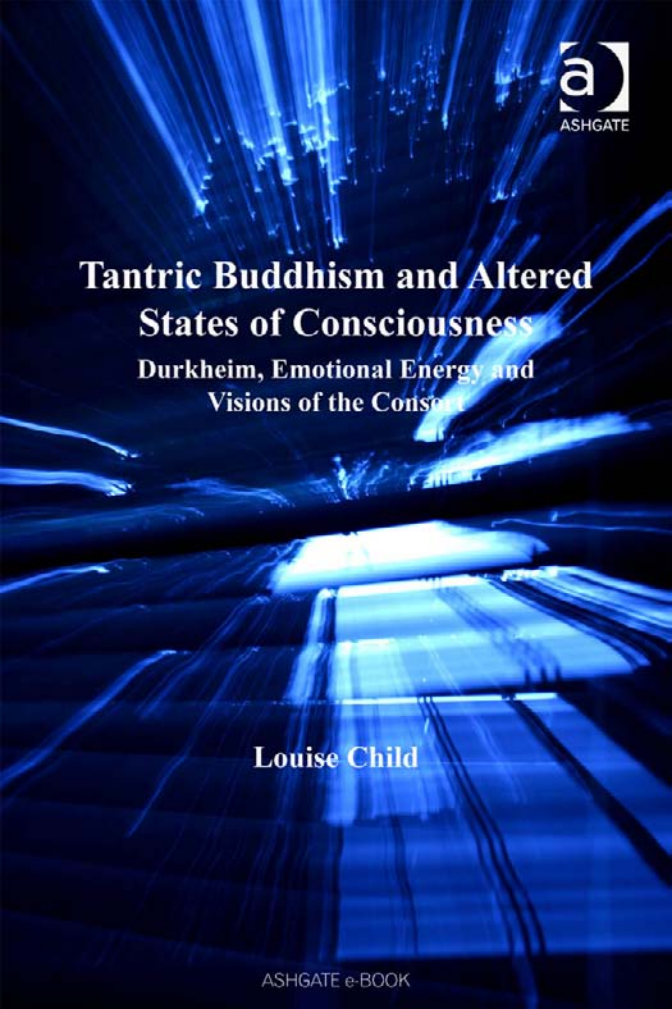
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Tantric Buddhism and Altered States of Consciousness
Durkheim, Emotional Energy and Visions of the Consort
Louise Child
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TANTRIC BUDDHISM AND ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

This book explores the role of altered states of consciousness in the communication of social and emotional energies, both on a societal level and between individual persons. Drawing from an original reading of Durkheimian social theorists (including Mauss, Hertz, and Hubert) and Jungian psychology, Louise Child applies this analysis to tantric Buddhist ritual and biographical material. She suggests ways in which dreams and visionary experiences (including those related to the 'subtle body') play an important and previously under-explored role in tantric understandings of the consort relationship.

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Durkheim, Emotional Energy and Visions of the Consort

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Chapter 1

Altered States of Consciousness, Symbols, and Social Theory

How can Durkheim's theory of *collective consciousness* and Jung's notion of the *collective unconscious* contribute to the study of dreams and visionary experiences? This is one of the primary questions that this book investigates, and in so doing it asserts that there is something social about altered states of consciousness that should be re-examined. However, I am not suggesting that one should equate 'the social' with economic and political structures and then apply this somewhat limited definition to an analysis of religious experience. Rather, this book argues that the psychological and social structures proposed by Jung and Durkheim are fluid and dynamic, being complicated by the presence of social and emotional energies that give vitality to the person and society, but which also give rise to tensions, conflict, and uncertainty.

Taking these insights as a starting point, I go on to suggest their implications for the study of personal emotions and relationships, drawing from ritual and biographical material generated by tantric Buddhism. This material contains a number of features that render it particularly useful for this study, partly because tantra explores the idea of ritual and religious relationships that are erotically charged, but also because it contains a wealth of references to altered states of consciousness, and a second theme that runs throughout this book is an attempt to suggest links between consort relationships and dreams and visions that may provide avenues for further investigations. Specifically it explores the links between religious symbols, visionary experiences and the transmission of emotional energies that may take place between an individual and society, within the individual psyche, and between persons.

Scholars such as Samuel have argued that the relationship between social and individuated being can be understood in terms of a tension between them (Samuel, 1990: 30). He suggests that 'visionary states' mediate this tension, by breaking previous thought patterns and social links, and creating new ones (Samuel, 1990: 108). An exploration of Durkheim's theory of collective consciousness and Jung's collective unconscious can support such statements and open up this area of inquiry to an analysis of levels of communication, which I suggest are closely related to both the generation, and contents of, a number of dream, vision, and trance experiences. I will argue that, for Durkheim and Jung, contact between persons goes beyond the confines of language, and is rooted, more precisely, in subtle senses and emotions that interact with the conscious mind through symbols. This suggests a dynamic conception of both society and the individual, animated by the tension between them. Because this tension is also thought to penetrate 'the person', the theories of Durkheim and Jung can also offer a 'depth' perspective to the study of identity

that contrasts with sociological, anthropological, and psychological explanations of 'altered states of consciousness' that are more limited by their perspectives on what constitutes society and the individual. One example is Lewis, who suggests that possession trance is primarily a form of social protest (albeit one not always subject to conscious control), utilized by oppressed groups, especially women (Lewis, 1978: 85). Explanations of possession trance that reduce the phenomenon to a series of external circumstances, such as poverty, marginal social status, or an excess of unsatisfied sexual desires, avoid a confrontation with indigenous explanations, while at the same time they suggest a restricted notion of the person.

Keller (2002) notes a number of these problems in her analysis of scholarly approaches to possession trance, an analysis that both draws from, and critiques certain aspects of, postcolonial and gender theories. She suggests that

> possessed bodies are extremely different from the contemporary Western model of proper subjectivity. They are volatile bodies that attract the eye of observers, and often their volatility is related to erotic or outrageous activity. Possessed bodies are not individual bodies … an ancestor, deity, or spirit had overcome them; however that is an interpretation that would be difficult if not impossible for most scholars to represent as the "truth" of the matter. By and large, scholarly approaches to possessed bodies have reinterpreted them as repressed psychological bodies, oppressed sociological bodies, or oppressed women's bodies. (Keller, 2002: vii)

While the focus of Keller's interest is on studies of possession trance, her insights have broader implications, especially for questions concerning agency, identity, and consciousness. She suggests, for example, that one of the reasons that academic examinations of spirit possession have proved to be problematic is the 'blotting' of consciousness during possessions (Keller, 2002: 4). The tendency, within a number of theoretical approaches, to equate agency with consciousness, is therefore difficult to reconcile with the accounts and explanations offered by a number of indigenous communities, which insist on an agency of ancestors, deities, and spirits (Keller, 2002: 22).

In addition, the construction and valuing of the western, male, 'self-possessed' agent, can help to maintain structures of power that are intended to place women and non-western peoples in a position of disadvantage (Keller, 2002: 21). The fact that possessions tend to occur predominately among women living in non-western cultures therefore compounds the problem (Keller, 2002: 2–3). Possession phenomena have been dismissed and reinterpreted as either a symptom of mental illness, or 'subconsciously employed guises used by powerless people to acquire power that the scholar identifies as real power in contrast to religious power, such as economic gain or social status' (Keller, 2002: 11). While feminist theories have attempted to re-evaluate possession more positively, they are nonetheless hampered by a focus on concepts such as 'personal self worth'. Keller suggests that such notions rest uneasily with indigenous assertions that the possessed body is simply a vehicle, rather than an autonomous agent making claims to personal authority (Keller, 2002: 45). She therefore suggests that a number of sociological, psychological, and feminist interpretations have approached the enigma of possession utilizing similar devices. Essentially, they attempt to solve the problem by ignoring it. When confronted with

a consciousness that is overcome, scholars translate the phenomenon into a question of beliefs (which they are often careful to state that they do not share) (Keller, 2002: 7, 29). As a result the power of deities, ancestors, and spirits (and to some extent the possession trance itself) is interpreted 'as a symbolic power' (Keller, 2002: 25).

Keller's insights present both a challenge and a cautionary note to scholars who wish to utilize sociological and psychological theories in the study of altered states of consciousness. However, the idea that deities have a symbolic dimension is not entirely incongruent with indigenous contexts of tantric Buddhism. It is possible to explore that aspect without reducing the entirety of the tantric Buddhist philosophy, ritual, and biographical material to a series of material or psychological problems expressing themselves through religion. Nonetheless, it is equally difficult to deny that altered states of consciousness have sociological and psychological implications. This is precisely because altered states are not simply isolated phenomena that only have an impact on the agency of the person concerned. They are, to some extent, framed and interpreted by the surrounding community.

Eliade, for example, uses this contact between the religious practitioner and the community to refute suggestions that trance states can be explained in terms of mental illness or deviant social behaviour (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 23–6). Rather, he asserts the social origins of visions, by pointing to their conformity to traditional models and their 'amazingly rich theoretical content' (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 14). In addition, he suggests that tribal societies also recognize mental illnesses, clearly distinguishing them from the behaviour of aspiring and practising shamans (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 31). The shamanic career often engages with disturbances in the body, emotions, and consciousness, initially within the shaman, and later with members of their social group. This engagement is, however, considered powerful, not because the shaman is attributed with a solely conscious agency, but because this is combined, through 'techniques of ecstasy' with an identity that is permeated by visionary communications with spirits. Eliade, drawing from Durkheim, identifies this as a forceful example of the penetration of the sacred into the realm of the individual, one that transforms shamans and enables them to negotiate transformations within the social context (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 8, 32).

Crucially, Durkheim gives the notions of 'the social' and 'consciousness' a number of different dimensions (Mellor, 1998). In addition to observable and external social structures, they are also related to qualities, penetrating the individual's inner life, which include a sense of morality, collective ideas, and emotional energy:

> if collective life awakens religious thought when it rises to a certain intensity, that is so because it brings about a state of effervescence that alters the conditions of psychic activity. The vital energies become hyper-excited, the passions more intense, the sensations more powerful; there are indeed some that are produced only at this moment. Man does not recognize himself; he feels somehow transformed and in consequence transforms his surroundings. (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 425)

He therefore argues that collective consciousness does not only hold certain ideas in common, it has a sense of itself, rooted in exchanges of emotional energy, that becomes accessible to more-differentiated thought processes through the intermediary

medium of symbols. He rejects the idea that his theory of religion is a restatement of historical materialism, arguing that,

> in pointing out an essentially social thing in religion, I in no way mean to say that religion simply translates the material forms and immediate vital necessities into another language … collective consciousness is something other than a mere epiphenomenon of its morphological base … if collective consciousness is to appear, a *sui generis* synthesis of individual consciousness must occur. The product of this synthesis is a whole world of feelings, ideas, and images that follow their own laws once they are born. They mutually attract one another, repel one another, fuse together, subdivide, and proliferate; and none of these combinations is directly commanded and necessitated by the state of the underlying reality. Indeed, the life thus unleashed enjoys such great independence that it sometimes plays about in forms that have no aim or utility of any kind, but only for the pleasure of affirming itself. I have shown that precisely this is often true of ritual activity and mythological thought. (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 426)

Jung also stresses the dynamic and processual nature of the psyche, arguing that its symbolic contents, especially archetypes, originate in the most submerged layer of consciousness, the collective unconscious. He believes that these primordial images are rooted in intuition, being associated with ideas of energy and power because they are 'the instinct's perception of itself' (Jung, 1960: 136). However, archetypes are expressed, in the mythologies of gods and spirits, and in concepts of energy in the natural sciences, because, arising into the personal unconscious, they assume some distinctive form (Jung, 1960: 137). He explains that

> the instincts and the archetypes together form the 'collective unconscious'. I call it collective because, unlike the personal unconscious, it is not made up of individual and more or less unique contents but of those which are universal and of regular occurrence. (Jung, 1960: 134)

Jung therefore proposes analysing a series of dreams over a period of time, suggesting that the dreaming state lies between the conscious and unconscious realms, and its contents therefore express movement within the psyche. This movement is both spontaneous, and part of a process, which he terms individuation, whereby the psyche strives to restore the internal balance and equilibrium of the person (Jung, 1960: 289–90). However, individuation should not be confused with personal isolation. It is, rather, a harmonization between consciousness and the collective unconscious. This takes place in the unconscious mind, which acts like a mediator between the two. For example, during dreams a number of symbolic contents are presented to consciousness. The unconscious can therefore be regarded as a threshold, containing social energy. In addition, Jung presents a variety of explanatory tools which can be applied to different kinds of dreams and personal circumstances (Jung, 1960: 259). This multi-causal approach has features in common with the complex attitude to dreams in the tantric tradition. For example, he includes a serious consideration of the possibility of telepathic communication in dreams, while tantra explores their potential as tools of communication between human beings across distances of time and space (Jung, 1960: 262; Norbu, 1993: 3, 9).

These propositions about 'communication' will be explored in more detail in this chapter. The first section focuses on the relationship between the individual and society, through an examination of practitioners' ritual engagement with tantric Buddhist deities. Drawing from Durkheim, I will argue that these deities can be thought of as collective representations (resembling totems) and suggest that they are therefore a focus and a repository for social energies. The second section goes on to examine the constitution of the individual, and explores the transformations, within the body and consciousness, that are related to practices of deity yoga, and the attainment, or realization of, the subtle illuminated body. The third section concludes with an exploration of consorts that suggests that there is a dynamic relationship between their depiction as symbolic representations and their human counterparts. I will argue that an exploration of altered states of consciousness has important implications for the understanding of this dynamic.

The Mandala, Totemism, and Emotional Energy

This section explores tantric practitioners' engagements with Buddhist deities, proposing that they can be understood in terms of an exchange of emotional energy between the individual and society. I concentrate here on the mandala in the context of peaceful deities that are the focus of popular religious rituals (particularly in Tibet). Each of these deities can be employed in more sophisticated tantric rites, involving complex visualizations, accessible to committed monks and laity who have undergone specific initiations. However, they are also the focus of more popular devotional practices, such as circumambulation, where the circular movement of large numbers of people re-creates a particular pattern that suggests that, while emotional energy can alight on a number of objects, animals, plants or persons, transforming them into symbols; certain shapes, such as the circle, express the movement of social energy in fundamental ways.

To explore the relationship between tantric Buddhist deities and emotional energy, I begin with the suggestion that such deities are essentially religious symbols, examining the vital role that symbols play in Durkheim's sociology of religion. In the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]) he explores the social and ritual roots of collective representations, a term that encompasses primary concepts in society (such as time) in addition to religious symbolism and his analysis focuses on the practices and totemic symbolism of aboriginal Australia, because he suggests that they provide a particularly clear example of principles which govern the relationship between religion and society more generally (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 91–3). Totems (often animals or plants) are simultaneously the defining symbols of each clan, and objects of reverence and worship, but the respect and fear that totems evoke is not restricted to the plants and animals themselves. It is given to any object that is thought to represent the totem, such as an artistic depiction. He therefore suggests that the feelings aroused by the totem are located in its association with a more pervasive, social phenomenon – the sacred.

This concept of the sacred is the link between Durkheim's example (Australian totemism) and his theories about the relationship between religion and society more

broadly. Durkheim argues that all religions, including Buddhism, are characterized by their division of the world into sacred and profane phenomena (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 34–5). This separation is not, however, primarily a cognitive division, because the sacred is rooted in the generation of powerful emotions, aroused by the nature of social life in general, and the intensity of religious rituals, in particular. A collective feeling, or *effervescence*, alights upon religious symbols in order to become conscious of itself, so that the totem, for example, becomes the emblem of the group (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 221). In other words, the symbol is a representation of something more subtle – collective consciousness. Being essentially undifferentiated, collective consciousness has the tendency to fuse together disparate ideas, so that a sense of common substance, or essence, is thought to enter into all things which come into contact with it (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 238). From this perspective, the totem, or deity, is simply, 'the tangible form in which the intangible substance is represented in the imagination; diffused through all sorts of disparate beings, that energy alone is the real object of the cult' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 191).

Collective representations, therefore, are powerful because they are regarded as sacred. Durkheim does not suggest that the plants and animals that constitute totemic symbols are intrinsically sacred, they are simply the forms which symbolize collective consciousness, itself rooted in the intensity of social energies. This process can be observed during rituals, wherein people are literally both animated and acting in unison, 'the only way to renew the collective representations that refer to sacred beings is to plunge them again into the very source of religious life: assembled groups' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 350). In restoring the vitality of the group, religious celebrations affirm the bonds holding members together. This is necessary because there is a natural dissipation of energy during profane periods, where work and daily existence are the primary preoccupations (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 349). What emerges is a tension between the intensity, and thus unity, of the sacred; and the individual concerns, and therefore fragmentation, of the profane. In other words, the sacred dissolves boundaries.

This theory may appear problematic for the scholar who, following Keller, does not wish to ignore indigenous assertions of the reality and instrumentality of ancestors, deities, and spirits. Nevertheless, the reality and instrumentality of deities in a tantric Buddhist context is also problematic. Mills examines tantric rituals within Gelukpa monasteries, suggesting that such rituals are regarded as effective because Buddhas have some kind of a 'presence' that can be employed, through collective rites, to secure the well-being of the local area. He notes that this notion appears to contradict Buddhist assertions that enlightenment is closely associated with a departure from the world, 'nonetheless, Buddhist understandings of the "existence" of Buddhas (and other phenomena for that matter) are relatively complex, and do not correspond easily to the simple notion that things either exist or don't' (Mills, 2003: 87). He draws from an examination of emptiness in Prasanghikha Madhyamika philosophy to suggest that, while Buddhist deities (in common with everything else, including the body and the self) are seen as 'empty' of inherent or static existence, this does not preclude their manifestation (on a more conventional or relative level), in ways that interact with the Tibetan social world (Mills, 2003: 88–90). This interaction can be explored in the context of a Durkheimian understanding of collective representations

to suggest that tantric deities provide a symbolic focus for collective emotional energies. Buddhist deities are thought to represent emotional energies in particularly concentrated (pure) forms, and the individual is therefore able to enter into a dynamic, transformative, engagement with them. Moreover, rather than limiting itself to a general theory of emotional energy, tantric Buddhism suggests that specific deities represent, and can thereby transform, particular emotional states.

Tantric Buddhism, like early Buddhism, does not advocate the worship of gods as a replacement for personal practice and meditation. It distinguishes between supernatural beings, such as *asuras* and *devas*, and enlightened ones, such as the Buddha, suggesting that the former are severely limited in their ability to help the individual. Buddhas and bodhisattvas, brought together under the term deities, are, however, considered powerful, because, unlike gods, they are thought to have transcended the laws of karma. While remaining grounded in Mahayana practices of meditation, tantra developed more elaborate systems for the visualization of deities, including ritual meditation systems, based on the concept of the mandala (Brauen, 1997: 9, 15). Amitabha, originally the focus of a popular devotional cult, became part of a mandala of five deities, known together as the Jinas or Dhyani Buddhas (Frederic, 1995: 124–5). The mandala, a representation found in a number of religious traditions and adopted by tantric Buddhism, is defined primarily by the employment of a circle, and its division into four cardinal points (Snellgrove, 1987: 198–9): 'A mandala is always organized around a deity, a point (*bindu*) or a major symbol … it is formed of circular or square concentric enclosures, provided with four "doors" directed along the cardinal points … each circle or enclosure is occupied by deities or symbols' (Frederic, 1995: 34). It is important to note that, although the mandala may be reproduced in two-dimensional images, what is represented is always understood to have a three-dimensional character (Brauen, 1997: 12). Another expression, referring to the mandala, is 'the palace of the deities'. In addition, the human body can also be regarded as a mandala (Brauen, 1997: 11).

The arrangement of Buddha families into a mandala can vary (Snellgrove, 1987: 195–8), but for peaceful deities the system followed in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is often used (Vessantara, 1993: 60). It is also found in the Vajradhatu mandala, and in the Garbhadhatu mandala, drawn from the *Mahavairocana Sutra* (Frederic, 1995: 37). This system consists of five Buddhas, with Vairocana in the centre, Aksobhya in the east, Ratnasambhava in the south, Amitabha in the west, and Amoghasiddi in the north (Vessantara, 1993: 54–5). They are described as:

> symbolic of the purity of the five aggregates, the five elements, the five directions, the five colours, the five transmuted addictions, the five wisdoms, and the five Buddha clans. Aksobhya is the paradigm of the Dharma's ability to transmute the hate of all beings into blue ultimate-reality-perfection wisdom; Vairocana transmutes delusion into white mirror wisdom; Ratnasambhava transmutes pride and avarice into yellow equality wisdom; Amitabha transmutes lust into red discriminating wisdom; and Amoghasiddi transmutes envy into green all-accomplishing wisdom (Rhie & Thurman, 1991: 334)

Each of these Buddhas, in other words, represents an emotion in its pure, rarefied form and, by visualizing them, the practitioner is thought to remove defilements in their own emotional states (Snellgrove, 1987: 190). In the case of Amitabha,

for example, passion is transformed into compassion. The process is conceived as having similar principles to those of homeopathy; effecting a cure by imbibing small amounts of a dangerous substance. In tantric Buddhist terms, this is described as bringing poisonous emotions onto 'the path', and thereby transmuting them into *amrta*, or nectar. For this reason, Amitabha is often visualized or depicted with peacocks, as Indian mythology attributes their colourful plumage to their eating of poisonous snakes (Vessantara, 1993: 97). Similarly, Amitabha is associated with the element of fire and the colour red, because passion, like fire, is regarded as potentially destructive or beneficial, depending on the context. This is used in a visualization practice, wherein the deity Amitabha faces the practitioner, emanating a 'wheel of fire', consisting of seed-syllables. Meditators then imagine that they take this wheel into their own body, through the navel, and expel it again, through the crown of the head (personal communication, Samye Ling Tibetan Centre, 1998).

Alex Wayman (1961) draws from Durkheim's analysis of religious symbols, suggesting that the five Buddhas in tantric Buddhism have something in common with totems. Using the method of analogy he argues that

> the classification of the animate and inanimate objects of the world under one or other of the families of Buddhas (usually five in number) constitutes totemic beliefs in the Buddhist Tantras. This is not to maintain that these Tantric families have all the features which anthropologists attribute to totemism as it is found in various 'primitive' tribes. For example the feature of exogamy is not generally adhered to by the deities of these Tantric families … we learn from Durkheim's treatment of the native Australian tribes that the totem is the collective designation of the clan. It is a name first of all and then an emblem. It is the typical sacred thing … all things, animate and inanimate, are classified under the various clans of the tribe. (Wayman, 1961: 83).

He explains that each of the five Buddhas is attached to a family or clan (*kula*). Usually they are paired as follows; Vairocana with the Cakra (wheel), Aksobhya and Vajra (diamond or thunder bolt), Amitabha with the Padma (lotus), Ratnasambhava and Ratna (jewel), and Amoghasiddi with the Khadga (sword) family (Wayman, 1961: 83–84). In addition, various members of the Buddha families, like those of the same clan, are thought (in some way), 'to have the same origin or ancestor' (Wayman, 1961: 85). Nevertheless, individuals are more likely to become connected with a Buddha family through religious practice and initiation, while the most fundamental totems in tribal societies are normally those designated at birth or in early childhood. However, a number of aspects of the universe are classified together with the Jinas, a feature which reflects the classification systems of tribal societies. For example, in male form, the five Buddhas are also the five personality aggregates, the five kinds of knowledge, and the five ambrosias (Wayman, 1961: 87). Because the five ambrosias are related to purification practices, this last designation puzzles Wayman. He indicates that 'one of the most striking identifications of the five Buddhas is with the five kind of ambrosia (*amrta*) in a context where they are explained as blood, semen, human flesh, urine, and excrement' (Wayman, 1961: 90).

The five ambrosias can, however, be better understood in the context of the deity's relationship to emotional energy. In the Kalacakra mandala, they are referred to as the result of 'action faculties', which animate the body, along with the senses and

the 'winds' (Brauen, 1997: 101). In another example, a number of small mandalas, or wheels (cakras) are thought to reside at various points along the central channel (located near the spinal column) in the subtle body. Tantric ritual practice aims to purify these centres (remove constrictions and obstructions) so that they can regulate the functions of the subtle body (Brauen, 1997: 54). In a number of Buddhist tantric systems, one of the five Dhyani Buddhas is thought to reside in each of these cakras (Brauen, 1997: 108). From this perspective, references to physical processes of excretion are encompassed within explorations of the concept of purification more broadly, concepts that suggest a relationship, animated by social energy, between the body, the subtle body, and consciousness. Therefore, even the individual renouncer monk, engaged in solitary visualization of the deity, can be seen to interact with something social. The mandala, with a deity (or its seed-syllable) placed in the centre, and within each of the four cardinal points, is an example of a system of classification.

According to Durkheim and Mauss, the organization of representations into a system of classification is not based on pure logic, nor is it located within the individual mind, but rather, it originates with social emotions:

> states of collective mind … give birth to these groupings, and these states moreover are manifestly affective. There are sentimental affinities between things as between individuals, and they are classed according to these affinities…in order for it to be possible for ideas to be systematically arranged for reasons of sentiment, it is necessary that they should not be pure ideas, but that they themselves should be products of sentiment. (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 85)

Durkheim and Mauss note that 'logicians and even psychologists commonly regard the procedure which consists in classifying things, events, and facts about the world into kinds and species, subsuming them one under the other, and determining their relations of inclusion or exclusion, as being simple, innate, or at least as instituted by the powers of the individual alone' (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 3–4). However, these ideas do not explain the evolution or variety of classification systems, because if the hierarchical ordering of objects into classes, species, or genera is determined within the individual before birth, it would have a more uniform expression (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 8). Instead, the development of complexity and diffusion in modern western societies is reflected in their extensive utilization of ideas concerning sharp distinctions, differentiation, and delimitation. There are, nonetheless, remnants of an era when collective thought, characterized by more fluid boundaries, was more dominant. Myths, folklore, and religious thought, for example, contain notions of 'metamorphoses, the transmission of qualities, the substitution of persons, souls, and bodies, beliefs about the materialization of spirits and the spiritualization of material objects' (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 5).

Within Australian aboriginal societies practising totemism, this unity of thought is even more striking, 'here, the individual loses his personality. There is a complete lack of distinction between him and his exterior soul or his totem. He and his "fellow-animal" together compose a single personality' (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 6). They suggest that this affinity is rooted in the sense of kinship, and lack therefore of differentiation, between members of the same totemic group, a sense which

extends to objects subsumed within the symbolic system (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 8, 11, 17, 20). The most basic social division is that between two moieties, which becomes further divided into clans (each possessing a totem) with the addition of marriage classes (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 10–16).

Durkheim and Mauss expand the discussion by exploring the more complex systems of classification that they suggest are rooted in social developments within some Native American tribes. The Zuni, for example, divide three-dimensional space into seven regions – the centre, the four cardinal directions, the zenith and the nadir – reflecting the tribe's seven clans (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 43, 47). The division of abstract space can therefore have social roots, and may be further linked to the division of social space in the camp, which tends to be circular and focus on a centre (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 57).

In the Ponka tribe, the circle is divided by the two moieties, and eight clans. These are reduced for classification purposes into four elements, dividing the circle into four parts, localized within the four arcs of the circumference. This system provides the basis for a division orientated to the four cardinal points (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 58–9). They thus suggest that cosmology expresses patterns which originate socially, and are also expressed in the organization of social space, 'the camp is the centre of the universe, and the whole universe is concentrated within it. Cosmic space and tribal space are thus only very imperfectly distinguished, and the mind passes from one to the other without difficulty, almost without being aware of doing so' (Durkheim & Mauss,1963 [1903]: 65). Drawing from an analysis of Chinese Taoism, they suggest that a similar mechanism applies when elements of the body are endowed with particular significance and meaning:

> Each element is related to a cardinal point, a constellation, and a particular colour, and these different groups of things are thought to correspond, in turn, to diverse kinds of organs, inhabited by various souls, to emotions, and to different parts whose reunion forms the natural character. Thus, yang, the male principle of light and sky, has the liver in the viscera, the bladder as mansion, and the ears and sphincters among the orifices. This theory, the generality of which is apparent, is not of mere curiosity value; it implies a certain way of conceiving things. By it, the universe is in fact referred to the individual; things are expressed by it, in a sense, as functions of the living organism; this is really a theory of the microcosm. (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 77)

This is not a static picture of the universe, but one which is rooted in conceptions of energy. For example, time, and especially the rhythm of the seasons, is also classified in this way (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 71–2). In addition, the symbol of the circle is often associated with the whole, an idea which they suggest expresses a conception of society itself (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 83). Building on this, I suggest that the significance of the circle lies in the basic energetic concept of rotation. In tantric Buddhism, rotation is significant both within popular religion and in the visualizations practised by smaller groups of initiates. The rite of circumambulation, wherein people walk clockwise around a sacred site or image (centre), sometimes in large numbers, is an important act of devotion (Ekvall, 1964: 235–40). Similarly, the clockwise rotation of the prayer wheel is thought to have benefits that resemble those of saying mantras (Ekvall, 1964: 120–22). On a more esoteric level, the structure of

the subtle body is thought to be punctuated by wheels (*cakras*), whose motion can be enhanced and regulated through meditation practices.

Although the circle can be represented two-dimensionally, a three-dimensional image is often implied. Durkheim and Mauss note that in the context of Chinese Taoism the male principle is associated with the sky and the female with the earth. Although they place the male in the south, with the female to the north, the symbolism also evokes a reference to the zenith and the nadir, which I suggest indicates a degree of polarity in this dimension, and thus an exchange of energy (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963 [1903]: 69). This depth perspective is explored in more detail in Jung's psychological analysis of the mandala.

For Jung, the Sanskrit term *mandala* originates with circles drawn in Indian religious rituals (Jung, 1959: 355). Using a Tibetan Buddhist mandala as an example, he suggests that it is 'an instrument of contemplation. It is meant to aid concentration by narrowing down the psychic field of vision and restricting it to the centre' (Jung, 1959: 356). He identifies the centre with the union of the divine male and female (Siva and Sakti in the Hindu context) (Jung, 1959: 356): 'Creation therefore begins with the act of division of the opposites that are united in the deity. From their splitting arises, in a gigantic explosion of energy, the multiplicity of the world' (Jung, 1959: 357). While the motif can take on a number of forms, they have in common the basic feature of the squaring of the circle. Jung suggests that this symbolizes a sense of wholeness in the personality, held together by a psychic centre or self. This point is potentially a source of energy, radiating outwards, or a vortex, which can draw energy to itself, during the process of meditative contemplation (Jung, 1959: 357–8).

However, symbols that have many features in common with the mandala are also produced spontaneously, for example, by people undergoing analysis. Although these are essentially 'free creations', they are also, nonetheless, 'determined by certain archetypical ideas unknown to their creators' (Jung, 1959: 360). Their appearance often coincides with psychic states of chaos and disorientation, and Jung suggests that they are an unconscious attempt, on the part of the psyche to 'reduce confusion to order' thereby exerting 'a retroactive influence on the unconscious' (Jung, 1959: 360–61).

As an extension to Jung's analysis, it is possible to suggest that the mandala is not only an example of a particularly common archetype; it is an image of the basic structure through which emotional energy moves within the psyche. From this perspective, the two-dimensional image can be seen to represent a three-dimensional cylinder from an aerial viewpoint, with consciousness at its zenith, and the collective unconscious within the nadir. Energy, therefore, not only rotates around the central point, but also moves between levels of consciousness, following courses that resemble a spiral. This motion would account for the drawing downwards of repressed contents, from the conscious mind into the unconscious, and the rising of symbolic forms from the collective unconscious.

In addition, Jung's work suggests that the mandala is not only significant for the relationship between the individual and society; it is also associated with transformations within the individual, and it is therefore to the constitution of the individual, according to tantric Buddhism, that I now turn.

Deity Yoga and the Transformative Body

While the previous section concentrated on mandalas of the peaceful deities, there are a plethora of deities within the corpus of Buddhist tantra, including female bodhisattvas such as Tara (Beyer, 1978 [1973]: 168–9). Although often maintaining some kind of relationship with the five-Buddha system, many of these deities have their own mandala, 'thus Kalacakra dominates the mandala of the same name … he has four faces, each facing one of the cardinal directions' (Brauen, 1997: 11). Kalacakra is an example of a deity who takes a fiercer or more wrathful form. Another example is Mahakala, a fearsome black deity, who is nevertheless related to Avalokitesvara, a widely revered gentle bodhisattva of compassion (Stablein, 1991: 167). Guhyasamaja is possibly the oldest wrathful deity, being the subject of Buddhist tantric writings from about the 4th century CE (Landlaw & Weber, 1993: 120). These writings utilize a form of twilight, or symbolic language, which at its most veiled or secret level is intended to shed light on 'the truth of passion' (Shaw, 1994: 149).

Visualizations in the most esoteric class of tantra, Anuttarayogatantra, also depict deities as consorts in sexual union. For example, in the Kalacakra tantra, Kalacakra is visualized together with the female deity Visvamatr (Brauen, 1997: 117). However, I suggest that important features of consort symbolism are based upon the notion that individual persons have a number of dimensions to their identity, and it is therefore these dimensions that are the focus of this section. It begins with an examination of two deeply interrelated concepts; deity yoga and the subtle, illuminated body, and goes on to suggest that enlightened personhood in tantric Buddhism can be viewed in terms of three dimensions, using the *trikaya* (or three bodies of the Buddha) theory. Moreover, the theories of Durkheim and Jung can also be seen in terms of three dimensions, because individual identity, according to these scholars, is permeated with ideas and emotions that are located within social dimensions of being.

As a focus for ritual visualization and meditation techniques, tantric deities incarnate and express a fluid identity, being conceived simultaneously as entities responsive to veneration and supplication and as energy forms which can penetrate and refine persons and societies (Brauen, 1997: 106–107). This dual role is based upon a number of meditative and ritual techniques, known collectively as deity yoga, which bring together devotion to enlightened beings with emulating them (Beyer, 1978 [1973]: 77). The process was not restricted to external or ethical behaviour, but was conceived as an alchemical transformation, into the 'body of the Buddha' (Beyer, 1978 [1973]: 253, 89). This body is not visualized as solid, but is

> a body of light or rainbows. Deities are visible because of the emitted or intrinsic light that radiates from them. They can be described as luminescent, opalescent or scintillating, or regarded as a kind of light-fluid which lights up everything it comes into contact with. (Brauen, 1997: 65)

Neither purely a concept, nor simply physical, the transformed body in tantra combines consciousness and physical substances, in their most subtle forms, animated by emotional energy, often described in terms of radiance, or translucent light. I therefore refer to it as subtle or 'etheric', because it is

> a multilayered mind-body continuum of corporeality, affectivity, cognitivity, and spirituality whose layers are subtly interwoven and mutually interactive … not as a boundaried or static entity but as the site of a host of energies, inner winds and flames, dissolutions, meltings, and flowings that can bring about dramatic transformations in embodied experience and provide a bridge between humanity and divinity.
> (Shaw, 1994: 11)

Because deities can be explored as collective symbols, portrayed in religious art and ritual by tantric Buddhists, the individual visualizing a deity explores an interaction between social and personal consciousness; one that can be understood in terms of communication. In addition, skilled practitioners are thought to generate and incorporate deities into their own bodies. The subtle body is thus deeply interrelated with deity yoga. In the most advanced practices, they are merely different aspects of the same phenomenon. This idea is built into the iconography of deities. Kalacakra's posture, for example, symbolizes the control of subtle substances, such as *prana* and *bodhicitta*, that are related to a combination of consciousness with the breath and bodily fluids (Brauen, 1997: 63). Durkheim's work can therefore be linked to the study of the etheric body, because the transformation of the practitioner into a deity can be understood in terms of the embodiment of collective forces, in other words, the acquisition of a sacred body.

Durkheim argues that the power of the sacred sharply distinguishes it from the profane. This separation is maintained by the mechanism of taboo, whereby the respect that religious symbols inspire keeps them apart from the profane (or ordinary) world. The sacred is 'that which the profane must not and cannot touch without impunity' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 38). This is partly because the individual is, in some ways, in awe of the group, depending on it for physical subsistence, language, and elevated aspects of being, including the sober structures of morality, and the passions of effervescence. Taboo also, however, contains an element of fear, because unprotected beings could be destroyed by the forces of the sacred, which are

> even physical forces that bring about physical effects mechanically. Does the individual come into contact with them without having taken the proper precautions? He receives a shock that has been compared with the effect of an electrical charge. They sometimes appear to be conceived of more or less as fluids that escape via the extremities. When they enter into a body that is not meant to receive them, they cause sickness and death by a wholly mechanical reaction. Outside man, they play the role of the life-principle … by acting upon them the reproduction of the species is ensured. All life is based on them.
> (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 192)

Beings therefore require a 'metamorphosis' in order to approach the sacred, leading Durkheim to suggest that initiation implies a total transformation of being, comparable to a death of the profane person and a rebirth into a sacred identity (Durkheim, 1995: [1912]: 37).

Deity yoga, by preparing individuals for a transition from a profane to a sacred state, is also a form of initiation, and literal rituals of initiation often precede it. By visualizing the body to be a deity, the yogin effectively makes it a religious symbol, a fit container for powerful social energies. At the same time, these forces,

though subtle, are not entirely illusory. They are considered to be something real, which the imagination seeks to express. This is why rituals of deity yoga are divided into two stages, the *generation stage*, during which a picture of the deity is painted in the yogini's mind, and the *completion stage*, whereby they become the deity (Brauen, 1997: 11). It is no accident that the focus of completion-stage rituals is the apprehension and manipulation of substances and forces within the subtle body. This energy is thought to permeate the whole of the body, in the form of *prana*,

> which pools to form currents (*nadi*) and vortices (*cakra*) … the subtle body appears as a radiant, shimmering energy field that is in constant internal motion and is crisscrossed by luminous filaments, or tendrils. Unlike the physical body, which appears solid and stable, it is neither compact or rigid … the most stable structures of the subtle body are known as 'wheels' (*cakras*) or lotuses (*padma*) because of their circular form and whirling motion and also because of the way that prana currents terminate at or issue from them. (Feuerstein, 1998: 148–9)

The term 'illumination', in this context, therefore suggests the combination of an experience within consciousness, an understanding or gnosis; with something perceived by the senses, whereby the physical body is literally suffused with light. Tantric Buddhism uses a number of terms to refer to bodily states and states of consciousness simultaneously. Examples include the 'rainbow body' (Norbu, 1986: 156), and the 'diamond' or *vajra* body, where radiance is described as the most refined quality of the body (Shaw, 1994: 86). Norbu describes tantric practice as a process that dissolves the material body, culminating in the revealing of its most basic essence, light (Norbu, 1986: 101).

Eliade explores references to illumination in a number of religious traditions, arguing that it is often associated with accounts of radical changes in the identity of those who spontaneously encounter it. He uses the phrase 'spiritual rebirth' to describe these changes, whereby the person 'acquires another mode of being' (Eliade, 1965: 21). While the term 'spirit' is problematic in the Buddhist context, Eliade's discussion is useful, because its substance echoes Durkheim's reflections of the sacred, paying particular attention to its impact on the individual. For example, he says that,

> the rapidity of spiritual illumination has been compared in many religions to lightning. Furthermore, the swift flash of lightning rending the darkness has been given the value of a *mysterium tremendum* which, by transfiguring the world, fills the soul with holy terror. (Eliade, 1965: 22)

In addition, he argues that medicine men no longer participate in the world of the profane, but share the condition of 'superior Beings'. For example, in aboriginal Australia and Borneo, crystals, especially quartz, are attributed with important powers, being regarded as a form of solidified light. During initiation ceremonies, it is believed that the initiate is killed by supernatural beings, cut in pieces, and filled with rock crystals, thereby attaining 'a different mode of existence from the rest of mortals' (Eliade, 1965: 24–25). Drawing from anthropological accounts of Yakut and Inuit shamans, he adds that illumination is thought to instigate the gift of

vision, enabling them to see, literally, across great distances, and more mysteriously, invisible entities such as the souls of the sick, or spirits, and future events. Vision, in these cases, incorporates the power of sight with altered states of consciousness, which Eliade describes as powers of clairvoyance (Eliade, 1965: 22–3). Therefore,

> although experienced in the form of an inner light and felt as a luminous event, in the almost physical sense of the word, the illumination confers … both paragnomic powers and knowledge of a mystical kind. (Eliade, 1965: 24)

Eliade also explores material from Indian religions, including early Buddhist references to the radiance of the Buddha (Eliade, 1965: 27, 31). However, in the case of tantric Buddhism, the enlightened being has a three-dimensional character. This is expressed in the *trikaya* (three bodies of the Buddha) theory. From the point of view of philosophical theory, the *trikaya* is a relatively late development in Buddhism, arising from an initial distinction between the Buddha as a historical person, and the Buddha as a body of truths which could be emulated, the *dharmakaya* (Williams, 1989: 171). This was utilized by Mahayana propagators of the *Perfection of Wisdom* texts, who saw their methods as superior to Buddhists who worshipped relics and stupas. The *Perfection of Wisdom* appealed to the teachings, rather than the form of the Buddha (Williams, 1989: 173). The *dharmakaya*, therefore, was initially a relatively abstract concept, referring to key qualities of enlightenment. It was not, however, an absolute, or God, because this conception contradicts its primary characteristic – emptiness, based on a principle of non-duality (Williams, 1989: 174).

It was in the Cittamatra school that the *dharmakaya* concept expanded in meaning, and the three-dimensional *trikaya* theory flowered. This relates to Cittamatra philosophy's openness to the idea that enlightenment had an essence, which could be uncovered by purification practices (Williams, 1989: 176). A concern with the essence, or true nature of things, led to an interest in instances of illusion or magical display. While, on the one hand, defiled or impure consciousness was regarded as illusory in nature, the attainment of purified consciousness entailed the ability to become the master of the illusion, particularly when motivated by compassion. From this perspective the physical body of the Buddha, or *nirmanakaya*, is conceived as a form of skilful means, taking birth and undergoing the process of becoming enlightened in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of certain methods of religious practice, such as meditation. In addition, enlightened beings are thought to be able to manifest the *sambhogakaya*, or apparitional bodies, in order to fulfil the needs of sentient beings (Williams, 1989: 177).

The *trikaya* can therefore be explored in terms of communication. Within the individual, the *trikaya* is compared to three aspects of consciousness – waking, deep sleep, and dreaming – corresponding to the *nirmanakaya*, *dharmakaya*, and *sambhogakaya*, respectively. Between the teacher and the practitioner, the *nirmanakaya* is the most external and structured method of transmission, whereby human beings utilize ordinary forms of communication, such as writing and speech. At the other end of the continuum, the *dharmakaya* refers to profound levels of understanding, beyond words. Mediating between these two lies the *sambhogakaya*, transmitting messages symbolically, through the appearance of an *apparitional* body

in dreams and visions. This body, I suggest, also plays a vital role in tantric sexuality, because union in sexual yoga involves,

> subtle exchanges of energy and a mutual resonance between the psychic bodies of the two partners. The inner yogas bring about an increase in sensitivity … so that they can detect delicate shifts, movements, and exchanges of energy. (Shaw, 1994: 86)

Another way of expressing this is to suggest that tantra portrays both the individual, and personal relationships, as expressing of a number of facets of identity. These aspects of being are not rigidly distinct, but in continual interaction with one another. Enlightened states have both physical and spiritual aspects, and it is an oversimplification to suggest that the *dharmakaya* is immaterial while the *nirmanakaya* is an ordinary or profane phenomena. More precisely, the three kayas express degrees of subtlety, distinguished by their relationship to energy. Material bodies are relatively easily perceived, being at the grossest or densest end of the continuum. More rapid vibrational frequencies are more elusive, as they are generated by subtle states of consciousness, which nonetheless have relational qualities, because they are associated with an increasing lack of differentiation. Purification techniques in completion stage practice utilize subtle energies to purify and refine the etheric body, replacing gross matter with particles of light. The *dharmakaya*, therefore, is both undifferentiated consciousness and a kind of absolute, but it can be apprehended and communicated, when, for example, it is imagined as the radiance of the etheric body.

The *nirmanakaya* is characterized by greater structure, and is therefore more tangible to human beings. However, manifestations of the *nirmanakaya*, such as human teachers, are thought to possess extraordinary qualities, often inspiring strong emotional reactions from those who encounter them. *Sambhogakaya* forms are often more detailed than the *dharmakaya*. For example, they may present the image of a deity, but this image is translucent, because within this body wordless experience meets consciousness, and thereby becomes symbolic (Govinda, 1969: 213–14). Both the deities of deity yoga, and oneself as etheric body are closely associated with the *sambhogakaya*, and they are described as taking this form during the bardo, a state of consciousness which tantric Buddhism refers to as a kind of passageway, or intermediate realm, between the states of living and death.

What is presented by the *trikaya* is, therefore, not a theory of total opposition between physical existence and enlightenment, as an abstract, purely cognitive, or nihilistic phenomenon. It is, rather, a three-dimensional exploration of tensions within the person. I argue that the ideas of Durkheim elucidate these tensions, and suggest that the *dharmakaya*, being undifferentiated, is related to social being on a fundamental level. Therefore, although the *nirmanakaya* is the most visible manifestation, and the most accessible to ordinary language, the *dharmakaya* can also be communicated. This is because language is characterized by a degree of structure and differentiation, while collective consciousness is a kind of resonance, which communicates less precisely, but with more depth.

It can be argued that Durkheim's own work also contains three dimensions. This is because he not only explores tensions between the individual and society, but he

suggests that different aspects of the social are also held in continual tension. These ideas are related to the paradoxical qualities of collective effervescence. Being a source of power, like heat or electricity, it gathers its own momentum, which is difficult to control:

> If religious forces are generally conceived of as external to the beings in which they reside, then there is no surprise in the extreme ease with which religious forces radiate and diffuse … their intensity pushes them on to diffusion, which everything facilitates … since they are emotions, and especially intense ones, they are eminently contagious as well. Hence, they are like an oil slick; they spread to all other mental states that occupy the mind. (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 327–8)

This contagious, or overwhelming quality can be dangerous. According to Durkheim, social structure provides essential limitations which hold this power in check. For example, he suggests that the contagion of the sacred gives rise to prohibitions because 'a profane being cannot violate a prohibition without having the religious force that he has improperly approached extend to him and take him over. But since there is an antagonism between himself and that force, he finds himself subject to a hostile power, the hostility of which is inevitably manifested in violent reactions that tend to destroy him', including spontaneous sickness and death (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 324–5). Duty, conscience, and convention, therefore arise from the sacred, in that they spring from considerations beyond the self, while at the same time, they curb its excesses, acting as an opposing force of stability. Individuality is a third factor (Durkheim,1995 [1912]: 273–5).

I therefore utilize a three-dimensional reading of Durkheim, suggesting that while there are tensions between all three aspects of being, they are not radically distinct. Within the individual, for example, society is present, both in emotional attachments to others, and in the sacrifices which people make when acting against their own desires. Durkheim uses the example of asceticism for this phenomenon. This apparently solitary and unconventional behaviour, whereby the individual is often isolated physically from social life, and separated from its usual satisfactions, such as food and sexual relationships, is nevertheless, for Durkheim, simply an exaggeration of the privations which all human beings undertake to some extent (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 321). It is the embodiment of an external restraint, which at the same time empowers the individual with social forces. As a result, the ascetic incarnates extraordinary abilities, inspiring awe (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 320).

Jung's description of the three dimensions of consciousness adds depth to this structure. He suggests a tension between consciousness, the unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The conscious mind is the most individual and differentiated form, and is dominant during the waking state, an observation that has much in common with ideas about the *nirmanakaya*. He also argues that some instincts, together with facets of the personality which may impede orderly behaviour and work, are diverted, controlled and sublimated. Although given less energy within the conscious mind, the emotional character of these contents makes it impossible for them to be completely discarded. Instead, according to Jung, they are submerged, and held within a threshold of potential thoughts, feelings, and actions: the unconscious. Fragments of the unconscious mind surface occasionally, in dreams, 'slips of the

tongue', and bodily sensations and gestures. This is because such contents become charged with enough energy to draw them from the unconscious into consciousness (Jung, 1960: 97).

Even more deeply submerged than the unconscious is collective unconscious. Being pure, undifferentiated consciousness, this cannot be expressed by language, because the nature of language implies borders of definition (Jung, 1960: 110). In this respect, it resembles the concept of the *dharmakaya*. It also bears some similarity to the sacred, in that it can only be apprehended directly as an experience of energy itself. However, because this energy gives rise to movement within the psyche, contents from the collective unconscious can arise into the unconscious mind, where they take the form of symbols, termed archetypes. Being primordial images, archetypes undergo interpretation, both by individuals and cultures, but are bound by neither, springing from deeper and older sources. Myths and dream images, therefore, do not originate in learned, conscious experience, but in a basic social sense of being, which is 'encoded', in a similar fashion to genetic material. It is for this reason that humans can have visions of information, stories and ideas which are distant from them in space and time, and which have not been introduced to them through mediums such as books (Jung, 1960: 112, 201).

The unconscious mind contains elements of submerged consciousness, together with contents arising from the collective unconscious. Its symbols, therefore, express communication between individual and social forms of consciousness. This communication is regarded by Jung as transformative, because it brings together different elements of the personality to form new combinations, a process which he terms alchemical (Jung, 1960: 293). For example, he suggests that, when archetypical contents enter the unconscious they are sometimes perceived as 'divine sparks', or an 'inner body of light' (Jung, 1960: 190–96). This symbol is often coincident with dragon or serpent imagery in dreams and visions. Symbols of the serpent indicate, on one level, a communication with the *cthonic* – dark, hidden forces, associated with the animal side of human nature. On another, they are related to time, because the serpent is grounded in the unconscious, which is not bound by time in the same way as consciousness is. He refers to this phenomenon as 'the synchronicity of archetypical events' (Jung, 1960: 198).

The serpent is also prominent in references to the etheric body in tantra. The *kundalini* is imagined as a female serpent which initially lies, coiled three times, within the subtle body, in an area roughly equivalent to the base of the spine. In the ordinary person, the *kundalini* is sleeping, and the aim of tantric awakening is to rouse her, directing the resulting power, through the energy centres (*cakras*), along the area of the spinal column, to unite with energy held in the cranium (Norbu, 1986: 90). This image of the enlightenment process suggests a tension between the body and consciousness, which is mediated by a third factor, the subtle body. Similarly, Jung identifies a polarity between spirit and instinct (Jung, 1960: 207). However, he stresses the continual interaction between them, 'a *dynamism* which makes itself felt in the numinosity and fascinating power of the archetypical image' (Jung, 1960: 211). For there to be a tension of opposites, they must have common qualities. He therefore concludes that both spirit and instinct are made of a similar substance, energy. This energy has qualities which echo Durkheim's references to contagion:

> it is an open secret that although physical and spiritual passion are deadly enemies, they are nevertheless brothers-in-arms, for which reason it often needs the merest touch to convert one into the other. (Jung, 1960: 212)

Taking the energetic analogy further, Jung reviews developments in quantum physics which point to a relationship between material phenomena and consciousness. For example, the observation of protons has been shown to have an effect on their behaviour.

> Experience has shown that light and matter both behave like separate particles and also like waves. This paradoxical conclusion obliged us to abandon, on the plane of atomic magnitudes, a causal description of nature in the ordinary space-time system, and in its place to set up invisible fields of probability in multi-dimensional spaces. (Jung, 1960: 229)

The space–time continuum (as normally understood) and consciousness therefore reflect or mirror one another, because consciousness organizes and differentiates information in order to make it intelligible. He also proposes that contents of the unconscious, such as archetypes, have a non-psychic aspect. Drawing on his study of synchronicity, he directs attention to a large number of instances of coincidence between consciousness and material happenings. He believes that telepathy and clairvoyance are

> completely explicable on the assumption of a psychically relative space–time continuum. As soon as a psychic content crosses the threshold of consciousness, the synchronistic marginal phenomena disappear, time and space resume their normal sway, and consciousness is once more isolated in its subjectivity. We have here one of those instances which can best be understood in terms of the physicist's idea of 'complementarity'. When an unconscious content passes over into consciousness its synchronistic manifestation ceases; conversely, synchronistic phenomena can be evoked by putting the subject into an unconscious state (trance). (Jung, 1960: 231–2)

This suggestion draws attention to the idea that a three-dimensional conception of the individual has consequences, in turn, for the ways in which communication between individuals can be understood. If the person is deeply permeated with collective energies that evade the structures of language, but can, to some extent express themselves through symbols, then symbolic forms become the crossroads, or site of interchange, between social and individuated aspects of being. Moreover, I will suggest ways in which the transmission of emotional energy between persons can also be seen to generate symbols. This idea expands the sense in which visionary or dream experiences can be regarded as social. Not only are many of their symbolic contents rooted in a *sense* of the social, they can also express the exchanges of energy that constitute the bonds of personal relationships. This idea can be explored in relation to the tantric Buddhist references to consorts, including symbolic consort deities, and descriptions of sexual, emotional, and religious relationships in some tantric Buddhist biographies.

Consorts and Communication

One of the difficulties presented by images of consort deities in sexual congress is their portrayal of the union of male and female on both meditative (symbolic) and physical (often ritual) levels. Rather than stressing any one of these four elements, I will explore the ways in which they interact, aiming thereby to illustrate a dynamic between human and sacred dimensions of being, and its implications for communication between tantric Buddhist consorts.

On a symbolic level, deities (whether consorts or individuals) have a number of features that are prescribed and imbued with meaning by the tradition. These include their colour, posture, ritual gestures (*mudras*), and various implements (for example, weapons). In addition, there are some attributes, even on single figures, that refer to the male/female pair. Perhaps the most notable example is the holding of the *dorje* and bell.

