

The Relationship of Pre- and Perinatal Psychology to 20th Century Art, Literature and Philosophy

Author: Janus, Ludwig

Publication info: Pre- and Peri-natal Psychology Journal 8. 2 (Winter 1993): 129-147.

[ProQuest document link](#)

Abstract: None available.

Full Text: Headnote ABSTRACT: Observations in the field of psychotherapy give us every reason to believe that experiences before and during birth remain present in our awareness of our own bodies and in our inner states of experience as a constant background of experience. During external and internal crises and conflict situations, this background experience can be activated in the form of fantasies and emotional states and can then influence images and ideas about ourselves and the world. Cultural development is determined by various forms of expression between primary experience and how the world is later experienced. In mythical philosophies of life, primary experience is projected outwards and is experienced as external reality, for instance in the symbols of water and the tree of life. The cultural change that has taken place in the twentieth century is determined by the fact that primary experience is increasingly felt to belong to our own life-histories and personal development. This is expressed in the concepts of prenatal psychology, but also in the symbolism of modern literature, art and philosophy. Some artists, such as Dali and Beckett, have directly regarded experiences before and during birth as a source of their art. INTRODUCTION Research in prenatal psychology has shown us that human beings, especially in their striving for self-understanding, have always been occupied with their pre- and perinatal experiences (Bowling 1988, 1990, Irving 1990, DeMause 1982, etc.). We find expressions of these first experiences in rituals and myths. In searching for his identity, Man has always had to face a basic experience of two worlds, the world before and the world after birth. The prebirth world appeared as a world beyond, the influence of which upon this world was conjured up and realized in rituals and myths. Only the continuity and interconnection of both worlds in our experience enables our life to feel complete; only this is experienced as healing. The Hero in myths, who symbolizes the adolescent, gains his full identity through a regressive journey to the uterine Waters of Life and the placental Tree of Life, followed by a return to the real world. He demonstrates his new identity by fulfilling special tasks which verify that he can come and go between both of these worlds and realities (Janus 1990, 1991). In each generation, the relationship between the postnatal world and the experience of life before birth has to be determined afresh. My theory is that the appearance of prenatal psychology itself is the expression of a culture shift, a new configuration of the relationship between pre- and postnatal experience. This can be seen in the fact that the months of life before birth and the experience of birth itself are now being interpreted as a proper part of biography. Previously, these stages of life were projected into myths about Creation and the World or accommodated in religious imaginations. I see even our modern conception of the eternal Laws of Nature as determined by fascination for the prenatal experience of omnipotence. In order to make plain what has been said, firstly the expression of pre- and perinatal experience will be described in the realm of myths, of monotheistic religion and then in the rational-scientific world-view. This will then allow what is slowly being taken as self-evident in our century, the increasing awareness of the fact of birth, of having been born, to be illustrated through examples from art, literature, music and philosophy. THE MYTHICAL WORLD-VIEW For the sake of example, I will take German mythology. In it, prebirth experience is projected as a world beyond, which precedes the Earth-World so that events here are dependent upon its influence. The exchange, which touches every individual, of the prenatally experienced womb for the world of postnatal experience is projected in Cosmogony and is described as the formation of the World out of the gigantic body of a primeval being, Ymir: "The World was made from Ymir's flesh, And out of the blood, the turbulent sea, The mountains from the bones, the trees from the hair; From the skull, the protecting roof of the Heavens. From his eye-lashes, wise gods created Midgard for human beings.

Finally, all the hard-minded rain-clouds are made From the brain." (quoted from Golther 1987, p. 517) The existence of the world is guaranteed by the World-Tree, Yggdrasil, which symbolizes the placenta and about which the seeress Völuspa says: "I know of an ash which is called Yggdrasil, White moisture makes the enormous tree wet; From there comes the dew which waters the valleys; Always green, it stands at the Primordial Spring." (quoted from Golther 1987, p. 527). The abiding presence of the prenatal experience of the placental Tree of Life gives security in the postnatal world. Postnatal experience is transcended, that is, dissolved into and then preserved within the prenatal. There are various stories about the origin of humans. At first, dwarfs appear and these we can interpret as symbols of children. They grow like maggots in Ymir's flesh. Humans themselves are simply able to grow out of rocks and places symbolic of the mother. The first man is called Akr, which means Ash and which thus points to his origin from the maternal Tree of Life. Mythical man grows out of the maternal sphere. At the same time, however, in his mythical projections, he stays enclosed in it, at least to the extent that the whole world, heaven and earth, is nothing more than the giant body of the primordial, maternal being. Prenatal experience can also be preserved, given shape and actualized in rituals and customs. So, for example, after the birth the placenta in the old Germanic culture was buried in the earth and a tree planted on top of it. When this tree grew well, it was believed that the baby involved was also healthy. (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987, p. 759 ff). By actualizing the beginning in rituals and initiations, the mythical world-view ensures the recurrence of the natural cycles and confirms the notion of existing in a benevolent world (Eliade 1986). Cosmology appears as embryology and preserves the feeling of being unborn. As a result, every fundamental change can only be understood in birth symbolism as the end of the world. The sun then becomes dark, the stars fall from the heavens, the earth sinks into the sea and perishes in a world-fire and in a chaos of wars and battles.

