

CHAPTER 3

Secrecy among the Sambia,
1974–1976



THE CENTRAL PROBLEM OF THE anthropological study of secrecy is to understand not only what a people believe in, but also what they fear and doubt; not what they celebrate in public ceremonies but how their mistrust is transferred into hidden acts and whispered stories behind the stage of society. It is hard to fathom how the secret masculinity vaunted in this book was conditional in a double sense: the men feared their inability to create and sustain it in themselves and they feared losing it once they had it. Moreover, concerning the reproduction of their own kind, they were frantic but also hesitant, and resisted passing on even the coveted secret masculinity to their sons. This paradoxical cultural reality is the ontological province of ritual secrecy, and it existed long before the historical Western concept of “utopia” was invented to cover the idea of “heaven on earth.” Indeed the contrast of this archaic sociality of secret masculinity in New Guinea with what is hidden in Western life (e.g., the idea of a “family secret”) is simplistic and terribly vulnerable to exoticization. But such an understanding was far ahead of me in my first fieldwork, as the following story tells.

August 1976

It is late in the dry season and I am near the end of a many weeks' long reconnaissance of the two dozen or so Sambia villages and their near neighbors, the feared Yagwoia. The patrol brings to a close a two-year period of field research with which I began the study of the Sambia. Trav-

eling with me is a troop of ten Sambia men and youths, all from my village, Nilanga. They include the carriers of supplies and interpreters, as well as my key informant-colleague, Tali, a ritual expert well known to the locals from his younger years (Herdt 1981: app. A; see also Herdt and Stoller 1990: chap. 5), and my close associates Weiyu and Sakulambei. The weeks have been occupied with the collection of final census and genealogical information on the Sambia villages in adjacent river valleys. However, it is the collection of the Anga area epic myths and the incredible origin myth of parthenogenesis common to the region that has most riveted my imagination. My main job—to study how male identity develops through secret initiation—has come to an end. Many performances of ritual initiation, each of them elaborate, some taking weeks to complete, have been observed during these years, from the first-stage initiation to the final, sixth-stage initiation, which signals fatherhood and the achievement of full moral personhood for Sambia males.

And in the process I have been transformed, though not as radically as the Sambia youth who experienced embodied change. However, once my presence was accepted at the rites, I became sufficiently acquainted with rituals to be permitted to ask the elders a few questions about their meaning. My oh-so-tentative interrogations signified a status change, of course, away from being the know-nothing puny red-skinned youth who had begun without language or cultural knowledge nearly two years before. I worried that I might never be able to return to the Sambia and could not have dreamed that my fieldwork was merely the beginning of a long process of learning. Before returning to Australia, I felt a terrible need to finish tracking the myths of Sambia back to their fabled origin hole, Kokomo, a sacred place a few days' walk to the south near Menyamya. The trip, which had hitherto been attempted only once by the Australian government patrol officer, was long and somewhat dangerous, as it involved crossing the border of the territory of the neighboring tribe, the despised Yagwoia.

In precolonial times the Sambia rarely ventured there except to raid. Even today they are extremely reluctant to travel into Yagwoia country. Not only were these enemies hated for the raids they inflicted upon the borderland, but they were said to be cannibals as well, who enjoyed the taste of "long pig," which, indeed, the Yagwoia admit. Sambia successfully raided them enough times to have left behind rage and many scores to settle. After days of resistance to my pleas for help along the trail in Sambia-

land, my companions consented to cross the mountain range that marks the tribal boundary.

Passing for long hours through uninhabited mountains, a no-man's-land of pine and palm that symbolizes the gulf between the groups, our troop arrives at dusk in the first Yagwoia-speaking village that straddles the mountaintop. It offers the benefit of a doorless government rest hut to sleep in. The weariness of weeks of travel has soaked into the Sambia, and yet Tali, an aspiring Great Man and my ritual consultant, has already gone ahead into the village, a place he knows from an adolescent journey long ago, to seek out his entry into a shadowy network of ritual contacts.

Tali has a distant age-mate who lives in the vicinity, and a runner is sent to fetch the man. It is Tali who negotiates the contract of hearing the sacred myths and more generally discussing secret things with the elders of their former enemies. Yagwoia men communicate two attitudes. First, the Sambia are the only group of warriors they feared sufficiently in precolonial times to undertake special alliances for raiding their territory. Second, Sambia are renowned throughout the area for continuing the "true" practice of initiations. Later I was to realize that the "truth" to which they alluded was boy-insemination, the secret masculinity the Yagwoia had long ago been required to forfeit to the native New Guinea evangelists who came to save their souls and establish a Christian order in their villages. As I learn of this I am stunned to discover the degree of radical culture change so close to Sambia-land—the accidental history of opportunistic colonialism. A bit later I am surprised to see the Yagwoia men show a keen interest in the young initiates of our troop. Off to the side are the Yagwoia women, and as some men in Western-style shorts approach us, they shoo the women away and begin to mutter hurriedly among themselves. The older Yagwoia half-jokingly mutter that we would have been killed and eaten not so long ago. The Sambia boys actually grimace and retreat at this joke. The whole situation so quickly becomes a tangle of strong emotions, as is typical of these parts, that second thoughts quickly creep into my mind, of guilty responsibility for having prodded my fellows here. Perhaps it was too much to expect Tali to access the local myths. Perhaps they are dead anyway.

What are Tali's motives in this strange place? Mainly they derive from his own ritual career, which is always uppermost in his mind. The dietetics of male initiation and secret masculinity are the manifestations: the quest

for male health, potency, and bodily purity through the use of ritual knowledge and procedures; a quest for ritual lore as Tali's means to attain authority in the prestige system of the Sambia men's house that honors this power as equal to the warrior's. Tali came to the Yagwoia only once, a generation ago, in adolescence, along with a party of Sambia men, including his father and uncle—now long dead—who had distant Yagwoia in-laws. They wanted to trade bird-of-paradise feathers and vegetal salt to the Yagwoia in exchange for ritual secrets. These trading partners are passed on for generations from father to son among the Sambia; the feathers, salt bars, bark capes, and sundry elements of ritual that fold into an irregular stream of barter. But they also initiated Tali with their sons. Now, in addition to these manly purposes, there was also my entreaty as friend to learn the origins of the myths; and this favor, Tali knew, would mean a great deal to me—a gift of immense value, through which he might gain sway for years.

All the usual ways of scratching around politely for information are trotted out; the exchange gifts start to flow, calling into practice the etiquette of hospitality through smoking and chewing betel, or offering sugarcane and a bamboo of water, all typical of male hospitality in the area. It is a slow and pretentious process, taking hours, sometimes days, with formal appearances monitored carefully for any trace of treachery—or weakness. Since the Sambia believe it is impossible to see into another's mind, one can only assess intent by action. And so the other Sambia men watch and smoke and gab.

And I, dogged from the long trip, soon begin to doze. In fact, by nightfall, having eaten some taro while thinking of culinary pleasures far away, I grow tired and ready to climb in my sleeping bag. Then, out of the dark, comes Tali, smiling. He said he would locate the myth-tellers and was good to his word: "Come along," he says, "we will story now" with the Yagwoia elders. It is nearly eleven o'clock and pitch black, the perfect time for secrecy in a small village. I should not have been surprised, given the penchant for Sambia themselves to tell secret stories only in the deep forest or after nightfall.

But another happy circumstance, unknown to me till then, has made this possible: Kwip, a long-lost middle-aged Sambia speaker, Tali's old age-mate from his youth, half-Yagwoia by birth. He arrives mysteriously and without escort after dark from a distant village in response to the messenger sent earlier. Kwip's solitary passage in the dark is most impressive,

and I can tell from the reactions of my Sambia friends that they are amazed at his courage. For to cross vast expanses of the lonely forests in the dark is dangerous to the stranger, and truly beyond the pale for the average Sambia, who fears the ghosts and forest spirits enough to bar travel outside the village at night, and certainly never alone. But this becomes a danger far greater in unknown lands, increased astronomically by the fear of attack by aging cannibals whose "true" appetite is never sated, so say my Sambia colleagues, by expensive imported Australian tinned beef.

The man is a savior, however; not only clever but also pleasant, and now a fellow ritual expert alongside of Tali. Initiated together a generation ago, Tali and the Yagwoia remain bonded in some curious way not at all apparent to me. As the saying goes among them, never forget the men who cried together from the ordeals of initiation, a poignant reminder of conditional masculinity.

At midnight, the dusty old government rest house has been converted into a new fortress of secret masculinity. It comes alive as a surge of Yagwoia men eager to participate in such a unique cultural event shuffle in and surround the fire. A large group of elders appear with Kwip, apparently ready to spin myths for a price. What is their price, I wonder? I make coffee and share it among this large congeries of strangers. My sleepiness evaporates, pipe in hand, as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity awakens me. And here, under cover of darkness, removed from the now slumbering village nearby, we await this revitalization—a matter of local myth-telling and the necessary orchestration of determining who will sit and who will stand. What is most striking, however, is the generational split with the younger men who are so intensely interested to see who among their own elders will speak and what stories they will tell. The first sign of a terrible tragedy emerges when one of the younger men raises his voice unnaturally and is dismissed out of hand by an elder who shuns his face.

The old men and ritual leaders tell a long "rope" or sequence of interconnected narratives—origin tales, including the myth of parthenogenesis, and so on, which I have traced from place to place among the neighboring societies of the Anga (Herdt 1981). The tales tell not only how society emerged from the obscure past, but also how the sexes came to hold their proper biological and social roles in war, reproduction, and the economy or ritual. These myths are absolutely hidden from the uninitiated, but especially women, of course. They tell of the creation of life, of the hermaphroditic ancestors, and then of death and rebirth through the source of

sexuality. This means that they are, by definition, strictly secret. And secrecy in this part of the world always means behavioral segregation—men from women, and men from boys—enforced by threat of death. This I know already; what I did not know about was the colonial hiatus suffered by the disruption of secret masculinity among the Yagwoia.

As I prepare myself for the role of scribe, armed with a primitive tape recorder and clipboard, a dreadful commotion breaks out among the Yagwoia hosts. I am immediately fearful for my Sambia friends. Never one to let events fall as they might—remember, I am twenty-five years old and every bit as ambitious and romantic as one might imagine—I turn to Tali for direction, fearful something has gone wrong. Tali whispers to his age-mate, Kwip, What in the world is going on? Meanwhile the younger Yagwoia men in their twenties and thirties have grown irritated and aggressive. Several Yagwoia men take charge; one of them, a huge, muscled man in his forties, barks out orders. I fear that the precious stories will be snatched from my grasp at the moment of their telling.

What could be wrong, I wonder? I fear that one of our men has gotten himself in trouble or offended our hosts. But no, Tali reassures me; it's on the Yagwoia side and has nothing to do with us. The young men "want to fight," he says, looking worried in the way he does when the swirl of things grows beyond the control of anyone. And soon I see for myself that we are irrelevant.

All of the Sambia and me are pushed off to the side as a nasty generational schism erupts between the older and younger men of the local village. Outside in the night air we can hear heated emotions and harsh words exchanged. A group of men set up a barricade and younger men outside are forbidden to enter.

Imagine, now, my profound consternation as the old men drive the younger men away from inside, forcing them to leave, the refugees of their own tribe! I cannot think what they mean and am unable to follow the heated argument that lies in store, because their tongue is not ours. A large group of Yagwoia adolescent and young adult men are once more literally blocked from entering the ramshackle hut. I see puzzlement turn into intense anger on their faces, as these chaps (quite a few of them older than me), citizens of the place, are driven away. I fear their hostility, as they might attack us, and it is dreadful to see. However, my heart sinks more when I see their desire to be in this place with the elders and hear the stories, hungering for knowledge long denied. But of course we cannot know

that at the moment. Nothing is to be done. The murmurs and resentment die down as they wander off and the dust settles around the hut. After carefully shutting the door and posting a guard the elders turn back to us, ready to begin telling the myths.

