



The Spanish Bull-Fight: And Kindred Activities

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Source: *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Aug., 1993), pp. 11-15

Published by: [Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2783449>

Accessed: 15/09/2011 20:34

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The Spanish bull-fight

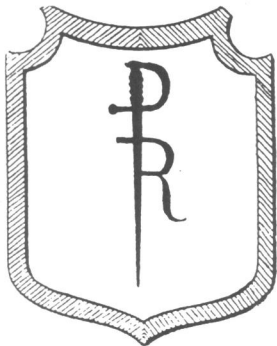
and kindred activities

JULIAN PITT-RIVERS



This article was originally written as a report commissioned by the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

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gional newspapers during the bull-fighting season and a bibliography in Spanish and in French of hundreds of thousands of books). It is also manifest in a whole number of local popular festivals throughout the Iberian Peninsula with the exception of most of Galicia and the northern half of Portugal (which are somewhat similar in this regard). The cult of the bull in the forms both of the *corrida* and of popular taurine festivals is today also an element of the culture of three regions of southern France: the south-west corner (from Toulouse and the Landes to the Spanish frontier), of Provence (as far east as Fréjus) and of the Auvergne.¹ It has been so at least since the Middle Ages and it is gaining in popularity in France at present: *peñas* (bull fight clubs) are being founded in those areas and new forms of popular festivity involving bulls have appeared within the last twenty-five years, notably the '*Toro-Piscine*', which consists in getting the local fire-brigade to create an artificial piscine in the place where the bull is to be baited and into which he may be enticed to tumble. It is worth recalling in this connection that under the Second Empire, in adulation of the Empress Eugénie, who was of Spanish (Andalusian) origin, bull-rings were built all over France (two in Paris and one even as far north as Dunkirk).

The *corrida* was christened by a writer of the early years of the century (Conde de las Navas) 'the most national of Spanish fiestas' (*La fiesta mas nacional*) and Spanish patriotism was allied with it in that epoch almost as closely as with the Catholic faith, though there was and has been at least since the sixteenth century a minority of educated Spaniards who disapproved of it and refused ever to attend.²

During that period many bull-rings were built, some

N INTEGRAL feature of Spanish traditional life is the cult of the bull; it has taken in the past, and still takes today, a variety of forms, of which the *corrida de toros* is by far the best known, the most expensive to attend and the subject of most publications (three national periodicals and a page or two in virtually all national and re-

of them pseudo-Mauresque in architecture, in keeping with the quite erroneous theory that the bullfight was 'of Moorish origin'. Bull-rings were built even in Galicia for the sake of summer visitors and state functionaries, though there they have mostly fallen into ruin or been converted, at least partially, to other uses. The *corrida* is often reviled by Catalan intellectuals as a Castilian imposition (though other Catalan intellectuals have maintained that it was Catalanian in origin and was imitated by the Castilians).³ In fact, bull festivals are celebrated traditionally in a number of Catalan towns. In many they practice a variety of '*encierro*', called the '*corre bou*'.

The bull-fight, also called *lidia* (struggle) in Spanish, is not really a fight at all; the bull cannot win, for even if he kills or disables the matador, one of the other matadors (they are usually three) must replace him and complete the rite. And if he cannot be killed by a bull-fighter he is killed by a butcher, the same evening. He can only survive if the public demands of the president (whose principal function is to be the mouthpiece of the public) that the bull be 'pardoned' on account of his exceptional courage and 'nobility', that is to say because he has embodied to perfection the values that the cult of the bull is intended to promote.

The bull-fight, in brief, is not a fight (though it is a kind of contest of courage); it is in no way a competitive sport (for there is no competition); it is not a game (though the '*course à la cocarde*' in Provence might so be considered, and so might the '*capea*' in Spain or certain of the Portuguese bull festivals; so, probably, was that represented in the famous mosaics of Knossos dating from 1600 B.C. It is not a spectacle, a theatrical show (though it is spectacular and can be most dramatic), for it is not a representation of reality, but reality itself; those who are killed in the ring do not return five minutes later, smiling, to take a curtain-call, they are dead forever like the bull who is towed out of the ring by the mules and butchered on the spot. It is the custom of the *corrida* to honour a bull-fighter who has excelled in his performance by giving him one or two of the bull's ears as a trophy, or, slightly less of an honour, to be granted a tour round the ring ('*vuelta al ruedo*') to receive applause from the public. The bull may be honoured in the same way.

