

6. In parentheses: an irrefutable indication that the Marind males were not so single-mindedly homosexual in orientation as they pretended to be.
7. *Geb-zé*: descendants of *Geb*; *Sami-rek*: belonging to *Sami*. The term *Sami-rek* can also be used for the *Mahu-zé* phratry. Similarly, *Geb-zé* is not only used for the moiety and phratry of that name, but also for the banana clan, the *Geb-zé* proper.
8. It is impossible to interpret these differences in function as differences in ideology. The *Geb-zé* are as ardent headhunters as the *Sami-rek*, and the latter indulge as often in homosexual acts as the former. What counts is the leadership or assistantship in the relevant rituals.
9. Sperm acquired from an act of anal homosexual intercourse? The myth gives no details on this point, and it is of no use to enter into speculations of a dubious nature.
10. Up to a point the same can be said of the imo rites. However, they do not make such a perfect cycle as those of the mayo.
11. The copulating pair under the mat symbolizes the sun in the underworld.
12. Apparently, the loam refers to the muddy well from which the first humans originated, the betel palm roots to the name of the Mayo Mother, Betelwoman.
13. Since the mayo initiation took place at intervals of four and probably more years, the Mayo Marind also organized head-hunting expeditions which were not preceded by the initiation ritual. In those instances ritual preparation for the expedition was confined to a series of nocturnal dances under the singing of *ayasé*.
14. The mythical crocodile had its house at the bottom of the sea, and it was full of prepared heads (Van Baal 1966:369).
15. When the book *Dema* had already appeared in print, my late friend Verschuere pointed out to me that the Marind make a terminological difference between a myth and a *Märchen*, and that the present story should be classified as a *Märchen* (folktale).
16. Dr. Herdt kindly reminded me of the essay by D. F. Tuzin, "Ritual Violence among the Ilahita Arapesh" (1982). I may add that this is only one of the many reasons I have to thank Dr. Herdt for his support and stimulating remarks. I feel happy that the last word of this lengthy text can be one of sincere gratitude.

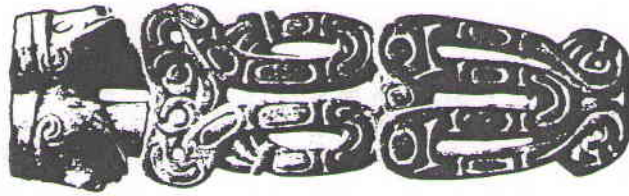
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Gilbert H. Herdt

Semen Transactions in Sambia Culture

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this study, semen transactions, may appear esoteric, not to mention vulgar: certainly the question of who gives and receives sperm is not one that much concerns Westerners today. Indeed, human fluids in general seem obvious and trivial, even embarrassingly natural, or unnatural, as the case may be. Seldom do we wonder how and why they are produced, or where and when they are consumed or discarded, or by whom. The perspective in certain Melanesian societies, however, is contrary to our view, for semen, like other body fluids, is of considerable interest (and is neither obvious nor trifling but is vulgar) in the sense that semen as a scarce resource is among the everyday concerns of common folk. If we recognize and study these concerns in their own right and in their own symbolic environment, we are led to examine how and why they inform the structure and meaning of sexuality in general and institutionalized homosexual prac-



tices in particular. I want to analyze why, that is, peoples such as the Sambia of the Eastern Highlands have fetishized semen, transforming it from an object into a subject, a living "commodity," with a personality and vital signs of its own.¹

The more one thinks about this symbolic transformation, the more remarkable it seems. A simple bodily fluid, endowed with much significance, has become a sort of director of people—predicting their perceptions and interactions, molding their selves, marriages, families, and clans—thereby making them all objects valued against itself. In Western culture we have perhaps made money and sex into predicate subjects of this sort. In Melanesia, it seems, there are a few such subjects: pigs and shell valuables, women, spirits, blood, and semen. Access to or power over these things makes individuals and groups valued and powerful.

We have long known that some Melanesian cultures use the body (e.g., of humans, animals, spiritual beings) as a conceptual model of and for social action, speech, and thought (e.g., Leenhardt 1979; Malinowski 1929; Mead 1935; Newman 1964). Typically, though, the significance of these symbolic models has been obscured in anthropological preoccupations with individualism, group solidarity, and exchanges of wealth ("norms of reciprocity," i.e., "linear sequences basically concerned with discrete acts of giving and receiving" [Weiner 1980:71; see also M. Strathern 1979]). The meaningfulness of these cultural commodities, including how they are transformed from things into predicates of relationships between persons, as elements in cultural systems, is what concerns me.

If we take accord of the full value Sambia invest in fluids such as semen and breast milk, then we can trace the systemic contours of the circulation of these valuable fluids in their culture. In this view, semen as a cultural idea and semen transactions may be understood as a special language, a kind of symbolic discourse for signifying the value and identities of persons, groups, and social and religious entities. Such a symbolic discourse may be trained on many objects (see Herdt 1982b; Weiner n.d.). But because of its centrality, semen as a commodity valuates and conditions basic Sambian cultural institutions—personhood, marriage, clanhood—as well as key social relationships in the family, village, and ritual cults, between men and women, humans and spirits.

Analytically, the value of semen may be understood at several conceptual levels that synergistically interact. For the Sambia we may ask: How do individuals value other persons, groups, or relationships (e.g., sexual, familial, kinship) as semen donors or recipients? Or we may ask: How do semen transactions underlying social relationships define who is related as kin or affines as well as what the nature of those social bonds is? Sambia men practice both homosexual and heterosexual activities. And since sexual intercourse may be defined by Sambia either as work or play, we may ask: Is it the mode of semen exchange or the type of sexual intercourse that registers the difference between, say, sex as work or sex as play? If semen is a scarce resource—a means of social reproduction of babies and hence, heirs, gardeners, and hunters, and females for marriage exchange for production, and warriors for group protection—who or what regulates this commodity in Sambia culture?

I will examine these perspectives in the following study of Sambia ritualized homosexual practices. My interest lies mainly in demonstrating the symbolic relationship between *ideas* about semen and all forms of sexual *transactions* in Sambia society. Thus, this account is primarily cultural and sociological in orientation; I am not concerned here with describing erotic acts or individual constructions of semen beliefs in gender identity or psychosocial functioning, phenomena I have touched upon elsewhere (Herdt 1980, 1981; Stoller and Herdt 1982).

SAMBIA CULTURE

Sambia are a fringe-area Highlands people. They inhabit isolated ranges of the southern part of the Eastern Highlands near the Papuan border. Their high forest territory is vast, while the population (around 2,300) is small. Population density averages between 5 and 10 people per square mile throughout their territory. Historically, they migrated from the Papuan hinterland around Menyama during the last two centuries. Myth and legend relate that they fled after a great war. They share in cognate cultural traditions with other Anga tribes in the area, such as the Baruya (Godelier 1982a), with whom they also warred and traded. But Sambia have also been influenced by Eastern Highlands groups,

especially the Fore (Lindenbaum 1979). So their society and culture embodies and reflects long-continued influences and transformations of imported patterns from both Papua and the Highlands.

Social organization and economy revolve around small sedentary hamlets built atop high mountain ridges for defense. Gardening and hunting are the main economic pursuits. Sweet potatoes and taro are the chief staples. Women do most garden work. Men do all hunting, primarily for possum, cassowary, birds, and eels. Pigs are few and are of little ceremonial importance. Descent is ideally organized on the basis of patriliney. Postmarital residence is patrilocal, so males grow up in their father's hamlet, inherit his land, and reside there. Marriage is by infant betrothal or sister exchange; bride-wealth was introduced only in the mid-1970s. Some men, especially senior leaders, have several wives. All marriage is arranged by elders, women being traded between exogamous clans, either within or between neighboring hamlets, though interhamlet marriage is the norm. Hamlets may have two or more constituent clans, which tend to be internally organized as an extended family. Inside hamlets, nuclear (or polygamous) families live together in small separate huts; but there is also one or two men's houses wherein all initiated, unmarried males live. The hamlet tends to function as a corporate group in matters of warfare, subsistence activities, marriage, ritual, and dispute settlements.

Sambia society is comprised of six different population clusters of hamlets in adjacent but separate river valleys. These population clusters are divided, in turn, into subgroups (phratries) believed related by ancestry, ritual, and common geographic origin. Each phratry has between two and six hamlets, situated on ridges often within sight of one another. These local hamlet groups, known as confederacies,* intermarry and engage in joint ritual initiations every three or four years. But they sometimes fight among themselves. Warfare has indeed been rife throughout the entire Highlands Anga area, taking two forms: intertribal war raids to kill and loot; and intratribal bow fights designed to bluster and get revenge for perceived wrongs. In other words, within the Sambia

*Confederacies here marks the same social unit as "parish" and "subtribe" in other New Guineast typologies.

Valley, my fieldwork site, hamlets have intermarried, initiated, and fought—sociopolitical dynamics of the behavioral environment that are crucial for understanding social and sexual life.

Relationships between the sexes are highly polarized. One sees expressions of this polarization in virtually every social domain. A strict division of labor and ritual taboos forbid men and women from doing each other's tasks in hunting and gardening. Women are responsible for food preparation and child care. Authority rests in the hands of elders and war leaders. Men are in charge of public affairs, though women have interpersonal influence to some extent in domestic affairs. The hamlet itself is divided into male and female spaces and paths tabooed to the opposite sex after initiation. Men's rhetoric disparages older married women as oversexed or lecherous and younger women as prudish or shy. Men fear being contaminated and sapped of their strength (*jierungdu*) by marriageable women.

Furthermore, male/female sexual relationships are generally antagonistic, and many marital histories reveal arguments, fights, jealousies, sorcery fears, some wifebeating, and even suicide attempts. Wives (much more than female kin) are stigmatized as inferior, as polluting and depleting to men, because of their menstrual and vaginal fluids. Sexual intercourse is supposed to be spaced to avoid depletion and premature aging or death. (Couples may have sex every three to five days, or as infrequently as once every two or three weeks, depending upon their ages, length of marriage, personalities, etc.) Prolonged postpartum taboos prohibit couples from engaging in coitus for up to two and a half years following the birth of a child. These generalizations indicate trends: Sambia heterosexual relationships are often extremely polarized compared even with other Highlands groups (Langness 1967; reviewed in Herdt and Poole 1982).

How do Sambia understand the nature and functioning of the sexes? Male is the socially preferred and valued sex. Female is perceived as inferior in every way, except reproductively. Infants are assigned either to the male or female sex, and sex-typing of behaviors and gender traits is rigid from childhood onward. Females, however, are believed to mature "naturally," without external aids, for their bodies contain a menstrual blood organ (*tingu*)

which hastens physical and mental development, puberty, and eventually menarche, the key sign a woman is ready for marriage and procreation. (Menarche occurs late in New Guinea and is now between ages sixteen and nineteen for Sambias.) At menarche a woman is initiated in secret ceremonies in the menstrual hut forbidden to all males (cf. Godelier 1982a:74ff.). Males, by contrast, do not "naturally" mature as fast or as competently. Womb blood and maternal care not only hold them back but endanger their health. Males cannot attain puberty or other secondary sex-traits (e.g., facial hair, mature penis) without semen. And their bodies, their semen organs (*keriku-keriku*), do not internally produce semen, Sambias believe. Therefore they require inseminations and magical ritual treatments of various kinds over many years to "catch up" with females and become strong, manly men (for details, see Herdt 1980, 1981, 1982a, 1982b).