You cannot imagine my extreme discomfort and self-conscious shame (being a recovering Catholic) at this wild turn of events. This should not be happening, I feel; it is so damn inexplicable. Sambias in their own land initiate boys at age eight into a secret warriorhood that guides their development for the next twenty years or so. During this time, the boys live exclusively in the men's house and avoid women and female things on pain of death. At first they are involved in years-long secret homoerotic relations with the bachelors of neighboring villages. This is followed by arranged marriages that are feared as much as they are desired by the boys. Finally in fatherhood they complete their agency and secret masculinity to ensure the continuation of their clan and souls. As they undergo successive initiations the men earn the right to hear all the great myths. It is their manly right and duty to learn of them, culminating in that most secret of all stories—the origin of parthenogenesis, telling how once upon a time the ancestors, Numbugimupi and Chenchi, both hermaphroditic, had homoerotic oral sex and then coitus, leading to birth and the founding of the society (Herdt 1981: chap. 8). It is incredible to see the youths' reaction to this revelation—like a kind of crazy dream, in that uncanny sense of something feared and wondered or sensed but never fully believed, and never dared to utter but also accepted as “truth.” By right and duty this and all the other stories are theirs to know and pass on once they reach this point.

Ritual secrecy surrounds this entire system, entry and exit. Once the boys are initiated it provides entry into the prestige and knowledge systems too. With each passing initiation boys are socialized into ever more complex magical knowledge and ritual iconography. The result is impressive, the learning of a secret encyclopedia, echoing the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament as a storehouse of ritual lore, rules, and esoterica. For example, initiates learn over two hundred ritually prescribed food taboos, including a huge number of leaves and plants, many of which have secret names. In addition, the secret edible plants have special meanings associated to them; to increase masculinity means to eat and use them, in rubbing the skin, like a system of dietetics the likes of which is foreign to a Western sensibility. Moreover, the boys are taught about many ritual icons, including a significant number of cultural interpretations of dreams that serve as

augury for hunting and warfare. Furthermore, they learn of place-names and secret stories to explain them, such as ritual initiation sites revealed only to the fully initiated. Many of the secret dietetics have secrecy associated with warfare magic and potency procedures. As time passes their ritual guardians describe more ritually vital foods, especially forest plants, and myriad ritual dietetics for health, vitality, and moral welfare: a wonder-world of hidden knowledge, about humans, animals, plants, spirits, and heavenly bodies.

As the years pass and males mature they are also taught sexual taboos, techniques, and stories, more reasons for avoiding females or purifying themselves from heteroerotic contacts. And they acquire the most efficacious war magic and secret sorcery practices, which are especially hidden. Their increasingly sophisticated personhood is more complicated by the secrecy, of course; a secret self known to father, age-mates, and brothers; and comrades-in-arms, the latter of whom may be among the boy's inseminators until he takes their place; but always leading to adulthood and a public world of war and leadership, accompanied always by ritual practice from which women and children are forever excluded. Sambia boys continue to live in the men's house as prescribed by tradition, a practice the Yagwoia apparently abandoned long ago.

Why should Yagwoia men be excluded from the secret circle as if they were women? They carry the very blood of their elders. Why, I ask Tali, are the elders excluding their *own* men? Nothing could be more alien to the Sambia: to hide ritual knowledge or myth from one's own kin. I can tell by the puzzle on the faces of my Sambia friends, Tali included, that they are as deeply disconcerted as me. Apparently, in this strange land, a strange custom prevails.

Many years have passed now, and I think I can better understand the young men's anguish at their exclusion from the secrets, and rage at their fathers and grandfathers, not only because I am older, but also because I, too, am more remote in space and time from the ritual secrecy of the Sambia.

Ritual secrecy defended this tense, floating world, power-filled and gender-divisive, hovering timelessly between subjects and hidden objects of desire: certainly not inside society, but not outside of social relations either. Ritual secrecy was meant to purchase a foothold, a coherent reality, for political solidarity. Apparently it fell apart for the Yagwoia. The anthropologist may be skeptical or afraid of entering this system of hidden powers and desires, and for good reason. Many a well-intentioned scholar

has smudged a career on topics less incendiary than secrecy. Such a caveat explains in part the worry I brought to the Sambia study many years ago, when fortune allowed me to enter their secret system, but in turn required me to use pseudonyms. But what of the Yagwoia?

Theirs is a more complicated colonial story, given secondhand to me. But I fear that the Yagwoia story will be lost on the reader unless I digress sufficiently to describe what I know best—how and why secrecy was a social fact among the Sambia during this time of my first fieldwork, in 1974 through 1976.

Placing Secrecy

I began to live among the Sambia in 1974, approximately fifteen years after their first direct encounter with Europeans and six years after the colonial government “derestricted” the area to outsiders following the forcible suppression of warfare. I was the first anthropologist to work among the Sambia, though the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier initiated fieldwork in 1967 among the neighboring Baruya people.

Until about 1956 the Sambia were isolated from direct contact with the Western world. About that time the first medical patrol passed through the area of the Sambia Valley. Soon, however, Australian government patrols followed, about 1961, so that local warfare was stopped. Occasional skirmishes continued until 1968. Until first contact, knowledge of the outside world had been limited to airplane sightings, interpreted as large birds. Rumors of trade with white-skinned men on the coast far to the south were constant. Sambia technology consisted of stone tools and bow and arrows. New imported material, such as steel machetes, and other trade items were slowly introduced. By the late 1960s, however, pacification was followed quickly by various forms of precipitous but often subtle social and technological changes, including the gradual introduction of a cash economy based upon coffee tree planting and, in 1979, a permanent airstrip, followed by bureaucratic installations: a local first-aid post, then a government school, in 1985.

At the time of my initial fieldwork in 1974 through 1976 the change was spotty and not very noticeable to an outsider. Only as I became submerged in village life did I gradually uncover how profoundly attitudes were changing beneath the surface of social life. Concomitantly, the elders were vigorously resisting this change in marriage and ritual practice. Sam-

bia was still a tradition-bound society, without roads, airstrips, or any permanent government presence, though its existence in a colonial setup precluded autonomy. By the time of subsequent field trips in 1979, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1988, and 1989, secret masculinity was becoming as rare as the men's houses that were now abandoned; and by my final field trips in 1990 and 1993, Sambia society was altered forever (see Herdt 1987a, 1993). Ritual initiation in the sense described before is a historical reality only, a fact that is made evident in the British Broadcasting Company film *Guardians of the Flutes* (1993) on which I consulted. We should study the earlier period prior to the burst of change not simply to remember the past, but because this was a time in which the public and private spheres still held much of their traditional meaning; and the secret system was vibrant and responsible for the performance of numerous male and female initiation ceremonies.

Historically, the Sambia were migrants from the Papuan hinterlands some two centuries ago. They and their neighbors share in a core of common cultural traditions (ritual, myth, and social organization) derived no doubt from ancient non-Austronesian migrations perhaps ten thousand years ago (reviewed in Herdt 1984a; Knauft 1993). Warfare has always been central to Sambia social organization, and marriage, residence, and sexual and family relations were adapted to the threat of war. The economy was based upon hunting and subsistence agriculture, the staples being sweet potatoes and taro. Sambia was an acephalous society in which political power rested primarily in the hands of ritual elders, war leaders, and shamans, and where a few Great Men could achieve renown through force of personality, charisma, achievements, and sociopolitical networks of influence with multiple sources of power.

Men claim diffuse power and the authority to rule in virtually all public affairs and are rarely challenged by women in rhetorical situations. Still, a profound force of contestation exists in some private and intimate matters, sexual relations being one and political loyalty another, wherein women hold considerable influence and are mistrusted and suspect. Moreover, women exercise control over most aspects of their own secret ceremonies surrounding menarche, marriage, and birth in the menstrual hut. The exceptions involve those situations in which warfare disrupts events or the men suspect the women of disloyalty (see Godelier 1989). The men's house and the women's houses were the countervailing points of this power and rule. Where the women's houses were contexts of privacy and

intimate relations between men and women, the men's houses were protected by taboos of ritual secrecy, on the one hand, and the veiled rhetorical threats of male public discursive attacks against women, on the other (Herdt 1981). Generally, domestic-private relations in village life were complicated and unstable. Men continually worry over the women's doings and fear the women will usurp them in one way or another. Women held considerable influence beyond the reach of men, for example, in garden production; while in fireside gossip, daily cooking, and early child care, women exercised near total control of space and time and were seldom challenged by men. However, in public affairs, women held little influence, never orated, and were subordinated to men especially in times of warfare and ritual (see the similar account for the Baruya in Godelier 1986).

In 1974 the Sambia were living in scattered communities over high mountain valleys in a thinly populated rain forest. Hamlets are composed of one or two great clans that have separate, constituent clans. Secrecy and ritual knowledge characterized the internal organization of clan ritual. Local descent groups inhabited two lines of hamlets generally in conflict and straddling opposite mountain ridges of the Sambia River Valley flowing down from the Lamari-Vaillala Divide.

Elders and war leaders were committed to the advance of their own village, and desire to best their competitors in a zero-sum game of constant bluff and battle with their peers in other villages. The enmity often embroiled them in armed conflict, more often than not the unanticipated outcome of squabbles over women and pigs. Two kinds of hostilities thus constrained what I have called the social economy throughout the region. First, and most important for internal tribal life, was intratribal bow fighting. This was ideally limited to showy, blustering challenges of lofting arrows between neighboring hamlets. Only unbarbed arrows (no stone weapons or barbed spears) were allowed. The aim was not to kill but rather redress some perceived wrong that involved no loss of human life, such as arguments over pigs, women, or theft of ritual custom. Sometimes, however, wounding and death occurred, and this escalated the fighting to a new level of intensity, no holds barred. Because Sambia value blood revenge, every death required a quid pro quo, until the score was settled or—more rarely—a truce arranged. Second, intertribal war raiding parties were periodically launched against hostile others beyond the valley. All technology was used, including barbed arrows and stone clubs, and all persons were open targets; since enemies were not human, killing, raping, and looting

were not moral violations as they would have been in the group (Read 1955). Morality in war, as in everyday life, was situation specific, with moral rules being tied to the "security circle" of the village and its surroundings (Lawrence 1965).

Another organization, the ritual confederacy, linked nearby hamlets together as units involved in a men's secret society, generally isomorphic with the phratry as defined previously. These localized confederacies in places like the Sambia Valley did, however, sometimes cut across phratries, creating wider, tenuous political alliances. What united these neighboring villages as a confederacy, however, was their fear of attack by true enemies from other tribes. Every three or four years, the hamlets of a confederacy jointly staged ritual initiations for their boys. Grandfathers, fathers, and brothers were the key organizers, creating an intimate circle of kin and family relations for all these ritual affairs. The initiations thus socialized sons and grandsons into the hamlet's warriorhood, inevitably introducing a theme of intergenerational transition in all events.

All marriages were arranged between exogamous groups or clans, often resulting in the common Highlands pattern of women moving into the hostile hamlets of their husbands. Sambia do not say they "marry their enemies," as do certain Highland societies (Meggitt 1964), but they do feel mistrust of outside women and a generalized sexual antagonism toward these "enemy wives." Marriage is by infant betrothal or sister exchange with little or no individual choice of spouse. Hamlets also exchanged women as wives, with certain neighbor hamlets intermarrying frequently enough that warfare between them was rare, at least for certain periods. Sambia Valley hamlets thus intermarried, creating shifting, unstable alliances, provoking mistrust at all levels of social arrangements, and interjecting suspicion and often paranoia into the spouses' sexual relationship, living arrangements, care of their children, and daily interests.

Training for warriorhood involves socialization for independence, but only in the context of stringent social regulations that assure conformity to ritual hierarchy in the men's house. Extreme autonomy and independence are sometimes manifested even in small boys. Sambia parents point to this hardiness as a sign that anticipates how this child may become a strong man, a war leader (*aamooluku*), which in another way Godelier calls a "great man." Such males are close to the vaunted image of an ideal and glorified man. They are more courageous and daring than others, more intelligent and resourceful, having had numerous occurrences, in their early development, of the tantrums and sulking that the Sambia know only too well to

announce the rise of a Great Man war leader (Herdt 1987a: chap. 4). They are expected to become great hunters and fierce warriors. Their unruly and antisocial behaviors are the cause of concern. "Never worry," grandfathers advise. "They will soon be initiated and feel the pain of a warrior." During this time they are producing the activities necessary for war-making and promoting homosociality among bachelors and initiates committed to the defense of their special, secret reality.