It is a ritual sacrifice and it is a part of Spanish popular Catholicism as indeed is the cult of the bull in general. Professor Romero de Solís has examined in detail the religious aspect of the bull-fight in his book on the *corrida* in Seville.⁴ I would point out that just about half the bulls immolated in the *corridas* of Spain are sacrificed in honour of the Virgin Mary, as part of the celebration of a religious festival; the calendar of bull-fights is the religious calendar. All the major religious festivals of Spain are celebrated in this way. The bull-fighting season in Spain started traditionally with the feast of St Joseph in Valencia and ends with the Virgin of Pilar in Zaragoza. In Andalusia, it started traditionally with the *corrida* on Easter Sunday in Seville and ends with St Michael, the end of the agricultural

Decorations for this article are reprinted from the Gran Diccionario Taurómico by J. Sánchez de Neira (Madrid, 1896). The initial letter A shows the matador's sword and hat, and the picador's lance. At the foot of page 10 is a brand from Córdoba: brands are traditionally applied to a bull's right hindquarters.

year, in Seville also. Every local community (*pueblo*), except in Galicia, celebrates its patron-saint with a bull-fight unless the municipality is broke, and if they can't afford a proper bull-fight they probably hire some cow-celves for a *capea* (a bull-bait). Every *barrio* (quarter) of Soria has its own patron-saint – and therefore its own bull-fight and every separate social identity is expressed in some kind of taurine celebration. In the small town of Nules (Castellon) most of the main streets are named after a saint and have an image of that saint set into a shrine somewhere in the wall. On the saints' day the inhabitants of this street celebrate their saint, having subscribed together to buy a young half-caste bull or failing that they have rented a young cow as surrogate in order to have a *capea*.

The bull-fight takes place always after, never before, the Mass, in the afternoon. (In the 19th century in Madrid, it took place on Mondays.) After the purification of the sacrifice of the Lamb the sacrifice of the bull restores to grace the mores of everyday life, releasing the faithful from an excess of sanctity, a too literal subjection to the Beatitudes, which renders the practical conduct of daily affairs somewhat difficult, for if all were to be 'poor in spirit' and 'meek' and turn the other cheek when struck, there could be no exercise of authority, no defence of one's rights, the wicked would have it all their own way and the social structure would collapse. Therefore, after the sacrifice of the Mass, which might be seen as the '*fiesta mansa*' (the docile festival), the celebration of the ideal of Christian conduct, there follows the '*fiesta brava*', as the *corrida* is called, to restore the worldly order, a counter-rite to the first, dedicated to the Holy Virgin, to Corpus Christi or to some other festival of the Church or to the patron-saint of the community. Yet if the lesson of the *fiesta brava* is a counter-weight to that of the Mass and recalls, albeit quite unconsciously, the sacrifice of the bull in Mithraism – the religion of the Roman legionaries and the rival of Christianity until it was suppressed after the Emperor Constantine had made the empire officially Christian – it is nevertheless in no way an attempt to annul the purifying message of the Mass, but rather to complement it and integrate it into the practical sphere of daily life. The symbolic alliance between the Virgin Mary and the bull-fight has been noted previously by Spanish anthropologists and indeed, Spaniards see nothing anomalous in celebrating the various festivals of the Virgin by a *corrida*, which is, among its many other symbolic meanings, a fertility rite. Quite apart from the exegeses provided by the practicers of a rite, rituals have many other symbolic meanings which are evident only to the outsider and since symbols are 'polysemic' – that is to say they can have various quite different meanings simultaneously (as is now generally recognized by anthropologists) – each man is free to find in the rite he performs the meaning of his choice. The remarkable persistence of rituals throughout periods of social upheavals is due to this freedom: what is performed remains the same, since what it means can be adapted to the needs of the situation and the moment.