THE WORLD-VIEW OF MONOTHEISM In Jewish monotheism, the cyclic development characteristic of myths is resolved in a single act of Creation and in the single-minded dealings which mark the warring tribe of the God Yahweh. This notion of the self and of the world reflects a completely different cultural situation. The maternal-prenatal insignia of unlimited power and possibilities have been placed at the service of an omnipresent, male god. At the same time, the circumcision of babies draws the fear of the birth trauma onto the father and ensures conduct reflecting fearful bondage to him, exactly as is perpetuated in Freud's myth of the castrating, primordial father. The relationship to the combative god Yahweh ensured a fighting spirit, a necessity for the Jewish tribe when one considers its political situation, standing as it did between the overwhelming cultures of Egypt and Assyria. For Eliade (1986, p.174), it is the category of belief, a psychohistorical novelty, which conquers the world of myths. The new psychology of monotheistic Man is characterized by the fact that, by participating in the omnipotence of the Creator for whom everything is possible, he has incorporated some prenatal omnipotence within his own Self. This is the prototype for all further psychohistorical development of the Self until modern times. Just as in the mythical world-view, the right to a self-conscious place in the world is produced by actualizing the prenatal origin, so in the monotheistic world-view, the actualizing of fetal energy and force serves to legitimize social behaviour. This structure lives on up until our times in the notion of the divine right of rulers. The king participates in a fictitious, prenatal immortality. Kantorowicz (1990) has demonstrated a special example of this conception in the political theology of the Middle Ages. In the theory of two bodies within the body, one of them is immortal and participates in fetal omnipotence.

THE WORLD-VIEW OF RATIONALIST NATURAL SCIENCE In the rational-scientific conception of the world, the reference to prenatal omnipotence is clear in its fascination for the eternal laws of Nature. A portion of the projection and identification with fictitious, prenatal eternity and infinity lives on in these eternal laws. We no longer follow the law of God but the law of Nature and, through a knowledge of this law, participate in its prenatal omnipotence. The unconscious aspect of this identification becomes clear in 19th century beliefs about Utopian progress, which hoped through unlimited progress to establish a Garden of Eden, symbol of prenatal life, upon Earth.

THE CULTURE SHIFT IN MODERN TIMES Nietzsche's saying about the death of God and the abdication of the rulers and kings in the 19th and 20th centuries who exercised the divine right

signifies a collective, psychological withdrawal of early childhood and prenatal projections. The experiencing Self discovers in its personal and collective affairs that it alone holds responsibility. In the language of psychoanalysis, the myth of Oedipus is recognized as a stage in the process of one's own life and experience. Likewise, God's otherworld is understood by Freud as a projection of the child's early experience of the father and by Jung and Rank as a projection of the early experience of the mother. However, the descriptions of birth anxiety (Freud), of the tendency to prenatal regression (Jung) and of traumatic separation at birth (Rank) do not constitute a scientific discovery limited to the realm of psychoanalysis. Rather, they are the expression of a shift of culture and identity. Early experience is very generally conceived of in modern art as experience within one's own biography. As a result, the world of myths and the art of primitives are fascinating for modern artists because in them the projection of early childhood feelings is immediately tangible. For Pound and Eliot, mythical and historical images have the function of a sort of interpreter which mediates one's own early experience. As an example of the representation of early experience in the arts, I have chosen Kandinsky, Dali, and Beckett, and as examples of the influence of early experience in philosophy, Heidegger and Sartre. I understand modern art and philosophy as a process of becoming selfconscious of one's own having-been-born and of one's own prenatal life. It is therefore interesting that modern art and philosophy have come up against resistance similar to that exercised against the findings of prenatal psychology. Just as art has been described as surreal, difficult to understand and absurd, so these same metaphors are to be found in the context of prenatal psychology.

PRE- AND PERINATAL ASPECTS OF MODERN ART Even one of the early, important works of modern art, "The Scream" by Munch, takes as its subject matter the physical sensation of fear and does so in such a manner that the relationship to birth anxiety is immediately apparent. The Danish cultural historian, Fabricius, writes of it: "The main figure in the picture is shaped like a screaming, 'prenatal', skull, which is being pressed through the palms of two hands themselves drawn like a channel or an opening which has the ability to mould the form of the person's head. Around the screaming skull flows a river of fire, blood and water. The river is drawn like a storm flood which threatens to devour the bridge-the one dry, firm and redeeming element. ... Furthermore, one can feel the birth-trauma symbolism behind Munch's 'The Scream' in the form, unconsciously given, to the fjord landscape in the background. The fjord appears like the opening of a vagina with the clitoris (or penis) represented in the form of a spit of land jutting out. This sexual background is enhanced by the sky with its blood-red stripes which look like lips over a gentle, breast-like horizon" (Fabricius 1991, p.78). The experience which motivated the creation of this picture appears to have been a primal hallucination. Munch described it as follows: "I progressed along a path with two friends-the sun went down. The sky was suddenly red-and I felt a tinge of melancholy-a seething pain under my heart. I stood still and leaned against a fence, dead tired-blood and tongues of fire lay above the blue-black fjord and the town. My friends went on and I stayed behind, trembling with fear. And I felt a great, unending scream going through Nature." The painting "The Scream" is related to others that deal with the subject of Salome. An example is the Salome-Paraphrase, in which a decapitated man's head is surrounded by an almost manifest symbol of the vagina. During the same period, the painting called "Madonna" also appeared; it represents the prenatal relationship with the mother. With the German painter Kubin, the demonic and death-threatening aspects of pregnancy figure in a distressing way in "Fertility" and "The Egg" (Hoberg 1990). After the death of his mother when he was ten years old, Kubin experienced a quasi-psychotic crisis and lost touch with the real world. At his mother's grave, he tried to kill himself in order to, by returning to her, gain deliverance from his earthly loneliness. His "Fall to Death" relates to this subject. Kubin has also documented his psychotic crisis in the novel "The Other Side", in which he returns to a realm of prenatal symbols in order to be reborn when this kingdom collapses (Kubin 1909). Modern artists reference the early mother in various ways. Some, like Klee, express themselves directly: "I am not to be understood at all in this world, for I live just as easily with the dead as with the unborn. Somewhat nearer to Creation than normal" (quoted from Roters and Gollek 1990, p. 170). With Kandinsky, on the other hand, the relationship to the early mother is expressed in the experience of "internal sounds" that form a connection to the