The village was always symbolically dissected by three gendered places, which curtailed the movement of men and constrained the agency of boys. Men, their wives, and their uninitiated children reside in women's houses, small igloo-like huts, whereas all unmarried initiated males live in a larger men's house, which is strictly taboo to all females. The clubhouse is the center of all secret ritual plans and discourse, especially war-making, and the sole residence for all initiated unmarried males. Yet married men, too, look to the clubhouse for social recognition and self esteem, and they often sleep there in times of ritual activity (as they did before, during war). The menstrual hut of women, placed somewhat outside the hamlet, is tabooed because birth and menarche are celebrated there, and the secrecy of fertility and procreation are protected by the "natural" flood of pollution surrounding the hut. Indeed, the entire hamlet is divided spatially into male and female spheres, with male footpaths and female ones, which are forbidden to the opposite sex.

Privacy, by contrast, is possible only in the garden or the forest (and on occasion the deserted men's or women's houses) for married couples or the pairs of boys and bachelors who hunt and conduct homoerotic relations away from the village. Privacy, in this sense, means a relational discretion, not a sense of being alone for the individual, for the Sambia do not recognize the need to be alone and generally frown upon such an idea, especially for children and young people.

Gender polarity was strictly enforced in the sexual division of labor, which viewed men as warriors and hunters, and women as gardeners. Men and women were generally forbidden from doing each other's tasks in hunting and gardening. Women are responsible for all food preparation and child care. Women are forbidden to climb trees or to chop down large ones. Women do not lead or fight in warfare. Men are ridiculed for caring for children. One of the problems of making the transition from being a boy to initiate is that the womanly tasks boys routinely took, including handling babies, were ridiculed by the men as weak or soft and polluted.

Sexual relations between men and women were conflicted and loaded

with the secrecy and segregation that made difference into excitement. Early sexual relations between couples were also highly ritualized, first through fellatio (a woman sucking her husband), and later in genital intercourse, a woman expected to submit to the missionary position. Generally, marital histories reveal arguments, physical fights, jealousies, sorcery fears, wife beating, and, more rarely, suicide. But it is not as if women simply do whatever the men bid. Women may subvert and resist the men's demands, such as "forgetting to prepare his food, refusing to make love, shouting and commenting on her husband . . . using sorcery or semen sorcery, and pollution poison in the food," Godelier has written for the neighboring Baruya (1986: 150). Indeed, this is the fabric of contentiousness that makes men steal themselves into their secret realities in order to seek shelter and trust. The women's speech and behavior are not allowed beyond a certain point lest they infringe upon the men's secret masculinity.

As sex between couples is highly ritualized, it follows that intimacy is itself a product of very structured rules, sometimes broken by lust, which causes ill effects later. Men believe sexual intercourse should be spaced to avoid depletion and premature aging or death, and yet they typically react in frustration and sometimes anger when they do not have sex with their wives. Many a young man is jealous and vindictive toward any wrong move on the part of his consort when they are beginning their sexual life together. Couples normatively have sex every few days, or as infrequently as once every two or three weeks, depending on age, length of marriage, and so forth. However, the postpartum taboo forbids sexual intercourse for some two years following birth. No overt contact, such as touching, between the sexes is permitted in public. Ritual practices, beliefs about the fears of female pollution, prolonged postpartum avoidance, and these other taboos thus undermine trust and intimacy, while promoting the partitions of secrecy in marital relations (Herdt and Stoller 1990). Couples who break the rules are swiftly visited by illness and death, and may suffer their children to be malnourished, ugly, weak, or diseased.

Precolonial Identity Politics

It is difficult for Westerners to appreciate the sexual politics and divergent realities of the genders in a world like this. A special trust and intimacy is created between people of the same gender, and for women, "evidence of women's driving motivations was structured through the device of secrecy"

(M. Strathern 1988: 114). Mistrust between adult genders is expected and all too real. Sambia strongly believe that such a special bond predisposes women to “grow” girls, and men to “grow” boys, after initiation begins (218). Homosocial trust attends being incorporated into the secret men’s house and then being asked to protect these same bonds from all interlopers for the rest of one’s life. The intimacy is itself generative of pleasure, and the pleasure has several manifestations. One of them is the pleasure of power and domination, enjoyed in the privileges of feeling superior to others. The other is the effort to create unity in the common threads of political and social interest vital in the maintenance of the clubhouse.

The Sambia division between what is “good for society” (i.e., the village) and what is “good for the clubhouse” is murky, tenuous, and often disputed—even in the internal discourse of the men’s clubhouse. This difference in interest and privilege stimulates a kind of moral virtue and self-righteousness in support of the superior ways of male bonding and emotional attachments flowing from male secret sharing. For the men’s (and probably the women’s) secret circle is morally construed as being the right, necessary, and virtuous path: a dictate of faith and pure ritual orthodoxy to uphold the purity of essential categories, such as “growing” boys through insemination, and essential relationships, such as the ritual guardian/initiate bond that lasts for life.

What ultimately matters is the protection of secret masculinity, including the homosocial sensibilities and subjective pleasure that derive from being with the same gender. This experience is particular to the historical and cultural circumstances that generate it—the men’s house, the women’s house—and for the men this has to do with the pleasures of using and fashioning power. But who or what are the subjects and objects of this power? The men’s house, with its own language, social relations, and secret concepts, enables the emergence of an alternative cultural reality, focused upon a system of “moral utopian” objects. Such masculine objectifications include the secret ritual flutes, the female hamlet spirits, the hierarchical relations between older and younger homoerotic partners, the absence of female pollution, and the presence of common concerns in the hosting of ritual practices. These moral utopian objects are largely constructed outside of the time and space world, and they are designed to meet the personal, social, political, and religious needs, interests, and life plans of men. Trust and the provision of internal confidence—a circle of shared strategic plans—are vital to this moral world. The creation of a security circle

sufficiently tight to keep women and enemies out, and thus to preserve military secrets, social and homoerotic pleasures, and harmony, was ever-present in the men's plans. The male bonding that issues from this pleasure is very intense indeed, not sufficient to generate sexual excitement within itself, but certainly facultative of the ritual idolatry and fetishism of desiring and admiring idealized objects of desire in their purest "male" qualities (see Read 1965: 152ff.).

Does women's ritual secrecy involve the same processes and qualities? Not in the same way, at least among the Sambia. The reason has ultimately to do with war, and with how warfare constantly undermines and threatens to destabilize all relationships, especially those among males. For it is males who define public affairs, however tenuously, by creating boundaries: inside and outside the men's house, separating themselves from Woman and from their immediate social relations with married-in women, versus mothers and sisters, who are far more trusted, even if rhetorical positioning makes no such distinctions. As Godelier (1986) has suggested, women—the disempowered—have fewer means to create divergent secret realities, even in the menstrual hut, and have less to gain from enacting these counterhegemonic agencies. This view applies to the Sambia too, and for this reason, the attitude of women toward their soon-to-be-initiated sons was highly ambivalent. These ritual attempts are prerogatives of the ability to wage war or defend against attack, thereby manipulating relations through what is unseen and hidden in the men's house. Secret masculinity, as a form of diffuse power in public affairs, exists in the absence of strong social control, hegemony, and consensus in village life. There is, in short, no symbolic counterpart to secret masculinity in the form of a secret femininity, though the men are unsure of this. Their fears produce instability and paranoia, and contribute to the gender politics of male plans to ensure secrecy.

The initiation of boys—that is, the reproduction of secret masculinity—is iconic of these gender politics, which threaten but also reaffirm this instability. Boys sometime resisted being initiated, more often than one would have imagined (Herdt 1987a). Especially the younger boys, seven and eight years old, seemed too small, timid, and bereft of comfort to be resocialized and then indoctrinated into the harsh reality of the men's house ritual secrecy. I want to underscore the sense of counterhegemony in the resistance of these little boys who were the proxy of their mothers, both in resisting and in being dominated. The boys represented, in this condi-

tional sense, Woman, and were objectified first as outsiders lumped with Woman. Only through the harsh means of ritual ordeals, including scraping the skin and bleeding the nose, among other efforts to “defeminize” the boy’s body, was the maleness enhanced sufficiently that the men could reclaim or better yet, advance a new claim that they had “given birth” to the agentic boy.

I am less sure than was Roger Keesing (1982a) that precolonial New Guinea women devised their own counterculture and even countervailing mythological systems in response to the men’s (Gillison 1993; Herdt 1997a: chap. 4). After all, men have the advantage and the disadvantage of going between the men’s house and the women’s house. Sambia women have their own sites of meaning and power inclusive of women in the menstrual hut. The diffuse power of women stems as much from how they learn to perceive what is hidden and to avoid the pockets of male aggression surrounding ritual secrecy—a coping strategy for incessant and sometimes incomprehensible demands from the men. But whether that is constitutive of a counter-mythological system remains doubtful. Nevertheless, the role of women to mediate and work between kin groups and networks, as argued long ago by M. Strathern (1972), is to some extent evident among the Sambia, particularly in domestic and extended family relations within the village, but only after they have become mothers and achieved higher social status.

Does the same argument apply to women’s cultural ontology? What of the special, secret, or tabooed places for women, especially the menstrual hut? Might they also serve as cultural sites of the production of ontology and action? I think so. The evidence we have from a range of New Guinea village societies suggests that the locus of women’s special ritual activities, fertility cycles, sacred songs and myths, birth-giving and parturition socialization, as well as the typical round of menstrual cycle practices, is focused on sites of ritual secrecy (Kyakas and Wiessner 1992). Moreover, a special status is attached to the menstrual hut in the cultural imagination of women (Brown and Buchbinder 1976). Indeed, it becomes an issue of some importance in testing the ontological theory to understand in what way women’s secret spaces become alternate sites of cultural contestation and production (Gillison 1993; Lutkehaus and Roscoe 1995; M. Strathern 1987).

In contrast to prefeminist frames advanced to understand these dynamics, feminist anthropologists have analyzed issues of patriarchy, heterosexism, and male same-gender relations more than ever before (best eluci-

dated by Marilyn Strathern [1988]). Challenging the idea that “men can grow boys” as nativist social ideologies, Strathern has suggested how this cultural reasoning has underanalyzed social relations. “It is relations that separate the genders, male from female and same-sex from cross-sex,” M. Strathern (1988: 211) notes. In this way we begin to better understand gender segregation and the association of women’s power with material structures or dwellings, especially the menstrual hut (Gillison 1993). As an archetypal theme in New Guinea, men greatly fear the menstrual hut—but how much of their anxiety is associated with women’s diffuse power located in that hut? It is men who need a nerve center and secret space to plan and map, because of the pervasiveness of women in domestic spaces. The counterhegemonic force of women resides in their intimate network of same-gender relations, which persist without interruption by initiation for much longer in the female life cycle than do the men’s. The leftover space—the menstrual hut—is not only truly feared and avoided by men because of “pollution,” but is the object of the most intense gaze and warnings against the subversion of women.

The intensity of male/male secret attachments and Eros locked in male imagery of the Ideal or Great Man, as well as the intimacy and pleasure sought and largely attained in homosocial relations, virtually guarantee that women and children are demeaned as Other. By externalizing all the shared traits that attend to the excluded, and having a secret theory that precludes many of the precepts and concepts upon which the nature of this Other is understood to exist and act, it is virtually assured that women are attributed with influence and diffuse power beyond the men. Paradoxically, however, this process displaces qualities and traits from self to Other; for example, nurturance or verbal scolding, traits perceived as having their own value or virtue for the Other, may become manifestations not of desire but of envy, at least symbolically, in ritual action. The most dramatic and illuminating symbolic displacement of men’s subjectivity is the ritual flutes, animated by their angry female spirits, and the strange manner in which the flutes create difference and fetishistic arousal (social and erotic) in men vis-à-vis boys (the proxy of women) (see Herdt 1982b).

Concomitantly such a process makes the ritual secrecy of protecting the body and secret personhood of men all the more passionate, imperative, and needy; for in such situations faith is too easily punctured by questioning, self-doubt, and criticism from the Other. The smugness of men in secret circumstances, looking down upon women, thus takes on a new meaning.

The men cannot abide irony in the experience of ritual secrecy, for that would undermine the very basis of faith, secrecy, and ritual absoluteness—purposely constructed reality confirmed to support the cozy homosociality of ritual secrecy. Here, the Sambia, unlike the Iahita Arapesh (Tuzin 1980), do not narrate ritual secrecy as a construction of men; rather they see it as a dictate of nature and the sacred, thus without choice or conscious intervention. Irony, it seems, is the enemy of ritual secrecy. Trust in male comrades was both an affirmation of this absoluteness and a reaction to the conditionality of their masculinity. Their divergent reality could not withstand the self-attenuation of irony, contrasting reality with humor. Their utopia depends upon a grim and seasoned determination to shut out self-reflection. However, smugness—the ability to feel secure in one's superiority and sense of an absolute arrogance (meaning here to act without permission vis-à-vis the other)—is generative of their political legitimacy.