The bull-fight is, among many other things, it has been said, a ritual means of ensuring the stability of society: that men be men and that social order be maintained and for this reason it has been defined as 'the ritual revindication of manliness' in the sense of sexual pre-eminence; an amusing chapter in Juan Belmonte's memoirs is entitled 'Why women fall in love with bull-fighters'. Indeed, many writers, and even more convincingly, painters (Picasso, André Masson and others)

have stressed the erotic symbolism of the bull-fight, and in the sense of male honour, ancient *carteles* (announcements of a *corrida*) often advertised a protagonist as '*El pundonoroso diestro Fulano de tal*' (Bull-fighter So-and-So, very meticulous with regard to his honour) – in the sense of tenacious courage, refusal to accept defeat. Hence the wounded matador struggles to his feet, picks up his sword and kills his bull according to the rite – before being carried off to the infirmary.

This is not the only dramatic scene that can be witnessed in the bull-ring: the death of the bull is, all too often, horrifying and tragic, as well as dramatic. If the matador fails in his ritual duty, shirking 'the moment of truth' (i.e. that which requires the greatest courage) by running out to the side instead of going in over the horns, he is said to have 'assassinated', not to have killed (that is to say immolated) the bull. If he stabs without killing, if he punctures the bull's lung and the poor beast totters round the ring, blood pouring from its mouth, before receiving the '*coup de grâce*', a dagger in the vertebrae behind the horns, it is indeed tragic, as tragic as the death of Hamlet, Joselito, Manolete or quite recently Paquirri⁵ or Yiyo; the death of every bull is a tragedy in itself. Even a bad bull-fight is redeemed to some extent by its tragedy; even in a good bull-fight the death of the bull is tragic. This beautiful animal exists, has been created, only to be sacrificed. The bull-fight represents then a particular philosophy of death⁶ which is one of the fundamental elements of Spanish culture. One of the essential conditions of this philosophy is that the bull should be respected. If he were not respected the rite would be quite ineffective or, at any rate, pointless. If the Lamb of God were not the personification of the values of Christianity, then what would be the point of His sacrifice? The bull who has demonstrated his ability to personify the values he was created to represent – aggression, courage, straight-forwardness, 'nobility', the ideal masculine virtues – is therefore treated with great respect: gentlemen stand out of respect to honour him when he is towed round the ring to receive applause.

There is, then, a clear distinction between the brutality of some frustrated cretins who vent their frustrations by whacking some miserable bovine on the backside with a stave during a village *capea* (a practice that has been prohibited today by most municipalities – no clubs are allowed!) and the respect that is shown to the bull in the *corrida*. But since this is also a fertility rite the bull represents the indefatigable capacity for copulation which is credited to animals – our animal nature is opposed to our spiritual nature: the closer to God the further from the beasts and vice versa – which is why vows of celibacy are taken by persons of sacred status and also why the notion of lasciviousness is expressed in the languages of Europe by the idiom of animals. The bull combines, as symbol, both the male moral virtues, but also, essential to a fertility rite, the animal virtue necessary to ensure fertility. It is the combination of moral human virtues and the physical capacity of animals, placing both under the aegis of the Virgin, Christ or the saints, that gives the *corrida* its profound meaning.

The history of the cult of the bull makes clear its connection with religion, which does not come to an end with the decline of the Church's political nor its social power, for the Spanish church has gone along with the cult of the bull rather than supported it and Rome has generally been hostile to the *corrida* except when the Pope happened to be a Spaniard. (The Borgias Popes, who were Aragonese, introduced the bull-fight



in Rome, but the custom did not survive them). The only constant ally of the bullfight has been the Spanish people who cannot conceive of celebrating anything without sacrificing bovines, any more than the Muslim (or Judaic) peoples can do so without sacrificing ovines.

ericordia, a convent devoted to the poor, etc.). The organization of the fiesta was a source of income and the meat of the bull went to the inmates, probably the only beef they ate in the whole year.

