

Week One

Praxis: Awareness Exercises

Awareness Exercise #6: Rock Gazing

Find seven water-polished pebbles as close in size, shape and surface characteristics as is possible. Make sure the stones are perfectly clean and dry. Label seven envelopes with the seven days of the week, and place one pebble in each of them. Every night, in a secluded place, on the appropriate day of the week, remove one pebble from its envelope and study it. Shine lights on it, turn it over in your hand, place it next to your skin on various parts of your body, draw it, map it, write about it, meditate on it. Continue this exercise nightly until you are thoroughly familiar with the individual characteristics of each stone. Try to develop a dialog with each of them. See if they wish to speak to you or to each other. As the stones give you the gift of expanded awareness, find out what each of them requires in exchange. Try to accommodate them, even if this is discomfiting. Press forward with this exercise to the limits of your sanity, and, if possible, a little beyond.

Friday's Rock 10/27/00

“Organic living beings have a cocoon that encloses the emanations. But there are other creatures whose receptacles don't look like a cocoon to a seer. Yet they have emanations of awareness in them and characteristics of life other than reproduction and metabolism.”

“Such as what, don Juan?”

“Such as emotional dependency, sadness, joy, wrath, and so forth and so on. And I forgot the best yet, love; a kind of love man can't even conceive.”

“Are you serious, don Juan?” I asked in earnest.

“Inanimately serious,” he answered with a deadpan expression and then broke into laughter.

Carlos Castenada

The Fire Within

Having resolved to follow the directions given to me by these unknown forces, these unseen teachers, I have chosen, or to be more precise — I have been chosen by — the stones that I will proceed to contemplate. And, accordingly, have placed them, as directed, in the cocoons of their envelopes, stowing them in the mirrored armoire in the living room. Tonight is the first night of this, my sixth Awareness Exercise. And I feel, as I take the first stone from its envelope, and lay it before me on my little writing desk, both pompous and childish. What is happening to me, that I am committed to looking at rocks while the apple of my brain becomes wormy with the fibers of an inoperable tumor? I used to have, such as it was, a life. Now I have symptoms. Well, as that last-resort adage goes, “If what you are doing is not working, try *anything* else.” I guess I will try gazing at rocks. It can hardly be more ineffectual than the other endeavors that have consumed me. The first stone, Friday’s stone, sleeps innocuously before me.

Outside it is dark, and the city, like a great cacophonous ocean, swirls around me. I am as alone in the house as I am in my skin. I will see what I can see.

The Friday stone is smooth and gray, as are all seven rocks. It is fairly uniform in color, with white flecks dispersed somewhat evenly across its surface, like loops of English tweed. Friday’s stone is ovoid in shape, about the thickness of the width of my thumb, and as long as the distance between the tip of my index finger and the middle of the second knuckle. Since the stone is flatter on one side than the other, I name the flat side “the back.” The back has the stone’s most distinguishing characteristic — a circular dark gray spot, like a blob of tar, situated in the middle of the stone about midway from an imaginary equator towards the ovoid’s narrower end. The spot reminds me of a single eye, primeval, opaque, something capable, perhaps, of looking, if it can see at all, at things from an odd or disconcerting angle. As soon as I see it, I want to look away from it, study the other less intruding features of the stone, escape if I can into abstractions. The back of the rock also has irregularly shaped darker smudges towards the wider end of the ovoid. Now I see that these stains may not be inherent in the rock’s composition, but created by the absorption of skin oils from my hand. On the tip of the narrow, “upper” half of the ovoid, is a small dark smudge which has a tiny white chip, like a white star, ticked out of the center of it.

The rock blooms with large, dark blotches as I handle it. It is definitely absorbing my skin oils. I make a mental note to be more careful in handling the other rocks, and now I remember the admonition I received once while visiting a cave — that the skin oils from even a single human touch will stop the most ancient of silica crystals from ever growing again. This makes me think my touch is polluting the rock. Then it occurs to me that perhaps the absorption of skin oils is not merely the result of my intrusion, but in fact may be a strategy adopted by the rock itself to *sense* me.

I decide to give the rock a name. Or perhaps the rock is telling me its name through the medium of my skin oils, speaking through some dimension, which I cannot directly perceive. The pebble may be capable of selecting from all of my memories the words which will serve as signifiers for our communications. (Or should I say, for our *relationship*?) I name the Friday stone Moby Polyphemus. The white hole at the tip is a blowhole through which the creature may breathe from its inner reality the oxygen it needs to survive in our alien environment. It, he — yes, he definitely has a gender — he, then, must breathe, Moby, as he swims, one-eyed, through our dimension. Perhaps only once a decade. perhaps only once a millennium, but, however infrequently, he must breathe. The blowhole proves that. His breath measures a slower scale of time. Can my consciousness enter the oceanic time-scale of this breathing? If the blowhole opens momentarily, will a single quanta of radiance impregnate our world? I seem to be able to look though the darkening blotches and into the depths of the rock. The darkness is deep, but not infinite. Down there (in there?), I glimpse a fleck of light, a spark that can illuminate a secret script. Perhaps this script comprises a grimoire whose magic can create or correct any number of events in our own field of awareness.

Now the eye captures my attention again. I do not know if it is blocked or blind. Or perhaps the black spot is the back of the eye, like a fovea of gathered photoreceptors, and our reality constitutes the stone's "brain," a place where the images that he sees are interpreted, so that Moby can function in a realm, which would otherwise be darkness to him. But this supposition presents another, even more portentous question: Is something or someone living inside the rock, inhabiting a reality as vast or perhaps more vast than our own? In that case, we may be Moby's dream or his mental construct of some energy configuration originating from his alien world.

I think I will remember Moby Polyphemus better if I associate him with a point on the surface of my body. So I place the rock at a nexus between my eyebrows. I imagine (I fear? I hope?) that as I sleep, the eye will open on this side of reality and shoot a tentacle of luminance from inside of my body to . . . to where exactly? But look now, quick, now, there it goes, that phosphorescent tentacle, winding to the core of the Earth. Is it here, in this core, the Earth's core, in this fiery womb for rocks, where I might find the Rosetta stone connecting our two awarenesses? If this happens, then the art of Rock Gazing will mate with the art of dreaming. Perhaps I will see him, perhaps I will hear him speak. Suddenly, I am afraid. I feel the boney structures behind my right eye (ah, why just that one?) begin to break down, as if they were dissolving into inner tears. The Nagual, don Juan, warned his apprentices against Rock Gazing. Now I know why.

Saturday's Rock 10/28/00

The island where I live is peopled with cranks like myself. In a cedar-shake shack on a cliff — but we all live like this — is a man in his thirties who lives alone with a stone he trying to teach to talk. . . . He keeps it on a shelf. Usually the stone lies protected by a square of untanned leather, like a canary asleep under its cloth. Larry removes the cover for the stone's lessons, or more accurately, I should say, for the ritual or rituals which they perform together several times a day. . . . No one knows what goes on in these lessons, least of all myself . . . I assume that like any other meaningful effort, the ritual involves sacrifice, the suppression of self-consciousness, and a certain precise tilt of the will, so that the will becomes transparent and hollow, a channel for the work. I wish him well. It is a noble work, and beats, from any angle, selling shoes.

Annie Dillard
Teaching A Stone to Talk

Saturday's rock is a nearly uniform charcoal gray ovoid about half as long as it is wide. On the "back" flat side of the rock is a small dot just slightly off center. (I see now that my perception strives to establish a front and back, a top and bottom, a left and right.) Viewing the rock from the back as if it were a map, I call the narrower end the north, and this enables me to assign the other three positions of the compass. The west edge has an indentation,

which remains lighter as the rest of the rock darkens with oils from my hand. The indentation is shaped like the concave hump of a conical hill or island, “negatively” carved out of the surface instead of appended to it, its crest pointing in towards the center of the rock. From the front view, the rock is nearly symmetrical, except for another indentation on the rock’s edge diagonally opposite the inverse cone. This is the neck of the rock, which is more like a “bend,” whereas the reverse hump is like a chipped-out area.