Male development and masculinization after childhood are the responsibility of the men's secret cult and its initiation system. This cult is organized and perpetuated by the confederacy of hamlets. Boys are initiated at seven to ten years of age, when they are separated from their mothers, natal households, and younger siblings. Thereafter, they must avoid all females for many years while living in the men's house. Avoidance taboos are rigidly enforced with shaming, beatings, and ultimately death (the last used to keep boys from revealing ritual secrets). Males undergo six initiations in all over the next ten or fifteen years. First initiation (*moku*) graduates are called *choowinuku*; second-stage initiation (*imbutu*) occurs between ages eleven and thirteen; and third-stage initiation (*ipmangwi*), bachelorhood puberty rites, is for youths fourteen to sixteen years of age. These initiations are all done in sequence on large groups of boys who become age-mates. They are from neighboring hamlets, thus making them members of a regional cohort. Initiates also become members of a warriorhood, which has local units responsible for defending their own hamlets. Fourth-stage initiation (*nuposha*) may occur anytime afterward. It is a public marriage ceremony, associated with secret male rites and sexual teachings for individual youths, to whom a woman has been assigned for their marriage. Fifth-stage initiation (*taiketryi*) occurs when a man's wife has her menarche. The bride then has her secret initiation in the menstrual hut. Afterward, the couple can engage

in coitus. The final, sixth-stage initiation (*moondangu*), is held when a man's wife bears her first child. She then undergoes a final women's secret ceremony too. Two children bring full adult manhood (*aatmwunu*) and personhood for both sexes.

The men's secret cult is ideally organized as a social hierarchical system according to ritual rank. Initiates are lumped into ritual categories: *kuwatni'u* is a category term for first- and second-stage prepubescent initiates (who may also be referred to as *choowinuku* or *imbutnuku*, ritual-grade titles); *ipmangwi* (or *moongenya*, "new bamboo") bachelors are third-stage initiates of higher adolescent status. Pubescent bachelors dominate prepubescent initiates; older youths and young married men dominate them; and elders are seen as politically and spiritually superordinate over everyone (Herdt 1982b). War leaders and shamans lead in fights and healing ceremonies, respectively. There is nothing unique about this kind of ritual system, for many similar forms can be found in Eastern Highlands (e.g., Read 1952), Papuan Gulf (e.g., Williams 1936a), and Telefomin (e.g., Barth 1975) societies. What is special, and what links Sambias and their Anga neighbors with Papuan lowland systems (e.g., Keraki, Kiwai Island, Marind-anim), is the widespread institutionalization of homosexual activities.

Sambias practice secret homosexual fellatio, which is taught and instituted in first-stage initiation. Boys learn to ingest semen from older youths through oral sexual contacts. First- and second-stage initiates may only serve as fellators; they are forbidden to reverse erotic roles with older partners. Third-stage pubescent bachelors and older youths thus act as fellateds, inseminating prepubescent boys. All males pass through both erotic stages, being first fellators, then fellateds; there are no exceptions since all Sambias males are initiated and pressured to engage in homosexual fellatio.

The symbolism of the first homosexual teachings in initiation is elaborate and rich; the meaning of fellatio is related to secret bamboo flutes, and ritual equations are made between flutes, penis, and mother's breast, and between semen and breast milk (see Herdt 1982a, for a detailed analysis). Boys must drink semen to grow big and strong. At third-stage initiation, bachelors may experience personal difficulty in making the erotic switch in roles. Thereafter, they may continue having oral sex with boys until they father children. Essentially, youths pass from an exclusively homosexual

behavioral period to a briefer bisexual period, during which they may have both homosexual and heterosexual contacts in secret, and finally to exclusive heterosexual relationships. Social and sexual failures in masculine personhood may be defined as the failure to achieve these transitions (Herdt 1980).

SUBJECT AND OBJECTS • For the Sambias, who ritualize obligatory homosexual practices on a broad scale, it may be said that two forms of sexual behavior characterize their culture and developmental experience. For males, first sexual contacts are secret, transitional, male/male oral sexual behaviors; for adult males and females, the parallel form is initial male/female oral (i.e., the woman is fellator) sex in marriage. Later, heterosexual genital contacts occur. To my knowledge, no other form of sexual behavior occurs, including masturbation to orgasm. The rules and norms surrounding these two sexual modes are, in certain respects, both similar and different; I shall describe them below. But in both cases, semen acquisition is an imperative organizing principle of people's social interactions and sexual behavior. Its magical power does things to people, changing and rearranging them, as if it were a generator. They, however, can do little to affect this semen principle: it does not reflect on them, but merely passes through them as an electrical current through a wire, winding its way into bodies as generator coils for temporary storage. Because it is instrumental to growth, reproduction, and regeneration, sperm (and its substitutes) is needed to spark and mature human life. Humans are its objects.

This view may seem upside-down to us, yet it is essential as a rational outcome of the Sambias point of view. By thus beginning with its novelty, we may hope to achieve a better understanding of the relative relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality, subjects about which we Westerners assume so much. I will first examine cultural ideas about semen, and then study how these ideas influence sociological types of semen transactions, between males and males, and males and females. Taken together, these ideas and social transactions form a system of objects of the predicate semen. Though these two perspectives are conceptually distinct, their complementarity suggests how normative goals affect individual social action and the developmental cycle of the group. When we view all of the valuations based on this predicate, we

are led to a systemic view of the structuring (but not the experience) of sexual interactions and eroticism in Sambias culture. It is essential to stress that semen predicates two different sorts of relationships: *direct sexual transactions* between semen donors and recipients, either on the individual or group level (in the latter sense, I am speaking normatively); and *indirect semen transactions* that affect changes in a third party via the semen recipient, who is believed to serve as a transformer of sperm (e.g., father to mother to baby). The concept "transformer" compares with Meigs's (1976) use of "transmitter," in which she argues that a person's body may store or deliver fluids (e.g., blood or semen) or essences to someone else. "Transformer" differs because of another dimension needed, transformation, that is, *changing* semen into something else, as medieval alchemists were thought to change lead into gold. I will later disentangle these levels of description and analysis.

CULTURAL IDEAS OF SEMEN VALUE

Sambias have five main cultural categories of semen valuation. These include erotic play, procreation, growth, strength, and spirituality, all of which are connected with sexual behavior. The metaphorical and analogical uses in rhetoric and imagination of these categories can be found in other domains, too (see Herdt 1981). Here, though, I shall explore their social significance for insemination.² The study of these categories will involve us in understanding how persons (and in some ways, nonhuman entities) are represented as potential semen donors or recipients, transformers, or transmitters of semen value, in Sambias culture. This section is concerned with the cultural level of these concepts.³

There are two analytic senses in which I shall use the term *value*. First, the anthropological sense of conventional valuations in a culture: attributed or assumed meanings shared and assigned to persons, institutions, and substances. Thus we can speak of the cultural regard for semen and the social esteem with which it thus endows persons and relationships. (There is also a libidinal value, present in conscious and unconscious thought, which will not concern us.)⁴ Second, there is the Marxist sense of the value of a commodity, such as gold, which "when impressed upon products, obtains fixity only by reason of their acting and reacting upon

each other as quantities of value" (Marx 1977:248).⁵ Hence, we can analyze semen as a scarce resource that can be consumed and produced, "conserved," "invested," or otherwise "spent." Persons and relationships may be valued (as a means to an end) in regard to their status as donors or recipients of the commodity semen.

In Sambia sexuality, there are several tacit assumptions underlying the relation between semen and the categories examined below, and I begin with them. (1) Semen is the most precious human fluid. Because it is believed vital for procreation and growth and is in short supply, sperm is more precious than mother's milk, its closest cultural equivalent. But precious does not necessarily mean powerful: menstrual blood is the logical antithesis of semen, it is dangerous and, in some rituals, is equally as efficacious as semen (Herd 1982b; cf. Faithorn 1975). (2) Sambia are by character prudish people (may I refer to them as "prudish lechers"? cf. Meggitt 1964). Semen, other fluids, and sexuality are sensitive subjects: the data and viewpoints described below took years to assimilate, even though the presentation makes my analysis seem easy. (3) Sexual pleasure is seen by Sambia only in relation to another person; that is, there is no equivalent to the Western narcissistic category "sex" (used in relation to masturbation, pornography, etc. as an indefinite noun, e.g., "sex is . . . good, bad, fun, boring," etc.). Sex, in the Sambia sense, is only spoken of as: *duwuno* (pushing or penetrating into) a boy's mouth or a woman's vagina; or as the slackening of one's erect penis (lit., *laakelu mulu*, "penis fight") via "his bamboo orifice" (metaphor for boy's mouth) or "her thing down below" (euphemism for vagina). Again, the verb *duwuno* is not used for masturbation and only rarely for wet dreams in which the dream images concern copulating with persons (e.g., interpreted as spirits).⁶ (4) When men refer to erotic desire (e.g., "I swallow my saliva [thinking about sex] with him/her") they tend to refer to their sexual outlets as if their alters' orifice (mouth or vagina) were fetishized objects like a commodity (i.e., they use "food" as a metaphor for their sexual needs). (5) All sexual intercourse may be defined as either work (*wumdu*) or play (*chemonyi*) or both. For example: it is *wumdu* to produce a baby by copulating with a woman many times; but it is *chemonyi* to promiscuously copulate with a boy once or twice knowing he

will not procreate. Insemination is also an action that mediates (e.g., like ritual, *pweiyu*) between work and play, sacred and profane. Let us examine each category in turn.

EROTIC PLAY • When Sambia use *chemonyi* (play) as an adjective in relation to sexual intercourse, they normatively refer to sexual release as erotic pleasure.* Semen is expended and orgasm (*imbimboogu*) achieved. I begin with this category not because it is most crucial—Sambia themselves would rank procreation first (Herd 1981)—but because it is essential for understanding semen valuations, and also because anthropologists often ignore erotic motivation as a native category.