In a number of popular fiestas the bull's meat is eaten by the members of the community sometimes in a collective feast, sometimes distributed to take home to cook (Medinaceli, Soria). There is a restaurant in Madrid, and one in Barcelona also, which specialize in serving the meat of a fighting-bull whose name, weight and sacrificer's name and the *corrida* in which he was sacrificed are supplied to the aficionados among the clients. Bull's meat for the rich!

The Andalusian countrymen among whom I lived for several years a long time ago⁸ distinguished between humans and animals on the basis of criteria quite different to that of the British public: humans had the name of a saint whom they celebrated on his day, together with all those who had the same Christian name, and who were thus his *tocayos* (namesakes), a bond of little importance, for it involved no duties nor privileges other than that of drinking together on that day. But a domestic pet could not be given the name of a saint, for it could not be a Christian, since it had no soul. A friend of mine, who came of old anarchist stock, to the greatest public scandal, named his daughter 'Diana', which people said was the name for a dog, not for a human being. The difficulty was overcome by adding the diminutive, thus 'Dianita' which they promptly abbreviated to 'Anita' which every little girl named 'Ana' was called. The fully human were called 'Christians'. Hence in the customs concerning baptism, the god-mother would collect the child from the mother's house (the mother did not attend the ceremony in the church) and bring it back afterwards saying: 'you gave him to me a Moor, and I return him to you a Christian'. ('*Tu me lo diste Moro y te lo devuelvo Cristiano*'). Such a distinction does not depend upon the religiosity of the speaker (and many of my neighbours were very anti-religious), but it is a part of their culture: animals and humans are not the same thing and should not be confused. Hence while they were not cruel to animals, they saw nothing morally binding in their behaviour towards them, such as they felt with regard to humans with whom they were morally involved. When, on the other hand, they learned from the newspapers about boxing, they were scandalized. How could civilized people enjoy such a revolting spectacle as two men bashing each other and not rush in to stop them? And when they learned that such spectacles were offered to the public for money in Madrid, they were profoundly shocked. The big cities were centres of vice, they knew, but such barbarous behaviour could only be attributed to foreign influence. In brief, the Andalusians viewed boxing in much the same terms as much of the British public views the bullfight.

Local taurine fiestas, the celebration of the patron saint of the place, when it is not a very important place, appeal to a public rather different to that of the *corrida*. They do not draw the international nor even the national tourists; they do not hit the headlines in the periodicals, must be content with a short mention in the local newspapers, unless they happen to number among 'the sons of the pueblo' an eminent matador who comes back to fight in his home village out of local patriotism. They are poorly advertised and it is quite difficult to know when they are going to take place, since the date may be changed two days before at a meeting of the municipal council. The public consists of the members of the community who are also attend-



IN ADDITION TO the religious pretexts for sacrificing bulls, royal bullfights were given to celebrate weddings, the birth of an heir, in thanks for a victory, the arrival of visiting royalty and in 1366 the King of Granada gave one to celebrate the circumcision of his son. Municipalities gave a *corrida* too on occasions which required to be celebrated, and private individuals gave one to celebrate marriages and even on occasions bequeathed in their will the necessary sums not only to assure the masses to be said for their soul, but to give a *corrida* (presumably) to celebrate their entry into Paradise. (They had to be spiritually rather sure of themselves to do so, but perhaps it was rather as an act of piety that would ensure that they would accede to Paradise).

A 'nuptial bull' was sacrificed in the middle ages on the occasion of a wedding and the groom was expected to place darts embroidered by the hand of his bride in the bull's withers and use as a fighting cape ('*capa de lidia*') a piece of her raiment. This custom, declared to be defunct by the folklorists of the beginning of the century, has enjoyed a revival in modern form within the last few decades. Road houses where wedding feasts are celebrated have started to build on a small bull-ring so that the bridegroom can demonstrate his masculinity in front of some cow-calf, on the occasion of the bachelor stag-party before the wedding or at the wedding dinner itself. (Examples are to be found just outside St Agustin north of Madrid, Chinchon south of Madrid, or on the road east of Caceres.)