I sense a healing presence in this rock, a tranquility, perhaps even a sorrow. But I also feel frustrated looking at it because it has so few distinguishing characteristics. The enigma is troubling. After a time, I begin to sense a smiling, almost clownish sensation. The name Aesklepios comes out of this inner feeling, Aesklepios, the Folly Master. Beneath his surface regularities, Aesklepios, the F.M., sports a fabulous motley, a Joseph’s coat whose intricate patterns encrypt the formulae for esoteric healing rituals and substances. Aesklepios is a reservoir of miraculous incantations and elixirs, or perhaps he is an island of hope, which rises from that reservoir.

The rock has grown almost completely dark now from contact with my hands. The eye-dot, which was far less pronounced than the eye of Moby Polyphemus, is now invisible, absorbed in the darkening oils. The exterior shroud is complete. The rock withdraws almost the last of its uniqueness into its concave cone, as a swirling fluid draws air into the velocity of its maelstrom. This withdrawal gives rise to a nostalgic feeling in me, a foreknown regret, as if the next time we meet, I will not be able to recapture this ephemeral identity. As if, like a true clown, Aesklepios must be, not only the master of folly, but also the master of disguises, the master of acquired roles. Inside his oblong, he secretes labyrinthine corridors of dressing rooms, filled with props, scripts, costumes, wigs and beards. Aesklepios, the Folly Master, is an alchemist indulging in the most bizarre and forbidden of experiments. He is a shape-shifter whose most potent laboratory is his own tripartite identity. Pondering this, I think how we are all split from moment to moment in what Johannes Fabricus calls the “oral triad” of the psyche: “the wish to eat, to be eaten, and to sleep.” (See *Alchemy, the Medieval Alchemists and their Royal Art*, Johannes Fabricus, page 51, where a woodcut depicts a she-wolf devouring the sleeping king.) Something ferel and very, very ancient is at work here, whose benevolence or malevolence pullulates more questions than any amount of reasoning can harvest with answers. I feel like I am entering an underground labyrinth whose stone passageways are gleaming darkly with blood and water. The

cries of animals, animals in pain, animals in ecstasy arise as if from my own marrow-bones. This is all madness, of course, but it is the madness of the world, and we must master these three follies in one body, as Aesklepios has mastered his many roles in one stone.

Sunday's Rock 10/29/00

In front of this wall was a slope in which was embedded a stone that jutted out — my stone. Often when I was alone, I sat down on this stone, and then began an imaginary game that went something like this: “I am sitting on top of this stone and it is underneath.” But the stone also could say “I” and think: “I am lying here on this slope and he is sitting on top of me.” The question then arose: “Am I the one who is sitting on the stone, or am I the stone on which *he* is sitting?” This question always perplexed me, and I would stand up, wondering who was what now. The answer remained totally unclear, and my uncertainty was accompanied by a feeling of curious and fascinating darkness. But there was no doubt whatsoever that this stone stood in some secret relationship to me. I could sit on it for hours, fascinated by the puzzle it set me.

C.G. Jung
*Memories, Dreams,
Reflections*

In just two days, I have learned something about how I make distinctions between similar rocks. The rocks are all oblong, all gray. They easily absorb oil from the hand. Their lengths vary only slightly. Sunday's rock is a little longer than Friday's or Saturday's. Its length extends from the tip of my index finger to the palmside edge of the middle knuckle. (How naturally one uses one's own body as a measurement to domesticate the foreign, the feral.) Sunday's rock is also a little rounder, a little heavier. If I call the flatter side of the rock the “back”, and the rounder side the “front,” this creates two distinguishable zones of observation, or perhaps I should say “regions of interest”. A third zone would be the edge of the ovoid, circling the rock.

I imagine engraved plates inserted between tissues in an antique, sacred book, like those maps of the first cartographers with Mercator projections showing the edges, the back and the front of the rock. The projections are blank, but now we know that there are theres there, places and times to enter,

domains of discovery, a whole planet revolving through that vastest of all dimensions: the mind. But, this is not, as the rock is somehow informing me, not just the human mind, which I perceive now as a definite bounded area, a kind of sheen whose color I cannot quite discern, call it ebony-gold, a wetness gleaming in darkness, yet definitely a wall, beyond which I sense something at present inconceivable, but not, considering the murmuring I hear coming from that directionless direction, ineffable. This . . . this . . . but I can't, no . . . I can't see this, not just yet, and so I look at the engraved plates, with their quaint antiquities and captions, and for a moment, standing safe within those ebony-gold walls, I recover a little wavering sense of security.

Sunday's rock has some slightly brown discolorations on the back. I can arbitrarily call the larger area of these discolorations the bottom of the rock, and the smaller area the top. Now I can divide each side of the rock into quadrants: a north (top), a south (bottom) and an east and west. I can draw north/south and east/west meridian lines, which cross at a hypothetical, but measurably determinable, center. In the case of Sunday's rock, the largest area of brown discolorations is on the backside of the rock in the southeast quadrant. One discoloration stretches around the rock like a single closing quotation mark. The top or "hook" of the quotation mark starts from the top of the ovoid at the N/S meridian and circles west (going counter clockwise) around the edge of the rock to the bottom of the ovoid. The bottom of the quotation mark tapers to a point just to the east side of the N/S meridian.

On the engraving, or projection, I mark the following geographical features on "the back", and label them:

1. Brown discolorations and chipped areas moving from six o'clock at the SW edge, and proceeding clockwise along the edge to a terminus point at nine o'clock.
2. Closed quotation mark crescent, beginning at twelve o'clock and moving clockwise to six o'clock.

Having to look this intently. So much tension. So much tension, just to stay focused upon the surface. And the descriptions, as flat, as unsymbolic as I have attempted to make them, yet burgeon with something. They bulge as if fomenting subterranean or subocianic volcanic pressures. These pressures force me to blink, and in that instant in which the eyelids close, there are

flashes of reddish/orange light, blood vessels on the eyelid, no doubt, the thin skin being somewhat translucent. And yet, something more than that is there, too. *Fires emerging from mirror-clad skyscrapers. Black smoke billowing, in which . . .* No. No. It's not only a "something", but rather a "someone". Someone, not me, but somehow derived from the same region of interest, so to speak, that I also evolve from. When the eyelids rise again, I have the strange sensation that I am being, not only watched, but guided, by the presence of some Other, who has perhaps escaped, like a genie from a lamp, from its dormancy inside the rock, free now to grow wildly, exuberantly in the fertile warm environment of my brain. I look away from the rock for a moment, to re-focus, and I see, or seem to see, a bluish, goldish orb, plasma-like, hovering in the air before me. There, and there's another, and another. Then a voice whispers, hoarsely, "*In the wilderness, be wild*". I have to exert a real effort of will to continue with my Rock Gazing, but eventually, I strip my mind of these associations, and proceed to "the front" of the rock, where I begin to sketch out and label the geography on this small, but ever growing, ever wilding world.

The front of the rock is very uniform in hue, but has the faintest brown discoloration, almost like a water stain on paper. *Rippling effects. But something deep, benthic, oceanic pressures that reveal . . .* This stain begins in the NW quadrant at 12 o'clock, and proceeds down the whole length of the rock to just west of the NS meridian.