Landlaw and Weber refer to some of these points in their description of the iconography of Vajradhara. In this instance he is drawn seated in a meditation posture together with his consort, Vajradhatu Ishvari, in what is termed a *yab-yum* (father-mother) embrace (Landaw & Weber, 1993: 112–13). However, he also holds a *dorje* (male) in his right hand, and a bell (female) in his left. This indicates an added level of symbolism because the male/female pair is also used to refer to two important Mahayana qualities of enlightenment: *upaya* – 'compassionate method' (male); and *prajna* – 'wisdom' (female). Wisdom, in this instance, is closely related to conceptions of *sunyata* 'emptiness', found in both the *Perfection of Wisdom* texts and within Madhyamika philosophy.

While both 'wisdom' and 'compassionate method' are important concepts in Mahayana Buddhism, it is tantra that emphasizes the interaction between the two, and suggests that they can be generated simultaneously, 'as two aspects of a single moment of consciousness' (Landlaw & Weber, 1993: 114). This is because consort deities refer to an additional layer of symbolism, related to the union of the *kayas* of the subtle body. Landlaw and Weber explore this layer, suggesting that 'wisdom' generates the *dharmakaya*, while 'method' is at the root of the *sambhogakaya* and the *nirmanakaya* (which together constitute the 'form bodies'). In other words, while the appearance of a deity is related to various techniques, such as visualization, an awareness that this appearance is 'empty' is essential for the generation of a deity to be complete. They therefore explain *yab–yum* symbolism as follows:

> The father, Vajradhara, stands for method, which in this context is the very subtlest level of consciousness pervaded by inconceivable bliss. The mother, Vajradhatu Ishvari, stands for wisdom, the clear light penetration into emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality. The image of Vajradhara and his consort in embrace, therefore, has nothing to do with ordinary sense gratification. Rather, it is a potent symbol of the blissful, simultaneous union of method and wisdom. (Landlaw & Weber, 1993: 114)

However, this interpretation emphasizes the symbolic meaning of the image at the expense of its more literal physical or human implications. I have suggested that the etheric body, as expressed in each of the three 'bodies of the Buddha', contains, in varying degrees, both abstract and material aspects; and will therefore argue that,

although the majority of tantric Buddhist practitioners (being celibate monks and uninitiated lay persons) relate to consorts primarily on an imaginative level, this engagement is enriched by the fact that consorts are not only present in static images, but are also brought to life through the popular genre of biography, the legendary life-stories of consort adepts. These stories document a conception of tantric relationships that often explores tensions between the enlightened and more human elements of the individual characters and their sexual partnerships. Moreover, although literal, ritualized sexuality is comparatively rare, I suggest that it plays an important role in the generation of tantric Buddhist symbolism, and in the values and conflicts that permeate the tradition.

One's perspective on consort symbolism also has implications for the study of gender in tantra because, while male yogis are thought to retain lofty, abstract, religious goals, women are sometimes regarded as 'ritual instruments' participating on a purely physical level (Shaw, 1994: 8). Shaw's insistence that, behind images of positive and 'exuberant' yoginis, are complex, real, women, who not only actively enriched tantric Buddhism, but also demanded certain forms of ritual etiquette and worship from male practitioners, is therefore a useful counter-balance (Shaw, 1994: 3, 12, 13).

Shaw's methods have been called into question by scholars such as Davidson who argues that female participation in Buddhism declined significantly in the medieval period in India and that there is scarce evidence for the influence of female gurus that Shaw suggests (Davidson, 2002: 92). Part of the problem is that Shaw uses notions of agency and liberation which do not fit easily into the historical contexts that she is describing. She suggests, for example, that tantric Buddhism can foster 'an ideal of cooperative, mutually liberative relationships between women and men' (Shaw, 1994: 4). However, she refines the notion of agency, for both men and women, by suggesting that in this context it relies, to some extent, on an openness to penetration by external forces, including, notably, the qualities or energies of the consort.

> The self (or nonself as it were) that enters into this practice is an unboundaried, nonessentialist … dynamic, fluidic one that can be permeated by the energy, breath, and mind of another person. The yoga of union is predicated precisely upon this ability to be infused by the energy and mental states of another person. (Shaw, 1994: 168)

Whether this radical potential was realized in specific tantric relationships and rituals remains a difficult question. However, I suggest that the lack of prominent women in the external structures of tantric Buddhism does not exclude the possibility that some women had mental and emotional involvements with male consorts, or that such involvement influenced developments in tantra, perhaps in more subtle ways than Shaw appears to suggest. One way of exploring this possibility is to examine the implications of the ways in which the three *kayas* are described as interacting with each other for communication between consorts. While Landlaw and Weber concentrate of the union of the *dharmakaya* and the 'form bodies', I suggest that the mediating role of the *sambhogakaya* (between the *dharmakaya* and the *nirmanakaya*) is an important link for our understanding, not only of the 'symbolic' and 'physical' aspects of consorts, but also of the ways in which they can relate to one another.

On one level, I am arguing that, just as individuals have a number of different aspects, relationships can also have various dimensions. Thus, while consort symbolism may express the union of 'male' and 'female' qualities within the individual psyche, it may also refer to experiences of fusion between people. The bonds of personal relationships may be rooted in a kind of collective effervescence, similar to that described by Durkheim in the context of the social relationships. Moreover, relationships may also have a collective unconscious. Submerged beneath the cognitive, rational, apprehension of the partnership, it is the quality or soul which animates it (Jung, 1960: 345). Admitting a specific individual, rather than the social (in the more abstract sense) into one's being, involves a degree of emotional intensity. Consorts, therefore, negotiate tensions between the individual and the social in ways that have consequences, not only for society, but for the personal, or inner life. They therefore act as a pivotal axis in tantra, evoking a sacred union at the heart of a three-dimensional communication matrix.

In addition, this three-dimensional approach can be applied to another puzzle that tantric Buddhism presents. Not only do pairs of consorts have symbolic and human counterparts, it is suggested that humans can communicate, or unite with, apparitional partners. The first Dalai Lama, for example, refers, in an explanation of certain Kalacakra practices, to different kinds of *mudras* (seals) that can bring about transformations in the subtle body, and therefore aid the practitioner seeking enlightenment (Mullin, 1991: 250). Speaking from the perspective of a male adept, he designates the *Karmamudra* as a human female with whom one has a karmic link. She unites with the meditator on a physical level. A *Jnanamudra* is a female projection, created within the imagination, while the Mahamudra 'refers to the empty bodies that actually arise as consorts from the appearances within one's own mind' (Mullin, 1991: 251). In addition, he argues that

> the yogis who actually arise within the empty body of Kalacakra and Consort are of three types; sharp, middling and dull. The first of these three rely exclusively upon mahamudra. They are able to experience the unchanging great bliss solely through union with her. The second must first rely upon jnanamudra to generate a basis of bliss through which they are able to enter into mahamudra. Practitioners in the third category, i.e., those of dull capacity, must first rely upon a karmamudra, or actual physical consort, in order to induce the experience of bliss. (Mullin, 1991: 252)

Shaw critiques this kind of explanation, suggesting that the First Dalai Lama is lauding union with an imagined partner as the path of a superior adept, while union with a human partner is for those less able, and arguing that the demands of celibate monasticism, together with potential dangers for novice initiates, are at the root of this view (Shaw, 1994: 146–8). While these points are valid, Shaw's emphasis on human women may lead her to overlook the subtlety (and possible irony) of the Dalai Lama's argument. An alternative reading of his explanation points to *Mahamudra* as a form of union that combines human elements with the energy of creative imagination, an energy based on the concept that both partners are also sacred beings, deities, who are, in addition, 'empty'. Therefore a practitioner who can engage in sexual union, while maintaining the awareness that the union operates on a number of different levels is more advanced.

Moreover, I will suggest that both male and female consorts can project and apprehend the subtle body in *sambhogakaya* form, thereby contacting one another in dreams and visions. The symbolic contents of such dreams and visions can therefore be explored in terms of the communication of shifts in the emotional energy that constitutes their partnership. In other words, the fusion of ideas and emotions, implied by Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness can be extended, beyond its applications for society in an impersonal sense, and explored as an aspect of some sexual relationships.

Outline of the Book

Chapter 2 explores portrayals of social and emotional conflict in tantric biographies, focusing on the social roles of 'mad saints' and Dalai Lamas in Tibet, and their contrasting attitudes towards celibacy and altered states of consciousness. This contrast has been examined by scholars such as Samuel, who draws from a Weberian theoretical framework, in addition to historical analysis, to suggest that the differences between 'crazy siddhas' and monastic philosophers (such as those within the Gelukpa school, headed by the Dalai Lamas) can be understood in terms of a broader opposition, that between' shamanic' and 'clerical' authority (Samuel, 1993: 19, 308). For Samuel, the distinction between the two is hardly absolute, as both 'idea types' can be found within a single legendary figure. However, I suggest ways in which the work of Durkheim (1995 [1912]) and Turner (1995 [1969]) can be used to further illuminate these tensions surrounding altered states of consciousness, arguing that they are a manifestation of broader social conflicts, between social structure and emotional energy. Although they can be seen as opposing forces, both are essential to the life of society and both contribute to the roles of the Dalai Lamas and the 'mad saints'.

Following this, I focus on the idea that polar tensions, related to the sacred, may be incorporated into the individual. Within tantric Buddhism, this process can be explored in the context of an individual's engagement with tantric deities, both as distinct entities and as aspects of the practitioner's own being. Eliade's (1974 [1951]) analysis of the 'shamanic crisis' is useful in this regard, because he draws from Durkheim's sacred/profane polarity to suggest that the inner conflicts of the individual can be both influenced by, and interpreted within the context of, social forces. Using the term 'shamanic identity' has its problems (Humphrey, 1996). Shamanism is not a unified religious tradition, but is a term employed, largely by western scholarship, to describe a variety of religious practices that are located within distinct cultures (Vitebsky, 1995: 10–11). Nonetheless, I will argue that Eliade's ideas, if used as a theoretical model, rather than as a definitive statement of ethnographic reality, are useful for an analysis of the ways in which altered states of consciousness can play a pivotal role in the biographies of individuals.

Chapter 3 examines the portrayal of consort deities in Hindu mythology, focusing on Siva and Krishna and their consorts. While maintaining caution regarding Flood's assertion that 'the religious culture of the tantras is essentially Hindu and the Buddhist tantric material can be shown to have derived from Saiva sources', I

suggest that an exploration of consort deities in the Hindu context is important for a scholarly understanding of the consort relationship in Buddhist tantra (Flood, 1996: 158). Both Hindu and Buddhist tantra arose within the context of, and demonstrated an ambivalent response to, the surrounding *brahmanical* religion of India, a religion that revolved around the central ritual of sacrifice, and I therefore explore this sacrificial theme. Drawing from Hubert and Mauss (1964 [1898]), I argue that both sacrifice and consort relationships are related to an oscillation between division and union that is fuelled by transmissions of emotional energy.

Chapter 4 is the first of two chapters that focus on the theme of death. It concentrates on tantric Buddhist rituals utilizing the subtle body, such as those within the *Kalacakra Tantra* and within the Six Yogas of Naropa. While the mandala in the introduction is concerned with ritual space, this chapter examines ritual time, suggesting that the phrase 'eternity' describes the impact of the sacred upon temporal perceptions. Whereas profane time is more characterized by differentiation, sacred time is characterized by continuity, between the participants of the ritual, and with the ancestors.

The interaction between eternal and differentiated states is related to both to the *trikaya* theory and the etheric body. A key idea that translates *trikaya* theory into ritual practice is the attainment of the three bodies of the Buddha, through a concentrated awareness of three analogous states, waking (*nirmanakaya*), deep sleep or death (*dharmakaya*), and dreaming (*sambhogakaya*). While death is seen as the most subtle, and therefore the most profound of these states, dreaming plays an important intermediary role. If the eternal is related to the collective, then dreams may 'communicate' emotions between consorts, across the boundaries of time and space.

Subtle, luminous states of being can be linked to higher vibration frequencies, an idea not dissimilar to Durkheim's notion that the sacred is related to the excitation of social forces. The substances of the subtle body, while extremely rarefied, are nevertheless physical. Being imbued with consciousness, however, they can also be regarded as symbolic. For example, Mahayana Buddhism uses the term *bodhicitta* to refer to a state of 'mind' (*citta*), specifically a 'compassionate' orientation towards achieving enlightenment (*bodhi*). However, in Vajrayana, two further layers of meaning are encompassed by the term. The raising or arousing of *bodhicitta* also refers to the raising and control of subtle substances or drops (*bindu*) and winds (*prana*), within the central channel. In addition, *bodhicitta* is related to actual and metaphorical forms of sexual union (Samuel, 1989: 199). For example, the channels deemed to exist on either side of the central channel are seen as representing the male and female poles within the individual (Samuel, 1989: 206).

Drawing from Turner (1967), Hertz (1960 [1909]), and Jung (1980 [1953]), I suggest that the body can symbolize, and therefore become imbued with, collective forces, so that society can transform the body as a whole, or particular constituents, into collective representations. If consorts can be seen as constituting a small 'society', then *bodhicitta* may also be a symbolic reference to an exchange of emotional energy between partners.

Chapter 5 explores this exchange within the biography of Yeshe Tsogyel. The genre of tantric biography is primarily a teaching tool for the tradition, rather than a

record of historical accuracy, and it should be noted that although the events described are set in the 8th century CE, the work was written in the 18th, by Taksham, a lama who had a reputation as a divine madman, and who frames the text as a revealed treasure (*terma*) teaching (Dowman, 1996: xv–xvi). The work is, however, useful for the exploration of identity in tantra, as she and her consort, Padmasambhava, are portrayed as human beings, who are also incarnations of deities (Dowman, 1996: xiv). They therefore have sacred, in addition to individual, identities. The communication between consorts can thus be analysed in terms of its archetypal aspects, because they are regarded as the founding *yab-yum* (father-mother) of tantric Buddhism in Tibet, especially by the Ningmapa school (Dowman, 1996: xii–xiii).

Chapter 6 examines the emotion of anger, as explored in tantric Buddhism's portrayal of wrathful deities. I suggest that, while Amitabha is associated with the transformation to the tendency to 'grasp' in emotional relationships, wrathful deities are concerned with the transformation of the opposite mind-poison, anger, manifesting itself as an impulse to avoid unpleasant experiences, and an urge to distinguish oneself as a separate being. Jung, in an exposition of Hindu tantra, suggests that hatred is closely bound up with the process of individuation (Jung, 1996: 4): 'Hatred is the thing that divides, the force which discriminates. It is so when two people fall in love; they are at first almost identical. There is a great deal of *participation mystique*, so they need hatred in order to separate themselves' (Jung, 1996: 5). He also points to a certain irony in this process, as hatred focuses the mind in such a way as to act as a great binding force (Jung, 1996: 6). I therefore draw from Mauss's (1972 [1904]) study of magic to examine ways in which the individual in tantric Buddhism is conceived, because this study suggests how magicians may incorporate certain qualities, or social forces within the 'self', a process which I suggest is not unlike acculturation.

Chapter 7 discusses concepts of transmission and religious authority in tantric Buddhism, utilizing a conception of charisma derived from a reading of Durkheim's work on collective representations. It explores the likeness of tantric teaching lineages to kinship structures (Mills, 2000: 17–20) and examines the implications of sexual imagery in tantra for notions of reproduction and perpetuation, both within tantric Buddhism and within societies (Mills, 2000: 24). Durkheim suggests that society perpetuates itself, not only through physical reproduction, but also through the transmission of language, knowledge, and emotional energy, between the generations (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 434–5). This transmission is intimately linked with collective consciousness, and I therefore argue that the sexual imagery in tantric Buddhism refers to the collective consciousness of consorts, which is seen in terms of the origin of collective energies and ideas more broadly. However, this origin, despite its associations with unity, is also a source of social and personal conflict, and it is to these conflicts that I turn in Chapter 2.

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Chapter 2

Consciousness, Power, and Renunciation

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I suggested that ritual can be understood to negotiate tensions between the individual and society, and thereby contribute to the maintenance of social order. This is not a static process, however, but one characterized by the exchange of emotional energy between the individual practitioner and the power imbued in socially recognized forms, such as the tantric deity. Visionary experience and heightened states of emotional life are therefore of immense importance to religious identity. Symbols, such as the mandala, express this relationship, being both structured, and perpetually in motion. They are therefore key tools in the attempt to understand the dynamic and processual relationships that human beings have with different aspects of the self and with others. Being signs that are thrown up at the crossroads between social bonds as passionate feeling, cultural codifications of experience, and expressions of individual identity, they are images which express the way that these facets of experience interact, both consciously, in collective representations, and unconsciously, as archetypes.

I have also argued, however, that Durkheim's theory should be viewed three-dimensionally. He not only explores tensions between the individual and society, but suggests ways in which they are played out within the individual psyche. He also proposes an additional tension, within the social, between moral life, as a series of prohibitions and obligations, and the sentiments which attract human beings into mutual interaction. This chapter focuses on material from tantric biographies, which explore these tensions by describing ways in which the practitioner's identity is characterized by conflict. This conflict can manifest itself within the individual, in forms of extreme emotional reactions and behaviour, which, I suggest, bear some relation to Eliade's concept of the shamanic crisis. At the same time, although shamans are apparently isolated figures, they play a role in the broader public imagination. Expressing ways in which the vitality of social life disrupts order, they are also thereby regarded as potentially dangerous. One such figure is the 'mad saint', in Buddhist tantra. Despite their personal content, stories of mad saints are shaped by ideas and conflicts within the tradition more broadly, and the role they present has points in common with the role of the shaman, as described by Eliade (1974 [1951]). I therefore suggest that his insights present a model, through which the social and psychological forces forging tantric identity can be investigated.

Similarly, social conflict is discernible in struggles between established religion, and religious movements. While the first is characterized by stability, with fixed, proscribed, rituals and symbols, and some pressure to conform to structural modes of being, religious movements tend to be more spontaneous, looser in structure, and

smaller in numbers, because they aim either to generate or to recapture a state of emotional intensity (Turner, 1974: 248–50). This conflict is highlighted in tantric texts, both within the tradition, as an ongoing play of words between monastic scholars and mad saints, and in ways by which tantra distinguishes itself from society more generally, by rejecting, for example, lay attitudes to relational life. While, on the one hand, individuals often separate themselves off, at the beginning of their religious career, by refusing conventional marriage, on the other, they come into conflict with the values of celibate monasticism through the formation of consort relationships. By crossing traditional divisions in their choice of partner, tantric consorts express something social, partly, but not only, because unconventional behaviour can be a point of recognition between tantric practitioners. Nonetheless, I do not believe that inter-caste alliances were formed simply to make a social statement, but were, rather, based on forms of attraction that transcended boundaries.

Themes of conflict, disturbance, and disruption in tantric biographies are useful in the wider study of religion because they suggest ways in which the concept of energy is explored beyond the ritual context. I have suggested that the symbolic contents of altered states of consciousness illustrate movements in consciousness, between social and individuated orientations. States of balance are thus described by ritual texts as the result of continual transformations, expressing the dynamic of the social that can, for example, be characterized by the renewal or discharge of energy. In order for these processes to be set in motion, however, the practitioner utilizes a series of underlying tensions, which can be expressed in terms of polarity – between union and differentiation, life and death, self and other, chaos and order, bonding and separation, and female and male.

By exaggerating tensions between these opposites, tantric Buddhism explores the dynamic, charged, and fluid nature of their relationship. Their subsequent traversal, subversion, and transcendence, therefore, suggests not only the acquisition of power in an abstract sense, but also entails a transformation in the way that initiates are orientated to the world. In particular, I will suggest that tantric Buddhism engages the emotional and the inner life, because it relates to communication, between different aspects of being, and between persons. The intimacy of sexual relationships, together with their expression of the tension between male and female, can provide particularly intense examples of this communication. This point is overlooked by scholars who suggest that women were ritual instruments in tantra, and thereby argue that consorts attained states of 'blissful union' with an abstract void, rather than each other.

Tucci, for example, notes the rising of kundalini energy as a process of liberating consciousness above and beyond conceptions of subject and object in dualistic thought, but does not apply this intuition to his discussion of tantra's sexual symbolism and imagery (Tucci, 1961: 115). He characterizes literal interpretations of consort deities in union, intimacy between women and men, as an institutional corruption, a deviation from the esoteric purity of the original teachings of the *Diamond Vehicle*, and a distortion of its underlying truth (Tucci, 1961: 123). He goes on to describe the purpose of consort deity worship as a sublimation of sensual feelings, and a rejection of human love, in favour of religious passion. Women are therefore largely avoided or, if they enter the drama, their role is restricted to one of 'instruments of salvation'

(Tucci, 1961: 131). Similarly, Jackson associates mysticism in tantra with celibacy and asceticism, coming to the conclusion that

> an analysis of the prerequisites and procedures of ritualised sexuality reveals that neither sexual pleasure nor the male–female 'relationship' … seem to play much of a part … a physical consort … the Action Seal is described instrumentally … and has as its purpose not the release of sexual energy but its sublimation. (Jackson, 1992: 92–3).

In contrast, Ray avoids the assumption that the sexuality of outcaste women was used as an object, regardless of her personal qualities. He does so by examining consort partnerships beyond the ritual setting, choosing instead to focus on the context of legendary life-stories. Locating the emergence of tantra within India in the 5th century CE, he explores biographies of Indian Buddhist siddhas who are thought to have lived between the 8th and 12th centuries. He suggests that

> one of the most interesting motifs of the male/female relationships depicted in these biographies is the degree of communication between the partners. In Tantrism communication is essential for spiritual growth, and transformed passion (total appreciation and love which expects nothing in return) is the driving force of communication … relationships between men and women often play a significant role in the ultimate success of both. (Ray, 1989: 196)

This communication, I suggest, is enabled partly because yogins and yoginis share a common ground, a passionate relationship with the religious tradition itself. This is illustrated by their refusal to enter into conventional marriage, because of their commitment to spiritual development (Ray, 1989: 193). Both Mandarava and Laksminkara opposed the marriages that were arranged for them in striking ways that suggest a degree of inner turmoil. Mandarava escaped from a heavily guarded palace, threw away her clothes, pulled out her hair, and scratched her face with her fingernails (Ray, 1989: 192). Laksminkara gave away her dowry to the poor, dismissed her servants, feigned insanity, smeared her body with ashes, refused doctors, and subsequently lived off refuse and slept in cremation grounds (Ray, 1989: 193). In both cases, the opposition to social convention is linked to a second theme, transformation through death. This becomes more explicit at another point in Mandarava's life, when opponents to her relationship with Padmasambhava tried (unsuccessfully) to kill both of them (Ray, 1989: 196).

Ray suggests that such hostility from the surrounding society was provoked by a disregard for caste distinctions, embedded within tantric rituals and displayed by adepts' attitudes. For example, Saraha, who was a *brahman* and a monk when he married his consort, the arrowsmith's daughter, declared that he 'did not see any distinction' (Ray, 1989: 196). In contrast, another high-caste scholar and monk, Abhayakaragupta, refuses three separate invitations of companionship, raw meat, and a *ganacakra* feast (consisting of ritual eating, drinking, singing and dancing) from three low-caste women, because of his concern with social status. As a result, he misses the opportunity to gain accomplishment (*siddhi*), because he does not recognize the identity of the women who had approached him – that of the deity Vajrayogini (Ray, 1989: 196–7).

Another phrase that tantra uses to express a similar idea is the expression 'one taste'. Consort relationships are distinguished in tantra from mundane sexuality, because they are thought to have the quality of *sunyata* or emptiness. While this partly refers to a lack of excessive emotional attachment, it is also a reference to 'loss of self' in simultaneous orgasm, whereby

> both partners experience the 'transcendental emotion' called in the tantras *samarasa* or 'one taste'. Here, neither partner is distinct. It is impossible to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. This experience of 'wholeness' or 'sameness' is accompanied by intensely blissful feelings. (Willis, 1987a: 70)

On one level, 'one taste' has a ritual origin, which refers to the performance of an act which is usually forbidden. The prohibition may be upon the substances consumed, for example, flesh, excrement, sexual fluids, or alcohol. It may also refer to the social positions of those sharing the meal, because eating is an act of communion. In the early Indian context, for example, it was forbidden to eat with members of other castes. In another sense, 'one taste' refers to the mad saint's 'transgressive equanimity', which is thought to be rooted in an altered state of consciousness, whereby all experiences are 'consumed' with equal enthusiasm (Samuel, 1993: 306).

The relationship between the two is explored in the legend of Luipa, one of the eighty-four Buddhist *siddhas*. At the beginning of the story, he is a king of Sri Lanka, but desires to renounce this role because of his contempt for wealth and power. When he first tries to escape, he is bound in gold chains by a group of his brothers and courtiers. However, he bribes his guards, and leaves disguised in rags. He then exchanges his golden throne for a deerskin covering, and sleeps on a bed of ashes (Dowman, 1985: 33). Living as a beggar, he sleeps in cremation grounds and receives transmission from dakinis, until he encounters a courtesan in a tavern, who suggests that he still retains a pea-sized obscuration of royal pride in his heart, and gives him putrid food, which he discards. She reprimands him for this, saying that his concern with the purity of his food prevents him from attaining Nirvana. As a result, he eats the entrails of fish, disembowelled by fishermen, in order 'to destroy his discursive thought-patterns and his prejudices and preconceptions … to transform the fish-guts into the nectar of pure awareness by insight into the nature of things as emptiness' (Dowman, 1985: 34).

Dowman suggests that the reference to royal pride can be understood in terms of racial, caste and social discriminations. On one level the practice of 'dung-eating' symbolizes the acceptance of all sensual experiences, transcending samsaric attachment to some and aversion for others. On another, it indicates a willingness to undergo social censure, because *brahmans* normally avoid fish, while fish-guts were thought of as 'fit only for dogs, the lowest life-form … such a practice … would have made him unclean in the eyes of his former peers, untouchable and inapproachable' (Dowman, 1985: 35). This practice may also indicate a reference to the consumption, in some tantric circles, of five forbidden substances, *mada* (wine), *matsya* (fish), *mamsa* (meat), *mudra* (grains, kidney beans, or aphrodisiacs), and *maithuna* (ritual sexuality) (Bharati, 1992 [1965]): 70). While this ritual is associated with the most extreme Hindu tantric groups, I will suggest that it remains evident within Buddhist

tantric rituals, although often in subtle, visualized forms. In addition, I will argue that it underlies a series of emotional and social tensions described in Buddhist tantric biographies. Therefore, in order to explore this relationship, I will discuss the concept of one taste in the context of Durkheim's consideration of the mechanism between totem and taboo, which rests upon his theory of the sacred.

Structure and Communitas in 'Mad Saints'

For Durkheim, the concept of boundaries is intimately associated with the sacred, because the distinguishing feature of the relationship between the sacred and the profane is their polarization. He characterizes this separation as

> absolute. In the history of human thought, there is no other example of two categories of things as profoundly differentiated or as radically opposed to one another. (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 36)

Nevertheless, he describes religious mechanisms, such as the relationship between totem and taboo, as being shaped by the interaction between sacred and profane states of being, asserting that the transformative qualities of this contact are essential for the sacred to be of value (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 38). This paradox is at the heart of his suggestion that the sacred is characterized by ambivalence. Being defined by its distinction from the profane, the sacred creates a tension that can never be fully resolved. Instead, he suggests that tribes in Australia provide an example of societies in which there is a continual alternation between sacred and profane time. The daily business of life is interrupted during ritual gatherings, wherein music, dance, and less restricted sexuality both stimulate and express emotional energy, or collective effervescence, generated by humans' proximity to one another (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 218). For example, in the Australian *corroboree*,

> the very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant. Once the individuals are gathered together, a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation. Every emotion expressed resonates without interference … amplified each time it is echoed. (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 217–18)

This energy alights on collective representations, such as the totem, which in turn becomes sacred. During ordinary life, therefore, the totem is surrounded by a series of prohibitions, separating it from profane existence. These prohibitions together constitute the phenomenon of taboo, which acts like a barrier, preventing contact between profane and sacred persons and objects, because to touch the sacred is to become 'infected' with its power. Taboo acts to maintain the necessary distance from, and respect for, the energy of collective consciousness. Nevertheless, for society to maintain its vitality, communion with, as well as separation from, the sacred, is essential. For this purpose, ceremonies exist during which, after a series of ritual precautions, the totem is eaten (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 338). The rite imbues participants with renewed vigour and energy, through a particularly intimate

form of contact, which can be understood as a transgression of the taboo. It also, paradoxically, reinforces it because

> there is no positive rite that does not fundamentally constitute a veritable sacrilege. Man can have no dealings with the sacred beings without crossing the barrier that must ordinarily keep him separate from them. (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 342)

Social energy is therefore contained within boundaries, which are periodically torn and reconstituted by religious rituals. However, the conception of the idea of force is not limited to specific events or vivacious encounters, these are simply some of its most visible and stimulating forms. Rather, Durkheim identifies force as one of the most fundamental religious concepts, in the sense of a form of power which animates the motion and life of every being, including stones, sun, moon, stars, animals, humans and the wind. He gives several examples of this idea, including the terms, *wakan*, *orenda*, and *mana*, used by the Sioux, Iroquois and Melanesians respectively (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 194–6). He believes that it is this almost instinctive awareness of energy is not merely imagined, but the perception of a reality which, because of its nature, cannot always be precisely articulated. However, its importance is emphasized by his suggestion that the genesis of concepts of energy in the natural sciences was this basic religious feeling (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 206).

Despite its importance, energy, for Durkheim, is not a single, unified concept. On the one hand, the sacred is contagious, based on intense emotions which, if unchecked, can rage like a fever out of control (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 328). On the other, it is also a moral force which may have uplifting qualities but which also demands restrictions, privations and sacrifices of the individual in the interests of social order (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 210–11). The combination of both of these facets is the energy which Durkheim describes as collective consciousness, and it is for this reason that I will suggest that Durkheim's theory of consciousness can be interpreted, not simply in terms of dualities, but as a three-dimensional system. While both kinds of force penetrate the individual, and in this sense violate a completely isolated and distinct sense of individuality, they are also in conflict with one another.

The anthropology of Turner explicitly concentrates on, and draws out these three-dimensional aspects of Durkheim's work. He notes that

> Durkheim … is often difficult to understand precisely because, at different times, he uses the term 'society' to represent, on the one hand, a set of jural and religious maxims and norms, coercing and constraining the individual and, on the other, 'an actual living and animating force' closely approximate to what we are here calling 'communitas'. (Turner, 1974: 251)

He goes on to distinguish his theory of communitas from Durkheim's theory of force, by emphasizing that, for Durkheim, force acts in 'anonymous and impersonal' ways upon the individual (Turner, 1974: 251). However, because collective consciousness is based upon an intensity of energy, I suggest that both Turner and Durkheim refer to a level of communication between beings which is beyond language and therefore, to some degree, unconscious and almost telepathic in nature.

Turner describes his concept of communitas as, 'a modality of social interrelatedness … which I oppose to the concept of social structure' (Turner, 1974: 231). This opposition is not absolute, but a continual tension, which he explains using the example of three-dimensional rituals of transformation, facilitated by the passage between boundaries. Drawing on the work of Arnold van Gennep, Turner describes these rituals as having three phases: separation, margin, and reintegration. In the first, an initiate enters into ritual space/time and withdraws from their usual position in the social structure. He is careful, however, to point out that the ritual mechanism itself takes account of social order; firstly as the structure from which the initiate is being separated, and secondly because the ritual has a specific place in society. When reintegrated, the initiate is re-established in society, often (but not always) taking more responsibilities or acquiring greater power or social status (Turner, 1974: 232).

When initiation is a preparation for adulthood or marriage, changes in social status are relatively clear. However, other forms of initiation grant powers, not involved in everyday life, but of a mystical nature. In either case, alteration is brought about through the experience of the middle phase, which Turner terms margin or *limen* (the Latin word for threshold). He describes this state as analogous to going through a tunnel, for the initiate's condition is 'ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between' (Turner, 1974: 232). It is the position of liminality that encourages *communitas*, a spontaneously arising sense of wholeness, between humanity and nature, within persons, and as a social ideal of equality and comradeship, which he contrasts to the more highly differentiated roles of social structure (Turner, 1974: 237).

In the liminal phase of rituals, initiates are often secluded from structured society in some way, 'they become men apart – and it is surprising how often the term "sacred" may be translated as "set apart" or "on one side" in various societies' (Turner, 1974: 241). They can also be given sacred knowledge, in the form of songs, dances, masks, or tribal lore (Turner, 1974: 238–9). This introduction to the group's symbolic life is particularly well suited to periods of liminality, because religious symbols embody qualities of tension between structure and communitas, being both shaped culturally, and communicated as experiential (often sensual) knowledge. Symbols thus express a duality, which Turner, like Durkheim, sees as integral to the human condition. He explains that, 'structural custom, once broken, reveals two human traits. One is liberated intellect, whose liminal product is myth and protophilosophical speculation; the other is bodily energy, represented by animal disguises and gestures' (Turner, 1974: 253).

Although based on an analysis of rituals, Turner's theory of liminality is not restricted to this context. There are periods during which a whole society

> takes cognizance of itself; or rather where, in an interval between their incumbency of specific fixed positions, members of that society may attain an approximation, however limited, to a global view of man's place in the cosmos and his relations with other classes of visible and invisible entities. (Turner, 1974: 240)

Such times may generate the growth of religious movements, wherein members seek to minimize gender or status differences, by the holding of property communally, or the rejection of the structures of monogamous marriage (Turner, 1974: 246–8). Nevertheless, within societies, communitas is reliant upon, as well as opposed to structure.

> My focus here is rather on cultural – and hence institutionalized expressions of communitas, communitas as seen from the perspective of structure, or as incorporated into a potentially dangerous but nevertheless vitalizing moment, domain, or enclave.
>
> Communitas is, existentially speaking, and in its origins, purely spontaneous and self-generating … it is essentially opposed to structure, as anti-matter is hypothetically opposed to matter. Thus, even when communitas becomes normative its religious expressions become closely hedged about by rules and interdictions – which act like a lead container of a dangerous radioactive isotope. Yet exposure to or immersion in communitas seems to be an indispensable human social requirement. People have a real need … to doff the masks, cloaks, apparel, and insignia of status from time to time even if only to don the masks of liminal masquerade. But they do this freely. (Turner, 1974: 243)

He suggests that this need is expressed by members of society who voluntarily acquire a permanently liminal status, by choosing a condition of poverty. Many religious figures signify renunciation through unkempt bodies and clothing (Turner, 1974: 244). On one level, renunciation and periods of liminality are associated with transformations within the individual, through which they may gain gnosis (Turner, 1974: 258). On another, this power is attained by a participation in a broader social tension, between structure and communitas (Turner, 1974: 260–61). While the individual may utilize this tension, they may also come to symbolize it. Appearing to distance themselves from society, renunciates incarnate its polarities, and thereby provide an important function.

This idea can be explored using biographies of mad saints in Buddhist tantra. One example is the biography of Drukpa Kunley which combines semi-historical accounts with stories which express his status as 'the archetypical divine madman' (Dowman, 1980: 28). Set in the 15th century, the story identifies Drukpa Kunley as an incarnation of the adept Saraha (Dowman, 1980: 35). Although he began his career as a monk, and took initiations and empowerments from lamas, he soon gave up his ordination and lived as a wandering mendicant. At this point, he also abandoned systematic yoga and meditation, but was proficient in shape-shifting and magical display (Dowman, 1980: 38–9). Many of the following stories are concerned with his subsequent enlightened activities, including drinking *chung* (an alcoholic beverage made of grain), taking numerous consorts, and singing rude songs (Dowman, 1980: 62). While his behaviour is challenged in a number of places, he often comes to be respected as an emanation of the Buddha, even by members of the monastic establishment. This is because his actions are not motivated by anger. Rather, they have a spontaneous quality, which tends to bring the situations he comes across to fruition.

Although Drukpa Kunley did not stay with anyone for long, a number of the women he was involved with went on to live in seclusion, attaining enlightenment (Dowman, 1980: 83). On one occasion, while visiting a monastery where the

monks are performing a ritual for their deceased lama in the hope that he will take an auspicious rebirth and find them again, Drukpa Kunley notices that the lama is already there, but in the form of a donkey because he had overloaded his pack horses. Initially outraged, the monks realize that Drukpa is telling the truth, and care for the donkey (Dowman, 1980: 77–8). He also murders an old woman, at her request, an action which outrages the bystanders, who are not aware that she would have died that night anyway. Drukpa Kunley seals her body in a storeroom, leaving instructions that she is not to be disturbed for seven days. After six, her son returns home, is told the shocking news, and breaks down the door. He is astonished to find that the room is filled with a pleasant smell, and that her body has been transformed into a rainbow body of light, except for the big toe (Dowman, 1980: 121–3).

Another figure who comes to represent tensions in Tibetan social and religious attitudes is the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683–1706). However, while Drukpa Kunley appeared to be in control of his situation, displaying both strength and humour, the Sixth Dalai Lama is a more tragic figure. Aris suggests that he 'strove against all opposition to be the person he believed himself to be. His rebellion against the role imposed on him by society was certainly one of the causes of his death' (Aris, 1989: 6). This role was dominated by the belief that he was an incarnation of the deity Avalokitesvara, on the one hand, and the successor to a position of influence, on the other. As head of the Gelukpa school, the Dalai Lama was expected to provide leadership within Tibet, and to placate or attack foreign powers, if the country was threatened.

The Fifth Dalai Lama succeeded in these tasks by employing a forceful personality, combining considerable political skill with magical powers, which were thought to have been fostered by his association with lamas from the Nyingma school. He was both a scholar and a prestigious statesman, who is regarded as being the first person to unite Tibet under a single government since the 9th century (Aris, 1989: 122). News of his death could have resulted in considerable upheaval, and it was therefore concealed for fifteen years (1682–97). It was said that he was in spiritual retreat and could not be disturbed (Aris, 1989: 110–18). When his incarnation, Tsangyang Gyamtso, was discovered, this was also kept a secret, and the boy was hidden in virtual imprisonment for many years. His youth was 'a sort of twilight, halfway between the greatest honours and remote oblivion' (Aris, 1989: 136–7). When the secret was disclosed, in 1697, the young Dalai Lama left confinement, to be introduced to the people and responsibilities expected of him (Aris, 1989: 143–51). However, his discomfort with public life was made evident by his refusal to take his final vows:

> What followed was an utter disaster in the eyes of everyone except presumably, the Dalai Lama himself. The Panchen Lama entreated him again and again to devote himself wholly to religion, to occupy the throne at Tashilhunpo while he was there…in short to behave as all his predecessors had done. Above all he should take the full vows of a monk … he would agree to none of the entreaties … his resolve in this was so firm that he said if his renunciation of the vows was not accepted he would commit suicide. (Aris, 1989: 155)

Although he remained the Dalai Lama, he wore lay clothing and kept his hair long. His amorous poetry suggested that he would go into town in disguise, to drink and

conduct affairs with women (Aris, 1989: 156–9). While this was tolerated initially, a combination of political intrigue and threats from Manchu China resulted in his disposition. In a public statement, it was declared that he was not the true incarnation of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (Aris, 1989: 162–5). He died soon after this, in 1706. This led to some confusion, with another candidate initially being enthroned as the real successor to the Great Fifth, although later Tsangyang Gyamtso was again recognized, this time posthumously (Aris, 1989: 172).

While Aris explains the unconventional behaviour of the Sixth Dalai Lama largely in terms of his personality and disruptive upbringing, he also touches on its broader implications for Tibetan conceptions of identity (Aris, 1989: 138–9). In particular, he suggests that it challenges the concept of incarnation because, although regarded as rooted in the same being, the Dalai Lamas exhibited very different characters. For this reason he rejects the suggestion that the Sixth was, in reality, a secret yogin, whose sexual relationships can be explained in terms of tantric practices. For Aris, Tsangyang Gyamtso was too sensitive and too human for such an explanation to apply (Aris, 1989: 160). Nevertheless, his skill as a tantric scholar is evident in his technical writings, even if it did not contribute to his personal behaviour (Dhondup, 1996 [1981]: 36). In addition, the devotion that the Sixth Dalai Lama continues to inspire in the Tibetan people points to the idea that his 'human' responses may also have contributed to his identity as a tantric saint. Rather, someone incarnating social and religious tensions could be moved emotionally by this role. His potential weakness and chaotic responses may therefore have been the qualities with which followers identified (Dhondup, 1996 [1981]: 32).

Underworld – The Shamanic Crisis

Exploring tensions between social structure and emotional energy in the work of Turner and Durkheim, I have suggested that the figure of the mad saint in Buddhist tantra both utilizes and represents these tensions through their religious identity. I have thereby implied that there is a connection between forms of personal transformation, and wider social processes. I have argued that these processes are fuelled by a fundamental tension – that between the sacred and the profane, which are opposed to, but nonetheless in continual relation with, one another. Mad saints therefore, tend to incarnate, or represent, those qualities of the sacred that are ambiguous, because they, to some extent, personify the tensions which exist between individuality, collective consciousness as emotional and energetic experiences, and social order. Like religion itself, these people are perceived as acting like a bridge between the sacred and the profane, performing vital services for society, but often remaining, to some extent, distanced from it.

While evident within society as a whole, this polarity also has great significance for the inner life, being the quality animating the human personality. Although the social is conceived as something external to, and more powerful than, the individual, it is not utterly distinct because, 'society can exist only if it penetrates the consciousness of individuals' (Durkheim, 1973 [1914]: 149). Durkheim therefore suggests that human beings have a dual nature, with a tension between individuated and collective

identity as its basis. The aim of this section, therefore, is to explore conflict within the individual, asking how it is possible for such qualitatively different states of being, individual and collective consciousness, to be in continual interaction, and sometimes opposition, within the psyche, without the human personality being torn apart by them.

This danger exists because society's influence on the individual is not confined to vehicles such as shared language. People can also be penetrated by powerful emotions, which bring them into a state of union, either with a group or another individual. This communication has both uplifting and fearful aspects. In one example, Durkheim refers to a Narrinyeri ritual:

> When a child comes into the world, its parents carefully preserve its umbilical cord, which is thought to contain some part of the child's soul. Two individuals who exchange umbilical cords preserved in this way commune by the very fact of this exchange; it is as though they had exchanged souls. But by the same token, they are forbidden to touch one another, to speak to one another, and even to see one another. It is as though they were objects of horror for one another. (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 414)

In other words, a relationship between two people can express a similar dynamic to that between the sacred and the profane, because this relationship becomes the focus of emotional energy. This energy penetrates the person, who can be overwhelmed by it. In order to remain balanced, an individual, like society, mediates between sacred and profane polarities. In normal circumstances this process tends to be hidden or masked, so that people can operate in the world from a position of relative stability. This is necessary both for the purposes of material production, and continuity in relationship, both within the self, and with others. To protect this stability, a ritual barrier between sacred and profane exists within the person. However, to renew a state of vitality, this barrier can be broken, releasing energy which can give rise to religious experiences, but also turmoil. Durkheim touches on this point when he states that

> it is quite true that religious life cannot attain any degree of intensity and not carry with it a psychic exaltation that is connected to delirium. It is for this reason that men of extraordinary sensitive religious consciousness – prophets, founders of religions, great saints – often show symptoms of an excitability that is extreme and even pathological: these physiological defects predisposed them to great religious roles. The ritual use of intoxicating liquors is to be understood in the same way. The reason is certainly not that ardent faith is necessarily the fruit of drunkenness and mental disorders … religion does not do without a certain delirium … it is well founded … a very intense social life does a sort of violence to the individual's body and mind and disrupts their normal functioning. (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 228)

I will explore this violence in tantric identity, suggesting that it has certain points in common with Eliade's conception of the shamanic crisis. I utilize this model partly because it contains essential points of continuity with Durkheim's work. Of central importance to them both is the dynamic between the sacred and the profane. However, Eliade more explicitly presents altered states of consciousness as a result of this mediation. He examines a wide range of practices and characters which he

brings together under the term shamanism, suggesting that they have in common the negotiation of states of consciousness, through experiences of religious ecstasy. Shamans are therefore religious technicians, who can incarnate tensions in extreme ways, traversing the boundaries between sacred and profane. If properly trained, they may use their skills to maintain equilibrium, both for their personal benefit, and for the gain of the community as a whole.

What makes these individuals stand out initially, however, is not extraordinary stability, but, on the contrary, a dramatic crisis, often in the form of serious illness. It is interesting to note the conceptual continuity with Durkheim, in that this idea fits in well with the sacred being pictured as contagious, and the concept of delirium as a fever. This is not only important to Eliade because of its startling nature, but also because it is a temporary condition, which he distinguishes very clearly from mental illness for this reason. In fact, he suggests that these symptoms display, 'the actual processes as it were, the repercussions, within the psyche, of what we have called the "dialectical of hierophanies" – the radical separation between profane and sacred and the resultant splitting of the world'(Eliade, 1974 [1951]: xi).

In other words, the future career of the shaman begins with a serious disruption in the normal balance of personality, exhibited in

> dreams and visions, … becoming frenzied … withdraws to the forests, feeds on tree bark, flings himself into water and fire, wounds himself with knives … a considerable degree of mental derangement … dirty, bleeding, with torn clothes and hair dishevelled. (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 15)

Nevertheless, shamanic training and initiation culminates in an identity which skilfully mediates between collective and individuated consciousness, utilizing techniques characterized by religious ecstasy. Ecstasy captures the paradoxical nature of the sacred, as it is brought under control by the initiated shaman, through his willingness to become, to some extent, its instrument (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 23). The point is illustrated, with considerable force, by the climax of the initiation process, a visionary experience of death, dissolution, and rebirth, during which the shaman witnesses the total dismemberment of their body, from the perspective of the severed head.

This process has striking parallels with themes in tantric Buddhism. Death and rebirth are important, both metaphorically as visualization practices, and as literal mechanisms, which Buddhists believe govern the passage of consciousness from life to life. The cremation ground is therefore considered a particularly suitable site for religious practice, and is also the setting, in tantric biographies, for a number of experiences during which the practitioner's life is transformed. These include the destruction and reconfiguration of the physical body, in order to attain/realize a spiritual body. In addition, wrathful deities such as Chinnamasta, common to both Buddhist and Hindu tantra, are depicted with a severed head (Benard, 1994: 77).

The onset of the shamanic crisis, therefore, can be interpreted as the battle which ensues as a result of the struggle of the bounded, individuated, self, when faced with an onslaught of information and energy from collective consciousness, in the form of 'spirits'. The shaman wins this battle through complete submission, witnessing

his own total destruction. In this sense, the perilous journey to the underworld that is undertaken by shamans faces directly a form of ontological insecurity, which is part of the experience of humanity more generally, but tends to remain in comparative obscurity if it is not brought to the surface by the 'fever' characterizing the shamanic initiation.

The reward for successful completion of this rite is the shaman's considerable empathy and intuition. It also imparts the ability to translate the rich imagery of trance and visionary states in a variety of ways, including healing, art, and storytelling. These skills are often attributed to the successful shaman's perception of energetic processes, which significantly alter their perception of the relationship between the mind and body. The yogin or yogini is thought to have analogous qualities. For example, their attainments are described in terms of an illumination of consciousness. Eliade, drawing on the insights of Raumussen's work on the Inuit people describes this phenomenon as an 'enlightenment', flooding mind and body, 'an inexplicable searchlight, a luminous fire, which enables him to see in the dark, both literally and metaphorically' (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 60). He goes on to remark on the resemblance between this light and the light described in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The recognition of this light is deemed essential for the successful passage of consciousness, between the world of the living and the realm of the dead.

This negotiation is regarded, in a shamanic context, as a series of repeated journeys which traverse a 'cosmic tree' or 'pillar' between the realms of earth, underworld, and sky (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 99). In travelling between different states of consciousness, many shamanic traditions refer to the help of spirit guides who take many forms, including animals such as horses or birds. Eliade also mentions the snake or serpent, an animal often associated with transformation. For example, in Australia, a rainbow serpent acts like a bridge, enabling the shaman to travel between earth and sky (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 132). In tantra, it is believed that a female energy form, described as a mythical serpent, sleeps coiled at the base of the spine. The practice of *kundalini yoga* is believed to awaken this serpent and help her to ascend, through the spine's subtle energy channel (analogous to the cosmic pillar or tree). On her journey, she pierces energy centres, called the *cakras*, finally reaching her male partner, located in the brain centre, an event producing a blissful consciousness and enabling the practitioner to overcome dualistic thinking, transforming the body, mind, and spirit in the process (Feuerstein, 1998: 182–3). In other words, the imagery of *kundalini yoga* can be interpreted as a transposition of three-dimensional sacred geography into concepts of sacred physiology, with the body itself being the site of transformative, three-dimensional consciousness.

This relationship, between psychological, emotional, and bodily states as 'realms' is explored in the biography of Princess Mandarava. This biography begins by suggesting that Mandarava's human life, in which she was a primary consort of Padmasambhava, is only one of a vast number of emanations of the goddess Pandaravasini, a consort of the long-life Buddha Amitayus. It also gives details of previous lives of Mandarava, listing a number of places in which she lived, and where inhabitants recorded her biography. While some of these – for example, India and Zahor – are easily understood, others imply that realms refer more precisely to states of consciousness, including those of the gods, dakinis, *nagas*, and the eight

charnel grounds (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 20–21). This idea is affirmed by the statement that

> the buddhas and bodhisattvas are the natural manifestation of the enlightened embodiments of dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya. The display of these realms of places and sacred grounds is beyond ordinary conception. Upon one atomic particle dwell infinite emanations of the teacher and assembly, revealing the Dharma according to the individual needs of the regions in this world system. The display of sacred places is inconceivably astonishing. Realms of space, earth, and subterranean activity … correspond to enlightened body, speech, mind, noble qualities, and enlightened activities, each one of which also comprises the other four. (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 18).

In the first life of Mandarava, there are also a number of points where descriptions of landscape can be read as indications of transformations within the body and consciousness. The story is set more than ten thousand aeons in the past, in an era known as Illumination of One Thousand Lights. King Indradeva and his consort, Infinite Beauty, while staying in the palace, become aware of a palace of a *naga* king, situated within a vast turquoise lake surrounded by a forest. At the centre of this area stands a square crystal mountain, with clouds of five-coloured light at its peak (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 22). The king and queen visit the naga maidens who live there, and exchange offerings with them, receiving a number of 'wish-fulfilling jewels'. As a result, they conceive a child, a manifestation of the goddess Pandarvasini, who develops clairvoyance and other miraculous powers (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 25–9). In another life story, the setting, a country called Damaru, is more sinister.

> The substances found there are flesh, blood, and bones. This continent is shrouded in the darkness of killing and slaughter. There exists no mercy or compassion, and inhabitants have no faith in the realized ones. It is a dark land … all the female inhabitants find pleasure in taking the lives of others. Their faces are wild and ruddy, their manner is so barbaric that the mere sight of them incites fear and terror. They will even kill their own parents in order to make sacrificial offerings of blood and flesh. (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 47)

This country also has a vast lake, one swirling with blood. Here, the palace of the demon king, Black Yaksha, is situated. In order to subdue this place, the dakini transforms herself into a red syllable *hrih*, and descends into the lake. Although the demon king retaliates by sending hail and lightning storms, the lake is transformed into nectar. It turns white, and no longer accepts blood offerings (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 47). As a result, the king receives a number of signs in his dreams, which he assumes are negative, but which actually indicate purification (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 48). This process culminates when it is time for his son to marry. A ring of fire appears around the lake and, in its centre, a red flower in the shape of a shield. Within the pollen heart of this flower was a sixteen-year-old girl, a female *nagini*. She marries the king's son, and, in order to keep her with them, the king hands over to her the government of the country, which thereby becomes pacified (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 49–52).

Two other stories focus on a theme that becomes prominent in the recounting of Mandarava's 'human' life, as a princess of Zahor – her union with an emanation of the deity Avalokitesvara (a form of Amitabha). In the kingdom of Kanaka, for example, Princess Ozer Nangyen (Adorned with Light), comes across a radiant lotus flower, resembling a mandala, which contains, in its pollen heart, a sixteen-year-old youth. He is an emanation of Avalokitesvara, born miraculously from the lotus (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 42–3). In another life, as Princess Natyendri, she escapes from her home in order to avert being persuaded into marrying for political reasons. She explains that, 'by the force of previous prayers, Prince Suryagarbha, an emanation of Arya Avalokiteshvara, and I have generated bodhicitta. I shall never take an ordinary husband' (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 35).

Her early life, as Princess Mandarava, appears to be more harmonious, both with her family and the kingdom. However, later difficulties are indicated in an incident, that resembles stories about the life of the Buddha, when she is eight years old. She goes to the palace roof, and gazing in each of the four directions, witnesses suffering, old age, disease, and death (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 92–4). As a result, she asks for her parents' permission to practise the dharma and meet a spiritual guide. They think that she will change her mind later, and therefore agree to her studies, but do not allow her to leave (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 95–6). The princess learns the shamanic arts of medicine and astrology (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 98–101). She also defeats a heretic, firstly in debate, and then through a competition of magical display, which includes demonstrating her ability to fly (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 102–104).