prenatal and postnatal stages of life. The collapse of the rigid objectivism that characterized the 19th-century attitude to reality was for him a starting point for the articulation of a new attitude: "The splitting of the atom was in my soul equal to the destruction of the whole world. Suddenly the thickest walls fell down. Everything became uncertain, shaky and soft. I would not have wondered if a stone in front of me had melted into thin air and had become invisible" (quoted from GaBner and Kersten 1991, p.265). In his art, Kandinsky is concerned to produce a new relationship to the otherworld of spirits. I believe that this other, spiritual world represents an actualization of prenatal events. In shamanism, the regressive movement back to the experience of the womb can be imagined either as a journey into the underworld or to a heavenly otherworld. One can understand Kandinsky's art as just such a making of contact with the beyond, the heavenly world that symbolizes prenatal existence. He is concerned, as he writes, with a new balance "between head (moment of consciousness) and heart (moment of unconsciousness, intuition)". This balancing involves the reactivation of an inner perception, the so-called "clairvoyant sense organ", which perceives "inner sounds" and which refers directly to colours. The perception of colours can itself stimulate regression to this primary world of "inner sounds". The entrance into this world is brought about by dissolving the prevailing, rigid reference to our surroundings that characterizes reality-oriented art. Kandinsky writes: "On the painting itself, I more or less disintegrate the objects, so that they cannot all be recognised at once and so that the psychic sounds can be experienced by the viewers gradually, one after the other" (quoted from Gafiner and Kersten 1991, p.268). The actualization of early regressive states, brought about by "psychic vibrations" stemming from the early relationship to the mother and triggered by art, is intended to help the viewer move towards a new, livelier relationship with the world; towards harmonization of his psychic sensations with cosmic energies. As Kandinsky testifies in his book "How One Obtains Knowledge of the Upper World" (1909), his prenatal symbolism and nature mysticism was influenced by the doctrines of the German theosopher, Rudolph Steiner. Steiner's ideas were bridges to particular deep experiences, and Kandinsky's first paintings were committed to Steiner's symbolism. One can understand those paintings as inaugural exercises in regression to primal experience. The "secret student" must, according to Steiner, go through various stages of detachment from the sensual and objective world so that in the end he is able to attain an experience of abstract-spiritual existence in the extrasensory world. Kandinsky also represents this view in the symbolism of his early paintings. In "Composition IV" (1911), the struggle for life in this world is symbolized by two black spears. The blue of the mountains signifies, according to Steiner's symbolism, the state of enlightenment. The other colours also have a symbolic significance. The figure on the right signifies the otherworldly body with its double (Doppelgänger) or, in terms of prenatal symbolism, the fetus with his prenatal, placental companion. Kandinsky worked for one-and-a-half years on the composition of this picture. This explains the complicated symbolism (Ringbom 1970, GaBner and Kersten 1991). The picture is, therefore, both for the viewer as well as for Kandinsky himself, an inauguration and a forging of contact with the primary world of "inner sounds" that makes a new, more alive attitude to the world possible. While the reference to the child's early experience of the mother through symbolism and abstraction is concealed with Kandinsky, this reference is completely explicit with Salvador Dali. For Dali, the experience of prenatal life is the source of his inspiration. Dali was conceived as a substitute for an older brother who had died. His mother had become depressed during his pregnancy. Dali writes of this: "The despair of my parents (concerning the loss of my brother) was only alleviated by my birth, but every cell of their bodies had sucked itself full with their grief. I felt their agony already in the womb of my mother. My fetus swam in a hellish placenta. I have never got rid of this agony" (Dali 1988, p.10). He described his intrauterine memories in his autobiography: "The intrauterine paradise had for me the colours of Hell, that means red, orange, yellow and bluish, the colours of flames, fire. Above all it was warm, motionless, soft, symmetrical, doubled and sticky" (Dali 1984, p.42). He described his method for producing prenatal images within himself as follows: "I let myself go down on all fours so that my knees and my hands were touching. Then I let my head hang down under its own weight and move in circles like a pendulum, so that all the blood flowed into it. I performed this exercise long enough until an enjoyable dizzy feeling set in. Without