The most general cultural attributes of erotic play may be sketched as follows. First, the factor of the sex of one's partner: erotic play symbolically typifies male/male sexual contacts more than male/female contacts. Male/male sexual contacts are culturally defined as behaviorally promiscuous. Male/female contacts, normative only in marriage, are viewed (unless adulterous) as steady transactions aimed toward procreation. Erotic play is of course an aspect of all male/female contacts, but it is not their most important one. *Exclusive* sexual access to a person seems inversely related to erotic play: a man's wife, as his sexual property, as Sambia see it, is less exciting than a boy or woman taken at first (i.e., as a virgin), or only once, on the sly. Age is a contributing factor here: sexual partners are perceived as having more "heat" and being more exciting the younger they are. A second factor is reciprocity: the more asymmetrical the sexual partners (youth/boy), the more erotic play seems to culturally define their contact. (By contrast, I have argued elsewhere that the husband/wife dyad is the most symmetrical relationship in Sambia culture; see Herd 1982b.) Third, sexual constancy, that is, greater frequency of sexual contacts, generally transforms sexual contacts from erotic play

*There is no marked category for erotic play as such: it is signified in ideology and social intercourse by *chemonyi*, "orgasm," and several conditions of sexual excitement (e.g., erection). The term *sexual* has a wide range of connotations in English; *erotic*, however, refers specifically to that which stimulates sexual desire and psychophysiological arousal, so I prefer *erotic* in this usage. I shall not attempt to describe sexual excitement here, but see Stoller and Herd (n.d.).

into something else. Husband/wife contacts are the most constant in Sambian sexual life.

Erotic play may be defined also according to the social purpose of insemination. Erotic pleasure is attached to male/male and male/female sexual contacts, and to both oral and vaginal intercourse.* But only heterosexual genital contacts result in procreation; all other sexual contacts fulfill other quasi-reproductive functions (e.g., growth of spouse) or are for erotic play. Since homosexual fellatio cannot eventuate in reproduction (consummation of marriage), it becomes a demonstration of a fellated's psychosocial maturity, that is, of his power to masculinize a boy. But this valuation is of significance for *donors*, whereas boy-recipients highly value semen for "growth." What donors value also is the fellator's mouth as a sexual outlet: the social purpose is sexual release.

Erotic play may be defined, lastly, according to the flow of a scarce commodity. Semen is viewed as a very scarce resource by Sambia, for, in the reproductive process, it is believed instrumental from conception to adulthood. It takes many inseminations to procreate: large expenditures of time, energy, semen. From this viewpoint, all male/female contacts may be construed as benefiting procreation (see below). Homoerotic play unevenly fits this paradigm. It is, after all, play, not work: procreative work is defined as producing babies. So how do they benefit the donor? Essentially, homoerotic play is culturally defined as an unequal exchange of commodities: recipients acquire semen, donors get sexual services. This exchange is unequal because (as Sambia see it) a man's sperm is being depleted, but he gets only erotic pleasure in return ("which is insubstantial"). Homoerotic activity thus creates a dilemma for bachelors, which is perhaps why some engage in it less frequently as they approach marriage. Homoerotic play is, however, less depleting than heterosexual intercourse (work) which is, in part, why bachelors usually do not replenish the semen "lost" during their early homosexual activities.

* All sexual contacts are symbolically defined against the norm of penetration and ejaculation into an insertee's mouth (initiate or woman) or vagina, insemination resulting from (the belief that) the full seminal emission is ingested/absorbed by the recipient's body (mouth or vagina is entrance).

PROCREATION • Procreation is defined as genital-to-genital heterosexual contacts that lead to the birth of offspring. Sambia regard vaginal intercourse as primarily focused on the production of babies. Oral insemination prepares a wife's body for making babies by "strengthening" her, as well as by precipitating her menarche (if she has not already attained it). Fellatio also prepares her for lactation by semen being transformed into breast milk. Oral sexual contacts are not believed to make babies in anyone; only vaginal intercourse does that. All heterosexual genital intercourse contributes directly to procreation in one's own marriage, and *all* sexual contacts may be viewed as contributing directly to the recipients' procreative competence (wife or boy-fellator) or reproduction (wife).*

Procreation is jurally defined as resulting from genital-to-genital sexual contacts between formally married husband and wife. Since heterosexual contact is not morally or jurally allowed outside of marriage, privilege of sexual access to a woman's body is restricted by marriage; exclusive sexual rights belong to her husband. Likewise, exclusive access to a husband's body and semen, after birth of their first child, is his wife's right (which view is a key argument women use to resist polygyny). Traditionally, only infant betrothal and bride-service marriage (which was rare) required the transfer of goods or services to the donors bestowing a wife. Infant betrothal, though, required meat and small food prestations only, whereas bride-service required more wealth, in addition to the bridegroom's years'-long work for his prospective affines. Sister exchange requires no exchanges other than that of the women. Since infant betrothal is preferred, and sister exchange marriages far outnumber those of bride-service, marriage transactions are not much related to bride-wealth in its usual anthropological sense (cf. Collier and Rosaldo 1981). The "wealth" exchanged (e.g., meat prestations) is largely produced through the labors of hunting by the wife-receivers.

Genital-to-genital intercourse creates a fetus by successively injecting semen into a woman's womb. After initial oral sexual con-

* Oral heterosexual contacts indirectly help procreation; see below under section on "growth."

tacts, a woman's body is viewed as ready to procreate. One instance of vaginal intercourse does not a fetus make: Sambias have no notion of conception in our Western scientific sense. The womb is the container and transformer of semen. It changes the sperm into fetal tissue: primarily bone and skin, but also muscle and internal organs. The semen coagulates inside the birth sac; this "biological" process is central to fetal development, and its imagery is important in social thought (Herd 1981:167-172ff.). Womb and umbilical blood also become circulatory blood in the fetus; they do not produce any other parts of the child, which result only from semen. Social ideology thus defines procreation as productive work (not erotic play) in two senses: it is hard work to feed enough semen into a woman's womb to create a fetus; and it is hard work for the woman's body to change this sperm into a fetus, sapping her own blood, and carrying the child in her body for so long.

(Blood and semen also differentially contribute to the sex of the offspring and his or her gender differentiation. First, both parents can magically influence the fetus's sex by ingesting various plants. They do this both because Sambias ideally prefer a boy as the firstborn and because they want to make the infant more attractive. Second, it takes more semen to create a girl than a boy. Two other beliefs explain why, and they pertain to the procreative/economic productive capacities of males versus females (i.e., in social reproduction). The most important is that females do more hard work (i.e., garden work) all the time; therefore, the female fetus "pulls" more semen from the mother to make itself. (A magical elaboration of this idea is that since females think about garden work constantly, their fetal thought anticipates and drains more "semen strength" in preparation.) The other belief is that a female fetus has a *tingu* (menstrual-blood organ), which makes the mother's vagina "hot," and therefore drains off more semen from the father during sexual contacts that create the fetus. During womb life, the sexes receive blood in differential amounts too. Essentially, girls have some of their mother's menstrual blood transmitted to their own menstrual-blood organs *in utero*. Later, during postnatal growth, this blood stimulates girls' psychobiological feminization (sexual and gender differentiation). Boys, by contrast, have no blood transmitted to their inactive *tingu*. Nor do they receive any

of their father's semen for use in their own semen organs: father's semen in both sexes merely creates fetal tissue. (Mystical aspects of these fetal processes are described below.)

Marriage is fully consummated after the birth of a child. Procreation results in final but distinct initiation ceremonies for the husband-father and wife-mother alike. The new father and his clan bestow a meat prestation on the wife's cognatic kin, especially patrilineal female kin, and her ritual sponsor, in public village ceremonies. Because procreation defines full adulthood for men and women, childless adults are not perceived as full persons. Nonetheless, all childlessness in a marriage is attributed to barrenness in the woman or contraceptive sorcery by other men (usually thought to be envious fellow villagers who wanted the woman for themselves). Sambias men dogmatically deny the possibility of sterility in a husband (see also Read 1951); indeed, such is never discussed in social discourse, and the only category for sterility is "barren woman" (*kwoliku*). Childlessness is thus an acceptable reason for taking a second wife, but not for divorce. Once a marriage is consummated, it is contracted for life and cannot be broken. A woman is rarely taken back by the donor group; when warfare occurs, a woman's ties with her natal group (i.e., enemies) are severed; divorce is thus extremely rare and usually instigated by a husband over his wife's perceived adultery; their children become jural members of the father's clan; and so only death breaks the marital bond.

GROWTH • Sambias believe that biological growth in humans results from ingestion of semen and several equivalent substances (mother's milk, pandanus nuts). Sexual intercourse for growth is described as: *pinu pungoogumoniapi* ("pushing" to "grow" by her), where *pinu* is an alternate verbal form of *dumono*. This idiomatic form may be applied to both male/male and male/female sexual contacts.

The value of semen for human growth comes in successive stages which differ according to the mode of semen transmission and one's sex. Initial growth for every fetus occurs through semen accumulations in the mother's womb. Postnatal growth in babies results mainly from breast-feeding. A woman's body is again treated as a biological transformer of semen in this regard: a man's in

TISSUE - blood, skin, muscle, bone (magically transformed)
SAC - VAG
WOMB - container

TECHNICAL
POETRY

127-244
127-244
127-244

seminations (especially oral) amass in and are transformed by his wife's breasts into mother's milk (*mu-tokeno*, breast food). Mother's milk is vital for the baby's growth. After breast-weaning, growth in early childhood is aided by eating pandanus nuts, which are seasonal but are treated as nearly equal nourishment to that of mother's milk. (The productive source of this nut food is one's father's trees and his "hard work" in tending and scaling them to procure the nuts.) Meat fed to children also contributes smaller increments to growth. Following weaning, though, girls continue to grow without further aids, whereas boys falter, staying weak and puny.

Male growth after weaning comes mostly from homosexual inseminations following initiation. This semen-nourishment form is male *monjapi'u*,* which men liken to breast-feeding (Herdt 1981:234-236). Oral sexual contacts feed semen into a boy's body, distributing sperm to his maturing skin, bones, skull, and producing changes toward masculinization (i.e., eventuating in biological puberty). The bulk of externally ingested semen goes to the boy's semen organ, where it accumulates as a "pool." This pool is drawn on after puberty for two purposes: it produces pubescent secondary sex-traits, especially musculature, hairiness on the body, and the development of a mature penis; and it provides semen for later sexual contacts. (The first sign of surplus semen in the body comes from seminal emissions in wet dreams.)

Girls require and are permitted no inseminations until marriage. Men believe that postmarital oral sexual contacts in cases of marriage before menarche provide a young wife's body with semen to stimulate the final "growth" changes necessary for childbearing. They also argue, as noted above, that women need semen to create breast milk. (Some women dispute these views and argue that a woman's body "naturally" creates breast milk; however, other women disagree with them on this matter.)

In sum, semen creates biological growth directly in initiates and wives through sexual contact, primarily fellatio, whereas it creates growth indirectly in fetus and newborn through being transformed by a woman's body into fetal tissue and milk. For the spouses, then, growth and procreation are concepts that refer to different

aspects of the same sexual contacts. For the offspring, as third-party semen recipient, postnatal growth is vital after birth, and long postpartum taboos prohibit marital sexual intercourse for fear the infant will be harmed (be stunted or ugly, an outcome that would shame the parents, especially the father, who would be viewed as lacking sexual restraint). In homoerotic activity, men offer boys the normative goal that semen "grows" them. But from the donor's standpoint, although initiates' growth does provide vicarious (because of homosexual promiscuity) long-term confirmation of the fellated's manhood, a fellator's growth is not of direct importance to a bachelor's personhood. Rather, homoerotic play takes precedence as the fellated's motive; the boy's growth is a latent social function of the bachelor's behavior (and is, I think, largely a rationalization on the men's part).