At this point, she requests to be ordained and to live within a monastery, but her family suggests that she stay with them, to become her mother's servant during the day. She agrees, but forgoes sleep in order to practice dharma at night. Soon after this, her brother, the prince, dies suddenly (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 110). Although these events are not explicitly connected in the story, they may be related on a symbolic level. Similarly, she is brought in to resolve problems that engulf the kingdom, disasters that may have indicated her emotional state:

> In the year that followed, the kingdom of Zahor fell under hard times as the great river swelled to bursting point, unable to contain the unceasing torrential monsoons. The river was so swollen that the people could not even travel upon it in boats or cross its bridges. The land became flooded. All the fish were washed ashore. As the flood water stagnated, it became polluted … the weather patterns became disturbed … lightning and hail storms predominated … the people suffered from various illnesses. Frustration and anger intensified, giving way to petty borderland squabbles that erupted into war … hurling bombs and pursuing one another with powerful weapons. The battles became so nasty that they spread forth like fire through every valley and region…this, of course, intensified the already existing anger and aggression, and people began to slaughter one another mercilessly. (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 113)

After ending the conflict, Princess Mandarava has a vision of a beautiful goddess, who declares herself to be the supreme consort Pandaravasini, a dakini emanating from the same ground as the princess herself. In addition she foretells that the king will try to persuade her to marry, but that she may have to go against his wishes

if she wishes to avoid samsara (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 115–17). For the time being, the king and queen decide to appease the kingdoms of potential suitors with offerings of wealth, because they want to keep the princess with them, but another incident suggests the underlying tension of the situation. There is a shortage of meat and fish in the marketplace, and Mandarava is sent out in search of some for her father's meal. She finds a swollen and bloated human corpse, cuts off its limbs, and brings them back to the queen, who uses them to prepare a broth. Upon tasting it, the king's body becomes light and blissful, and he spontaneously levitates. Reacting with fear and anger, he calls the queen to him, demanding to know if he has been poisoned. She tells him that Mandarava was responsible, and he 'accused her of giving him meat that was either poisoned or impure, since his body felt so unusually strange. Yelling at her, he insisted that she tell him the truth. He grabbed her by the neck, threw her down, and waved his knife in her face' (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 120). However, they realize that the corpse was, in reality, sacred, being the flesh of a sage reincarnated seven times. The rest of the body is retrieved, dried, and placed in a jewelled vessel to be worshipped (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 121).

It is after this incident that the crisis, concerning Mandarava's potential marriage, comes to a head. Kings and ministers from a number of foreign countries gather in force around the palace, demanding that the king make a decision (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 122–5). He hesitates, fearing that by offering her to one country he will be forced into conflict with the others, and therefore consults the princess. She expresses a determination to go against his wishes, refusing to marry anyone for caste or class considerations, because she wants to practise the dharma. As a result she is confined within the palace walls. Although she is initially confused and depressed, a vision of Vajrasattva advises her to retain her resolve (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 126). She therefore escapes from the palace into the forest, discarding her silken garments and jewellery and taking ordination. The king, in an attempt to continue to protect her, allows her to live in a separate, guarded enclosure, in order to study scripture (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 130). Nevertheless, Padmasambhava, using his magical abilities, is able to meet her, and remains within the enclosure, teaching both the princess and her attendants (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 131–3).

On discovering this, the king is outraged, and orders that Padmasambhava be bound and burnt alive, 'as for Mandarava, she refused to go into a family of honour according to my wishes, and now she stays with a common vagrant. Throw her into a dark pit of thorns, where she shall remain for twenty-five human years without seeing the light of day' (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 137). Padmasambhava, however, transforms his punishment into an opportunity to display his power:

> Numerous deities appeared in space, and rain showers suddenly fell. The pyre became a lake of sesame oil. In its centre bloomed a marvellous, huge lotus flower surrounded by rainbows and lofty, massing clouds … the entire lake and its flower were now surrounded by a ring of fire. Seated on the very centre of the lotus was the Vajra Guru Padmasambhava as an eight-year-old youth … everyone then knew beyond a trace of doubt that this young man was indeed a nirmanakaya Buddha. (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 138)

The king, therefore, repents his behaviour, but Mandarava refuses to leave her pit of thorns until he apologizes in person (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 142–3). The

consorts are then reunited, and retreat to the Maratika cave in order to practise deity yogas and achieve immortality (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 152–4).

Conclusion

The story of Princess Mandarava brings together the themes of inner and outer conflict in a number of ways which suggest a relationship between external events and her visionary experience. One example is the warring ministers and kings from foreign countries, who nonetheless enter the story in the context of ambiguities concerning her personal decisions about religious practice and sexual relationships. In addition, her imprisonment, initially in the palace and later in a pit of thorns, may have been a metaphorical allusion to the state of samsara, a point suggested by references she makes in a discourse which she gives to a group of women:

> When thoughtlessly utilized, the objects of desire in samsara, an ocean of poisons, are the cause for one's own failure and unhappiness. Like an undiscerning child, one's body is literally destroyed in the depth of the fire pit of negative karmic accumulations. Those who are foolish enough to enter this pit will fall into its depths, from which liberation cannot occur. In this ocean of samsaric enjoyments that cannot bring satisfaction, one is constantly distracted by the powerful, turbulent waves of negative accumulations. The activities of samsara are like being lost in a great forest of sharp razors: if one moves without looking, one's body is instantly destroyed! Within the iron-fenced enclosure of samsara, one is heartlessly encouraged to continue fooling oneself. (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 117–18)

More specifically, her own liberation is closely linked to her relationship with Padmasambhava. This relationship can be read on several different levels. If the story is seen essentially as metaphorical exploration of psychic experience, Mandarava and Padmasambhava can be viewed as female and male aspects of the psyche. From this perspective, their separation through conflict, and eventual union, indicate transformations within the self. From a more literal point of view, the story explores tensions in society. The king and his ministers represent authority and social structure. While initially opposing the consorts, the king ultimately recognizes the value of their partnership. This interpretation has a similar dynamic to stories about 'mad' saints, in that there are instances where appearances are deceptive. Padmasambhava is punished by the king for transgressing the boundaries of Mandarava's palace. However, by transforming the fire which was intended to destroy him into a sacred lake, Padmasambhava also transmutes his identity, from a hated criminal, into a revered saint. Mandarava's actions also have hidden meaning. When she offers the dismembered parts of a corpse she finds at the roadside to her father for food, he is furious, believing he has been poisoned. Nevertheless, the body turns out to be 'spiritual' food which makes him levitate, a common metaphor for altered states of consciousness.

In addition, I suggest that both incidents contain veiled references to 'sacrifice'. While this chapter has explored the ambiguity of the sacred, drawing from Durkheim's references to totem and taboo, the next chapter expands on these ideas

more specifically in the Indian context by examining Hindu sacrifice. More broadly, I will explore the complex attitude of tantric Buddhism to the idea of illusion in subsequent chapters, but I refer to it here because Mandarava's visionary experience plays a vital role in strengthening her resolve, and in her communication with Padmasambhava. I therefore suggest a third interpretation of the consort relationship in Mandarava's story which combines the first two. Mandarava's relationship with Padmasambhava expresses and explores conflicts, which are sited both within her personality and in her circumstances.

A key idea in this interpretation is the tension between her human life, and her divine or sacred identity. Her sexual relationship is described as a karmic connection with an emanation of Amitabha. This is crucial to her understanding of her true nature, because she is an emanation of Amitabha's consort. It is therefore significant that, when they retreat to Maratika cave, their practices to achieve immortality consist of the deity yoga of Amitayus, the Buddha of Long Life, and their success is signified by a clear vision of him (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 153). Before this, Mandarava has to take a 'journey', alone, to experience a number of fearful places which she compares to the state of the bardo. In undertaking this task, she faces east, the direction in which Padmasambhava has departed. Although the text describes her 'going away', without any attachment to her family and possessions, the comment that she remains in a meditative 'posture of equipoise' may refer to a state of trance, rather than a literal expedition (Chonam & Khandro, 1998: 149). Her experience of fearful places may therefore be regarded as a product of her visions, but also suggests her distressed emotional state when separated from her consort.

Oppositions within the individual, therefore, are deeply intertwined with polarities which originate socially, between the sacred and the profane, and within the sacred, between structure and communitas. Discussion of sexual relationships in tantra bring this point to the fore, because they combine references to personal emotions with their broader religious and social framework. While this is expressed in a number of ways by the tradition, the most fundamental is the idea that both male and female consorts take on the identity of a deity. The following chapter argues that this transformation is based on an underlying principle, the recognition of a close relationship between religious and erotic passion. This comparison, between the concentration required to become aware of one's identity as a deity, and the focus of attention between lovers, is an important theme in both Hindu and Buddhist tantra. It is also commented upon, with some irony, in the poetry of the Sixth Dalai Lama. I will therefore conclude with some examples:

I incline myself
To the teachings of my lama
But my heart secretly escapes
To the thoughts of my sweetheart.

Even if meditated upon,
The face of my lama comes not to me,
But again and again comes to me
The smiling face of my beloved.

If I could meditate upon the *dharma*
As intensely as I muse on my beloved
I would certainly attain enlightenment
Surely, in this one lifetime. (Dhondup, 1996 [1981]: 77–81)

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Chapter 3

Consorts, Myth, and Sacrifice in Hindu Tantra

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I used Buddhist tantric hagiographic literature to argue, following Durkheim, Turner, and Eliade, that both society and the individual are not static or inviolate entities. Rather, both are characterized by a series of tensions, based on the ambiguity of the sacred. Within society there is an uneasy partnership between different manifestations of the sacred – as emotional energy, and as social order. Within the individual, a balance must be struck between sacred and profane aspects of being. In addition, I have shown ways in which these two issues are connected in my discussion of mad saints and shamans. While the shamanic career may begin by exhibitions of disturbance within the individual, if successful, their role has social significance. This is partly instrumental. Shamans may work with collective energy to solve personal and social problems, when they are called on to heal the sick, for example. Attitudes to shamanic characters may also be shaped by shifts in society more broadly, so that adepts come to represent and personify certain qualities of the sacred.

I have also introduced the consort relationship into this discussion. Biographies, like that of Princess Mandarava, place the consort relationship at the heart of individual and social conflict. This is partly because her decisions about personal life are used to illustrate ambiguous social attitudes in Buddhist tantra. For example, she has to choose between the king (or householder) and yogins (such as Padmasambhava). Critically, I will argue that the ambivalence of erotic relationships in tantra hinges upon the visionary and ecstatic experiences they generate, which can, in turn be located in the tensions they express, between the sacred and the profane. Most fundamentally this idea is founded on the notion that each of the partners has an identity consisting of human and divine elements. This conception of identity relies on a religious imagination that views deities in sexual relationships, as well as in the form of independent entities.

Such a view is not confined to the tantric Buddhist context, but is also rooted within the broader framework of Indian religions and society. As Mayer (1998) suggests, there has been some debate concerning the similarities between certain strands of Vajrayana Buddhism and some Saiva (particularly *Kapalika*) ideas and imagery. While earlier studies have tended to see this as 'primarily the result of both traditions arising from a common Indic cultural substrate', the work of Sanderson (1994 & 1988), who has analysed texts from both traditions, has called this idea into question, as he presents evidence that suggests that tantric Buddhism borrowed more

directly from Saiva sources (Mayer, 1998: 271–2). In Chapter 6, I look more closely at the notion of incorporation in tantric Buddhism, but my aim in this chapter is to draw from popular Hindu mythology in order to gain a broader perspective on ideas about deities as consorts, and how those ideas related to sacrifice in Indian society.

While there are significant differences, as well as similarities, between Hindu and Buddhist tantra, both religious systems arose in India between the 4th and 15th centuries. They were therefore influenced by, and responded to, a broadly similar cultural environment; namely, a social structure characterized by *brahmanical* religion. The institution of sacrifice was pivotal within that structure. Sacrifices could be performed by a number of groups at a local level, especially to goddesses (Flood, 1996: 184). Nevertheless, *brahman* males were distinguished by their access to and recitation of the *Veda*, a body of Sanskrit texts which emphasized the importance of ritual action, and laid down 'correct' techniques for the performance of sacrifice (Flood, 1996: 12). Flood suggests that although 'there are forms of Hinduism which have rejected the Veda, and its legitimizing authority in the sanctioning of a hierarchical social order', tantra still makes some references to this order (Flood, 1996: 11). In other words, even when opposed, the Veda, together with dharma (the ethics, duty, and laws that the texts express and represent), was extremely important in the shaping of Indian society.

This society was organized in two, interrelated ways, class and caste, *varna* and *jati*. Varna emphasized differences in society according to occupation. Members were, broadly speaking, divided into *brahmans* (ritual specialists), *ksatriya* (nobles or warriors), *vaisya* (commoners), and *sudra* (serfs). While this classification was associated with varying degrees of purity and pollution to some extent, *jati*, or the caste system is defined in these terms: 'The caste hierarchy is based on the polarity between purity and pollution, the Brahmans being the most pure, the Untouchables the most impure' (Flood, 1996: 59).

A concern with purity and pollution is associated with the notion of the sacred in a number of societies, although the way that it is expressed varies. Dumont therefore suggests that it is important to recognize the role of religion in the hierarchical structure of Indian society (Dumont, 1970: 66). The notion of the impure is not simply a question of hygiene, it originates socially. Nonetheless, it is associated with substances produced as part of 'organic life' (Dumont, 1970: 47). These include dead bodies, cut hair, and animal carcasses. The Untouchables are thereby associated with certain occupations, including washing clothes, cutting hair, and handling the dead (Dumont, 1970: 48–9). It can therefore be suggested that contact with lower castes was avoided by *brahmans* in an attempt to isolate them from energies of the 'impure sacred', originating in contact with dangerously potent substances. This concern with impurity also governed contact between men and women in Hindu society, because castes were strictly endogamous, and functions of the female body, particularly menstruation, were regarded as highly polluting.

Hindu mythology reflects this opposition between forces of social stability, on the one hand, and more volatile energies of creation and destruction, on the other. Hinduism is characterized by a plethora of deities, worshipped in various ways. One should therefore be cautious in suggesting that Vishnu, Siva, and Brahma form a fundamental trinity (Flood, 1996: 116). Nonetheless, this perspective associates Siva

with the destruction and creation of the cosmos, and regards Vishnu as the preserver, while Brahma represents the divine in totality, and a transcendental origin. For this reason, the relationship between the three deities can be visualized, not only as a triangle, but as a sacred circle. Brahma is both the centre and the circumference, being the inception point, or potential, from which all things arise. Vishnu is regarded as the full flowering, or maturity of a cycle, while Siva is a fire, accelerating processes of decay and preparing the ground for new life.

In addition, Siva and Vishnu are not just conceived as abstract principles, but are personified, in images and myths that illustrate their relationship to the social world. While Vishnu appeals largely to the orientations of ordered social relationships and sanctioned forms of sexuality, Siva is more aligned to the disruptive aspects of the renunciate position, which bring together elements of asceticism and intense emotional and erotic energy. However, the positions of these deities are not mutually exclusive, an idea which I will demonstrate by examining their complexity in the context of the consort relationship.

Love in Separation

Vishnu exemplifies the values of the household life, including the importance of family, stable economic and social systems, and conformity to the caste and gender boundaries constituting the Indian social structure (Flood, 1996: 149). His *avatars* (or incarnations) include Krishna, who is usually portrayed as a child or a young man with a mischievous character (Flood, 1996: 116). Devotion to Vishnu, however, has taken a number of forms, which include drawing from emotions normally associated with more volatile, and therefore ambiguous, human affections (Flood, 1996: 134). Donna Wulff, in her examination of the work of Ropa Gosvami, a 16th-century disciple of Caitanya (a famous Krishna devotee), explores the relationship between Radha and Krishna in these writings (Donna Wulff, 1982: 21–41). She suggests that Krishna and his consort, Radha, represent one example of a number of possible relationships between Krishna and his devotees. In order to approach the deity, practitioners can regard him with

> *santa*, contemplative adoration of the transcendent Lord; *dasya*, humble servitude to the divine master; *sakhy*a, intimate companionship with the beloved friend; *vatsalya*, parental affection for the adorable child; and *madhurya*, passionate love for the supreme lover. (Donna Wulff, 1982: 28)

Stories about Radha and Krishna explore *madhurya* as representing a particularly intense relationship with the divine which, being passionate, has transgressive qualities. In one sense, this transgression is bound up with the idea that the devotee, as Radha, comes closer to incarnating, as well as supplicating a divinity, because the love between her and Krishna is reciprocal. She is one of a number of *gopis*, who were pictured as cow-herd women from the village of his youth, drawn to the music of his flute, and engaging in erotic play with him. Nevertheless, Radha is singled out as especially significant. She is compared to another of Krishna's lovers, Candravali, 'whose deferential reserve indicates greater awareness of Krishna's lordly majesty

(*aisvarya*) and constrains him to show similar courtesy toward her, Radha responds primarily to Krishna's sweet charm (*madhurya*), and their more intimate love affords him greater delight' (Donna Wulff, 1982: 39). She also offers him a certain amount of resistance, which intensifies the violence of their emotions:

> Bold employ of teeth and nails
> By one experienced in love sports
> Radha's show of opposition
> Gives Hari immeasurable delight (VM 7.9; quoted in Donna Wulff, 1982: 39)

In addition, the relationship is illicit, because Radha is a married woman. This willingness to abandon convention is, however, valued. The uncontrolled and reckless nature of her feelings are upheld as being closer to the true nature of religious devotion. While Radha attempts, in vain, to forget Krishna, the detached yogi tries, unsucessfully, to gain a mere glimpse of his nature: 'The image of the yogini is similarly evoked by a tender scene … in which Radha's intense desire to see Krishna culminates in a supreme effort to make him appear before her eyes by meditating (*pranidhana*)' (Donna Wulff, 1982: 29). As a forbidden affair, stories of Radha and Krishna bring into play themes of separation and reunion, which apply both to erotic relationships, and to tensions within the self, between human, profane aspects of existence, and the divine or sacred. In the divine realm, the consorts are indistinguishable, a part of one another. On earth, by taking male and female forms, they relearn to appreciate the time they spend together, through the anguish of being apart: 'Radha is necessary because love requires two, because sweetness needs "another" to taste it' (Donna Wulff, 1982: 41).

Another example of the Radha and Krishna story is the *Gitagovinda*, composed in the 12th century. Miller uses the concept of memory to elucidate Abijnanasakuntala's rendering of this work, suggesting that the problem of uniting with the divine, while remaining an earthly being, is at the core of the myth's tension (Miller, 1982: 14). This tension is not resolved, but celebrated as a form of recognition, which has a dynamic quality:

> Seeing rare beauty, hearing echoes of sweet sounds
> even a happy man becomes strangely uneasy
> then dim traces in his heart move him to remember
> loves of a former life, buried deep in his being. (Miller, 1982: 15)

This approach to religious devotion, which utilizes emotional states in order to draw closer to, or 'remember' a relationship with the deity, is a widely recognized strand of Vaisnava worship. Expressed in song, dance, meditation, and states of ecstasy, as well as poetry, this approach is broadly identified by the term *bhakti*. At its most refined, devotion is indistinguishable from *prema*, love. Nevertheless, there were differences of interpretation between worshippers of Krishna. While for some, the relationship between Radha and Krishna is essentially a metaphorical illustration of religious truths, others could suggest that human consort relationships have a sacred character. A number of conventional Vaisnava strictly avoided contact with women, and sharing meals with members of other castes. For others, *bhakti* took on

qualities associated with communitas, so that individuals emerged who behaved like 'mad saints', and groups of followers ate together in defiance of caste boundaries (Dimock, 1989 [1966]: 68–102). Some male devotees assumed the costume and role of Radha in ritual worship and performances, in order to emulate her devotional qualities. There were also more tantric methods of uniting Radha and Krishna, such as those utilized by the *sahajiyya* movement in Bengal:

> To the Sahajiyas, the body is full of rasa, of the bliss of union, or, speaking purely physiologically, of semen. The place of rasa at the beginning of the *sadhana* is in the lowest lotus, the seat of sexual passion. By *sadhana*, rasa is raised from lotus to lotus along the spinal column, until it unites with the thousand-petalled lotus in the head; there, in pure experience and pure consciousness of Radha and Krishna in union, of the svarupa, is full and eternal realization of their bliss. Here there is no longer even the seeming distinction of human and divine. (Dimock, 1989 [1966]: 177)

However, Dimock goes on to suggest that this movement of consciousness is also from physical and sexual sensation towards achieving a 'blissful state of pure abstraction from all things physical, a state of *samadhi*' (Dimock, 1989 [1966]: 178). While this is one interpretation, I will argue that *rasa*, or 'taste' refers to a more subtle combination of physical and religious emotions. These remain to some extent ambiguous, expressing tensions in the concept of 'union with the sacred', rather than transcending them. Marglin, for example, examines *rasa* in the context of temple dancing, conducted by *devadasis*, women dedicated to the deity of the temple (in this example Visnu or Krishna), who are permitted sexual relationships but remain unmarried. She suggests that ritual dance transforms participants, who

> taste *srngara rasa*, a culturally constituted emotion that is embodied thought. I have argued that the transformative power of the ritual resides in its marriage of form and content. The form of the ritual is its body, its sensuous dynamic presence; the contents of the ritual are the values and beliefs, or, in other words, the thought part. By joining form and content, body and thought, the dance has the power to create a culturally specific experience in the participants, an emotion that also unites body and thought, that is, an embodied thought. Bodily experiences are here unified with thought; they are not relegated to a separate realm, of physiology, sensation, or nature. (Marglin, 1990: 230)

The relationship between the dancers, the audience, and the deity is associated with 'food'. Food is offered to the deity by participants, who also 'consume' its remainders, in the form of the dust from the dancer's feet. Marglin argues that what this cyclical relationship suggests is a process of refinement, because the dance is a symbolic form of intercourse with Krishna, which thereby replenishes the fertility, harmony, and good fortune, of the community as a whole. For her, the dust is transformed by the dance into *rasa*, which is a sacred substance, a tantric offering representing female sexual fluids, consumed as the 'leavings of *sakti*' (Marglin, 1990: 218). In other words, the *devadasi*, through the dance, refines erotic sensations into a more subtle substance, which restores vitality to the wider community – in this case, the participants of the ritual.

This account has themes in common with Durkheim's discussion of sacrifice, not only because sacred substances are 'eaten', but because the dust from women's

feet would normally be considered, in Indian society, to be highly polluting. Marglin touches on this point when she refers to a story, told to her by a *devadasi*, in which Krishna suffers from an illness that can only be cured by obtaining the dust from women's feet. A sage was sent in search of this substance, but could not to obtain it. All the women he asked were afraid of committing a sin against the deity by offering something polluted. The *gopis*, however, put aside their fear in order to relieve his suffering. Their love was greater than the threat of punishment (Marglin, 1990: 227).

Siva and Erotic Ascetism

O'Flaherty (1973) coined the term 'erotic ascetic' to describe Siva's paradoxical relationship to sexuality. On the one hand, he is celebrated for his celibacy and austerity, while on the other, myths about his relationships with his consorts, in particular Parvati, suggest that he was regarded, in some contexts, as having qualities related to the ideal of householder (Flood, 1996: 150). One of the most striking characteristics of the deity Siva is therefore his embodiment of polar tensions. This is especially evident in his practice of yoga, which gives him the poise and control associated with the exemplary ascetic. At the same time, however, yoga generates fire within him that is both passionate and destructive. The opposition is illustrated in images of Siva, known as *urdvalinga*, depicting him as a yogi with an erect *linga*. Kramrish suggests that such images are a reference to worshippers retaining semen within the body during sexual intercourse. Yogins are thought to reverse the process of emitting semen, so that it travels, instead, upwards along the spinal column, reaching the brain and producing mystical experiences (Kramrish, 1981: 12).

Such an interpretation ignores myths concerned with Siva and his consorts. Kinsley, for example, suggests that the force of Siva's personality is both highlighted and softened in the context of his relational life. He therefore approaches the subject through an exploration of Hindu goddesses, rather than assuming that Siva images always refer to forms of self-absorption. This leads him to suggest that, for example, Siva and Parvati express a tension between ideals in Hindu religious life, exemplified by participation in the domestic and social world, and renunciation:

> Parvati, for the most part, represents the householder. Her mission in almost all renditions of the myth is to lure Siva into the world of marriage, sex, and children, to tempt him away from asceticism, yoga, and otherworldly preoccupations. In this role Parvati is cast as a figure who upholds the order of dharma, who enhances life in the world … which … eventually brings him within the sacrificial, priestly order permanently. Parvati civilizes Siva with her presence; indeed, she domesticates him. (Kinsley, 1988: 46)

Crucially, however, she initially attracts his attention through her own rigorous practice of austerities. This she commences because previous attempts of the gods to curb Siva's power (in the form of intense heat) have failed. They send the god of love, Kama, to distract him, but Siva (temporarily) destroys Kama, burning him to ashes with the fire of his third eye (Kinsley, 1988: 42). Her strategy is also to accumulate 'inner fire' in the form of *tapas*. This fire can be interpreted as both a

form of personal power, or energy, generated by the performance of yoga, and as an 'offering', because ascetics used the substance of *tapas* to persuade deities to grant them requests in exchange (Kinsley, 1988: 42).

In addition, her sexual energy matches Siva's, and they are regarded as having two children, Ganesa and Karttikeya. This union, of eroticism, imagery associated with death, and domestic life, is portrayed with some humour in the mythology of Siva and Parvati as consorts. One painting, 'shows the foursome seated around a fire. Karttikeya and Parvati are helping each other thread a garland of skulls, while Siva and Ganesa play idly with one of Siva's serpent ornaments' (Kinsley, 1988: 44). In a number of Bengal myths Parvati is portrayed as trying to curb the excesses of her 'irresponsible, hemp-smoking husband, who cannot look after himself' (Kinsley, 1988: 44). This tension is also evident in her continual, but unsuccessful efforts to build or find a proper home for them (Kinsley, 1988: 47–8).

Another way of expressing this idea is to suggest that Siva and Parvati represent, in the context of Indian society, a sometimes uneasy union between the orientations of social structure and communitas. Kinsley points to this idea in his discussion of consort symbolism, in the form of *linga* and *yoni*. His suggestions are also reminiscent of the idea that contact with the sacred is more potent when it is surrounded by prohibitions:

> The ubiquitous image of the linga in the yoni symbolizes the creative release in the ultimate erotic act of power stored through asceticism. The erotic act is thus enhanced, made more potent, fecund, and creative, by the stored up power of Siva's asceticism. The linga and the yoni symbolize a creative interaction between the world of the ascetic, in which sexual abstinence is mandatory, and the life of the householder, in which sex is necessary … as a couple they are usually shown as affectionate. The half-male, half-female image also emphasizes the uniting of opposites. The lesson seems to be that the two poles that they represent, dharma and *moksa*, should not be isolated from each other. In relationship with Parvati, Siva does not give up asceticism entirely … nonetheless, the mutual bliss of Siva and Parvati also seems to teach that asceticism enhances the intensity of sexuality and makes the orderliness of the householder's world even more attractive. Held together, or in creative tension, yoga and *bhoga* (worldly or bodily pleasure), dharma and *moksa*, may be seen to complement and complete each other in the divine pair. (Kinsley, 1988: 52)

Consort symbolism may therefore portray the relationship between the genders as one of polar tension, which is, in addition, related to other positions within society more broadly. While in the case of Siva and Parvati, conflicts between the ideals of asceticism and the life of the householder are highlighted, there are other examples which bring forward different aspects of polarity in Hindu religious consciousness. I will argue that the story of Sati, Siva's first wife, explores the ambivalence surrounding the rite of sacrifice, in the context of Siva's uneasy relationship with his father-in-law, Daksa, who represents social structure and authority, not least because he is, in turn, the son of Brahma. In addition, the relationship between Siva and Kali exhibits a fascination with the reversal of polarities.

Images in which Siva surrenders himself to Kali, indicate the idea of 'reverse sexuality', with Siva as a prone corpse-like figure beneath her. She is also depicted as standing or dancing above him, displaying a terrifying form, with, for example, a

lolling tongue (Mookerjee, 1995 [1988]: 63). Kali is also evocative of emotions of revulsion, combined with awe, which are related to notions of impurity, because of her association with blood and the cremation grounds. Mythological explanations for this iconography associate it with her role as an out of control warrior, who can only be pacified by Siva in his prone form. In another instance Siva becomes a crying child on the battlefield, who reawakens Kali's maternal instinct, causing her to pause from her frenzy and pick the baby up in her arms (Kinsley, 1988: 130–31). Deities such as Kali express a tension between the ordered social world and the chaos of death, disorder, and violent emotions. In Indian society these dangerous emotions were kept at bay by the rigorous enforcement of 'ritual purity', a strategy which at the same time intensifies the hold of the 'impure sacred' over the imagination, and increases its power. Her association with blood and the cremation grounds defines Kali as

> a being who is liminal in nature, who dwells on the boundary of society and threatens, subverts, or challenges the status quo. For Tantrism, she is an appropriate symbol of rituals and meditative techniques that seek to confront, appropriate, and overcome, forbidden, feared, 'polluting' realities. (Kinsley, 1997: 90)

I will argue, however, that emotional energy plays an important role in Kali's relationship with liminality. For example, in one incarnation Kali becomes Mahakali, who destroys time, together with an aspect of Siva, Mahakala (Mookerjee, 1995 [1988]: 69). Both of these deities are also found in tantric Buddhism. Kali's frenzied dancing is also an expression of energy, in the forms of sound and vibration. The concept of energy in the myths of Sati, Parvati, and Kali, also indicates that they are related. Myths suggest that these female deities are essentially different aspects of the same being. In a general sense, all three consorts can be viewed as manifestations of *sakti*, a dynamic female principle which interacts with Siva, activating his potency. More precisely, Parvati is regarded as an incarnation of Siva's first wife Sati. In addition, the name Kali refers to an attribute of Parvati, her dark skin, which is sloughed off, giving rise to a distinct goddess (Kinsley, 1988: 42). Taken together, therefore, these deities represent female qualities, not as mutually exclusive entities, but potentially as different aspects of the same person.

Mythology surrounding goddesses may reflect Indian ideas about gender more broadly, and the identity of women in particular, however, this reflection can be interpreted in a number of different ways. David Wulff, for example, suggests that fierce female deities may be largely the product of fearful, infantile, male fantasies about the bad mother. He sees his position as corrective to Freud's concentration on the relationship between a male child and his father, but nonetheless locates the image of the deity in emotions connected to early development, rather than adult life (David Wulff, 1982: 290).

Such an approach also tends to assume that dark images of the feminine are negative male projections. This ignores the possibility that the imagination of women was also instrumental in their creation, and that they may, therefore, reflect positive aspects of women's own self reflection. More precisely, I would argue that the myths, in focusing on the way that Siva and his consorts respond to one another,

suggest a dynamic identity which operates on a number of levels. This depth applies to the creation of the individual, whether male or female, but it is also a feature of the relationship between them. These mythical relationships, each in different ways, contain both passion and conflict, features challenging the idea that either gender was viewed as totally static, restricted, or devoid of a number of dimensions. Rather, while gender was one source of division in Indian society, as was caste, consort deities tend to move between division and union. This expresses unresolved tensions in erotic relationships which can be likened to those within society. It also suggests the possibility that the mythology of Siva and the goddess was at times influenced by the actual and visionary experiences of human sexuality, experiences that involved both partners.

That Siva's consorts are related to various countenances of human women, some of which are wrathful, is suggested by one myth describing an argument between Siva and Sati. Sati is enraged by her father's refusal to invite Siva to an important sacrifice. She interprets this act as an unforgivable slight against her husband, and is therefore determined to attend the ritual herself in protest. When Siva tries to dissuade her,

> Sati becomes enraged and accuses him of neglecting her. In her anger her eyes become red and bright and her limbs tremble. Seeing her fury, Siva closes his eyes. When he opens them, a fearsome female stands before him. As he looks at her, she becomes very old, her graceful appearance disappearing. She develops four arms, her complexion becomes fiery and her hair dishevelled, her lips smeared with sweat, and her tongue lolls and sways from side to side. She is naked except for a garland of severed heads; she wears the half moon as a crown. Standing before Siva, she blazes like a million rising suns and fills the world with earth shattering laughter.
>
> To make sure that he does not flee from her terrible form, Sati fills the directions around him with ten different forms (the Mahavidyas) … wherever Siva goes or looks, he sees a dreadful figure, and his fear increases. Unable to flee, he stands still and closes his eyes. When he opens them, he sees before him a smiling woman whose face is as pleasing as a lotus blossom. She is black, her breasts are large, and she is naked. Her hair is dishevelled, and she glows with the brilliance of a million suns. Siva asks: 'Where is my beloved Sati?' She replies: 'Do you not see Sati standing before you?'
> (Kinsley, 1997: 23)

Sati proceeds to attend Daksa's sacrifice, an act which culminates in tragedy. Sati kills herself in outrage. Accounts vary, but two significant interpretations suggest that Sati offers herself as the sacrifice. In one, a devastated Siva clings to her body, carrying her 'about the universe … Vishnu follows the grieving Siva about and gradually slices bits and pieces from Sati's body until nothing remains. The pieces of her corpse fall to the earth; wherever a bit of her body lands a sacred place, called a *pitha*, is established, where goddesses of various names and types become the object of worship' (Kinsley, 1988: 38). In another, Sati simply immolates herself 'in the fire of her own yoga' (Flood, 1996: 192).

There is a connection between this myth and the practice of *suttee*, whereby widows are expected to destroy themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands (Flood, 1996: 192–3). This connection would suggest that ritual sacrifice envigours

and reinforces a hierarchical and patriarchal social structure. In addition, a related myth, which is cited as the reason that Siva was not invited to the sacrifice, also appears to suggest that Siva's power largely lies within unconventional forces, which lie at the periphery of the Hindu social, sacrificial order. According to Dyczowski,

> the Kapalikas worshipped Bhairava, the wrathful form of Siva who, because he decapitated Brahma, was forced to carry a skull as penance … it was because Siva was a Kapalin that Daksa did not invite him to the sacrifice that he had prepared for the gods. In this version of the myth, the orthodox tradition represented by Daksa does not appear to be concerned to exclude Siva from the pantheon as much as Bhairava-the Skull Bearer and the god of many Saiva Agamic cults, including those of the Kapalikas. (Dyczowski, 1988: 29)

Initial myths concerning Bhairava, therefore, appear to explore a straightforward opposition between orderly society, maintained through adherence to the Veda and the practice of ritual sacrifice, and the violent rejection of that society, by members of extreme Siva cults, such as the Kapalikas, Aghoris and Naths. The reincorporation of a 'tamed' version of Siva into the sacrificial fold could therefore be viewed as evidence for a gradual decline of 'tantric' elements in Hinduism, coupled with their incorporation into Indian practices more generally, in a milder form. Flood, for example, refers to a version of the myth whereby Siva beheads Daksa when he discovers Sati's death, suggesting that one interpretation relates to Siva's status and worship more broadly:

> Siva was originally excluded from the vedic sacrifice…he is a deity perhaps originally from outside the vedic pantheon, but who came to be accepted as one of the gods. Indeed, in destroying the sacrifice with fire, Siva is paradoxically fulfilling it and so ensuring that the sacrifice is his. We can, in fact, see in this myth an analogue for the development of Saivism. As Siva is outside the vedic fold, so are the traditions associated with him, and as Siva makes his presence known so forcefully and is, of necessity, absorbed within the vedic pantheon, so Saiva traditions are incorporated into vedic ideology and practice. (Flood, 1996: 150)

From this position sacrifice is exclusively concerned with renewing social stability, and is therefore the preserve of privileged groups, such as the *brahmans* in Hinduism. Siva, however, also utilizes sacrifice. By severing Brahma's head, Siva makes his own bid for power through committing a transgression, suggesting that the sacrifice, like the sacred, has an ambivalent role in the formation of religious identity. Visuvalingam alludes to this in her exploration of the origin myth of Bhairava, a manifestation of Siva who commits the heinous crime of Brahmanicide, when he slices off the fifth head of Brahma with his thumbnail (Visuvalingam, 1989: 157). This act, she suggests, defines his essence in terms of 'transgressive sacrality' (Visuvalingam, 1989: 160). She points out that Abhinavagupta, an influential Kashmir Saiva philosopher who is associated with the *brahmanical* trend of modifying the more extreme elements in tantric worship, nevertheless exalts Bhairava (Visuvalingam, 1989: 159–160).

Moreover, her account of the myth begins with a disagreement between Brahma and Vishnu, who each assert their right to be considered the supreme deity. The testimony of the four Vedas, however, argues that Siva-Rudra expresses the Ultimate Truth: 'But the disputants were unable to accept that Rudra, endowed with so many

symbols of impurity and degradation, could be identical with the Absolute Reality of Brahman' (Visuvalingam, 1989: 160). Rudra appears, emerging from a pillar of flame, but the fifth head of Brahma continues to taunt Rudra, whereupon Siva creates Bhairava, who punishes Brahma, severing the fifth head with his left thumb-nail. Although Vishnu and Brahma immediately acknowledge the supremacy of Siva, Bhairava's act still requires a penance. The severed head sticks to Bhairava's hand, remaining there in the form of a skull begging-bowl. As a rite of expiation, Bhairava is ordered to roam the world in this condition, followed everywhere by a female, called *Brahmahatya*, brahmanicide (Visuvalingam, 1989: 160–61).

He thereby observes the Kapalika rite of atonement until he arrives at the domicile of Vishnu. Bhairava's way is blocked by a guard, and he therefore commits a second brahmanicide, and kills him. Carrying the corpse on his shoulder, he presents himself to Vishnu. Vishnu offers his own blood as an offering, in an attempt to compensate for the crime, but although it flows for aeons, the blood cannot fill Bhairava's begging-bowl. Vishnu therefore venerates Bhairava, suggesting that he is a Supreme Being, untainted by sin. His degradation is, therefore, merely an illusion. The episode is completed when *Brahmahatya* sinks into the underworld, taking the skull with her and freeing Bhairava (Visuvalingam, 1989: 161).

Bhairava's twelve years of wandering identifies him with an impure criminal. Moreover, it corresponds with the punishment recommended for brahmanicide in Hindu lawbooks. Nevertheless, while real murderers of *brahmans* were 'considered wholly degraded, Bhairava is exalted' (Visuvalingam, 1989: 164). This paradox is central to the identity of the Kapalikas, who performed this rite of penance, carrying the skull-bowl and skull-staff (*khatvanga*), even when they had not literally committed the crime (Visuvalingam, 1989: 164). She also asks why the crime of brahmanicide is specifically chosen, and argues that the key to the answer lies in the vedic theory of sacrifice, which

> presupposes that the consecrated victim should be defectless, pure and auspicious, and that with the ideal victim being a Brahman, Brahmanicide, or whatever it symbolizes, would itself be productive of great power. The purifications that the sacrificer had to undergo after the sacrifice moreover resembled the expiation of the criminal, and the diksita was in fact equated to a Brahmanicide. But the sacrificial mechanisms revolved around the identification of the sacrificer, the victim and the divinity, and ultimately offered the sacrificer the means of sacrificing himself to the divinity, but through the mediation of the victim with whom he was symbolically identified. The Kapalikas' practice of sacrificing their own flesh and blood as oblations probably carries the notion of self-sacrifice to its logical conclusions. (Visuvalingam, 1989: 164–5)

In addition, because *brahmans* had to maintain their position by following a series of prohibitions which were thought to maintain their purity, a number of other sins were equated by legal codes to brahmanicide. These included incest, stealing a *brahman's* gold, associating with criminals, intercourse with a low-caste woman, dropping of hair or fingernails into food, and eating with the left (impure), rather than the right (pure) hand. The execution of Brahma with the left thumbnail therefore suggests a symbolism that utilizes transgression in a wider sense, particularly when that transgression is embedded in ritual impurity (Visuvalingam, 1989: 165). She

therefore locates the source of conflict in the myth as one between two poles of the sacred (Visuvalingam, 1989: 167). This conflict is not just played out between deities, it also lies within each of them individually. She suggests, for example, that while Vishnu often portrays *brahmanical* orthodoxy, he has a secret, transgressive, face. Incarnations of Vishnu, such as the boar Varaha, emerge, like Bhairava, from a pillar (Visuvalingam, 1989: 168).

This idea can be related to Turner's notions of liminality. The twelve years of wandering constitutes a typical period of initiation for Hindu adepts, while Bhairava confronts Vishnu on a doorstep or threshold. There are also echoes of Eliade's analysis. The symbol of the pillar not only refers to the sacrificial stake, but also to the 'immeasurable world pillar traversing and uniting the three cosmic levels of netherworld, earth, and heavens', which the Kapalikas carry as a symbolic weapon in the form of the khatvanga (Visuvalingam, 1989: 183). This symbolism is retained in the iconography of tantric Buddhist wrathful deities, such as Heruka, and is related to the etheric body, where the central channel, *susumna*, is the focus of attention. The *khatvanga* here partly refers to the ascent and descent of subtle substances within the central channel (Visuvalingam, 1989: 183). At the heart of her exploration, however, is the notion that sacrifice, like the sacred, is ambiguous. Although in one sense the ritual is an attempt to structure, channel, and ultimately transform, dangerous emotions, polluting substances, and unconventional behaviour, on another it draws from these powerful forces in order to be effective. I will therefore use Hubert and Mauss's work to examine sacrificial rites more deeply, suggesting that they can best be understood in terms of the manipulation of social energy.

Hubert and Mauss's exploration of sacrifice largely utilizes anthropological models, in order to 'define the nature and social function of sacrifice' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 1). However, they question Robertson Smith's explanation, partly because he assumes that totemism was literally the original religion of all societies (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 5). Secondly, while Smith emphasizes the importance of communion as the defining element in sacrifice, Hubert and Mauss also stress the mechanism of *piaculum*, or expiation, arguing that 'the expulsion of a sacred spirit, whether pure or impure, is a primordial component of sacrifice, as primordial and irreducible as communion' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 6). They therefore explore in some depth Hindu Sanskrit texts and evidence from Judaism (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 7).

In explaining sacrifice, Hubert and Mauss take the idea of consecration as a starting point. However, while all sacrifices contain an element of consecration, not all consecrations are necessarily sacrificial. What makes sacrifice distinct is an extension of its effects,

> beyond the thing consecrated; among other objects, it touches the moral person who bears the expenses of the ceremony. The devotee who provides the victim which is the object of the consecration is not, at the completion of the operation, the same as he was at the beginning. He has acquired a religious character which he did not have before, or has rid himself of an unfavourable character with which he was affected; he has raised himself to a state of grace or has emerged from a state of sin. In either case he has been religiously transformed. (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 9–10)

They go on to use the term *sacrificer* to denote the subject who benefits from a sacrifice, suggesting that this subject can be an individual, or a group. In addition, objects of sacrifice, may also be transformed by ritual. For example, a newly built house might be the focus of rites. These instances, however, tend to affect a person at the same time, for example, the owner of the house (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 10). Sacrifice is also distinguished by the specific role of victim. Firstly,

> the thing consecrated serves as an intermediary between the sacrificer … and the divinity to whom the sacrifice is usually addressed. Man and the god are not in direct contact. In this way sacrifice is distinguished from most of the facts grouped under the heading of blood covenant, in which by the exchange of blood a direct fusion of human and divine life is brought about. (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 11)

Secondly, the victim is more than a simple offering, because the offering does not automatically undergo a change in its essential nature. For the offering to be defined as a sacrificial victim, whether it is an animal, fruit, or vegetable substance, it must be destroyed. It is this destruction which gives sacrifice its potency, because 'the religious energy released is stronger' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 12). They therefore define sacrifice as follows: 'sacrifice is a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 13).

The mechanism of sacrifice is described as consisting of three parts: entry, the central destruction of the victim, and exit. All three are governed by a negotiation with the sacred. While its tripartite structure has points in common with Turner's analysis of ritual, the process also has features which appear to be liminal. For example, before the ceremony, the sacrificer, his instruments and the place of worship, and the victim are not necessarily sacred. However, the rite, being concerned with religious forces, cannot be properly executed unless the profane condition of the people and objects involved is brought, to some extent, within the domain of the sacred. There must therefore be an entry into the sacrifice (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 20). In addition, the sacrificer is often considered too profane, or sullied with impurities, to approach sacrifice too closely. The priest therefore acts as an intermediary, who therefore becomes liminal. The ambiguity of his role not only rests on the fact that he operates in disparate worlds, his own condition is transformed by virtue of his participation in them both. If the sacrificer cannot attend the sacrifice in person,

> the priest becomes, on the one hand, the mandatory of the sacrificer, whose condition he shares and whose sins he bears. On the other hand, however, he is sealed with a divine seal. He bears the name, the title, or the robe of his god. He is his minister, even his incarnate presence … he is the visible agent of consecration in the sacrifice. In short, he stands on the threshold of the sacred and the profane world and represents them both at one and the same time. They are linked in him. (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 23)

The Hindu *brahman* can therefore enter the sacrifice with the minimum of preliminaries, for he is regarded as already more imbued with the sacred than the average person. This attitude also points to his continual concern with purity, a

concern which suggests that, even when not actually performing a sacrifice, he is in a condition of perpetual readiness to do so. For similar reasons, a temple requires less preparation for sacrifice, while other places need to go through processes of consecration before they can be used (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 25).

In the Hindu context, the setting up of fires was vital to making a place suitable, defining a sacred rectangular space known as the *vihara* (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 26). Within this, is a space known as the vedi, the site of the gods during the ceremony. Its most central point is the sacrificial pole or *yupa*, to which the animal will be bound. This stake recalls Eliade's concept of the world tree or cosmic pillar. Not only is it 'one of the points at which all the religious forces that are in operation converge and are consecrated', it is also thought to touch three realms in space: the upper part recalls heaven; the middle, air; and the bottom, earth (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 27). The *yupa* is also identified with the sacrificer. The creation of this sacred space also has points in common with the mandala. The activities define

> a series of concentric magic circles within the sacred area. In the outer circle stands the sacrificer; then come in turn the priest, the altar, and the stake. On the perimeter, where stands the layman on whose behalf the sacrifice takes place, the religious atmosphere is weak and minimal. It increases as the space in which it is developed grows smaller. The whole activity of the place of sacrifice is thus organized and concentrated around a single focus. Everything converges around the victim who is now about to appear.
> (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 29)

The victim is raised by various procedures into an ever more sacred state, a process which culminates, in the Vedic rituals, with the circumambulation of the victim by the priest, 'a final ceremony whose effect is to enclose the victim itself in a final magic circle, smaller and more divine than the others' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 31). In addition, the victim is identified with the sacrificer: 'Indeed, it is not enough to say that it represents him: it is merged in him. The two personalities are fused together' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 32). At the same time, a certain distance is maintained. The sacrificer needs to come into contact with the victim, in order for an exchange of energy between them to take place. The animal's death, can therefore restore the vitality of the sacrificer. At the same time, the victim, being highly charged with the sacred, can only be approached with caution, and therefore a mediator, the priest, touches it, but using an instrument: 'Thus this process of drawing together the sacred and the profane, which we have seen come about progressively through the various elements of the sacrifice, is completed in the victim' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 32).

The pivotal moment of sacrifice, the destruction of the victim, is also highly ambivalent. It is essential to break the victim's link to the profane, and release its spirit. However, sacrifice is also a crime, 'a kind of sacrilege … the purifications which the sacrificer had to undergo after the sacrifice resembled moreover the expiation of a criminal … this was because the act of slaughter released an ambiguous force – or rather a blind one, terrible by the very fact that it was a force. It therefore has to be limited, directed, and tamed; this was what the rites were for' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 33). This tension, at the heart of sacrifice, indicates a relationship with

the broader tension which I have explored in this chapter, between the emotional energy and social structure.

The body which remained, because it retained some element of the sacred powers of the victim, was also the subject of various rites. When burnt, the process was relatively swift. However, the body could also be used to imbue the sacrificer with its qualities. Before the kill, the sacrificer used touch to give something of himself to the victim. Afterwards, the victim's body could be used to communicate its sacred character to the participants. This is most intimate when parts of the body were consumed: 'By eating a portion of it he assimilated to himself the characteristics of the whole' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 40). In the example of Hindu animal sacrifice, some portions are allocated to the gods, while others, ida, are divided between the priest and the sacrificer. Before any portions are eaten, goddesses are invoked: 'the divinity is not only invited to be present at and to participate in the sacrifice, but even to descend into the offering. What takes place is a veritable transubstantiation…a mingling of the two substances which become absorbed in each other to the point of becoming indistinguishable' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898): 43–4).

The process is completed by rites of exit, which restore the participants to the profane world. These consist largely of the purification or destruction of the sacrificial instrument and the purification, using water, of the participants (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 46–7). Hubert and Mauss therefore suggest that the process of sacrifice is marked by degrees of intensity: 'The religious condition of the sacrificer thus also describes a curve symmetrical to the one traced by the victim. He begins by rising progressively into the religious sphere, and attains a culminating point, whence he descends again into the profane' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 48).

Hubert and Mauss suggest that, in a general sense, the basic mechanism they describe can be applied to a variety of sacrifices. However, they do refer to subtle differences. For example, while the aim of the rite can be summarized in terms of effecting a change of state for the sacrificer, the details are refined according to his condition before the ritual. If he is regarded as neutral, the sacrifice, and especially the victim, imparts something of the sacred to him (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 50–52). In other instances the sacrificer intends to unburden himself of an excess of sacred energy. These examples include criminals, sinners, the sick, or those who have come into contact with death, because their state is also imbued with the sacred, but in its impure form. These rites therefore emphasize expiation, and have 'as their purpose to communicate to the victim, by the sacrificial continuity, the sacrificer's religious impurity and with that victim to eliminate it' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 53). However there are also sacrifices which remove a temporary state of sanctity which is not considered a blemish, for example at the conclusion of a religious vow. They therefore suggest that expiation is only one example of a more general class of sacrifice, which Hubert and Mauss term the 'sacrifice of desacrilization' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 57).

Despite the differences between these rituals, their basic resemblance suggests that the different expressions of the sacred are similar in essence:

> It is already a remarkable fact that, in a general way, sacrifice could serve two such contradictory aims as that of inducing a state of sanctity and that of dispelling a state of

> sin. Since it is composed of the same elements in both cases, there cannot exist between these two states the clear-cut opposition that is generally seen … what is pure and what is impure are not mutually exclusive opposites; they are two aspects of religious reality. The religious forces are characterized by their intensity, their importance, their dignity; consequently they are separated … they can be exerted for good as well as for evil … thus is explained the way in which the same mechanism of sacrifice can satisfy religious needs the difference between which is extreme. It bears the same ambiguity as the religious forces themselves … by suitable procedures these two forms of religious feeling can be transformed into each other. (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 58–60)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the consort relationship through the mythology of Hindu deities, suggesting that this material explores tensions between male and female, shaped by the structure of Indian society. Kali's association with dangerous and disruptive substances and emotions may therefore reflect a patriarchal concern with the control and subordination of women. However, opposition and reconciliation between consorts is also used as a metaphor for uneasy alliances between different values in Hindu society, for example, those of householders and ascetics. Moreover, the concept of 'love in separation' suggests that the emotions of erotic love and a practitioner's relationship with the divine have something in common, an idea which becomes highly developed in a tantric context. I have suggested that both human relationships and interactions with the deity move between states of union and instances of distinction or distance. Similarly, allusions to sacrifice in the myths about Sati may have reinforced practices which were harmful to women. Nevertheless, I have argued, drawing from Hubert and Mauss, that the theme of sacrifice was not only utilized by representatives of social order. Mediating powerful social energies, sacrifice is also characterized by a degree of ambivalence, which, I suggest, partly explains its presence in the context of consort relationships.

Fundamentally, sacrifice and the concept of consort deities both express a tension between the sacred and the profane. In sacrifice, the profane is able to communicate with the sacred, while paradoxically maintaining a safe distance. This is possible because the individual uses an intermediary, the victim. The destruction of the victim therefore prevents the destruction of the sacrificer (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 98). The sacrificial ritual can therefore be imagined as a process which creates a conduit for social energy, an analogy which explains the transfer of qualities between the sacrificer and the victim. In some cases the sacrificer receives some of the sacred properties of the victim. In others the sacrificer unburdens energies of the 'impure' sacred, which are received by the victim. However, sacrifice usually combines these two processes within the same ritual. This is possible because sacrilization and expiation are different aspects of the same principle, 'the link between the sacred and the sacrificer, which is established through the victim, regenerates the sacrificer and gives him a new power' (Hubert & Mauss, 1964 [1898]: 62).

Consort deities can also express polarities, between the genders and within society. When portrayed as subject to human emotions, deities are more easily conveyed to the human imagination. At the same time, these emotions are sometimes regarded as

a suitable 'intermediary', which enables practitioners to draw closer to the sacred, through a passionate relationship with the divine. In tantra, this relationship is made more complex because the deity is not always seen as a distinct entity. There is, rather, a more fluid conception of the divine, which penetrates earthly forms of being. The deity is not only a mythical religious personality, but also constitutes the energy of the subtle body.

Lilian Silburn explores this idea in the Kashmir Saivism of the 4th to 17th centuries, through the work of the philosopher Abhinavagupta (Silburn, 1988: xv). She suggests that he makes no sharp distinction between the universal and the individual body, viewing each person as containing, in microcosm, elements and forms of consciousness which are fundamental to universal processes, including the energies of Siva and Sakti (Silburn, 1988: 81). Within the subtle body, these energies are concentrated on either side of the central channel. Purification is partly conceived in terms of a balance between these two sides, a union of male and female energy within the etheric body (Silburn, 1988: 26–33).

Therefore, the subtle body, when functioning correctly, can also be imagined as a conduit. The transfer of energy, however, is not a self-contained phenomenon. During initiation, for example, the practitioner's cakras can be 'pierced' by the mantra vibrations of the master. Nevertheless, female consorts are regarded as vital to the act of transmission, because they absorb these energies more easily. The guru can therefore initiate her first, whereupon she initiates her male consort (Silburn, 1988: 175). This process culminates in instances of ritual sexuality, described in terms of sacrifice (Silburn, 1988: 184). It focuses on an exchange of energy between the partners, 'from mouth to mouth', a phrase which also refers to exchanges of food between the mouths of the bride and groom in Kashmiran marriage ceremonies (Silburn, 1988: 191). The intimacy of this relationship is thought to transcend the usual barriers of caste and gender, because the female consort is not chosen on the basis of beauty or worldly status. Rather she shares with the male partner a similar orientation towards tantric goals and an ability to concentrate both the mind and subtle energies (Silburn, 1988: 180).