More striking, but very faint, are white lines in a dolman shape. The dolman lies between 5 and 6 o'clock in the SE quadrant, its basestone slanted towards the bottom of the ovoid and its capstone positioned near a latitude line connecting 4 and 8 o'clocks. *Men dancing in moonlight, in firelight, one is chosen by lot, a black biscuit or cake, a triple way of dying, of entering life.*

There is a small white chip on the edge of the rock in the SE quadrant at about 4 o'clock.

This is a very subtle and beautiful stone. I almost don't want to touch it for fear of obliterating its distinguishing marks. Again, the color is quite uniform. The stone seems to speak of ancient mysteries. I close my eyes again and a voice, emitted from this rapidly growing Other and now sinking its mycelial roots deep down into my brain stem, says: "*This is a dream stone, one of those pebbles given to the forlorn ancient Irish king, Fergus, by*

No woman's loved me, no man's sought my help.

Fergus: A king is but a foolish labourer,
Who wastes his life to be another's dream.

Druid: Take, if you must, this little bag of dreams;
Unloose the chord and they will wrap you round.

Fergus: I see myself go drifting like a river
From change to change; I have been many things —
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
Upon a sword, a fir tree on a hill,
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
A king sitting upon a throne of gold —
And all these things were wonderful and great;
And now I have grown nothing, knowing all.
Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow
Lay hidden in this small slate-colored thing!

I blink again and write, without thinking, without hesitation. The stone suggests that there is something beyond the mastery of the Red Branch Kings (red branches — the limbs of particular trees? madrones? mazanitas? certain willows? trees of the desert hills or the lowland streams? Or perhaps the phrase refers to the veins and arteries of the body?). That illusive, but hyperreal something seems to act as an interface between form and formlessness, or perhaps between material form and dream form. The stone, the most compact of earthly objects, grants entry to the most ethereal realms, realms where one gains mastery over form itself. Certainly the dreamstone's mastery grants ecstasy, but the poem suggests that ecstasy enmeshes one in sorrow, not joy, and that the proliferation of awareness through many objects increases knowledge, but obliterates identity. If I stare at the stone for a long enough time, its opacity seems to grow transparent. My vision leaves the body of the stone and enters that web or grid of perceptions that cradle the stone. *Plasma orbs. Soldiers crying from trenches. From hospital wards. From operating theaters. Couples drowning. An angel gowned in scarlet promulgating a strange, incendiary language to two men in dark, hulking garb huddled around a black crystal. A mirror replicates the scene.*

There must be something wrong with my brain or with my eyes, for now the stone has disappeared and only the wavering threads of the gridlines remain.

10/30/00 Monday's Rock

Willow wand, ear finger,
By power of divination
Force confessions from the mouth
Of a moldering corpse.

Robert Graves
Reconstruction of the Welsh *Dichetal do Chennaib*
(*Recital From the Finger-ends*)

Folklorists have used the analogy of pebbles made smooth by many tellings. The rough edges and odd protrusions are worn down. What is not mentioned in this analogy is that pebbles do not become perfect spheres. Their shapes say something about the stone from which they were formed and about the tides and stones around them. By looking at the shapes that remain, something can be learned.

David C. Rubin
*Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive
Psychology of Epic, Ballads and Counting-out
Rhymes.*

Mapping has become a focus of awareness. Without such a focus, I am inundated on one side by a solidity, which defies all intrusion, and on the other side by a kind of cauldronous flux, swirling with images, words, emotions, any or all of which I fear would overwhelm me if I surrendered to them. Therefore, I will, I must map. I will superimpose meridian lines and begin to sketch in the major geographical features of Monday's rock. At this point too, I am aware that geography is not only about space, but also about time — the busy-ness that underlies this observation threatens again to — *a young girl walks away from a precipice and hangs impossibly for a moment, too long a moment, in the insubstantial element of air.* Could I call my perceptions eons, which change and evolve rocks, or is it the rocks, which change and evolve my perceptions? I tell myself, "Roy, these are not questions that can be answered in the abstract realms of speculation: look, explore. Somewhere there is a door." Each eyeblink is a real journey now — but journeys to where? Are these scenes snippets of narrative, like strands of living material, writhing round frantically trying to connect, to

weave themselves, to weave me, into coherence? I try to keep my attention focused on the surface of the rock. *The surface. The surface. The surface.* A strange mantra that seems to break it's own trance. How can these most measurable, most rational of observations also be creating these clouds, these vortices, whirling, whirling, one inside the other, and drawing me down, down to . . .

The most prominent feature on the front side of Monday's rock is a thin white line, which makes a complete ellipse around the western hemisphere from 7 o'clock to 11 o'clock. Another white striation, although not an ellipse, proceeds in a nearly straight line beginning in the SE quadrant at 5 o'clock and proceeding northeast to a point just north of the EW meridian. I have to struggle to stay focused on these aspects of the rock, aspects that might be defined as its consensus reality characteristics. But I cannot hold it. I blink and I see — *A river, a village with crude stone domiciles, sheep on steep rolling hills. A horse. A church.* These things keep intruding, and not just during the eyeblinks, now. But whenever I look at or think about the rocks. It was not only the oil from my hands infecting the rocks, but some essence from the rocks infecting me.

As it crosses the EW meridian a second, much shorter striation runs parallel to this longer one for about an eighth of an inch. East of the main striation at about 4 o'clock is a small white gouge. *And the vortices contain voices, the sound of a man singing, maybe, accompanying himself with an antique string instrument. Something is plucked, plucked . . .*

On the back of the rock one sees the completion of the elliptical from 11 to 5 o'clock. To the west of this striation, just below 11 o'clock, a small squiggle-shaped scar appears, looking somewhat like the flag of a musical notation. On the eastern edge of the rock, as mapped from the back, there is a small white gouge just north of 3 o'clock, and a still smaller gouge occurring at 4 o'clock. *Something horrible. Latin-sounding pronouncements. Bodies tied to stakes: burning.* These striations appear to be, not so much etched into the rock, but rather the outward manifestations of sedimentary layers, which, if we could see inside, would cut through the entire stone.

A horse-faced man in a black frock. A book with a black cover. The striations on the front of the rock are like the outlines of the graceful bole of a tree or of a phallus. This lends to the rock an air of masculine delicacy. I

am reminded of the grace of line found in the draftsmanship of certain renaissance artists. A voice says the name “*Sandro — Sandro Lingam, the willow’s bole*”. This stone radiates a smooth youthfulness and nobility, ardent, but not licentious, firm and confident, but with an inner eroticism that is as beautiful and nostalgic as the memory of a swan’s reflection slowly arabesquing across the most quiescent of waters. *An old man smoking a strangely-carved pipe, in a bathroom, the shower running to dissipate the smell of the smoke, which is a strange smell, almost urinous . . .* Pseudonyms abound, arising from a language that is somewhat like French, but it is not French — the syllables *mar ça bru* — I can’t make sense of it. The feeling is that of innocence, which arouses sexual longings, yet at the same time brings one to the edge of tears. This innocent virility, if those characteristics can be mated, is like a young man just leaving puberty, pure and open, and moony with a dream of ever-present, but never-requited, love. But why a willow? *A river in furious spate. A desperate chase. An escape!* Picture a tree on the bank of a green river, its smooth, pale trunk rising from fecund waters, its strength always growing, its branches always weeping. *Small creatures, frogs or something, falling, falling, from a desert sky, accompanied by tinny, tiny voices like static almost, from outer, from inner space . . .* It seems that there is something here, something female and loving, this young man’s counterpart, that can catch us, when we are in mortal fear of falling or of drowning.

10/31/00 Tuesday’s Rock

There is the true man of no rank in the mass of naked flesh, who goes in and out from your facial gates. Those who have not yet testified: Look! Look!