STRENGTH • Strength (*ierungdu*) is a key concept in Sambian culture; we shall here examine only its implications for semen transmission and thereby human maturation.

Strength is absolutely derived from semen and its symbolic equivalents, mother's milk and pandanus nuts. But more than those latter substances, semen masculinizes a person's body; there is no substitute for it. Unlike procreation or growth valuations, strength can be obtained directly only through semen. In Sambian thought, there is a general tendency to play down strength and stress growth as characteristic of the breast-feeding relationship. Suckling milk definitely grows a baby, but it is much less associated with strengthening it. Sperm in the womb forms the skeletal fetus; nursing helps create the baby's teeth, the hardening of its skin and skull. But milk is more for growth. The "strong" results of milk, Sambians believe, are transformations of semen: mother ingests sperm, which her breasts convert into milk. The "strong" part of milk is also more crucial for male infants, but it alone will not masculinize them. Thus, in analytic terms, strength is not intrinsically produced but is rather derived from the mother/infant relationship, itself a product of marriage. In male Sambian terms, however, strength is a transactional product that makes use of the father's secret sexual acquisition of semen from other men, which he feeds to his wife, whose body, in turn, has a "natural" capacity to store the fluid and turn it into breast food that strengthens and

As with growth, a father can indirectly add small amounts of strength over the years following weaning by providing meat and pandanus nuts to children. Cassowary meat, too, which may be eaten only by males, has fat (*moo-nugu*) that sometimes is treated as a second-rate semen equivalent (Herd 1981:110). (Other kinds of fat, e.g., from pigs or eels, are never likened to semen.) But these are small increments.

If one follows the semen cycle, we see a chain of links in which men strengthen persons: husband strengthens wife through initial fellatio; father strengthens baby through mother's milk; bachelor strengthens initiate through fellatio. Symbolically, homosexual fellatio provides the key ritualized strengthening of boys' postpartum bodies. As I have emphasized elsewhere (Herd 1981, 1982a), fellatio insemination is chiefly seen as growing a boy, the perceived outcome of which is strength. Culturally, the act of feeding/inseminating is equivalent to the verbal category *moniapi'u*, male nursing, the social/perceptual outcome of which is the state of being *jerungdu*, as seen in both its physical and psychosocial manifestations: large size, attractiveness, valor, forceful speech, sexual potency, and many social achievements, including progeny.

There is another secret source of strength that is important in male thought and which concerns the nonhuman sources for the replenishment of semen expended in sexual intercourse. Analytically, this semen valuation might be treated as separate from the "strength" concept because of its ontogenetic status in the male life cycle (adults give semen away and then must replace it to stay strong). But Sambias do not think of the matter in this way, for this replenishment is seen simply as a further extension of strength-building. Yet, since this replenishment practice is learned later in ritual life, and comes from trees, not men, we shall here examine it as an auxiliary replacement process.

In semen transactions, one person's loss is someone else's gain: semen, which embodies strength, depletes the donor, whose strength therefore diminishes. Fear of semen depletion is an important theme in male ritual discourse and ideology. (It is registered, too, in individual gender aberrations; Herdt 1980.) Concern with too frequent semen loss is an inhibitor of initial homosexual contacts, bachelors being cautioned to go easy. (Here, again, fellateds and fellators are at odds.) Yet bachelors' fears are not great; and the

early use of ritual mechanisms for semen replenishment in fellateds is played down. Among married men, the situation is quite different. A key pragmatic focus of fifth- and sixth-stage initiation ceremonies is teaching about secret ingestion of white milk-sap from trees, which is believed to replace semen "lost" to women. (Pandanus nuts are another semen replacement, though of lesser importance because they not always available.) This milk-sap comes from a variety of wild forest trees and vines, and the sap is referred to as *iaamoonahyu*, "tree mother's milk."

Trees are, in general, regarded as if they and their products were primarily of the female sex, e.g., as with pandanus trees. And myth also genderizes them this way (Herd 1981). Thus, there seems little doubt that the imagery and symbolization of the adult man's semen replenishment is not, then, symbolic insemination, but rather that of symbolic breast-feeding. This interpretation is confirmed by their drinking of sap from long aerial roots of pandanus nut trees: the trees are ritually referred to as "females," and the roots are likened to "women's breasts." We see, therefore, that semen comes initially from homosexual fellatio, which can later be replaced by milk-sap (and, to a lesser extent, by pandanus nuts and cassowary fat); and semen, in turn, is transformed into breast milk and fetal tissue by women. At rock bottom, male ideology seems to postulate that these forest trees create *new* semen.

SPIRITUALITY • The final category of semen valuations I shall refer to as spirituality, though it is not a marked category in Sambian culture or language. Spirituality is, in our terms, an animistic composite of both natural and supernatural elements. These elements include most noticeably spirit familiars (*numelyu*) of various sorts, believed to be *transmitted* (not transformed) through semen for males (and through blood for females). The reproduction of spiritual elements in persons and groups is entirely a social outcome of sexual intercourse over which individuals have little control.

Before describing familiars, two other matters deserve mention. The first is the concept of soul (*koogu*), a spiritual aspect of personhood that is related to sexuality and parenting. There is no clearly formulated theory of the soul's origin in individual development. Some men attribute it only to the father's sperm. Others say it is a combination of semen and material in the mother's

Don't know!
u'lu'lu'lu'
Don't know!
Don't know!
Don't know!
Don't know!
Don't know!

womb (they do not specify which parts of semen and/or blood). Though the womb is important, some people attribute the birth of a child's soul not to fetal life but to postnatal socialization. Men normatively relate the father's sperm to the child's soul in both sexes, especially in boys. This ambiguity is no doubt an expression of all persons' normative blood ties to mother and matrilineal kin. Yet, since the soul survives death and becomes a ghost, forest spirit (big men), or hamlet spirit (prominent women) haunting its clan's territory, its patrilineal origin and afterlife influence seem clear in sociopolitical organization. The skull and bones of the deceased also become powerful weapons in sorcery and are most efficacious when used by biological kinsmen, sons especially. In both cases—souls and bones—spiritual essences of semen are thought to survive death. The other concept is "thought" or *koontu*, which I gloss as personhood. "Thought" is the totality of one's experience, beliefs, and knowledge. Personhood is mainly a product of social training; its relation to body substance and biological inheritance is less certain. Socialization is its chief source, however, and this means that both mother and father influence personhood. (The ritual negation of maternal influences on boys' personhood is addressed by the process I have called "accountability"; Herdt n.d.)

Without question the most significant semen valuation for spirituality is the child's inheritance of spirit familiars. Transmission of familiars is ideologically clear and sex-linked. Boys inherit only their father's familiars via his semen. Girls inherit their mother's familiars through her blood. (Mother's milk, a semen derivative, is ignored in this domain.) Genealogical inheritance of clan familiars (i.e., totems) among males seems to derive from the semen that creates a son's body tissue. Later, males acquire other familiars attracted to them through ritual ceremonies: the nature of this attraction again implies that father's semen is instrumental. Shamanic familiars, transmitted through semen from father to son in the mother's womb, is a clear case of necessary patrilineal inheritance required for legitimate performance of the shamanic role (Herdt 1977). Other familiars, both personal and clan-related, ensure longevity, spiritual protection, or strength. Male ideology generally denies women such blessings from their natal clan familiars. Men may have their familiars "stolen" unwittingly by male

children, which leads to sickness or premature death. Homosexual inseminations do not transmit familiars to semen recipients (cf. Schieffelin 1976, 1977). Finally, men's ingestion of milk sap from trees is consistent with the perpetuation of their clan familiars (though this idea is not fully conscious in Sambian thought). We shall return to these points below.

SEMEN "VALUE" IN SOCIAL TRANSACTIONS

Who may and should have sexual intercourse with what categories of persons in Sambian society? What are the principles of these social transactions? In this section I examine social action in relation to the cultural ideas of semen valuation already described. The sociology of semen transactions involves two viewpoints. First, there are *direct* semen transactions between persons resulting from sexual intercourse. Second, there are *indirect* semen transactions with a third party believed to occur by the transformation of sperm into something else by a second party; whether the source of semen is human or nonhuman (i.e., trees), however, the semen transformers are always humans. A subcategory of indirect inseminations may be seen as *delayed exchanges* between social groups, the semen being returned to donor groups via former recipients in the subsequent generation. I will study each of these types in turn.

DIRECT SEMEN TRANSACTIONS • All sexual contacts are restricted by exogamous taboos and social norms. Sexual contacts are permissible only between unrelated people; that is, those related through common cognatic links, especially agnates, are forbidden sexual partners. Marriage should be arranged between different clans, preferably of different villages. Statistically, though, up to 50 percent of all marriages are contracted within certain hamlets; FZD marriage is normatively permitted in delayed-exchange marriage contracts; and MBD marriage, though frowned upon, occurs rarely when no alternate wife can be found (Herdt 1981). Homosexual contacts are likewise prohibited between all clansmen, matrilineal kin, age-mates, and with ritual sponsors. (Homosexual infractions occur, however, as between matrilineal cross-cousins, or distant kin not normally encountered, though these are unusual.) Male initiates' ritual sponsors are called "moth-

er's brother," a social title, since only some sponsors are actual or classificatory mother's brother. Nonetheless a boy's sponsor becomes, in effect, a pseudokinsman who combines both maternal and paternal attributes, making it very wrong for any sexual contact to occur between them. In general, all sexual contacts are highly regulated and tend to occur with people of other hamlets (who are potential or real enemies), so sexual contacts distinguish kin from nonkin, and friendly from hostile persons.

In direct sexual transactions, all the above cultural ideas of semen value come into play, but the domain of erotic play is especially important. Erotic play is a social motive and goal that applies mainly to adult men. Their motive for erotic play is sexual release, that is, orgasm. Boy-fellators never have orgasms in homosexual play. And men deny, in general, that women experience orgasm, though they believe women are lascivious and that some enjoy sexual play.

Men's enjoyment of erotic play changes through the life cycle. Some older boy-fellators do experience vicarious erotic pleasure from homosexual fellatio, as indicated by their reports (near puberty) of their own erections while fellingating a bachelor, or by certain feelings or body sensations during fellatio. Bachelors (fellateds) engage in homoerotic play to (in local idiom) "straighten their penises," that is, to reduce sexual tension/frustration, or to "feel *ilaiyu*" (here meaning pleasure) from orgasm. Men get erotic pleasure from copulating with their wives, first through fellatio, and then in genital-to-genital intercourse, which most men favor over fellatio. To reiterate: male/female oral sexual contacts, like those with boys, are regarded more as erotic play.