While in one sense tantric circles could consider themselves beyond caste distinctions, in another they can be seen to reverse their polarity. According to Bougle, the caste system is characterized by three primary features, hierarchy, hereditary specialization, and repulsion. This, he suggests, means that

> the different groups of which that society is composed, repel each other rather than attract, that each retires within itself, isolates itself, makes every effort to prevent its members from contracting alliances or even from entering into relations with neighbouring groups … horror of misalliance, fear of impure contacts and repulsion for all those who are unrelated, such are the characteristic signs of this spirit. It seems to us that it is, as it were, designed to atomize the societies into which it penetrates; it divides them not merely into superimposed levels but into a multitude of opposed fragments; it brings each of the elementary groups face to face, separated by a mutual repulsion. (Bougle, 1971 [1908]: 9)

If this definition is accurate, then tantra challenges the social order of caste by utilizing forces of attraction, rather than repulsion. While the social body in Indian society was regulated by a series of relationships of avoidance, particularly of the

'impure' sacred, tantric ritual thrives on the notion of contact. Moreover, this would suggest that, although moral order and communitas both arise from the sacred, they can nonetheless be distinguished. Systems of order are more orientated to social than purely individual desires, but they are more differentiated than, for example, the emotional energy of collective effervescence. For this reason, I have been cautious in this chapter about the suggestion that tantra was essentially a peripheral, tribal, movement of individualists, although all of these identities may have contributed to tantra's self-image. More precisely, I have argued that tantra can be seen to respond to a series of tensions at the heart of Indian social life and that therefore its more extreme practices and images may have been an attempt (although not necessarily a conscious one) to redress the balance between forces of attraction and repulsion within society.

This idea is supported by the connection between tantra and the theme of sacrifice, because while sacrifice is thought to transform the individual sacrificer, it is primarily concerned with the maintenance and utilization of social forces. For this reason it is associated with the rejuvenation, not only of the participants, but of society more broadly, and even of the cycle of time itself. In addition, the gruesome imagery of the practice of carrying the skull begging-bowl may have marked ascetics out as potentially dangerous, unconventional individuals, but, as a symbol of penance, the skull-bowl is also evocative of a re-established relationship with the divine.

Concepts of sin, expiation, and penance are explored by Hertz in his work on sin. He describes penitence in terms of a 'second baptism' because of the way that it restores the social and moral energies of the individual (Hertz, 1996 [1922]: 57). He begins with a discussion of Christian ideas, which sets the process of sin, penance, and reconciliation with the divine in the context of a conflict between an errant son (worshipper) and a forgiving father (God) (Hertz, 1996 [1922]: 63–5). He is, however, cautious about purely psychological explanations for this myth, suggesting that it

> remains to be proved that sin and expiation are nothing more than the necessary projection on the supernatural order of this little private drama running from the son's offence to the father's pardon … to try to reduce these essentially troubled and collective ideas … and emotions to the scale of human and individual feelings is to be condemned to ignorance of what it is that produces their originality and power. (Hertz, 1996 [1922]: 65)

He suggests that such explanations are limited because sin cannot be reduced to personal or conscious faults, it extends to unwitting transgressions, or can be caught up in the actions of others to whom the person is related (Hertz, 1996 [1922]: 73). In addition, although sin is thought to produce radical changes within the individual, imbibing them with a kind of impure or dangerous substance, it cannot be removed by way of a purely subjective change. The pardon which renews a believer is endowed with miraculous and supernatural power (Hertz, 1996 [1922]: 72–4). Hertz therefore draws from comparative ethnology, focusing on Polynesian societies, to argue that sin and expiation are concerned with three key ideas, taboo, transgression, and purification (Hertz, 1996 [1922]: 85–108).

In one sense, therefore, skull imagery, whether it belongs to practitioners or divinities, can be related to social and moral life. Nevertheless, in Chapter 6, I will argue that the iconography of wrathful deities is also significant for individual identity, being associated not only with sacrifice, but also with magic. In the next chapter, however, I will draw from Hertz's ideas to explore Tibetan Buddhist notions of purification, particularly with regard to the themes of altered states of consciousness and death. Hertz's interest in a polarity between the pure and the impure is evident not only in his exploration of sin, but also in his writings on death, and on 'the right hand', a connection that Parkin draws attention to, and which he locates in Hertz's preoccupation with the 'dark side of humanity' (Parkin, 1996: 123).

In addition, I will suggest that the notion of transgression can be expanded, particularly in the context of consort relationships, to include the transgression of the boundaries of time and space. From this perspective, while consorts may be separated physically, they can still maintain a connection through shared visionary or dream experiences. Chapter 4 therefore explores the foundations of such experiences in tantric Buddhism, based on the idea that sexuality and death are related to one another, and that both can be imitated or 'practised' in ritual.

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Chapter 4

Sacred Physiology, Yoga, and Death

Introduction: Immortality and Eternity

In the previous chapters, I explored thematic similarities between Hindu and Buddhist tantra, suggesting that both forms originated from common circumstances in the cultural climate in India from a period spanning 500 CE to about 1500 CE. Using the anthropological and sociological theories proposed by Durkheim, Mauss, Turner, and Eliade, I suggested that tantra arose as a response to particularly strong tensions between moral order, as represented by the *brahmanical* tradition, and collective effervescence, which manifested itself in a number of religious practices, movements, and myths. These included *bhakti* devotion, circles of practitioners, which incorporated both genders and a number of castes, and the concept of deities in sexual, consort relationship. While in some ways the *brahmanical* tradition represented a threat to tantric initiates, because *brahmans* were powerful enough to impose religious and social sanctions on tantrikas, from another perspective the conservative pole was not an entirely negative force, because it intensified the potential power of utilizing *transgression* in order to generate intense emotional and religious experiences. I focused upon transgression at a social level, in this case that of caste and gender boundaries, to examine ways in which it can be understood to have aided a sense of communitas in tantric circles.

The flouting of traditional authority may have been a reaction to spontaneous movements of collective energy, brought about by tensions located in the erecting of boundaries between the realms of the sacred and the profane, and the necessary tearing of these boundaries. For some individuals, this may have been in part a conscious political strategy underpinning tantric practices such as ritual intercaste sexuality. There may also have been unconscious elements to these practices, which I suggest can be explored by looking at the relationship between personal feelings and fluctuations of emotional energy in society. However, I have argued that these elements, studied without considering the role of altered states of consciousness, especially in consort relationships, may not provide a complete picture of the dynamics involved, especially the role of intensely passionate sexual and spiritual love between some tantric partners.

This chapter develops the theme of transgression in more detail, suggesting an intimate relationship between the three-dimensional nature of consciousness and perceptions of time. From this perspective, collective consciousness, being undifferentiated, is associated with eternity, in the sense of timelessness. This connection is described by both Caillois and Eliade, who argue that myths concerned with primordial beings, arise from, and are evoked during, times of intense collective and religious activity, such as the festival. In contrast, profane time, being associated

with differentiated consciousness, is more linear and structured. For Eliade, the concept of eternity is connected with sacred, primordial, and mythic time, because it is bound up with a cyclical pattern, in social life, that is connected with ritual. He describes ritual as imbuing human acts with sacred energy, and thus a transcendent reality, because

> their meaning, their value, are not connected with their crude physical datum but with their property of reproducing a primordial act, or repeating a mythical example … they are repeated because they were consecrated in the beginning … by gods, ancestors, or heroes. (Eliade, 1954: 4–5)

The circular imagery applies not only to the repetition of ritual gestures, but also to the ways in which the division of sacred and profane time in society is linked to concepts of renewal. This is especially true of rites connected with new cycles of time, such as the New Year, which are often associated with festival, the expulsion of demons, purification, resurrection of the body, and the breaking of barriers between the living and the dead (Eliade, 1954: 52–62). This creative act is intimately concerned with a return to the centre, a concept not limited to space, but which also relates to sacred time or eternity, a point from which chaos is transformed into cosmos, in other words from social being as anarchic to initial structure (Eliade, 1954: 17–18).

Caillois, drawing from Durkheim, frames his thesis in the context of the polarity of sacred and profane, focusing on the role of transgression. For Caillois, myths of primordial time are related to the renewal of social life, which occurs periodically in societies as a result of a transgression or rupture between the realms of collective and individuated consciousness. Taboo, the mechanism that usually keeps these worlds apart, is ritually broken during festivity, thus releasing aspects of social being associated with undifferentiated, primal chaos, which is understood to have existed before the original ancestors instituted taboos regulating both social and natural order (Caillois, 1959: 103):

> Simultaneously nightmare and paradise, the primordial age seems like the period or the state of creative vigour from which the present world escaped, with its vicissitudes of wear and tear and the threat of death. Consequently, it is by being reborn, by reinvigorating himself in this ever-present eternity, as in a fountain of youth with continuously running water, in which he has the chance to rejuvenate himself and to rediscover the plenitude and robustness of life, that the celebrant will be able to brave a new cycle of time. (Caillois, 1959: 107)

He also suggests that the unleashing of intense emotional energy is observable in the increased movement and excitement of human beings, generated by their unusual proximity:

> It connotes a large conglomeration of moving and boisterous people. These massed gatherings eminently favour the creation and contagion of an exalted state that exhausts itself in cries and movement and that is incited to uncontrollably abandon itself to the most irrational impulses … the human mass, swarming, undulating, and stamping the ground, pivots and sways around a center pole. (Caillois, 1959: 97–8)

Altered states of consciousness can thus be understood as transformative processes that mediate between primordial and profane time, giving rise to 'glimpses of eternity', or momentary apprehensions of the tension between these two realms. In the context of the consort relationship therefore, the symbolic rupture of the social order, implied by transgressions of social boundaries may also have been related to more literal tears in the space–time continuum, facilitating particular forms of communication in the tantric movement. One way of exploring this communication is to re-examine the role of the body in tantric practice, and especially the relationship between deity yoga, death, and sexuality.

In Chapter 5, I will explore sacred biographical literature, which, as a genre, tends to view themes of religious transformation as being more important than chronological accuracy. By placing these ideas in the context of human life-stories, it is possible to gain a better understanding of ways in which boundaries of time and space are thought to be crossed by practitioners, and to set the events concerned in the context of religious identity and human relationships. For example, deities and dakinis are described as having contact with human beings, and persons come to view themselves as deities and incarnations of previous teachers. In common with a number of other cultures, Tibetan biographies portray pivotal moments in the religious career as characterized by a crisis, involving some form of death and rebirth. While I will concentrate on the relational aspects of this crisis in Chapter 5, underlying them is the assumption that gaining spiritual power involves the ability to move, between the world of the living, and the realms of the dead; by experiencing death in some form.

The focus, therefore, of this chapter, is to explore transformative rites, in which both death and sexuality are 'practised' or 'mimicked' by practitioners, who thereby uncover relationships between physical experiences and consciousness. By doing so, they also reveal subtle aspects of communication, associated with subliminal energy, and manifesting themselves in, for example, visionary experience. In tantric Buddhism, this process is framed by a negotiation between three dimensions of enlightened experience, the 'three bodies of the Buddha' (*trikaya*), accomplished through the experience and understanding of death, rebirth, and the intermediate state.

The Three Bodies of the Buddha

The literature on death and dying in Tibetan tantra is both extensive and extremely diverse (Mullin, 1998: 15). Although the breadth and detail of materials on this topic preclude the possibility of surveying all of their implications, I suggest that there are a number of recurring themes that are particularly illuminating in this context, and which therefore provide the framework for this chapter. For example, many Tibetan deities are associated with death in differing ways. Yamantaka, a fierce deity, is believed to help destroy fear of its more terrifying aspects by cutting through confusion, and he is therefore related to Manjusri, the bodhisattva of Wisdom (Mullin, 1985: 81). Amitabha, a deity related to the transformation of passion into compassion, is also invoked to promote longevity, in oneself and others (Mullin,

1998: 151). However, despite their differences, both sets of beliefs and practices hinge on a relationship between death and consciousness, based upon the idea that actual death is a *process* rather than an instantaneous event. There is thought to be a time lapse between physical death and the ejection of consciousness from the body. Therefore,

> if the body is cremated before consciousness has left, it is almost the same as murder. The body should be left untouched until consciousness has departed. If it is touched, the consciousness may leave from the first point of contact. Because it is more favourable for it to leave via the upper than the lower portions of the body, the first place to be touched should be the crown of the head. (Mullin, 1998: 87)

In addition, the behaviour of those who have contact with someone who is dying in Tibet is guided by the idea that the experience of the death and the rebirth process can be influenced by the state of mind of the person concerned, and therefore emotional agitation is discouraged (Mullin, 1998: 82). This is one of a number of points where observable behaviour, of interest to anthropologists, intersects with perspectives that permeate both popular Tibetan religious tradition and restricted practices of higher yoga tantra.

Another related example is the widespread belief that faith in deities such as Amitabha can transform the instant of death into enlightenment, or failing that, enable the practitioner to be reborn into a pure land, known in Tibetan as *Dewachen* (Vessantara, 1998: 99). However, the tantric practice of *phowa* (transference of consciousness), which is understood to accomplish this, is regarded as complex and dangerous, because it involves manipulating the subtle body and simulating aspects of death. Therefore even with initiation and the guidance of a qualified teacher, it is done for a relatively short period of time, usually until physical signs appear, such as small amounts of blood and pus, from an aperture in the crown of the head (Mullin, 1998: 85).

This increasing level of subtlety not only applies to technical proficiency, but to the way that concepts, such as that of pure lands like *Dewachen*, are perceived. For example, the deity and the tantra known as *Kalacakra*, or wheel of time, are also related to the belief in a pure land, known as *Sambhala*. While this land may be described as clearly distinguished in space and time from earth, it is also possible to argue that Sambhala is a product of the visionary experiences that generated the *Kalacakra* texts, and the transformations in consciousness related to those experiences:

> According to Buddhist tradition, the *Kalacakra Mulatantra*, or *Root Tantra* (also known as the *Paramadibuddha*), was taught by the Buddha Sakyamuni in his mystical manifestation as the deity Kalacakra to King Sucandra of Sambhala, who had travelled to India to request these teachings from him. From Sucandra, this lineage was passed down through a line of seven Great Kings and twenty-one Kalki Kings of Sambhala, beginning with Yasas Manjusri … when Yasas Manjusri reincarnates as the twenty-fifth Kalki King, Sambhala and our world will unite and a time of great material and spiritual bounty will begin … whether Sambhala is located on our planet but can be experienced only by those whose minds and karmic propensities are pure, or whether it exists elsewhere is a

> question still debated by devout Tibetan Buddhists. But it is certainly true that for almost a millennium Tibetan Buddhists have been praying to be re-born in Sambhala or in our world when the twenty-fifth Kalki King appears and the golden era of Sambhala begins. (Lamrimpa, 1999: 2)

The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is also described as a visionary text. More precisely, it derives from a 14th-century text, the *Great Liberation Upon Hearing in the Bardo*, which is an example of a *terma* treasure, one of many thought to have been hidden by Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyel, in both physical form, and as a 'seed' in the consciousness of initiates, which is 'rediscovered' when needed, or when the consciousness of the 'discoverer' has ripened. In this case the transmission is thought to have been imparted to *Karma-Lingpa*, an incarnation of one of these original disciples (Freemantle & Trungpa, 1992: vii–viii; Cuevas, 2003: 14–17). Its relationship with primordial states of consciousness is, however, not only related to the history of its generation, but is explicit in its content. It is partly intended as a guide for persons undergoing the actual death process, which is seen as structured three-dimensionally, consisting of death, the *bardo* or intermediate state, and rebirth. In addition, the book is relevant beyond instances of literal death. It describes visionary states of consciousness, also experienced and utilized by the living, in order to transform negative emotional states into the basis for enlightenment. This process is thought to purify energies, known collectively as karma (Freemantle & Trungpa, 1992: xxii–xxiii).

This concept of purification is intimately bound up with assumptions concerning the intermediate state (between death and rebirth). On the one hand, it is especially volatile, rendering one who undergoes it vulnerable, and potentially distressed. On the other, it is more open to the possibility of personal transformation. The end of actual death is described as complete blackness, followed by total unconsciousness, and is therefore thought difficult, if not impossible to control. Rebirth, likened to waking states, is associated with physical embodiment and differentiated consciousness, and is therefore based upon what Buddhism depicts as a false sense of a real and permanent self. The intermediate state is distinguished by its dream-like quality, wherein freedom from the gross body is combined with greatly heightened mental powers, enabling consciousness to travel at will, and to communicate its own nature to individuals in the form of intense visions (Rinbochay & Hopkins, 1985: 52).

It is for this reason that fear itself is deemed as having an overwhelming power, generating experiences of a terrifying nature. Although the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* mentions Amitabha as only one of many deities which appear in this state, his association with eliminating fear and attachment to the body are themes which permeate the whole text. For example, Amitabha is one of several deities portrayed as appearing in the bardo in the form of brilliant light (in this case red), which can be nonetheless disturbing. At the same time, clouded emotions appear in the form of a smoke-like haze, initially more attractive, but more potentially dangerous. The practice encourages people to ignore yearning for clouded appearances and to recognize brilliant luminosity as a natural radiance, which is the essence of their own nature (Freemantle & Trungpa, 1992: 109).

This idea may also be related to ways in which the deity Vajrasattva (diamond purity) is related to the death process itself, and to his role as a gateway for higher initiations in Buddhist tantric practice. Some Vajrasattva initiations act simultaneously as initiations into the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Samye Ling Tibetan Centre, Vajrasattva initiation: 1998). In addition, primordial experiences of intense clarity which arise on emerging from undifferentiated consciousness in the death process (known as the Clear Light of Reality), are also linked with Vajrasattva (Vessantara, 1998: 238). This link with undifferentiated consciousness may in turn explain Vajrasattva's association with the concept of eternity, in the sense of the transcendence of both space and time (Vessantara, 1998: 229).

The transformative qualities of death not only characterize ceremonial initiation into higher yoga tantras, but also permeate the visualizations and ritual practices which follow. It is believed that the death process itself can be accessed in altered states of consciousness, codified into a number of recognizable stages, and 'practised' in order to tap into its potential. Although it is thought possible for an adept to attain enlightenment at any time, two specific experiences are deemed key times from which a person can benefit from practice and attain enlightenment. The first is during actual death experience, and the second is while engaging in sexual activity with a consort (Cozort, 1986: 60, 89). From this point of view, the enlightenment of Sakyamuni Buddha is described as having actually occurred in a previous lifetime, wherein he

> was taken to a Highest Pure Land where in his tantric practice he eventually joined with a consort … 'Divine Daughter Whose Drop Is Supreme'. He received instructions and initiations from previous Buddhas, actualized the clear light, the pure illusory body, and union, whereupon he became completely enlightened; later, he emanated a human body, the historical Sakyamuni, to teach the Doctrine. (Cozort, 1986: 108)

The 'practice' of death, the intermediate state, and rebirth is often referred to in higher yoga tantras as 'bringing them to the path' and transforming them into the three bodies of the Buddha (*trikaya*). Cozort refers to these bodies as the Truth Body (*dharmakaya*), the Complete Enjoyment Body (*sambhogakaya*), and the Emanation Body (*nirmanakaya*) (Cozort, 1986: 113). I will go on to explore the implications of this practice and the *trikaya* theory in more detail, arguing that its three-dimensional picture of consciousness has striking points in common with pictures of consciousness drawn by Durkheimian sociologists. Here, however, I will sketch in an outline, drawn from Nagao (1991). In tracing a history of this concept, he makes points which also help to explain the way in which tantric mythologies transgress, or overturn, historical perspectives, for example, in the idea that Buddha must have had a consort, and therefore been enlightened in a previous life.

According to Nagao, the Buddha was initially called 'the Enlightened One' as a title of respect, not as reverence for a deity, because he was considered to have uncovered a basically human state. He proposes that the twofold body of the Buddha initially arose from the first disciples' response to the death of Gautama and their attempts to codify and transmit his teachings. Although the physical body (*rupa-kaya*) was gone, his teachings and 'essence' were seen as imperishable: 'In this way

the concept of "dharma-kaya" occurred. The Buddha as dharma-kaya in eternal aspect, which could not be seen with the naked eye, was conceived in addition to the Buddha's earthly form which the disciples still vividly remembered' (Nagao, 1991: 104).

Later, within Mahayana Buddhism, the *dharma-kaya* also took on qualities of the absolute, in the form of dharma-realms and dharma-nature, associated with 'suchness' (*tathata*) and 'emptiness' (*sunyata*). In addition, tales of the Buddha's past lives (*Jataka*) arose as narratives, exploring ways in which the Buddha had accumulated sufficient merit, as a bodhisattva, to take birth as Gautama and become enlightened. This logic extended to encompass the potential in all living beings for enlightenment, and therefore it was thought that there must be innumerable Buddhas and bodhisattvas, in the past, present, and future (Nagao, 1991: 105). It was in the Pure Land sutras that their deeds and characters were recorded in detail. For example, Amida Buddha's unlimited wisdom (Amitabha) and benevolence (Amitayus), gave rise to the concept of the third body of the Buddha, the Reward Body, as a 'reward' for the keeping of vows and disciplines related to being a bodhisattva (Nagao, 1991: 106). Nagao identifies the Yogacara Buddhist school as developing the *trikaya* theory extensively as follows. The *svabavika-kay*a (Essence Body), which corresponds to the *dharma-kaya*,

> exists all over the world with the *dharma-dhatu* as its own being; it is an immovable wisdom, an eternal body of the Enlightened One. Being absolute, it transcends human understanding and speculation; it is incognizable, invisible, inconceivable, without colour or form … the foundation and basis for the other two bodies, the *sambhogika-kaya* (Enjoyment-body) and the *nairmanika-kaya* (Transformation-body). (Nagao, 1991: 107)

While the Transformation Body is perceived as a physical body, it remains a body of the Buddha. This is because it is essentially a dharma realm, which, choosing to limit itself, temporarily transforms to appear as corporal. However, he goes on to describe the Enjoyment Body as the pivotal mediation point between the other two bodies, and as associated with bodhisattvas receiving teachings in a Pure Land. Although these experiences are described as being visible (perceivable), they are nonetheless more subtle than perception in the *nirmanakaya,* because certain Buddha images, marks, and characteristics are described in texts, but found to be impossible to represent visually. They are therefore designated in *trikaya* theories as the Enjoyment Body, unrecognizable in the *nirmanakaya*, but not completely beyond the apprehension of consciousness (Nagao, 1991: 109). He suggests that the role of the Enjoyment Body (*Sambhogika-kaya*) is crucial to the three-body theory, as its soteriology 'revolves around the axis' of the character of the Enjoyment Body (Nagao, 1991: 111). This revolution, however, is a twofold process, because the transformations involved have a double nature:

> While, on the one hand, there is the aspect of transcending the human Buddha, the *nairmanikaya*, there is, on the other hand, the concretization of the absolute, the *svabhavika-kaya*. Therefore, the *sambhogika-kaya* has the two aspects of being at once transcendental and phenomenal, and at once historic and super-historic. (Nagao, 1991: 114)

There are a number of aspects of Nagao's analysis which I want to explore in more detail in this chapter, because its principles are significant for tantric, as well as Yogacara Buddhism. In addition, this idea has vital links with the anthropological and sociological concepts I am exploring. While the Pure Land concept is unique to Buddhism, and interpreted differently in Japanese and Tibetan traditions, there are nonetheless features in common with religious concepts of mythic lands, formulated in a number of societies, and described by Eliade. Both are, for example, rooted in images of rejuvenation associated with the renewal of cycles of time. The *trikaya* theory and the analyses of Caillois and Eliade both presuppose that time *does* have a linear character, from one perspective, but that this is not the only way that it has been conceived. Several religious traditions suggest that there are realms where the boundaries between space and time have been obliterated, or where time is described in terms of circular movements. Transformations of consciousness are, in these belief systems, rooted in the ability to perceive both linear time and timeless realms. The movement, which takes place between the two, is characterized by disturbed energy, travelling between their poles, and thus *transgressing* their boundaries. The idea is introduced by Nagao when he discusses the 'revolving of the basis' (*asraya-paravrtti*) as a way to uncover one's basic Buddha nature (*tathagata-garbha*). He goes on to suggest that purification is seen as uncovering the human mind's essential luminosity, and it therefore transforms a practitioner's vision of the world, from polluted and unreal, to consummate and pure (Nagao, 1991: 116). This occurs when

> the basis on which one relies, revolves, and turns into a different basis (or non-basis); the ground itself on which one stands, overturns, revealing a new world, illuminated by a new light. There is the anxiety of one's foothold being fundamentally challenged – the anxiety that it might collapse and disappear, meaning death. But through this death, there is the possibility of the same basic structure coming to life again by being illuminated with a new light. This is not simply the renovation of the mind, which is a part of oneself, or that of the body, or simply of the one's disappearance and becoming non-existent; it is the conversion and transmutation of one's whole existence. For example, if we were to imagine a magnetic field flowing through man's being, then the *asraya-paravrtti* would be the flow of this magnetic field in the opposite direction from its usual flow … the matter of purification in human beings is not the removal of something filthy, but is none other than the backward flow of man's mechanism or magnetic field, with its structure unchanged. (Nagao, 1991: 115–16)

In the tantric context, however, Nagao's assertion that the *dharmakaya* is formless is not strictly accurate. Rather, all three bodies of the Buddha are based on corporal experiences of emotional energy, which are thought to express themselves in differing degrees of subtlety, reflected in the visualizations connected with them. For example, consciousness is believed to reside in 'winds' that are related to the breath. However, the term 'wind' implies that corporal breath alone is signified, whereas the term *prana*, from which the translation 'wind' derives, also refers to energies that circulate as part of the breathing process. In addition, physical bodily fluids are seen as being the most material manifestations of substances that also express themselves in rarefied or subtle forms. Collectively, the full range of these substances are known

as *bodhicitta*, a term which also signifies will to enlightenment or compassion. Individual drops of this are termed *bindu*. The zero-point, or absolute, from which all other states of consciousness manifest themselves, is not imagined as void. It is, instead, described as being an 'indestructible drop', located in the central channel, in the heart cakra, and it contains the origin of all subtle drops in the body:

> The red and white drops, along with the winds and channels, are an integral part of tantric physiology. They are described as the pure essence of the essential fluids of the male and female, having evolved from the original white drop of the father and red drop of the mother that combined to become the original physical basis for the human body at the time of conception. Hence, both the white and red drops are found everywhere in all male and female bodies, where they coat the inside of the channels 'like frost'. However, the drops are not equally distributed throughout the body, for the white drop predominates at the top of the head and the red predominates at the solar plexus.
>
> The origin of the drops is the 'indestructible drop' at the heart, a tiny drop the size of a large mustard seed or small pea, with a white top and red bottom; it is called 'indestructible' because the continuum of the very subtle wind within it is never broken. The indestructible drop is actually *two* indestructible drops: (1) the 'eternal' indestructible drop, which is the very subtle wind and mind, and (2) the lifetime indestructible drop, which is a subtle material object and is destroyed at the end of an individual's lifetime. (Cozort, 1986: 72)

Higher yoga tantras employ techniques that reverse the processes associated with subtle substances in a number of ways. Firstly, the arrest of both breath and semen is indicated as a way of ceasing activity within the two channels on either side of the central channel. This is thought to create a vacuum, which draws these materials into the central channel, stabilizing them and increasing their power (White, 1996: 226). Secondly, the accumulated force in the central channel causes a number of cakras along that channel to 'melt', releasing energy, and therefore increasing vitality, through fully functional valves, previously blocked by tight knots (Cozort, 1986: 6). Thirdly, winds are dissolved into the heart cakra, causing the 'indestructible drop' to melt, the mind of 'clear light' to arise, and thus, the realization of emptiness (Cozort, 1986: 65). While each tantra varies in the way that it constructs these visualizations, I will refer to the *Kalacakra Tantra* here, because its description illustrates well the connection between tantric conceptions of time, and processes of reversal:

> In the Kalacakra system, immutable bliss acts as the instrument for the utter annihilation of the material realm. Every day 21,600 types of energy course through the body. Each breath corresponds to one type of energy, and during one day there are 21,600 breaths. As one stops one of these 21,600 vital energies, one brings to cessation one of the 21,600 material constituents of the body. Each of these cessations corresponds to one great bliss. The process culminates with the stopping of the so-called karmic energies … this is the culmination of the path of Kalacakra. At this stage there is a union of the body, which becomes empty form, and the mind, which becomes immutable bliss. This union is eternally indivisible … the white *bodhicitta* comes down from the crown of the head to the tip of the jewel, the sexual organ. Simultaneously, one brings the red *bodhicitta* up to the crown of the head. The body is filled from the top to the bottom. The *bindus* are exercised in this way, and with each of the 21,600 *bindus* one experiences the immutable bliss and primordial wisdom. (Lamrimpa, 1999: 30–31)

Death, Alchemy, and Initiation

In tantric yoga, according to Eliade,

> the absolute reality … contains in itself all dualities and polarities, but reunited, reintegrated, in a state of absolute Unity (*advaya*). The creation, and the becoming that arose from it, represent the shattering of the primordial Unity and the separation of the two principles … in consequence, man experiences a state of duality (object–subject etc.) – and this is suffering, illusion 'bondage'. The purpose of tantric sadhana is the reunion of the two polar principles within the disciple's own body. (Eliade, 1973 [1958]: 206)

Eliade explores yogic concepts of unity, drawing attention to ways in which they rupture boundaries, on one level between male and female, but most significantly between the sacred and profane. For example, he defines the aim of yogic techniques as the transformation of the body into a sacred body (Eliade, 1973 [1958]: 211). This body, created through purification practices such as mantra recitation and visualization, is made immortal, using processes which are symbolically linked with the reversal of time, such as the retention of breath and semen, these substances being essentially the life force (Eliade, 1973 [1958]: 232–3).

While concepts associating yogic practice with the quest for immortality, utilizing bodily energy, are useful starting points for exploring tantra, it is important to bear in mind the centrality of the concept of non-duality in tantric Buddhism, in order to avoid interpretations which are weighted too heavily towards spiritual or material planes. The concept of purely bodily immortality is incongruous with Buddhist emphasis on the inherent emptiness of existence and the lack of a true self. However, the interpretation of enlightenment as a complete destruction of being can be viewed as equally extreme, and difficult to reconcile with tantric beliefs in the bodhisattva, who chooses to be reborn out of compassion (Nagao, 1991: 114). In addition, Eliade gives too much attention to physiological explanations for the arrest of seminal emission and the retention of breath, an interpretation which suggests that union with the consort, or with deities in apparitional form, is unconnected with erotic desire (Eliade, 1973 [1958]: 232).

This perspective is questionable because there is evidence that sexual pleasure plays a role in the completion stages of tantric yoga, as it entails a state of consciousness, like that of dreaming and the bardo (intermediate state between lives). The erotic is therefore related to transitions, both in the person and between the partners, which draw on different degrees of subtlety (Rinbochay & Hopkins, 1985: 20). Thus, transforming the stages of death into the three bodies of the Buddha can also transform communication between human beings. The *dharmakaya,* being related to primordial consciousness, infinite potential, and lack of differentiation, is the most subtle of the three. It is associated with death, deep sleep, and the moment of orgasm. The *nirmanakaya*, while still being conceived as a sacred body, can be perceived by beings in profane, differentiated states of consciousness, connected with waking states and birth. The *sambhogakaya*, however, mediates between the other two, and is therefore the body most closely associated with altered states of consciousness, for example dreams, and the bardo. In the same way, sexual energy can be viewed as the intermediary force which in its most extreme form, orgasm,

can bring about a 'merging of consciousness' between two people. In other words, the potential unity of the dyad can be seen as a particularly intense example of undifferentiated social consciousness. While the *sambhogakaya* realm is imagined as containing deities, made of bright, translucent light, the source of these deities is recognized as human, because the aim of tantric practice is to acquire the body of a deity:

> The purpose of the stage of generation is to 'ripen' the mental continuum for the stage of completion … it is a rehearsal of the stage of completion in the sense that one passes from the stage of generation to the stage of completion by bringing one's imaginative vision to such a height of clarity and power that what one has imagined becomes real. The stage of completion 'completes' the vision by effecting the transformation of the trainee into a Buddha. (Cozort, 1986: 41)

Thus, contact with apparitions may be rooted in human communication and personal relationships, but on a subtle level, a point Eliade touches on when he discusses the central concept of love in tantra (Eliade, 1973[1958]: 260). However, my aim here is not simply to re-evaluate the role of bodily processes in tantric yoga. In questioning the stress laid in some texts on the literal withholding or reversal of seminal emission, I am arguing that this interpretation misses subtle but vital clues about the true nature, both of the technique itself, and of the experience of unity which lies behind it.

Eliade recognizes this when he moves from discussing physical techniques to exploring 'subtle physiology', which he believes, 'was probably elaborated on the basis of ascetic, ecstatic, and contemplative experiences expressed in the same symbolic language as the traditional cosmology and ritual. This does not mean that such experiences were not real; they were perfectly real, but not in the sense in which a physical phenomenon is real' (Eliade, 1973 [1958]: 233–4). He goes on to explain that what 'does not fall' during sexual yoga is referred to in some texts as the *bindu*, a term which represents semen on one level, but which designates a state of consciousness on another. This is because the term is part of what Eliade identifies as 'intentional language', permeated with a deliberate ambiguity of meaning, implying sexual and meditative experiences simultaneously. The purpose of this language is not simply to encode, and therefore hide information from the uninitiated. Although concealment is part of its nature, the main intention is to point to perceptions, in altered states of consciousness, wherein the distinction between alternative meanings is itself blurred:

> *sandha-bhasa* … seeks to conceal doctrine from the noninitiate, but chiefly to project the yogin into the 'paradoxical situation' indispensable to his training. The semantic polyvalence of words finally substitutes ambiguity for the usual system of reference inherent in every ordinary language. And this destruction of language contributes, in its way too, toward 'breaking' the profane universe and replacing it by a universe of convertible and integrable planes. In general, symbolism brings about a universal 'porousness', 'opening' beings and things to transobjective meanings … to understand *bodhicitta* at once as 'thought of awakening' and semen virile; through language itself (that is, by the creation of a new and paradoxical speech replacing the destroyed profane

> language) the yogin must enter the plane on which semen can be transformed into thought, and vice versa. (Eliade, 1973 [1958]: 250–51)

Similarly, the arrest or reversal of physical functions is related to immortality, not simply because breath and fluid are vital to physical life, but because they symbolize a reversal or conquest of creation, as a cosmic process, defeating death by devouring or abolishing time. Thus, strictly speaking, what Eliade is referring to is not simply the endless preservation of physical constituents implied by the term immortality, but rather glimpses of eternity, a 'nonconditioned and timeless state', mediated through perceptions of the subtle body as energy (Eliade, 1973 [1958]: 271). One way of exploring these insights in more detail is to examine ways in which sociology and anthropology, influenced by Durkheim, has interpreted the relationship between death, purification, initiation, and social energy. A key concept that informs this discussion is *liminality*, used initially by Turner to define the intermediate state of rituals (which he argues are three-dimensional), but which he also uses in a more general sense, to describe qualities and emotions related to the middle stage of the initiation process, such as ambiguity, transformation, and especially the confusion or transgression of boundaries, between human and animal, between different status groups in society, and between the living and the dead (Turner, 1967: 96–7). Associated with this idea is the concept that bodily fluids such as blood, semen, and those emitted from corpses are also liminal in character:

> This use of an aspect of human physiology as a model for social, cosmic, and religious ideas and processes is a variant of a widely distributed initiation theme: that the human body is a microcosm of the universe … is regarded as a sort of symbolic template for the communication of gnosis, mystical knowledge about the nature of things and how they came to be what they are. (Turner, 1967: 107)

Hertz, taking Durkheim's approach to *piacular* or mourning rites as a starting point, proposes that 'death has a specific meaning for the social consciousness; it is the object of a collective representation' (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 28). In order to investigate the relationship between this collective representation and society, he focuses on a series of rituals and beliefs which contrast those that he identifies as prevalent in his own society at that time, because they presuppose that death is not instantaneous, but an ongoing process, and therefore they include a double burial. He uses in particular the societies known collectively as the Dayak of Borneo to examine the structure of this rite, identifying it as process with three stages, provisional burial, the intermediary period, and the final ceremony (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 28).

The intermediary period, between provisional and final burial is related to two factors of interrelated significance. It gives the hosts sufficient time to prepare for the final ceremony, which on a practical level often requires the amassing of some wealth, to be expended on the feast that then takes place (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 31). The second, and for Hertz the primary factor, is that during this period the corpse completes the process of rotting, a transformative condition, and becomes a dry skeleton. Hertz asserts that Indonesians attach a mystical significance to the disintegration of the body, using as evidence practices connected with the products of decomposition:

> The fact that the state of the corpse has an influence upon the final rites is clearly shown by the care the survivors take in hermetically sealing all cracks in the coffin and in ensuring the flow of putrid matters to the exterior, either by draining them into the ground or by collecting them in an earthenware vessel … the putrification of the corpse is assimilated to the 'petrifying thunderbolt' because it too threatens with sudden death the members of the house which it strikes. The reason that they consider it so highly desirable that the putrification should take place in a sealed container is that the evil power which resides in the corpse and which is linked to the smells must not be allowed to escape and strike the living. On the other hand they do not want the putrid matter to remain inside the coffin, because as the desiccation of his bones progresses so the deceased himself must be gradually freed from the mortuary infection. (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 32)

This concept of a period of infection, or contagion, has echoes of Durkheim's conceptualization of the sacred as being inherently ambiguous, manifesting itself as energy which is conceived as having both pure and impure forms. While often beneficial, these forces are potentially dangerous and, if uncontained, can overflow into everyday life (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 412). This paradoxical relationship is, in turn, linked to a complex interconnection between concepts of the body, and concepts of the soul. On the one hand, the soul is conceived as distinct from the body, because it can leave it, temporarily, during sleep, and more permanently, at death (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 245). However, this duality is not absolute, because parts of the body, especially blood, are seen as synonymous with the soul, both being connected with the energy that animates collective existence, its totemic essence (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 262). From one perspective, this essence is differentiated as individuals incarnate it. Nevertheless, being comprised of religious, and therefore, for Durkheim, *social* forces, it also has an objective character: 'The individual soul is thus only a portion of the group's collective soul. It is the anonymous force on which the cult is based but incarnated in an individual whose personality it cleaves to: It is *mana* individualised' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 267).

He therefore explains the concept of reincarnation as closely related to stages of mourning. From one perspective, the dead person is envisioned as entering initially into an ambiguous realm, between life and death, then undergoing reunion with the ancestors, and later being reborn in a new body. From another, it is society that undergoes a collective shock upon the loss of one of its members, and which, through rituals, regains energy and confidence (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 405): 'Thus souls are said to be immortal only to the extent that this immortality is useful in making the continuity of collective life intelligible' (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 272). Collective energy provides this continuity, which transgresses boundaries between individual lives. Expressing a sense of being united with both primordial (ancestral) and finite (human) realms, this energy also holds these dimensions in tension. Processes that indicate transformations from one state into another therefore generate a degree of anxiety in society, because it is at these times that the underlying tension is brought to the surface.

According to Hertz, mourning is connected with this period, wherein the body undergoes transition, and the soul is believed to be equally volatile. It hovers near the body, unable either to join the ancestors, or fully relinquish its living existence:

> but if it is true that this period of transition prolongs the soul's previous existence, it does so in a precarious and lugubrious manner. The stay of the soul among the living is somewhat illegitimate and clandestine. It lives, as it were, marginally in the two worlds: if it ventures into the afterworld, it is treated there like an intruder; here on earth it is an importunate guest whose proximity is dreaded. (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 36)

This concept, that the soul is volatile and vulnerable, is thought to have pre-dated Buddhism in Tibet, and retained its influence upon the *Liberation Upon Hearing in the Bardo* (Cuevas, 2003: 32). Moreover, it can be related to Turner's notion of liminality, a period of 'betwixt and between', which he initially explores in relation to the more symbolic death of initiation rituals. In cases of actual death, transformative processes affect society as a whole, particularly the mourning relatives. As Hertz explains, the rituals of mourning are closely connected with a series of prohibitions (or taboos), intended both to contain and expiate the contagious aspect of the dangerous or impure sacred (see Chapter 8). These taboos separate the relatives from the rest of the group, in various degrees according to their emotional proximity to the deceased, by rites that mark them apart from profane life (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 37–9). Thus, death is viewed as a process, with a liminal period, intimately connected with the draining fluids of the body.

These substances have a symbolic relationship with disturbances in social energy, rooted in the shock to collective consciousness that the death of one of society's members entails. Such energy threatens to pollute society, if unmediated by ritual (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 82). Death is therefore, in some ways, analogous to the dangers facing potential initiation candidates, because it entails a transition between sacred and profane realms, surrounded by rites of purification. Hertz makes this point when he argues that the concept of death as initiation should be taken almost literally for many societies (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 80).

In Tibetan tantra, the concept of initiation is regarded as a multi-dimensional process. People can be initiated into the mandala of a great number of deities, while some deities are more frequently the focus of large, public initiation ceremonies than others. For example, some Tara rituals are relatively open, requiring few commitments. They are believed to be beneficial for a number of undertakings, such as pilgrimage. Although seen primarily as a blessing, the 'protection' offered is believed to extend far beyond the duration of the ceremony itself, removing obstacles to future aims, including more selective rituals (Beyer, 1978: 401–403). Initiation also operates to bind participants together into communities defined less by geographical proximity and more in terms of a *lineage*. However, in order to illustrate the relationship between initiation and death, I will focus on ritual visualization techniques, described in *alchemical* terms. Constituting the generation- and completion-stage practices of most higher yoga tantras, these practices are thought to

> purify birth, death and the intermediate state in the sense that through them these three are stopped – birth being transformed into an Emanation Body, death into a Truth Body and the intermediate state into a Complete Enjoyment Body. The fruit of this transformation is the deathless state of Buddhahood – known in Highest Yoga Mantra as a body of union having the seven features of god and goddess facing each other. (Rinbochay & Hopkins, 1985: 26)

This process is described as alchemical because it involves a series of meditations, during which a number of 'signs' appear spontaneously, signs that are also thought to occur during actual death. The first four are related to the dissolution, in the body, of four material elements, while the following three are related to movements in the subtle body. When earth dissolves into water, there is an appearance like a mirage; for water into fire, there appears to be smoke; for fire into wind, the sign is like fireflies; and when wind dissolves into space (ether), the appearance is like a butterlamp flickering, which steadies (Cozort, 1986: 74). However, this process of dissolution is not thought to be one element acquiring the characteristics of another, but rather, as each element is withdrawn, the capacity for the next to become the basis of consciousness increases (Rinbochay & Hopkins, 1985: 38). Following this are states of consciousness, described as *empties*, wherein the signs are related to the entry and dissolution of winds in the central channel:

> The mind of radiant white appearance … is brought about when, because all the winds from the right and left channels enter into the central channel above the heart, the white drop located at the top of the head melts and drips down to the top of the heart … when the drop arrives at the top of the heart, the mind is filled with a brilliant white light like moonlight … the mind of red or orange increase, occurs when the winds in the right and left channels below the heart have entered the central channel through the lower opening, causing the red drop located at the navel to ascend toward the heart. When the red drop touches the lower part of the channel-knot at the heart, the mind is filled with a reddish appearance like sunlight … the mind of black near-attainment, occurs when, through the force of the winds being gathered at the heart, the heart channel-knot is loosened, enabling the white drop above the heart and the red drop below the heart to move to the indestructible drop at the center of the heart. When the white and red drops meet, the mind is filled with a vacuous blackness like a clear autumn night sky. One eventually swoons into unconsciousness … the mind of clear light, is the most subtle consciousness possible. It occurs when all of the winds dissolve into the very subtle vitalizing wind and the red and white drops are dissolved into the red and white parts of the indestructible drop. (Cozort, 1986: 73–6)

This detailed description is given in full here, because it demonstrates one of the ways in which ideas related to death are connected to concepts of sexual energy. The movement of 'drops' of vital fluid is thought to bring about certain 'signs' in consciousness during actual death, and in the initiation process. This complex symbolism, while being located within a specific religious system, may be further illuminated through comparisons with colour symbolisms of other cultures.

Although Turner's anthropological findings are based on his empirical research with the Ndembu of Africa, many of his conclusions have broader implications. These include his discussion of the relationship between bodily and social energy, which permeates his concepts of communitas and liminality. At this point, I will explore the way that this energy generates symbols, especially in his three-colour classification model. Three basic colours – white, red, and black – are described as 'rivers' by the Ndembu, and are given a number of different meanings, depending on the context. He points to an association between white and either semen or breast milk, signifying aspects of either sexual, or mother–child relationships respectively.

Red is linked to blood, on the one hand maternal, and on the other, that drawn during conflict or hunting. Black may be indicative of decay, but is more usually linked to a fall into unconsciousness, during death, sleep, or a 'blackout' (Turner, 1967: 89). Although the interpretation of each colour varies considerably, according to the ritual or situation concerned, Turner does draw some general conclusions about their nature, which I believe may also apply to the red, white, and black symbolism of tantra:

1. Among the earliest symbols produced by man are the three colours representing products of the human body whose emission, spilling, or production is associated with a heightening of emotion. In other words, culture, the superorganic, has an intimate connection with the organic in its early stages, with the awareness of powerful physical experiences.
2. These heightened bodily experiences are felt to be informed with a power in excess of that normally possessed by the individual; its source may be located in the cosmos or in society; analogues of physical experience may then be found wherever the same colours occur in nature; or else experience of social relations in heightened emotional circumstances may be classified under a colour rubric.
3. The colours represent heightened physical experience transcending the experiencer's normal condition; they are therefore conceived as deities (Hindu) or mystical powers, as the sacred over against the profane. (Turner, 1967: 89)

Jung's insights into the symbolism of alchemy are also significant in this context. He explores its manifestation alongside medieval Christianity, identifying alchemy as subliminal responses to conflicts and tensions within the tradition (Jung, 1980 [1953]: 21–3). He suggests that alchemical sources, describing changes in the state of minerals and chemicals, are more intelligible if regarded as concerned with transformations in consciousness itself:

> For many alchemists the allegorical aspect undoubtedly occupied the foreground to such an extent that they were firmly convinced that their sole concern was with chemical substances. But there were always a few for whom laboratory work was primarily a matter of symbols and their psychic effect … although their labours over the retort were a serious effort to elicit the secrets of chemical transformation, it was at the same time – and often in overwhelming degree – the reflection of a parallel psychic process which could be projected all the more easily into the unknown chemistry of matter since that process is an unconscious phenomenon of nature, just like the mysterious alteration of substances. What the symbolism of alchemy expresses is the whole problem of the evolution of personality described above, the so-called individuation process. (Jung, 1980 [1953]: 34)

Another way of expressing this idea is to say that alchemical symbols are spontaneously produced as a result of disturbances in energy, particularly energy travelling between the poles of the conscious individual psyche, and the collective unconscious. It is for this reason that many of these symbols are paradoxical in nature. Being related to both the body and the psyche, they are also seen as fluid and highly volatile, because of the unpredictable power that emotional energy can generate. I therefore suggest that all alchemical symbols are, to some degree, liminal (in Turner's sense of the word), as they are indicative of transformative processes,

rather than structural equilibrium. The best example of this idea is the symbolism attached to mercury.

Jung begins by distinguishing between the 'crude' substance, and Quicksilver (its distilled form, which is also fluid) (Jung, 1967: 207). Mercurius has also been identified with fire, in the form of mystical illumination (Jung, 1967: 209). In addition, it was related to air, being portrayed sometimes with wings, wind, and breath. Jung suggests that this indicates mercury as being symbolic of pure, eternal, spirit, manifested in earthly form. In other words, mercury's paradoxical nature symbolizes an interpenetration of spirit and matter (Jung, 1967: 212). Defining Mercurius as the intermediate substance, which he calls soul, Jung goes on to say that, 'soul represents a higher concept than "spirit" in the sense of air or gas. As the "subtle body" or "breath soul" it means something non-material and finer than mere air. Its essential characteristic is to animate and be animated; it therefore represents the life principle' (Jung, 1967: 213). Thus Mercurius is an arcane substance, related to the primeval chaos and earthly paradise: 'Besides being the *prima materia* of the lowly beginning as well as the highest goal, Mercurius is also the process which lies between, and the means by which it is effected' (Jung, 1967: 235). Being a mediator between the individual and the collective unconscious, this substance also incarnates ambivalence, it is 'ambiguous, dark, paradoxical, and thoroughly pagan' (Jung, 1967: 241).

White, a historian of medieval Indian religion, explores the relationship between Siddha traditions and the rituals and symbolism of alchemy, yoga, and tantra. He argues that there is a great deal of continuity of technique and philosophy between these traditions, because

> Siddhas, the Yogis of medieval India were both alchemists (Rasa Siddhas) and pioneers of *hatha yoga* (Nath Siddhas). Yoga and alchemy were complementary, interpenetrating disciplines for the medieval Siddhas. The Rasa Siddhas and the Nath Siddhas, if they were not one and the same people, were at least closely linked in their practice. (White, 1996: 10)

He identifies the most important concept that they have in common as being that of *rasa*, a substance he describes as

> male and female sexual fluids … but ever so much more … *rasa* – the fluid element found in the universe, sacrifice, and human beings – has been identified by Indians with the fount of life. All fluids, including vital fluids in humans, plant resins, rain, the waters, the sacrificial oblation, are so many manifestations of *rasa* … the miracle of conception occurs through the union of male and female vital fluids, semen and uterine blood. With early tantrism, these procreative fluids came to be conceived as 'power substances' for the worship of and ultimately the identification with gods and goddesses whose boundless nature was often portrayed as sexual in nature … the way to become a 'second Siva' – for this has nearly always been the goal of tantric practice in its various forms – was, in early tantrism, realized through the conduit of a horde of wild goddesses (which the tantrikas identified with their human consorts), generally known as *yoginis*. These 'bliss-starved' goddesses, attracted by offerings of mingled sexual fluids, would converge into the consciousness of the practitioner, to transform him, through their limitless libido, into a god on earth. (White, 1996: 4)

The transformative properties of *rasa* lie in its myriad identity, on the one hand, and its role in the internalization of the sacrifice, on the other. These two ideas are brought together by the relationship between *rasa* and mercury. Although *rasa* is thought to be related to the fluid body of the earth more generally, it has a special affinity with mercury and sulphur, because these substances are thought to be the sexual fluids of Siva and the goddess. From this perspective, the transubstantiation of these substances, particularly through alchemical processes which are thought to rarefy them, thus extracting their most subtle essences, is equivalent to exploring the most subtle (sacred) aspects of sexual energy (White, 1996: 5).

While feminine energy is thought to be solar, masculine is identified as lunar. Both are related to cycles of depletion and rejuvenation, as *rasa* is, on the one hand, bodily fluids resulting from processed food, and subtle emotional states, refined through aesthetics. Both meanings are captured in the translation of *rasa* as taste (White, 1996: 186). The term is also integral to the internalization of the sacrifice, because *rasa*, being identified with both the moon and *soma*, also came to mean 'any oblation offered in fire' (White, 1996: 184). The act of sacrifice, being primordial in essence, renews time and is therefore associated with immortality (White, 1996: 216).

Thus, just as mercury is refined, in alchemical texts, into the ambrosia through which human beings become divine, the physical constituents of the body become refined, through the practice of yoga, into a body of increasing subtlety, and therefore divinity. Earlier, I identified the first stages of the death process, as described in Buddhist tantras, to be the dissolution of the four basic elements, earth, water, fire, and air. White argues that this process is understood to take place along the vertical axis of the subtle body, with the lower cakras identified with earth, and the cranial vault related to ether, 'the most subtle differentiate to be found in the visible world and the least subtle differentiate to be found in the invisible world', which is in turn identified with the sexual emission of the goddess (White, 1996: 211). However, White describes the techniques of tantra as not simply valuing either male or female energy, but rather utilizing the uncertain or ambiguous aspects of their coming together in tension:

> The yogin's lower abdomen (the solar plexus) is the place of the female, sanguineous sun, which provides the heat necessary to triggering the yogic process, but which can also, like Time … wholly consume the body, causing aging, disease and death. The head, and more specifically the cranial vault, is the locus of the sun's counterpart, the cooling moon, a moon whose *rasa* is nothing other than semen that has been carried upwards by the yogic process and so has been transmuted into nectar amrta, which is equivalent to soma, the draft of immortality … whereas the Vedic sacrificer sought to regulate macrocosmic time as a means to ensuing cosmic and social order … the yogin claims to be capable of imploding these two temporal orders into one another as a means of transcending both and freeing himself from time (and every other natural and cultural constraint) altogether … one must work *through* rather than *against* the overwhelming energy of the feminine. In Tantra, sexual intercourse, the abandonment of male semen (the sacrificial offering) into the fiery maw of the female sexual organ, is identified as a sacrifice, the benefits of which accrue to the sacrificer. (White, 1996: 28)

Conclusion

I suggest that what these insights point to, when brought together, is that transcending time is neither a solitary, nor a purely conceptual, act. Rather, it is related to a sense of unity, which is an aspect of social relationships generally, and sexual relationships in particular, being rooted in a series of mediations between consciousness and the body. While Chapter 3 explored the association between consorts in Hindu mythology and sacrifice in order to demonstrate ways in which thinking about the couple are linked to ideas about social unity, this chapter has examined tantric yoga, wherein sacrifice is discussed on a more symbolic level, particularly as something that occurs within the subtle body. However, the corporal element is not lost in this context, because the internalization of sacrifice in tantric yoga is a process in which the elemental materials, such as fire and wind, remain, but in subtle forms specifically related to the etheric body. For example, White asserts that both ritual and internal sacrifice have similar aims, because both transform being by repeating a primordial, creative act (White, 1996: 216).