having to shut my eyes, I saw, emerging out of the pitch-black . . . darkness, phosphorescent circles, in which the famous fried eggs (without frying pan) formed. . . . These fire-eggs mixed themselves eventually with a very soft, amorphous paste; it seemed to be pulled in all directions. Its extreme elasticity, which adapted itself to all shapes, seemed to grow with my increasing desire to see it grinding, folded, put together and rolled together in the most diverse directions. This was for me the climax of delight and I wished everything would stay just as it was" (Dali 1984, p.47). It seems to me not too far-fetched to suggest that these are prenatal memories of motoric and touch sensation with the soft uterine wall, which the child before birth can move, as it yields elastically under his movements. The symbiosis with Gala also served Dali as a "probe" which could bring him into contact with the prenatal beyond. Many pictures show how Gala, summoning up a sort of trance, transformed herself into fetal symbolism. In the picture "Gala Mirando el Mar", a sort of fetal waters with a fetal being inside of it appears in a window opening above Gala's head. In the painting "Picture of Mrs. Isabel Styler-Tas (Mea)" the head and upper body of Gala transforms into a mythical mountain with a path into a holy grove winding around it. A further picture names the transformation in the title: "My naked wife looking at her own body which transforms itself into stairs, three twists of a column, heaven and architecture". In other pictures, a tree of life, symbolizing the placenta, arises out of the physiognomy of Gala's hair, as in the picture "The Three Sphinxes of Bikini" (Maur 1989). Modern performance art draws the viewer even more directly towards perinatal regression. The German performance artist Gilles moves himself along a zig-zag line in a room symbolizing the uterus. At the same time, his heart beat is amplified over loud-speakers. He hyperventilates, constricts his chest with a black cloth and then, after a short period of unconsciousness, comes back again along the zig-zag line (Kraft 1991, p.86). The 1974 performance of Beuys in New York with the title "Coyote - I like America and America likes me" has become generally wellknown (Kraft 1991, p.83). In a sort of shamanistic journey and deep regression to the origins of America, Beuys allowed himself, after a flight from Europe to America, to be wrapped in felt in the airport and then to be brought to the gallery in an ambulance. After this symbolic uterine regression, he lived for a week with a companion animal, symbol of the placenta, in a secluded part of a room that could be seen through the wall of a cage. Beuys related to the coyote in various ways. The writer Caroline Tisdall described the event as follows: "The days and sequences passed slowly. The damp, sweaty heat took its toll on the famous hat of the man, who consequently took to himself a very offbeat appearance. Man and animal draw nearer together. It was as though they had always been there. But now time was coming to an end. The man took the animal's straw and slowly scattered it around the whole room. He took his leave from Little John, pressed him against himself without being able to hide the pain of separation. Insulated in felt, the man was brought to the airport in an ambulance, back into the world where he is Joseph Beuys. He had not seen the reaction of the coyote. As Little John suddenly found himself alone in the presence of people, he behaved for the first time like a captured animal, roamed up and down and to and fro, with real wolf-strides, searching and whining. The smell of fear coloured the air round about him" (Tisdall 1976, p.8). Not unimportant for an understanding of Beuys's fascination with felt is the fact that, as a pilot in the second World War, he was shot down and perilously wounded. Tartars wrapped the unconscious man in felt and nursed him back to health (Stachelhaus 1987, p.28). The paintings of the contemporary Austrian artist Ringel can be almost read as a commentary on the findings of prenatal psychology. The paintings "Attempt at a Conversation with My Wife" and "The Argument" directly portray the presence of the prenatal relationship in the exchange between the partners (Sydow-Zirkwitz 1975). Pre- and perinatal themes are also very obviously present in the work of the action artist Brus. In his "Action Ana" (1964), he performed a self-entanglement which allows for perinatal associations. Similar associations can be made for the "Action Self-Mutilation" from 1965, as well as for "Action in a Circle" and "Action with Diana", Brus pursues the theme of perinatal danger in his drawings for the picture-poem "Dream Relationship Cure" of 1980 (see Brus 1986). The pictures in a contemporary book which surveys modern paintings (Benkert and Gorsen 1990) allow themselves to be immediately understood as expressions of perinatal experience. Pako Knöllner shows something of the compression of the skull (p.224, 225) and similarly,