One can also find square bull rings from before the period when they became round in the 18th century⁷ attached to chapels of the Virgin to which pilgrimages were made (for instance, the Chapel of the *Virgin of Gracia* 10 kms north of Caceres, or of the *Virgin of Virtudes* in Santa Cruz de Tudela in la Mancha).

The Church and the *corrida* were associated economically in several ways: many bull rings were, and sometimes still are, constructed and/or owned by a religious organization (e.g. that of Toro, by the Hospital in 1834, by la Maestranza, an aristocratic brotherhood of military-religious origin, dedicated to works of charity, in Seville, in Pamplona by la Casa de la Mis-

ing the other spectacles offered by the town: the young mothers' bull, the small boys' bull, an eighteen-month-old cow-calf possessed of a savage fury not found in the more mature male animals, the little girls' calf, etc. The capeas where the young blades can show off, the *Gigantes y Cabezudos* (the Giants and Fatheads) the bull of the wine, in which a barrel of wine is placed in the middle of the plaza and the tap is turned on for people to help themselves, but at the same moment the bull is let into the ring. Those who over-indulge in the hospitality of the fiesta are rather likely to get caught by the bull.

The public, from neighbouring pueblos, come to criticize and maintain that this fiesta is clearly not as good as their own, that the girls are not as pretty, the boys not as courageous nor as well-behaved and so forth. For the festival of the patron-saint is the occasion for expressing their collective identity and this, above all, is a matter of opposition to the pueblo next door. In Spain the local community has a moral force unknown in England. For this reason while few visitors come from any distance to the local celebrations, many 'sons of the pueblo' who have emigrated return to celebrate the patron saint's day and reassert their identity as such, for a Spaniard owes his *naturaleza* (nature) to his place of birth. If he goes to live elsewhere, he is almost certain to receive as a nickname (and nobody is known by anything else in a small Spanish pueblo) his place of birth. Moreover his *naturaleza* is recorded in the municipal census of the place where he resides. It is an essential part of his identity.

The cult of the bull is not disappearing today, either in popular Spanish culture nor in the bull-fight of the national culture – despite the enormous cost of seats, comparable to that of the opera in other countries, whereas attendance at a local fiesta costs nothing, and despite the prophecies of its disappearance in the near future that have been issued over the last 500 years. For it is inherent in the Spanish mentality.

A few years ago, a British Eurodeputy (who may well remain nameless since he was not re-elected) proposed a motion to the Parliament of Strasbourg to the effect that the Spanish government should be required to prohibit the bullfight in Spain under pain of seeing their country expelled from the European Community. He did not apparently know that France also celebrated the bullfight in identically the same form and with the same rules, and it would have been necessary to require the French government to make a similar undertaking if France were not to be expelled from Europe also.

The incident was of small importance in itself; but there is a lesson to be gleaned from it: that the moral unity of Europe, so essential to its political unity, depends not on attempting to homogenize its legal provisions and oblige the different peoples of Europe to share the same values and become culturally uniform, but on respecting their differences of culture and their right to be different. As all anthropologists know or should know, however they prefer to express it, cultural variety is the only defence against the anomia and loss of identity that economic homogenization is thought, quite erroneously, to entail. Europe will be polycultural or bust. □

1. The word culture is used here in the sense it has for the social sciences, not in that which it has in Ministries of Culture. The *corrida de toros* is practised in identical form in France as in Spain, and in a slightly modified form in Portugal. (Out of regard for the susceptibilities of their oldest allies, the Portuguese do not kill the bull but simulate the kill). Two of the most eminent 'rejoneadores' (bull-fighters on horseback) today are Portuguese, and there

are several who have made their careers in Spain, fighting on foot.