The creation of secret reality in the men's house thus smugly assures selfish satisfaction, too: secret desires and hidden objects, even the substitution of the hidden object of desire (the initiate) as a proxy for the public Other (women and wife). These formulations are vital to the internal coherence of the secret male reality making in the men's house.

Homosociality and Male Ritual Development

To enter the Sambia men's house is first to notice the lived-in and slightly sour smell of sugarcane peels, rubbish, and urine (from underneath the house) that ventilates the atmosphere. It is not so neat and tidy as it appears outside. A few young boys—first-stage initiates—huddle near the fire; some of them are clowning around, the older youths sitting silent, or morose, all of which may change in a rush of older men. Then the boys hush and the adolescents come to life, to show off for others with whom to rival. They are more “on stage” as the talk leans toward a hunt in the morning, in a ravine where cassowary have been spotted; and the best hunter of the village tells how he has already set his traps and will dream tonight of what may happen on the morrow. A fire is now roaring to ward off the late afternoon fog and chill. The men roast second-rate sweet potato, their only repast for the evening, since their wives have gone off to distant gardens. At its peak the clubhouse may seat thirty men, though typically only a dozen boys and bachelors sleep there. The younger initiates are pushed out the door and sent down to the creek to fetch water, or cut sugarcane, or do some other menial task, often at the command of the

bachelors—just to prove that the boys will take orders. And the boys will go grumbling under their breath that they are not the bachelors' "women." This clears the decks for the older men's discussion of an impending marriage exchange which they were loath to discuss with the boys present. Such talk inevitably turns to the sisters of the younger boys and to sex with women, especially the relationship between coitus and menstruation. All such talk is completely forbidden to the boys; the secrecy of the men, their character as "in-betweens" who have sex with the boys and with the women too, is at stake, and must be defended, creating hierarchy—an internal barrier within the clubhouse. The rituals to rid pollution are touched upon; these are hidden from the younger males till later, that being privileged knowledge, and thus one form of power is kept out of their reach, for now. Of course warfare may come up; it is always just a matter of time until the challenges and heroics of warfare are spoken. But once the elders enter, the old war tales pop up, intermixed with ritual stories and—after the initiates are asleep—allusions to sexual relations with women.

This is what marks the fabric of the clubhouse: drab, untidy, and sour-smelling. The physical power of muscular male bodies is as omnipresent as male unity and intimacy; but also the competition of male peers, the routines of order via orders issued from the higher to the lower status. These accoutrements of male sociality actually merit study in their own right, for they massage the contexts of storytelling in matters of marriage exchange and sex with women, menstrual pollution, war stories, and ritual procedures for purity and preservation of masculinity, giving substance to masculine domesticity in the homosocial utopia imagined by the ritual secrecy of the men's house.

This physicality of the male body is what separates childhood from the subsequent development of secret masculinity. As the introduction to the men's secret cult and initiation into the mystery of the ritual flutes and bull-roarers, the revelations of the first-stage ceremony are so shocking and profound to the boy as to defy pat stereotypes or simple generalizations. But one thing is certain: the door to the men's house marks the separation of the boys from secular public life. Thus begins a long liminal period, roughly associated with the many years they engage in ritual boy-inseminating practices and sleep in the men's house. The absence of Woman in the men's house is so dramatic by comparison with childhood that it invites comparison to the screaming secret of the ritual flutes in village life (Herdt 1981).

Over the next fifteen years, boys undergo six secret initiations in all, which correspond to age-grades and ritual status. First-stage initiation (*moku*) males are *choowinuku*; second-stage initiates are *imbutu* (ages eleven to thirteen); and third-stage initiates are *ipmangwi*, or youth-bachelors, who have attained social puberty (fourteen to sixteen years of age). All three of these initiations are performed in sequence on large groups of boys who become an age-set cohort. These rites make boys and youths members of a warriorhood, the local unit of which is based in and responsible for defending its own hamlet and performing its rituals. The final three initiations are organized for particular youths, underlining their character as "life crisis" events in the lives of the young men and their brides. Fourth-stage initiation (*nuposha*) may occur anytime after the *ipmangwi*. It is a marriage ceremony, with secret rites and sexual teachings for individual youths who have a woman assigned for their marriage. Fifth-stage initiation (*taiketnyi*) takes place when a man's wife has her menarche. Sixth-stage initiation (*moondangu*) is held when a man's wife bears her first child. Having two children brings full adult masculine personhood (*aatmwunu*) and the end of exclusive residence in the clubhouse.

The formal marriage ceremony (*nuposha*) of the Sambia is often performed before menarche begins to alter the young bride's status. Ideally this introduced the newlyweds to oral sex, in which the younger woman fellated her somewhat older husband. The procedure was much like the homoerotic experience, but it was of course absolutely unknown to the younger bride, just as the pleasures of heteroerotic insemination were unknown to the boy-initiate. This point also highlights the non-subtle power difference between initiated men, on the one hand, and women and initiates on the other; and it amplifies the extreme prudishness regarding sex, in particular the remarkable measures of privacy taken to ensure that others do not observe the newlyweds having sexual relations. The mere mention of their sexual relations in public invites great shame and social distress. Only after the menarche (when coitus is permitted), and more particularly with motherhood, do women attain full personhood, which brings greater social influence and some measure of domestic power in the lives of women. Coitus never stops being secret; however, as the couple age and children come along, the imperative to hide sex or feel shame about it declines, as no doubt the absolute feeling of difference between the spouses is mediated across time. Ideally the young husband may continue secret insemination of boys in the men's house until he fathers a child by his wife.

In both cases, however, sexual relations remain hidden from others, secret with respect to the other partner, and totally silent.

In the secret ontology of men, first-stage initiates are viewed as symbolically equivalent to the menarcheal females in their late teens. We may see in this symbolic association the necessary symbolic transformation of the prepubertal boy-initiate into a sexual object of the postpubertal male youth. In addition it serves as the basis for the embodiment of the intense secret ideal that males "menstruate" through the nose to attain "pure" masculine vitality, physical growth, prowess, and, later after marriage, the continued well-being and preservation of health in spite of proximity to women, menstrual blood, and coitus (Herdt 1982c). Nose-bleeding rites must therefore commence the purifications of first initiation, preceding insemination; and then they must continue throughout the male life cycle, even in old age, ceasing only at senescence.

The secret imagery of the process in the cultural imagination of males signifies the perception of the boy's body as being ready for oral penetration as a necessary condition for the physical development and growth of his phallus at a later stage. While it is viewed as dangerous and also exciting for that reason, blood-letting is critical to the production of secret masculinity for the Sambia. Only after blood is let can the "birth" of the phallus occur, electing the boy to manhood, an irreducible intentional reality of secret masculinity. Both of these physical steps, elements critical to the dietetics of Sambia practice, help to essentialize the boy as a sexual object.

The sexual objectification of initiates, transformed from children to semen recipients, supports residence in the men's house. This years-long process of liminal seclusion has typically been ignored in New Guinea studies (Herdt 1984a; Knauff 1987); consequently we have only sketchy ideas of what actually occurs following initiation into the cult house, even when it is certain that initiation is typically the introduction to sexuality in all of its manifestations. Among the Sambia, initiates learn to ingest semen from older youths through oral sexual contacts in middle childhood. First- and second-stage initiates may serve only as fellators; they are forbidden situationally to reverse erotic roles with older males. No other form of sexual relations is permitted, including mutual masturbation. The sexual heat of a boy's mouth, while less than a woman's vagina, is thought to be stimulated by the expected gift of semen. The absence of any other sexual outlet assures older males of the control of boys. Sexual objectification is greatest when the boy's body is most like a prepubertal girl's and most

unlike an adult man's. Stated differently, the more like a man a boy looks and acts, the greater his agency, and the less desirable he is as a homoerotic object.

Generally, boy-inseminating rites among the Anga-speaking groups require that semen is passed on from one body to the other, as if it were an electrical charge or magical substance necessary to activate the other. Semen moves so as to reciprocate the transmission of "blood" as a principle of marriage and kinship across generations (Herdt 1984a); thus, a man who receives a woman in marriage exchange is expected to inseminate her younger brother, the man's clan the recipient of a womb and child, the woman's clan the recipient of semen to masculinize the younger boy. Thus, secret masculinity hangs in the balance of marriage exchange. Third-stage pubescent bachelors and older youths therefore serve only as fellateds, inseminating prepubescent boys, who must wait their turn until they achieve social puberty. All males pass through both social erotic stages, being first fellators, then fellateds: there are no exceptions. After marriage, a man is allowed both homoerotic and heteroerotic contact until the birth of his first child, ultimately terminating all homoerotic activities, at least ideally, just as he takes up more-or-less permanent residence in a "woman's house" with his wife or wives.

A point of male vulnerability in this secret dietetics of initiation concerns "semen atrophy," men's belief in the rarity of semen, its absence as a "natural" element in the body, and its depletion across time in order to produce masculinity or reproduce in children (see Herdt 1999: chap. 5). Since biological maleness is based on the accumulation of a semen pool inside the body through years of repeated inseminations, the depletion of semen threatens not only well-being and ritual stature, but also health and life. This remarkable fear of male atrophy is introduced into the boy's subjectivity through ritual pedagogy. The male body—in this anxious, dreamy narrative of men's stories—is conceptualized as an empty reservoir to be filled up; however, it is easily emptied again, to its peril. Hence, once filled, the "semen organ" of the boy sustains existence by supplying semen, but it is diminished unless a source of replenishment is found. Such a great dread may be the core of men's secret ontology, so closely guarded from the women. Boy-inseminations (homoerotics) and relations with wives (heteroerotics) for reproduction require repeated ejaculations that stimulate "growth" or "babies" in others by depleting one's only reserve.

Like a zero-sum game, semen atrophy imagines always that someone's

loss is someone else's gain. The secret reality of depletion is difficult if not insufferable, and it has resulted in many compromises in defending one's personal fund of semen, especially regarding women. Regulation of heterosexual intercourse is a primary defense. But another is also vital: adult men practice secret, customary ingestions of white tree sap in the forest. Men say that this tree sap "replaces" ejaculated semen "lost" through heterosexual intercourse. So men regularly drink tree sap after coitus in order to replenish maleness. Interestingly enough, though, most bachelors—although they worry over semen depletion—do not replace semen lost through premarital boy-inseminating. Only with marriage are those personal anxieties reinforced through the institutionalized practice of tree sap ingestion (Herdt 1981: 248–51).

Tabooed as a cultural space, the men's house becomes their dormitory and barracks, shorn of any hint of women or femininity. The more spartan, the better to promote the boy's warrior characteristics, Sambia men feel. In precolonial times initiates were mostly being trained for war and were on call at all times, even when they were small. First-stage initiation embarks the boys on a developmental ritual career into adulthood that requires maximum sociobehavioral and symbolic "distance" from their mother, other women, and children, and maximal "closeness" to older males, elders as ritual leaders, fathers and brothers as seniors, older unrelated adolescent youths as sexual partners, and same-age peers as comrades and brothers (consanguineal or classificatory). Soon after initiation boys are expected to start showing their fiber and make a name for themselves as hunters. The second-stage initiate by age twelve or thirteen (the age at which Tali first visited Yagwoia) is expected to go eagerly to distant enemy lands and on long trade parties or up to the deep forest for months of rugged hunting, while girls at this age have never left their village and continue domestic routines, remaining structurally subordinated to their parents.

Secret Masculinity of the Kuwatni'u

First initiation for boys places them into the cultural category *kuwatni'u*, a general rubric and a term of address, shared with the class of second-stage initiates, signified by the acts of receiving semen and avoiding women. They are no longer referred to as boys or *kwulia'u*; indeed their boyhood name is stricken and may never be said by them again. It is insulting to a man's honor to refer to a man by his boy's name. At first-stage initiation he

receives an informal *kuwatni'u* name (actually a nickname used informally by his age-mates) and a formal adult name (used by parents and adults). The name change symbolically marks the sociocultural status and personal identity change from childhood to initiation rank.