Male social ideology defines both homoerotic and heteroerotic play as transactions in which the older male is *always* the inseminator. No role reversals are ever situationally permitted. The older male is viewed as the socially active party who should control the behavior interchanges that lead to the insemination. A man's control over sexual contacts is established by the social norms regulating the behavioral conditions of sexual intercourse. Men are physically bigger than boys and most women. During intercourse the man either stands over his fellator (who *kneels*) or lays on top of his wife (in the "missionary" position), methods that allow a man instant freedom to withdraw from body contact at will. Men

are also usually years older than their insertees, either boys or women (even though men curiously regard younger wives as of like age and maturity; see Herdt 1981:177, 181). Again, these interactions are defined as asymmetrical: women and boys get semen, men get erotic pleasure. Most men are (consciously) uninterested in the erotic arousal of either boys or women, so direct sexual transactions emphasize the sexual excitement of the insertee.

In spite of the men's view, the concept erotic play admits of some social reciprocity between all sexual partners. Men grudgingly recognize that women have erotic interests; for instance, sexually experienced wives are rhetorically described as lascivious harlots consumed by insatiable erotic appetites (Herdt 1981:187). Perhaps this dogma is the men's response to knowing that women favor certain men over others as mates. Men also know that boys joke about fellatio among themselves and that initiates favor some bachelors over others in regard to the amount and taste of their semen.⁷ Bachelors likewise favor certain boys over others: those who are more attractive to them are either more or less sexually aggressive and/or willing to perform fellatio. These reciprocal aspects thus underscore the frame of play, and they are not found in notions of sex for procreation, growth, strength, or spirituality, all of which are merely passive outcomes of insemination as a one-way street.

Since semen is highly valued as a means to valuable social ends—personal strength, marriage, offspring, personhood—it should be conserved and wisely spent. Men assume that women and boys *desire their semen* for those social ends; no other motive is searched for in understanding why insertees engage in sexual intercourse. (We know the situation is more complex: for instance, boys must at first be coerced into fellatio; but men also "know" this.) The seeming personal conflict on men's part, at least in homosexual contacts, is that *they get only sexual release in return for their sperm*. They recognize this in idioms that depict the penis as having a mind of its own: for example, "that no good man down there [penis] gets up and we follow its nose [euphemism for glans penis]." Meaning: men inseminate from sexual impulse, almost against their own will. Here, then, we may see a perceived conflict between private impulses and rational norms.

This psychosocial conflict is felt in two other ways. First, women

are more prized as sexual outlets than are boys. Women are *owned*: this ownership is itself a contributing dynamic to the sexual excitement of Sambian men. Male/female relationships are, in general, filled with more power than are male/male contacts, for heterosexuality is more highly regulated. Sexually, women are also more powerful, for they can contaminate as well as deplete; and women deplete semen more than do boys. Moreover, sexual impulses leading to adultery are a tremendous social problem in Sambian society (see below). Second, when orgasm occurs it is treated as being beyond conscious control. Wet dreams are the best example.⁸ For women, breast-feeding may also apply: some women report that they experience *imbimboogu*, which they liken to orgasm, when feeding, although it is not clear yet what this social labelling of their experience means (see Stoller and Herdt, n.d.). All these points support the conclusion that individual sexual impulses are stronger than the social need for semen constraint in heterosexual versus homosexual contacts. They also suggest that Sambian men are later motivated more toward heterosexual relationships.

What seems to underlie this conflict is the fact that sex for erotic play is the only sexual mode that produces no social advantage to the semen donor. Because all ejaculation is potentially debilitating, and semen is a male's most valuable resource, all sexual contacts are viewed as a "careful metering of semen" (Gell 1975:252). Seen this way, erotic play represents what Gell (1975) refers to as a "nemesis of reproductivity": it makes no personal sense in the scheme of things, even though it is personally pleasurable. All other categories of direct sexual transactions may be defined as work, not play, for this reason: like other forms of work (e.g., gardening), sex for procreation, growth, and so forth produces social products. One's semen is spent to reproduce heirs and perpetuate one's clan. With this view in mind I will now contrast other cultural ideas pertaining to heterosexual and homosexual contacts.

The idea of procreation applies only to male/female sexual contacts. In native theory all heterosexual contacts, oral or vaginal, contribute to a woman's reproductive competence. In practice, however, only early marital contacts are treated this way: oral sex is infrequent after a woman bears children. My impression is that both men and women in later years prefer genital-to-genital contact (and I think most women always prefer vaginal sex). Though

homosexual transactions are not procreative (but cf. individual boys' fears of becoming pregnant [Herdt 1981] and similar beliefs about male pregnancy elsewhere [Meigs 1976; Williams 1936c]), semen in boys does assist in their overall attainment of reproductive competence as adults.

The concepts of growth and strength are applied to both homosexual and heterosexual transactions. In theory, boy-fellators as semen recipients "use" sexual contact first to grow and then to get strong. Until third-stage initiation this norm holds; youths are thereafter accorded biological maturity and may no longer serve as insertees. (By definition, a Sambian man who sought semen from another male would be terribly stigmatized as unmanly; and to do so with a boy—pederastic fellatio—would be morally unconscionable; Herdt 1980.) Growth and strength apply differentially to women as semen recipients. Essentially, all heterosexual fellatio grows and strengthens a woman until she is a mother. Later oral sex does not grow a woman, for she is viewed as biologically mature. It does replenish her strength, however; a sort of perpetual fountain-of-youth men must give up after bachelorhood. Indeed, men complain that women are healthier and outlive them because of this constant source of orally ingested strength. (In this sense, a wife is like a boy-fellator.) Vaginal sex is generally believed to contribute neither growth nor strength to a woman: instead, indirectly, a man's sperm grows and strengthens fetus and infant.

Finally, the concept of spirituality applies unequally to direct sexual transactions. No transmission of spirit familiars occurs between males and females. None is imparted to one's wife: she is simply *one* source of the transmission of soul and familiars to one's offspring. Again, men believe that only sons inherit father's familiars (either indirectly, through sperm via mother, or directly, through cult ceremonies that call forth one's father's familiars after his death). A daughter's familiars come only from her mother; but her soul is linked (the notion is vague) to her father and his clan territory, though not irrevocably.⁹ Moreover, there is absolutely no sense that a boy-fellator acquires his familiars from any bachelor-fellated; but the idea is neither here nor there, since Sambians never seem to consider the possibility.¹⁰ Analytically, though, we should underline that their folk model of spiritual transmission keeps familiars discreetly in clans and firmly embedded in the

genitor's procreative role. Here we see a firm separation between spirituality and sexuality, on the levels both of ideology and social action. The division between spiritual and material reproduction in marriage is especially notable (cf. Tuzin 1982).

There is one other notion, which we may define as spiritual, that involves direct homosexual transactions. *Kwolaalyuwaku*:* a multivalent concept referring to masculine decorations and ritual paraphernalia (as a category term) which is also a ritual secret pseudonym for semen. (It is also close to *kweiaalyu-uaku*, which literally means "sun's white grease," an alternate for cassowary fat [*kaionwugu moo-nugu*]). The semantic referent of the semen aspect is esoteric, yet clearly signifies a collective semen pool. This pool is perceived as the semen contained in the bodies of all men living within neighboring hamlets: it therefore reflects the ritual cult and the confederacy. The idea is that boys have access to this pool, which they can tap into through homosexual insemination, strengthening themselves. Symbolically, then, *kwolaalyuwaku* is a metaphor for the men's collective cult.

But on the individual level, the concept is bidirectional. For a long time I was skeptical of men's statements that it *strengthened themselves* to inseminate many boys. How could this be? Men argue that just as a boy draws strength from numerous men, who deposit their semen in his reserve for future use, so men are kept strong by having their sperm safely contained in many boys, who are likened to a sort of magical string of semen depositories for one's substance, spread throughout society. Should a man or any of his semen recipients get sick, other recipients remain strong and healthy. And since recipients harbor parts of one's sperm (strength) inside them, so, too, one is kept healthy (in sympathetic-contagious magical thought). A woman lacks this protection: she is not a cult initiate, and her semen comes from only one man, her husband. Nor is a man likewise protected by inseminating women or creating children: the concept is not extended beyond homosexual contacts. Thus, semen not only bestows but maintains strength, the only concrete evidence known to me that explains why homosexual

* *Kwol*, marks male; *aalyu*, water; *waku*, a type of strong betel nut and a cover term for certain decorations. Sometimes the term is shortened to the secret name, *Kweiwaku*, which men use explicitly to refer to "the semen of all men."

insemination is less depleting than that of heterosexuality. In this ritual sense, homosexual practices are placed within a spiritual framework and are opposed to heterosexuality and marriage.

All the above sexual contacts concern normatively appropriate semen transactions between donors and recipients. *Illicit* heterosexual semen transactions (adultery) reveal the social boundary of ideas about exclusive jural claims over a man's semen. All adultery is severely condemned; a man may use violence against a wife suspected of it. Therefore, it is hidden until discovered, when the spouses fight. If a husband is accused of adultery, or of wanting to take a second wife, the fight is called *kweikoonmulu*, literally "semen fight." Semen fights entail dreadful cursing and brawls. This adultery can be seen as "stealing another woman's semen," though it involves much more, of course. Accusations of a wife's adultery (which is rarer, for Sambias treat adulterous women harshly) also concern semen in two ways: fears that a husband's penis has been contaminated by intercourse with his wife's vagina after sex with another man (thought to bring him sickness); and questions about the wife's lover's semen contributions to a future child. In sum, adultery reveals that marriage bestows the right of exclusive spousal control over semen and insemination exchange as scarce resources.

What are the social effects of these direct sexual transactions on group relationships? Let me examine the most general latent and manifest functions of sexual contacts in the same generation. First, semen flow mirrors marriage transactions between groups. Semen may only be normatively transacted between persons of groups who can intermarry, that is, homosexual contact is forbidden with matrilineal kin and clansmen. The same clan that donates a wife thus has clansmen who are appropriate homosexual partners (cf. Kelly 1976). Affines of the same generation (e.g., brothers-in-law) are especially appropriate homosexual contacts. The paradigm of this affinal homoerotic bond would be a young man who marries a younger woman and who can inseminate her younger initiate brother, either consanguineal or classificatory WiB (cf. Serpenti, chap. 7, and Sørum, chap. 8, this volume). This man manifestly inseminates his wife to grow and strengthen her, and to procreate, and may (along with his fellow clansmen) inseminate her younger brother for erotic play, the effect of which is to grow

and strengthen the boy. These sexual transactions would define a man and his clan as semen donors, while his wife and brother-in-law would be recipients. Yet ego's clan is also a wife recipient from his younger homosexual partner's donor clan. This set of social transactions is common in Sambia life.

Second, marital/sexual bonds tend to create closer political ties between unrelated groups. Sambia engage in marriage and homosexual contacts only with propinquitous groups in the same confederacy. One does not receive or give semen to true, intertribal enemies. Affinal ties, in particular, create closer political affiliations for mutual defense between and within hamlets. Affinal ties also establish marriage contractual obligations and sentimental bonds that persist in the next generation, influencing alignments among hamlets.