The yogic technique of *gtu mo*, the generation of 'psychic heat', is perhaps the most obvious example of the internalization of the sacrifice, because it involves the generation of 'fire' within the etheric body. It often is visualized as originating in the area of the navel, and, when activated, rises up the central channel, causing subtle substances to melt, either within the heart cakra, or in the cranial vault. This practice is the foundation on which most of the Highest Yoga tantras rest, because it is a crucial step in the process of transforming the body into the 'three bodies of the Buddha'. It is also integral to the 'six yogas of Naropa', being the basis for emanating the illusory body, perceiving 'clear light'; the transference of consciousness into a higher realm (or another living body), and bardo yoga, which utilizes the state of dreaming (Mullin, 1997: 14).

The *Vajrayogini Tantra* is a good example of this, because it incorporates the 'six yogas of Naropa', and Naropa is thought to have been given the teachings by Vajrayogini directly (in apparitional form) (Tharchin, 1997: 12). The manipulation of psychic heat, in this tantra, is placed within a rite that describes the purification of the subtle body's substance, in terms of an *inner offering* (Tharchin, 1997: 51). Once initiates have visualized themselves as the deity Vajrayogini, they picture, in the mind's eye, three human heads, which act as hearthstones – similar to stones which would support a cooking pot, if one built a fire outdoors. The heads are coloured white, red, and blue, respectively, representing the states of consciousness immediately preceding the attainment of the 'clear light': 'white luminosity', 'red radiance', and 'black near attainment'. Upon the three heads rests an upturned skull-cup, in which appear a number of substances, related to the body, on the one hand, and the five Dhyani Buddhas, on the other (Tharchin, 1997: 54–5). They include faeces, urine, red and white *bodhicitta*, and white brain matter (Tharchin, 1997: 56). These are purified by imagining that light rays, from the heart, reach the wind mandala, causing its air to move, and the fire to blaze. As the fire ignites beneath the skull-cup, the liquids inside it boil, and melt into one:

> [Then] just above the skullcup there suddenly appears a white letter Hung, which is Heruka's nature. This turns into a shiny white *katvanga* that hangs upside-down over the skull and looks as if it were sculpted out of butter. When the steam from the boiling substances reaches the *katvanga*, it begins to melt, dripping into the skullcup. After swirling counterclockwise three times in the substance it dissolves and disappears. As a result, the nectar turns the colour of mercury a milky white colour. The nectar is now cool and sweet. Because the *katvanga* has Heruka's nature, just by having fallen into the substance it transforms everything into nectar. (Tharchin, 1997: 57–8)

This visualization actually takes place within the etheric body. This is indicated by the section explaining its ultimate meaning, where the fire is referred to as *gtu-mo* (the hot one), and the *khatvanga* (in the head) emits a mercury-like substance (Tharchin, 1997: 60). The fact that this fire is regarded as female, together with Vajrayogini's designation as a semi-wrathful deity, suggest that the of linking sacrifice and sexuality in tantra need not restrict the female role to one of passive victim. Tantric yoga requires the consecration of both partners, because both assume the form of a deity. While in many rituals a deity of either gender can be generated by men or women, during the 'secret offering', at the completion stage of the *Vajrayogini Tantra*, men identify with Heruka (Tharchin, 1997: 206). The two deities then enter into sexual union, a 'one pointed absorption' during which their bodies dissolve into light:

> the male deity's secret organ disappears into voidness. In its place a white *Hung* syllable appears, which turns into a five-tipped white vajra. Then a red *Bya* syllable appears, which becomes a red jewel marked at its tip by a yellow Bya syllable. The female deity's secret organ disappears into voidness. In its place a red *Ah* syllable appears, which turns into a three petalled lotus. (Tharchin, 1997: 205)

Thus, the loss of individual identity, or destruction of ego, is important for each consort, bringing about mutual dissolution. In addition, not only is the elemental sacrificial fire of yoga (*gtu mo*) described as female, there are numerous references to female deities who actively instigate violence. An important example of this is the rite of *chod*, described in Chapter 6, wherein female *dakinis* are thought to wield the sacrificial knife, symbolically tear the adept to pieces, and drink their blood and flesh offering from skull-cups. Initially, however, Chapter 5 explores Vajrayogini and her role for devotees in more detail. Drawing from the biography of Yeshe Tsogyel, I will also place rites of psychic heat, ritual sexuality, and simulated death, into the context of lived experiences, such as the consort relationship.

Chapter 5

Identity, Biography, and Shamanic Death

Introduction

Tibetan Buddhist 'liberation stories' or sacred biographies have been examined by a number of scholars who point to identity as a central concept for understanding how they came to be written, their purpose for the intended audience, and the themes which run through them. Jerome Edou, for example, explores this in the introduction to his translation of the biography of Machig Labdron, a female yogini, living in the 11th century (Edou, 1996: 110). He suggests that her role as a receiver, innovator, and transmitter of the ritual practice of *Chod* is closely linked to her identity as a manifestation of Yum Chenmo (the Great Mother), who, in turn, personifies the essence of the primary collection of sutras from which *Chod* draws its inspiration, the *Prajnaparamita* (Edou, 1996: 28).

Machig is thought to have received, in a number of visionary experiences, confirmation of her relationship with Yum Chenmo, and revelations which enabled her to codify existing *Chod* practices into a unique system, through direct contact with the deity Tara (Edou, 1996: 79). This system was passed on, in forms which are named according to methods by which each was taught. These included sutra, tantra, sutra and tantra, and recovered treasure (*terma*), all of which can be traced back to elements in Machig's hagiography, demonstrating ways in which biographical writing mediates between the identity of key religious figures and their lineage (Edou, 1996: 6). In other words, the life-story often includes episodes that not only suggest that the subject is an enlightened person, but points to ways in which their life connects with the lives and teachings of others. This extends both to their inspiration, including previous texts, their gurus, and encounters with particular deities, through to their role as transmitters to their own disciples, thus founding a branch of the tradition.

The main biography I will explore in this chapter is that of Yeshe Tsogyel, who is thought to have lived in the eighth century (Dowman, 1996: xii). Machig Labdron is considered, by the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, to be an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyel, another key figure in the foundation and transmission of tantric Buddhism (Edou, 1996: 93). The *terma* tradition initially flourished due to the efforts of Yeshe Tsogyel and Padmasambhava, who hid many texts in an effort to ensure the continuation of their lives' work, the promulgation of tantric Buddhism in Tibet (Dowman, 1996: xvi). This process was associated with the building of a monastery, Samye, and was conducted together with figures of secular power, such as the king. I will, nonetheless, argue that the root aspects of identity that they exhibited, and which followers are encouraged to recognize in biographical accounts, are experiences of transformation, linked to the apprehension of the subtle body.

In Chapter 7, I will return to a broader discussion of identity and community, when I explore themes of transmission, lineage, and power in tantric Buddhism. However, in this chapter, I wish to explore identity on a more intimate level, focusing on ways in which individual lives of adepts have been characterized by crisis, ultimately enriching their sense of themselves and communication with others. Drawing from Eliade's model of shamanic death, I will argue that a variety of visionary experiences, in these texts, are critical mediating points for the reader and for the central characters, providing 'glimpses of eternity' operating simultaneously on a symbolic level, and on the body. Edou, for example, suggests that, although offering the body in ritual visualization discourages attachment to the physical on one level, work with the subtle body is, nonetheless, an essential part of the practice, because this is the foundation of all completion-stage Highest Yoga tantras, including *Chod* (Edou, 1996: 85).

In addition, he argues that tantric Buddhist hagiography – called in Tibetan *rnam thar*, meaning complete liberation – has as its focus, not historical accuracy, but examples of spiritual progress, which, as a genre, are intended to inspire as much as inform the reader (Edou, 1996: 96). Because of the attention paid to inner life, combined with the tendency to view all phenomena as essentially illusory, these texts appear to blur the distinction between concrete and symbolic events. Especially problematic is the way in which elements of the sacred play pivotal roles in the lives of yogis, through encounters with deities, visions, dreams, and predictions. On the one hand these are viewed as testifying to the spiritual attainments of the practitioner. However, they also undercut the structure of the narrative, because personal autonomy is limited by divine intervention, overriding boundaries of profane time and space (Edou, 1996: 97).

Hubert's *Essay on Time* (1999 [1905]) contributes in two ways to this argument. His starting point is the idea that, in order to explore time from a sociological perspective, it is important to be aware that its representations are rooted in social experience. Because, drawing from Durkheim, his conception of the social is intimately bound with the notion of the sacred, he also proposes that religious festivals are primary principles governing the measurement of time, through the creation, for example, of the calendar. In addition, he makes the crucial point that, 'the acts and representations of religion, and it might be added, of magic, entail ideas of time and space that are quite different from the usual ones' (Hubert, 1999 [1905]: 43). He extends this idea to ways that myths tend to be conceived as located either at the beginning, the end, or outside of time (Hubert, 1999 [1905]: 46). He also notes that within the structure of the myth itself, time is frequently distorted. For example,

> especially in tales, the calculation of time presents an unbelievable incoherence. A Macedonian story-teller assures us, without turning a hair, that a hero who took three years to descend the Antipodes and twelve years to climb back up again, without spending an appreciable length of time down there, remained thirty years outside of his own country. The contradiction is not shocking for it is a fairytale … it is a commonplace of mythology and folklore – one which has its counterpart in our individual experience that, according to circumstance, durations do not elapse at the same speed, for this changes with the passage from the supernatural to the normal life of men. A shepherd, who falls asleep for

> an hour, wakes up after a hundred years; returning from a visit to the fairies, he finds only new generations in his village. Conversely, heroes can live years of magical life in a single hour of human life (Hubert, 1999 [1905]: 50, 61)

Drawing from the work of Bergson, he relates this ambiguity to the relationship between time and consciousness, arguing that time, being experienced, has qualities, in addition to being a unit of quantitative measurement (Hubert, 1999 [1905]: 64). However, he locates these qualities in the rhythms of social life, and therefore within collective consciousness (Hubert, 1999 [1905]: 71). These rhythms, in turn, give rise to the idea that, while all representations of time are generated socially, certain times are considered more sacred than others, being saturated with the energy of intense collective activity. In other words, periods of time are subject to the same mechanisms that operate in society to distinguish between the sacred and the profane, namely, a series of prohibitions which together constitute both the inhibition of certain acts during sacred time, but which also signify this time itself as taboo, bounded by rites of entry and exit similar to those surrounding ritual space (Hubert, 1999 [1905]: 74). He thus characterizes sacred time as being the result of an exalted collectivity, which, being in unison, experiences time without differentiation:

> the facts relating to consciousness in question are objectivised because they coincide in the consciousness of many, who are simultaneously conscious of their agreement and of its inevitability. The objectivity of these facts follows from their shared and experienced subjectivity. On the other hand, their abstraction is parallel to their objectivisation. Finally, the first idea, that of mana or the sacred, lends some of its reality to the second, that of time. But given that the conditions of the mystical environment are such that any conception within it turns into efficacy and reality, whenever there is occasion to conceive of the abstract and general idea of time in the environment, this time finds itself realized absolutely. From this it again follows that religious events which take place in time are legitimately and logically considered to be taking place in eternity. (Hubert, 1999 [1905]: 79)

According to Eliade, although this tension between sacred and profane time is played out in society more generally, it is a particular concern of the shaman, because his flights of ecstasy are intimately connected with his ability to move between the worlds of the living, and the realms of the dead:

> We have seen that one of the commonest forms of the future shaman's election is his encountering a divine or semi-divine being, who appears to him through a dream, a sickness, or some other circumstance, tells him that he has been 'chosen', and incites him thenceforth to follow a new rule of life. More often it is the souls of his shaman ancestors who bring him the tidings. It has even been supposed that shamanic election was connected with the ancestor cult. But … the ancestors themselves had to be 'chosen', at the dawn of time, by a divine being. (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 67)

Eliade goes on to explore ways in which the shaman interacts with a number of beings, on both symbolic and visionary levels, who aid in the process of mastery of techniques of ecstasy. A key idea in understanding this process is one of travelling between worlds. This is illustrated through his discussion of bird symbolism, which

is often incorporated into the shamanic costume. From one perspective, birds are conceived as an alter ego, while from another, they are described as spirits who provide guidance, but both concepts hinge on the premise that there is a relationship between ecstasy and flight. Journeying, whether to the heavens or the underworld, is associated with the symbol of the Cosmic Tree. As birds, shamans not only learn to negotiate its axis, but, in addition, to translate and communicate the experience using a particular gift of speech (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 69–74). While on one level this relates to clarity of expression, shamanic or 'secret' language also signifies a connection with the essence of mystery, because it implies the ability to translate messages between modes of being which are usually thought of as polar opposites, such as human and animal, or living and dead.

Eliade also notes a relationship between some tutelary spirits and sexual emotions. He cites examples of shamans whose teaching has consisted of a kind of 'marriage' to female spirits who approach them in dreams, have sexual relations with them, and introduce them to teaching, either themselves, or by enabling the initiate to communicate with her 'associates', who often take the form of animal spirits:

> She has been coming to me ever since, and I sleep with her as with my own wife, but we have no children. She lives quite by herself without any relatives in a hut, on a mountain, but she often changes her abode. Sometimes she comes under the aspect of an old woman, and sometimes under that of a wolf, so she is terrible to look at. Sometimes she comes as a winged tiger. I mount it and she takes me to show me different countries. (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 72)

However, Eliade downplays the role of the erotic in shamanism, arguing that although ecstatic experiences are subject to such 'deviations', the themes of death, dismemberment, descent to the underworld, and resurrection, are the critical elements for shamanic identity (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 79–80). I suggest, however, that the erotic aspects of visionary experience are neither deviant, nor subsidiary, but rather that shamanic death and ecstatic sexuality are two aspects of the same phenomenon. While either theme can become predominant, according to personal circumstance and social and religious context, tantric Buddhism is based upon the intuition that, at source, the two are inextricably intertwined. In the previous chapter, I used ritual material to demonstrate this connection, arguing that the 'practice' of both death and ritual sexuality explore liminal dimensions of being. I want to expand on this idea here, focusing on the significance of Tibetan deities and mythical figures, and the role that they play as turning points in tantric identity. While Eliade's ideas about tutelary spirits and his emphasis on death and rebirth can enrich our understanding of deities such as Vajrayogini, and the concept of the dakini, they do not, on their own, adequately explain the significance of these figures. Initially, therefore, I want to contextualize Eliade's ideas within the broader framework of Durkheim's thought.

Eliade, for example, explains that 'secret language' is often transmitted to an initiate shaman, through the eating of a snake or another magical animal, because these animals are thought to be receptacles for the souls of the dead. He therefore proposes that communication with mythical animals and spirits is primarily contact with souls of the dead, signifying 'being dead oneself' (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 84). For Durkheim, the significance of death lies in its intimate association with the sacred.

He explores this idea by explaining the grief process as the impact of a shock upon collective consciousness. In addition, he argues that concepts of 'realms of the dead', and rebirth, are rooted in a tension between the perpetuation of society, and the loss of individual members (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 271). Personhood incarnates this tension, being on the one hand, discontinuous and impermanent, and on the other, continuous and durable, as social energy. When this energy alights upon symbolic representations, often animals, they are transformed into sacred beings, totems, which become indistinguishable from collective consciousness itself. While totems incarnate identity on a social level, they are also internalized in a more diluted form, in the individual, because each individual is imbibed with aspects of the social (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 283). Therefore, tutelary deities, according to Durkheim, are essentially totems which take a more personal form (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 427). He goes on to argue that the tension between social and individual aspects of being is played out, in ritual, through a dynamic between taboo and transgression, a drama in which the totem plays a central part. The totem, being sacred, is set apart from the world of everyday associations and activities by the awe it inspires, and is therefore forbidden, taboo. However, its ritual consumption is essential to the vitality of society, because transgression is a form of communion with the energy of collective consciousness. This ambiguity can also be explored on an individual level, which Eliade does by portraying 'shamanic death' as transformations in being, related to altered states of consciousness, which are acutely intense at the beginning of the shamanic career, when the initial barriers between sacred and profane are torn apart. He describes an Australian shaman as saying:

> when you lie down to see the prescribed visions, and you do see them, do not be frightened, because they will be horrible. They are hard to describe, though they are in my mind and in my miwi (i.e., psychic force), and though I could project the experience into you after you had been well trained. However, some of them are evil spirits, some are like snakes, some are like horses with men's heads, and some are spirits of evil men which resemble burning fires. You see your camp burning and the blood waters rising, and thunder, lightning and rain, the earth rocking, the hills moving, the waters whirling, and the trees which stand still swaying about. Do not be frightened. If you get up, you will not see these scenes, but when you lie down again, you will see them, unless you get too frightened. If you do, you will break the web (or thread) on which the scenes are hung. You may see dead persons walking towards you, and you will hear their bones rattle. If you hear and see these things without fear, you will never be frightened of anything. These dead people will not show themselves to you again, because your *miwi* is now strong. You are now powerful because you have seen these dead people. (Eliade, 1974 [1951]: 86)

Apparitional figures, such as dakinis, can be interpreted as incarnations of the social energy of the feminine. However, from a Durkheimian perspective, this also implies an instance of union with collective consciousness. Being characterized by emotional intensity, it is expressed strongly through sexual relationships. Therefore, in the next section, I will describe and explore the dakini in greater detail, arguing that, within the context of sacred biographies, they play both roles, providing insights into ways in which these aspects of their identity interact.

The Sacred Feminine and Shamanic Death

The life story of Yeshe Tsogyel is contextualized, initially, within a framework that indicates the complexity of her identity on a number of levels. I will suggest that this context needs to be explored in some detail, because it is both the stage on which the later dramas of her life are set, and is of crucial significance to ways in which the text is understood, in tantric Buddhism, to interact with the contemporary reader. The biography begins with a homage, indicating its status as sacred, which praises Yeshe Tsogyel, as a dakini, on three levels. These levels correspond to the three bodies of the Buddha. As *dharmakaya*, she is known as an absolutely empty being, Kuntuzangmo, in *nirmanakaya* form she is Yeshe Tsogyelma, while her *sambhogakaya* being is Vajrayogini (Dowman, 1996: 3). In addition, the significance of her relationship with Padmasambhava is introduced, in the context of his importance to the establishment of tantric teachings in Tibet. He is referred to as Guru Pema Skull-Garland Skill (Guru Rinpoche), and the force of his character is described as manifesting itself both in his relationship with Tibetan society as a whole, and as erotic power:

> He converted those who were most difficult to convert – Tibetan barbarians and the demon savages of the South-West; he subdued gods, demons, devils and fanatical extremists merely by entertaining the thought of their subjection. He taught in the most difficult way – showing contrary supernatural forces simultaneously in magical display. And he attained the most elusive of all powers – the power of immortality … he had a greater number of accomplished mystical consorts than the number of sesame seeds it takes to fill a room supported by four pillars, and all of them came from the Highest Paradise … among them were five emanations of Vajra Varahi from whom he was never separated. (Dowman, 1996: 4)

Yeshe Tsogyel is described as the emanation of Vajra Varahi associated with speech, and the roots of this connection are further explored in the description of her conception, which also takes places on a number of different levels. She is described as having become the goddess Sarasvati (Goddess of Sound), through having absorbed and compiled the sacred word of the Buddha Sakyamuni in apparitional form. King Trisong Detsen of Tibet and Guru Pema are also described as having sacred identities, as the bodhisattva Manjusri and the Buddha Amitabha respectively (Dowman, 1996: 6). After Guru Pema was invited to Tibet from India by the king, in order to help with the building of the monastery Samye, he searches through a number of Buddhafields for an emanation of Sarasvati to help him spread tantra in Tibet, calling her with a 'song of pleasure'. She responds by saying:

> HO! Buddha Hero, Heruka, Pleasure God!
> When you, great dancer, dance the nine dances of life,
> The pure pleasure of the sacred lotus is everywhere discovered,
> And in the vastness of the *bhaga* there is no anxiety;
> It is time to project an emanation into the savage world.
>
> 'SAMAYA HO!' exclaimed the Guru. 'The bond is formed.'
> 'SAMAYASTVAM!' I replied. 'You are the bond!'
> 'SAMAYA HRI!' exclaimed the Guru. 'The bond is all!'

> 'SAMAYA TISHTHA!' I replied. 'The bond is strong!'
> 'RAMO HAM!' exclaimed the Guru. 'Let the fire burn!'
> 'RAGA YAM! I concluded. 'We are burning together!'
>
> Thus the Guru's vajra and the Dakini's lotus were joined, and we entered a trance of union … from the junction of Guru and Dakini beams of light in the form of red syllable A surrounded by a circle of white vowels, and the white syllable BAM surrounded by a circle of red consonants, shot like the flight of a shooting star towards Tibet, to Seulung in Drak. (Dowman, 1996: 8–9)

Within this introduction to Yeshe Tsogyel's life are a number of references to symbols of the sacred feminine in tantric Buddhism. These include the dakini and the deity Vajrayogini, both of which are related to the concept of speech in tantric Buddhism. Tsultrim Allione (1986), in her introduction to the translation of a number of biographies of Tibetan yoginis, explores these symbols, suggesting that human women both draw from, and influence, portrayals of the divine female. This idea is demonstrated by descriptions of the dakini, a concept which draws its power from its deliberately fluid and ambiguous nature. While, on the one hand, women are thought to incarnate the dakini, she is also thought to manifest herself in more subtle ways, including dreams, symbols, aspects of male and female personalities, and forms of intuitive awareness. It is for this reason that Allione identifies the dakini's being as primarily related to *energy* (Allione, 1986: 42). It is important to note in this context that one of the main symbols for the 'great mother' in tantra is three-dimensional. The downward-pointing triangle called *Chos 'byung*, is white on the outside, and has a blood red interior. This triangle is essential to the iconography of Vajrayogini, who is understood as a female deity, and as incarnation of the dakini, 'Vajrayogini both stands on the triangular source of the dharmas and has it in her secret place' (Allione, 1986: 22).

In addition to being three-dimensional, this deity portrays a subtle blend of erotic imagery with symbols which evoke death. For example, she is adorned with three ritual ornaments – the hooked knife (*Kartik*), the trident staff (*Khatvanga*), and the skull-cup of blood (*Kapala*):

> The hooked knife is held in her right hand. It is raised as if to strike. The handle of the knife is a half vajra, four prongs around a central prong, closed at the top. The 'vajra' symbolizes the masculine energy which means 'thunderbolt' or 'diamond' or 'indestructible' or 'skilful means'. Since this is the handle, the dakini must grasp the handle to strike with the knife. Therefore she must grasp the force of this thunderbolt in order to cut. The blade is in the shape of the crescent moon with a hook on the end. This is the shape of a traditional Indian butcher's knife and descends from the Tantric charnel-ground cemeteries in India. There the knife was used to skin and cut up human corpses … in her left hand the Vajra Varahi holds a skull cup (Kapala) brimming with blood or white amrta. The Kapala symbolizes the vagina, and the blood (rakta) is the essence of the dakini, the red bodhicitta, the female counterpart of semen, the white bodhicitta … the Khatvanga is the third accoutrement which is present in an iconographic image of a dakini. It is a staff, with a trident at the top, and underneath the trident, tied to the staff, is a double vajra with three severed heads … the three heads symbolize the three 'kayas', or bodies. The dry skull stands for the Dharmakaya, a level of being which has no form, but contains the potential for everything.

> The second 'kaya' is the Sambhogakaya, symbolized by a head which has been severed for several weeks. The Sambhogakaya is the dimension of light, the manifestation of the essence of the purified elements … the Nirmanakaya is represented by a freshly severed head under the other two on the staff. (Allione, 1986: 32–5)

It is interesting to note that the *Khatvanga* also symbolizes the dakini's consort, implying that its three-dimensional nature not only constitutes her personal identity, but is relational in character. From this perspective, I suggest that Yeshe Tsogyel is described as being intimately linked to 'speech', not only because she has liminal aspects to her personality, but because what occurs between herself and Guru Rinpoche draws power from its subtle nature. The concept of speech relates, on one level, to the three-dimensional concept of body, speech, and mind, corresponding to the *nirmanakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, and *dharmakaya* respectively. In addition, sacred speech manifests itself in tantra through mantras and seed-syllables. Thirdly, the dakini is closely associated with speech as *twilight* language, which consists of a number of forms of 'symbolic codes', deciphered by practitioners who are believed to have both access to visionary experience, and the ability to interpret this experience. The term twilight suggests the ability to understand contents of consciousness on the cusp between light and dark, and sleeping and waking, and is therefore related to literal dreaming, and 'dream states' (Allione,1986: 42–4).

Although the detail and internal clarity of Tibetan tantric symbols mean that they cannot be subsumed within other interpretive systems, I nonetheless suggest a striking similarity with some of the images and ideas which Eliade proposes constitute shamanic identity. For example, the Tibetan term for dakini, *Khadro*, means sky-goer, reminiscent of Eliade's theme of mystical flight. This association, between ambiguous female deities, yoginis, and animals has roots in medieval Indian tantric traditions (White, 2003: 62). Similarly, twilight language appears to bear some relation to shamanic language, in that it involves the encoding and decoding of messages between different realms of consciousness. In addition, Vajra Varahi, a particular form of Vajrayogini, known as the Diamond Sow, has a wild boar's head coming out of the side of her human head, which Allione suggests represents animal qualities within the human personality, and especially brutal aspects of female sexuality (Allione, 1986: 31–2). This symbolism could also be interpreted as indicating that the deity incarnates totemic aspects of female identity.

Given these features in common, I will explore the possibility that human and apparitional females not only have similar qualities, but that some images and visions experienced by tantric practitioners were a medium of communication, both with the sacred as an impersonal force, and with each other. Understood in this way, speech is essentially transmitted energy, which can manifest itself through sound, but also visually, and through sensations, associated with subtle forms of apprehension in altered states of consciousness. While Allione explores themes of death and rebirth in Tibetan sacred biographies, she links them to the oppression of women in some conventional relationships, and their subsequent release from these situations, coupled with religious liberation (Allione, 1986: 46–50). While this analysis is insightful, I will argue that just as destructive relationships can motivate women towards renunciation, positive ones may not only allow religious

independence, but contribute to it. To do so, I will suggest that Yeshe Tsogyel's bond with Guru Rinpoche is an example of *liminal eroticism*. Secondly, I will explore her yogic practices, showing ways in which they can be seen as a process, linked to radical changes in her consciousness and her body. Although largely undertaken alone, I suggest that this process is nonetheless linked to transformations rooted in her role as a consort.

Allione uses the folk tale of Nangsa Obum to illustrate shamanic elements in Tibetan ideas about yoginis. This example is useful because it is a *delog* story, one in which the central character actually dies, gaining useful visionary experience from the underworld, before returning to their life, and transforming it (Allione, 1986: 53). In this case, the principal deity Nangsa turns to is Tara, and this turning point enables her to leave her family, and begin tantric practice (Allione, 1986: 91, 121). While Yeshe Tsogyel does not literally die, her entrance into religious life, together with her relationship with Guru Rinpoche, does echo a number of themes touched on in Nangsa Obum's tale, as broader social conflicts are played out through her body. These tensions, I suggest, are not simply between the genders, but rather, in the Tibetan context, between secular and religious forms of authority. However, patriarchal concepts are a factor, because the attempt to force her into secular marriage is related to the idea that she can be both controlled and possessed.

Yeshe's relationship to the issue of control is not without complexity. Her initial refusal to comply with her father's instructions to marry is couched in terms of her determination to be free from the fetters of worldly existence (Dowman, 1996: 15). Although caught by one of the princes competing for her hand, she runs away, nearly causing a war between the factions of rival suitors. This problem is resolved by the king, who marries her himself, and subsequently gives her to Guru Rinpoche in return for tantric teaching and initiation (Dowman, 1996: 21). Although the yogin accepts her, he refuses all the accompanying material forms of payment that the king offers.

For several years Yeshe is taught basic Buddhist precepts before initiating a sexual relationship with Guru Pema (her term for Guru Rinpoche), by requesting tantric initiation, following a spontaneous vision of the goddess Sarasvati. Yeshe places emphasis on her experiences of pain and conflict, as spiritual qualifications, before asking for 'the Sacred Word which transcends cause and effect' (Dowman, 1996: 26). He responds by binding her to him through the *samaya*, a series of sacred vows, of which the most important are those of the Buddha's Body, Speech, and Mind (Dowman, 1996: 27). In contrast, once their relationship is established, Yeshe relinquishes control in a number of ways. Firstly, their practice is said to have taken place in a 'Pure Land', implying some form of altered state of consciousness. This is brought about by the appearance of Twelve Sisters of the Mountain Passes, 'blazing in light with a white palanquin of light. After we had seated ourselves within it, it rose into the sky and sped away … instantly, we found ourselves in Zhoto, where we took up residence in the Great Assembly Hall of the Dakinis at Tidro' (Dowman, 1996: 35–36). Secondly, she offers herself three times, in order to receive the initiations of Body, Speech, and Mind, which enable her to realize her nature in *Nirmanakaya*, *Sambhogakaya*, and *Dharmakaya* forms respectively. For example, during the Body

initiation, which is associated with serenity and the heart cakra, Guru Rinpoche responds to her offering thus:

> the radiance of his smile of compassion shone in five-fold rays of light so that the microcosmic universes were pervaded by clear light, before again the beams of light concentrated in his face. Invoking the deity with the ejaculations DZA! and HUNG! the light descended through his body and his mystical vajra arose in wrath and as Vajra Krodha he united with the serene lotus in absolute harmony. Through the progress of our ecstatic dance of delight, the sun and moon mandalas of we mystic partners' psychic nerves' eight focal points of energy gradually blazed up into intense light, and the essential energy of each of the eight focal points intensified through the four levels of joy as an offering to the hosts of deities of each of the centres. In a state of sheer pleasure, with an intense feeling of power and realisation that was difficult to bear, the Lama revealed the Mandala of the Dakini's Heartdrop. (Dowman, 1996: 37)

When empowered by the Buddha's Speech, Yeshe is transformed into the deity Vajra Varahi, intuitively understanding the meaning of psychic nerves, energy flows and seed essence, through her union with Guru Pema in the form of a semi-wrathful (Heruka) deity, Hayagriva, whose 'resonance of … joyful laughter shook the entire three realms, forcefully shaking them up and blowing them apart' (Dowman, 1996: 38). In order to receive the third initiation, of the Buddha's Mind, and thereby understand her *Dharmakaya* emanation to be Kuntuzangmo, she offers herself a third time, to Guru Pema as an emanation of Red Heruka, whose heart radiates intensely fierce red light:

> I, the girl Tsogyel, sank beneath mundane appearances, and having slipped into the nakedness of pure pleasure … with three fingers stirring the pollen dust of the lotus, I offered my mandala to the mandala of the Guru's Body, with an intense snake-like dance. The mandala of dynamic space having gathered into itself the nature of the Great Pema Heruka himself by means of the hook of the lower member's focal point, the Absolute Heruka, his magnificent flaming vajra in a state of rapacity and violent abuse, his wrinkles uncreased, projecting his full emanation, took command of the lotus throne with a roar of scornful laughter that flooded appearances with glory, transmuting them into pure pleasure. Thus he revealed to me the Mandala of the Blazing Sun of Radiant Inner Space, conferring power upon me. (Dowman, 1996: 40)

Although, at first glance, these passages appear to relate more closely to ecstatic sexuality than to death, there are nonetheless indications that the transformations which Yeshe undergoes have sufficient depth to be understood as 'near-death experiences'. Firstly, as initiations of Body, Speech, and Mind, they are related to the *trikaya*. In the previous chapter, I explored ways in which the three bodies of the Buddha established a three-dimensional sense of identity for tantric practitioners. While each of its three facets is integral, I argued the importance of setting this structure in motion, because of its relationship to the circle of birth, death, the bardo, and rebirth. In addition, this movement between dimensions of being is significant because, as states of consciousness, they also underlay aspects of experience, such as dreams, during the individual lifespan. However, for Yeshe to have clearly perceived her identity in terms of the *trikaya*, a certain level of attainment in her

practice is implied, because a delicate balance between 'spontaneous awareness' and control is implicit in the *trikaya* concept. This balance is illustrated by the first three Vajrayogini generation-stage yoga practices, of Sleeping, Waking, Tasting Nectar. The first is described as 'purifying sleep':

> first, emanate light rays from your heart. When these reach the outer world and all its inhabitants, they are immediately transformed into light; then withdraw this light and dissolve it into your body. At this point, your body dissolves into the Bam syllable in your heart. That syllable then dissolves from the bottom up as far as the nada flame. Finally the nada flame also dissolves into clear light. That clear light is a state in which all phenomena, including your body and mind, have dissolved into emptiness … for yogis and yoginis even sleep can be used as a form of meditation to perceive shunyata. You have to think that your mind is a Buddha's jnanadharmakaya or wisdom body. (Tharchin, 1997: 21–2)

This process of dissolution follows closely the pattern of meditations which are thought of as 'practising death', which also culminates in the perception of clear light. In the same way, the yoga of Waking echoes ideas about bodhisattva beings *choosing* to be reborn, because their karma has been exhausted, and they are therefore not compelled to do so. As the practitioner wakes, they are instructed to take the *nirmanakaya* of Vajrayogini, in order to help sentient beings more directly (Tharchin, 1997: 23). The yoga of Tasting Nectar is thought to purify speech. In the ritual visualizations associated with this practice, the triangular 'dharma source' is drawn, in the mind's eye, with the syllables Om, Ah, and Hung placed in each corner. These correspond, in a number of tantric mandalas, to the cakras at the forehead, throat, and heart, respectively, so that symbolism relating to planes of being is transposed onto cakras in the subtle body. The throat centre, represented by the seed syllable Ah, lies between the head and heart cakras, providing a conduit between the two. However, the role of 'speech', in this context, is not restricted to the spoken word, but is described as series of subtle sensations:

> The nectar's essence is bliss-voidness wisdom. Put it on your tongue, enjoy it, meditate on it. Visualize that the holy nectar travels throughout all the nerves in your body reaching all the substances and airs within them, burning away all impurities. After those substances have been purified, they flow back through the channels and completely fill the central channel, causing you to experience great bliss. (Tharchin, 1997: 24–5)

He continues by describing these yogas as joys, a concept connected with the *four joys*, bliss experiences explored in tantric yogas. These joys are related in turn to *four empties*, subtle states of consciousness that are thought to arise as a result of *prana* withdrawing from the two side channels of the *kundalini* and entering the central channel, thereby melting red and white drops, initially at the navel and head respectively, and afterwards within the indestructible drop, the essence of being within the heart's core (Cozort, 1986: 73–6). Although diligent practice is usually prescribed to initiates learning to sustain and negotiate these levels of consciousness, they are nonetheless rooted in intense bodily experiences characterized by a loss of control, such as fainting, falling asleep, dying, and orgasm. This paradox is referred to by the idea that the *four empties* are not, in themselves, a direct realization of

emptiness, but can be utilized to support this apprehension (Cozort, 1986: 73). Yeshe is therefore introduced to them in the context of an *initiation*, described as sensual, visionary, and flooded with 'light'. The union between Yeshe and Guru Pema is thought of in terms of a complete *radiant mandala*, with four intense focal points, where their being intersects. Concentration on these points is literally a descent experience, with the forehead union first, and the throat, heart, and gut following. Within each of these four points, however, the consorts also connect with deities in union, indicating that there is an archetypical dimension to their experience, which, I suggest, indicates a connection to the concept of fusion itself, rooted in the collective unconscious. For example Yeshe states that

> in the red paradise of the gut centre, in the sixty-one lesser pure lands, were sixty-one Herukas in mystic union with their Consorts, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of identical forms, in the centre of which was the principal of them all, the Red Heruka and Consort, into whose Awareness of innate joy I received initiation. Thereby, all traces of emotional clinging and the action and reaction patterns of undifferentiated body, speech and mind were eradicated, and with insight into the elements of the path of utter purity I gained ability to benefit the infinite unbounded universe. Here, I received the secret name, Boundless Awareness Tsogyel. (Dowman, 1996: 41)

Being an initiation, this only provides foundations, which Yeshe goes on to cultivate in yoga practices. However, the themes and tensions established at this point resurface on careful examination of subsequent events. In particular, an exploration of her periods of ascetic practices demonstrates ways in which her identity is both individuated, and replenished by social energy. Her initial spur to attempt these practices comes in the form of a vision, graphically portraying the eradication of self, through imagery associated with death:

> In this vivid vision of radiant light I arrived at a place called Orgyen Knandro Ling, The Land of the Dakinis. In this land the fruit trees were like razors, the ground was plastered with meat, the mountains were bristling piles of skeletons and the clods of earth and stone were scattered fragments of bone. In the centre of this mandala was an immeasurable palace built of skulls and wet and dry heads, and the ceiling and door-blinds were made of human skin. At a radius of a hundred thousand leagues the palace was ringed by volcanoes, a wall of vajras, a perimeter of falling thunderbolts, a ring of eight cemeteries and a wall of beautiful lotuses. Within this boundary were flocks of flesh-eating, blood-drinking birds and crowds of demon savages, male and female, and other brutes, all of whom surrounded me glaring at me threateningly, but thereafter they acted with neither hostility nor friendliness. Then I went up into the palace, and having passed through three successive doorways, I found many Dakinis in human form, carrying offerings to the principle Dakini. Some cut shreds of flesh from their bodies with knives and preparing the flesh as a ganacakra offering, they made worship. Some let blood from their veins, some gouged out their eyeballs, some cut off their noses, their tongues, or their ears, some cut out their hearts or their lungs, liver, spleen or kidneys, some gave their flesh and some their life blood, some gave their bone marrow and fluids, some gave their life-force or their breath, and some cut off their heads or their limbs. After cutting and preparing their offerings, they presented them to their principal Dakini and Consort who blessed them and distributed them as tokens of faith. (Dowman, 1996: 65–6)

However, after consulting with Guru Pema, Yeshe is advised that this vision should be understood on a symbolic level, and that a number of yoga practices emphasizing stability of concentration would be more beneficial. As a result, she begins to try to generate psychic heat (*gtu mo*), through remaining on a mountain peak, wearing only a cotton cloth (Dowman, 1996: 69). Although this practice does not include literal dismemberment, it is understood to generate radical corporal transformations, which are, in turn, signified with imagery reminiscent of shamanic descent. During this process, there are a number of points at which the usual rhythms of her body cease, to be replaced by spiritual counterparts, consisting of the energy of the subtle body. In addition, each crisis restores her connection, both to Guru Rinpoche, and to deities she encountered during initiation. In other words, she relives her introduction to collective consciousness. On one level, this occurs through her visionary encounters with symbolic figures, which, I suggest, are essentially tutelary deities. More personally, her intimate connection with Guru Pema is recalled. This occurs firstly after she has been doing the cotton cloth meditation for one year. She is covered with blisters, suffering pain, and unable to breathe. Turning, in her mind, to Guru Pema for help, Yeshe finds that the warmth of psychic heat begins to generate, and he comes to her in a vision, in the form of a Heruka, giving her a skull-cup of *chung* to drink: 'Then my frost-bitten, blistered skin was sloughed off like the skin of a snake, and thinking that the time was propitious to practice the austerity of bone ornaments, I cast away my cotton cloth and decked myself with the various bones' (Dowman, 1996: 70). This second stage also includes severe abstinence from food, where she survives on only water and stones, and during the ensuing year both her mind and body become drained so that her legs could not support her body, and her body could not support her head. Coming close to death for a second time, she focuses on Guru Pema, and subsequently she has a vision of a naked red woman, 'who thrust her *bhaga* against my mouth, and I drank deeply from her copious flow of blood. My entire being was filled with health and well-being, I felt as strong as a snow lion, and I realised profound absorption to be inexpressible truth' (Dowman, 1996: 71). She therefore takes her practice to a third stage, and goes naked, depending only on air for sustenance. As a result, she comes close to death for a third time, and again asks Guru Pema for help, whereupon he appears, in a ball of light, and admonishes her for being too literal in her understanding of austerity. He advises her to renounce her pride instead, and to consume essential herbs, elixirs, and shrubs in order to restore her health (Dowman, 1996: 72–3).

In the period following, Yeshe's practice enters a new phase. She resolves to remain in *samadhi*, a form of meditative concentration, in order for her insights to become stable. It is interesting to note that, just as her earlier flight from conventional marriage can be compared to the Buddha's renunciation of the luxury of palace life, this decision can be likened to his resolve to remain in meditation, just prior to his enlightenment. The pattern also conforms to the Buddha story's portrayal of the discovery of the 'middle-way', in that Yeshe, like the Buddha, only reaches this stage of remaining in meditation after having experienced the extremes of ascetic practice, and thereby discovering their disadvantages. However, although the phase of extreme physical austerity is over, Yeshe, by remaining still, invites experiences which, I will argue, are the most crucial elements of the descent process. These

are described in the text as a series of illusions, created by local gods and demons, disturbed by her *samadhi*, manifesting themselves in a variety of seductive and fierce visions (Dowman, 1996: 78). The first ones are essentially temptations, including those of food, sex, and luxury, which she overcomes by asserting their insubstantial nature and her lack of attachment to the world, whereupon they either transform or vanish. Secondly she undergoes visions of violence, reminiscent of those described by the shaman testing his power that I referred to in the introduction to this chapter:

> The earth moved beneath me, shaking and quaking, emitting an empty roar louder than the bellow of a thousand dragon, with an intolerable banging of black lightning … I was threatened by a terrific display of weapons … besieged by phantom herds of ferocious beasts … a vast army of billions of different insects and worms led by spiders, scorpions and snakes inundated the area … many limbs without bodies hung in space before me. Many exceedingly repulsive forms flashed in and out of my vision, writhing around in spectral configurations in space. (Dowman, 1996: 79–81)

Like the shaman, she combats these demons by remaining steady in her practice and reminding herself that 'whatever occurs, good or bad, is a mental construct, and so keep a level head' (Dowman, 1996: 80). As a result, previously obstructive forces become her allies and she is able to progress. While this is portrayed as essentially a solitary experience, it is also important in the context of transformative relationships, which I have argued relate to themes of shamanic death throughout the biography.

I suggest they are linked in two ways. Firstly, because union between people on a fundamental level is a form of the collective consciousness in miniature, it brings the participants into contact with the forces of that consciousness, triggering the descent process. Secondly, I suggest that, although the resulting disturbance in consciousness requires the initiate to penetrate into the nature of illusion, their success is assured not by rejecting, but by 'holding on' to the telepathic bond they have formed. In Yeshe Tsogyel's biography, this level of faith is demonstrated throughout her life and practice, but is particularly poignant in the years following Guru Rinpoche's death. She continues to follow his instructions, working for the benefit of others, and hides their ecstatic experiences, in the form of *terma* treasures, in the minds of her disciples, and in the body of the Tibetan landscape (Dowman, 1996: 146–7). However, she views her own death as returning to Guru Pema's presence (Dowman, 1996: 160).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the biography of Yeshe Tsogyel in some detail, focusing on ways in which themes of shamanic death intertwine with the bonding process of tantric consorts. I have, in addition, argued that visionary symbols are not uniform in meaning, but are understood in different ways by the tradition, depending on both their nature and context. I have, nevertheless, identified three broad categories, all of which are linked to Durkheim's ideas concerning collective consciousness. Firstly, deities, such as Vajrayogini, and mythic figures, such as the dakini, can be understood as symbolic expressions of sacred feminine energy, held

within Tibetan society as a whole. Secondly, I suggested that deities can also become integrated into a more personal sense of identity. For Yeshe, this is a dynamic process, whereby she establishes contact with her nature as three-dimensional, in the form of the *trikaya*. I have linked this to the idea, drawn from Durkheim, that tutelary deities can be understood as personalized expressions of *mana*, by suggesting that the dakini, in human form, can be likened to a shamaness, whose power is demonstrated by mystical flight.

In addition, some dakinis and deities, in apparitional form, may be the creation of human shamanic figures, projected for the purpose of communication. For example, Guru Pema is transformed, in a vision, into Heruka, which Yeshe perceives offering her a cup of *chung*. Thirdly, the biography describes some apparitional forms as 'demons', testing the initiate's ability to process the concept of illusion. This kind of vision may be understood as a response, within the consciousness of an initiate, to the 'shock' of initial contact between the realms of the sacred and the profane, and the resulting disturbance of sedentary images. Their fearful nature may be attributed to their origin – collective, primordial, energies, which, although held within the individual psyche, are nonetheless taboo.

The depth of this concept can be illustrated by turning to Jung's exploration of the collective unconscious, which he relates to the processes which occur between two people in the *Psychology of the Transference* (1954). Although his initial interest in the problem is based within practical, clinical psychology, he nonetheless explores it through the imagery of (western) alchemical images. This system is a critical element in his understanding of the transference phenomena. He recommends the reader to consult his work, *Psychology and Alchemy*, as a preliminary text, and go on to read *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, which expands themes introduced by the transference (Jung, 1954: 164–6). Jung suggests that the importance of the concept of mystic marriage in alchemy is based on it being analogous to chemical combination, while in addition expressing an archetypical union of opposites (Jung, 1954: 169).

He argues that this image is rooted in the unconscious, disturbed in part by the energy generated in processes of bonding between people (Jung, 1954: 180). From this disturbance symbolic contents arise into consciousness, often in the form of dream images, which in turn *fascinate* the two people involved, drawing them closer together. In the case of the therapeutic situation, he points to both the dangers and potential healing power of this bond, which he suggests should neither be resisted or encouraged, because it is both spontaneous and compelling, to the point where the doctor is not so much treating a patient, as taking on their suffering (Jung, 1954: 172). This idea bears some resemblance to ways in which some shamans are understood to heal the sick. They can undertake a journey to mythic worlds (such as the underworld) to retrieve the soul of a sick person, and must undergo trials set by 'disturbed' spirits, who have 'stolen' the soul in order to voice grievances, especially breaches of taboo (Vitebsky, 1995: 98–102). Because the emotions involved have the intensity of collective energy, they are also characterized by its depth. They are therefore seldom recognized in relation to oneself, but need another person, usually of the opposite sex, to act as the source of their reflection, so that the people involved 'find themselves in a relationship founded on mutual unconsciousness' (Jung, 1954: 176). This relationship is 'charged with dangerous polar tensions', relating to the

paradoxical nature of the sacred forces which saturate it (Jung, 1954: 187). Jung demonstrates this idea, and the processes connected with it, through the illustrations of the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, which traces the stages of *coniunctio oppositorum*, according to the perceptions of western alchemical ideas. The couple's sacred character is alluded to through their being imagined as royal, while the taboo aspects of intimacy are brought into play by their designation as a brother–sister or mother–son pair, also called Sol and Luna (Jung, 1954: 200).

The first image of the sequence, *The Mercurial Fountain*, sets the scene for the mutual transformation as being one in which purification, or more accurately, distillation, is fuelled by the vapours of the substance mercury, which is both spiritual and chthonic, and, in addition, represents the circular motion of death and rebirth, continually replenishing itself (Jung, 1954: 206, 210). The ambiguity of the substance of their connection is also illustrated in the second image of the sequence, in which the pair approach one another, for what is essentially an *incestuous* betrothal, indicated by the joining of their left hands. Jung suggests that this is partly because intimate relationships bring to the fore the darker, as well as divine, aspects of the unconscious, together forming a series of 'moral contradictions' (Jung, 1954: 211). On the one hand the image of incest implies a joining of elements of likeness, which Jung interprets as the individuation process, a union within one's own being that he calls the development of the *self* (Jung, 1954: 218). On the other, he stresses the image's portrayal of 'a human encounter where love plays the decisive part' (Jung, 1954: 217).

Preceding the quality of wholeness, in either the self or in relationships, Jung argues that there is a stage of *transference*, characterized by the *projection* of unconscious contents between people, based upon emotions bound up with the experiences of early life and primary, family, relationships. He thus suggests that the female figure is representative of male unconscious contents, his *anima,* while the male figure is an aspect of the female psyche. These figures have personal attributes, based on individual experience, but primarily arise from the collective unconscious, which, because of its depth, tends only to be initially linked to consciousness in a process of reflection upon others, rather than in relation to oneself (Jung, 1954: 219–20). This crossing over is represented in folklore by subtle relationships between brothers and sisters, having magical and erotic aspects, which Jung explains in terms of a tension between incestuous, endogamous, relationships, and exogamous connections with those outside of the family group. While in some tribal societies this tension is mediated by the division of the tribe into *moieties*, who favour a system of cross-cousin marriage, societies that have undergone the refraction of modernity re-present the problem of sexual taboos within the psyche and in mystical experience (Jung, 1954: 225–7).

In the third picture, which portrays the confrontation of the problem in spiritual and physical nakedness, Jung argues that the joining of right, rather than left hands indicates a move towards integration of conscious and unconscious contents. Because the partners perceive more clearly their difference from one another, the will to union needs to be fuelled by an increase in the energy between them, 'the fire which maintains the process must be temperate to begin with and must then be gradually raised to the highest intensity' (Jung, 1954: 239). It is this energy which

enables the next stages in the process, the descent into the bath of purification (dissolution), followed by the conjunction, represented erotically (Jung, 1954: 240, 246). This union, thought to 'conceive' the soul's child, is also a twilight moment, holding within it a number of paradoxes. On one level, taking place in water, between winged creatures, it holds together the earthly and the divine. On another, it is a kind of fertility, immediately followed by death. However, Jung points out that the death-like stillness of the joined being with two heads represents a stagnation that may appear devastating, but which, nonetheless, contains the 'seeds' for a rebirth of consciousness (Jung, 1954: 256).

Three further stages, of 'soul-loss', 'purification', and the 'soul's return' take place before this potential can be realized (Jung, 1954: 266, 271, 281). If successfully completed, the process culminates in a 'new birth', represented in the tenth picture of the sequence. This new being holds in paradox qualities of unique creativity and primordial, mythic, origin, which Jung explains by pointing to 'the extraordinary *timeless* quality of the unconscious' (Jung, 1954: 309). He goes on to explore the concept of immortality as an experience of feeling, which is both intuitive and emotional (Jung, 954: 310, 312). While emphasizing the importance of the body and senses as integral to the process, he nevertheless touches on the key idea of *luminosity* as closely bound up with perceptions of eternity (Jung, 1954: 316).

Jung's alchemical insights regarding the transference provide valuable evidence of a relationship between erotic spirituality, and death and rebirth. In particular, he suggests that both are connected to the disturbance of energy, which triggers *communication*. Within the individual, this takes place between levels of consciousness, in its conscious and unconscious forms. When two people are involved, there is an increase in both the intensity, and the complexity of this communication, because the unconscious of one person affects the consciousness of the other, and vice versa. However, while the contents may, in themselves, be *illusionary*, being essentially a *projection*, Jung regards the energy binding the pair as real. I suggest that, given its association with mercury, together with the hermaphrodite symbolism in the latter stages of the sequence, this energy is not only transformative of consciousness, but itself undergoes changes, as the connection between the people involved develops. Thus, the 'divine child' could be interpreted as the energy of erotic union, in rarefied form.

Nevertheless, theoretical structures, such as those of Jung, cannot be simply transposed onto material from Tibetan religious biographies, which are already located within their own complex interpretive system. Although Jung draws from the symbolic system of alchemy to illustrate his ideas, they are formed in the context of his, modern, western, clinical, experience and grounded by theoretical psychology. For example, I suggested that some visions in Tibetan biographies may have been projected between consorts. This idea bears some similarity to the way Jung uses the word projection, in that both senses are based upon emotional energy. However, while for Jung, this is an involuntary, confusing, and often painful phenomenon, in the biographical accounts the precision of the messages, combined with the skill attributed to the practitioners in question implies a more defined, intentional process of communication.

This is because, although Jung goes on to make a number of points about relationships in the broad sense, his starting point is the dialectic between psychological therapists and their patients. This is a situation in which the emotional health of at least one of the participants is brought into question, and which therefore assumes the erotic aspects of this relationship to be problematic. In Yeshe Tsogyel's biography, the consorts are guru and disciple, a dynamic that may have some features in common with the therapeutic relationship, but which cannot simply be equated with it. In addition, both Jung's ideas and the Tibetan biographical texts suggest some contents of consciousness to be more illusionary than others. I have already explored Jung's conception of a process which begins with an awareness of these contents, purifies or distils them, and then culminates in a sense of wholeness. In the next chapter, I will describe purification in tantric Buddhism in more detail, suggesting that wrathful deities are concerned with the purification of aggression.

Chapter 6

The Purification of Aggression

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced the concept of 'transformative emotion' for the exploration of tantric Buddhist identities. Focusing on the mandala of the Dhyani Buddhas, I argued, drawing from Durkheim and Jung, that they both expressed and utilized emotional energy and used this basic premise to suggest a three-dimensional theory of consciousness, based on Durkheim's suggestion that human identity negotiates a series of tensions. Initially relating to a polarity between individuated and collective consciousness, his conception of collective consciousness can be further divided by tensions between social structure and emotional energy. Generated by human proximity during social, and especially ritual, life, emotional energy creates and sustains the bonds upon which social order and moral life depends. However, it also has a paradoxical quality, because, when amplified by contagion, this energy is difficult to contain, whether its path is positive or destructive. I suggested that tantric Buddhist ritual addresses this problem, firstly by personifying emotional energy into deities, and secondly by seeking to transform this energy, rather than repress it, using the etheric body as a conduit.

The contrast between the emphasis on renunciation and celibate monasticism in early Buddhism and tantric Buddhism's exploration of the emotions, including passionate sexuality, has at times been regarded as a form of corruption, a degeneration into magical and superstitious practices, evolving from the laity's need to satisfy 'this worldly' goals, such as power, or relief from immediate suffering, rather than being motivated by transcendence of emotional craving, the soteriological goal of Nirvana outlined by the historical Buddha (Govinda, 1969: 95). In previous chapters I have argued for a more sophisticated understanding of renunciation. For example, tantric terms, such as *bodhicitta*, refer simultaneously to physical and spiritual phenomena, and may therefore suggest experiences of altered states of consciousness, expressing an interplay between religious and sexual passion.