What does it mean to be an initiate or *kuwatni'u*? The category term signifies the lowest-ranking male in the men's house and secret system, suggesting the boys' deference and fear of their elders. The fearfulness is created through initiation ordeals and threats, and maintained through a variety of control measures that permeate life in the clubhouse. Some informants trace the etiology of the term to the general taboo that requires initiates always to hide themselves from women, especially their faces, when women approach them. So pervasive and strict is the rule that one gradually stops being startled and grows quite accustomed to the experience of having a whole group of initiates suddenly jump off the path from which one is walking and vanish into the brush at the sight of the most harmless old woman making her way piled high with garden produce back to the village. I once had such an experience. I was walking at the head of a line of initiates, talking with some and quite absorbed in what I was saying. They fled quite silently unknown to myself, while I continued talking rather loudly and greeted just such an old woman, who must have thought me quite strange talking to myself in the middle of nowhere. Moments later, as silently as they disappeared, the boys crept back like shades out of the bushes when she had passed on, shaking her head.

The deference, avoidance, and fear of the glances or looks of women implied by the term *kuwatni'u* leave a definite mark of shame on the boy's identity that he never wants to repeat in the years to come. However, it is precisely this ability of women to gaze upon them—first as boys, then as initiates, and later as adults—that contests the agency of males and lifts the power of women over men.

Kuwatni'u are completely under the surveillance and control of older bachelors and men in the clubhouse—and for good reason. Men fear that initiates will escape into the forest, or run back to their mothers' huts, not only during the first stage, but occasionally up to the time of the third-stage bachelorhood ceremony too (Herdt 1987a). Direct control of the initiates exposes them to constant hazing and the whims of the older youth, some of whom are actually the sexual partners or the comrades of their partners. In general, though, most of the older males are their kin and supporters, their elder classificatory clan brothers, cousins, or uncles. Their

ritual guardians may or may not be present in this group, but their older blood brothers may help to protect them. In keeping with the spartan outlook of the clubhouse, again, protection means in the context of the warriorhood that the boys should be toughened and made obedient to the war leaders and elders, and not coddled or treated in ways that will continue their softness or unmanly demeanor. For example, boys are punished for laughing in public, which is considered undignified for adult men. At the slightest sign that a boy would be tempted to go back to his mother or younger siblings, which might jeopardize the men's ritual secrecy, the boy will be severely reprimanded and if necessary beaten, or worse. Many are the stories of boys threatened with death if they reveal the secrets. The threats are not idle. This is one area without compromise; for as Godelier (1989) has written, betrayal of ritual secrets is so terrible that the men will not countenance any threat and will eliminate a boy if necessary, without possibility of blood revenge or retribution by his kin, as stipulated by the men's secret covenant with each other at first initiation. But what happened to secrecy after the changes of colonial rule?

When colonial authorities suppressed Sambia warfare, an unexpected dilemma presented itself to the elders. The initiates gradually stopped being trained for warfare; the war raids ceased, and the vigilance that preserved the absolute sanctity of the men's clubhouse secrecy was undermined. The veils of secrecy began to be challenged, though not openly at first. Gradually, the secrecy of the men's house was jeopardized by the opening up of a formerly closed social system and by the increasing openness of physical movement. During the time of my first fieldwork I was continually struck by the fact that the older and younger initiates had so much free time on their hands. Although the ideology of preparedness remained, demands to train and prepare for war were gone. The budding initiates loved to roam in gangs, hunt and fish close to the village, occasionally play "king on the mountain" and warrior games, and of course chum around the men's house as if there were little else to do. Back in the clubhouse they would tire of hearing the war tales so common to their elders' gatherings round the hearth, with their ceaseless gab and gossip about the tales of old. With each passing year this secular trend increased. Moreover, the bachelors were going in greater numbers to work on coastal plantations or to live in the towns, which disrupted the tenuous structure of authority and hierarchy within the men's house, as I have written before (Herdt 1987b).

The Long Liminality of Secret Masculinity

A long-standing enigma in the creation of masculinity among the Sambia and kindred Melanesian societies concerns the huge length of time boys spend in ritual seclusion. Why does status change require ten years or more, among such peoples as the Sambia, the Baruya, the Gahuku-Gama, Baktaman, and others considered below? The key is the boys' agency—or lack of it—in the men's house. The political and ritual problem of the *kuwatni'u* as a structural category in precolonial times was that boys were lacking in agency and no longer classified as children, but neither could they achieve this without secret masculinity. Their adulthood depended upon their ritual careers: following the rules, making a name for themselves, contributing to the symbolic capital of the clubhouse.

The kind of conditional personhood created by this seclusion is reminiscent of the description of the Greek city-state as a permanently armed military camp (Dover 1978: 192, n. v). How else could the camp be prepared for attack or warfare at any time? As long as the cohort of unmarried initiates—age seven to their early twenties—are placed into a military clubhouse removed from women and are harnessed for fighting, the village could depend on a constant source of manpower for its military needs. Without it, the village might fail. Pairing off younger and older males into opportunistic couples was the consequence of such a political formation. Agency and military prowess go hand in hand in such a regime.

As amoral, liminal persons, betwixt and between the normative positions and regular outposts of social life, children (boys especially) are a fuzzy category in Sambia culture, being between sacred and profane, the men's and women's worlds (Turner 1967). It is a very strange threshold that extends into young adulthood. One might say that such a liminality is the psychocultural requirement of the creation of a sexual and social subjectivity based upon ritual secrecy. But from the social and political perspective of the solidarity of the men's house, this liminality is extremely useful, perhaps instrumental, in the production of warriors, through the social control of boys and their agentic activities. As the boys accepted being objectified in order to achieve manhood, they signified their acceptance of the ideological or utopian cultural reality of the men's house. This subjectivity included the creation of difference within them psychologically, a necessary step to their subsequent overcoming of the gaze of women, in preparation for eventual intimate sexual relations with their

wives. All such measures of course ensured the regulation of women as a scarce symbolic resource by the men's house.

Thus, by creating very long-term secret ritual seclusion and female avoidance, the boys were removed from public affairs, where incoherence, compromise, and doubt are typical, because these qualities might have crept into their subjectivity. Neither could the boys be tempted to give away secret knowledge to women, being always under surveillance. As they matured, their reputation as warriors rose in the region, even as they remained largely powerless in village political life (indeed, married women, especially women elders, had a greater measure of agency compared to the initiates). The structural boundary inclined male initiates to identify with their mates in the men's house and compete with the others in villages outside.

A strategic masculine edge was being produced: for military preparedness; for growth and masculinity in boys' bodies; for strength and advancement in the entire male age-grade of the region; and ultimately for the individual youth's own marriage and the achievement of full male agency in adulthood. Obviously, it is in the self-interest of the initiate, then, to foster his own competence in handling ritual secrecy. To whatever extent he could do so, through the imposition of dietetics and self-discipline, such as inducing nose-bleeding in himself, then to that extent might he succeed over his fellows. Such a developing secret masculinity is omnipresent in daily activities, when boys monitor each other's behaviors and will occasionally report infractions of rules and violations of taboos of hiding to their seniors. The violators are invariably punished, typically by caning them or thrashing with sharp cassowary quill-bones. In such moments one sees the latent conflict and competitions between age-mates and generational cohorts become manifest. But in fact these competitions are given dramatic expression in certain ceremonies among men at each initiation. The net effect of the rivalries between age-mates and competition between generations within the men's house is to create horizontal lines that top off the vertical cleavages long discussed since the time of Read (1965: chap. 4) on up through Godelier (1999: chap. 2). Rivalries are encouraged up to a point within the ranks of the initiates as warriors-in-training, in learning to hunt and fight, and in mastering ritual practices and secrecy.

Nevertheless, in the clubhouse it was forbidden to discuss the disempowerment of initiates—that is, the boy's domination by older males and his lack of agency in certain areas, especially in his tabooed relationships with women and children. In the latter case we are dealing with what was

truly a whispered secret, rare in the small hours of the morning or at the margins of the forest where boys were at some distance from their omniscient elders. The secret utopian ideology of the men created a different conscious emphasis that tended to displace and disrupt the boys' griping and insubordination—when and if they occurred. Elders were interested in but one thing: the production of a new kind of body, a warrior's masculinity and body, in each boy. This obviously promoted the older men's ideology and their individual self-interests. It also subverted the boys' fears and deflected the boys' desires away from the women's house, and kept them turning back upon the clubhouse. In the long years of living secluded in the men's house the ritual practices and common inseminations to which a boy was expected to submit, and eventually to become enthusiastic about, promised empowerment vis-à-vis women on the outside and eventually trust by seniors in the men's house.

Secret Masculine Desires

What subjectivity is created through secret masculinity? How are its desires inculcated and socialized through the men's house pedagogy? Initiation reveals to boys the "secret" (*ioolu*) meanings of practices never before known; this wonder-world opens the door to experiences only sensed or dreamed, such as actually witnessing the ritual flutes, dangerous and hidden from women and children. Of course, not all of the secrets are revealed to boys at first, only those appropriate to their age and ritual grade. In this sense, *ioolu* for Sambia has a strong connotation of things hidden from the public gaze, a notion apparently common to New Guinea systems (Schwimmer 1980). Like many other New Guinea peoples, Sambia also speak of the *kablu* (kernel, foundation, root) or "base" of something to signify its "inside" meaning. With each successive initiation more hidden knowledge and practices are added. By this notion the men explicitly demarcate a boundary between the inside (men's house) and secular affairs, which they think of as polluted, messy, dangerous, and uncongenial. Moreover, men implicitly differentiate between sacred knowledge known to elders and the lesser knowledge and practices of subordinates. Thus, they hierarchically structure knowledge and practices, linking knowledge to moral action and hence agency. For example, boys can know about the ritual flutes, but only after third-stage initiation do they have the right to use them—a metaphor for active, penetrative sex and social control.

Binding male subjectivity to a new, more adult form of agency is criti-

cal to the thinking involved in ritual initiation. Ritual secrecy is governed by the general category *pweiyu*, or “ritual,” ordinarily glossed as a noun to refer to an extant practice, such as the nose-bleeding ritual, as well as by a modification of *pweiyu* which can be used as a verb in the sense of tying or binding “a thing together.” Men will also refer to a “ritual binding” (also *pweiyu*) in the same manner. For instance, a special vine from the forest is used to bind ritual things; when it is cut the vine exudes white tree sap (likened to mother’s milk), and men mark this meaning *pweiyu* with a secret name. Thus they can talk of how the vine is hidden in a men’s net string bag, making the container of secret paraphernalia twice-bound, first with the vine inside and then with the bag around it. Such metaphors of ritual secrecy are compared or analogically contrasted with “outside,” the visible and public that is impure or polluted, and of contrary nature, such as women’s net bags, used for garden produce, babies, and firewood, covered in dirt and debris. The kinds of net bags have a radically divergent nature, which reflects the divergent nature of male and female; they become likened to enemies. In the broadest sense of *pweiyu* is the sensibility that to initiate a boy is to bind his thought to the laws and customs of ritual secrecy.

Ritual rebirth is the key to understanding these changes for Sambia boys. We should think of masculine rebirth as an ontological process having subjective, body, and political ramifications. To create the necessary shared secret reality of this rebirth as a subjectively “real” experience in the objective circumstances of the men’s house requires both a shared mythopoetic image of the effect upon the body and an agreement about its real-world effects for political organization. What is at stake is the effort of initiated men as an organization to seize control of the cultural imagination and its influence over the women’s world and the control of public affairs. Subjectively, the mythopoetic imagery creates through many sensual experiences a conception of maleness and manliness exclusive of all womanliness.

For example, the bachelor as a category is referred to as *moongenyu*, a term that means “new bamboo.” It metaphorically refers to the prototypic young bachelor as a type of muscular/virile body and as a form of partially empowered agent following third-stage initiation. Politically, while the bachelor has more freedom to move about in public life, he must still avoid women in all contexts, but he is able to dominate boys and inseminate them. Secretly, however, *moongenyu* also signifies a manly penis: the

imagery corresponds in men's secret lore to how the penis is believed to grow and enlarge, gradually enabling sexual intercourse. This is based upon the assumptive notion that successive inseminations result in the creation of a fertile adolescent youth, himself capable of reproducing the system of substance transfer. He is the very picture of what is regarded as sexy, lusty, and beautiful—an object of desire for both women and boys. This certainly is the case for the Kaluli people of the Great Papuan Plateau (Schieffelin 1976: 125), but without its being either totally mandatory or secret, and the Baruya (Godelier 1986), as noted before, who totalize boy-inseminating as an ontological principle of all masculinity.