Third, semen metaphorically defines political power: inseminators are more powerful than recipients in virtually every sense. All male persons eventually serve as both direct semen donors and as recipients. All females are always direct recipients, or indirect donors, to their offspring whereas males constitute a category of both direct givers and takers. And their sexual status, of course, flip-flops during the male life cycle. Symbolically, I think, Sambia define the administration of semen as a masculine act, whereas the taking in of semen is a feminine act. One of the manifest functions of the secrecy of homosexual fellatio is to hide from women the shame men feel at having earlier performed in this feminine way (Herd 1981:chap. 8). A latent function of homosexual secrecy is to rationalize and disguise men's use of boys as a sexual outlet. By the same token, the ritual secret of homosexual growth and strength unites all males as a category against all females. This social link, which also mystifies the nature of male/female relationships, politically reinforces male power and thereby perpetuates the men's ritual cult (Herd 1982b).

INDIRECT SEMEN TRANSACTIONS • This mode of social transaction is based on the symbolic principle that sperm is transmitted to someone whose body transforms it into something else useful to a third party. The paradigm is the nuclear family triad: father → mother → child. The alternative form of indirect insemination views men as replenishing their semen from tree sap,

which their bodies turn into semen: tree → man → semen recipient. Having already described direct sexual contacts, these semen transformations can be easily outlined.

We have seen that sexual intercourse between spouses involves all cultural ideas of semen value except spirituality. Now when we examine the effects of her husband's semen on the prospective infant, the woman's role as transformer is clarified at two developmental points. First, as we have seen, her orally ingested sperm is specifically transformed into breast milk. This milk is stored for the infant's nourishment after birth. Subsequent semen from vaginal intercourse is stored and transformed in the woman, converted by her womb into fetal tissue, as we saw. Both the intrauterine formation of the child, as well as its postnatal breast-feeding, are indirect products of the father's sperm.

In this type of indirect transaction, there is a subtle interplay of cultural beliefs being applied. Erotic play occurs between the spouses, leading to procreation; but the concept is not extended to the transformative outcome, since the father never has sexual intercourse with his offspring. Indeed the paradigm of sex as work suggests that woman, as wife/mother, is *the means of production* man needs to effect children's adult reproductive competence. Semen is indispensable for reproduction, yet so is a woman's body (breasts and womb). Moreover, no matter how much the men's ideology attempts to claim procreation as solely their production, a wife is vital for social reproduction: she not only gives birth but nourishes and cares for heirs, transforming semen into strength. She also transmits her husband's spirit familiars to sons, and her own to daughters. Both parents contribute to the child's personhood or thought; but men believe only they produce its soul. Following weaning, a girl is believed to mature on her own, but a boy needs more semen for growth and strength. Thus, a boy indirectly taps the semen pool of his father through homosexual contacts with other men who substitute, in his father's place, as ritual semen donors, motivated out of erotic play. The sexual cycle is completed when this son becomes an inseminator, and his sister is traded for his wife, sister and brother having reached sexual maturity.

The other form of indirect transaction consists in men ingesting the white tree saps. It may seem odd, here, to juxtapose this secret

ritual practice with reproduction. But Sambia male ideology treats tree-sap ingestion as a part of the whole adult cycle of reproduction; and, in my experience, men directly associate tree-sap drinking as normal and regular links in a chain of psychosexual activities that are as much a part of everyday life as their own sexuality. Drinking tree sap is not actually taught until a man's last initiation, when he is a new father. Thereafter, men regularly ingest it at various times, but always in abundance after sexual intercourse with their wives. Men are thus preserving their biological maleness (semen) and restoring their strength. Neither erotic play, growth, nor procreation as cultural ideas are applied to contacts with trees. Drinking tree sap simply regenerates semen and preserves health against depletion. So this ritual practice may be considered a defensive tactic—and the more so because it is secret—yet it is also more than that.

Drinking tree sap also has a latent creative function: the creation of *new* semen that flows into the societal pool of sperm. Sambia men do *not* view it this way: to them, drinking tree sap merely replaces what they have personally lost. But, besides that, they see their society as a "closed system," its resources limited, for a variety of reasons I shall not here detail; suffice it to say that their religion is animistic and their ethos dominated by warrior values that recognize adulthood as a personal achievement which is, nevertheless, carefully structured through a strict ritual system of norms and customs that regulate people, marriage, sexuality, and semen. This view is predicated on a cyclical model of time (cf. Leach 1961). Seasonal movements, ceremonies, and customary transactions repeat in regular cycles. They do not recognize that their population is now expanding or that the concomitant stress on their resources (means of production) may be increasing; nonetheless, men believe that they expend sperm and that they get more from trees. Let us now consider the implications of this view for their use of the concept spirituality.

The trees from which men acquire sap are on clan territory. The land itself is one's main material inheritance from previous generations; it is held in agnatic corporate estate, though men own specific tracts of it from which they exploit resources (game, pandanus nuts, milk-sap trees). Land is coveted and defended against other groups; it is central to a clan's residential and territorial

organization. It is guarded also by clan spirits. Ritual practices, too, are a social heritage, customs valued in themselves and for group identity, having been handed down from previous generations. It seems obvious, therefore, that the social ideology of trees provisioning new semen through the bodies of clansmen is a latent function of the regeneration of patrilineality.

Patrilineality thus provides land and trees, ritual practices, and the social personae needed to transform tree sap into sperm. Tree sap without an adult male body is just tree sap. The male body—the product of a long process of procreation with outside women and homosexual insemination from outside men, of magical ritual treatment making it fertile and procreatively potent—is the instrument that regenerates society. Tree sap maintains maleness and masculine personhood. It regenerates one's clan, its patriline and hamlet-based warriorhood, and thus the community itself. These social identities are conceptually placed, in time and space, through concentric social networks based on a magical notion of successive degrees of purest patrilineal substance. Hence, male ideology claims that father, son, and clansmen are of one semen substance, one common origin place, one residential location—all elements of genealogical ancestry that fan out to embrace a pool of spirit familiars, ancestral spirits, and the semen underlying all. Whether the trees are seen as beginning or finishing this process is beside the point: Sambia have a cyclic view of their system that makes tree sap pivotal in a greater chain of being. What is the nature of semen value in this whole system? This problem forms the last part of my chapter.

DELAYED EXCHANGE • The final category of indirect semen transactions concerns exchanges across generations between groups. This subject is very complex indeed, so I shall merely sketch contours of the system of intergroup relationships. What do groups give and receive? And do their exchanges of semen balance out across time?

The key principle of delayed exchange is that groups who exchange women also exchange semen through homosexual contacts. Group A takes a woman from group B. They become affines. Their initiated males of different cohort at different life cycle stages engage in homosexual intercourse both ways (giving and receiving

Flamboyant, flamboyant — structure of the relationship is not clear.

semen). Children of groups A and B become matrilineal kin in the following generation. In delayed exchange (infant betrothal or bride-service) marriage, group A later returns a woman to group B. In direct exchange (sister exchange) they will not. Marriage between generation 2 of these groups is frowned upon, except in the case of delayed exchange infant betrothal to father's sister's daughter (FZD), that is, a daughter of group A goes back to group B. Yet actual FZD marriage (addressed as "sister" by her MBSO) is also disliked; more commonly FZD is traded for another woman from a different group. Homosexual contacts between generation 2 are also forbidden. In effect, generation 2 shares ties of blood and semen: boys of group A were formed from the blood of a woman of group B, and their body tissue came from their father, some of whose own semen may have come from males of group B. These boys (of group A), must turn to a third, unrelated group, in order to take both a wife and semen.

What do groups A and B exchange? Group A gets a woman as garden producer and maker of babies. She reproduces heirs to perpetuate group A. Group B gets food gifts and a promise of a return woman (possibly her daughter) in the next generation. Boys of group A get semen from bachelors of group B, and vice versa. Homosexual insemination ensures masculinization and adult reproductive competence. Boys of groups A and B may receive ritual sponsors from each other's group (in purest form, MB). This man is the boy's guardian and teacher in sexual matters (remember they are forbidden to have sex). So each group provides boys of the other group with nurturance and sexual tutorship. In generation 1, a man may copulate with both his wife and her younger brother. The man gets a wife and another homoerotic transitional sexual outlet. His wife and her younger brother both receive semen: growth, strength. And the younger brother (or, if not himself, his sons or clansmen) will eventually receive a return wife, the brother-in-law's daughter, which the latter's sperm created and nourished.

What does intermarriage do to social relationships? First, marriage transforms groups from unrelated enemies to less hostile affines. Where homosexual contacts occur with groups who are politically hostile, and between which warfare and masculine competition are common, marriage places affines in a set of productive relationships where none existed before. Second, they exchange

women as resources. It is in the wife-giver's best interests to ensure that the marriage is productive in every way, so that they receive a woman in return. Marital sex for procreation is productive social work; it outweighs erotic play in homosexual contacts and results in social sanctions against adultery and barrenness. Third, women and semen thus become circulating commodities. Unrelated groups exchange semen, on both sides, with the wife-donors getting a wife out of the bargain. The initiated boys of both groups require semen to complete their personhood, while the men need wives as sexual outlets and procreators to step out of the adolescent stage of homosexuality into the adult stage of marriage and family. Semen, therefore, although a crucial commodity, is secondary to women as a commodity: without wives men cannot attain full personhood. Even though semen is needed to attain manhood, and though it provides a village with the new warrior recruits it requires to protect and expand itself, this warriorhood goes for naught unless women are available for the group's economic and biological reproduction.

Finally, the value of semen as instigator of social reproduction at both the individual and group levels pits males against one another in symmetrical competition. This competition takes two forms, intragroup and intergroup transactions (Forge 1972). The one is intrahamlet individualized competition for homosexually procured semen in order "to grow" and have first pick of wives needed for reproduction later. Here, boys as age-mates try to outperform one another in a contest to achieve maturity first. (In fact, older brothers encourage their younger toward this end.) The other competition is between hamlets, and, in a wider sense, between a confederacy of intramarrying hamlets vis-à-vis the other confederacies of Sambia society. Men aspire to make their confederacy outdo others in war and overall productivity. Hamlets also act together to find women for their bachelors so as to produce more children—potential warriors and females for the marriage trade—compared with other groups. A social race is on: its outcome is social reproduction. Social conflicts within hamlets do erupt over men competing with one another for wives and resources. Conflicts over women with peers in other hamlets also occur, sometimes precipitating warfare. But intrahamlet competition is overshadowed by the normative stress on achieving social

maturity in concert with the best interests of one's own village group. Ultimately, social survival requires competing neighbors too, for they provide women and semen, and are the best defense—strength in numbers—against attack from true enemies elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explored Sambia semen valuations from several different points of view: what seemed at first esoteric, vulgar, and trivial seems now complex and symbolically significant in understanding native concepts of sexual contacts and the structure of social relations and modes of production in Sambia culture. Ritualized homosexuality belongs to this symbolic field and cannot be understood, either subjectively or objectively, except in relation to the meaningfulness of this field seen over time.