Rinzai Gigen
Sermons

I take out my imagined map — 4 engraved plates for day 4. “Engrave”. Isn’t this a Cabbalistic term for meditation? The rock, the solid ovoid with its imaginal meridian lines, my concentration, or, meditation, intruded upon by certain inner visualization, lightning flashes, so brief that it is only the revenants of them that I see on the backside of my blinking eyelids, a kind of secret code, perhaps, already having burned itself out before it can be cracked. *Light, layers of light, on water, on sand, on a paradise of crippled animals.* What? What was that?

A little shaken still, but recomposing myself, I begin to superimpose and label the major surface features of Tuesday's rock. This, I am thinking, is like trying to deduce thoughts from dissecting the brain. But, undaunted, perhaps unfeeling, a fearless, clueless anatomist, or butcher, I proceed.

Tuesday's rock is nearly uniform on the front, but has some tiny craters on its surface, as if sand grains had been imbedded, and then had fallen out, leaving pin-prick holes. *An amphibial eye emerging from where it is buried, sand gains falling away as the membrane covering the eye lifts, not to light, but to darkness. Whoa. Whoa. What. What. What.*

Steady. Steady now. Not to worry. The doctors are wrong. Your brain is as right as rain. Rain in the desert? Steady.

These holes become more prominent and more numerous around the rock's edge, with the most prominent of these small craters located to the west of the NS meridian in the NW quadrant between 9 and 10 o'clock. A slightly smaller crater occurs about 1/8 of an inch SW of this prominent one. *A black cat with sagacious yellow eyes.* My hands begin to sweat, and I feel Diva arabesquing round my legs. This, I am thinking, cannot be good. Or can it? *Yeaoh.*

Other, smaller pits are scattered about the edge of the rock, the edge . . .

Go on. Don't stop. You have to keep it flowing. You have to . . .

The other distinctive feature of Tuesday's rock is its overall roundness. *A solid man in a dovegrey suit. But now he is naked, under layers of light, walking augustly, dividing a stupefied crowd.* Where is he going? And where, oh, God, am I? A buzzing hubbub like a . . .

Viewed from the southern edge, another prominence rises steeply along the length of the western side, then tapers, less steeply, to a plane that tilts towards the northeast.

Steady. Steady, now. It's Ok, now, it's going to be Ok.

I examine the four projections on the plate: the southern and northern poles, plus side views, east and west.

Do not blink, I think, or those swarming images — *flies so many flies* — will destroy the little planet in your hand. *So many images, in octagonal frames, slowing or freezing, so much motion flashing jewels through jewels.*

Beautiful! But . . .

The map of the back of Tuesday's rock is now engraved with superimposed NS and EW meridians, plus a longitudinal line connecting 1 o'clock to five o'clock in the eastern hemisphere and a latitudinal line connecting 10 o'clock to 2 o'clock in the southern hemisphere— a satisfactory disposition, however incomplete, yet it is consistent with my present, nascent state of knowledge. *A little laquerware container, shellacked with layers and layers of inner, knowing light.*

Hold. Hold, Roy, this is just an afterimage of your own souvenir. Remember: "Knowing proceeds from knowing, not from nothing." Then a voice, an oriental voice, not mine, perhaps mine, radiating from the domain of the eyeblinks, says: "*Knowing proceeds from not-knowing, from nothing.*"

The room has gone blank. There is only the rock, perhaps it is not even being seen. Perhaps "I" am no longer even here to see it. But the words still come.

The back of Tuesday's rock is quite flat. It has three dark smudges — whether permanent or not, I cannot determine. One smudge is just on the west side of the NS meridian line, about a 1/2-inch down along the 10 o'clock/2 o'clock latitude.

No. No. It is not my eyes that are blinking, it is the rock! The rock is blinking, flashing in and out of existence, a signal, beckoning me to follow to that place where the "out" mode is "on". But if I go there, when I go there, what will happen to me? And the voice again, yes, definitely it has an oriental caste: "*To me? Who is this me?*" Then laughter.

Southeast of it, on the 1 o'clock/5 o'clock longitude, is a second, smaller smudge. *It's dark. Dark. A man with a knife, the flat of it held up against a face that is O so wounded, so scarred . . . a lamb, the smell of blood . . .*

When will the bleeding stop?

Another smudge occurs in the southern hemisphere, just west of the NS meridian near the 8 o'clock/4 o'clock latitude. I weep. It is all a shambles.

But the rationalist, unfazed, continues: Three smudges on the back, sandgrain divots on the front and around the edge, or what I call the “ front” and the edge, because I must use something to orient, to navigate — these are the physical characteristics, which distinguish Tuesday’s rock.

Yes, I am steady now. Steady. A little tremor in the hand. Nothing more. A little dryness of the eyes, from not blinking. Ok, go ahead. Blink. You can blink. Blink. Blink. Blink. There. There. Nothing happened. Go on. Nothing is happening.

I don’t know why, but so far I have considered all the rocks to be male. Can there be, for me, such a thing as a female rock? These rocks, I think, are some kind of slate-colored sedimentary type, perhaps compacted from volcanic ash, fused under great pressures, then broken. The fragments perhaps rolled and polished by rushing waters, by streams or by tides, until, by repeatedly colliding with each other, they achieved their current rounded forms. But, in spite of all these violent perturbations, they are now egg-like, smooth, peaceful. *Busy early American quays, a calf drowning, a young black girl, branded, taking a terrible hiding . . .*

Oh please, please . . .

Inside them is a deep collectedness, a compact space, if such a thing could exist, where all the outward bashings have reversed themselves, so that what remains has been transmuted into an utter serenity. These features of the rocks, on the rocks, in the rocks, they pull wild emotions out of me, and then, they calm them. *A fruitless search. A woman wracked by a ravaging fever.*

Ok, you are calm. Just accept it. Just let go.

It is as if these rocks were more than kin — as if, in fact, they were the very progenitors of our feelings, from time’s beginnings until now. And what about all this fixation on external features, what Rinzai Gigen calls the “facial gates,” viz, the ingress/egress ports of the senses? *A man in wicker-*

woven clogs, oriental, his sandalwood face turned serenely towards the rising sun.

Yes, just let it in, let *him* in.

If we can sense a thing, even so opaque a thing as a rock, we require that it also be able also to sense us. As Rilke says, we are watched from all corners of the cosmos, and we want those watchers to be endowed with sentience, to be capable of bearing the monument of a name. *Voices, as of choirs singing, arise from certain plants.*

Let it in. Let it all in. Surrender to this face before you were born.

What name should I give this rock, but Pitt, a Quaker friend, calm in his own Meetinghouse, one born in fire, stoned by his own clan, baptized by roiling floods, and who has, in every atom of his being, remained simple, clean, elevated, serene — *Serenity Pitt*. Even his distinguishing marks are unassuming, as if he said, by his very presence, “I am not so much different from others. Through much the same processes, we are all disintegrating, all moving towards emptiness. Are we not drifting towards the blankest bliss, where no more blows can land?” *Riches in darkness growing.*

This rock’s Inner Light is like that of an old Zen Master’s, striped of everything, until its fullness is void.

11/1/00 Wednesday’s Rock

When he began working with Symbolist texts, he was forced to reconsider some of his ideas about visual and verbal relationships. Although images are prevalent in Symbolists works, description no longer served a strictly mimetic function. Reality was conceived as an assemblage of signs referring to a spiritual world; thus an artistic text could create an orchestrated version of that ideal world.