Volmar SchulzRumpolt (p.235). Thomas Lange (p.226) and Volker Tannert (p.227) give form to the experience of perinatal fragmentation of the bodyconcept. Helmut Pfeuffer's theme (p.251) is the ongoing effects of the traumatic, bodily experiences which accompany birth upon the bodyconcept. PRE- AND PERINATAL ASPECTS OF MODERN MUSIC I would like to suggest that, like Kandinsky with his abandonment of objectivity, modern atonal music strives to transcend the object-bound apprehension which characterizes the postnatal world and which in music is represented by normal tonality. Atonal music has the function of giving the sense of hearing the freedom to regress in the direction of early sound experiences. The regressive power of music has been known and used at all times in the past. However, only in our time has its association with birth regression become quite clear. The primal therapist Orban described a regressive experience using music as follows: "I had the opportunity to join in the experience of the five-daymarathon with the American therapist, Dan Miller. In sessions with between 6 and 14 participants and using only relaxation exercises and the music of Paul Horn ('inside'), that is, without words, he brought about spontaneous birth experiences. Only through the power of the music, which in this case was a bizarre flute piece played inside the Indian tomb, the Taj Mahal, the participants were literally placed back into the fetal situation, that is, into their inside" (Orban 1980, p.6). A patient of Arthur Janov reported: "Twice during my therapy I experienced something curious. I realised only on the second occasion that a particular piece of music put me back in touch with feelings of my birth. This special music is accompanied by deep bass sounds, a little like the music of Quincy Jones" (Janov 1984, p.87). In a similar fashion, classical music and modern Beat music have the ability to stimulate "oceanic feelings", an experience of oneness with the music and solidarity with the universe. The only difference is that it occurs more immediately with modern pop music, which was originally called Beat music. Beat in English can refer to the pulse as well as to the beat of the heart. The beat leads very directly to an internal resonance with the primal experience of the maternal heartbeat and of the fetal Self. From psychotherapeutic treatment, we know that the music of present-day youth in the critical years of puberty can have a stabilizing effect. Resonance with primary experiences gives the Self the feeling of continuity. With much empathy, the cultural historian Carla Mureck has described the aspect of initiation in contemporary "destroyed music"; "When one gives one's self over to these noises, it is as though one goes head long with the little, shaky boat of the fragile Self into the turbulent din of a maelstrom, just as Poe described it. It is as if one was thrown into a black hole. It is said that time and space reverse themselves there and that it may be the suction force out of which we were born with the planets and into which we will go again. It is dream-time music, a being-out-of-the-world music, 'stalker-music', which leads us into the forbidden zone. Collisions between archaic sounds on the one hand and mechanical-industrial ones on the other . . . confront the world of natural man and of childhood with the adult world of work and of war" (Mureck 1990, p. 128). PRE- AND PERINATAL ASPECTS OF MODERN LITERATURE Pre- and perinatal symbolism has always played an essential role in literature. One particular fairy-tale motive has become very widespread. A hero, facing the identity crisis of puberty, sets out on a journey to a world beyond which is the origin of his being. He endures various tests, and returns broadened and matured. This is the basic theme of the fairy tale but also of more modern novels, such as the story of the initiation of Robinson Crusoe from 1719. On the threshold of adulthood, he is placed, just as according to the old scheme of initiation, on another world, develops there into the ideal of the modern Homo faber and returns again as an adult (Roebling 1990). This theme of the attempt, through regressive, perinatal experience, to find a new identity is much more concretely and directly expressed in the literature of the 20th century than in the abstract symbolizations of earlier times. An example of this is the work of the German poet Gottfried Benn, who has time and again described the "disintegration of the Self" and the self-transformation that occurs through going down into "placental places". But the work of Beckett seems to me to be especially paradigmatic. He takes his "not-being-completely-born" to be the starting point of his poetry. I therefore want to discuss Beckett more fully. It all began when Beckett, along with his analyst, Bion, attended a lecture given by C.G. Jung, in which he spoke of a patient who had not been completely born. Beckett's biographer, Deirdre Bair, summarizes Beckett's experience as follows:

"Through Jung's words, Beckett found a key to the understanding of his relationship to his mother. If he had not been completely born, if he really had prenatal memories and remembered birth as painful, it seemed to him only logical that when the first process in life had gone wrong and failed, it would lead to a defective and incomplete development of his personality" (Bair 1978, p.209). The image of the unsuccessful birth is a central theme in Beckett's work. Pozzo, one of the main characters in "Waiting for Godot" practically says so before his exit: ". . . one day we will be born, one day we die, on the same day, in the same moment. Is that not enough for you? They bear astride the grave, the day shines forth for an instant and then it is once more night" (Beckett 1976, p.94). His biographer Simon summarizes: "Birth is an expulsion from the womb, and every expulsion allows the expelled symbolically to live through the memogram of his birth one more time. In reality, one is not born, but thrown into the world. It makes a second birth necessary. One would like to be born in order to be able at last to die. The question of this second birth remains unclarified and it will remain so until Beckett's last work" (Simon 1988, p. 124). Beckett's significance for the spirit of the times lies in the fact that his paradigm of the unsuccessful birth coincides with the problem of understanding existence in a world without gods and without myths. In such a world, in which a person is conceived into a society not governed by images, a real arrival is difficult to imagine. Simon formulates: ". . . thus in Beckett, Nothingness illustrates in his way the impossibility of recovering from the death of God. . . Essentially the comic game of Beckett's clowns consists in allowing the 'gasping which sentences to life' to be heard. Beckett's clowns are what remains of religious people who have not accommodated themselves to the new state of things and now die in endless, bizarre convulsions (Simon 1988, p.116). Another popular example of how explicitly perinatal experience is described and its biographical significance demonstrated is the German bestseller "The Perfume" by Suskind (1985). After five miscarriages, a child is born under the most disgusting circumstances, from a mermaid, into a stinking fish-basket, where it is left to die. Through his crying, the bystanders become aware of the situation; and the mother is beheaded because of attempted murder. Thus, the child grows up in alienation, with foster parents. Apart from the degradation and rejection, his birth-trauma consists of a traumatic overstimulation of his sense of smell through the stink of the fish-market. Overcompensating, the hero of the novel becomes as an adult a scent specialist. However, his initiation into adulthood is unsuccessful. It comes about when he stays in a tunnel in a lonely mountain, symbolic of regression to the womb. Because no one has smelled him, because no one wanted to have him, he cannot smell himself; he perceives his own odour only as a fog wrapped around him. One could say that just as one only perceives one's self when one has been perceived by others and only recognises one's self in the eyes of others, so, according to the opinion of the author, one can apparently only perceive one's own smell when one has been smelled by a loving person. With that, fate takes its toll. Just as his mother wanted to murder him at birth, he now murders young women in order, through a complicated procedure, to steal from them their smell. He wants to be able to claim for himself an "own smell": "What he desired was the scent of certain people, namely those extremely rare people, who inspire love. These were his victims" (Süskind 1985, p.240).