2. Fray Juan de Mariana, a noted polemicist and thinker of his day and confessor to King Philip II, inveighed against the bull-fight, but not for the same reasons as the modern critics of it; he thought it should be forbidden on the grounds that men should not be permitted to risk their lives unshriven.
3. It is believed in every town where the bull-fight has an enthusiastic following that it was originally an invention of that town.
4. Romero de Solís, Garcia Baquero and Vazquez Parladé, *Sevilla y la fiesta de toros*, Ayuntamiento de Sevilla, 1985.
5. On the occasion of the burial of Paquirri in Seville, the crowd took control of the procession and diverted it from the intended route between the church and the cemetery and led it back to the *Maestranza* (the Seville bull-ring) to give the coffin of their hero a last honour, a *vuelta al ruedo* (a turn round the ring). The photos in the newspapers showed hands from the crowd stretching up to touch the coffin and make a final contact to receive his grace. Similarly, after the death of the banderillero Montoliù in the ring in Seville in 1992 the coffin was removed from the church at 3 a.m. and taken to the *Maestranza* for a last turn round the ring and returned to the church whence it was taken next day to his native Valencia, where once more he was given a farewell turn round the ring before going to the cemetery. The Spanish public's capacity for spontaneously inventing ritual has been observed on many other occasions.
6. Spanish sick jokes about death are commonly recognized as part of this philosophy (see, for example, Berlanga's film *El Verdugo*, 'The Executioner'). But attitudes to death vary not only from one culture to another but from one period to another. The Victorians sentimentalized death (as the monuments of the period in churches show), but they could not abide any mention of sex. The modern British can't stop talking about sex but are shocked by any mention of death (see Geoffrey Gorer 'Death, grief and mourning' and the French historians Philippe Ariès, Michel Vovelle, etc.)
7. Romero de Solís, *Razón y Revolución en el origen de la Construcción de Plazas de Toros*, lecture given in Granada, Centro de Estudios Etnológicos A. Ganivet, 12 May 1992.
8. While doing the study for my doctorate: *People of the Sierra*, University of Chicago Press, 1959, 2nd edition, 1971, 3rd edition forthcoming.

Appendix

Around the turn of the century there was a vogue for lady matadors in the same epoch when circus-like shows were put on in the bull-rings such as a combat between a fighting-bull and a tiger – which ran away terrified – or putting the *banderillas* from the back-seat of a motor-bike. But Spanish machismo won the day and ladies were finally forbidden to fight in the ring. At this point a certain Teresa Bolsi, who had fought up till then in a crinoline, declared she was a transvestite and continued to fight in male garb. Though the idea of lady matadors offended certain phallogocratic sensibilities, I have argued that it was not as anomalous as it appears at first sight, for as my symbolic analysis shows (see my 'Sacrifice du Taureau', *Le Temps de la Réflexion* IV, 1983), the matador symbolizes a female role in the first *tercio* (act), while in the third act (*tercio de la muerte*) he achieves a super-masculine embodiment, assuming the phallic values of the bull which he then transfers to the public. The ritual in which this is done includes distributing the bull's ears which he has been awarded as a trophy, throwing them high into the stalls. It should be observed that the sexes may be either mutually exclusive as in daily life (the more feminine, the less masculine, and vice versa) or they can be cumulative as a religious context – the Gods in Hinduism or in ancient Greece are only the more powerful for being bisexual – hence Joan of Arc or Agostina de Aragon could lead frail men into the fray, precisely because



they were physical women. Hence the lady-matador, who is not a transvestite in the first act, but a real woman, displays the masculine *Geist* of Joan of Arc when she comes to the 'estocada'. The male matador symbolizes a woman in the first act in order, by contrast, to become the essence of masculinity for the immolation; the female matador becomes Joan of Arc for the kill. Freudians will remember the androgynous nature of Freud's pharaoh and, in his essay on Leonardo,

'only a combination of male and female elements can give a worthy representation of divine perfection'.