Mythopoetics of Secret Masculinity

Thus the bachelor (or *moongenyu*) becomes an object of desire and social attraction that merges both the idealized mythic figure of the bachelor and the real-life person into a unified fetish-category. We might compare this imagery to that of Woman/Other as an idealized object that is substituted for the real-life woman to whom a boy is later married and with whom he will engage in sexual relations. But such a comparison, whether for the Baruya, the Kaluli, or the Sambia, imagines that the Man is fetishized because his body is or contains the essences or substances necessary for the chain of virility and reproduction. Indeed, the Sambia believe that the man creates virility/growth in the boy, in a manner analogous to how women create babies. Kaluli deny knowing where babies come from (Schieffelin 1976: 125), which their ethnographer seems skeptical about. However, such a denial is perfectly in keeping with the metaphorical intent of their beliefs, since they see men as the admired and desired sexual object, placing ideological and conscious emphasis upon the Ideal Man, not the Woman/Other. By comparison, the Sambia make it clear why they fetishized the *moongenyu*: they admire his phallus and they expect he will “grow” the phalli of the initiates whom he inseminates. Sambia men imagine that the glans penis grows in a last surge of ritual inseminations near the third-stage initiation, representing a final growth of manly phallus, signifying quintessential maleness and potency.

In fact, it is an image frozen in the developmental subjectivity of the male. The growth of the penis, in the men's ritual pedagogy and practice, suggests the notion that the inseminations result in an elongation of the phallus as a “pure product” of semen. The sense of this “growth” is forever

constitutive of the man's sense of virility and body image as he approaches sexual relations with boys and then later contemplates the dangers of sex with women. This sense of timelessness pervades the formation of male subject/object desires and relationships in the lifelong practice of ritual secrecy. Adult men cannot do without the barrier of ritual secrecy that separates them and enables their negotiation of sometimes tense and challenging situations, requiring deceit and manipulation on a personal level (Herdt and Stoller 1990: chap. 5). In short, the subjectivity of secret maleness embodies what I have previously referred to as the ideology of an Ideal Man, but this is a split image, the public adult warrior's mature body and the secret subjective body that is still "growing" as if it were a boy, in the cultural reality of the men's clubhouse.

Eventually the bachelor must give up the receptor role and become the dominant player who bestows the gift of semen to younger initiates. But does the youth have enough semen, and is his phallus sufficiently close to the imagery of Ideal Man that he will not be silently mocked by the younger initiate who will drink his sperm? This question hangs in the transitional space from being the subject who desires penetration by the older male to becoming the Ideal Man object who desires to inseminate a younger boy. The older youth also begins to anticipate marriage arrangements. A key informant, the youth Moondi, for instance, once told me how he began to fantasize about inseminating a favored younger initiate soon after his third-stage ceremony (Herdt 1987a: chap. 3; Stoller and Herdt 1985). Until that time he had perceived himself primarily as an object, not as much as a subject, in the mythopoetics and secret practice of being male. Within the year, though, he began for the first time to consciously desire women, specifically a younger woman betrothed to him, whom he eventually married, largely completing the transformation from object to idealized subject.

Ritual rebirth is a key to understanding this transformation in sexual subjectivity, for it appeals symbolically to suckling and breast-feeding, recast into sexually intimate relations between an older and younger male. The concept of feeding or *monjapi'u*—the sense of "feeding to grow or nurture"—is critical here (see Herdt 1981, 1984a). The orality of the sucking links sex with feeding, and semen with breast milk, in countless ways, literal and figurative, all essential to the embodiment of the intentional reality of trust and utopian commitment that the men try to inspire in the boys.

As Sambia equate semen with mother's milk, and allow for the substi-

tution of semen later in life by certain white tree saps and cassowary grease, they condition their masculinity on the secret ingestion of fluids and essences. The initiate who sucks the young man's penis is imagined to be like an infant suckling at the breast. That nursing is fully fetishized can be seen from the fact that an adult man is aroused by the sight of a woman's breasts or the act of her nursing a child (Herdt and Stoller 1990: chap. 7) and that gazing on this is forbidden to men, especially the young father.

Suckling as a trope thus opens up as a major symbolic arena of ritual/emotional/erotic relationships in the homosociality of the men's clubhouse. Its secret ontology conceptualizes penis "suckling" which men do to "grow and feed" boys as the vital dietetic process necessary to attain manhood. Men also inseminate their wives, first through fellatio, and then in genital sex, in order to "grow" her breasts and make her a strong mother. The bachelors thus believe (literally, not metaphorically) that they "grow" boys, with a power to create secret masculinity, just as the boys' mothers once "grew" them. To say that the bachelors have "faith" in this belief system is a necessary redundancy because the elders go to great lengths to shelter the initiates from the "polluted" world of public affairs. Of course, it will easily be seen that the public discussion of this idea would subject the men to skepticism and a variety of forms of accusation of exploitation and manipulation of women and the younger boys, as the men themselves acknowledge when they say that they are *bomwalyu* men—middle men—situated halfway between sex with the boys and sex with women, which they must hide from both sides. Ritual secrecy obviously protects them from interrogation all the way around. But we should not think for one moment that the men are skeptical that their inseminations make the boys into strong warriors, since they explain their own personal development in this same way (Herdt and Stoller 1990: chap. 4). Such cynicism is a luxury of the modern period that can ill be afforded by people at war.

We begin to see how the clubhouse tried to produce the utopian sense of a hermetic circle of self-sufficiency—especially during the troubled times of warfare. What the men are producing, I think, is something more inclusive than politics, and that is their shared commitment as a men's house to their own conception of reality in the world. Perhaps one might say that power precedes the practice of boy-inseminating by creating institutions over which men have control; thus, in these societies, political power is a necessary, but ritual secrecy is the sufficient, condition to satisfy social reproduction.

The imagery of the Sambia Ideal Man entails both sexuality and power in the role of the budding young warrior. Not only is it a demonstration of the warrior's sexual expectations, but the mythology of the role provides a context for individuals to reflect upon the changes in their bodies and erotics that are privileged to males and regarded as "the gift" of secret initiation. Men fear the loss of semen as a vital essence. They require replenishment of the fluid from a secret white tree sap, also compared to milk and semen, which is always consumed after sex with boys and with women, to stay healthy. But it is women who are feared more than boys, a point that probably contributes to the persistence of boy-inseminating. Because male status and social position depend upon this achievement, which is regarded as neither "natural" nor "inevitable" in secret masculinity, the desire for change in one's body and social advancement mirrors a whole new area of subjectivities that transfer the desires onto culturally approved and sanctioned objects.

The ritual flutes are a key to understanding this merging and transfer of ontologies. The sound of the flutes, the *namboolu-aambelu* ("female frog," or better yet, "cry of the woman frog"), signifies a complex system of desires that become a product of power, pleasure, ritual knowledge, and advancement, all rolled into the orthodox symbol of two bamboo tubes (smaller/larger), always played in pairs, that are said to be "married." By contrast, the bull-roarer (*duka'-yungalu*, or "bird's cry") is marked as a male signifier and is used less to attract than to repel spirits of the dead, as well as to announce the funeral of a boy, at which event the flutes will be played out of sight. The idea of the "marriage of the flutes" as a metaphor for the man/boy erotic relationship is evocative but hidden totally from the public meaning of the flutes, said to be a "female frog." In the men's secret reality, however, the idea fans out to encompass a whole network of relationships and practices, and together with the sounds of the bull-roarer comes close to representing the totality of men's secret collective consciousness (in Durkheim's, and then Read's [1952], senses). While the jural contract of the homoerotic relation is missing from public discourse and affairs, ritual secrecy provides the necessary envelope for embodiment of the daily practice. Hence, we can understand how, through the imagery of ritual percussion instruments and sacred music, the secret ontology of subject/object relations and idealized Objects is extended beyond the men's house into the secular world that came before the clubhouse. In another context, Gillian Gillison has made a similar point: "Gimi men

design flutes—and, by analogy, their whole society—not to valorize female fertility but to cure the fatal consequences of men's own desires" (1993: 354).

The metaphors and sensations of boy-inseminating represent for the boy physical attachment to men—though not as much to an individual man as the collective pool of semen (*kwei-waku*). Indeed, this secret image provides the secret name for the bull-roarer, thus signifying the actor's connection to associates in his time, their body substance, and the pool of past transmissions of substance that created them in turn (Herdt 1984b). The ritual metaphor becomes an omnibus representation for thinking and talking about transforming a man's sexual partner into a cultural producer in all major areas of male advantage: warfare, ritual, and marriage for reproduction. According to this mythopoetics, males and females differ in most respects of their being, including the origins of their being in the cosmos. The ritual development of the male is designed to create and reproduce this distinctive ontology. Ritual "death" and "rebirth" are basic to it: out of the symbolic processes of initiation a new being, a new person/self with a body of different substance, is born, and thus the genders in society are reproduced.

The duration of sociosexual relations between older and younger males is roughly coterminous with their residence in the men's house, that is, their bachelorhood. But the transition from initiate to bachelor, from being more like a boy to more like an Ideal Man, is difficult, halting, and often filled with anxieties, particularly for the younger boys in an age-grade and for those without the social support of powerful clan-families. Since third-stage initiation signifies advancement to marriageable status, requiring the willingness of the father and elders to bestow upon the youth an appropriate, nubile young woman for marriage, the loss of a father or the lack of a sister to exchange suggests the tenuousness of the supplicant without suitable symbolic capital or access to a suitable bride to complete his male personhood through marriage and fatherhood. This tenuousness is forever threaded into the life-crisis subjectivities of the transition out of the men's house.

Secret Conditional Masculinity

There are three great ritual secrets of Sambia men: the practice of nose-bleeding, which forces initiates to nose-bleed in order to remove female

pollution and toughen their masculinity; oral insemination by an older male that is supposed to produce strength and masculinity, as well as virtue and good health; and the final revelation of the origin myth, which tells that once upon a time men were hermaphroditic. This hidden knowledge and practice entirely belies the public male mythology of male dominance. The men themselves are profoundly concerned that the women might learn of this knowledge and practice, which would make the men feel deeply shamed and humiliated. This thought is such a source of distress and subjective vulnerability to all initiated Sambia males that it can only be whispered in the men's cult house (Herdt 1981).

Ritual secrecy of course protects against disclosure (more properly, against public discussion of these matters). On pain of death, women and children are forbidden entry into the circle of secrets, especially the practices of ritual blood-letting and ritual insemination of boys by older males to masculinize them. Here, clearly, we find the echoes of Simmel's conception of secrecy as an antisocial force in this notion of restriction and manipulation. Such quaint practices, heavily tinged with power, pose a double challenge to the anthropology of secrecy. On the one hand, they implicitly undermine the public ideology of the men that they are superior to women. The reason for this is that in both of these ritual practices, men are apparently in jeopardy of seeming to imitate, even to identify, with women: the nose-bleeding as menstruation, the insemination as birth-giving. What the men are creating is a new form of reality, which includes new subjects and objects that obviate the idea that men imitate women. But this is also a reconstitution of the desires and morality of the boys. It is this latter association of ritual secrecy with the production of cultural reality that interests me most.

A general relationship between social consciousness and subjectivity is implied in this change. To recall Simmel's (1950) brilliant insight: secrecy has the enigmatic effect of heightening the social awareness of actors, even as it reduces their self-consciousness as individual actors. In another sense, secrecy creates perpetual stage fright and chronic self-evaluation, which are tangible in the anxiety one sees in men who prepare to stage public ceremonies in front of the entire village. Of course the self-awareness is absolutely vital to managing impressions and hidden desires while living in close quarters. Boys have to be taught, via a secret ontology, how to render a public performance in a seamless and pleasing way. They excel and mas-

ter the challenge, but they pay a price in social and psychic vigilance that requires vast social energy to keep things intact.

