell* series (45, 48, 63), can be seen as integral aspects of a potentially transformative process. The motif of a journey into a dangerous labyrinth, underworld, or hell is a standard theme in the sessions of people reliving birth in a therapeutic context or during a spontaneous psychospiritual journey. The Dark Night of the Soul represents an important stage in the spiritual journey of the mystics. It is also a critical aspect 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 – 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.

It is interesting to speculate why Giger has not yet really focused on the transcendental potential of the perinatal process. The great American mythologist Joseph Campbell commented in one of his lectures at the Esalen Institute that the images of hell in world mythology are 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 received much less attention. 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 hope that this last alternative is closest to the truth. I would love to see Giger use his incredible imagination and masterful freehand airbrush technique to portray the transcendental beauty of the imaginal world with the same mastery with which he has captured its "terrible beauty." Many others who admire his art have made similar comments. But Giger has always pursued his own inner truth, and it is unlikely that he will be swayed by the wishes of his fans, however sincere and passionate. He will follow the inner logic of his Promethean quest, wherever it takes him, as he always has. And those of us who appreciate and love his art will continue to enjoy the extraordinary products of this process as they emerge into the world.

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H.R. Giger was once quoted as saying, "Some people say my work is often depressing and pessimistic, with the emphasis on death, blood, overcrowding, strange beings and so on, but I don't really think it is. There is hope and a kind of beauty in there somewhere, if you look for it." H.R. Giger's inspirations and life seem to confirm that view. Photo: He Began Drawing To Combat Night Terrors. Photo: Kedar Misani / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 3.0. As a child, Giger was beset with night terrors, a sleep disorder that causes episodes of intense fear, screaming, and flailing dur © Carmen Giger (HR Giger Estate) / p. 134â€“136 The Spell II, 1974 Acrylic and India ink on paper on wood. Sci-fi meets hair-raising horror in Swiss artist HR Gigerâ€™s surreal worlds, enveloped by menacing darkness and inhabited by threatening hybrid creatures that are part alien, part machine, and entirely bone-chilling. p. 220/221 Erotomechanics VII (Mia und Judith, first state), 1979 Acrylic and India ink on paper © Carmen Giger (HR Giger Estate). p. 220/221. Erotomechanics VII (Mia und Judith, first state), 1979. Acrylic and India ink on paper. HR Giger petrified audiences around the world wh Now, Giger's artistry is helping to bring a new extraterrestrial terror to Earth with the release of Species, for which he designed the monstrous guises of the otherwise beautiful alien killer Sil. Reached just after his 55th birthday, the artist admits that the day left him a little worse for wear. Was he celebrating heavily? "No," he chuckles, before con-tinuing in his slow, deep and clipped Teutonic tones, "I was working in my basement with perocryl, which is like poison, and when I had finished, my. head, lungs and everything were in pain, like somebody had stuck some-t