Fred Leeman
*Odilon Redon: The Image and
the Text*

I should note that an odd thing is beginning to happen with words — reading them, writing them, and sometimes even speaking them. They seem

to be forming of and by themselves now, without much interference, or even input by me, except for the odd sensation I have of being excavated, mined, by what or by whom I cannot say. Plus, the entire process is far, far too objective for me to be the sole or even the tangential volitional instigator. Yet in spite of, or perhaps because of this fact, this process, which seems so utterly objective, is also *internal*. I know it sounds strange, but the writing, the reading, the speaking — the “playback” — of these words has become an objective inner event, that seems to involve, as if in a vast, radiant cloud, untold, untellable numbers of others. I must add, too, that these others are not human alone, or even exclusively from this earth, this time, this dimension. Yet, they still somehow become, in the moment that I am engulfed in these words, an inextricable part of who I am. Ah! The cloud, like some wondrous compassionate predator, seizes the ordinary me as its beloved food, and I am digested in the infinite plenitude of its being. Certainly, this is bliss, yes, but a bliss that is destroying every vestigial familiarity with the self that I know as my self. Before, I saw myself, or my existence as a FACT, but now that word sticks in my throat an ACK ACK ACK ACK stuttering velocity which cannot quite congeal into solidity. It has happened like this. At first I was just writing these texts, making my diligent journal entries in a cheap spiralbound notebook, and then, just as with the dissolution of the surfaces of the rocks — God, I wish I could stop that from happening — the surface of my body, sitting at my little desk, gazing at the rocks and writing, begins to waver, to form long strands of lines, like the grid lines on the rocks, and then the lines begin to bunch into shiny little clouds: the plasma shapes! If I draw my attention to these shapes, I am pulled inside, and it is inside this space — this time?, this egg? — that the texts begin to emerge, sort of like living blobs of mercury, which elongate into letters, and then writhe and squirm into words. These vast ideational or phonational beings, i.e., images that can convert themselves into sound, then begin to amass on a golden wall, which seems to have been waiting in abeyance for just this purpose. Think of eels adhering to a nourishing subaqueous cliff-face composed of this precious — ah, what do they call it? — “noble”, yes, *noble* metal. The wall is a self-illuminated sheen, and through some spontaneous operation, which I can only paradoxically describe as “will-less will”, I can transfer what has attached itself to this golden sheen to the pieces of paper in the notebook or even to the screen of my computer, without, amazingly, (and yet, curiously enough, I am not amazed) the usual intermediary mechanical steps of manipulating a pen or typing on a keyboard. Now, as if this wasn’t odd enough, it seems as if this experience of mine, is not really mine at all, or rather not mine alone,

but a composite operandum created in this objective inner space by the accumulated experience of anyone, everyone and everything who has ever written, read, spoken, or even been signified by words. If I look closely at any given word, strange things begin to appear. I can see my body, and the bodies of enumerable others, all of us living out our lives as a sort of an effluent epi-phenomenon of language. The words, it seems, are willing us into existence. “The Word made Flesh” is the Biblical phrase, I believe, but it has been extracted for me from the ephemeral realm of metaphor to become a literal reality. Ah, but this is too strange. I must, must try to stay focused on the surface, as increasingly difficult as this is now becoming . . .

The plate or map for day 6, week one has been appropriately engraved with NS/EW meridian lines, plus, the radiating lines of a clock face have been superimposed on the front and back ovoid projections. Prominent surface characteristics bear captions, words perhaps more enigmatic than clarifying. The map can be seen as a face, but a face scarred with unfamiliar features, strange mutations, the inhuman calling to the human.

Wednesday’s rock is not so flat as the others. Its shape is that of a twisting tube rounded off on both ends. Like Tuesday’s rock, Serenity Pitt, Wednesday’s rock is also pitted, but with rust-colored oxidation in and around the divots. The front of Wednesday’s rock has a prominent pit on the NS meridian at the 11 o’clock/ 1 o’clock latitude. A white scar proceeds about an 1/8th inch NW of this oxidized pit. *Dancers, unbelievable exhibitions of grace, by performers who seem almost like otherworldly children. A danseur leaps into the air, and sticks, sticks, hanging there for an impossibly prolonged moment, while an audience of decadent sycophants gasps, each titled non-entity suddenly streaming back out of the threads of his or her fashionable clothing and into the flesh and blood of their primitive bodies.* Other pits are distributed around the edge of the rock: one at 11 o’clock, one slightly set in from the edge at about 9 o’clock, and a series of pits running counterclockwise from 8 o’clock to six o’clock. Now I wonder: do these surface characteristics block or enable me to see into what lies beyond them? Are they a camouflage or a code? One thing is for certain, they draw me in, expanding both my visual acuity, and some other sense that is not altogether defineable by the word “sight”. It is as if by concentrating with minute attention on the external, another, shall we say, “tangential” process is instigated, that sense which we all possessed in childhood, but which was hushed up by the threatened parental or political authorities, that once upon a time world that was always, is always, breathing just under the

bed, or the chair, ready at any moment to betray the ordinary with the miraculous, if only we dare to open this other eye. But to see what? These ordinary markings on a rock? Look: on the edge of the SE quadrant, there is another prominent dot at about five o'clock. Four more of these pinholes are clustered on the edge at about 3 o'clock. And three oxidized pits, set just in from the edge, occur at about 1 o'clock. *I feel the presence of something moving under water, something enormous and containing a vast intelligence. The water swirls as it moves, as if a sound vibration were making visible, palpable music from the undulations.*

A verbal description clutters the imagination, but as you (we?) can see, the rock is still quite smooth, almost void: hence this proliferation of words to fill the space.

On the back of Wednesday's rock, a cluster of pits occurs in the SE quadrant, almost at the rock's center, where the meridians cross. One of these pits has an especially prominent flake of oxidation in its gouge. In addition, a whitish scar occurs in the SE quadrant sagging just below the EW meridian line at the 3 o'clock edge. *A break in the centuries-long stylized cultivation of dance. Nymphs and fauns cavorting in an erotic frenzy, wildness, insanity, but wildness and insanity exquisitely controlled through an almost bone-crushing discipline and grace.* This scar continues until it almost reaches the center crossing of the meridians. Almost. Almost. *A virgin is immolated to the crescendoing clamor of pounding asymmetrical rhythms.* Both sides of this rock are almost equally flat, so determining a front and back was, is, as are many of life's decisions, difficult and somewhat arbitrary. *The shouts of someone hysterically counting in Russian. Lurid colors and sumptuous fabrics flooding a proscenium.*

This rock has a certain gracefulness about it, a sweet asymmetry. For that reason, I give it the name Grace — Grace, my first female rock! Clearly the pressures that have shaped Grace have been enormous — twisting, bending, rounding, gouging, as if she has tumbled and tumbled, gathering more beauty and wisdom as she was buffeted about. *A disappearance. An invalid in a boat that sails somehow inside the body, while the body itself is insanely running to and fro inside of a culture who's lining, like that of an expensive dress or jacket, is ornately stitched in gold and silk, but whose outer fabric has become a drab uniform of bloody rags.* Grace is elegant, like a dancer, but an older dancer, one who has gained rather than lost youth through a lifetime of suppleness training. She is quiet, but hardly demure,

perhaps Russian, aristocratic by attainment, if not by birth, proud, not haughty. One could fall in love with her at a distance, at first sight. *Two standing together on a train platform, the train bearing human beings to a vast killing field. The sound of a man who is falling desperately in love, his breathing a breath that carries him deep underground, out of the grip of time, where miraculous healings are wrought at the bottom of the sea or at the center of the Earth.* Although she has had and still has a legion of admirers, she has, as yet, no mate. She is in love with something beyond herself. She is in love with her art. *A sea-ruined shoe.* For her, it is only this art that matters, and when facing this art, she is absolutely impeccable, self-effacing, but with a will of iron, and a fiery temper when it comes to what she calls “the truth”. *The scientific preservation of corpses, the undead moving through the formalin of materialist philosophies. A forest floor littered with eggs, a voice, large, commanding, as if reading, that says “It is said that there is evil in the world; I will go and search for it.”* For her that truth necessarily means moving beautifully, even if one is being driven by brutal forces. Grace Maryanka — as wise as a savant, with a mystic weight that carries pig iron in a step as evanescent as a champagne bubble. *A high grade imbecile drooling in a wicker wheelchair, a big buzzard’s head on a spastic spring: he stutters loudly, maniacally: “Ma er mi er”.* Now, as I look at her, her gray, I mean the gray of the rock, seems almost to glow with a deep lavender, and the lavender wavers, changes into a flashing of kaleidoscopic scenes. *One scene, almost frozen in isolation, initiates the tale: a white chicken with a red comb standing on a rutted road, raked by a certain vertical fall of autumnal light, a voice rising from the earth as ephemeral as dissolving dew.* And seeing this, seeing this, my heart is beating as if newly awakened.