Here, I will explore the transformation of anger in tantric Buddhism, through the iconography and rituals associated with the wrathful deities, and the ways in which 'wrathful' identity has been outlined in Buddhist tantric biographical texts. In the same way that Amitabha embodies the transformation of passion into compassion, Aksobhya is thought to transform hatred into 'mirror-like wisdom' (Frederic, 1995: 13; Mayer, 1998: 301). Although hatred has both social and individual manifestations, my focus will be an examination of transformed individuality in tantra, and the ways in which this individuality may be related to social forces, and I therefore draw from Mauss's (1972 [1904]) study of magic to explore this relationship.

Mauss opens his discussion of magic with reference to his previous work on sacrifice, a theme I have explored in Chapter 3. For Mauss, sacrifice was 'deeply rooted in social life' and he argued that the concept of the sacred was the best tool for its study (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 7). Nonetheless, he suggests that there may be powerful rites other than religious ones and that an examination of magic may be the best place to look for these rites (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 8).

However, this study presents, for Mauss, a basic initial problem. While the relationship between religion and the social is easier to demonstrate, magic, at least initially, appears to be more an expression of individual, rather than social forces (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 9). This is demonstrated through magic's illicit nature, its association with evil spells, the breaking of prohibitions, and secrecy. In contrast, religious rituals, especially sacrifices, are more open and socially sanctioned. While religion is more often located in the temple or shrine, magic tends to be performed in woods, and shadowy corners (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 21–3). In addition, a number of substances regularly employed for magical rites are ones which society usually considers dangerous or polluting, including leftovers from both the body and sacrificial rites, 'the remains of a sacrifice which should have been consumed or destroyed – bones of the dead … leftovers from meals, filth, nail-parings, hair leavings, excrement, fetuses, household detritus' (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 47).

Mauss's solution is an examination of the tension between the social and the personal in magic and he argues that magic is an individual appropriation of what, nonetheless, remain social forces. This point can be illustrated through his exploration of traits associated with magicians, who, in many ways, are set apart from ordinary society. These include distinguishing physical characteristics, infirmities, the ability to fall into ecstatic trances, and unusual professions or gifts, such as doctors, gravediggers, blacksmiths, actors, and jugglers. At the same time he points out that such people, 'actually form kinds of social classes. They possess magical powers not through their individual peculiarities but as a consequence of society's attitude towards them and their kind' (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 28). In addition, more conventional roles of authority tend also to be endowed with magical properties, including chiefs, kings, and priests (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 30). Further, he emphasizes the positive qualities which are attributed to magicians:

> The mythical qualities of which we have been speaking are powers or produce power. What appeals most to the imagination is the ease with which the magician achieves his ends. He has the gift of conjuring up more things than any ordinary mortals can dream of. His words, his gestures, his glances, even his thoughts are forces in themselves. His own person emanates influences before which nature and men, spirits and gods, must give way. Apart from a general power over objects, the magician has power over his own being and this is the prime source of his strength. Through force of will he accomplishes things beyond the power of normal human beings. The laws of gravity do not apply to the magician. He is an expert at levitation and betakes himself anywhere he wishes in a trice. He is to be found in many places at once … a magician's soul is an astonishing thing. It has even more fantastic, more occult qualities, much darker depths, than the run of human souls. A magician's soul is essentially mobile, easily separated from his body … in general, any individual who has the power to send forth his soul is a magician … a soul is a person's double, that is, it is not an anonymous part of his person, but the person

> himself … in some cases even, the magician is said to split himself in two. (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 32–4)

The magician's double can take on a number of forms, including demons, his breath, spells, animal spirits and tutelary deities, who are in turn associated with shape-changing powers (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 35–7). This concept of spirits is also closely bound up with the rites of magic. For example, spells are described as invoking, or conjuring spiritual forces, which have a collective character, demonstrated by society's recognition of their traditional roots (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 54–9). Similarly, he suggests that demons and spirits are essentially collective representations. As personifications of magical causality, their powers are based on the ability to change the state of persons or objects, a power often described in terms of *binding* (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 79–85). Paradoxically, these rites are also characterized by diverse elements in a diffuse state:

> Magic is a living mass, formless and inorganic, and its vital parts have neither a fixed position nor a fixed function. They merge confusedly together … the spirits which the sorcerer possesses or which possess the sorcerer may become confused with his soul or his magical powers. Spirits and sorcerers sometimes have the same name. The energy or force behind the rite – that of the spirit and the magician – is usually one and the same thing. (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 88)

This contradiction, between magic's isolated, diffuse, scattered, and broken character, and its attributes as a collective phenomenon, leads Mauss to ask how the relationship between magic and religion can be conceived, if not in simple opposition to one another. The answer he proposes is that the forces appropriated in magic and in religion are the same, but in magic it is the individual, rather than society, who utilizes them (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 89–90). It is this power which gives rise to the concept of spirits or demons and which underpins the efficacy of the magician's rites (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 110). However, its roots and applications are suggested to be much deeper. For Mauss, *mana* – a force, quality, or state, which permeates both living and inanimate things – is power *par excellence*. For him, it is not simply 'an idea of the same order as the sacred', it is 'more general than that of the sacred … the sacred is a species of the genus *mana*' (Mauss, 1972 [1904]: 119).

Wrathful Deities: Ritual, Evolution, and Meaning

One of the most striking features of tantric Buddhism is that, despite its emphasis on enlightenment as a question of individual practice and responsibility, it fosters a large number of deities who evoke devotional worship. However, there is some logic underlying this apparent contradiction, for, although Buddhist devotion is intensely passionate, it is also regarded as inherently empty of existence. In other words, it is conceived, ultimately, as a form of 'skilful means', which, in recognizing and identifying with a range of states of consciousness, enables the adept to perceive their transitory and insubstantial nature. This twofold process encourages emotional experience, while at the same time, works to destroy confusion, thought to arise

from identifying those emotions with any absolute or stable sense of self. On the one hand, the greater the reverence for the deity, or their incarnations in human form, such as gurus, the more effective the practice, because the force generated 'cuts' through doubts and apprehensions of the discursive mind (Mayer, 1998: 303). On another level, all devotional objects and beings are thought of as simply aids to fostering sacred qualities already present within the body and consciousness of the initiate, and the relationship is therefore 'illusionary'.

This context is particularly clear in one of the settings in which wrathful deities are described in tantric Buddhism, that of the bardo. Chapter 4 referred to the appearance of deities in the bardo, and to the idea that a failure to recognize each of the succeeding deities as ultimately projections of one's own consciousness accelerated the process towards karmic rebirth. Moreover, the unenlightened state, or the bonds of karma, was essentially conceived as fear of the intensity of one's own illumination (Lauf, 1989: 154). This point is reinforced by the structure of the bardo process, where deities appear initially in their peaceful forms, followed by their wrathful counterparts. While the former, if the initiate identifies with them, are thought to purify the emotions, the latter purify the mind. However, the mind's afflictions are thought of as more subtle, because the intellect's discursive function tends towards inflexibility (Lauf, 1989: 141; Mayer, 1998: 285).

Tribe's analysis of wrathful deities examines chronological and thematic developments in Indian tantric Buddhism through its texts, which he divides into five classes: Kriya, Carya, Yoga, Mahayoga, and Yogini (Tribe in Williams, 2000: 204). He suggests that the earliest Kriya texts date from the 2nd century CE, with the Carya tantras appearing in the 7th century and theYoga tantras in the 8th. Yoga tantras are associated with mandalas that portray five celestial Buddhas, including Amitabha, with the Buddha Vairocana taking the central position (Tribe in Williams, 2000: 204–209). Mahayoga tantras, including the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* and the *Vajrabhairava Tantra* arose during the 8th century and, while maintaining some continuity with Yoga tantras, they are distinguished by their increasingly wrathful nature and the placing of Aksobhya (or deities related to him) at the centre of the mandala (Tribe in Williams, 2000: 212).

Yogini tantras, including the *Hevajra Tantra* and the *Candamaharosana Tantra*, appeared in the 9th and 10th centuries. In common with the Mahayoga tantras, Aksobhya remains prominent, the deities are fierce, and sexual and transgresive elements are included. However, Yogini tantra mandalas may also have female central deities – such as Vajravarahi, Vajrayogini, and Kurukulla – and they incorporate cremation ground symbolism that Williams suggests is strongly influenced by tantric Saivism (Tribe in Williams, 2000: 213–15). In contrast to the royal attire and relatively peaceful appearance of Guhyasamaja and his consort, the Yogini tantra deities

> have human bones for ornaments, flayed human and animal skins for clothes, are garlanded with strings of skulls or severed heads (fresh or decaying), and drink blood from cups made from human skulls … standing, often in dancing posture, in sexual union with a female partner of similar appearance. Grimacing expressions, protruding and bloody

> fangs, flaming hair and eyebrows, and a third eye in the center of the forehead, indicates their 'Hindu' ferocious nature. (Tribe in Williams, 2000: 214)

While scholars such as Sanderson (1994: 92–7) and to some extent Williams have emphasized the ways in which these developments in tantric Buddhism were shaped by external forces and religious traditions, it is also possible to take a more emic approach to the same phenomenon. According to Linrothe, for example, 10th- to 12th-century developments in Indian tantra are characteristic of the third stage of a three-phased evolution of wrathful deities within the Buddhist pantheon, an evolution that he suggests is inextricably linked to the rise of esoteric Buddhism itself (Linrothe, 1999: 5–6).

Linrothe, following Schopen (1997) concentrates on non-textual artefacts, such as inscriptions, images and statues, mainly from Bengal and Orissa and Kashmir (Linrothe, 1999: 10–11). He suggests that

> the forms found in Esoteric Buddhist images seem to share a great deal with other traditions of 'grotesque' in that as a 'species of confusion' they violate the expectations of reason and natural order. The grotesque is often occupied with transgression of the boundaries between the sacred and the profane and appears in a number of other religious and secular traditions. What is rather unique to these wrathful deities is that Esoteric Buddhism has infused forms which are expressly violent and threatening (and, at least to the unfamiliar, troubling and offensive) with divine rather than demonic significance. They do not represent merely the darker, destructive side of nature. Instead, by fusing an outer expression of malevolence with an inner valency of compassion, they enfold chaos into the sacred. They are visual expressions of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. For the adept, the fusion paralyses or transcends dichotomizing cognition, and dualism is subverted. (Linrothe, 1999: 8)

He goes on to argue that these deities, which he terms *krodha-vighnantaka* (wrathful destroyers of obstacles), evolved in three, roughly consecutive stages, during the 6th–12th centuries. In Phase One (6th–8th centuries), *krodha-vighnantakas* such as Hayagriva and Yamantaka are largely subordinated to bodhisattvas, for example, Avalokitesvara or Manjusri. During Phase Two (8th–10th centuries), *krodha-vighnantaka* deities become more independent, or are fitted into fivefold mandala system, rather than in the triadic symbolism that characterizes Phase One (wherein a central Buddha is flanked on either side by a bodhisattva). To illustrate the Phase Two imagery, he focuses on the development of Yamantaka and the emergence of Vajrapani-Trailokyavijaya. In Phase Three (10th–12th centuries), Linrothe explores Heruka, Hevajra, and Samvara, who are ranked together with the Buddha in level of importance, and appear at the centre of dominant mandala cycles (Linrothe, 1999: 13–14).

Phase One wrathful deity images emerged, in embryonic form, from representations of *yaksa* spirits, pre- or non-Aryan folk deities, who represented the ambivalent in nature. They were then adopted, initially in *brahmanical*, but slightly later in Buddhist contexts, to personify certain symbolic aspects of more prominent deities. For example, Cakrapurusa personifies Vishnu's wheel (Linrothe, 1999: 45–6). As protectors or guardians of bodhisattvas, they took on three main forms:

> the ferocious *vira*-Yaksa type, the less exaggerated, almost heroic *vira*-Yaksa type, and the mischievous child-like *vamana*-Yaksa type … the first type has an awe-inspiring, slightly fearsome character. These incipient features will be fully developed over time in such deities as Yamantaka, who among others remains grotesque throughout his many incarnations during Phases One to Three. The subdued but dignified type combines power with grace. Such handsome *krodha-vighnantaka* are relatively rare in Phase One images, but they will come to the fore with Phase Two *krodha-vighnantaka* like Trailokyavijaya. Finally, the *vamana*-Yaksa type evokes not so much awe as humour, a feeling which is the flipside of sacred horror. (Linrothe, 1999: 37)

As Phase Two images emerge from Phase One *krodha-vighnantaka*, they increase both in stature and status, some evolving from the *vamana* into the *vira* type. Simultaneously, late in the Phase One stage, guardian figures associated with Mahayana texts and symbolism diminish in size and importance. From this evidence, Linrothe suggests that Esoteric Buddhist elements began to emerge 'under the wing' of Mahayana texts, images, and practices. They were gradually sifted out, taking a more important role in tantric Buddhism, while simultaneously, and literally, shrinking in the mainstream Mahayana context. Linrothe associates this development with an initial complexity in the way that the relationship between wrathful deities and the bodhisattva was conceived:

> The entire mien of the Phase One *krodha-vighnantaka* suggests subservience and a willingness to surrender to the will of the bodhisattva. Here we sense an ambiguity which is at the core of the Phase One *krodha-vighnantaka*. Is he a furious manifestation of the bodhisattva? The personification of Vajrapani's implement? Or is he an unstable oath-bound convert, a powerful outsider Vajrapani has just subjugated and over whom strict control must be maintained? … his essence is not one of easily graspable categories. The unsettling ambiguity suggests the presence of an Esoteric Buddhist element in an otherwise relatively straightforward Mahayana context, and it is subtle uncertainty which characterizes the early history of the *krodha-vighnantaka*. We see here an unstable force which the bodhisattva must restrain, but as time goes on we will watch this force break the bounds of restraint to become larger and more important than the bodhisattva who now employs it. (Linrothe, 1999: 53)

Intimately related to this transformation is the way that deities such as Yamantaka, the wrathful manifestation of Manjusri, are understood not simply as personifying an attribute of the deity (*ayudhapurusa*), but the essence of the deity's speech, *dharani*. Yamantaka is bound in an oath of subservience to Manjusri, while at the same time representing aspects of the dominant deity's own magical power, through mantras, spells, and invocations (Linrothe, 1999: 64). Initially these powers included rapid flight and coercion, but, over time, were extended to the protection and purification of the grounds on which mandalas were constructed, and to exorcism of demons (*abhicaraka*) (Linrothe, 1999: 65–7). This dual aspect – of a power both conquered and employed – is rooted in the relationship between Yamantaka and Yama, the Vedic god of death:

> Yamantaka (lit. 'the one who puts an end to death') assumes many of the characteristics of the god he combats. Yama, the god of death, is converted to the Buddhist pantheon in

> all his terrifying power and transformed into a new personage of the appellation 'He who deals death to the death dealer'. (Linrothe, 1999: 67)

In a similar way, Hayagriva, the horse-headed attendant to Avalokitesvara, originated in *brahmanical* religion, as the 'loudly-roaring one', an incarnation of Vishnu, who entered the underworld to retrieve sacred vedas stolen by demons. He draws the demons to him, with the power of his voice in recitation, thus capturing them and protecting the texts (Linrothe, 1999: 86). However, Linrothe does not equate the growth of esoteric elements in tantric Buddhism with an increasing concern for mundane, rather than religious goals. On the contrary, he regards Esoteric Buddhism to be concerned with *samyaksambodhi* (absolute enlightenment) in this life, in ways absent from the purely Mahayana imagery of the Phase One bodhisattva cult (Linrothe, 1999: 135). He illustrates this point with a discussion of the development, during Phase Two, of two related deities, Acala and Trailokyavijaya. In the case of Acala, this transformation is linked to his role in preparing the adept for ritual practices:

> The task of *bandhaya-siman* is usually the first step in the Esoteric Buddhist ritual procedure. The exercise secures the boundaries and purifies the grounds where the *mandala* will be constructed and rituals will take place. It is an important preliminary stage which ensures that the rite will not be contaminated by impure objects and actions. It also protects the adept who is about to unleash potentially overpowering spiritual forces. Acala is called upon for this critical task of 'holding ground' to ensure the adept is not besieged when most vulnerable by impure outside forces, demons, or Mara's hordes. Acala's power to maintain sacred ground may account for his distinctive posture in South Asian images, in which he literally puts his knee to the ground. (Linrothe, 1999: 152)

A simultaneous reinterpretation of both the nature of purification, and the significance of the ground, are key factors in the introduction of tantric Buddhist soteriology during Phase Two, a process which Linrothe describes as 'advancing the tasks out of the realm of magic into the realm of the spiritual, or psychological, endeavour. More precisely, the magical and the spiritual are allowed to coexist' (Linrothe, 1999: 152). This comes about with a twofold understanding of the nature of the obstacles to be purified. Esoteric Buddhism suggests a subtle distinction between outer forces, and inner obstacles, or karma. Thus the purification of the ground, or mandala becomes the purification of the mind: 'Phase Two ideology always provides an inner explanation for outer actions. To visualize Acala and to perform his mudra and *dharani* is tantamount, not just to keeping malevolent demons at bay, but to purifying one's inner state' (Linrothe, 1999: 152).

While I believe that this distinction is significant, it is extremely fluid in tantric Buddhism. Outer obstacles are conceived as ultimately illusory, not only because the tradition focuses attention on purifying the perception of the initiate, but because the mind and outer circumstances are intimately related. In addition, it is not simply the mind which is being purified, both the ground and the mandala are also metaphors for the subtle body. The significance of the ground, and its relationship to the human body, is significant in the context of the use of detritus, or waste products, in magic.

This theme comes to the fore when Acala becomes Candamaharosana, whom I will explore later in this chapter.

Trailokyavijaya (who evolves into Samvara) plays a similar role to Acala, being particularly associated with purifying obstacles and securing boundaries. In addition, in his connection to Vajrapani, Trailokyavijaya illustrates a development in the complicated relationship of conquering and incorporation of dangerous forces which the *dompteur-dompte* relationship expresses, a relationship which Linrothe argues can be traced to the overcoming of Mara by Sakyamuni. Trailokyavijaya extends his powers beyond the underworld, to subjugate the Lord of the Three Worlds, Siva-Mahesvara (Linrothe, 1999: 177).

During Phase Three, deities such as Guhyasamaja, Heruka, Hevajra, and Samvara, become prominent in their own right. In addition, the symbols of inversion and incorporation take on a deeper significance, as does Aksobhya (head of the Vajra family), who is related to the above deities, and who displaces Mahavairocana (representing the *tathagatakula*) as the central deity of the mandala (Linrothe, 1999: 227). Moreover, rather than being portrayed as historical references to the Buddha's teachings, or as the pronouncements of a bodhisattva in a pure land, these texts are imagined as originating from the fully fledged wrathful deity residing in the bhaga of his deity-consort (Linrothe, 1999: 230). This image of the union of polarities also gives rise to Hevajra's name (He, being compassion, and Vajra being wisdom), expressing the great bliss (*mahasukha*) of the union of two-in-one (*yuganaddha*) (Linrothe, 1999: 233).

One of the themes that emerges from this sketch of the evolution of wrathful deities is that of subjugation, combined with acculturation. This operates on a number of levels. For example, the simultaneous conquering and incorporation of Vedic deities in tantric Buddhism suggests some competition and hostility between these religious traditions. It could be argued that this process is rooted even earlier in Indian history, in a tension between localized, tribal religious expressions, such as nature spirits, and *brahmanical* rituals and texts. Sutherland, for example, states that

> these legends point to the struggle between conquering tribes and autochthonous peoples whose lower status and depleted control of the area are reflected in their equation with non-human species, in this case snakes. We need only look at the history of imperialism, in which scores of aboriginal tribes and nations have been denigrated in similar ways, their resources plundered and their humanity denied, to accept the possibility that the designation 'yaksa' or 'naga' may have related to another imperialistic restructuring of a tribal society. The conversion of these native inhabitants of the conquered territories constitutes an important aspect of the legendary proliferation of Buddhism. (Sutherland, 1991: 42)

The transmission of Buddhism into Tibet is also portrayed as the forced conversion and subjugation of local territories and deities who became dominated by a largely male monastic religious elite (Marko, 2003 [1990]: 325). Therefore, while tantric Buddhist practice may have been coloured by indigenous religions, their inferiority was stressed. While there is some truth to this, the process also has another dimension; namely, transformations internal to the adept. In practice, although tantric deities are

worshipped, they are also thought to reflect enlightened qualities that people already possess. This intimate relationship – between forces of nature, mythical beings, and the human body and emotions – is important to the ways in which *nagas* and *yaksas* were originally imagined.

Sutherland suggests that they are both linked to water symbolism, expressing both its importance in Indian thought and its ambiguity. While *nagas* tend to be represented as snakes of the waters or the earth, *yaksas* are more often represented as connected to trees. However, they are associated both with fertility and destruction, as their essence is the subtle substance, *rasa*, which manifests itself as tree-sap, the elixir of life (*soma*), and also venom (Sutherland, 1991: 48). In addition, the appearance and character of ascetic *siddhas*, such as the *kapalikas*, probably influenced iconography, in addition to being inspired by it. From this perspective, the rise of tantras which place deities related to Aksobhya (who is also related to water), such as Vajrasattva and Vajradhara, at the centre of the mandala, suggests a simultaneous subjugation and incorporation of anger within the individual personality.

One particularly potent example of a deity from the Vajra family, which Boord explores through the Northern Treasure texts of the Nyingma tradition, is Vajrakila (Boord, 1993: 1). According to Boord,

> *vajra* as a prefix is almost ubiquitous within the Buddhist *tantra*. Originally meaning 'the hard or mighty one' and referring in particular to the thunderbolt as a weapon of Indra … characterised as 'unbreakable' (*abhedya*) and 'indivisible' (*acchedya*), the term may be said to represent nothing less than the full enlightenment of the *Samayaksambudda* who himself came to be referred to as Vajradhara (He who holds the *vajra*). The Sanskrit word *kila* means 'nail', 'peg' or 'spike' and thus Vajrakila may be taken to mean 'the unassailable spike' or, on a higher level, '(He who is) the nail of supreme enlightenment'. (Boord, 1993: 2)

The key function of the spike, to create and protect boundaries of sacred ground, can be seen within myths originating with the *Rg Veda*. Indra kills the demon serpent Vrtra (who was thought to cause drought by obstructing the waters) with a spike and then uses it to stabilize the earth and prop up the sky (Mayer, 1990: 4–5). Within Buddhism, pegs were used to mark out the centre and circumference of temples and *stupas* (Boord, 1993: 39–40). From this function, Vajrakila not only develops into a deity with his own mandala, 'a bloody charnel ground in the centre of which dwells the god in a palace of skulls, astride a throne of demonic corpses' (Boord, 1993: 4), but can also be viewed, literally, as the 'linchpin' of the mandala concept itself. This, in turn, represents one of the ways in which Vajrakila can be identified with the human individual, because the mandala not only marks out the physical space in which ritual activity can occur, but also relates to processes within consciousness. In addition, the mandala can also be understood as a map of the body, especially the subtle body, which is stabilized, or centred, by the *susumna*, which runs up the body's vertical axis. For example, in a text in which the yogin identifies himself with Vajrakila,

> he takes the ritual nail into his hands. Thinking of himself as the single-faced, two-armed god with the lower half of his body in the form of a triple edged spike blazing in a mass of

> fire, the yogin blesses the ritual *kila* by contemplating his right hand and the *mandala* of the sun from which arise the *bijas* of the Five Tathagatas and his left hand as the *mandala* of the moon emanating from the *bijas* of their five consorts. Then, as his hands are brought together with *mantras*, the male and female Buddhas unite and the *bodhicitta* of their union flows into the *kila*. Rolling it between his palms, the yogin exhorts the *kila* to fulfil the four magical acts. (Boord, 1993: 7)

This passage suggests the internal process of production of *rasa* within the subtle body, as sun and moon are symbols for the two channels running alongside the central one. However, the generation of this power is also regarded as sexual within Vajrakila mythology. In addition, the close meditation on light, *sampannakramaya*, is said to enable the adept to kill others in acts of violent sorcery. It is this paradoxical nature which Boord suggests fills the texts with the 'darkest images of witchcraft', while at the same time allowing them to rank themselves amongst 'the most profound of spiritual practices' (Boord, 1993: 17). For example, within the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, the victim is killed by stabbing a *kila* into the head, throat, and heart of an effigy, destroying their three primary cakras. Given the supposed efficacy of these rites, which could be employed for literal, as well as symbolic, ritual killing, the term liberation as a euphemism for murder gives the texts a particularly sinister turn of phrase (Cantwell, 1997: 107).

This is portrayed in details of Vajrakila's iconography, which Boord suggests, 'have appropriated the form and adornments of the conquered enemy. Thus Vajrakila is invariably dressed in "the spoils of war", including clothing of human, elephant, and tiger or leopard skins, bone ornaments, snakes, a crown of five dry skulls, and a necklace of fifty freshly severed heads' (Boord, 1993: 79). However, as passages from the *Guhyasgarbha Tantra* demonstrate, liberation through destruction, transformation, and subjugation is, at least on one level, what the utilization of wrathful deity practice alludes to. His three faces indicate the destruction of the three poisons and the attainment of the three *kayas* (Boord, 1993: 80). For example, the *Mayuri* protection spell refers to the peacocks, who are thought 'to devour snakes in order to transform their poison into the shining colours of their iridescent plumage' (Boord, 1993: 56). Vajrakila is also associated with the scorpion, portrayed as guarding the 'treasure' of the deity's texts, when they were discovered (Boord, 1993: 112). This transformation, of venom into *amrta*, is also closely bound up with visions of sacred sexuality. In a ritual from the Mahottarkila cycle, the yogin visualizes a mandala,

> composed of a central area of faeces with swirling white semen to the east, a heap of flesh like a mountain to the south, foaming red blood to the west and a lake of urine to the north … seated with his consort upon his lap, the *yogin* should concentrate on her *yoni* and visualize the syllable AH, red and shining brightly in its centre. He then imagines rays of white light streaming forth from the OM at the base of his *vajra*, bright red light shining from the HUM at its midsection and blue light radiating from the PHAT at its tip. His ardent desire for the bliss of her 'secret cavity' is said to annihilate all worldly attachments. (Boord, 1993: 165)

From a union of non-dual bliss white *bodhicitta* falls to become a lake of nectar, with heaped bodies of crushed demons at its centre. This substance is then imagined as a potent purifying force, which empowers the meditator. The visualization combines two essential characteristics of the rites which, I will argue, are also combined in portraits of its practitioners. The first is an empowerment of the individual, based on aggression. The second is a potent sexual force, in this case masculine. The two are connected by an emphasis on processes of dissolution, characteristic of magic more broadly, and suggesting that the drive toward individuality is related to anger, because both err toward forces of separation, while attachment moves toward union.

Further to this, I suggest that, while sacrifice binds a community by generating the energy of the sacred, magic acknowledges and utilizes this energy's subsequent differentiation, a process symbolized by its interest in waste products, including those of the sacrifice, and of the human body. Therefore, between them, sacrifice and magic comprise a total system, through which movements of emotional energy can be traced, Moreover, processes of dissolution are bound up with the notion of the *impure* sacred, because of the strength of emotions such as horror and disgust which society expresses with regard to decaying bodies and menstrual blood. They also demonstrate ambivalence, being imbued with the awe and prohibitions which characterize the sacred (Caillois, 1959: 42).

This dual character can be regarded as two aspects of the sacred, both charged, but with one as positive and the other negatively. This is how Caillois expresses their relationship, implying, in turn, a relatively radical break between them both and the profane, associated with magic (Caillois, 1959: 45–50). However, what lies behind society's reaction to the impure sacred can be two related, but discrete, fears. On the one hand, the intensity and contagious nature of the sacred releases passions in society, which have a destructive aspect, with the potential to unleash warfare, revolution, and the breakdown of moderating social structures. On the other, human disintegration and excretion can also be viewed as necessary to the social body, a movement which is important to its health, but feared, because of the loss of energy as a unifying force which they entail. Caillois introduces this idea by arguing that, although the impure and pure are both aspects of the sacred, the pure tends to be located at the centre of social life, while the impure is associated with the periphery (Caillois, 1959: 52). This is connected to the notion that, while health, strength, and cohesion are all aspects of ritual purity, the notion of the impure evokes images of death and dissolution (Caillois, 1959: 55). From this perspective, it is not the impure sacred in itself which is dangerous, but the emotion of clinging, or attachment, which holds on to the integrity of the social body, leading to stagnation. If discharge is thus arrested, society is in danger of retaining poisons, which, I believe, manifest themselves in the phenomenon of cruelty. The drive toward differentiation can therefore be seen as a negative pole, towards which energy from the sacrifice is drawn and processed, creating a vacuum in the social body, which demands revitalization through ritual.

This movement is a thread, running through both the rituals concerning wrathful deities, and the biographies of those thought to personify them – including, in the case of Vajrakila, Padmasambhava and the Fifth Dalai Lama. It is also, I believe, one way of understanding the layers of ritual and metaphor, wherein the secret, or inner

meanings appear to contradict the drive for power which the outer rites and 'mundane *siddhis*' suggest. Rather than expressing a strict dichotomy between 'high' and 'low' forms of religion, wrathful deity mythology explores dark emotions through their relationship to the 'ground'. In so doing, it poses a fundamental connection between the transformative powers of the human (particularly the subtle) body, the social body, and the body of the earth. Vajrakila illustrates this idea particularly well. As a fierce deity, he evokes the destructive social emotions of the impure sacred. Being a ruthless subjugator and manipulator of demonic forces he is a powerful tool for the magician. As a stake driven into the ground, he creates a centre for the mandala, and sacralizes the earth. When visualized as piercing the *cakras*, he simultaneously destroys and liberates the body, by forcing open its energy centres.

The mythology of Padmasambhava's transmission of Buddhism into Tibet can be reflected upon in this context, given that in his role as the subjugator of local gods and demons, he is usually thought not simply to employ Vajrakila, but to personify him, to the extent that he has been depicted from the waist down in the form of a *kila* (Boord, 1993: 114–16). However, given that the ground is often associated with the feminine in Tibetan mythology, this portrayal raises questions of gender and sexuality which need to be explored in more detail. For example, in a myth set in a period which pre-dates Padmasambhava, the earth is described as a 'demoness of the soil', who obstructs the emperor Srong-btsan (7th century) in his attempts to erect a Buddhist temple. One of his wives, a Chinese princess, uses her geomantic skill to tackle the problem:

> the appropriate locations for the required subjugation were determined on the ground and then the spread-eagled form of the demoness was rendered immovable by transfixing her limbs. Thirteen shrines and *stupas* were built in order to effect this. One of these pressed down upon her heart and then an inner circle of four transfixed her shoulders and hips, an intermediate group held firm elbows and knees, and a final set pinned down her wrists and ankles. As a result of that subjugation, it is said, the land of Tibet was tamed in readiness for the introduction of the Buddhist *Dharma*. (Boord, 1993: 68–9)

This symbolism is problematic, not simply because the demonic is portrayed as female, but due the complex series of associations which the image evokes, particularly of domination, both of the female, and of the earth. Marko, for example, argues that what lies behind it is aggressive territorial expansion in Tibet, led by an institutionalized monastic male elite. In her view, the myth has a patriarchal political dimension, wherein 'violence plays a specific role in recreating a mythic notion of wholeness through the body of woman the demon as fragmented territory, a site for the recreation of wholeness' (Marko, 2003 [1990]: 322). Sutherland also suggests that

> in the Tantric context, the symbolic domestication of the wilderness, which the yaksa embodies, takes the form of a sexual subjugation of the wild (i.e., erotic) yaksi by the male practitioner. Her undomesticated sexuality is brought to heel and transmuted into familial goodwill, serving simultaneously and conversely as a metaphor for her actual sexual enslavement by the practitioner. (Sutherland, 1991: 147)

Given that wrathful deities, demons, and *nagas* are all explored in both female and male form in tantric Buddhist mythology, I will suggest that they are not simply expressions of negative male fantasies. Rather, they explore dark aspects of being, which nevertheless contain reservoirs of power for both genders.

The Wrathful Female and the Magician

Wilson, in her exploration of Theravada texts, suggests that 'confrontation with death and decay looms large in the history of Buddhism' (Wilson, 1996: 1). This confrontation, according to her analysis, was both shaped by, and contributed to, a number of tensions in the Indian social context, especially between the religious ideal of celibate monasticism, and the economic and emotional drives represented by the role of the lay householder (Wilson, 1996: 18). Drawing from a number of early Buddhist texts, particularly hagiographies, she suggests that this conflict was not gender-neutral. Rather, these stories tended to assume the typical renunciate to be male. The female, as an object of erotic desire, tended to be represented as being more bound up with the body, and therefore the forms of economic and social reproduction that both sustained and threatened monasticism as an institution. She suggests that emphasis was put on the impurity of the body's apertures and emissions because of a symbolic relationship between the physical and the social. Being a minority group, unable to perpetuate itself through sexual reproduction, the monastic community tried to protect its boundaries through meditation on the relationship between the body's permeable and fluid functions, and its inevitable impermanence and decay (Wilson, 1996: 48–56).

Focusing on the Buddha's life-story, together with ritual practices he is said to have taught his disciples, Wilson argues that Buddhist attitudes to death are primarily instituted to encourage a distaste for sensual desire, by promoting a disgust for the body. She critiques rituals whereby 'male protagonists become Arhats or "worthy ones", through viewing dead, dying, or disfigured female bodies. By viewing women as object lessons on the folly of desire, the men in these narratives thereby achieve the state of spiritual liberation that is characterized by the eradication of desire' (Wilson, 1996: 3). The practice which she refers to is the cremation ground meditation (*ashubhavana*), wherein practitioners observed decaying bodies in order to instill awareness of their insubstantial nature. This practice was neither compulsory, nor widely practised, being viewed as potentially mentally disturbing, combining ideas about the erotic with the repulsive. However, the technique flourished in hagiographies in which male practioners were portrayed as witnesses to these scenes, with women given the role of object to the male gaze:

> While meditation manuals suggest that it is a bad idea for a monk to look at a dead woman's body because he might find it arousing, post-Asokan hagiographies combine arousing and disgusting stimuli in ways that practioners of aversion therapy might have approved of: alluring women die sudden, spectacular deaths that sicken the beholder just at that moment when he is most vulnerable to the charms of women … the Buddha ultimately subverts the sexual desire that he encourages by the strategic use of repulsive figurations of the feminine. (Wilson, 1996: 12)

She suggests that this concept is rooted in stories about the Buddha's initial renunciation. Before leaving the palace, he is said to have contemplated the sleeping women of his harem, seeing them as 'a charnel field strewn with corpses' (Wilson, 1996: 2). Although Wilson's research is not primarily about the tantric tradition, she does suggest that tantric Buddhism continues to foster similar values, because of its continuing use of cremation ground practices (Wilson, 1996: 188). In addition, scholars such as Paul have asserted that negative images of women were perpetuated within the Mahayana, through, for example, the idea that women are *Mara's daughters* (Paul, 1985: 15–59). This idea is particularly interesting, given its association with another critical episode in the Buddha's life-story, which is also frequently recast in other tantric hagiographies, the subjugation of Mara on the eve of the Buddha's enlightenment.

Bloss explores the significance of the figure of Mara as a personification of evil in Buddhism, suggesting that studies, such as those of Ling (1962), place too much emphasis on Mara's role as a disrupter of monastic meditation (Bloss, 1978: 156). Ling suggests that, while Mara, to some extent, evolved from symbolic figures such as the *yaksa*, his fully fledged conception and significance was related to the concerns and texts of monastic, rather than popular, Buddhism (Ling, 1962: 72–5). This is partly because he is understood to personify distractions which arise during meditation, and are therefore overcome by persistence, and, ultimately, entrance into the enlightened state (Ling, 1962: 52). Bloss, however, argues that in popular Buddhism the confrontation between the bodhisattva and Mara, just prior to the adept's enlightenment, is a particularly important dimension of his mythology, which

> can be read as conflict over world sovereignty and that the defeat of Mara, centering on the witness of the earth to the bodhisattva's virtues, signals a new reign. Through this confrontation the Buddha comes to encompass rulership which orders the world by righteous conduct. This perspective is strengthened through discussions of the relationship of the Buddha and *cakravartin* (world monarch, wheel-turning ruler), the early Buddhist belief in the selfless ruler who guarantees an abundant realm. (Bloss, 1978: 157)

Mara, the epitome of delusion and agitation, is drawn to the Buddha on the eve of his enlightenment, because this achievement would challenge Mara's authority. He employs a number of strategies of confusion and distraction, including an attempt to remind the bodhisattva of his *ksatriya* caste duties and *brahmanical* values. Next he sends his daughters, Craving, Discontent, and Lust, to try to lure the practitioner away from his goal. When this fails, he uses his powerful army to launch a terrifying attack, but their weapons are transformed into garlands of flowers (Bloss, 1978: 158). Having frightened away hosts of gods who had been worshipping the bodhisattva, Mara's final assault consists of an attempt to cast doubt on Siddhartha's sufficient accumulation of merit in past lives. While Mara can bring to bear his numerous performances of ritual sacrifice, the bodhisattva appears to be conquered, having no witness to previous good karma. The bodhisattva, however, calls upon the earth as his witness, and places his hand upon it 'causing an earthquake that overwhelms the hosts of the Evil One and causes Mara to retreat' (Bloss, 1978: 159). This episode immediately precedes entrance into the meditation during which the Buddha becomes

enlightened. Bloss suggests that, although this passage appears to reject worldly power, a number of images in Buddhist texts evoke themes of virtuous kingship, including attributes of a warrior, and the Buddha taking Mara's place on a tree-altar, likened to a throne (Bloss, 1978: 160):

> The view that the confrontation of Mara and the bodhisattva forecasts a new reign is reinforced by the suggestion of contemporary interpreters of Buddhism that the Buddha encompasses the powers of the universal ruler or *cakravartin*. This relationship between the Buddha and bodhisattva and kingship stresses that nature responds to a righteous king with order and abundance. It is well known that the Buddha is born, teaches, and dies according to the Pali texts in the symbolic idiom of the king of kings. (Bloss, 1978: 161)

Although Bloss focuses on early Buddhist texts and interpretations, his emphasis on the episode wherein the Buddha touches the earth demonstrates some continuity with both Mahayana and Esoteric Buddhism, through the iconography of Aksobhya and a number of wrathful deities to which he is related. Each of the five Dhyani Buddhas are depicted as re-enacting specific moments in the Buddha's enlightenment. The *Bhumisparsa mudra*, in which the Buddha's right hand touches the earth, is typical of depictions both of the Buddha himself and Aksobhya. It is a mudra both of great resolve and the subjugation of demons (Frederic, 1995: 44).

Secondly, Davidson's (2002) historical analysis of tantric Buddhism in medieval India suggests the forging of strong links between religious and temporal power that were fostered by turbulent political changes and continuous warfare. Specifically, he argues that Buddhist kings came to regard themselves as divine, and their territory as consecrated space, resembling a mandala. Moreover, mandalas also underwent changes that reflected these imperial metaphors, so that the deities came to be portrayed as feudal lords and ladies (Davidson, 2002: 68–72). Davidson emphasizes ways in which developments in tantric Buddhism were influenced by the incorporation of ideas and images related to the social and political landscape and is wary of scholarship that too readily accepts the perspectives of practitioners. He argues that, influenced by Jungian interpretations of the mandala, academics have 'been seduced by his explicit gnosticism, which maintained that the spiritual plane influences mundane reality and not the reverse' (Davidson, 2002: 131).

However, while worldly power and traditions such as Saivism certainly had an impact on the evolution of these symbols, they are complicated by the fact that the biographical *cakravatin* rarely operates alone, but interacts with unconventional ascetics. For example, King Trisong Detsen, who is thought to have played a key role in the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th century, invites Padmasambhava to help with the construction of the monastery Samye because while each day a portion of the building is constructed, that night the local deities destroy the work. The Indian siddha, Padmasambhava, is therefore requested to display his wrathful activity, and overcome the troublesome indigenous deities. Nevertheless, their first meeting was not without its problems:

> King Trisong Detsen weighed this thought in his mind, 'I am the ruler of the black-headed Tibetans. I am the lord of the beasts with a mane. As I am also a king who upholds the Dharma, the master will pay homage to me!' Master Padma thought, 'I am yogin who has

> reached attainment and, since I am invited to be the king's master, he will pay homage to me!' Their greeting was not in harmony, so Master Padma then sang the song 'I Am the Great and Powerful' … having sung this, Padmakara raised one hand in the gesture of homage, and light rays from his hand scorched the king's dress. The king's ministers all became terrified, and King Trisong Detsen himself bowed down. (Tsogyal, 1993: 65–7)

Moreover, the biography of King Asoka suggests a similar relationship with the monk Upagupta. King Asoka is thought to have lived about one hundred years after the death of the Buddha, and his life typifies the role of the *cakravartin* in early Buddhism. It is possible that aspects of the mythology surrounding Trisong Detsen were drawn from the model of King Asoka, and that while Upagupta was portrayed as more orientated towards monasticism than the yogin Padmasambhava there are similarities in the way both men were thought to have complemented and modified the power of the king.

Bloss examines the encounter between Mara and Upagupta through concepts of binding and unbinding, veiling and unveiling (themes that frequently appears in magical rituals) (Bloss, 1978: 162–3). When Mara disrupts Upaguta's attempts to teach a crowd by sending rains of pearls, gold, and celestial women, Upagupta is not deceived, but the crowd grows, believing that these events are signs of Upagupta's teachings. In triumph, Mara places a garland of flowers around the neck of Upagupta, while he is in meditation. Upagupta responds by transforming the corpses of a serpent, a dog, and a man into a flower garland, and placing this around the neck of Mara. Mara's initial sense of triumph is crushed when the garland reverts to the form of rotting corpses, and cannot be removed. Upagupta takes it away only when Mara is bound to him by an oath to stop interrupting *bhikkhus* (Bloss, 1978: 164–6).

Upagupta is also said to have played a role in King Asoka's consecration of his kingdom through the building of 84,000 *stupas*. According to the *Asoka-Avadana*, King Asoka attained sufficient merit to do this, and thus attain the status of a *cakravartin*, because in a previous life, as a child, he threw a piece of dirt into the Buddha's begging bowl (Bloss, 1978: 171). As Strong points out, this episode is intriguing and complex. The dirt is in one sense an impure offering, responsible for King Asoka's ugliness, but it is also an act of tremendous merit, giving him both worldly command, and the power to transform the land, through the erection of *stupas* (Strong, 1983: 63–4).

These monuments simultaneously create sacred space, while employing substances and ideas imbued with magic. In early Buddhism, *stupas* were thought to contain fragments of the Buddha's body, while in tantric Buddhism, their shape represents constituent elements of the subtle body. The cube at the bottom represents earth, the central round part, water, the conical upper structure, fire, and the umbrella above that, air, with a flaming drop crowning the *stupa*, symbolizing the elixir of life (Govinda, 1969: 185–6). Govinda also draws attention to the significance of the *stupa* in the biography of the sorcerer Milarepa, who, in repentance for a number of murders, becomes Marpa's disciple, and requests tantric initiation. He is ordered to build and then destroy a number of stone structures, each resembling a section of the stupa (Govinda, 1969: 186). He is therefore acting out the destruction of each of the elements within his own body, in order to transform his magical powers.

Another quality of the subtle body associated with the relic in early Buddhism, illumination, represents majesty according to Bloss (Bloss, 1978: 171). Asoka's power, therefore, can be interpreted as being rooted in a process whereby he imbues the body of the earth with the Buddha's body, a process begun in reverse by his offering of dirt for the Buddha to consume as food. Bloss also suggests connections with *naga* worship in this story. Asoka goes to them to request the relics (which they guard) to fill his 84,000 stupas. *Nagas*, like the Buddha, were portrayed as holding a bowl, in their case 'representing control over the waters of fertility' (Bloss, 1978: 169). Upagupta plays a key role in King Asoka's relationship with the *nagas*. It is he who takes King Asoka on pilgrimage, persuading the *nagas* guarding secrets to divulge them to Asoka (Strong, 1983: 121). In the *Lokapannatti*, Kisanaga Upagupta (slender serpent Upagupta) is called upon to subdue Mara's disruption of a Buddhist festival. In this story Upagupta does not simply command serpents, he has integrated some of their qualities:

> Upagupta as a great Thera and naga is controller of the powers of fertility par excellence. As a naga he possesses the force to bring or withhold rain and the essence of waters, semen, and sap. But in many texts his naga nature makes him somewhat unstable and prone to sensuousness. He, therefore, must dedicate his full energies to meditative control. Great control and great natural power are thus gathered in one figure. This Thera-Naga mixture found in Upagupta, produces a tension between the Thera and the assembled monks. The monks chastise Upagupta for not attending the Uposatha ceremony or joining the assembly and ask him for a penance. (Bloss, 1978: 172)

Upagupta's character is thus not a simple representation of monastic values, but one modified by association with ambiguous powers, and which modifies in turn the *cakravartin*, who represents more than worldly power and territorial domination. Between them, Upagupta and Asoka represent power as an interaction between at least three forces – asceticism, command and authority, and nature – and, like wrathful deities, they both subjugate and incorporate the chthonic. In addition, although employing, and being influenced by external forces and worldly action, kingship can also symbolize transformative power within the self. This psychological perspective is explored by Jung, who argues that developments in a man's personality involve an integration of chthonic contents of consciousness, a process that he suggests is bound up with the incorporation of the feminine.

Jung begins his exploration of the *Mysterium Coniunctionis* with a description of tensions between opposites, symbolized by a number of dualisms, such as moist/dry, spirit/body, heaven/earth, masculine/feminine, and Sol/Luna. He suggests that, the more distinctive the poles, the greater the unifying force, 'the factors which come together in the *Coniunctio* are conceived as opposites, either confronting one another in enmity or attracting one another in love' (Jung, 1963: 3). King and Queen, for example, represent masculine and feminine as opposing forces within human beings. In addition, this symbolic identification with royalty or divinity is described as an elevation, placed in a tension with theriomorphic representations, or mythic characters associated with animals or the underworld. Using Gnostic and alchemical images, he describes the movement towards totality as entailing an intense, three-dimensional conflict, taking place both above and below the conscious ego personality

(Jung, 1963: 6). The double quaternary, or mandala, is thus described as a vessel of transformation, with its central point, a very small circle, making peace between the elements or enemies, who meet one another there, in an embrace. Jung suggests that this process can be visualized as a mercurial fountain, which breaks down divisions, and combines the forces of Sol and Luna in a process of dissolution, likened to both a chemical combination, and a marriage (Jung, 1963: 12–16). This process is both turbulent and paradoxical. For union to be possible, the constituent elements need to be broken down into a more subtle or refined form. However, to initially attract one another, they must manifest distinct qualities:

> After the hostility of the four elements has been overcome, there still remains the last and most formidable opposition, which the alchemist expresses very aptly as the relationship between male and female. We are inclined to think of this primarily as the power of love, of passion, which drives the two opposite poles together, forgetting that such a vehement attraction is needed only when an equally strong resistance keeps them apart … primal guilt lies between them, an interrupted state of enmity. (Jung, 1963: 89)

Sol and Luna, therefore, both have dark aspects, suggesting that the union between masculine and feminine is not a distinct process from the vertical union between transcendent and the submerged realms of consciousness, often symbolized as that between the sky and the earth. The earth is depicted as both a negative pole, and as a place of healing and regeneration, because it breaks down and transforms dead matter, literally creating fertile ground for new life. The process of dissolution is related to the undifferentiated nature of the unconscious, which has a collective character, in contrast to consciousness, which is a discriminating force, stressing the individuality in human nature. Similarly, the moon, as a symbol for the feminine, suggests not simply a less brilliant illumination, but rather cyclical changes which symbolize unconscious processes, because, from a masculine perspective, the combination of opposites presents the feminine and the unconscious simultaneously. Luna not only represents transitions, from full to new moon and back again, but also has the moon's ability to eclipse the sun, and therefore symbolizes its shadow. This has also been described as the descent of the sun into the feminine Mercurial Fountain (Jung, 1963: 27–30). However, the picture is complicated, because Sol also has its own dark side, which, ironically, expresses itself in an attempt to disassociate from the unconscious, repressing its contents:

> Despite all attempts at denial and obfuscation there is an unconscious factor, a black sun, which is responsible for the surprisingly common phenomena of masculine split-mindedness, when the right hand mustn't know what the left is doing. This split in the masculine psyche and the regular darkening of the moon in woman together explain the remarkable fact that the woman is accused of all the darkness in a man, while he himself basks in the thought that he is the veritable fount of vitality and illumination for all the females in his environment. Actually, he would be better advised to shroud the brilliance of his mind in the profoundest doubt…naturally this is possible only if he is prepared to acknowledge his black sun, that is, his shadow. (Jung, 1963: 247–8)

This drama is played out through the process of the death, disintegration, transformation, and restoration of the king, which, for Jung is also a symbol for

Sol, signified, for example, by his radiant crown. In addition his orb, representing the world, together with his raised throne and association with 'majesty', suggests a relationship between the king as both self, and the bestower of magical vitality for the community (Jung, 1963: 258). He thus binds personal and social power, which gives him his strength, but is also the source of his periodic decline and decay, as conflict maintains a balance between the two, in psychological terms, between the contents of consciousness and the unconscious:

> The anima becomes creative when the old king renews himself in her. Psychologically, the king stands first of all for Sol, whom we have interpreted as consciousness. But over and above that he represents a dominant of consciousness, such as a generally accepted principle or a collective conviction or a traditional view … in the individual it only means that the ruling idea is in need of renewal and alteration … the old king lacked something, on which account he grew senile: the dark, chthonic aspect of nature. (Jung, 1963: 308–310)

The murder, or sacrifice of the king is therefore necessary 'for the purpose of renewing his kingly power and increasing the fertility of the land' (Jung, 1963: 268). This is only possible, however, if the female is also integrated into the personality, a completion of the work of the royal marriage, regarded as a psychic pregnancy (Jung, 1963: 359–60).

Sol and Luna, as described by Jung, take on a number of different forms. As red and white substances, related to sulphur and mercury, they have a fluid nature, which enables them to blend. As King and Queen, they personify transcendent aspects of the self, and as animals such as lions and dragons, they represent its animal or instinctive nature. However, most importantly, they are both objects of illumination. This illumination is imagined as partaking in the nature of the 'centre', in the sense of the mid-point of a mandala. Described in spiritual terms it is thought of as the soul-spark, which dwells in the body, particularly the heart (Jung, 1963: 47–9).

While Jung demonstrates his awareness of the importance of the body and emotions by emphasizing the role of natural forces in the evolution of the self, I suggest that tantric Buddhism takes this idea a step further, because, while Jung tends to associate illumination almost exclusively with consciousness, tantric Buddhism presents illumination as a literal quality of the body, in its subtle form. The perception of this illuminated body is linked to the realization that a static, permanent self is an illusion, a realization that Tibetan Buddhism suggests is the source of 'magical' power. Reminiscent of Mauss's description of the magician's double, Padmasambhava's 'empty' power is illustrated by the large number of his names – all are earned through dramatic events in his life, having both literal and visionary aspects. For example, after having completed some cremation ground practice, he entered an area which was ruled by an evil king who

> was forcing the people under his domain onto an errant path from which later they would go to the lower realms. The prince considered that there was no other way to convert them than through subjugating and wrathful activity. He tied up the hair on his head with a snake, donned a human skin as his shirt, and made a tiger skin his skirt … the prince killed all he males he came across, ate their flesh, drank their blood, and united with all

> the females. He brought everyone under his power … therefore he was named Rakshasa Demon … after this, he practiced at the charnel ground … and had a vision of Vajra Varahi who empowered him … the dakinis gave him the secret name Dorje Drakpo Tsal, Powerful Vajra Wrath. (Tsogyal, 1993: 39–40)

In addition, although Jung suggests that an integration of the feminine is a crucial to the masculine psyche's development, he does not explore 'wrathful' females in any detail. Moreover, the implications of this idea for sexual relationships tend to be suggested, rather than fully explored. In contrast, tantric Buddhism depicts both in *Candamaharosana Tantra*, which concerns a wrathful deity who is described as very violent, devastating all evil ones with his anger (George, 1974: 44). He evolved from Acala, the purifier of the ground, and has a number of forms of Vajrayogini as his consort, including, Lust, Anger, Calumny, and Envy (George, 1974: 45). The goddess is, however, closely related to human females, in that her worship is said to be effected by the worship of human females. According to this tantra, women are the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the Perfection of Wisdom (George, 1974: 82–3). This worship is described as taking the form of physical sexuality, including eating of substances from her body, and thereby transcending the usual distinction between pure and impure (George, 1974: 78–9). While this has a literal dimension, I suggest that it also refers to more subtle process in sexual relationships, whereby partners 'consume' and thereby transform, the negative emotional energies of the other.

The text hints at this by referring to the mutual consumption of the impure in the form of deities, such as Aksobhya, and Vairocana, which on one level refer to movements in the subtle body, governing forms of excretion, while on another, they represent the purification of emotions, such as hatred (George, 1974: 68). While Jung tends to present the integration of the feminine and the chthonic as an abstract process within the psyche, this tantra suggests that it can also be understood as a dynamic that occurs between consorts. Being a relationship which incorporates the other, it is essentially social. Nevertheless, the exclusivity between the partners suggests an involvement between individuals, whose sense of personhood is thereby enriched.

A similar principle is demonstrated by the Tibetan ritual known as *Chod of Mahamudra*: *With the Object of Cutting Down Demons*. Based on teachings that were transmitted, in the 11th century, to Machig Labdron from Sonam Lama, the rite contains insights from the *Prajnaparamita*, together with Vajrayana techniques, which were integrated, and modified by Machig, using instructions gained through her visionary connection with Arya Tara (Edou, 1996: 6). *Chod* is essentially a visualization technique, wherein the constituents of the body, mind, and emotions are dismembered by Vajravarahi, and offered as food for a banquet, to which the meditator invites a number of honoured guests, including visible or imaginary enemies, negative forces, and demons, especially the demon of clinging to a sense of self (Edou, 1996: 40, 52).