This aspect of ritual secrecy may seem paradoxical because, in the Western preconception, social and self-consciousness are conflated or equated. But being intimate with others is having to live perpetually on stage, and we must not confuse social awareness with social engagement here: the differentiation process of secrecy accentuates social awareness. The lesson of ritual secrecy is that to harbor a secret leads the self to withdraw trust and self-presence from social interaction, which may be seen as diminishing social engagement from the perspective of the folk psychology of the "true" or essential self in Western life. From the perspective of Sambia ritual secrecy, however, it actually produces the opposite effect. By intensifying the withdrawal of trust from the public to the men's house, there will be greater awareness of impressions and performances and the rules of the public role, whether being enacted as father or shaman, as the secret ontology is safe and contained in homosocial recesses of the men's house. The social role in public affairs signifies elements of what we claim on the front stage; while secret positionality signifies what we are not but what we ought to be. By comparison, the Western system of contractual secrecy privileges notions of individualized "fantasy" or "clandestine contracts" behind closed doors, following the divergent logic of Cartesian subject/object and Freudian reality/fantasy splitting of consciousness. These conflate "individual fantasy/cultural reality" and physical reality in the time and space world (Herdt 1987d) as experienced by the patient who confesses to his doctor, or the client who consults her lawyer.

We should not interpret this secret and emerging cultural reality as if it were the same as myth, or as the unconscious, for ritual secrecy does not observe the distinctions we have made in anthropology between myth and thought (Young 1983; Obeyesekere 1992). Rather, being always hidden from certain others, and being sometimes intensely intimate, this stitched-together reality forms the necessary developmental basis for wrenching the boy from domestic sociality and subjective imagery, providing the sources for the phenomenology of the boy following his initiation at age seven. This is what ordinary reality in the adult is made from. Secrecy in the rest of the boy's life has such a power to charm; he is made to reckon with its dramatic and sometimes brutal revelations; but soon enough he comes to feel a growing faith in this nature of things.

The ethnographer of secrecy is thus witness to an ontological production in a double sense: the ritual secret is the invention of a men's culture that has a vested interest in making situated ideological claims about reality and society seem totally natural; while the individual actor accommodates to this contested turf by producing desires and performing ritual acts that reflect back upon the body-self as if his secret subjectivity was as inexorable as life and death.

Thus is necessity transformed into pleasure. In everyday sociality, commonsense impressions and their ramifications in action no longer seem as fundamental as they once did. Secret obligation assumes the intimacy of a community of believers who yearn for support from each other and a mode of self-rationalization in all of the meanings of their public actions. Where the boys begin actively resisting separation from their mothers' bodies and yearn to return to their fold, years of living in the men's house and sharing in the teachings of women's pollution actively transform the boys' desires for renunciation into active fear of menstrual blood and its traces on the female body (though a good Freudian would say that this idea is itself a token or rationalization, and thus represents a mystification of some deeper meaning buried in the unconscious). Merely to think of menstrual blood or the public metaphor for it (*pulungatnyî*) is to produce a compulsive spitting by a man, since he has taken the thing (menstrual blood) in his mind and mouth and must eliminate it. From puberty, when it is first rather awkwardly performed, through adulthood, the experience of this spitting, if not in fact the desire for it, contains the pleasure of taking in and eliminating that which is so dangerous (Herdt and Stoller 1990).

It is through these small and diminutive acts of masculinity, loaded as they are with secret training and knowledge, that we come to understand the development of secret systems of desire. Where the spitting begins in trauma for boys, the result of a dislocation they despise, it ends many years later in the self-motivated and often solitary acts of an adult man who clears his mind and mouth continuously—the admired and ultimate graces of being a Sambia man. This progressive “naturalization” of secret gestures is as seductive and unconscious as the experience of what Americans experience as “spontaneous” erotic desires, which conspire to descend upon the self, much as the ancient Greeks believed ideas to come into their heads from the gods (Simon 1977) or as the Japanese novelist Mishima (1954: 92) similarly described the aesthetics of social masks emerging as if inspired by spontaneous forces in the heavens.

Totalizing Systems

The Sambia refer to their system of collective initiations as *iku mokeiyu*, a multivocal concept that signifies a complex sequence of rituals and a collective male reality. *Mokeiyu* refers to a kind of central sacred fetish, blood-red from the shaman's headband wrapped around the bundle, shaped like a phallus and filled with power. Its potency is fundamental to building ritual cult houses, bestowing a kind of "growth fertility" upon their structures and persons. The fetish is used in a thumping ritual to stimulate body growth in boys by pounding their chests. *Mokeiyu* refers as well to ritual authority, a specialist (often but not always a shaman) of high degree, who "sings out" for other men to assemble and begin the ritual initiation process (Tali is such a specialist, though not a shaman). Finally, there is the sense in which the *iku mokeiyu*, or "ritual cult," engages the notion of a group of man-trees, since *iku* is the common term for tree, but is also the common lexeme for "patriclan," which also stands as a general signifier for "man." The idea easily merges into the notion that the *iku mokeiyu* represents the larger cultural formation of a group of men's houses that typically initiate their sons together.

This latter sense of *mokeiyu* has excess metaphoric value in its reference to a variety of features that embody or link a whole group of men who are thought, again in a diffuse but definite way, to share in the same body substance. The utopia of a collective pool of men, their bodily substances, especially semen, is iconic of a system of villages and territories. The power of the medicine bundle also promotes an identification with a phallic red thing that brings good health and long life. It's a remarkable indication of collective consciousness that Durkheim would no doubt have liked.

In fact, the concept of *kwei-waku*, or metaphoric "semen pool," calls to mind some of the traits most admired in the Sambia sexual subjectivity of the Ideal Man. By linking the bull-roarer and secret flutes to the semen pool, as the men do at the time of the cult-house raising, they prevail upon a generalized power in the time and space world—albeit known only to them, and hidden from women—a literal, embodied polity. Secretly men believe that all the men who ever played the flutes or twirled the bull-roarer claim inheritance of this semen pool (Herdt 1984b). The practice of boy-inseminating, the men believe, links the boy not so much to individual men as to the collective pool of semen, timeless and indestructible. The strands of these concrete and metaphoric meanings, hidden in the secret

folklore of idiomatic male discursive practices, take years for the boy to piece together in what I am calling the secret masculinity.

The constitution of the men's houses as a cluster to form a regional cult of ritual secrecy involves now a whole range of elements: (1) the creation of a collective *mokeiyu* system; (2) the initiation of all males without exception into this system, which instills many ritual practices; (3) the initiates' seclusion in the men's house, which goes on for years, until fatherhood; (4) the use of icons, flutes, and bull-roarers to promote the collective designs and practices of the men's house; (5) the use of ritual pedagogy to communicate secret texts, and to warn of the sanction of death if the secrets are revealed; (6) the embodiment of power through semen from the older generation; (7) the notion that all boys, temporarily residing in the clubhouse of another village, are given immunity from war and death, and safe passage back to their village; (8) the renewal of the pledge to keep the secrets from women and children; (9) the sharing in a pool of ritual secret words and concepts, as noted in the idea of *kwei-waku*; (10) the emergence of a system of imagery, which takes a focus in desires, for an idealized and desired male sexual object, hypermasculine, which I have called the Ideal Man; (11) the final emergence of a system of subject/object relations, hidden from the public, which requires secret language and objects, and the ability to master the social construction of appearances and impressions of reality in daily life. I would claim that this rather sketchy and crude formulation comes closest to what we might call the collective sense of a men's secret society among the Sambia.

In piecing together this image of the cultural reality of secrecy among the Sambia we are led back to question the fundamental problem posed by Kenneth Read in his critical work among the Gahuku long ago. Read asked what made the cult a functioning entity, for the promotion of the collective good or integration of the society. But he also quickly implied that the men were staging a hoax in their secrecy because he could not see how their goals could be the same as the women's. Once we take the reality of secrecy seriously we can return to an earlier question: Why do the men need ritual secrecy in order to create agency and sociality?

The Men's Resistance to the Boys

The answer—to return to my opening argument—rests with our faulty conception of society as a shared consensual reality. There are contests for

the definition of reality being shaped time and again by war or the threat of war in New Guinea societies like that of the Sambia. The men in these secret formations are in dire need of solidarity and compelling ways to bend the realities of social relations toward the purpose of military and political alliance. This is never easy to do; betrayal, assassination, sorcery, countersorcery, pollution and poisoning by women, as well as sheer threats of domination by other men, especially bands of warriors from other villages, hang in the air, tugging at the seams of consensual agreements on morality and maturity in these intimate communities. All of this is made more difficult by the strong and compelling manner in which women and preinitiate boys share in one domestic household, with a different calculus of morality and maturity—a divergent cultural world (Herdt 1987a).

Here finally we must confront the basic mistrust of the boys by their fathers—the resistance of the men to having their sons initiated. Many accounts of initiation focus on the anxieties of the boys in their fear of being conscripted into the rites. The boys' fears and anxieties are real and must not be underestimated (Herdt 1982a). However, from the perspective of the reproduction of the men's ritual society and secrecy, it is the profound disquiet and anxiety about trusting the boys that is perhaps a far greater threat to the clubhouse. What do the men have to fear? Primarily that the boys, once let into the secrets, will go back to their mothers and tell all. This would be a great humiliation and a devastation. But since the men's clubhouse is the seat of military strategy and war-making, the mistrust of the boy means that he might alert his mother or other women and children to the plans of the men for battle, tipping off the enemy and creating a potential disaster in case of attack. Why would the boy-initiate do such a thing to his own father and brothers? After all, does he not admire and respect them, and want to be like them? Will their legacy not be his; their land his; and his wife bestowed by them? All of this is true, and the objections must be registered in this rational manner, as we shall see in Barth's account of the Baktaman (chapter 4). However, we are not dealing only with rationality, but also with social mistrust and paranoia, and the dread of being responsible for death and destruction, the ultimate conditions of masculinity.

The new initiate, before he has been socialized into the men's beliefs and practices, is feared because he may be an unwitting agent of destruction, just as he was as a boy. He may unwittingly transmit pollution from his mother into the men's house. Likewise he may unwittingly spill secrets

and give away the military plans and secrets of his men's house, should he enter into intimate relations with his mother. The fear of all of this is inflicted in later male development and all sexual subjectivity in adult men; no doubt this early trauma is reflected in the fear of men and fathers alike, when they ponder the question: Can we trust this child?

Here again, the boy-initiate's compliance with the demands of the men's society to be inseminated by older adolescent bachelors serves as a general proxy for how the men assess their ability to trust in a particular boy. One who agrees, who is compliant, who is thought to obey, but also to intentionally follow the necessary taboos and ritual rules—such a boy is to be trusted with authority in public affairs. The men gradually gain in their confidence of him, and his status rises. Perhaps he will become a Great Man, perhaps not. They no longer monitor his behavior, or force the bachelors into surveillance of his comings and goings, as typically happens in the immediate aftermath of first-stage ritual initiation. Thus the rise in male agency is a direct expression of the boys' agreement with the men to be entrusted by them with their reality.

A clue to the alternative mode of sociality and reality-building comes from the role of the erotic in these secret ritual traditions. Secret initiation is the introduction to sexual development and erotic life not only for the Sambia. From Aboriginal Australia to the Papuan Gulf to the Sepik River area of New Guinea, wherever secret formations flourished, the nature of all sexual interaction was generally withheld from boys and girls until initiation. Many such societies actually disapprove of childhood sexual play. Sambia boys are fervent in associating the awakening of the erotic in them to their debut with adolescent bachelor partners. Surely the structuring of cultural reality is at issue, the stamp of the divine on the homoerotic a particular sign of a divergent ontology in these societies. Equally contested is the site of social reproduction—men's house or menstrual hut?—and how one gender or the other is ideologically shut out of the process. Perhaps it is the case that where local ontologies, placed in the service of gender differentiation and hierarchy, lead to the formation of secret societies, these will almost always be exclusively in support of male privilege, even domination. Among the Sambia, the excitement of homosociality and boy-insemination draws upon both its secrecy and the devotion to such privilege. Thus, among the Sambia, exclusion of women creates an idealized and fetishized Woman/Other, whose nature precludes understanding the ontology of the homoerotic in the development of the male. Surely we

might think of this as a permanent misogyny that stems from too much liminality and too much of a division of community into permanent armed camps, all signs of a world of war.

Secrecy emerges from the tribal world as a form of differentiation that both solidifies and divides the genders, age groups, and thereby the known world. Contained within the ritual secret is a theory of being: of being male and female, young and old, higher and lower, social practices that create boundaries and formations. The effect is to reproduce these in the social order, as objects apart from the actor, a point that is difficult to grasp in the secrecy systems of Gahuku-Gama or Baktaman or Baruya. The insight is best grasped when these societies undergo rapid change, and we are, for a few moments, witnesses to the cultural realities of secrecy, before these die.