PRE- AND PERINATAL ASPECTS OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

From the psychoanalytic point of view, the great mythical figures and images produced as Man became conscious have been raised to a new rational level and newly configured in philosophy. The water of Thales, origin of all things, was drawn up from the original waters of myth. But the uterine origin is also preserved in this abstract concept of being. If myth still represents our original experience in direct and tangible images, philosophy in comparison is an enlightenment in which the mythical projections are unmasked. However, in believing in the omnipotence of reason, a new myth was cultivated. With Plato, this myth took the form of the realm of Ideas, symbolic of the realm which lies before birth. According to Plato, this all-embracing awareness of earthly being has to be regained. Ultimately, this view amounts to primitive man's concept of wholeness, which should be achieved through the interconnection of prenatal and postnatal existence. Plato deals with this primordial connection and the attainment of wholeness in a masterful way through the famous allegory of the cave. Many remain stuck in the distress of the perinatal change in the conditions of life, so that a psychic birth that embraces both prenatal and

postnatal spheres of existence does not take place. However, since Aristotle, the building of great systems has dominated the stage in philosophy. In the 19th century, the creatureliness of human beings began increasingly to take centre stage; with Schopenhauer, the painful nature of life, and with Kierkegaard, human despair. I believe that the fact of birth has been a significant theme in this century, albeit in an abstract and encoded manner. I would like to illustrate this with the examples of Heidegger and Sartre. A central concept in Heidegger's "Being and Time" (1986) is that of "Geworfenheit", the fact of having been thrown. This one word, which gives evidence of Heidegger's rural origins, describes the fact of birth. In German, "werfen" (to throw, fling, drop, bring forth, produce) is the expression used for animal birth. In Heidegger, human "Geworfenheit" is always linked to the fact of man's degeneration in the world. In one place he writes quite explicitly: "Factual existence is birthy and it even dies birthy, in the sense that being always faces death (Sein zum Tode)". With this last idea, that to exist means to face death, the real problem of "birthiness" is hidden. And it is this theme of "Sein zum Tode" that is dealt with at length in Heidegger's philosophy. One can understand it and also his concept of "Hineingehaltensein ins Nichts", that is, "being held inside in nothingness", as expressions of birth anxiety. The philosopher Macho has endeavoured to lay bare the concern with birth latent in Heidegger's thought and hidden behind his analysis of death. He has done so in order to at last make possible a philosophy that develops out of our birthiness (Macho 1989). The philosophical thought of Sloterdijk (1989) goes in the same direction. He deals at length with the fact that philosophy has always forgotten birth. He himself wants to grasp the fact of human birth philosophically: "Only a birth philosophy can become attentive enough to the abysmal side of human 'coming-to-the-world' that the notion 'world' at last unites with the drama of arrival upon it" (Sloterdijk 1989, p.180). Heidegger's "Seinsvergessenheit", "forgetfulness of existence", then reveals itself simply as forgetfulness of pregnancy. In Sartre's existentialism, the fact of birth is perhaps even more encoded than in Heidegger. However, in "Nausea", he deals at length with the feeling of being really alive that follows the experience of deep regression, an experience opened to him by taking psychoactive substances. Succinctly and at the same time very abstractly, he formulates in "Being and Nothingness" that: "Freedom is the grasping of my having-been-thrown-out (Geworfenheit)" (Sartre 1990a, s. 625). If we could translate having-been-thrown-out as having-been-born, then the fact of birth would rise to be of central significance in Sartre's system. In actual fact, however, Sartre understands "Geworfenheit" in a very abstract way, as when he writes: "Of course, I take my place by the fact that I was born, but I am responsible for the place which I take. Here one clearly recognises the interconnection, which is impossible to unravel, in the situation between freedom and having-been-thrown-out, for there was no freedom in being thrown out. . . . and without freedom, the fact of having been thrown out would not be discovered, it would not even have any meaning" (Sartre 1990a, p.627). Sartre becomes more concrete than in these abstractions when, in "Nausea", he achieves immediacy in his experience of life through the feeling of disgust. In a sudden, deep regression in a situation of sexual attraction to a woman, he is overcome by nausea. Through this base feeling, which triggers the usual real and human associations, a deep regression to archaic feelings of fusion and death is produced. From this regression, which is eventually a deep experience of the mother, the hero of the novel gains a feeling for the immediacy of his existence. While viewing a root, the hero says of himself: "I was the root of the chestnut tree or rather I was totally conscious of its existence. Still separated from it-because I was actually aware of it-and yet lost in it, nothing other than it" (Sartre 1990b, p.149). In a deep regression, the hero finds himself in a place outside of time. Time has stopped still. After this deep experience, the hero can return again to the world in which he previously lived, the city. CONCLUDING REMARKS The experiences of the pre- and perinatal stages of life have won biographical immediacy, not only in the worlds of art, literature, music and philosophy, but also in the worlds of comedy and film. Thus Superman owes his overwhelming powers to the primordial catastrophe of his birth, the destruction of the planet Krypton. Because he survived this original disaster, all earthly dangers are unable to touch him, since he attains fetal omnipotence and the ability to fly, a prenatal symbol. When a report arrives of a terrible crime, which actualizes the original catastrophe of his birth and his mastery of it, the