Melanesians have typically ignored ritualized homosexuality, especially in the construction of comparative models of social organization and culture. Even heterosexual activities have, in general, been scarcely studied as such; and the meaning of the temporal and symbolic structuring of heterosexuality has not been accorded much analytic value beyond the vague category "sexual antagonism," which has been implicitly used to support whatever explanatory model an author advanced (Herdt and Poole 1982). But what matters more, for my purposes, is that the fluids of sexual and reproductive acts—semen, blood, and milk—have been narrowly studied as entities and artifacts in exchange, or as parts of the growth process in reference only to individual development or societal functioning: they have not been seen as symbolic objects and commodities, expressed through concepts and social transactions, whereby the natives reproduce the identities of persons, social roles, clans, and intergroup relationships across generations.

Past analyses of semen and blood as culturally constructed concepts in New Guinea belief systems, for instance, reveal this structural-functional emphasis. These fluids have long been seen as important in native notions of sexual temperament and gender (e.g., Mead 1935). The great interest in procreation beliefs evinced in the 1920s, first raised by Malinowski (1913) among Aborigines, and then in Trobriand descent ideology (Malinowski 1929, 1954), illustrates this interest. Writers questioned whether natives were

ignorant of procreation, and what this ignorance of conception meant (Ashley-Montague 1937; Róheim 1945; and see Bettelheim 1955; Leach 1966; Spiro 1968). We see now that denial of semen valuation in kinship and procreation belongs to a broader cultural ideology of social regeneration and reproduction (Weiner 1978, 1980). In Highlands studies, from Read's (1951, 1954) work onward, ethnographers have noted consistent concerns about the role of blood and semen in notions of the body, sex, and gender. Accounts of the norms of sexual contacts, dogmas about conception, sterility, and reproductive competence, and ideas about exchange of menstrual blood and semen between people as patrilineal kin and affines, all illustrate how ethnographers functionally related body fluids to sociosexual relationships and the positioning of persons in networks of social groups (e.g., see R. Berndt 1965; Glasse and Meggitt 1969; Langness 1967; Meggitt 1964; Newman 1964; Reay 1959; A. Strathern 1972; M. Strathern 1972; Wagner 1967). Preoccupation with the exchange of sexual fluids between groups has, in particular, addressed Western concerns with "discrete acts of giving and receiving" (Weiner 1980:71; cf. for example, A. Strathern 1969a, 1972). More recent theorists have gone beyond exchange constructs, or structural models that view body treatment as "reflections" of society's divisions and boundaries (Douglas 1966), to conceptualize semen, blood, and other entities as the culturally valued materials out of which gender and reproductivity are symbolically constructed and perpetuated (Gell 1975; Herdt 1981; Lindenbaum 1972; Lipuma 1981; Meigs 1976; Panoff 1968; Poole 1981, 1982; M. Strathern 1978, 1980; Weiner 1980).

With the Sambia, and other societies reported upon in this book, we are dealing with peoples whose cultural systems use sexual relationships and fluids as objects and commodities to recreate social order in successive generations, for these are among the scarcest and most vital resources in this process. Weiner has stated this view succinctly.

As these resources circulate through time, i.e., as they are embedded in others, they produce value in others because they embody a shared code that speaks directly to the processes through which identities such as clan, ancestors, kinship, or kingship, actively are

transmitted through generations. Transmission, however, is not habitual, nor is it automatic. The work of reproduction is enacted with a counter awareness of the force of decay, rotting, and death. A cultural system is grounded in the very paradox of things running out. . . . The regenerating/degenerating paradox found in nature is no less understood as the very same paradox underlying the attachment of individuals to each other through time.

(Weiner *n.d.*:7-8)

Semen and other fluids are not just things that *are*: they have a value beyond themselves for extending one's personhood—that is, existence—beyond the present. No doubt many experiences of these material things (e.g., fluids, sex, and others' bodies) entail this transcendent attitude. Sambia spiritual concepts speak to this issue directly,¹¹ just as the conflict between sex as work or sex as play addresses it indirectly. "Religion is an art of making sense out of experience, and like any other art, say, poetry, it must be taken symbolically, not literally," Firth (1981:596) recently said. His view is certainly germane to the ritual treatment of semen.

The social fact of semen for Sambia is that it is a scarce resource that circulates through time. Its material and phenomenological attributes make it usable as a commodity that can be consumed, stored, and given away. Its perceived use-value derives from the fact that (1) sperm can be "contained" indefinitely in bodies, and (2) then be seemingly passed, from person to person, without changing its essence or efficacy; (3) it represents an investment of labor (food, care, procreation of children), acquired through direct individual sexual transaction or indirect transformation (sperm into milk), that can be given or received; (4) in being transmitted semen extends its transformative value to make the recipient more reproductively and socially competent; (5) these recipients, in turn, will produce more wealth and future individuals who will fill productive roles and fill out social groups; and (6) by so doing, semen transactions recreate the social links between the living and the dead, the worldly and the spiritual realms, between ego and others, and between the divisions of society.

Semen extends its value as commodity through four types of transformations that underlie related modes of "biological" reproduction among Sambia. First, semen through oral sex strengthens and finishes the growth of wives. Second, it acts through wives'

bodies to create fetuses, and becomes milk to feed babies after birth. Third, semen is "fed" through fellatio, ritually disguised as "male breast-feeding," to strengthen and grow homosexual partners. Last, sperm is produced in men by drinking certain tree saps, symbolically considered the "breast milk" of these trees, thus regenerating them and making more sperm available. In this last mode of production men, as biological transformers of tree sap into sperm, are recipients, not donors, but the semen cycle remains unchanged: men turn back to society as the dominant donors. Thus, semen as a commodity regulates and generates marriage and the family, clans and village units, and makes possible the ritual cult, which requires, in particular, secret homosexual intercourse.

In Sambia social reality, individuals are born and die, but semen flows through them (along with blood) to recreate society. Individuals pass on. Growth, as an aspect of these individuals, dies with them. But strength persists: in the form of bones and skin tissue in offspring; in spirit familiars; in ghosts and spirits; and in the deceased's bones, which after death may be used for sorcery. Erotic play passes on too, is useless, except insofar as it has effected growth, strength, and procreation. Sex as work is far more productive, if less exciting: family and heirs result. In this model, a woman's body as sexual-procreative property belongs to her husband, as much as his semen belongs only to her. Her blood, after marriage, belongs to his clan, through his offspring, which must be "paid for" in birth ceremonies. Both fluids are necessary for procreation, but it is semen that men "own" and control best. The "natural" fact that semen can be drunk (passed on) like any drinkable fluid sustains the view that it is a circulating, valuable, unchanging resource, which must be, nonetheless, internally transformed in certain ways by certain persons to achieve the desired ends.

The most powerful social fact of homosexual contacts is that they may only occur between potential enemies who may become affines (generation 1) and then kin (generation 2). Semen transactions not only define who is related and in what salient ways but homosexual contacts predicate the partners' relationship as prospective affines in their generation, which makes their children matrilineal kin in their own. Structurally, social ties based on blood and semen should not be mixed via sexual relationships:

semen relates nonkin, who in turn, through women as links, have descendants sharing semen and blood. (A male ego may receive semen from his brother-in-law, whose children, that is, the ego's sister's children, possess her husband's semen and her blood.) Ties of semen, and blood (via women traded), flow in the same direction. The seeming exception is marriage to actual (not classificatory) FZD, a marriage Sambia frown upon. Such marriages are acceptable only when the FZD cannot be traded for a woman from another group. In these rare marriages, however, spouses share no blood, though they may indirectly share semen via their fathers' homosexual contacts with each others' groups. Thus, the cultural principle not to mix blood and semen is contravened, and people resist such marriages. In general, this cultural linkage (blood and semen) makes heterosexual relationships more socially important and multiplex than homosexual contacts. Both men and women, their bodies and fluids, are needed to achieve biological and social reproduction in this model (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1949; see Pettit 1977:70-72).

This view does not explain ritualized homosexuality among Sambia; it merely elucidates the phenomenon in broader terms. For to seek causes, not just of the sociocultural system of values, but of individual acts of homosexual behavior, we should have to examine its individual subjectivity and developmental context, according them an analytic role I have here ignored. Yet, Sambia do shed light on other, similar systems of social reproduction in Melanesia.

These systems should be seen as a continuum in relation to the value of semen. At one extreme, semen is regarded as rare and precious, so that it must be conserved and regulated, but not *replenished*. Here, we might see situated groups such as the Enga, Kuma, and Gahuku-Gama (Meggitt 1964; Read 1951, chap. 5, this volume). Sexual antagonism seems associated with the low social status of women here. At the other extreme would be societies in which semen is just another fluid, not regulated or conserved, so that it plays little or no role in descent ideology, such as among the matrilineal Trobriands (Malinowski 1929). Here, sex antagonism is weak and women's social status is high. A third type of system could be seen as one that highly values semen that comes from homosexual contacts first flowing to

sexual contacts, as among Kaluli and Marind-anim (Van Baal 1966, chap. 3, this volume; Schieffelin 1982). Sambia, who also use semen replenishment techniques, would represent the extreme end of this valuation of semen. Among these groups, sex antagonism and women's social status is either ambiguous or, as among Sambia, high and low, respectively. The exact arrangement of such a typology is hinted at by Lindenbaum (chap. 9).

What of the nature of the value accorded semen as a commodity in such Melanesian systems? Here, the gender researcher thinks immediately of the multiple facets of fetishism. We must distinguish between what Freud (1962) called erotic fetishization (a person or thing, e.g., shoe, breast, semen, creates sexual excitement as a representation of an unconscious object), and what Marx called fetishism in commodities. I have elsewhere considered erotic fetishization in relation to ritual flutes and Sambia homosexuality (Herdt 1982a). Though much remains to be said, I shall not pursue that discussion here. Yet it is clear that *because* the semen of most males *looks* the same, one can sustain the cultural illusion (Freud 1961) that the same substance is being circulated through time and space. Of semen as fetishized commodity, however, more can be said.

The value of semen does not merely derive from its economic "exchange value." Its significance stems from being necessary to socially and biologically reproduce the cultural identities described above. But because of its portable properties, and its relationship to sexuality, semen comes to take on the characteristics of a commodity in both male/male and male/female sexual contacts. What is the nature of this commodity? Godelier's (1978:155) comment on fetishism and magic is illuminating:

The "exchange value" of a commodity is the value relationship established in exchanging the commodity for other commodities. This relationship does not create the "value" of the commodity because the value is born with the productive process of the commodity and not in the process of its circulation between producers. Circulation does not create value. The value *exists* before the commodity is circulated. Once commodities circulate or are exchanged, they enter into value relationships which may or may not correspond to their value. They may be sold for more or less than their value. 208

Semen may be "sold," to extend Godelier's metaphor, for homosexual access to a boy and marriage to his sister (Serpenti 1965:164ff.). But that mystified value of semen existed before the marriage exchange took place. For Sambia, again, it is the symbolic place of semen in the overall productive process of social relationships that compels actors to assign it use-value as a scarce resource. The point is that their cultural ideology bestows multivalent value on semen: the value is not intrinsic simply because sperm circulates or can be exchanged.