Secrecy Disrupted

And this leads me back to the opening story. I had come with the Sambia, that quarter century ago, to hear and learn the secret myths. The Yagwoia elders were eager to tell them and were prepared to do whatever was necessary to bring this about, including scuffing up and removing their own grandsons. But why, I did not know; I know only that I felt bewildered and highly self-conscious; a White man, younger than some of the men's sons and grandsons, who had been shown the door. Of course politics and colonial power were in the air, but had I known they would re-create this conflict, I would have stayed in my village rather than witness the exclusion of a whole generation from the reproduction of the hidden reality.

Of course there was an accidental history to this "barn dance," one of those unexpected quirks of social change common to colonization: The younger men had never been initiated! Not one of them. Here they were, strapping youths, twenty-year-olds, and even men who looked thirty or more, who never knew the glories and grinds of initiation ordeals. They could not possibly have fathomed the embodied meanings of insemination the Sambia boys among our group had known.

Among the Yagwoia, the missionaries had done their job well; had arrived a generation before their beachhead among the Sambia. They were too numerous and remained too long among the Yagwoia, and the traditional secret practices were among their first targets. Their first step was to get rid of the ritual flutes. They did their best to oppose initiation and

largely succeeded, at least in the elimination of all new recruits into the men's house. However, the adult men still had their secret reality, tucked away, in the form of the wonder-world of secret lore and all the stories and ritual teachings. They wanted to teach this; the urge to pedagogy was strong. No wonder the older Yagwoia men had shown such fascination with the Sambia lads in our company: the boys still practiced the tradition of boy-insemination, and it provoked the uncanny desire of those visited from the past by the shades of who they once were and never could be again.

A new taboo was issued: the ritual traditions would be kept secret from all subsequent generations; the sacred stories would survive in silence among the older generation. In that strange disconnected reality of secrecy, the elders could abide this only by teaching each other all they knew—a kind of reciprocal process of idealizing and making of each other Ideal Men. They had no choice when it came to the missionaries' oppression. But still, of course, they were dissatisfied; who was to receive and pass on the sacred stories and myths?

How could we know the problem that the Sambia and I presented to the cultural production of these old men? Their own grandsons were not initiated but we were. And not only were we not their offspring; we used to be enemies. But their sons—seemingly in defiance of the timeless quality of the secret world I have painted, and at least as far as their ritual system was concerned—were symbolically dead and gone forever to them. And even though we came from far away and I was White and the hour was late, I reckon that we, and I, offered the best chance to preserve their cultural treasures. Indeed, the plaintive note of this writing leads to my end point: the older cultural reality—the one produced in secret, and then hidden from the missionaries and ultimately from their own offspring—that world of hidden subjects and objects, and all it represented in the glory of their manhood—is now dying, if not in fact dead.

This is a romantic view, of course, and it is meant to counter the feckless cynicism that would see the secrets as empty vessels hidden from the missionaries who suspected them of being filled with subversion. Of much greater importance is the reality of the Yagwoia stories, for that is based upon a dialectic of what is secret and the corresponding system of desires and objects in the public domain. And all of that is of course gone and impossible to salvage except in the most crude and formulaic way. The sons and grandson-insiders were excluded and the enemy-outsiders included, a corruption of the creation of ritual secrecy as I have outlined it

here. Obviously my status as a White man, a token of the colonial outside, as well as my privileged status as confidant and initiate of Sambia, allowed me to sit in and tape-record. I am not proud of the power contained in that fact; I am only grateful that the stories, however fragmentary, can be preserved for some future generation of Yagwoia. It was my social responsibility, living among the Sambia in those times, to share in the cultural ontology of the boys and men in these matters. They made me privy to their greatest secret, the myth of parthenogenesis (Herdt 1981). I am forever grateful to them for it.

What the Sambia see at that final most secret part—the revelation of the myth of parthenogenesis, at the end of the ritual cycle—is not empty, but a cosmic myth that explains not only the origins of human society, but the creation of the genders out of the original hermaphroditic state of humankind. Thus, the men see in this final stage vindication of their secret masculinity—that is, the lived experience created through ritual and now reflected back upon their long lives.

“Myths treat of origins but derive from transitions,” Victor Turner (1968b: 576) once wrote, a bit of wisdom that links the Sambia with the Yagwoia in reckoning the nature of being in the world of war and ritual secrecy. For their sacred myth tells that once upon a time the world was originated by two beings of hermaphroditic nature, a blend of male and female anatomy, whose sexual interactions impregnated one and masculinized the other, thus founding society, but also initiating the secrecy on which male power and warfare were based. Sambia reckon their sons are too green to hear this story until they have already achieved fatherhood, and I think they are right. The hidden reality of the culture heroes and what they did and desired is too much for the youth to take when they are still growing up.

But for all of these indigenous and colonial bits and pieces of a drama of power and cultural loss among the Yagwoia, what really mattered in my hearing the stories, the Sambia have said to me, is that *they* had already staked a claim on my soul. This is a normative claim, by the way, typical of the religious sentiments and oaths that mingle between the generations. Sambia seemed to worry not only about the loss of names and souls being stolen by the Yagwoia—the sense of the power in those myths was still very great, in spite of the commotion—but about the peril to my own soul, in hearing, taking in—embodying—those myths. The evidence of their claim, as I have often been told, is that people have seen me—to be more precise, my “totems” or “spirit familiars,” the iconography of my soul

according to Sambia dream theory—in their own night dreams (Herdt 1987c; Herdt and Stoller 1990).

My “nature” was not the same as theirs because I had not grown up with the Sambia; my “growth” and “strength” as a male knew none of their embodiments. But it is equally true that I had come to share in the ritual world of Sambia men by witnessing so many of their initiations. Whatever differences existed between these two tribes, and indeed, the differences between the Yagwoia and their former enemies the Sambia were considerable, this much they knew that they secretly shared in common: an ancient practice of boy-inseminating rituals that created manhood. The Yagwoia elders seemed to know this in their first meeting with our troop, and the recognition of what was lost, and what might have been, was a powerful indicator of their decision to tell the myths. Their reality-sharing posited absolute faith in the hidden initiations as a time-honored means of the elders and ancestral spirits and the essences of semen to make a man out of what was once just a boy-thing. Perhaps in this peculiar way, too, my person (apart from the skin color) and ritual knowledge were closer to the Yagwoia elders than their own sons were, since the latter could never be initiated, or even see an initiation performed. My participation in Sambia rites, and my interest in them now, suggested a rather complete identification with the local theory of both being and doing secret male practices—totally at odds with the teachings of the missionaries. Before the time of European contact and missionary efforts, ritual practices had been a screaming secret in Yagwoia society, too, separating male from female, and elder from younger. Today, however, the rites are dead, truly a whispered secret unknown to the most recent generations, suggesting the kind of historical hiatus that brings down empires and raises new ones. Perhaps the one thing worse than having lost the power to regenerate reality, the legacy to pass on to sons, is the absolute dread that the secrets, if passed on, might be misused, laughed at, and spoiled, the kind of betrayal that might end in the self-blinding sacrilege of an Oedipus.

We must not think that the story of the loss of secrecy among the Yagwoia is by any means unique. Maurice Godelier has observed for the Baruya:

The initiation ceremonies—which had never been discontinued among the Baruya during the colonial period but had merely been held far from the gaze of the missionaries and the soldiers—

increased in scale albeit still without the rituals associated with war, which was now forbidden, and with homosexual relations between the initiates, which were on the decline. (1995: 73)

The decline hastens, and wherever secrecy is at stake, the pressure is increased.

These younger Yagwoia men, shamefully excluded from the secret stories by their elders, were excluded because their *elders* felt shame that their offspring were not initiated. The youths were not proper, virtuous, moral masculine persons in the eyes of their fathers and grandfathers: they were the Other. While this allusion in their remarks seemed to indicate the missionaries, it will be clear that the exclusion from the clubhouse (which used to be primarily directed against the Woman/Other) somehow also discolors their relations with their own uninitiated sons. Today their sons have souls claimed by others: namely, the Christian missionaries. How could the young men understand their elders' form of secrecy at all, the latter wondered out loud? Not only does this Christian civilization not know their sons' real Yagwoia names—the childhood names that should have given way at the time of initiation to grander, warrior names of old—but their sons carried Christian names that were utterly foreign and meaningless to them. In the great song-ropes of the civilization of Anga-speaking societies, including the Sambia (Herdt 1989b), a man can only be known by his inherited ancestral name, which is celebrated in a name-song, linked to many other names, past and present, of his lineage and their territory, a wonderful rope of identity-songs. All of that is lost to the Yagwoia. Truly, their fathers felt, they no longer shared in the same substance, the same being, as themselves. Their nature cannot be the same as that of their fathers. And my willingness, indeed, my eager desire to hear those sacred stories and take them into my being, made of myself a means to reproduce their cultural reality temporarily.

A generation ago, Roy Wagner wrote of another New Guinea people in a completely different context: "Life, then, is for the Daribi a matter of retaining one's soul in its association with one's body, of keeping one's free will and mobility, and of holding at bay the world of influences and entities which would 'bind' the soul and tear it free of its matrix" (1967: 61). The idea rings true also of the Sambia and the Yagwoia, except that there is a secret ritual embodiment that they provide and demand, which they believe vital to create and nurture the soul, through long years of gender-

segregated seclusion. This ritual embodiment is their manhood. A man's soul is the embodiment of all that tradition and secret ontology, which, when torn asunder, renders all of sacred life meaningless.

Here is what the Yagwoia elders found so intolerable: the terrible old threat of betrayal of the secrets by their own sons. They felt that the influence of the missionaries could never be trusted. As Godelier has suggested for the Baruya, betrayals of all kinds occur in social life, including terrorism, rapes, and so on, and these are usually "forgivable"—with one exception:

Such are the betrayals by initiates, men or women, who pass on to members of the other sex the secrets and powers of their own sex. These betrayals jeopardize the very foundations and mechanisms of domination and exploitation of one part of society by other. They run directly counter to the major contradiction in these classless societies, which is the subordination of one sex to the other, of women to men. They impinge upon people's conceptions of the order of society and the universe. They flout the ideological teachings and the whole edifice of legitimization built around this order. (1989: 179)

We begin to understand the intolerable plight of the Yagwoia elders, who felt not only that they had been "robbed" of their own sons by the missionaries. The chaos visited upon them and the treachery of their sons' and grandsons' rejection of the secret initiations were unpardonable. For surely to feel rejected by one's own son because of what one is, the very nature of one's flesh and being, a product of secret ritual, is a kind of castration on a cosmic level. The elders cared nothing for Christian heaven. They felt only the betrayal of their sons' necessary support since the elders' souls depended upon their sons' ritual observances and memorization to ensure their own immortality. Pity them for what they have lost in the virtues of society as much as for how they fear an indefinite future and loss of immortality. Here we see at last that the stakes in ritual secrecy are the material world as it is, and the utopian world as it is intended to be, forever.

My fate will be complete when, on another day, those Yagwoia myths, published and then recycled back to their real origin hole, fall into the hands of the by-then literate grandsons and great-grandsons of the men in this story, who receive them as completely strange, not familiar at all—the

token of some weird lost tradition; or worse, they are greeted with hostility and thrown back in my face as the inventions of a strange old White man who obviously never knew the culture because, after all, there never was secrecy.

It is through such stories that anthropology remains forever humbled by the small role it has played in such dramas of change; not in causing it, for we have but little power; rather in witnessing the creeping rationalism of Western expansion that normalizes reality by rejecting the lessons of all other cultures. The practice of ritual secrecy is a way of dealing imperfectly with messy and incoherent threads of social relations, especially the anguish of being unable to live up to one's rights and duties in such a warring society; this creates a torment of being male and having a masculine nature that is incomplete, not strong and big enough, to match the image of the Ideal Man. The deployment of secrecy for domination is a common result. For some, the demise of secrecy is liberating; many women experience it this way. For others it represents the loss of the treasure of aboriginal rituals and the role they played in creating the reality of people of all kinds. The elders experience it this way. What stands in their place is denuded and secondhand; the former certainty of their place in the world—created by ritual secrecy out of the cultural imagination—now gives way to another mode of social life based on principles of opposition to secrecy. But these are no more open or certain than before, though they are much more drab.