regressive transformation of the journalist, Clark Kent, into Superman takes place, occasionally even in a telephone box, a place symbolic of connection to the other world. Thus Superman remains the eternal adolescent. The prenatal references are even more direct in the very successful film "E.T.". Barely disguised, a placental, prenatal companion arrives in a family to help the little hero of the film. Through symbiosis with him, he can rehabilitate himself and face the family crisis. Psychologically important is the fact that the family crisis reinstates the perinatal loss of security. In regressing to the security of the prenatal relationship, the boy, so strengthened, can withstand the shock of birth and can cope with the next stage of his personal development towards more autonomy, a development that has become necessary because of the parental conflict. Although in this and similar films and stories the pre- and perinatal symbolism is barely disguised, there exists a peculiar unawareness of this theme. Although Dali and Beckett openly pointed to the pre- and perinatal references in their work, this fact, however, has been hardly noticed by the public and the critics. This lack of awareness exists also with regard to the traumatic birth situation dramatically portrayed in the German best-seller "The Perfume". The reference to birth in the novel could not be more explicit but it is actually not realized by the reader. As a result, the unique fascination and eeriness which stem from deep experiences remains intact. In spite of this, my opening statement still seems to be correct. Pre- and perinatal psychology and modern art are, in similar ways, symptoms of a change in awareness in which the earliest phases of human life are approaching and entering consciousness. One small step is still needed for us to become really conscious of the fact that the beginning of life also belongs to our biography. I would like to suggest that, in the next few years, a significant change in public opinion, which has already been indicated in the arts, will take place. The increase in self-certainty and improvement in our relationship to the world will carry it through. This will have the healing effect that the social and psychological circumstances surrounding the conception, pregnancy and birth of human beings will be seen in a completely new light and be handled with much greater care. Only if so is there any prospect of a further development of human life. Now, when we are on the point of finding an ecologically more aware way of living in the world, let us hope that we take this step forward.

CONCLUSION The main presupposition of this essay is the following: the uniqueness of the human condition lies in the fact that Man's prenatal and perinatal experience remains active in his imagination and continually confronts him, albeit disguised in the symbols of his fantasies, dreams, myths and unusual experiences. Thus, it can be said that we are the inhabitants of two worlds, the one before birth which lives on in us and the external world that we experience after birth. This fundamental aspect of the human condition is expressed differently in different cultures. However, as can be seen in shaman initiation and the journeys to the otherworld undertaken by the heroes of myths and fairy tales, maturity has always meant the integration of these two worlds, the prebirth with that after birth. In earlier times, the human condition was expressed in an unconscious, projective manner in myths, rituals and symbols. However, since the cultural changes that occurred at the beginning of our century, the fact that the imagination finds roots in prenatal and perinatal experience has become ever clearer. It is an implicit theme in the works of Kandinsky and Munch but becomes explicit in Dali and Beckett, for example. Thus, it seems to me that a process, similar to that which has taken place in psychology with the development of prenatal psychology, has also taken place in modern art. Both developments can be understood as the expression of a cultural shift in which we are becoming more conscious of various aspects of the beginning of our life. As a result of this, it should become possible to deal with pregnancy and birth in a more responsible way in our society.

References

Bächtold-Stäubli H, Ed. (1987) Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens. Band 6. De Gruyter Berlin.

Bair D (1978) Samuel Beckett. London: Jonathan Cape.

Beckett HS (1976) Warten auf Godot. Werke 1,1. Suhrkamp Frankfurt.

Brus G (1986) Gunter Brus-Der Überblick. Residenz Salzburg.

Dali S (1984) Das geheime Leben des Salvador Dali. München: Schirmer/Morel.

Dali S (1988) So wird man Dali. Moewig Rastatt.

DeMause L (1982) Foundations of Psychohistory. Creative Books New York.

Deschurnes R (1984) Dali Dumont Köln.

Dowling TW (1988) The psychological significance of the placenta. In: G Schusser, W Hatzmann (Hrsg.) Das Leben vor und während der Geburt Universitätsdruck Osnabrück.