But we should not overlook the mystifying and rationalizing effects of this ideology for the politics of the men's secret cult. (We have, after all, been dealing with *male* ideology.) By positioning semen as a valued resource, men are placed firmly in control of *their part* of the means of sociobiological reproduction. And what is their part? It is the crucial role semen plays in every cultural domain described above; indeed, its biological role is unique in the generation of growth and strength in initiates (via homosexual contacts). Yet in regard to infants, growth and strength and procreation can occur only through the mother. Attitudes toward spiritual aspects of personhood reflect a tenuous hold, at best, on exclusive claims to patrilineal allegiance. Semen as commodity may thus exploit the rhetorical, paramount role of men in society. But the value relationships of semen are so caught up in the complementary requirement for women's procreative powers that the regeneration of social identities is conditional: affines and enemies live in close proximity with divided loyalties. Women's social status, interpersonally, not normatively, is probably higher and more consequential than men's rhetoric allows. Absolute control of sexual intercourse, through restriction of sexual access to women, female avoidance taboos for initiates, and obligatory homosexual activities, helps ensure the stability of the men's part in the social-reproductive process. The metering of sperm, so crucial for social development, keeps boys and women "in their place." Thus it is no mystery why Sambia severely sanction adultery, why childhood sexual experimentation is forbidden, or why men keep tree milk-sap drinking secret. If semen were free, easy, or readily at hand, its value would deflate. The traffic in women and, perhaps, the sexual activity with boys, would be undermined.

But only perhaps. This political economy perspective does

Children become initiates and then men: at each life cycle stage they gain and lose certain social trappings of power and responsibility as their capital (e.g., semen) changes. Insemination in a boy is, in a sense, a gift to him, his reward for erotic play. Inseminating a wife is different: the value is on the "hard work" of making this investment pay off. Next to semen, a man's sisters are his most important capital in the marriage business (Van Baal 1970). Here, direct and delayed semen transactions become complex indeed.

Until he has given in return, the receiver is "*obliged*," expected to show his gratitude toward his benefactor, or, at least, to have regard for him, to refrain from using against him all the weapons he otherwise might, to pull his punches, lest he be accused of ingratitude and stand condemned by "what people say," which is what gives his actions their social meaning.

(Bourdieu 1977:6)

Yes, the semen given in a homosexual act may not, after all, be free: it can be purchased at the expense of the boy's sister. If so, the two males are bound to refrain from direct conflict (e.g., see Allen 1967; Meggitt 1964). If not, the recipient is at least obliged to remember where some of his strength came from. At any rate, these two parties (semen donors and recipients), or their children, can become affines and then kin in time.

Understanding Sambia ritualized homosexuality depends upon this diachronic view. The interactors live in the same small world: they are not going anywhere. Resources that flow out of one's group are destined to find their way back, if not in this generation, then in the next. Cyclical models of time have this reciprocal expectation built into them. Semen transactions, in homosexual and heterosexual contacts, imply this circularity; hence our use of *ritualized* as an adjective. It is not just the sex of one's partner, the social motives or outcomes, or the commodity value of semen that informs homosexual acts: the *time* of ritualization counts, too, in their social meaning.

Everything takes place as if the ritualization of interactions had the paradoxical effect of giving time its full social efficacy, never more potent than when nothing *but* time is going on. "Time," we say, "is on his side"; time can also work against one's side.

is heavily ritualized, as in the dialectic of offence and vengeance, there is still room for strategies which consist of playing on time, or rather the *tempo*, of the action, by delaying revenge so as to prolong the threat of revenge. To restore to practice its practical truth, we must therefore reintroduce time into the theoretical representation of a practice which, being temporally structured, is intrinsically defined by its *tempo*.

(Bourdieu 1977:7-8)

The practice of homosexual behavior is embedded in a cyclical tradition of semen transactions that made one's mother and father, and will define one's own future relationships with boys and women. Identities follow from this semen flow. The tempo of such an ancient practice is to be found not only in this day's contacts or that's, but in the last generation and the next. The system sets rigid constraints, but individuals and groups follow strategies around broad time posts to maximize the value of themselves and their resources. Time does not forget who gave and who received semen.

NOTES

1. Research among Sambia (1974-1976, 1979, 1981) has been supported by the following institutions, and I gratefully acknowledge their assistance: the Australian-American Education Foundation; the Australian National University, Research School of Pacific Studies; the National Institute of Mental Health; the Department of Psychiatry, Neuropsychiatric Institute, UCLA; the Department of Anthropology, Stanford University; the Stanford Center for the Study of Youth Development, Stanford University; and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. For their very helpful comments on this chapter, I wish to thank Michael Allen, Jan Van Baal, Nancy Lutkehaus, Fitz John Poole, Eric Schwimmer, Marilyn Strathern, and Donald Tuzin.
2. These cultural categories cross-cut various symbolic domains and social arenas, such as taboos (*kumaaku*), ritual (*pueiyu*), food sharing, myth, etc. One certainly could abstract from action and rhetoric the normative and metaphoric operations of these categories (cf. Wagner 1967, 1972). As I indicate below, sexual interaction is a conscious, although not always marked, frame for acting and speaking among Sambia, but I cannot here provide a complete description of all its manifestations.
3. See Herdt 1981 for conceptual models. This essay considers mainly the male viewpoint, and it is not meant to be a complete cultural analysis, by any means.

4. Sambia tend to treat and think of semen as an energy force in individuals and society which may be compared, by direct analogy, to Freud's concept of libido. The analogy is apt in several ways: this energy force circulates through others (e.g., as subjects) who may be taken in (e.g., as objects) via semen or its equivalents (mother's milk); and it can be dammed up or released—the imagery of the hydraulic model is apt (cf. Heider 1979:78-79, who thinks otherwise). We could also distinguish, following Federn (1952), between subject-libido (energy available to self qua subject) and object-libido (energy available for investment in objects). Technically, I think, semen as a symbol among Sambia is used narcissistically (object-libido invested in ego is narcissistic libido) in self/other interactions.
5. My use of the terms *commodity* and *fetishization* are not meant to indicate a homology with Marx's usage, which was tied, of course, to the specific analysis of capitalist production, characterized by the production of commodities that emerge in a market economy. By analogy, though, these terms are useful for my analysis. Marx broadly argued that the results of human activity transform resources into items of use-value, which are assigned an exchange value by society (see my conclusion below); the worker's time is overshadowed by the supreme importance attached to the commodity, a process through which the capitalist extracts surplus labor as profit. The Sambia, however, acknowledge semen to be a result of social relationships of production (e.g., as in marriage bonds), and they tend also to stress the importance of semen as a fluid that can transform resources into more useful reproductive items or characteristics (e.g., babies, warrior strength). Nonetheless, the way in which men fetishize semen as a circulating commodity has a mystifying effect upon these social relationships of production: they deny women's essential part in the reproductive process and claim final biological development in boys is achieved only through insemination. This mystification of the total reproductive process thus enables men to extract from others the resources needed to sustain and expand themselves and their clans, and to control the related scarce resources in relation to women. Finally, I do not mean to imply by use of these terms that other Melanesian groups, or even all (RH) societies, use semen as a key resource in the same way as Sambia, or that they fetishize it as a commodity in their systems of circulation in order to reproduce social entities. Elements or fluids such as semen and blood clearly have variable significance in Melanesian societies; our separable analyses of them must, in a certain sense, renegotiate their meaning in each cultural system.
6. For instance, Sambia do not use *duvuno* in reference to masturbation, their term for which means "peeling away the glans from

penis." Genital rubbing, in the limited sense (not necessarily erotic) of stimulation of the genitals, occurs; I have seen children do it, boys sometimes do it to bachelors (to produce erections for fellatio), and men sometimes report doing it to themselves in preparation for coitus with their wives. But what they *mean* is self-stimulation without ejaculation. This conceptual distinction is important and should not be misunderstood. Spilling one's own seed not only makes no sense to Sambias, it does not seem erotically exciting for them. Their fantasy life and erotic scripting have no place for it, an argument I will pursue elsewhere.

7. Sambias have invented an art we could call *semenology*: they are fascinated with the forms, textures, and tastes of semen, which they discuss frequently, like wine tasters. Among boys, a fellated's penis size is not accorded much importance, whereas his seminal fluid, amount of flow, etc., is. (Privately and unconsciously, though, penis size is sometimes important.) Among women, the situation seems the reverse: a man's penis size (and sexual prowess) is important—women prefer men with big penises—whereas semenology is less significant, or so say men.
8. Sexual behavior in the imagery of dreams is viewed as erotic play: wet dreams are pleasurable but wasteful erotic play with spirits, who may wish to harm the dreamer. Breast-feeding, even though women say they experience *imbimboogu*, is not ever conceived of as erotic play by women, as far as I know, though breast-feeding is apparently a common image and form of scripting for *men's* erotic daydreams (*vis-à-vis* fellatio performed upon them).
9. However, there is ambiguity here, since a woman who lives in another hamlet (her husband's) long enough, becomes after death a ghost or hamlet spirit who may haunt there, rather than returning to her natal hamlet or clan territory. Even so, the souls of females are not a subject in which men place much interest.
10. Cf. the Great Papuan Plateau societies, especially Kaluli (Schiefelin 1976:127f.; 1982), which have institutionalized such beliefs about homosexual insemination (see also Kelly 1976; Sørum 1982). On the individual level, Sambias boys evince fantasies and beliefs that make it clear that psychological introjection and projective identification are a part of their homoerotic experience, including, for instance, notions that incorporating a fellated's semen may bestow his personality traits.
11. One is tempted here to note similarities between Sambias male ideology and certain Hindu ideas, the latter of which couple semen retention with male spiritual prowess (see, for example, Eliade 1976).



5

Kenneth E. Read

The Nama Cult Recalled

"Fantasy is revealing: it is a method of cognition; everything that is imagined is true; nothing is true if it is not imagined."

Eugène Ionesco, "*La démystification par l'humeur noir*," *L'Avant Scène* (1959).

When Gilbert Herdt asked me to contribute to this volume,¹ I wondered what I could add to my published work on the Gahuku-Gama (Read 1951, 1952, 1954, 1955, 1959, 1980a). The data on which those materials are based were collected thirty years ago. Using Herdt's (1981) phrase, the Gahuku-Gama I have described are a people "frozen in time." Until 1981, I had not been back to them since the end of 1952. Some of my Gahuku friends are dead now; but there are a few old people (and some younger ones) who knew me and are still among us. The contacts I have had with them have been limited, however—no more than a few personal messages that have had nothing to do with my original research. Therefore, any lacunae in my data on the Gahuku *nama* cult and male/female polarities