Edou disputes the idea that *chod* originated with indigenous Tibetan practices, despite its resemblance to the shamanic experience of death and dismemberment in the underworld. This is firstly because of *chod*'s basis in the *Prajnaparamita*

texts, and secondly because he does not regard the rite as having a basis in ecstatic or trance states (Edou, 1996: 9). There is strong evidence to support the continuity between the *Prajnaparamita* and the ritual *chod*. However, this does not necessarily discount its relationship with altered states of consciousness (Stott, 1989: 221–2). The assumption that it does is based on the premise that an exploration of altered states represents a radical break with the philosophical premises of the Buddhist Mahayana in India, from which the *Prajnaparamita* sprang. I am cautious about this assumption, because although the theme of subjugating demons develops considerably with the growth of tantric Buddhism, the idea goes back to life-stories of the Buddha, told by early traditions, including the Theravada. In particular, many wrathful deities in tantric Buddhism are thought of as manifestations of Aksobhya, who is depicted in the earth-touching *mudra*, the moment when the Buddha defeated Mara. This scene was significant to early monastic Buddhists, not simply as a heroic tale, but as a motif depicting a conflict with illusion, as part of the meditative path. I believe that this engagement with illusion is not confined to doctrinal Buddhism, but is symptomatic of a disturbance in consciousness that a variety of religious systems portray and codify in different ways, including shamanic traditions.

Mahayana Buddhism uses the concept of illusion to illustrate the idea of emptiness, by using the example of the dream images, which are real to consciousness, but have no inherent nature of their own 'in the same way, according to Mahayana, phenomena seem to exist, but in reality their essence is emptiness. They are like a mirage or an illusion created by a magician' (Edou, 1996: 27). Although sometimes interpreted as simply a metaphoric designation, designed to break down barriers in thought, emptiness is also the basis, in tantra, for the magical powers of yogins – including levitation, conjuring, and the inducement of visionary experience in others – which characters such as Padmasambhava are thought to have employed. In addition, although *chod* severs attachment to the self, and especially the body, it nonetheless employs techniques, in common with Highest Yoga tantras, which utilize the subtle body, such as the union of subtle mind and *prana* (Edou, 1996: 85). Although Edou denies *chod*'s relationship with shamanism, he asserts that

> Machig's Chod tradition is a dramatization and a synthesis that utilizes all the resources of the mental sphere, combining into a single doctrine the ultimate teachings of Mahamudra, tantric visualization techniques, and the vast pantheon of primordial forces, local gods and demons that inhabit the imagination of the Tibetan people. This appears to be the main function of Chod: to serve as a link between the highest metaphysical vision and the popular religion. (Edou, 1996: 76–7)

The crux of this link lies in the range of phenomena that are classed as 'demons', including positive and negative thoughts, spirits, zombies and phantoms, and the attachment to self (Edou, 1996: 70). In other words, the ritual texts recognize a continuity between circumstances which appear to be external to the individual and their mental and emotional state. This does not just acknowledge the role of perception in the way one receives a situation. It also implies the ability to transform reality in ways that I have chosen to term 'magical'. This process is outlined in the description of the level of final accomplishment. In the first stage, the yogi's meditative absorption is unbearable to local gods and demons, who create obstacles.

If he persists, these obstacles crystallize into hallucinations, mirages, and dreams, whose object is to terrify the practitioner into abandoning the practice. If these fail, they lose power over the mind, and the demons begin to pay attention to the yogin's voice, granting him supernatural powers and intense joy. Finally, the obstacles are subjugated, and receive instruction (Edou, 1996: 73–5).

This pattern is similar to ideas about the evolution of wrathful deities and the practitioner's relationship with them, as forces both subjugated to, and incoporated within, the individual practitioner. It also, I suggest, has significance for the ways in which karma is described, particularly in hagiographical texts. Karma is portrayed as, simultaneously, an awareness of social, including sexual, bonds which endure across lifetimes; and as an obstacle, transcended by those relationships. This is because of an ambivalent attitude to visionary experience in tantric Buddhism, which on the one hand throws up a series of illusions, rooted in fears of the loss of the self, while on the other, it may unveil the united consciousness of individuals in human relationships.

Conclusion

The biography of Machig Labdron begins with an exploration of her karma. This is done on two levels. Firstly, she is described as 'a wisdom dakini, Vajradakima, belonging to the mind group of emanations of Yum Chenmo, she who gives birth to all the Buddhas of the three times' (Edou, 1996: 119). Secondly, her previous life, as an Indian monk turned wandering yogin, is outlined. His monastic training included learning in all three schools of Buddhism, culminating in initiation into the mandala of Cakrasamvara, which gives him the ability to travel through the Buddha's Pure Lands, without obstruction. While practising in Bodhgaya, he receives instructions from Tara, and as a result, heads north, in the direction of Tibet (Edou, 1996: 120). Coming to rest in a cremation ground, he is disturbed by a fierce dakini, who wears bone ornaments and holds a chopper and *khatvanga*. Angry at his intrusion, she conjures a number of magical apparitions, but, overpowered by his *samadhi*, she offers him her life essence, and binds herself in an oath to the dharma. This event is followed by visions of Nairatmya (Lady No Self) and Mahamaya (Grand Illusion Goddess), who instruct him to prepare to tame wild and wandering beings in Tibet by visualizing the deity Kalika (Black Majestic Lady) (Edou, 1996: 121):

> Finally, at the first signs of dawn on the full moon day, a most wrathful dark-blue dakini adorned with bone ornaments and carrying khatvanga and chopper told him, 'Yogin, prepare yourself to move to Tibet. Since I must kill you, quickly dissolve your consciousness into my heart!' Raising her chopper, she demonstrated the act of killing him. As instructed, he dissolved his consciousness into the heart of the dakini and she blessed his bodily remains so that they would not deteriorate. He was just twenty years old. (Edou, 1996: 122)

The spiritual aspect of Machig's conception is also portrayed as intimately concerned with the wrathful dakinis, who appear to Machig's mother in a dream, tearing out her heart and eating it, while drinking her blood from skull-cups. They replace her heart with light, radiating from a syllable A, which emanates the five colours, and

pervades her whole body. This association with light continues with the child's birth, as her name, 'Shining Light of Lab', refers in part to Machig emanating light from her tongue, crown, and third eye (Edou, 1996: 123–6). In addition, she is born chanting the letter A, which represents the power of speech, and quickly masters the recitation, both of mantras, and of the *Prajnaparamita* (Edou, 1996: 125–7). This talent brings her to the attention of Geshe Aton, and she enters a monastery, at age thirteen, where she remains for four years before she meets Dampa Sangye, who knew her in a previous incarnation, and Sonam Lama, her root guru. The latter advises her to integrate the meaning of the *Prajnaparamita* into her mindstream, so that her former mind will be replaced by one free from fixations and attachments. While reading the chapter on demons, Machig is said to have reached an exceptional realization: 'This insight of realizing the non-existence of self was like the sun dissipating the darkness: the erroneous belief in the existence of a self was forever silenced' (Edou, 1996: 132).

This renunciation is evidenced by changes in her way of life. She demonstrates having cut through her attachments to clothes, the company she keeps, her surroundings, food, and the opinions of others, by wearing beggar's rags, wandering across the country, sleeping anywhere (including on the side of the road, or in the house of a leper), and eating anything, with the exception of meat (Edou, 1996: 133). During this period, she receives initiations from Sonam Lama, including the empowerment of Mahamaya, whereupon she levitates and is transported to the home of the *naga* king, known as Dragpo Dakyong (Wrathful Moon Protector):

> This place was so terrifying that no one could even bear to look at it. She immediately overpowered the naga king by her samadhi, and as he couldn't stand this, he called for help to all the other nagas in the region. From everywhere they assembled into an immense army, showing an entire array of terrifying magical powers. Machig instantly transformed her body into a food offering for demons. Unable to destroy her, the demons were forced to surrender and offered her their life essence in order to survive. The naga king Wrathful Moon Protector and the others took the oath to never again harm living beings and to protect Machig's teachings … finally, at dawn, the majestic Lady Tara appeared and transmitted the one hundred empowerments from the *Quintessence That Dispels the Darkness of Ignorance* and gave her many predictions: 'Yogini, you and an emanation of Buddhakapala, the yogin Thopa Bhadraya who will soon be arriving in Tibet, will unite as means and wisdom, then achieve the aims of beings at one hundred and eight desolate places and springs. Your teaching will be like the sun rising in the sky and you will reach the level of no return.' Dissolving like a rainbow, she vanished. (Edou, 1996: 134–5)

Her meeting with Bhadraya is also associated with the *Prajnaparamita* texts, as it occurs when she goes to the house of a wealthy benefactress, Lhamo Dron, in order to recite this text for her. Before setting out, she consults Sonam Lama, who advises her to go because of a previous karmic connection which will benefit beings. That night, she has a vision of two dakinis, one red with an eye in her forehead, and the other blue-black with wrathful appearance, who both advise her to unite with Thopa Bhadra, as means and wisdom. This advice is echoed, before her departure, by the appearance of seven white women who state that, because of her connection with him in former karma and prayers, she should not be afraid to unite with him. At

this point, however, Machig believes that the apparitions could be a demonic trick, and is uncertain how to respond. She is then greeted by a white girl riding a white mule, who says she has come to welcome Machig, on behalf of Thopa Bhadra, who is waiting for her in Echung (Edou, 1996: 141–2). On reaching Echung, Machig's hostess introduces her to Thopa, a yogin with bloodshot eyes, who is performing the initiation rite of Cakrasambhava. When he asks her is she is tired from her journey, she suggests that his coming to Tibet from India was a bit of a folly, and proceeds with her recitations of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* in a private chapel:

> Only from time to time would she discuss some Dharma with the pandita or ask him for stories about India. But then on the evening of her seventeenth day there, on the eighth day of the lunar month, Bhadra and Labdron entered the meditative absorption of skilful means and wisdom. Light pervaded the entire house and the benefactress Lhamo Dron, fearing that the butter lamps had set the house ablaze, ran up to have a look. All she saw was a five-coloured light, similar to a rainbow, which pervaded the entire house, and within this, all ablaze, were two moons in union, one white, one red. Apart from this she didn't see anyone, and frightened by it, she left the rooftop chapel and went back to sleep. (Edou, 1996: 143–4)

Lhamo Dron questions Machig about the incident, having seen the Indian *pandita* leave her room at dawn, and Machig replies that she has been deceived into this union by the vulgar prophecies of some malevolent demon. However, her hostess develops great faith in the adepts, keeping their secret, and Machig's fears are allayed by the reassurances of Sonam Lama, whereupon she goes to live with Bhadra in Central Tibet. She gives birth to a number of children, but the consorts continue to lead a wandering life, partly because of public censure, and partly in order to practise and receive transmissions (Edou, 1996: 145). After some years, she receives teachings from Dampa Sangye, who suggests that she goes to Zangri, the Copper Mountain, to subjugate demons and gather disciples. This she succeeds in doing, attaining a powerful reputation in the tantric community, and receives numerous visitors, including monks and lamas with whom she exchanges initiations and teachings. During this period, she establishes her lineage, *Chod of Mahamudra*, which becomes famous for combating both disease and demons (Edou, 1996: 150). Aged 41, Machig enters a retreat cave and receives transmissions from Tara, who also explores Machig's karma, declaring her to be inseparable from the deity Yum Chenmo. Tara explains that, in order to enable all sentient beings to acquire merit,

> through the power of my wishes and compassion, from the dharmata there appears a bright light in the shape of an orange-coloured bindu marked with the syllable MUM, ablaze with light. In turn this transforms into the Great Mother Yum Chenmo … from my heart there radiates a greenish-black ray of light marked with the syllable HUNG and it enters into the Mother's heart, awakening her … she transforms into a sky-blue dakini with one face and four hands. She is the sovereign of the Vajradhatu … the mind emanation is the bluish-black Vajra Lady with one face and two hands who subjugates all demons. On the crown of her head is a boar's head emerging from her hair … finally she took birth in Tibet. She is no other than yourself, Shining Light of Lab. (Edou, 1996: 152)

The encounter completes a circle, through which Machig's identity is explored. Aspects of her practice and character separate her from conventional society. These include her years of wandering, without the physical protection of the monastery, and her marriage, which excludes her from the social sanction of living as a nun, but which also makes it difficult for her to settle in the lay community. Nevertheless, her identification with the deity suggests that her power had archetypical roots, and her lifelong connection with her root lama was a strong social bond. This combination fosters the development of the practice for which she is best known, the rite of chod, which, I have suggested, dramatically explores altered states of consciousness as a confrontation of tensions with regard to the 'self'.

Machig Labdron is thought to have been born around 1055 CE. Her spiritual career therefore coincides with a period in Tibetan history, known as the Second Transmission. While Padmasambhava is a key figure in the original transmission of tantric Buddhism to Tibet more than a century earlier, this tradition did not thrive continuously following his lifetime. There was, rather, a significant decline, followed by renewal and repropagation, which included the efforts of a number of masters to rediscover and translate ritual and philosophical texts from India. These figures included Atisa, who was invited to Tibet from an Indian monastery in 1042, and Marpa the Translator (1012–1096), who laid the foundations for the Kagyu school with teachings he had gathered from India. These new translations gradually formed a corpus (*gsar ma*), as opposed to the old translations (*rnying ma*) of the Nyingma school which are based on both historical and visionary communication with Padmasambhava. In addition, less formal communities sprang up, some led by 'mad saints', including the community at Zangri, the Copper Mountain, of which Machig Labdron was the focal character (Edou, 1996: 1–2). In the next chapter, I will explore the concept of transmission in more detail, focusing on the lineage system of the Nyingma school, and I will suggest ways in which transmission in tantra is related to the relationship between consorts.

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Chapter 7

Transmission and Identity

Introduction

Theory in religious studies is bound up with the concept of transmission, because, in order to understand a religion, it is necessary to examine its development over time. In addition, worshippers may shape their identity by referring to a tradition's relationship with the past, although the image which they draw of their own religion does not necessarily correspond with historical accuracy. Religious traditions may emphasize their strength by suggesting ways in which they have successfully passed down values or rituals between a number of generations of practitioners. They may also stress their vitality, expressing an openness to new ideas. Similarly, religious movements within established traditions may argue that their group has recaptured the 'essence' of beliefs or practices, through discarding excessively complex or rigid regulations.

More broadly, these issues are intimately related to mechanisms of continuity and change, which not only have an effect on the evolution of a particular religion, but are important to the study of society as a whole. For Weber, the development of societies is related to structures of authority and power, which he suggests take a number of differing forms, characterized by degrees of creativity or conservatism. Impersonal structures, rooted in society, are thought to emphasize a sense of continuity over time, while innovation tends to spring from unusual individuals. Legal authority, for example, is the power to command, based on normative and rational laws, while traditional status implies the sanctity of powerful positions, based on their connections with the past. Charismatic authority, on the other hand, rests on 'devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and on the normative patterns of order revealed or ordained by him' (Weber, 1968: 46).

Those who possess charisma, therefore, demonstrate exceptional qualities. These set the charismatic apart, while at the same time marking them as valuable to society. For example, deference is given to 'prophets, to people with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, to leaders in the hunt, and heroes in war. It is very often thought of as resting on magical powers' (Weber, 1968: 48). Being located outside of the everyday, charisma is opposed to rational and traditional forms of authority, because of the latter's focus on routine forms of action (Weber, 1968: 51). Although reason can effect change, this tends to be both measured and limited, because it works from without, adjusting the social structures within which people can act. Charisma, on the other hand, has the potential to become a revolutionary force, because it rests on inner transformations, which reorientate subjective perceptions (Weber, 1968: 53–4). These same qualities, however, limit the impact of charisma over time.

This is because charismatic individuals die, breaking the continuity of their rule. In addition, as a movement expands, practical and economic considerations demand its increased organization along rational lines:

> In its pure form charismatic authority has a character specifically foreign to every-day routine structures. The social relationships directly involved are strictly personal, based on the validity and practice of charismatic personal qualities. If this is not to remain a purely transitory phenomenon, but to take on the character of a permanent relationship forming a stable community of disciples or a band of followers or a party organization or any sort of political or hierocratic organization, it is necessary for the character of charismatic authority to become radically changed. Indeed, in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in the process of originating. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both. (Weber, 1968: 54)

He explains this problem by exploring issues surrounding succession to positions of power. Methods include the use of oracles, or divination, appointment by the original leader, hereditary succession, and designation by a group of powerful persons within the organization. Each method, however, brings into play impersonal rules or systems, which erode the unique qualities that the original charismatic inspired, by instituting socially regulated conventions. According to Weber, charisma is a powerful force for radical change, but its effects ebb away as it is transmitted into wider society, and are significantly depleted over time (Weber, 1968: 55–8).

Here, he is paradoxical, reluctantly acknowledging the social and ritual roots of charismatic force, while setting these roots in opposition to his ideal of the charismatic individual. He defines charisma as the possession of extraordinary powers, rooted in ecstatic states, which give rise to a number of effects, including healing, divination and telepathy (Weber, 1993 [1922]: 2). He terms a person permanently endowed with charisma a magician. While these powers can be generated, socially, through the orgy, a 'primordial form of communal religious association', its involvement with intoxication, through narcotics and music, means that this is necessarily, for the majority, an occasional event (Weber, 1993 [1922]: 3). Weber also suggests that this type of ritual gathering is considered impoverished from the perspective of prophetic religion, because 'these acute ecstasies are transitory in their nature and apt to leave but few positive traces on everyday behaviour. Moreover, they lack the meaningful content revealed by prophetic religion' (Weber, 1993 [1922]: 158). Although he suggests that magic is in some ways rational and systematic, he argues that ecstatic states are essentially aimed at a deadening of bodily sensation, and cannot be transformed into a lasting foundation for the conduct of one's life, unless

> to heighten the conscious awareness of this religious possession, orgiastic ecstasy and irrational, emotional, and merely irritating methods of deadening sensation are replaced, principally by planned reductions of bodily functioning, such as can be achieved by continuous malnutrition, sexual abstinence, regulation of respiration … the Hindu techniques of yoga, the continuous repetition of sacred syllables … meditation focused on circles and other geometrical figures, and various exercises designed to effect a planned evacuation of consciousness. (Weber, 1993 [1922]: 161)

Similarly, he argues that the mystical union with the divine 'entails inactivity, and in its most consistent form it entails the cessation of thought' (Weber, 1993 [1922]: 169). This assessment of mysticism is questionable, in my opinion, because it is not based on a detailed study of states of consciousness. Rather, it reflects a suspicion of ritual, which Weber tends to argue is essentially magical, together with a distrust of the body, and therefore the sensuality of symbolism. This feeling is reflected in his assessment of the history of Buddhism, where he argues that, 'in comparison with the superior intellectual contemplativeness of ancient Buddhism, which had achieved the highest states of sublimity, the Mahayana religion was essentially a popularization that increasingly tended to approach pure wizardry or sacramental ritualism' (Weber, 1993 [1922]: 78).

Although Weber defines mysticism as a negation of the body, his focus is to compare it with the practice of asceticism, which may use similar techniques, but is different, in his view, because the ascetic is orientated towards systematic patterns of, and meaning in, his relationship to the world. Weber's ascetic is, above all, a rational actor. Even when rejecting the world, he does so with a force that contrasts sharply with the mystic's indifference (Weber, 1993 [1922]: 169). This kind of asceticism, exemplified in particular by Calvinist Protestantism, is motivated by a special view of salvation. Firstly, it postulates an all powerful and transcendent god, an idea in conflict with any notion of self-deification. Secondly, because believers see themselves as instruments, rather than possessors of god, they demonstrate grace through active participation in the world. This action, however, must be both systematic, in order to conform to rational ethics, and devoid of any emotional excess, because erotic passion in particular is thought to deify the creaturely (Weber, 1993 [1922]: 165–8).

Asceticism therefore produces a reformed kind of charisma, one which appears fraught with ambiguities and inconsistencies. This is because it combines the concept of grace with everyday activities in the world, interacting with 'the social' primarily through a logical system of ethics. Weber's emphasis on asceticism, as he defines it, results in a failure to explore the relationship between a sense of grace, and the emotional aspects of social being, a relationship which, I argue, is the essence of charisma. In addition, Weber tends to suggest a marked opposition between rational and emotional life, a tendency which limits his exploration of consciousness, and ignores potential structures which can be discovered within apparently chaotic phenomena.

Applying some theoretical insights of Weber to a study of Buddhist tantra in Tibet, Samuel paints an evolutionary picture, in which 'original' tantra was inspired by charismatic figures, drawn from tribal groups in India using shamanic techniques (Samuel, 1993: 379). 'Clerical Buddhism' is therefore regarded as a later historical development, which challenged 'pure' tantra, through processes of rationalization, in order – not altogether successfully – to overtake and control indigenous religious expression (Samuel, 1993: 365, 428, 433). This suggests a radical distinction between clerical and shamanic Buddhism that has problems, from both historical and theoretical points of view. From its earliest stages, as Samuel points out, Buddhist tantra developed as a synthesis of a number of different influences, including philosophical exploration, sophisticated ritual techniques, clerical institutions, and

wandering yogins (Samuel, 1993: 463–5). He acknowledges the variety of approaches to religion in Tibet, suggesting that in many instances they were combined, while nevertheless tending to overstress the antagonism between them (Samuel, 1993: 10).

This is based on an exploration of the development of the primary religious schools in Tibet, taking place in two waves, known as the first and the second transmissions. Although Buddhism was first introduced by Songtsen Gampo in the early 7th century, the first transmission is associated with the actions in the 8th century of King Trisong Detsen who, together with Padmasambhava, founded the Buddhist monastery Samye, and established a series of teachings which came to be known as the Nyingma (old) tantras (Samuel, 1993: 50, 440). The second transmission saw a number of practitioners journeying to India in order to retrieve a variety of teachings which took the form of texts, rituals, and yogic practices. Their transmission in Tibet was the essence of the foundation of the Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelukpa schools in the 11th century. This development was portrayed as a response to a decline in Nyingma fortunes, based on suspicions of that 'Old School' monks were abusing their freedom to practise sexual yoga and magical rituals, and were thereby gaining power in some communities, without genuine religious attainments (Samuel, 1993: 467, 471). The Kadampa movement, which evolved into the Gelukpa school, therefore introduced a greater emphasis on monastic discipline and celibacy that they perceived as a return to correct Buddhist practice, but which Samuel suspects signifies an attack on shamanic trends in Tibetan religion. This is evidenced by the Gelukpa schools' acquisition of significant religious and political power, based partly on compromises with Mongol and Manchu empires in 'foreign policy', and partly on an increasingly bureaucratic internal structure. For example, the Gelukpas tended to promote more scholars into positions of authority, who were tested in reasoned debate and examinations, and who went on to produce texts and written commentaries (Samuel, 1993: 271–3).

These trends within the Gelukpa school should not, however, be taken out of context, which in this case remains an orientation towards the aim of enlightenment. Texts, for example, are frequently meditation guides and vary according to the techniques recommended for attaining different altered states of consciousness. They can promote processes of contemplation, evoking 'emptiness', and using reasoned argument to suggest that reason cannot define, but merely point to, the state in question (Willis, 1995: 146). Others are ritual manuals (*sadhanas*) that give instructions on becoming the deity, sometimes including ritual manipulations of the subtle body. The Gelukpa school also produced biographies of *siddhas* within their lineage, who combined scholastic achievements with the attainment of both mundane and ultimate *siddis*, or accomplishments (Willis, 1995: xvi). Characters such as Tokden Jampel Gyatso (1356–1428) and Gyelwa Ensapa (1505–1556) displayed powers in these biographies, such as flight, telepathy, and walking through walls (Willis, 1995: 4–7, 21).

Crucially, Buddhist tantric texts are not only shaped by altered states of consciousness in their aims, but in their methods of production. Authority, as a religious practitioner, or a tantric writer, is often derived through an individuality that draws from visionary contacts with both deities and gurus, together with the

ability to *translate* experiences, in a clear and organized fashion, comprehensible to others. Tsongkapa (1357–1419), who was credited with the founding of the Gelukpa school, relied upon a teacher and 'mystical medium', Lama Umapa, to communicate with the deity Manjusri early in his career. At a later stage, after completing a number of retreats, Tsongkapa communicated more directly with Manjusri, and was even regarded as his incarnation (Willis, 1995: 155). Although the Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelukpa schools combined political and religious power, specifically through the mechanism of *rule by incarnation*, I suggest that to equate this with rationalization and bureaucracy (as understood by Weber), is a contradiction in terms.

At what appears to be the opposite extreme, 'mad' yogins exhibit unconventional behaviour, hostile to orderly society. However, while breaking patterns of behaviour and thought, the mad yogin can resolve problems underlying communities he contacts, thereby restoring a sense of harmony on a deeper level. Lama Drukpa's biography, for example, portrays him as being consistently rewarded with thanks and reverence from people that he violates, insults, and abuses. The style of writing, which is both bawdy and comical, gives insight into the way that his character was perceived, as an embodiment of the charismatic, incarnating both positive and destructive forces (Dowman, 1980: 28–9). This characterization can also give rise, however, to some confusion regarding the relationship between the initiate and the guru. It exemplifies the strand in tantric thought that encourages the trust and acceptance of some figures of authority, although their behaviour disturbs the consciousness of individual followers or the community. Tantric devotees can appear to be unquestioning and submissive, unable to combine irrational tenets of faith with reasoned scepticism.

Tibetan society's acceptance or rejection of a religious figure is, however, neither an automatic nor an instantaneous process (Willis, 1995: 18). Some *terma* treasure discoverers, such as Permalingpa (1450–1521), were subject to accusations of fraud all their lives, while sensual indulgence and the acquisition of power or worldly wealth were only tolerated in particular circumstances (Aris, 1989: 47). This reaction suggests that charisma was not regarded as either a completely irrational or a totally individual phenomenon. Rather, society bestows charismatic authority on certain persons, a process that imbues them with emotional energy, while at the same time defining limits to their influence. These limits are not necessarily bureaucratic structures, however, but are based upon the fluid nature of the charismatic's identity, which is marked by an ability to move between different planes of existence, incorporating the essence of both past teachers and deities. It is for this reason that, 'Permalingpa was far more concerned to establish which bodies he had occupied in his previous lives than to describe the ancestry of the family he was born into during his present life' (Aris, 1989: 21). What this system implies is that more power is bestowed on individuals who become eroded as distinct entities, as they are penetrated by figures of collective veneration, who thereby transmit authority in a direct way, maintaining the vitality of contact through altered states of consciousness.

These processes are linked with the idea of *lineage*, which on one level describes ways in which societies organize biological and social reproduction, through kinship structures and rituals of initiation. On another, it refers to the passing on of ideas and techniques which perpetuate society's *knowledge*, taking philosophical, moral, and practical forms. I suggest, drawing from Durkheim, that these two aspects, the

structuring of emotional energy and the transmission of cognitive processes, are not radically distinct, but are closely interwoven with one another, because of the relationship between consciousness itself and social relationships.

Rather than focusing on a rupture between 'this worldly activity' and nihilism, Durkheim suggests that the everyday world and the sacred are in tension with one another, but that this tension is the fuel for an overall dynamic mechanism that destroys and reproduces social structure. He argues that the essence of the sacred is emotional energy, generating collective effervescence through ritual. This energy does dissipate over time, but a balance is struck between the sacred and profane, through the ritual's repetition, and its symbolism (collective representations). These symbols remind people of the experience of collective energy, while at the same time channelling it, mediating between consciousness as a rational instrument, and as emotional and bodily experiences, rooted in a sense of social being. Durkheim, therefore, regards symbols as important in the transmission of moral and social order, because they both spring from, and refer to, collective consciousness, a sense of the social, penetrating the individual conscience, and entailing obligations and sacrifices. This sense of being bound to other individuals can be impersonal, when it manifests itself in the performance of duty, but is underpinned by patterns of social relationships, held together by a common sense of humanity (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 349–53). A potent example of a collective representation is the totem, symbolizing the collective consciousness of the clan. By defining the boundaries of kinship through the mechanism of taboo, the totem structures both physical and social reproduction (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 100).

Although Durkheim does not use the phrase charisma as much as Weber does, I will explore the concept in this chapter, drawing from a broadly Durkheimian framework. This is because transmission, in the context of tantric Buddhism, has as its goal the transformation of identity through ritual initiation. This is thought to awaken the 'seed essence' of divinity, within the initiate, through a profound connection with the guru, who incarnates the deity. The ability, through contact, to transmit constellations of energy within the etheric body, thus constitutes the guru's charisma. While the deity can be regarded as a collective representation, the guru's person attains an especially potent symbolic significance. Being human, gurus evoke a strong sense of resemblance, while at the same time, they are not passive recipients of emotional energy, but embody, identify with, and manipulate it. The intensity of social energy with which they are imbued makes the charismatic a focus for society, while at the same time designating these persons as separate. The charismatic, in the same way as any other collective representation, is sacred, and contact with them is thus bound by similar restrictions and precautions. This is why their interaction with society at large is often portrayed as disruptive and dangerous, in much the same way as the sacred can be. The charismatic not only is taboo, but demonstrates transgression through intimate contacts with living persons, deities, and religious authorities from the past.

Transmission as Discovery

In spite of the distinct features characterizing each tantric method of transmission, and their variety within the tradition, I suggest that they hold in common a sense of discovery. Although based on transformation, it is nonetheless, essentially conceived as an awareness, rooted in the realization of the etheric body, through altered states of consciousness. This body, being the defining characteristic of divinity, is understood to be already latent within the individual, but dormant. The *Hevajra Tantra*, for example, suggests that the gem is

> the body surrounded by a circle of flames. A gem is useless when uncut but when it is cut it gives delight. Likewise, the gem of phenomenal existence, which is united with the five desires, when not purified becomes poisonous and purified becomes nectar-like. (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 277)

While the motivation and dedication of the meditator, emphasized in early Buddhism, continue to be important in tantra, there is, in addition, the idea that contact, with sacred objects, persons, and deities, is the key experience that awakens this sleeping awareness. Jung expresses a similar idea, when he suggests that a key symbol for the search for wholeness is the *hidden treasure*. When found, it expresses contact between collective and individual consciousness, understood as an alchemical purification of the *prima materia*, in which the physical body is transformed by union with spiritual forces (Jung, 1980 [1953]: 340).

Early Buddhism also used the symbolism of the stone in its core ritual of initiation, with disciples taking refuge in the three jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. As the mandala of Mahayana emerged, the jewel became the symbol for one of the key Dhyani Buddhas, Ratnasambhava, who is thought to transform ordinary pride into divine pride, signifying the role of the practice of visualization in engendering and sustaining enlightenment. This idea develops and becomes more elaborate with the emergence of tantric Buddhism, as deities are imagined in magnificent palaces, decorated with gems. The palace, being itself an aspect of the mandala, is also a symbol for the etheric body of the deity. The Nyingma technique of Supreme Vision, for example, suggests that certain subtle channels are pathways of awareness, which travel from the 'inner field' in the heart, to organs of perception, especially the eyes. This 'inner field' is sometimes described as a crystal palace of five lights, the site of the 'youthful vase body', which has similarities with the seed-like *tathagatagarbha*, but is a more developed form of latent Buddhahood (Gyatso, 1998: 203). It is likened to a 'precious amulet', wherein the body transforms into letters and light (Gyatso, 1998: 205):

> The youthful vase body is the 'inner manifestation' of the ground's radiant light at its most primordial level … in deluded samsaric beings the youthful vase body is occult, like a lamp burning inside a vase. It has no outer manifestation. But the yogin is said to be able to perfect self-awareness and its display-energy, whereby the seal on awareness is rent … after which visions begin to manifest. (Gyatso, 1998: 204)

The transmission system of the Nyingmapa school also generated the specific role of the Treasure-discoverer, perhaps the most complex and developed use of the symbol of the jewel in Buddhism. It is also the most characteristically Tibetan, being a response to problems of continuity, in religious tradition and Tibetan politics, after the death of Padmasambhava. The Nyingma had to produce authentic indigenous teachers, who at the same time demonstrated a legitimate link with established Buddhist authorities. While not rejecting the translation of, and commentary upon, Indian tantric Buddhist texts, the Nyingmapas also developed a distinct scriptural tradition, both biographical and ritual. This tradition embraced the charismatic figure of Guru Rinpoche, who can be thought of as resting on an intersecting point between Indian and Tibetan tantra. He was an Indian yogin, who utilized sexual yoga and wrathful practices to infuse his being with the Tibetan people and landscape, through initiation, the taming of demons, and the 'concealing' of treasure. On another level, the system has points of continuity with the Mahayana, which also sought legitimacy for texts not authorized as the Buddha's literal spoken word.

McMahan explores the struggle for legitimacy in the Mahayana, suggesting that while the doctrinal differences between its *sutras* and the Pali canon have been debated by scholars, their contrasting literary styles have been relatively neglected (McMahan, 1998: 249). He compares the conventional openings to Pali texts, which situate the teaching in India, given by the historical Buddha, and beginning, 'Thus have I heard', with a typical example of the introduction to a Mahayana text, in this case, the *Gandavyuha Sutra* (2nd or 3rd century CE). Although opening in a similar setting (the garden of Anathapindika), the disciples include bodhisattvas, led by Manjusri and Samantabhadra, who ask the Buddha, telepathically, not to tell, but to *show* them the teachings, whereupon

> the pavilion became boundlessly vast; the surface of the earth appeared to be made of an indestructible diamond, and the ground covered with a net of the finest jewels, strewn with flowers of many jewels, with enormous gems strewn all over, it was adorned with sapphire pillars, with well-proportioned decorations of world- illuminating pearls from the finest water, with all kinds of gems … a dazzling array of turrets, arches, chambers, windows, and balconies made of all kinds of precious stones … the adornments pervading the cosmos with a network of lights … the Jeta grove and buddha-fields as numerous as atoms within untold buddha-fields all became co-extensive. (McMahan, 1998: 250)

While this kind of lavish mythical imagery can be attributed to wider lay involvement in the development of the Mahayana, and such texts' appeal to the popular imagination, McMahan suggests that the increasingly widespread use of writing in India at the time was also an important factor. The written word was utilized by the Mahayana, in their establishment of a legitimacy 'as a fledgling heterodox reform movement facing a well-established monastic orthodoxy' (McMahan, 1998: 251). This strategy is significant for McMahan, because he suggests that writing is bound up with, and appeals to, the sense of vision. The Mahayana therefore transformed the sensual medium of transmission from sound to sight, as it evolved from an oral culture to a textual one (McMahan, 1998: 251). He argues that early Buddhism was primarily spoken. The Sangha laid claim to its authority through the communal recitation and hearing of discourses, a process that aimed to preserve a precise memory of the

teachings, down through the generations. For this reason both iconic representations of the Buddha, and reading and writing as a private activity were not encouraged (McMahan, 1998: 253).

The growth of the Mahayana, on the other hand, can be characterized by its creation of sacred sites, through both the lay practices surrounding the *stupa* cults, and the increasingly sacred status of their texts. This had a physical aspect, when, for example, the practice of copying manuscripts was regarded as having merit, even if the scribe was illiterate. The book's presence, in addition to its recitation, could serve to make a site sacred, a process complementing the *stupa* cult, while at the same time working in tension with it. This is because, on one level, reverence for 'the book' worked in similar ways to worship of the relic, being based on contact. On another, books store ideas, and can therefore be reflected upon, while still being preserved. The insights of texts, such as the *Perfection of Wisdom*, were thought of as the 'cause of the wisdom of the tathagatas', while relics were regarded as its repository (McMahan, 1998: 254–7). In other words, by following a book's teachings, the disciple could access the 'truth body' or *dharmakaya* of the Buddha.

This process becomes more complex when Mahayana texts locate their authenticity, not by denying that of early Buddhism, but by suggesting that the truths it recorded were provisional, given the limitations of *sravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. It was argued that some teachings were given in secrecy, to a select few, while at other times the same teaching could be heard differently by different people, the early discourse being 'skillful means', simply preparing the way for more fully fleshed out teachings, which would be revealed at an auspicious time (McMahan, 1998: 266–8). In addition, Mahayana texts such as the *Lotus Sutra* incorporated an expanded sense of the 'site' of teachings, by suggesting that the Buddha enlightened countless beings in former lives, and must therefore have been already enlightened before the historical story of Sakyamuni's life and awakening, a story re-evaluated as itself simply a form of skilful means. Transcending space and time, the 'place' of transmission could be generated through visualization, as, for example in the Pure Land tradition (McMahan, 1998: 270).

The sense of vision, therefore, played a crucial role in the process whereby the Mahayana came to define itself. On one level, both iconic representations of the Buddha and texts, as physical objects, became repositories for the energy of the sacred. Recitation and transcription of texts, together with the making and worship of images, imbued them with power, while at the same time providing devotees with access to contact with that power. On another, the written text gave disciples contact with its contents 'in the mind's eye', relocating the site of the teaching within consciousness itself. Neither of these developments would have flowered, however, had it not been for key changes in the way that the people related to the Buddha, and, I suggest, the bodhisattva.

While the Buddha breaks the bounds of his historical personage, the 'receiver' of the text, the bodhisattva, is also marked by an expanded sense of awareness. He hears a more subtle message in the original teachings, stores it in consciousness until the proper time for revelation, and awakens it by conjuring the Buddha's presence in the Pure Land. It is in this expanded and transformed sense of the person that the relationship between visualization, as a ritual technique, and vision, as a form of

altered states of consciousness, lies. The *trikaya* (three bodies of the Buddha) theory, opened the way for a three-dimensional conception of his being, as human person (*nirmanakaya*), deity (*sambhogakaya*), and transcendent truth (*dharmakaya*). In turn, the emptiness of his self can be understood as the ability to move between these dimensions, thereby restoring in the consciousness of the devotee what had been lost at the moment of the Buddha's death – *contact*, with the founder of their religion.

This three-dimensional model of enlightened identity is the linchpin of the Nyingmapa transmission system, because, in addition to applying to the Buddha, it is also, in a vital sense, applied to the charismatic identity of Padmasambhava. Guru Rinpoche is referred to as the primary *source* of tantric Buddhism, not only because he is thought to be the principal bringer of Indian tantra to Tibet, but because of the way that he did so. This rests with his identity as a deity in two senses. Firstly, his own realization is regarded as perfect, because he is described as an emanation of Amitabha, the *Lotus Born*. The myth that he was not born from a female, but found as a fully formed child in a lotus flower, may be seen as a way of raising his status, while simultaneously side-stepping his connections with women and the body. But this is not the only interpretation, most obviously, because the lotus is also a symbol for the female sexual organ (Willis, 1995: 150). What it expresses, I suggest, is the idea that his relationship with the sacred, personified as Amitabha, was in one sense, fully fused with his identity. This resonance, in turn, deifies Padmasambhava, so that, as Guru Rinpoche, he can be visualized, and thus taken as a 'model' for the enlightenment experience.

This idea is illustrated in the *long transmission* system of the Nyingmapas, which is thought to have three stages, Mind, Indication, and Aural Transmissions. The Aural Transmission is the culmination of the process. It is teaching in the ordinary sense, through a chain of disciples, using the spoken word, and written scriptures. It is rooted in teachings of this kind, given by figures, such as Padmasambhava, in their *nirmanakaya* aspect. He is thought to have received them from *sambhogakaya* forms, such as Vajrasattva, in an Indication Transmission, which uses symbolic expression, and is also known as the *transmission between knowledge holders*. Their knowledge is based upon the Mind Transmission, wherein

> Samantabhadra, the dharmakaya, transmitted tantric teachings to the sambhogakaya Buddhas who are inseparable from him, through Mind Transmission without any verbal or physical expression. In reality the dharmakaya does not express anything, but for the sambhogakaya Buddhas the tantric transmission appears from the dharmakaya spontaneously. This is also known as the transmission between the Buddhas. (Rinpoche, 1997: 47)

The *short transmission* suggests a more direct route because, 'a disciple of Guru Padmasambhava who received transmission from him in the eighth century can transmit the empowerments and teachings to his disciples today. And if he is the Terton of that particular teaching in this life, he is second to Guru Padmasambhava in the lineage' (Rinpoche, 1997: 49). *Terma* teachings are passed on through the three *Long*, or *Common Transmissions* (Mind, Indication, and Aural), together with three additional *Uncommon Transmissions*. These are, Aspirational Empowerment, Prophetic Authorization, and Entrustment to Dakinis (Rinpoche, 1997: 49). Each

deals with a different aspect of concealment, the strategy that defines the text as a *terma* or treasure text. For example, although Pure Vision teachings are described as being received in pure visions with deities and masters, they may or may not also be *terma*, depending on whether or not the vision awakens knowledge of an original concealment. Similarly, although Earth Termas use the discovery of symbolic scripts (as physical objects), while Mind Termas appear in consciousness, the original concealment of both takes place in the 'essential nature of the minds of realized disciples' (Rinpoche, 1997: 61). The first step of this process is the Prophetic Authorization, whereby, on giving a transmission, Guru Rinpoche is said to have designated a disciple, who will become a *terton* in a future life, and prophesied the time and place of the text's discovery. The concealment itself is the next step, the Aspirational Empowerment transmission, while the Entrustment to Dakinis is thought to put the teachings under their protection. It is at this stage that they may be encoded into symbolic scripts and hidden in caskets in the earth, or the consciousness of the initiate. In either case, the dakinis play a key role in their 'translation' (Rinpoche, 1997: 64–5).

This sketch of the *terma* transmission system suggests that, at the moment of concealment, Guru Rinpoche's identity is understood to be three-dimensional. In his *nirmanakaya* aspect, he is situated in the historical event of an initiation ceremony, giving teachings to the disciples of his lifetime. As *dharmakaya*, he transmits and conceals teachings 'by the power of his aspirations, in the essential nature of the minds of his disciples, or in the expanse of their awareness state' (Rinpoche, 1997: 64). The *sambhogakaya* mediates between the two. It operates when he prophesies that the disciple will go through a number of rebirths, and reveal the teaching at an appropriate time, thereby linking two historical events through a level of perception outside of time. It is also integral to the encryption, which protects the texts, by 'hiding' them in a facet of consciousness undisturbed or 'unsullied', by the turbulence of karma, while at the same time leaving clues, which the initiate will recognize when ready. One example of this process is the idea that,

> after the transmission of the esoteric teachings to his disciples, his consort Yeshe Tsogyel compiled the teachings through the power of her unforgetting memory. Then according to the wishes and blessings of Guru Padmasambhava, with the help of other realized calligraphers she wrote the teachings in symbolic scripts on yellow scrolls of paper, put them in caskets and concealed them in different places, so they would be discovered by the Tertons and used as keys to awaken the recollection of the words, meanings and realization of the Terma from their awakened state of mind. (Rinpoche, 1997: 68)

Both human and visionary dakinis (epitomized by Yeshe Tsogyel) are therefore deemed essential to the discovery of *terma*, and this is the reason given for the fact that the majority of *tertons* had consorts. In many cases, a particular woman was needed to find a specific treasure, while more generally the consort was regarded as a 'support' for discovery, as an 'instrument', who helps to produce and maintain the 'wisdom of the union of great bliss and emptiness, by which the adept attains the ultimate state' (Rinpoche, 1997: 82). The term instrument is useful, in that it points to the ways in which the consort is the key to the discovery and translation of treasure scripts. However, I suggest that she is also crucial to what is transmitted in the first

place. In order to explore this question, I turn from the multi-dimensional identity of Padmasambhava, to issues surrounding the identity of the *terma* discoverer, which Gyatso raises in the context of an examination of a pair of 'secret' biographies, *Dancing Moon*, and *Dakki's Secret Talk* (Gyatso, 1998: xiii).

Biographical Reflections

Janet Gyatso is interested in Jigme Lingpa (1730–98), both as a respected *terma* discoverer, and as an author of the genre of secret autobiography. She analyses both these roles, and the relationship between them, to explore puzzles surrounding the nature of identity in tantric Buddhism. In particular she asks how Tibetan Buddhist autobiography, 'such an eminently self-obsessed genre can be written by someone who believes the self to be an illusion', suggesting that, 'it is provocative to learn that in Tibet it was precisely the introduction of the ideology of "no-self" that marked the dawn of self-written stories of the self' (Gyatso, 1998: xiii). Jigme Lingpa's fundamental treasure texts, brought together as a collection called *Longchen Nyingtig* (The Heart Sphere of the Great Expanse), were the product of a series of visionary experiences, characterized as the retrieval, in trance, of scriptures earmarked for him by Padmasambhava in a previous life, when Jigme Lingpa was Trisong Detsen (Gyatso, 1998: 3). It is these experiences that are recorded in his secret autobiographies, and they therefore play a key role in processes whereby the *Longchen Nyingtig* is accepted as an authentic *terma* text.

Because confidence in *terma* texts is generated by the belief that the discoverer is both genuine and powerful, secret autobiography brings to the fore a number of apparently paradoxical assertions about the author. On the one hand 'they reveal what is most interior, and most basic, to his self definition. They are far more bold about who he is than the outer autobiography, which is usually circumspect and humble' (Gyatso, 1998: 7). On the other, he expresses both irony and doubt about his grander assertions, attributing the most crucial aspects of his identity to others, including his previous incarnation as Trisong Detsen. This 'shared' identity extends to the point that the 'true' author of the work is in question. It could be argued that Padmasambhava is the real narrator, or that the title *Dakki's Secret Talk* refers to the crucial connection between the dakini and language, making the words essentially hers (Gyatso, 1998: 108, 243). Gyatso suggests that

> what is adumbrated in the case of Jigme Lingpa's secret autobiographical writing is an exceptionally multivalent sense of self, truly a 'homo-multiplex' … this heterogeneity directly reflects the complex cultural matrix in which, and for which, Jigme Lingpa created his secret identities. (Gyatso, 1998: 123)

For this reason his self-construction both conforms to norms in his society, and at the same time asserts his importance, as a unique individual (Gyatso, 1998: 9–10). This complex mix can be traced back to an intermingling of two strands in the Tibetan understanding of the term lineage. Clan genealogies and kinship status continued to be important with the introduction of widespread writing in Tibet, and were recorded (in a somewhat bureaucratic fashion) in the form of 'bone repositories', which were

used in legal disputes and land ownership titles: 'To present a thing's genealogy is tantamount to an assertion of its legitimacy' (Gyatso, 1998: 117). This idea was extended in Tibet to include a more subtle tracing of origins, where the 'source' is located with spirits and deities:

> In the oral context, rehearsing of origins often involves transic possession. The epic bard experiences a 'descent of the story' … like the oracle medium's 'descent of the gods' … the reciters of origin stories themselves embody the legitimating powers they are recalling. We can note that Treasure revelation also involves a kind of possession, a 'descent of [Buddha-] Word' … one of the functions of the Treasure discoverer's autobiography is precisely to bear witness to that revelatory event. (Gyatso, 1998: 117)

Although Jigme Lingpa's writings are firmly located in the latter, visionary, aspect of lineage, and he never takes full ordination vows, many of his experiences take place in retreat, the prescribed environment for intense religious practice (Gyatso, 1998: 132–3, 140). In addition, he furthers the foundation of the non-sectarian (*Rimed*) movement, and his own position within the community through a number of conventional strategies. These include, transmissions of old treasures and reviving of liturgical cycles, the production of canonical editions, a defence of Nyingma dance traditions, cultivating powerful friends and patrons, philosophical debate with Gelukpa monks, and offering his ritual services (Gyatso, 1998: 134–42). This behaviour can be seen as an uneasy compromise between his 'true' Nyingma identity and the tasks he is obliged to undertake in order to gain recognition from a Gelukpa religious elite. This interpretation, however, oversimplifies the opposition between schools in Tibetan Buddhism. Members of the Gelukpa school, notably the Sixth Dalai Lama, also exhibit broadly similar tensions, between the expectations of a public role, and individual character traits. In addition, institutional power and erudition did not prevent a number of Tibetan scholars, including the Fifth Dalai Lama, from declaring 'what the reader has just read was the mere scribbling of a lazy ignoramus with nothing better to do' (Gyatso, 1998: 214). Secondly, this conflict is not perceived in a totally negative light, but is incorporated into the strategy of Jigme Lingpa's process of legitimation: 'The tension in the outer autobiography, simply stated, stems from the fact that Jigme Lingpa achieved public status on the basis of what is the very antithesis of public activity, namely, a meditative retreat' (Gyatso, 1998: 143).

Writings that emerge from Jigme Lingpa's retreat experience suggest that it is precisely at the point where tensions remain unresolved that they contribute most. This is particularly true with regard to his own identity. Gyatso suggests that Jigme Lingpa's identity is partially mediated by the concept of the unformulated ground. This idea was crucial to the Nyingma corpus of teachings (the *Great Perfection*). The *unformulated ground* is not purely theoretical. Nor does it indicate a static void, or a blankness into which the adept 'swoons' (Gyatso, 1998: 202). It is linked to a state of consciousness termed spontaneous awareness, manifesting itself in the lives and poetry of yogins. At the same time, however, it is not totally chaotic, because it reflects

> a thematization of opposition itself, a thematization that draws attention to the unformulated ground that underlies, and makes possible, the coexistence of any particular opposed pair. … such valorization, of course, is a kind of decision, but of a different order than the incompatibility itself, and it does not entail a resolution, since the opposition must be maintained if the unformulatedness of the ground is to be brought to the fore. (Gyatso, 1998: 211–12)

Similarly, Jigme Lingpa both is, and is not, his previous incarnations – a relationship explored in a vision where he encounters a manifestation of Yeshe Tsogyel. She hands him the skull of Trisong Detsen (her husband), only to snatch it back and present it to him again as an 'optical illusion-like apparition', together with a double, exactly like the first:

> Distinguish them! she demands, but the answer is indeterminable, and as he flounders in indecision Jigme Lingpa loses the greatest prize of them all, the vision itself: the lady 'vanished like a rainbow in the sky'. (Gyatso, 1998: 212)

Such episodes are not simply colourful illustrations of intellectual puzzles, but serve as a vehicle for the transformation of the yogin's identity, a process that also has a physical dimension. This is demonstrated by instances of incorporation, where, for example, the vision dissolves into his body (Gyatso, 1998: 212). Another key example is in *Dakki's Secret Talk*, which describes a dream in which Jigme Lingpa receives some treasure. The episode is preceded by intense sorrow. He weeps with longing for the presence of Guru Rinpoche. On falling asleep: 'while spacing out into the vast reaches of a radiant-light vision, I mounted an attractive white lioness and was carried to an unrecognizable place beyond the horizon of the field of the sky … I encountered, in actuality, the Dharma body, the face of the dakini of primordial consciousness. She committed to me a flattened casket made of wood, in the shape of an amulet box with its edges stopped up with wax' (Gyatso, 1998: 56). She assures him of his identity as Trisong Detsen, declares the treasure to be the secret repository of the dakinis, and vanishes. Inside the box, he finds five scrolls and seven crystals. Although initially he could only see scrambled secret dakini sign letters on the paper, they transform into Tibetan 'like an optical illusion' (Gyatso, 1998: 57). He is then instructed, by a girl in ornaments, to keep the instructions a secret, and to 'take them in' rather than just seeing them, by eating the crystals and paper. He remarks that this girl would become his code breaker at Samye Chimpu (Gyatso, 1998: 58). Not only do visions feature physical experiences, but they are also, at times, understood as signs of success in yoga practices in which the body, especially the subtle body, plays a part:

> The physical analogue of successful fulfilment practice is sometimes expressed by the metaphor of the 'vajra body', into which practitioners endeavour to transform their gross, fleshy bodies. Bringing the winds into the central channel and cultivating the bliss and heat associated with the tigles and cakras is understood to be synonymous with a loosening of the knots around the central channel, allowing the subtle winds and energies to course unobstructedly. This in turn is believed to engender Buddhist realization … it is also believed to make the subtle winds and energies manifest externally, leading to visions of the 'pure lands' as well as an ability to create apparitions of the body that can be perceived

> by others. The Treasure tradition adds … a special claim: that the entrance, abiding, and dissolution of the vital winds in the central channel is the *sine qua non* for the receipt of a 'transmission of the realized'. (Gyatso, 1998: 195)

Fulfilment yoga is also characterized by its sexual aspect, which Gyatso argues is one reason why Treasure-discoverers, including Jigme Lingpa, needed consorts as a 'support'. She also suggests that this yoga is not 'a sacralization of the love act', because the bliss utilized is 'empty', and therefore without attachment (Gyatso, 1998: 195–6). This assessment is questionable. For example, when the *Hevajra Tantra* lists the essential qualities of a consort, it includes that she 'loves the practitioner' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 265).

In this context I will approach the question by re-examining what is implied when a Treasure-discoverer refers to when he 'remembers' a transmission from Padmasambhava. Although this metaphor conjures an image of a formal initiation ceremony, wherein Padmasambhava 'plants a seed' into particular, male, disciples, this is not the only interpretation. Jigme Lingpa suggests that taking initiations also implies achieving certain states of consciousness, especially the cultivation of experiences of radiant light (Gyatso, 1998: 187). This, more subtle, understanding implies, in turn, ways in which Padmasambhava is not just emulated, but incorporated into the identity of the Treasure-discoverer. This same idea can be applied to female consorts, who share a sense of identity with Yeshe Tsogyel. They are linked by the mediating figure of the apparitional dakini, who is sometimes regarded as a manifestation of Yeshe Tsogyel, and at others, an aspect of human females. In addition, the process of hiding texts, which Padmasambhava accomplished together with her, can also be understood on more than one level. Her assistance may have been practical; for example, when copying out and distributing texts. On the other hand, their sexual and emotional relationship, utilizing the techniques of fulfilment yoga, could have generated experiences at the heart of Nyingma texts, experiences 'rediscovered' by Treasure-holders, together with their consorts. If this is the case, then when yogins 'remember' a link with Padmasambhava, it is primarily in his role as Yeshe Tsogyel's lover.