Wednesday’s rock is the mystic dancer, the one inside of each of us who transforms hardship into dignity, into assurance, into the polished haven of taste and style.

11/2/00 Thursday’s Rock

Well, you know or don’t you kenet or haven’t I told you every telling has a taling and that’s the he and the she of it. Look, look, the dusk is growing! My branches lofty are taking root.

James Joyce

Finnegans Wake

Parentetical remarks: Something unprecedented happened just now as I was preparing to engage Thursday's pebble in the Rock Gazing Exercise. I became aware of a kind of space or gap — no, not a space or a gap, since both of these terms imply “somethingness” on either side, or arising from— this was simply a cessation, a cessation expanding between my eyeblinks and its swarm of images and my external sensory focus on the rock. This was a liminal shadow land, neither here, nor not here, someplace between the products of the senses that we arrogantly call consensus reality and the internal focus that we naively call fantasy or dream. There is this third thing, then, between the objective and the subjective, an incubation chamber where some process or some being decides how to sort what could be from what is. Would it be rash to say that the fontanel in my skull, which closed when I was an infant, was re-opened, and that this, shall we say, metaphysical trepanning, instigated a sudden release of brain pressure, that brought me back to that hyperperceptive, but innocent stage of development? And what does this neobaby see in its second go round at life? He sees that the ebony-gold wall, or sheen, was a barrier keeping us from perceiving this boundryless, featureless ovum, and that the mercury-like blobs adhering to the sheen were seeping through from that unseen, that unseeable side. The cessation was, is speaking to me, was, is, forming words. But what is the wall, and why am I, and everyone and everything else, or so it seems, locked in its keep? Hand me my auger, good angels, I have a hole to drill.

The plate of this seventh, and last rock has been engraved with meridian lines, and now there is a new feature: contour lines. The projections are evolving.

Thursday's rock is the most eccentrically shaped of all the seven rocks.

I hear sounds without meaning and I write them down, as if transcribing, merely through phonetics, the ack ack ack of a foreign tongue.

The night clings to rocks almost as old as herself,
And, unlike the moon, which has fled, hooded,
She lingers, prompting, or trying to prompt,

Her dreaming vassals to some show, however
Feigned, of fealty . . .

The front (the top) of the rock is very uniform in texture and color. However, its overall contour is that of an eccentric hump. This hump rises steeply from the western edge, its ascent commencing just west of the NS meridian, where it forms an imperfect crescent whose outward bend begins at 12 o'clock. The crescent then elbows to the west at 3 o'clock, before sweeping smoothly back towards the east and cupping the whole bottom of the rock at the southern pole.

What exactly is this diligence of mine to map the surfaces of these rocks, and what am I mapping? Geography? Physiognomy? History? Chronology? The petrified body of language?

The eye, choked with beauty
By the day, does not wish so soon again
To see the interminable polish of salt flats,
Like ancient ice, dusted with gold, and sliding
To distant horizons, ringed by mountains,
Mauve-curtained by walking rain.

The question is, or so the baby thinks, are the correspondences between the surface characteristics and their attendant visions — or shall we say detours into other dimensions? — general or specific? Or is there some third, fuzzier possibility, a liminal realm negotiating between these two? On the front edge of the rock, at 11 o'clock, is a gouge and a pit shaped somewhat like an exclamation point. This line with its toe-dot is diagonally situated, as if it were in the process of falling on or rising from its side, its excitement dying or perhaps just being birthed, into articulation.

It does not wish to find itself again among the voluptuous
Prisms of raindrops, arching their dazzling spectrums
Across immensity.

The first thing I notice on the front of the rock is that it seems as if it had started out as an ovoid shape, which was then depressed, as if the entire eastern hemisphere has been pushed by a shaping thumb.

The colors burn coolly through the great inland sea

As steel-blue kissed with orange,
Naples yellow fetched into whited indigo.
These delirious brights and palenesses of dusk,

The rock seems eccentric, old, like someone who has lived with great dignity, but with a lively sense of humor. Good foil to my infant self. It seems a trickster, a prankster, who, nonetheless, only tricks to teach, and then only in the service of some invaluable life-lesson. Thursday's rock is a coyote bodhisattva. Suddenly, the words on the wall crawl like ants.

All these — gargantuan, grand — are sticky
With emotions of the self —

I see my imaginal engraving of this rock has begun to acquire captions and more surface characteristics. The cartographer at work here appears to be autonomous, something or someone observing, labeling beyond my conscious ken.

Its pomposity, its loneliness, its diatonic masses
Thumbed out to ravish a still unregenerate ear —

On the back of the rock, in the SW quadrant, is a deep, jagged scar. This is the deepest mark showing on any of the seven rocks. I like this rock. I will name it Giles Nagual.

It wants, the eye, the self, a bit more night,
More of its double, dreaming in the rocks,
More of this sleep that seeks to expand its magic
Into these pulsing colors of the rainbow.

I expect him to teach me cosmic secrets with great drama and high humor. I feel boyish in his presence, and a bit scared, too, as if Giles Nagual's jokes might stick one with a hidden knife-point. I think of those tricksters referred to by the Elizabethans as "cunning men," gnarly eccentrics roaming a countryside decimated by wars of succession and aristocratic prerogative, men clothed in ratty jerkins, earflapped skullcaps, twisted, out-at-the-heal buskins. Men maimed by brushes with legal authorities, both secular and ecclesiastical, and scarred by confrontations with the supernatural. In the ravaged sphere of imagination, through my newly opened fontanel, I see them, dog-eared, one-eyed, gapped-toothed and hobbled, staring into crystal

orbs, mortaring bone ashes, murmuring esoteric incantations. These men were publicly vilified and privately solicited. Their glances could sour milk in a cow's udder, rust farm implements, blight corn and make cats laugh.

The desert, the cessation, is living and growing inside of this rock, and also, miraculously, monstrously, inside of me.

I have a cat. And I can assure you; that it is not easy to make her laugh.

Interregnum: First Week's Summary

By the early 1960's, Penrose {a.k.a., Roger} was thinking seriously about a complex geometry that would be built of null lines and would employ all the power of complex mathematics. This geometry would also connect with the basic ideas of spin networks. With the help of such geometry, Penrose hoped to be able to make deep interconnections to quantum theory. The question was, how to proceed?

The answer lay in his creation of twistors, objects that lie partway between relativity and quantum theory and, being more general than spinors, combine linear and angular momentum and live in a world of complex dimensions.

F. David Peat
*Superstrings and the Search for
the Theory of Everything*

After seven day's of Rock Gazing, I have made these nine observations about my perception of objects. (These observations may or may not extend to my perceptions of people or events.)

The First Nine Perception Observations

P.O.#1

My perception must be owned as unique, and not made to stand for perception in general. I perceive as I perceive. Others may perceive differently.

P.O.#2

My perception quickly focuses on difference, anomaly.