Dowling TW (1990) The Roots of the collective Unconscious. In: L Janus (ed.) Die Seelenleben des Ungeborenen-eine Wurzel unseres Unbewußten, Centaurus Pfaffenweiler. Eliade M (1986) Kosmos und Geschichte, Insel Frankfurt. Fabricius J (1991) Pränatale und perinatale Motive in der Malerei. In: L Janus (ed.) Die kulturelle Verarbeitung pränatalen und perinatalen Erlebens. Textstudio Gross, Peterstalerstraße 196, 69118 Heidelberg. Gaßner H, Kersten W (1991) Physikalisches Weltbild und abstrakte Bildwelten bei Wassily Kandinsky. In: M Wagner (ed.) Moderne Kunst Rowohlt Hamburg. Golther W (1987) Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie. Magnus, Kettwig. Heidegger M (1986) Sein und Zeit Niemeyer Tubingen. Hoberg A (1990) Alfred Kubin. Edition Spangenberg München. Irving MC (1990) Natalism as Pre- and Perinatal Metaphor. Pre- and Peri-Natal Psychology 4, p 83-110. Janov A (1984) Frühe Prägungen. Fischer Frankfurt. Janus L (1990) Zur Verarbeitung prä- und perinataler Erlebnsvorgänge im Märchen. In: L Janus (ed.) Das Seelenleben des Ungeborenen-eine Wurzel unseres Unbewußten. Centaurus Pfaffenweiler. Janus L (1991) The Expression of Pre- and Perinatal Experience in Cultural Phenomena. Pre- and Peri-Natal Psychology 5, p. 203-220. Janus L (1991) Wie die Seele entsteht. Hoffmann und Campe, Hamburg. Kantorowicz EH (1990) Die zwei Körper des König. dtv München. Kraft H (1991) Die Rituale der Initiation in den Performances von Joseph Beuys und Peter Gilles. In: L Janus (ed.) Die kulturelle Verarbeitung pränatalen und perinatalen Erlebens. Textstudio Gross, Peterstalerstraße 195, 69118 Heidelberg. Kubin A (1909) Die andere Seite. Ellermann München 1975. Macho T (1989) Heideggers Todesbegriff. Manuskripte 104, p. 37-47. Maur K (1989) Dali Hatje Stuttgart. Mureck C (1990) Die Hölle ist da, feiern wir das wärmende Feuer". In: C Gehrke: Konkursbuch 25. Konkursbuchverlag Tübingen. Orban P (1980) Disco. Kindheit 2: 1-16. Overy P (1989) Kandinsky. Phaidon Köln. Ringborn S (1970) The Sounding Cosmos. ABO Akademie Vol. 38, Helsingfors. Roebling J (1990) Über prä- und perinatale Phantasien in der neuzeitlichen bürgerlichen Literatur. In: L Janus (ed.) Das Seelenleben des Ungeborenen-eine Wurzel unseres Unbewußten. Centaurus Pfaffenweiler. Roters E, & Gollek R (1990) Der Blaue Reiter. In GC Argan (ed.) Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts. Prophyläen Berlin. Sartre JP (1990a) Das Sein und das Nichts. Rowohlt Hamburg. Sartre JP (1990b) Der Ekel Rowohlt Hamburg. Simon A (1988) Beckett. Suhrkamp Frankfurt. Sloterdijk P (1989) Eurotaoismus. Suhrkamp Frankfurt. Stachelhaus H (1987) Joseph Beuys. Claassen Düsseldorf. Süskind P (1985) Das Parfum. Diogenes Zürich. Sydow-Zirkwitz H (1975) Franz Ringel Sydow-Zirkwitz Frankfurt. Tisdall C (1976) Joseph Beuys. Coyote. Schirmer Mosel München. Vogt P u.a. (1987) Edvard Munch. Benteli Bern. AuthorAffiliation Ludwig Janus, Ph.D. AuthorAffiliation Ludwig Janus studied in Munich, Essen, and Gottingen and trained as a psychoanalyst in Gottingen and Heidelberg. He was employed as a psychotherapist at the Fachkrankenhaus für Psychogene Erkrankungen in Tiefenbrunn near Gottingen from 1969-1971 and at Psychosomatische Klinik in Heidelberg from 1971-1975. He has since been working as a psychoanalyst in his own practice and as a lecturer and supervision analyst at the Institut für Psychotherapie and Psychoanalyse in Heidelberg, having been director of this institute from 1981-1987. He has written many scientific articles on neurotic and psychosomatic illnesses, the analysis of discordance in twins, psychophysiological measurements during therapy, the history of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical treatment techniques, and prenatal and perinatal psychology. He is a member of the executive committee of the International Society of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine (ISPP), and may be reached at Köpfelweg 52, 69118 Heidelberg-Ziegelhausen, Germany. The author wishes to acknowledge the help of Terence Dowling in translating this text from the German.

Publication title: Pre- and Peri-natal Psychology Journal

Volume: 8

Issue: 2

Pages: 129-147

Number of pages: 19

Publication year: 1993

Publication date: Winter 1993

Year: 1993

Publisher: Association for Pre&Perinatal Psychology and Health

Place of publication: New York

Country of publication: United States

Journal subject: Medical Sciences--Obstetrics And Gynecology, Psychology, Birth Control

ISSN: 08833095

Source type: Scholarly Journals

Language of publication: English

Document type: General Information

ProQuest document ID: 198720187

Document URL: <http://search.proquest.com/docview/198720187?accountid=36557>

Copyright: Copyright Association for Pre&Perinatal Psychology and Health Winter 1993

Last updated: 2010-06-06

Database: ProQuest Public Health

Contact ProQuest

Copyright © 2012 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved. - **Terms and Conditions**