While this suggestion raises questions with regard to gender in Tibetan tantra, it hinges, more fundamentally, on the way in which transmission itself is approached, in a society that utilizes the concept of rebirth to constitute an essentially 'empty' identity. Jigme Lingpa, through his autobiographies, affirms a powerful, and often unconventional individuality, by demonstrating links with important social figures of the past, such as Trisong Detsen. In his visionary experiences, he contacts both local and more widely renowned deities, and, ultimately, identifies with dakinis and Padmasambhava, as both human persons and collective representations. Gyatso suggests that the resulting tensions are deliberately maintained, in a strategy of uncertainty, so that, for example, the reader is never quite sure whether Jigme Lingpa is, or is not, Trisong Detsen.

One way of illuminating this enigma is to draw from Lévy-Bruhl's concept of *participation*, as he explains it in *'Soul' of the Primitive* (1928). The term 'primitive' can be misleading. Even when referring to societies with a primarily oral culture, it implies the inferiority of tribal societies, by suggesting that they represent an

earlier stage of evolutionary development. This can lead to a crude comparison of contemporary aboriginal cultures with the distant origins of western societies. These problems are compounded in the Tibetan case because of its subtle mix of 'popular' religion with tantric Buddhism, both of which used the written word.

However, I believe that the tone of Lévy-Bruhl's work suggests difference, rather than a hierarchy, between societies. This is useful, because it challenges attempts to create an artificial similarity between western perceptions of the 'self', based on Christian ideas of 'the soul', and notions of identity in other societies. In particular, he suggests that while western observers tend to differentiate between a material body and an immaterial soul, which coexist, temporarily, in this life, this antithesis is not universal. Many peoples imagine all physical matter as being animated, to some extent, by mystic forces, while spiritual realities have some kind of bodily form, even if this is intangible or invisible (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 110–13).

In addition, the individual is not bounded absolutely by their physical exterior, as people can transmit their essence to objects with which they have had contact, their appurtenances become an extension of the personality (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 115–24). This extension can become so profound as to constitute a 'double' of the person, a concept that Lévy-Bruhl suggests applies to the 'life-principle', a substance often imagined as being located within the body, but which has elusive properties. For example, it can be removed by an enemy, and destroyed or 'eaten' by way of a mystical 'incision', which is, nonetheless, invisible (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 128–34). The owner can hide this substance in a distant place, with the aim of protecting it, without reducing its ability to exert influence: a situation described as a kind of 'bi-presence', 'in which a being exists and acts in two or more places at the same time' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 135). This character can also apply to the shadow or reflection of an individual, which is not simply a metaphor for the 'vital principle', but is equated with it (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 136–40). In the same way, persons can have a 'second self', an animal, plant, or stone, which is distinct, and at the same time confounded with the individual, in a relationship that he describes as a 'mystic consubstantiality' or 'participation' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 142–4). He therefore suggests that concepts such as the werewolf do not assume that the 'soul' leaves the body of a man, to enter that of a wolf, but that both constitute the same individual, who can be present in two places simultaneously (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 158–60, 203–204).

Lévy-Bruhl does not suggest that tribal peoples do not have a sense of personal existence, experiencing pain and pleasure, and through which each member of the group acts. What he challenges is the idea that a specific notion of individuality, wherein the self constitutes a 'subject', is universal (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 15). He analyses the collective representations (institutions and customs) of a number of societies, suggesting that the differentiations and distinctions that have come to govern western categories of thinking, are not fundamental to societies in which the 'homogeneity in essence' of all beings, including oneself, is emphasized as the basic principle of understanding. This essence is characterized as similar to a mystical reality, permeating persons and objects. It is simultaneously material and spiritual, and is both one and multiple in nature (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 16–17). While not denying the practical knowledge of plants and animals, which medicine-men, for example, utilize, distinct classifications of objects are less important to 'primitive mentality'

than their participation in the same essential nature. When objects or persons are distinguished, it is based on the intensity of mysterious forces that they possess:

> Accordingly he sees no difficulty in metamorphoses which are quite incredible to us: to him, all forms of matter may change their dimensions and their shape in the twinkling of an eye. All of them are receptacles, either potential or actual, of these mystic powers, and sometimes it happens that a being which is apparently insignificant may contain a formidable amount of *mana*. (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 20)

One example, from the Dschagga people in Kilimanjaro, is the idea that 'bees are human beings'. This is expressed throughout the process of bee cultivation, in which every connected process and object is surrounded with rites emphasizing a bond between the arboreal and human families, in order to ensure the success of the enterprise. It is also rooted in a deep participation felt by the Dschagga with their ancestors, because the efficacy of their rites is believed to rest on the fact that the ancestors, both of the humans and the bees, did things the same way (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 21–6). Sacred stones are significant in a number of societies for similar reasons. They endure, and are thus 'to the soil what the bones are to the body' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 27). In some cases unusual stones are thought to be imbued with *mana* in a general sense, which can influence the fortunes of the possessor. In others, this idea is expanded, and the stones are said to have a 'dual existence' with beings in human form in the underworld. The interpreter of a sacred stone can thus communicate with their human forms in dreams. When sacred stones are displayed to initiates, they are regarded as 'reincarnations' of the ancestors, possibly the original parents of the tribe (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 27–31).

Lévy-Bruhl suggests a connection between instances where human beings can take animal shape and Australian aboriginal totemism. Both phenomena are based on the idea that men and animals are 'intimately interchangeable': 'Whether it is a case of a wizard with the power of taking the form of a tiger, or of a mythical ancestor possessed of both the human and animal nature, the mental process is exactly the same' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 52). Both are conceived of as forms of 'participation' which, in totemism, extends to the bond of the social group that takes an animal name. The sense of identity between the animal and the group is based on a concept of *origin*, where a number of hybrid beings, thought to have existed in a legendary period, are regarded as totemic progenitors (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 50). Persons who possess the ability to assume diverse forms are therefore thought to possess an intensity of mystic force. In every social group the man who has been

> admitted, by a long and secret initiation, into the world of occult forces … has at the same time acquired the power to assume, when he pleases, some other than human form. Now the mythical ancestor is naturally represented as bearing within him the highest degree of mystic force. He is *par excellence* a reservoir and source of *mana*. He therefore possesses, *ipso facto*, the ability to appear, now in one form, and now in another, and to participate constantly in both forms at once. (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 52)

He suggests that, in a number of tribal societies, practices such as hunting and fishing rites are orientated to an intuition of solidarity between an individual animal and its

species: 'they are imagined, or rather, felt, to be all participating in the same essence' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 61). From this perspective, when any member of that species is attacked or killed, the wound is felt by the whole unit. The mystical principle of this unit is, in addition, personified into a being, who is variously spoken of as the ancestor, chief, master, elder brother, or king of the species and 'holds fast the principle … of the others, so that they remain with one another and keep healthy' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 66). These societies picture the relationship between a single person and their social group in a similar way. While distinct emotions, thoughts, actions, and consciousness are recognized, the collective origin of the personality is more influential. This applies in particular to 'family' relationships, in which there is an intimacy that he compares to the one between a person and parts of their own body, but which is structured differently to western family units (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 74–7).

A distinctive feature of the 'classificatory family' is that the primary ties are seen in terms of interactions between social units, rather than between the individuals who make up these units. This is demonstrated by the lack of distinction between actual and 'potential' relatives: for example between a person's biological father and the men who, according to the system, could have been their father. For this reason, child-rearing is often more of a group activity. In addition, for adult men, women of the same generation tend to be regarded as either sisters (forbidden sexually), or wives (with whom a potential sexual relationship exists) (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 78–9). When married, the partner is referred to in the plural because 'it is not that the man and his wife make up a composite body between them, but that the men on the one side and the women on the other make up a composite married body' (Lévy-Bruhl, 1928: 80).

These ideas can be used to illuminate ways in which Tibetan deities are thought to 'participate' both with each other, and with human beings. One example is the Dhyani Buddhas, each of which represents a 'family' of deities, who can determine the character of an individual's practice. For example, a blindfolded initiate may throw a flower into an image of the mandala, and the position in which this flower lands determines the 'family' of the initiate's practice (Snellgrove, 1987: 228–9). Within each family, in a number of tantric systems, certain deities are interrelated. Amitabha heads the 'lotus family', who transforms passion into compassion, and therefore manifests as both Avalokitesvara (the embodiment of that compassion) and Mahakala (its wrathful aspect). Guru Rinpoche is regarded as Amitabha in human form, and also as a deity in his own right, with whom Treasure-discoverers participate when they regard themselves as incarnations of his disciples. From this perspective, his union with Yeshe Tsogyel can be seen as the 'mystical essence' of union itself, representing consorts, in tantric Buddhism, as a 'composite body'. However, this kind of collective representation is not restricted to the Nyingmapa. Willis, in her exploration of 'intentional' language, quotes from a passage within the secret biography of the Gelukpa siddha Chokyi Dorje:

> he meditated near the sacred water of Pema Chan, all the surrounding areas were suddenly transformed, becoming in an instant like the actual twenty-four places [in India], while the earth surrounding the water turned into sindhura. Thereupon at that famous spot, he

> performed the contemplations on guru yoga related to the Completion Stage, and he beheld the countenance of the King of Dharma, the great Tsongkapa. It was then that Je Rinpoche himself gave to this holy one the complete instructions of the ordinary and extraordinary Oral Tradition. In particular, Je Rinpoche taught him the extraordinary practice of the three-tiered mental exercise of guru yoga wherein he visualized his own outward form as that of an Indian pandit and his inner aggregates and sense organs as a host of deities. In his heart, the Buddha Shakyatuba was clearly manifest, and in that one's heart resided Vajradhara. (Willis, 1995: 26)

Willis suggests that, because Chokyi Dorje sometimes refers to a female sexual partner in connection with advanced tantric practices, the 'place' Pema Chan could be the body of a female consort, specifically her 'lotus' (*pema*). In addition, drawing from the *Hevajra Tantra*, the twenty-four places mentioned in the passage may refer to both the 'outer' pilgrimage places, the Indian *pithas*, where yoginis and dakinis are thought to dwell; and the 'inner' places, sites within the 'vajra' body, such as the *nadis* (Willis, 1995: 27–8). She also draws from the imagery of the *Cakrasamvara Tantras*, in which *sindhura* is a powder, used to 'mark the three doors' of the initiate. When the earth surrounding the holy water transforms into *sindhura*, Chokyi Dorje could be alluding to Cakrasamvara's consort, Vajrayogini, because of a correspondence, in tantric literature, between 'sacred water', holy nectar, and menstrual blood.

This reference is significant, not just because it demonstrates experiences that the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism hold in common. It also refers to important ways in which the 'site' of a teaching is transformed in tantra. As a visionary experience, it is located in consciousness, but one which refers to the body of the landscape, in ways not unlike the hiding of Earth Terma. These ideas fuse together in the image of the 'vajra body', a concept not dissimilar from Lévy-Bruhl's suggestion that, for some societies, the body and the soul are merely two aspects of the same substance, imbued with mystic force. Tantra refers to a combination of breath, bodily fluids, energy, and consciousness, when it uses terms such as *prana*, *tigle*, and *bindu*. When visualized in the form of Vajrayogini, the body of the woman becomes the sacred site, especially her menstrual blood.

Conclusion

In the first section, I used the example of the Tibetan terma tradition to suggest that charismatic identity utilizes a series of complex tensions between social and individuated aspects of the person. On a theoretical level, I argued that the framework on which this system is based depends upon the bodhisattva, as a vehicle of visionary experience, and the *trikaya*, which postulates that Buddhahood has three dimensions. This emphasis, combined with Buddhist ideas about karma, gave Padmasambhava charismatic status, because it gave rise to the idea that he could transmit teachings in a form that could be preserved in consciousness, intact, across lifetimes. Being both a deity and a human being, he came to be regarded as a 'source' of the teachings, which could be accessed through altered states of consciousness, and thereby incorporated into the identity of practitioners.

Drawing from Gyatso's analysis of Jigme Lingpa, I have suggested ways in which karma is not simply a theory of the evolution of consciousness, but is used to create conceptions of identity in the current life, based on the ambiguities of 'participation' with deities, teachers from the past, and dakinis. I utilized Lévy-Bruhl's work on the 'Primitive Soul' to argue that 'homo-multiplex' is not unique to tantra as a way of conceiving identity, rather, it is a feature of societies in which collective consciousness is particularly strong. Because the social group is characterized by a lack of differentiation, the representations of that group tend to assume that plants, animals, objects, and humans, also have a substantive amount in common. Most particularly, they are imbued with social energy. This energy, however, is not distributed evenly, but is felt more intensely, the closer a being is to the source of vitality. This source is expressed through a collective representation, in which the solidarity of the social group, and its connection with other groups of beings, intersects. This representation is the totemic ancestor. Being a hybrid being, it symbolizes the 'bi-presence' of identity, in its most fundamental sense. At the same time, descent from a mythic ancestor suggests the continuity of society's basic structures over time. It is also, in the present, an origin, constituting a 'centre of participation', radiating social energy. Tantric Buddhism is not precisely totemic, but I believe that it conceives of lineage in a similar way, whereby the practitioner, through initiation and practice, is drawn closer to the centre of participation, and thereby absorbs the emotional energy of the deity, with successively greater levels of intensity. In order to explore ways in which this may be done, I will begin by examining totemism more closely, using Durkheim's discussion of the origins of the incest taboo.

Durkheim argues that the determining principles of the incest taboo are most clearly observable in societies in which the law of exogamy is the binding force (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 14, 25). He defines exogamy as the prohibition that forbids two members of the same clan from forming a sexual union. The clan is

> a group of individuals who consider themselves related to each other, but who recognize this relationship in only one manner; namely, by the very specific sign that they are bearers of the same totem. The totem itself is a being, animate or inanimate, and generally a plant or an animal, from which the group is reputed to be descended and which serves the members as both an emblem and a collective name. If the totem is a wolf, all the members of the clan believe that they have a wolf as ancestor, and therefore that each of them has in himself something of the wolf. That is why they apply this appellation to themselves: they are wolves. The clan, thus defined, is therefore a domestic society, since it is composed of people who regard themselves as being of the same origin. (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 15)

This association can be sharply distinguished from other kinds of family groups, because it is not primarily based on either consanguinity or territorial affiliation (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 16–17). Although members believe that they are descended from the same totem, it can be acquired by means other than birth (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 65). In addition, being bounded by moral sanctions, the clan is more firmly the basis of the social structure, than, for example, the relationship between a man with his wife and children, which is less regulated, and therefore less important to the system. This is because, although the wife and children often live in the father's

territory, the totem is transmitted through the maternal line (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 27, 30, 37). He suggests that this form of social organization pre-dates patrilineage, and that therefore, 'wherever the agnate lineage is established, totemism is weakened' (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 46).

In addition, because marriage is forbidden within the same clan (or *phratry*), but permitted within the same tribe, exogamy is not rooted in a search for partners outside that tribe's broader territorial boundaries (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 57). He concludes that totemism is, most importantly, a religious phenomenon (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 69). Therefore the origins of exogamy are to be found in an exploration of the religious systems that surround it, especially the institution of taboo. This collection of ritual prohibitions also isolates beings, such as priests and chiefs, who are infused with supernatural power (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 70).

Exogamy is an example of a social barrier, whereby members of the opposite sex, within the same clan, maintain distance from each other in the same way that the sacred and the profane are separated more generally, through taboo. The fact that punishment for its violation is often left to divine forces, makes this rule no less feared, but it does suggest that exogamy is rooted in religious sentiment. Specifically, he argues that women are thought to be imbued with a power, dangerous to men, which therefore keeps them at a distance (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 71–2). While suggesting some hostility between the sexes, the exclusion of women from religious life is seen as a later development, rather than an innate feature of totemism (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 78). There is, however, a 'religious horror' surrounding women, which often prevents the sexes from eating together, but which is most profound when they emit blood, during the menses and childbirth, and it is these times that give rise to the strictest taboos (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 75–82).

Durkheim locates this feeling in the qualities attributed to blood more generally. It is the animating force, both of the physical body and of the clan, and is therefore too dangerous to eat. When it falls, this energy is communicated to the surrounding area, rendering it taboo. When the blood of a clan member is spilt, the entire group is threatened, both by the draining of the life-principle that this represents, and the contamination of the whole community that is thereby unleashed (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 84). Women are thus made taboo through their association with blood, particularly during their reproductive life, but it is women of the same clan who are taboo in the highest degree, because their blood is of the same substance as its members. The incest taboo is therefore just an example of the separation of the sexes more generally, but more violently guarded, because of the intimacy of contact in sexual union (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 85–7). The significance of blood derives from the way that each being is related to the totemic ancestor, and therefore contains some of this power. Being based within the clan, it is diffused among all its members without being diminished. Located within each individual's body, it is also the property of the group, who, in a sense, form a single flesh. This idea expresses,

> in a material form, the collective unity which is characteristic of the clan. A homogeneous and compact mass where there exists, so to speak, no differentiated parts … such a group sees its own image in terms of a feeble individuation, of which it has a vague consciousness, by imagining that its members are *incarnations*, hardly at all different,

> from one and the same principle; they are various aspects of the same reality, *a single soul in several bodies*. (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 88 – my emphasis)

Thus, like Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim is arguing that, within these societies, physical substances, in this case blood, and the vital principle animating the group are not simply used as analogies for one another, but are felt to constitute the same substance. Another way to describe the same point is to suggest that blood is a *collective representation of collective consciousness itself*. Being grounded within the body, it is shared by all members of society, and evokes powerful emotions. Because it flows, it has qualities in common with energy, and therefore lends itself to being combined with that energy, in the collective imagination.

According to Durkheim, women's association with blood led, through the mechanism of contagion, to their being regarded as sacred. Although their tabooed status might be attributed to beliefs in the impurity of women's fluids, he argues that similar taboos surround people with power in the tribe, such as chiefs, and priests. In addition, he refers to the ambiguity of the sacred, which combines emotions of respect and reverence with fear and horror. He suggests that, when the impure aspects are emphasized, it is a reflection, not of their true nature, but of the inferiority of status in public life, which women in that society hold (Durkheim, 1968 [1897]: 90–95). However, the picture is complicated by the idea that what is hidden, or distanced from the public arena, is not necessarily disparaged. This concept is significant for the study of tantra. While the most visible and structured systems of transmission appear to take place between men, I suggest that the emotional energy generated by intimate relationships between men and women is central.

This suggestion is based on the idea that metaphor, in the western sense, does not accurately describe symbolic systems in tantra. References to 'intentional' or 'secret' language suggest that fluids of the body and consciousness possess the same essence, the subtle body. Moreover, if women's blood can be seen to represent collective consciousness, they are not passive recipients of this symbolism but participate in it. Lying within the least differentiated aspect of being, blood, as the vital principle of the group, evokes a state wherein members of a society sense one another in a fundamental way. In the context of consort relationships, the telepathic, reciprocal bond may be more intense because the collective energy is focused on, and imbibed by, the partner. From this perspective, sexual relationships in tantric transmission are 'hidden', not because they are at the periphery of the religion, but because they constitute the *centre of participation*. Being the energy at the 'heart' of the sacred, consort relationships are tabooed, or distanced from profane activity, while at the same time they are the point of *origin* of the group's identity. Like a stone (perhaps a jewel), thrown into a pond, this energy radiates circular ripples. Moreover, transmission systems operating between guru and disciple (usually man to man), are more distanced from the centre. They are not, however, in simple opposition to it, because, rather than dissipating vitality, the structure of tantric ritual directs energy, from the circumference, back to its source. In other words, the ripples of the sacred flow both away from, and towards, its centre.

Ritual, therefore, is better understood as a generic term, within which individual rites vary in their constitution and purpose. The definition of ritual as primarily

the structured repetition of prescribed acts, conjures an image of the participants' synchronicity, while at the same time playing down levels of personal involvement and spontaneity. While all rituals contain collective movement, the degree to which this is imposed by an external structure varies. The closer to the centre of participation the ritual is, the more spontaneous its substance. For example, the phrase, 'initiation from Padmasambhava', does not simply refer to official ceremonies, but also indicates a union with him, located in altered states of consciousness. While less explicit, his relationship with Yeshe Tsogyel is also a primary source of identification for Treasure-discoverers. Moreover, the 'receiver' of the text has a multi-dimensional personality, one that includes a crucial, though discreet, consort relationship. These ideas can be explored in *Hevajra Tantra*. Originating in India in the 8th century, it is not a treasure text, but it is important to the Sakya school of Tibetan tantra and expresses principles of fulfilment yoga, held in common by the schools of tantric Buddhism (Farrow & Menon, 1992: viii–x).

The text is related as a series of questions and answers, between deities. While the chapters forming part one (*The Awakening of Vajragarbha*) frame these questions as posed by a variety of deities and answered by Bhagavan, in part two the 'teacher' appears to change a number of times. At the beginning, he is simply the *Bhagavan* (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 153), while in chapter three, he is identified as both Vajradhara and Vajrasattva, and his questioners are yoginis (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 180). By chapter five, he is Hevajra. His consort, Nairatmya, is not only asking questions, but is engaged in various stages of 'love play' with him, including kissing, embracing, and sexual union (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 254). I suggest that this progression is not incidental, because their erotic relationship generates the transmission of this tantra, an idea which is made more explicit as the work progresses, but which is initially indicated in its beginning: 'Thus I have heard: At one time Bhagavan dwelt in the wombs of the Vajra Lady which are the body, speech and mind of all the Buddhas' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 1).

In one sense, the dialogue between consort deities can be considered more correctly as a translation of their emotional interaction, which is therefore the 'source' or essence of the text. In addition, the protagonists develop, or reveal their nature, as they progress through the tantric rites. This is indicated by the way that the commentary describes Hevajra as a form of Vajradhara, and denotes Bhagavan as, simultaneously, one who has the qualities of a lord, and, 'of the nature of Semen; that Bliss is the Beloved' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 4). In other words, the same two people can be thought of as speaking the text, but the consorts are transformed as they emanate various deities. This process culminates in chapter five, entitled, *Manifestation of the Mandala of Hevajra* (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 241). At one point, they are silenced, having 'dissolved into a state of orgasmic flow' a 'stabilized meditative state' from which a number of goddesses beg them to arise, in order to continue their discourse (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 245). Although inaccessible to language, this state is not mere blankness, but is characterized by mutual absorption.

A similar idea is conveyed within the Bhagavan's instructions, when he refers to the Concealed Essence (*samvarabheda*). The commentary refers to ways in which this phrase can be understood: firstly as concealed within the body, in the

form of four centres (cakras); and secondly, as four consecrations, named Master, Secret, Wisdom, and 'the Fourth' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 15–17). These stages are linked to emotional energy, through their relationship with 'bliss' and the *four joys*. They are also associated, by analogy, with degrees of intimacy where, 'the Master Consecration is by the purification by the Smile, the Secret Consecration by the Gaze, the Wisdom Consecration by the Embrace and the Fourth Consecration by the Two in Sexual Union' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 183).

The consecrations also represent structure, because they must be taken in order, so that each acts like a ritual gate, or barrier, through which initiates must pass. This is made clear by the stipulation that receiving Kriya tantra consecrations is not enough, the Master Consecration must be given to those embarking on the *Hevajra Tantra*. Within each consecration group, disciples are also divided, based on their ability. For example, within the Wisdom consecration, all are instructed in the relationship between the *nadis* and consciousness, but only those of 'strong sensibility' are instructed in 'the Stabilized Meditative State of the Dream-like' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 18). While each of these consecrations requires a human consort, their accomplishment progresses, from external ritual to internal experiences, which cannot be conveyed to the disciple in words, so that

> the Fourth Consecration is experienced with an external consort and is based … upon a technique of yoga which does not depend upon anything … and is pervaded by the Sightless Moment where it is not possible to determine any definite place of origination. (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 19)

Similarly, the 'Application of the Vow' is divided into three kinds, Extremely Undifferentiated, Undifferentiated, and Differentiated, depending on whether the disciple has strong, medium, or weak, sensibilities (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 69). In other words, what is understood as ritual becomes more subtle, the closer the initiate is to the centre of participation. The centre is explored in the text when the Mandala Circle is described as 'the abode of all Buddhas', expressing enlightened consciousness, and 'holding' the Great Bliss, experienced through the sexual activity of consorts, and revealing their 'Innate Radiance' (Farrow & Menon, 1992 : 190–91). The mandala appears to be generated through visualization and practice (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 129, 162). It is, nonetheless, regarded as a result, not a cause, being 'the manifestation of the great bliss … for nowhere else than from this great bliss does the mandala originate' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 163).

In addition, the 'Circle of the Yoginis' is so called because yoginis are manifestations of the bliss, generated by the 'activation of the state of union' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 93). The womb is thus regarded as the Pure Land, *Sukhavti*, 'the Citadel of Bliss' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 167); while the lotus of the female consort is 'the Source of Nature' (*dharmadhatu*) (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 104). This relationship, between the female body, and the 'source', is also referred to in tantric code language. This code was, on one level, hidden from non-initiates so that tantric adepts could identify one another. By pressing the left thumb, for example, a yogi can ask a yogini, 'how are you?'. It also, however, refers to 'the essence of nature', through symbolism. The left representing wisdom, and the thumb the vajra.

'The sign indicates pressing, with the Vajra, of the very core of the Wisdom's Lotus in order to attain the state of flow' (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 73).

Evidence from the *Hevajra Tantra* suggests that contact with women lies at the heart of transmission in tantra. Its intentional language, however, implies that, while the importance of the female body is not denied, visionary consciousness is also important. When the womb is imagined as 'site' of a tantric text, it becomes the focal point for the concentration of the energy of the sacred. The context of the consort relationship increases its intensity, combining the personal feelings of the individual, with the force of collective representations (deities in union). As a constellation of associations, it thus gives rise to a transformative identity, which moves with ease between different dimensions of existence, and holds apparently conflicting manifestations in opposition, without destruction or resolution. This is illustrated in a passage which describes Nairatmya, the female consort of Hevajra, as sexual fluids (of both sexes), with bliss as her nature, while at the same time referring to her in terms of female and male persons. Furthermore, she is within the subtle body:

> The bliss of Nairatmya is the Mahamudra located in the navel centre. She is of the nature of the first vowel, **a**, and the Enlightened Ones conceive her as Wisdom personified … she is beyond taste, smell and flavours and is the cause of Innate Joy. The yogi generates in her and enjoys her bliss. It is along with Her that the Accomplishment which bestows the Bliss of Mahamudra is attained … She is herself the Innate, the great blissful one, the divine Yogini. She is the Mandala Circle. She is of the very nature of the Five Aspects of Enlightened Awareness … She is me, the lord of the mandala. She is the Yogini Without a Self … the very epitome of the Essence of Nature. (Farrow & Menon, 1992: 218–19)

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Chapter 8

The Subtle Body and Emotional Energy

This book has aimed to demonstrate ways in which the study of tantric Buddhism can be enriched by the insights of Durkheimian sociology and Jungian psychology. In addition, I have presented a particular reading of these theorists that has, in part, been shaped by the framework and challenges presented by the tantric Buddhist context. The central idea that I have explored in this process of mutual reflection is a conception of altered states of consciousness that is related to social and emotional being.

I have suggested that the tantric Buddhist engagement with dreams, visions, and trance states is not a peripheral activity within the tradition, but one that illuminates a number of its core tensions and concerns. Religious authority, even within the most conservative expressions of tantric Buddhism, is closely bound up with visualizations and visions of deities, gurus, and consorts. The codifying and recording of such experiences within both ritual and biographical texts suggests that their significance extends beyond the isolated individual. I have argued, rather, that their symbolic contents are generated and recognized socially, and can therefore be explored through social and psychological theories of symbols, such as Durkheim's collective representations, and Jung's archetypes. More precisely, I have suggested that altered states of consciousness are both the product of, and mediate, a series of polar tensions, based on a basic distinction between individuated and social aspects of being. However, rather than confining myself to an analysis of encounters between the individual and social structure, I have suggested that visions are social in a more fundamental and personal sense. They express the depth, subtlety, and complexity of the forces within the individual, and the fluctuations of emotional energy within human relationships. In other words, visions communicate. This insight has given rise to a more complex reading of both the analyses of Durkheim and Jung, and the *trikaya* theory within tantric Buddhism, suggesting three-dimensional models that can help the scholar to explore ways in which different aspects of social life and the person interact.

Tantric Buddhism explores a number of significant relationships, including the one between an individual and the deities with which they engage. This engagement, involving simultaneously, the body, the emotions, and consciousness, is both alchemical and transformative. The practitioner progresses from worship of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to attempts to emulate their qualities, a process culminating in becoming the deity, or, more precisely, uncovering an awareness of a sacred dimension to being.

In addition to Durkheim and Jung, I have drawn from Turner and Eliade to suggest that this awareness is closely associated with two deeply interrelated concepts, illumination and subtlety, which appear to manifest themselves as a result

of exchanges of emotional energy within liminal states that lie at the crossroads between the male and female, the living and the dead, and, most importantly, the sacred and the profane. There is a degree of paradox here. For while the sacred and the profane define one another through the strength and impermeability of the boundaries between them, these boundaries (prohibitions and taboos) are erected precisely because sacred energies destroy boundaries, and in the process provide society with its lifeblood. I have therefore argued that it is the subtle body's relationship with these collective forces that gives it its multi-dimensional character. Illuminated with social energies, the adept experiences a collapse of the distinctions between consciousness, the body, and the emotions.

Such an experience has more of an impact on the individual than an abstract concept. It permeates ways in which the web of religious, social, and sexual relationships that constitute a tantric identity are idealized and conceived. Two relationships that are explored in some detail by the tradition are that between the guru and disciple, and that between consorts. While there are references to female gurus, who have taught both women and men, the majority of recorded tantric teachers have been men. It could therefore be suggested that the guru/disciple relationship, which fundamentally shapes the character of tantric Buddhism, primarily involves the transmission of teachings between two men. This impression is bolstered by the fact that, in some ritual texts, and biographies such as the *Six Yogas of Naropa*, it appears that the female consort is an object of exchange, sealing the bond between two males, the guru and the disciple (Guenther, 1995 [1963]: 80; Snellgrove, 1987: 261–2). Nonetheless, I have focused on the consort relationship, an emphasis based upon the idea that the dynamic between the guru and disciple is modelled on a more hidden, but nonetheless more potent and elementary relationship, that between consorts.

Stories such as the life of Yeshe Tsogyel are comparatively rare, and they do not necessarily reflect the difficult material circumstances or poor status of many ordinary women, especially nuns, in Tibet (Willis, 1987b: 97). Moreover, as Padmasambhava's consort and disciple, her role could be described as essentially supplementary to his. However, I have argued that, as a couple, they represent a founding force of tantric Buddhism in Tibet. On the one hand, this phenomenon has archetypal aspects, related to their association with enlightened beings, such as Amitabha and Vajrayogini, and their transformation into deities in their own right (Padmasambhava is often thought of as a 'second Buddha'). On the other, their human dilemmas, both as individuals and as partners, suggest that it is a negotiation between different dimensions of being that is the source of the power that has captured the imagination of tantric practitioners. This is partly because erotic relationships are social and personal simultaneously, and therefore lie at the crossroads between sacred and profane states, a phenomenon made more complex by the additional male/female polarity.

Tantric Buddhism explores this polarity in a number of ways. On the one hand, the consort relationship has a transgressive quality, which is paradoxically essential to its definition, a quality that can also create some confusion when analysed through the lens of a focus on either gender rather than the communication between them.

Kollmar-Paulenz, for example, explores the life of Machig Labdron in order to draw out particular conflicts that face women in a 'Buddhist, patriarchially

structured society' (Kollmar-Paulenz, 1998: 11). She therefore interprets accounts of moral condemnation concerning Machig's consort relationship in terms of society's particularly harsh reaction to women (rather than men) who choose unconventional religious and relational lives (Kollmar-Paulenz, 1998: 17). What she does not account for is the note of irony in Machig's biography, which revolves around the power generated by the couple's interaction between 'wisdom and means', and which celebrates the ways that they overcome obstacles (both internally and with regard to conventional society) in order to generate the ritual systems of *Chod*.

Chapter 6 has explored *Chod* in some detail, partly because Machig's hagiography is not simply a narration of a series of events, but can also be regarded as an introduction to key concepts that contextualize *Chod* rites within tantric Buddhism as a whole. It is, on one level, an example of tantra's 'homeopathic' attitude to the emotions, which overcomes the human being's most basic fears by generating, and observing terror. Attachment to the body is thought to be eroded through a visualization in which one 'offers' the dismembered body. The similarity to shamanic imagery suggests, in addition, that altered states of consciousness, and in particular imagery that arises in visionary states, may express disturbances in consciousness that are related to the breaking of sacred/profane boundaries within the adept.

The transcendence of boundaries is an important theme in tantric Buddhism, one that goes beyond the choosing of unconventional relationships, and is celebrated as a non-discriminating state of mind, an idea often encapsulated in the phrase 'one taste'. While I have explored many of its specifically tantric implications, it is important to bear in mind that overcoming the discursive mind has an important role in Buddhist traditions more broadly, and is closely related to meditation systems that are intended to erode an individual's (mistaken) sense of self.

Nonetheless, tantric Buddhism explores this motif more extensively, not least because of the wealth of symbolic imagery that is employed by the tradition. Much of this imagery emphasizes a union or balance between the male and the female that is also regarded as a union, or restoration of balance, between right and left, or above and below. In particular, the techniques and metaphors that explore one of tantric Buddhism's central motifs, the subtle body, focus on restoring the balance of human consciousness and emotions by the ceasing of activity in the right and left channels and drawing energy into the central channel (*avadhuti*) (Shaw, 1987: 56). Moreover, this is accomplished by techniques involving 'psychic heat' during which female energy within the lower cakras is generated in order to 'melt' male substances, thought to be held in the area of the cranium. If successful, these processes are thought to purify the most subtle substances (male and female) within the centre of the subtle body, the heart cakra. There is therefore not only an interaction between right and left, but also one between above and below.

While I have explored these mechanisms in some detail in Chapters 4 and 5 (on death), I have suggested that they are, in addition, related to altered states of consciousness. This connection is made in the *Ecstatic Song of Laksminkara*, wherein references to the *avadhuti* are placed in the context of other 'non-dual' perceptions that defy ordinary logic: 'Amazing – a mouse chases a cat! An elephant flees from a drunken donkey!' (Shaw, 1987: 53).

Sacred Ambivalence, Women, and the 'Left'

In order to explore ways in which the preceding arguments have been developed during the progress of my chapters, I utilize Hertz's essay the *Pre-eminence of the Right Hand*, because this essay explores the significance of ideas about a left/right polarity within the human body, and relates these ideas to a number of other polarities, rooted in a basic distinction between the sacred and profane (Hertz, 1960 [1909]). Moreover, Hertz suggests that the sacred/profane polarity is made more complex by the additional notion the impure sacred.

In this work, Hertz examines the ways in which collective representations can be transposed onto the human body. He asks, in particular, why it is that the right hand, in many societies, is associated with noble, active, and honorable qualities, while the left is given a more clandestine, auxiliary role (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 89). Although acknowledging that more people are naturally right-handed, he suggests that this disposition is not an adequate explanation for the exalted status of this hand (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 90–91). Rather, the right hand is frequently encouraged and trained, while the left is restricted, often with the force and vehemence of a prohibition, a phenomenon that he locates within religious and social forces (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 92–4).

Hertz suggests that mechanisms of prohibition are intimately bound up with the maintenance of a sacred/profane polarity, which in turn rests upon the idea that

> certain beings or objects, by virtue of their nature or by the performance of rites, are as it were impregnated with a special essence which consecrates them, sets them apart, and bestows extraordinary powers on them, but which then subjects them to a set of rules and narrow restrictions. Things and persons which are denied this mystical quality have no power, no dignity: they are common and, except for the absolute interdiction on coming into contact with what is sacred, free. (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 94)

However, Hertz points to a further distinction, between the pure and the impure sacred. While the pure sacred is associated with harmony and joy, the forces of the impure sacred: 'violate and disturb the order of the universe, and the respect they impose is founded chiefly on aversion and fear. All these powers have in common the character of being opposed to the profane, to which they are all equally dangerous and forbidden' (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 94).

However, the same phenomenon appears modified if approached from the sacred, rather than the profane point of view. Hertz uses the example of a chief, who is aware that his sacredness possesses very different qualities to that of a corpse (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 94–5):

> The impure is separated from the sacred and is placed at the opposite pole of the religious universe. On the other hand, from this point of view the profane is not longer defined by purely negative features: it appears as the antagonistic element which by its very contact degrades, diminishes, and changes the essence of things that are sacred. It is nothingness: the harmful influence that it exerts on things endowed with sanctity does not differ in intensity from that of the baneful powers. There is an imperceptible transition between the lack of sacred powers and the possession of sinister powers. Thus in the classification which has dominated religious consciousness from the beginning and in increasing

> measure there is a natural affinity and almost an equivalence between the profane and the impure. The two notions are combined and, in opposition to the sacred, form the negative pole of the spiritual universe. (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 95)

Hertz goes on to suggest that this dualism between the sacred and the profane is not only the essence of tribal thought. It also dominates the classification systems by which societies are organized. While both the blood and women of one's own *moiety* are forbidden to the individual, those of the opposite moiety, being less imbued with one's own sacred essence, are surrounded with fewer prohibitions (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 95). This relationship can be seen to have a somewhat symbiotic quality, a notion that I will return to in the context of gender in tantra. Moreover, Hertz argues that more 'evolved', hierarchical, social structures remain rooted in conceptions of religious polarity, a point that I explore (in Chapter 3) in relation to the caste system: 'the whole universe is divided into two contrasted spheres: things, beliefs, and powers attract or repel each other, implicate or exclude each other according to whether they gravitate towards one or other of the two poles' (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 96).

Moreover, this dual classification system extends far beyond its social origins, being the basis, not only for the most basic expression of opposites, but for the ordering of space and the attributing of the cardinal directions with symbolic significance. While light, with its sources in the east, the south, and the sky, is associated with the pure sacred, and therefore with life, health, and courage; darkness, the descending sun of the west and north, and the earth, are related to a combination of the impure sacred and the profane, and are therefore seen as harmful, weakening, and deadly (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 96).

This bi-polar thinking is also, according to Hertz, expressed in terms of gender, a process that extends beyond the ways that societies relate to male and female persons, because objects, in addition to being classified as sacred or profane, are often also given a gendered designation:

> primitive thought attributes a sex to all beings in the universe and even to inanimate objects; all of them are divided into two immense classes according to whether they are considered male or female … this cosmic distinction rests on a primordial religious antithesis. In general, man is sacred, woman is profane. (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 97)

From this perspective, the significance of female contributions and symbolism in tantra would largely be to introduce a profane element into tantric ceremonies, adding power to tantra's uniquely taboo-breaking, or magical character. While there is some truth to this, I have suggested that there are problems with such interpretations of tantric Buddhism, particularly those that place women primarily in an 'instrumental' role. I have therefore explored transgression in tantric Buddhism, arguing that, while it contains a number of unique features in this context, there is also some common ground that tantra shares with other religious traditions.

Chapter 2 explores transgression's relationship with the ambivalence of the sacred and suggests that there is an uneasy, but mutually dependent, relationship between the structures of social order, and the passions that make this order possible, such as the energies (often generated through rituals) of collective effervescence. While taboos are an essential, defining component of the distinction between the sacred

and the profane, access to the vitalities of religious life is only possible through the breaking of taboos. An examination of tantric biography, however, suggests that boundary breaking is neither mechanical nor proscribed, but is a result of personal and social conflicts that are never fully resolved.

Chapter 3 develops this point in the context of the relationship between Hindu tantra and the more conservative poles of Indian religion. I have suggested that social order was expressed in terms of the caste system, which, being based on a series of taboos between stratified social groups and between men and women, was governed by forces of 'repulsion' or separation between these groups. The tantric breaking of these taboos represents a radical break with this social order. Drawing from opposing forces of attraction, tantric Hinduism celebrates and worships objects and persons normally considered to be associated with the impure sacred (such as corpses and menstrual blood), precisely because they normally inspire fear and revulsion. However, the suggestion that tantra was therefore a peripheral religion, generated by the political and social concerns of marginalized social groups may be an exaggeration. While tantra and conservative Hinduism may draw from the themes and rituals of sacrifice in very different ways, the mechanism of sacrifice, and the circuit of social energies that it represents, provide a series of core practices and metaphors for a wide range of Indian religious traditions, including tantra. Moreover, with its direct access to the energies of collective effervescence, tantra may be seen as a 'return to the centre' of social life that utilizes, as much as it challenges, the boundaries of society, because it is these boundaries that make transgression possible.

Therefore, while transgression may have political implications, these are not simply an expression of a (male) individual's political or religious power. Although some tantric Buddhists, by accessing the sacred, do gain access to certain forms of respect, fear, or authority, their power is, nonetheless, intimately bound up with a relationship with collective forces. Drawing from Eliade, I have suggested that such forces penetrate the individual in complex and often disturbing ways. This process is sometimes related, in tantric Buddhism, to the conflicts that surround the consort relationship, a relationship that I have suggested contains its own collective consciousness. From this perspective, when consorts transgress boundaries in order to become suffused with the sacred, they are also seeking union with one another.

Chapter 4 extends the concept of transgression, arguing that men and women transgress the boundaries of time and space in order to communicate with one another. In the context of ritualized sexuality this communication is enhanced by an exploration of liminal states of consciousness that are related to the bardo, a realm 'betwixt and between' the abodes of the living and those of the dead. While on one level this process relates to the subtle sensations of the etheric body, on another it suggests a link between eroticism and death that can be further explored using Hertz's work on death and the impure sacred (Hertz, 1960 [1909]). I have argued that this link is based on processes of dissolution which are, to some extent, paradoxical. On the one hand, death implies the destruction of the individual through fragmentation, a process symbolized through the decay of the physical body. On the other, tantric explorations of death suggest that this experience contains within it the potential for recognition of, and therefore union with, both enlightenment and

one's consort. This view has points in common with Buddhism more broadly. The destruction of the self, achieved through realizing the 'emptiness' of its various components, is the key to breaking away from the wheel of samsara. Nonetheless, the tantric embracing of sexuality, especially within the context of death, is more unique. While the impermanence and disintegration of the female body is used in other Buddhist traditions as a cautionary tale to reinforce celibate monasticism, and therefore separation between the sexes, tantra retains a perception of a connection between dissolution and eroticism that suggests that enlightenment can not only be defined in negative terms, but also as a form of union, both with the energies of the sacred, and with the consort.

This perception goes beyond an immersion in the fragmentation of the individual that sexuality can generate. While it shapes some ritual celebrations of the female, it also, more importantly, suggests the possibility of communication between individual men and women. This is explored in Chapter 5, where I suggest that the concept of the transgression of time and space can not only illuminate the subtle or liminal aspects of ritual eroticism, it can also be applied to instances of communication where the actors are separated geographically or historically. Dreams, for example, may contain the transmission of visionary experiences between deities, or teachers of past eras, and contemporary initiates. They may also express the transmission of emotional energy between consorts.

In addition, episodes explored in Chapter 5 can contribute to the suggestion that the relationship between the genders, like that between *moieties*, can be regarded as symbiotic. From the male perspective, the female can be problematic. The possibility of union may represent a gateway to the sacred, but this entails a dissolution of the self that challenges the individual's integrity. Resistance to this fragmentation can therefore be expressed in terms of an association between the female and the negative poles of the impure sacred or the profane. However, the reverse could be suggested from the female point of view, a point illustrated by Yeshe Tsogyel's account of her relationship with Padmasambhava that is described in terms of an initiation that resembles the death process (as conceived in tantric Buddhism). Moreover, when practising meditations and rituals associated with psychic heat alone, she undergoes a series of physical and mental crises, or death experiences, during which her connection with Padmasambhava is reaffirmed through visions.

Chapter 6 utilizes the symbiotic metaphor in another way. It suggests, drawing from Mauss (1972 [1904]), that while religion and magic appear to be sharply opposed (with the first drawing from the sacred and the second focusing on the impure sacred, the profane, and the individual) they are, more precisely aspects of a broader concept, that of *mana*. While the generation of energy is essential to the health of society, it must also be released. The social body, like the physical body, relies on the twin processes of nutrition and excretion, and it is the balance between these processes that is essential. Mauss's analysis suggests that elements of the impure sacred, such as 'leftovers', both from meals and from the human body, are important tools in magical ceremonies. This is partly because such objects are thought to contain a residual energy, which emanates from the original owner but leaves this person vulnerable to magical attack, partly because substances removed from the body represent a fragmentation of the original personality. On the other

hand, I have argued that the magician deliberately employs their own inner conflicts and fragmentation, (one example is the magician's 'double'), reintegrating them within the individual personality, and thereby gaining power.

In the context of tantric Buddhism, this process is bound up with the notion of purification, wherein poisonous emotions are simultaneously embraced and released, and are thereby transformed into the luminosity of the subtle body. Moreover, I have explored its role in the context of the consort relationship through a number of metaphors that refer to the earth's association, both with the female, and with decay and regeneration, a point that Hertz touches on when he suggests that male and sky are often symbolically paired, while the earth or 'below' is often seen as female (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 97–8, 101).

In Chapter 7, I return to a number of ideas that I initially presented in the introduction. In particular, drawing from the significance of the 'centre' of the mandala, I suggest that the transmission of emotional energy across the generations can be regarded as a return to origins, a notion that can be applied in various tribal contexts, in addition to the case of tantric Buddhism. Adepts, for example *terma* treasure-discoverers, shape complex, multi-faceted identities through the incorporation of past teachers and deities. This connection, based on certain applications of the notion of karma, draws from visionary experiences that suggest that figures such as Padmasambhava are not only significant because of their role as founders of the tradition, they are also regarded as the source of more contemporary experiences that express the vitality of tantric Buddhist communities.

I have argued that this source is enriched by the energies of social life (in the broadest sense), but that these energies are focused on a powerful collective representation, that of the erotic union of the consort couple. This illuminated union, I have suggested, is the concept that lies at the centre of the tantric mandala, and its power radiates outwards, permeating more widespread ritual and philosophical issues within the tradition. One example of this phenomenon is the stress laid on secrecy, both literally, through guarding information from non-initiates, and in the more subtle sense, whereby certain perceptions, such as a lack of dichotomy between consciousness and the body can only be transmitted through direct experience. In both cases it may be suggested that such behaviour is structured around a bond with the guru, which is protected partly because its progress is thought to have consequences across lifetimes. However, union with a consort is even more hidden, and this obscurity, particularly of the female partner, may indicate, not its marginal status but, on the contrary, its relatively great importance.

Drawing from Durkheim, I have suggested that the female consort is a more mysterious figure within the tantric tradition precisely because her powerful associations with the sacred lead to her being surrounded with taboos. In other words, entry into her mandala (from the periphery to the centre), is surrounded by a series of structural prohibitions. This connection, between the consort and the sacred, rests on the idea that she can represent the phenomenon of collective consciousness in two ways. Firstly the female's reproductive cycle is reminiscent of the perpetuation of society itself and brings with it an engagement with bodily fluids, especially blood, that have a complex relationship with society's conception of itself. On the one hand, blood, especially that which flows from the body as a

result of warfare or menstruation, is related to death, and as such can be seen in the light of the impure sacred. On the other, blood, as part of the living organism, is thought by many societies to embody mystical principles that animate individuals but originate with the sacred energies of social life. When spilt, however, it remains dangerous, not least because its ebb and flow is reminiscent of the volatile – and contagious – nature of the passions of collective effervescence.

This reference to passion points to the second way in which consorts represent collective consciousness; namely, their potential for a kind of fusion that not only blurs the distinctions between the united individuals, but also entails a collapsing of the boundaries between physical, emotional, and mental aspects of being. In Chapter 6, I pointed to ways in which such an experience implied a recognition, or employment of the impure sacred. While tantra often refers to this in terms of the consumption of substances which in other circumstances would be considered distasteful or forbidden (for example sexual fluids), I have argued that consorts may also 'consume' and transform one another's poisonous emotional states. Moreover, I would argue that tantra not only engages with the impure sacred, it suggests and values certain states of consciousness and perceptions wherein the impure sacred can be transformed into the pure and *vice versa*. This is possible because both the pure and impure sacred are distanced from ordinary life because of the contagious and potentially dangerous energies that they are thought to embody. To transform a collective representation from one form of the sacred into the other would largely be a question of observing, and seeing the 'emptiness' of the mental and emotional constructions that generate exaltation at the sight of a king and revulsion at the sight of a corpse. The meditation and visualization skills fostered within Buddhism, and especially tantric Buddhism (for example, cremation ground practices) are aimed towards achieving precisely this kind of equanimity.

This 'lack of distinction' between different poles has an important role to play in the relational context of the tantric tradition, wherein the mistreatment, or an aversion for, women is regarded as a severe fault that will incur karmic retribution (Shaw, 1994: 48). I would argue that one reason why respect for women constitutes a crucial tantric vow is that assertions of hierarchy on the basis of gender create barriers, both between consorts, and in the mind of the dominant partner. Such barriers obstruct the potential for experiences of fusion, which Shaw suggests are characterized in the tantric context by the belief that the female is a divine source of *sakti* – energy (Shaw, 1994: 44). She argues that this energy 'is not something that a man can extract or steal from a woman at will. The woman chooses when and on whom to bestow her blessing' (Shaw, 1994: 45). Therefore it is not just women as a 'class' that tantra concerns itself with. It also lays stress on approaching women, particularly potential teachers and consorts, as distinct individuals. Shaw points to both of these elements when she describes the 'behaviour of the left' as both a formalized method of communication with female initiates, employed by tantric yogins, and as one way to please dakinis and yoginis, who respond by indicating their (often tempestuous) moods: 'as the name indicates, this system of esoteric etiquette requires that a man focus on the left side in all his interactions with women: when walking with a woman, staying to her left and taking the first step with the left foot; when circumambulating her, doing so in a counterclockwise fashion; using his

left hand to make secret signs; making offerings and feeding her with his left hand; and embracing her with his left arm' (Shaw, 1994: 45). The act of circumambulation suggests that the woman is regarded as a deity, and therefore sacred. At the same time, taking place in an anticlockwise direction, circumambulation indicates a reversal of polarities. This anticlockwise rotation (*apradaksina*) is most commonly found within yogini of mother tantras, such as the *Cakrasambhava* and *Vajrayogini Tantras* in which female principles are stressed (Stoddard, 1998: 170, 179).

For Hertz, the clockwise rotation orientates the worshipper's right side toward the sacred centre, thus bringing together two symbols of harmony and order. If one moves in the opposite direction, then the left, which represents the chaos and fragmentation of the periphery, is brought into conjunction with the pure sacred in a disturbing fashion (Hertz, 1960 [1909]: 102). Nevertheless this disturbance, although explicit in the context of some tantric rituals, is also related to a series of broader issues that I have suggested are rooted in the ambivalence of the sacred. I have argued that, for Durkheim, moral life is not simply a question of conformity. It is, more precisely, a negotiation of tensions. On one level, there is a degree of opposition between the needs and urges of the individual, and those of the social group as a whole. Nevertheless, this picture is complicated by tensions between social structure and the forces of collective effervescence. The moral is expressed in obedience to the structural requirements of prohibitions and taboos. However, more fundamentally, morality is also an aspect of collective consciousness, an awareness or empathy that human beings have with one another. This empathy can cross structural boundaries, within ritual, in the generation of charismatic social movements, and in the formation of passionate personal relationships.

These tensions give rise to patterns that suggest that movements of social energy are neither linear, nor do they simply flow in one direction. Like the mandala, the transmission of energy, between different aspects of the society, and within the individual, can be imagined as operating within three-dimensional structures. This idea can be illustrated by Stoddard's analysis of the ways in which tantric initiates may utilize images, such as the mandala, to progress, through a series of visualizations, to the goal of enlightenment. She suggests that the 'dynamic movement within Buddhist mandalas' can take a number of courses, including centripetal and centrifugal, rising and descending, 'bridging samsara and nirvana, by direct route, or in spirals' and clockwise and anticlockwise procedures (Stoddard, 1998: 175).

These patterns represent a complex mix of objective and personal forces. Being rooted in the transfer of social energies – within society, the individual, and the subtle body – they express a certain regularity. This is one reason that symbols are a powerful resource for the expression of communication between the individual and collective consciousness. At the same time, I have suggested that this communication can be manifested in experiences, such as altered states of consciousness that can be bewildering to the observer, and filled with disturbing contents. In addition, the biographies of tantric adepts may appear to conform to certain narrative structures, during which they 'play out' various tensions. Paradoxically their attainment of the renunciate role is often accomplished with an almost complete rejection of conventional society. Yet, I would suggest that they are not simply following a rational or pre-prepared script. The turmoil described in these biographies is at least

partially intended to indicate difficulties encountered by practitioners, and thereby foster a persistence with practices that are thought to be ultimately beneficial.

I have therefore argued that the consort relationship in tantric Buddhism is neither debauchery disguised as religion, nor a calling to higher, less embodied, and more spiritual forms of harmonious love. Instead, tantra entices the practitioner into a tempestuous, deeply felt, and often painful engagement with the tensions and subtleties that are a part of social and individual being. In taking up this challenge, initiates aim, not for a total transcendence of the human condition, but to undergo various transformations, within the body and consciousness, that are related to fluctuations in emotional energy, often characterized by the quality of illumination. The importance of these transformations suggests that these altered states of consciousness permeate the ritual and biographical texts of tantric Buddhism to the core, and therefore an analysis of trance, dream, and visionary experiences has been the primary tool with which I have explored this conservative *and* radical tradition.

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