P.O.#3

My perception moves from the surface observation of physical characteristics, then proceeds to naming, and then to mythologizing — i.e., the rock has a chip; I call the chip a blowhole; I name the rock Moby, after Melville's white whale and/or Polyphemus, the cyclops who threatened to devour No Man.

P.O.#4

My perception triggers emotions, feelings of sadness or affection, which seem to arise from various places inside my body.

P.O.#5

My perception places things on a conceptual grid, arbitrarily creating a front and back, an edge, a north, a south, an east, a west, directional meridians, clock stations, and contour lines.*

P.O.#6

My perception personifies, relates to the personifications, and seeks to create an interactive dialog between my personality and these personas.

P.O.#7

My perception makes visual maps and verbal descriptions.

P.O.#8

My perception makes rules and methodologies for itself (such as this list, such as seven rocks, such as seven days of the week and so forth). These rules enable me to quickly focus on distinctions, thereby compressing information and expanding time.

P.O.#9

My perception worries that it is incomplete, that it will forget, and that future perceptions will obliterate previous ones.

{Even before I begin the next section, I find this note, apparently inserted by a hand other than my own, the further categorizing comment perhaps of a future commentator, who has noticed something in retrospect which follows here, to wit, that these texts seem to covertly refer to a number of possible Me's. One, let us call this person the "narrator/pro-antagonist", who

expresses himself with philopsychosophological sophistication when referring to interactions with the rocks, and a second, let us call him the “organ sack”, a mobile incarnate more sophomoric than philosophic, who describes certain biographic or social events ostensibly taking place, circa 2000-2001 A.D., in the consensus reality world. The readers/listeners form perhaps a third category of Meness, one which contains a nearly infinite number of particular subsets and is likewise distinguishable by a mode of address, which betrays its — their? — where/when abouts in the text through the use of certain indexicals. And perhaps a fourth category of Meness more subtly signals its — Our? — ghostly presence as other characters or even objects, which are analogously signified, if only obliquely, in the flow of words. This note, as the reader/listener might by now suspect is not only other- but also self-referential, its essential Meingness being streams of sounds or words, which wind round and double back on themselves, bunching, beading, weaving, eddying to create exactly what?}

By way of biography, I should add, although it seems superfluous, that there were, in fact, other events in my life this week besides gazing at rocks. Although my asthma attacks have subsided, my prostate is no better, and the medication that I have been taking to enable me to pee standing up has had the unfortunate side-effect of making me occasionally incontinent. (I wonder: Can one be *continually* incontinent? Can the clock of the body outgas, outswat, outsnout, outpiss, outcrap waste product not specifically generated by the body, but by the environment as a whole? Is that what a psychotic, an artist or a saint is: One who serves as the kidney, or sweat glands, or mucus membrane or bowels for the culture or species at large? Behold: a new definition for Art as the redemption or elimination of the suppressed, used-up, toxified, dysfunctional, and so forth. DaVinci, Shakespeare or Jesus as muckmasters.) At any rate, my big accomplishment of the week was to venture out of the house in search of adult diapers. I made this effort to save the furniture, and subdue the stench, in the unlikely event that Mary Ann would return, or even the blessed Esclarmonde. (I have adopted Esclarmonde’s habit of watching CNN, MSNBC, FOX *et al*, sans sound, and by observing body postures, skin-tone changes, breathing patterns, eye movements, etc., I seem to be able to ascertain far more “news” than any auditory subtext could deliver. A disturbing picture of our collective insanity is beginning to resolve into focus.) Ah, but I digress — the diapers. Is there an event in life *more* embarrassing than buying diapers for one’s self? I mean, really, if you are

competent enough to drive a car and make it to the Hep-U-Sef convenience store, shouldn't you have already mastered toilet training? Fear seems to act as a trigger for my weakness, and prior to my excursion, I had a great many fears. What if I should wet myself while driving, or, God help me, while actually in the midst of the purchase? I briefly toyed with the idea of wearing a ski mask to conceal my identity, but quickly jettisoned that scheme, remembering how unwelcome convenience store customers are who enter masked. The possibility of being shot by a nervous, trigger-happy clerk dissuaded me, but only barely, and only because I feared that he might merely wound and not kill me. Jesus God, I can hardly stand to absorb another catastrophe. Naturally, I considered making casual conversation with the clerk, maybe something along the lines of "Mother is getting so much worse, now, I don't know how much longer we are going to be able to keep her at home." This plan, too, was aborted, as being hackneyed, and possibly drawing, not sympathy, but sniggering from whatever middle-eastern immigrant might be manning the till. In the end, I decided on speed and efficiency. Get in. Get Depends. Get out. Just act normal, maybe buy chewing gun, a lotto ticket, and then say "and *by the way*, I need some of *these*, too, while you're at it." Yeah, grab some condoms. Very manly. Like, what am I going to do with these, make inflatable coxcombs? I had never done such a thing in my life, but the pressure of necessity (and the bladder) instigates desperate measures. The purchase itself went smoothly. Surprisingly smoothly, in fact. Some spot of bother with a subteen, ignoble ratfaced punk lurking outside, apparently with no other intent but to perpetrate some juvenile act of malicious mischief. Rich kid with authority issues, proly, skedaddling suspiciously at my approach. But the rest was smooth, quite smooth, thankya'Jeesus. A turn of events that I attribute to the extraordinary courtesy of the clerk, a man with deep, black eyes and a sweet, high tenor voice that soothes. But the voice's sweetness notwithstanding, it was not so much anything he said which served as an anodyne to my pain, but rather some quality, or depth in his almost luminescent mien. His nametag read: Mohammed. Nice guy, I'm thinking, maybe a bit too nice for this kind of job in this kind of world. He's different in some profound way that separates him from Americans. I have the gut feeling that he's seen things, experienced things, things that for Americans only exist as media entertainment. I can sense — and when, I wonder, did I become so all fired *sensitive* — that inside him strange lights swirl, maybe even clash. If there are colors expressive of heroism and fear, loneliness and compassion, they are his colors, non-physical, too intense in a way to be endured by the eye. They have a story to tell, Mohammed's story, and I want to hear it. I want to

know him better. Imagine that, wanting to know a convenience store clerk. There is something, at any rate, of the angelic hovering about him. Palpable, almost like those wondrous plasma orbs, or like a flavor in the air dispelling the mixed odors of nachos, rotisserie hot dogs, popcorn and burnt coffee. The man's accepting manner almost prompted me to become brazen enough for a moment (but only for a moment) to ask him for the bathroom key. Hey, I was thinking it might be prudent to wear my recent purchase on the ride home — considering the vagaries of Houston traffic, even on short jaunts. A voice inside of me said: "Today is not the day. Don't press your luck." So this contingency I left unexecuted, deciding, instead to bid a jaunty farewell to the prophet and to merely spread one of the absorbent articles out on the car seat and sit on it. Such are the trials and tribulations of a neophyte Scientist of Awareness.