In the history of the theatre (and the *corrida* borrows elements from theatre) male roles have been taken by women and female roles by boys in different cultures and epochs. At the present moment a girl called Cristina Sanchez is having considerable success in Spain as a matador, and there are several French girls who are aspiring to enter the bull-ring professionally. □

Contextualizing alternative medicine

The exotic, the marginal and the perfectly mundane

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Alternative medicine in Britain has grown rapidly in popularity and prominence since about 1970. Indeed, unless the current recession halts this trend, it will not be long before the term 'alternative' – with its connotations of a minority cultural taste or deviant activity – will no longer be appropriate. Quantitative studies and opinion polls carried out in Britain during the 1980s suggest a steadily increasing rate of usage and a widening range of patients. Research in European countries as well as in North America and Australia has indicated that this is far from being an isolated pattern (Fulder 1988:27ff). The number of practitioners is increasing rapidly too.

Anthropologists, and indeed other social scientists, are beginning to take account of these developments. What qualifications do we as anthropologists have to pronounce upon them, and what kind of research on alternative medicine might we be particularly equipped to carry out? More specifically, do concepts developed in the course of anthropologists' study of medical pluralism in 'Third World' countries have any relevance here?

Anthropologists have a tradition of sympathetic and serious attention to healing practices which exist outside the purview of modern biomedicine in the ex-colonial world. In an influential article on medical pluralism published in 1980, Charles Leslie urged anthropologists to distance themselves from the prevalent biomedical view that such systems of healing involve only quackery and charlatanism, and to consider the role which alternative and traditional healers might play in total health care systems in 'Third World' countries (Leslie 1980). Yet when we follow Leslie's call for comparative research, contextualizing western alternative healing systems proves not to be an easy matter. Is alternative medicine the western equivalent of traditional ethno-herbalism or even shamanism (Graham 1990:20), the heir to the wise women or witches of the western past? Or is it best seen as having its roots in essentially modern concerns with health and the perfectibility of the body (Coward 1989:43)? Social scientists in general have shown collective uncertainty here.

A tradition of studying the politically marginal and cultural 'underdogs', strong among qualitative sociologists and some anthropologists, favours gravitation to that end of the alternative spectrum which appears most 'exotic'. Gary Easthope considers practices such as homeopathy and acupuncture in his book *Healers and Alternative Medicine* (1986), but he devotes much more space to those systems most distanced from modern

biomedicine: Philippine spiritual surgery (drawing out of foreign substances by means of the hands and spiritual force) and western spiritualism. Significantly, the Hampshire clinic he studied, at which homeopathy and other (mainly western) systems were practised, was run by a medical Indian doctor and the description of this clinic is to be found in a chapter entitled 'Eastern Healers'. It is as though he wants to be able to place homeopathy, a healing system of decidedly western origins, in an 'exotic' context. A similar uncertainty is found in McGuire's excellent study of ritual healing in suburban America. McGuire includes both therapeutic ritual healing congregations, such as Christian Scientists and occult healing groups, and what she calls the 'technique practitioners' – those who apply a technique, 'typically in a client-adherent relationship rather than in a group setting', such as Shiatsu or chiropractic. But the latter are included rather uncertainly and as rather marginal to her main interests. 'Technique' healing – though widely used – is 'less interesting' because 'the technique itself – and not the beliefs supporting it – seem to be the key attraction for most adherents' (McGuire 1988:29).

Certainly practices such as chiropractic or acupuncture rely on the services of paid professional experts much more than is the case with, say, spiritual healing, and consumers of these services do not really constitute 'groups' except in the loosest of senses. The use of the term 'adherent' seems odd in this context: is the implication that Shiatsu or chiropractic are cults really appropriate?

In part this ambivalence may derive from a real difficulty in researching healing: namely that once we go beyond that which is offered to the sick person by biomedicine, the range of possibilities is highly diverse, and limiting a research project on healing becomes difficult, even arbitrary. The users of alternative healing systems are themselves highly diverse in motivation. Clearly some consult healers or join healing groups to resolve specific problems which orthodox medicine has not resolved to their satisfaction, whilst others do so out of conviction (Sharma 1992:52). The latter may be the minority at the present time in Britain, but there is no way of dividing the two categories sharply. As McGuire points out, the use of a 'technique' such as Shiatsu frequently 'opens the door for an adherent's subsequent journey into other alternative healing approaches' (McGuire 1988:30).

The contextualization of alternative medicine with the 'exotic' and the spiritual is something which some