Besides meeting with Mohammed — that remarkable man — the only good thing about the whole diaper incident was that it took my mind off the looming presidential election, which for some reason, is more important to me than even my own abysmal circumstances. Most Texans, of course, are keen on the chances of seeing their native son sneak or be sucked into high office, but for me this possibility seems cataclysmic. I want to quickly point out here, that this has nothing to do with politics per se. Normally I am as apolitical as a tree-stump. But ever since that fateful date, August 6th, I have been, on top of my other troubles, plagued with disturbing visions involving the Shrub. Also, the strange events that accompany the delivery of the Awareness Exercises now come barbed with suggestions of a coming event that would mark the end of the imperfect American experiment with democracy — and perhaps the end of much else as well. I seem to see in that prep-boy smirk the timer of a fuse for explosive events that will lead to an irreparable tear in the fabric of history. I don't know why, but every time the TV burns with an image of Bush or Cheney, I literally, not figuratively, witness them trailing black clouds filled with deformed children. And those children, they are so pitiful, floating there, many armless, or with only fingers sticking out of their shoulder sockets. There are cyclopes, too, abortions born without faces, except for that one distressing, blind eye staring unblinkingly out at horrified mothers, midwives and doctors. It's so bad, that I sometimes even think of Mary Ann's pregnancy and our poor . . . Ah, but no, I won't go, I will never go there again . . . And as if these deformities were not ominous enough, there are also visions of vast refugee camps, diasporas of the most abject misery, millions exposed to the lash of unmerciful, violent elements, the weakest of them expiring anonymously

and thrown into mass graves. And these events are not only occurring “over there” in those imperfectly imagined other countries, where suffering seems the *de rigueur* past-time of people unlike us Americans, those unwashed unfortunates whose sole purpose in life seems to be to serve as spectacles for our “ain’t it awful” smugness, while we glut ourselves on that specious entertainment ironically referred to as the “nightly news”. No. These events are happening here, too, in the divinely anointed good ole’ U.S. of A. Whole cities annihilated by flood or fire, and the survivors fanning out like viruses to infect the rest of the Nation with their affliction. The entire wretched phantasmagoria is all spelled out in those two faces: one vacuous, the other cynical, for nobody else, but me, it seems, to see. I wonder, with a shudder, that if anyone ever reads these lines, will they know as history, what I only know in my imagination? And will they perceive all this as something monstrous, as I do, or will they be so inured to catastrophe that they will view these events as the normal course of American global politics, as inevitable, perhaps, as heat in the desert? I must say that these visions, these waking nightmares, shake me to the core, and are more harrowing to me than the pronouncement of the neurologists predicting my own death. If they were generalizations, perhaps they would be tolerable. But they are specific, instantaneous, and explicit down to the last detail of each individual’s agony, rage and hopelessness. That a great mass of Americans, perhaps not a majority, but enough, might cast their ballots for this future seems almost as tragic as the events themselves. It unnerves me to think that my neighbors, my family, people that I rub shoulders with every day, are willing to usher in this monstrosity by the simple act of casting a careless ballot. It is almost worth being incontinent to have something else, something personal, to distract me from these atrocious premonitions . . . I get myself tuned up to this fever pitch, but then, blink, blink, blink, and I see — or they show me, whoever “they” are — a bird with a familiar human face. Ah, this is the bird with only two left wings, which swerves to crash into its own fascistic version of apocalypse, the black wall with the golden sheen spelling out this peculiar end for history, an end fashioned not by the Other, the enemy, but by his own paranoia. Hmmm? What exactly am I afraid of? My own pee-stained version of events? For all I know my visions may mean that Chainy and the Shrub are meant to save us from these horrendous destinies. Maybe I should vote Republican too. Sweet Jesus, show me what is true.

When I arrived home from the Hep-U-Sef with my Depends, there were three messages on my answering machine. The first was from Mary Ann,

informing me that she would be extending her stay in Berkeley, and hinting that our separation might be more than temporary. The second was from a lawyer, whose name was unfamiliar to me, asking that I return his call and leaving a number with a 602 area code, wherever the hell that is. Like most people, calls from unknown attorneys scare the you know what out of me. Lucky I have those Depends! And the third was from, I believe, Esclarmonde. Although I have heard her voice so seldom that I could not be sure that I recognized it on the phone. Besides, the message was so brief, one word, actually, and in Spanish: “Rispirar.” I don’t speak Spanish, but I think she was telling me to breathe — which I do, but only shallowly and intermittently.

Good news! (Well, maybe.) When I called back the lawyer (respirar, Roy, respirar) he told me that I had been named as the beneficiary of an estate dispersal of one Dr. Sandro (!) Lieto, an Italian gentleman, of late from Sedona, Arizona, possibly deceased, missing, absconding into voluntary exile, or just in the mood to give away money. I could not tell exactly which from the conversation. Need I emphasize how my heart fluttered at the serendipitous repetition of the name “Sandro”? When I asked the attorney if there had not been some mistake, he rattled off my social security number and my mother’s maiden name, and assured me that I was the correct party, and that the legacy was a gift to support me in my “literary” endeavors. I could not conceive of what endeavors he might be referring to, surely not that stack of poems hidden in the old clothes drawer? But, in the last few months my life has been so plagued by catastrophic oddities that it almost seemed inevitable that a beneficent oddity would also have to occur. At any rate, I am most grateful to the good Doctor for his largess, but apprehensive about the lawyer’s demand that I travel to Phoenix for “a reading of the dispensation.” I told him about my financial situation and precarious state of health, but he did not back down from his request, and merely observed, in that clinical, detached way that some attorneys have, that the sojourn would be “well worth your while.” “Besides,” he added, “Dr. Lieto has specified in his instructions that all the beneficiaries must meet together and give a personal exposition of their work to the assembled parties.” He then asked me if I had any preference as to the date of this meeting, which, considering that I was unemployed, broke and dying, I did not, although I asked that it be “sooner than later”. At that, he intoned: “A date will be arranged, and you will be notified.” When I hung up, I was sure that the call was a hoax of some kind, but could not help pondering what literary endeavor to initiate as a way to justify the Doctor’s mysterious prognosis and request.

What a week it has been! And what a potent Awareness Exercise Rock Gazing is! The physical adventures, the perception of the grid, the psychical tripping inside the domain of the eye blinks, the discovery of the ebonygold sheen barrier, the possibility of a monetary legacy, the evil premonitions leeches on to the images and voices of the Republican presidential candidates, the angelic Mohammed, the bird with two left wings, all of these things, plus others, which seem indescribable, are flowing from the rocks, or being emitted from them in quantized bursts that somehow flower synchronistically both inside my brain and also as language in the notebook or on the computer. It's all so rich, so fascinating, so confusing, so exhilarating and so graciously, wondrously terrifying. Words, like little Fabergé eggs, each packed with some potential mystery or miracle are seen floating as those plasma orbs all around me, and inside of them are little elfin-like creatures, who seem to be busy slicing off parts of themselves to puff into and thereby fluff out — balloon-like — more and more of these brilliant emperor bubble eggs. And yet, in spite of all that has happened, I know that I am but the most nubile of blastocytes pulsing in the earliest stages of post-fertilization incubation. Something is growing inside me, and also in these pages, that may only be using the human experience as food, yolk in the egg, whose purpose is to nourish that mechanism or organism, which is beyond the human. I am in freefall now, the perturbing agent in a spiraling field that is so subtle, so elemental that it seems the connecting Mother matrix of all that is, the portrait of one man, who has become No Man, a netting of holes in the fabric of space/time, seeking identity everywhere and crying out from a chorus of voices to be heard, at last, to be heard.

*Note on the conceptual grid: One's first thought is that the grid is a construct of human reason to help it negotiate the eccentric or maddeningly uniform features of objects. But clairvoyants describe the auric body as spiraling filaments of light, which create the physical form by emanating seeming solidities from cosmic lines of force. Then there is the case of aborigines in Australia, who have been known to walk for days to be under a cloud that rains for fifteen minutes. They sing as they walk. The song guides them through "dreamtime," which they describe as a web, upon which hang the dewdrops of everyday events. They say that people in our culture can now see only the drops and not the web. Perhaps the web, the grid, is the rockbed of reality, and what we are calling objects or events are mere ephemera. Energy may be orbiting in all directions all around us, in all

directions through us, and intersecting with itself as it spirals. Our perception (my perception) may be hypnotized by this energy dance. We (I) may have fallen into a trance, and in that trance, we (I) may be falsely experiencing these knobby, repetitive, seemingly discreet and multivalent objects and mistakenly believing in them as something real.