

Week Six

12/1/00 (Preliminary note)

Every Friday, since Friday is the beginning of a new cycle of Rock Gazing, I must determine how or if I will continue my researches. I have options. I could return to the dishevelment of my habitual, albeit, abnormal life. No, this is my life now, my new habit, the sackcloth, or rather the sweatshirt, of a secular hermit dedicated to interminable mental meanderings. Or I could take the rocks out of their envelopes and allow them to intermingle. No, no, no, at this point, I believe such a course would be rash. This could lead to unbearable interactions between set times. Friday might rush forward or drift backward and meet with Wednesday. Impossible connections might occur, and the whole enterprise might degenerate into some abominable form of narration. I suspect that in the enclosure of the armoire, the paper of the envelopes is too thin a partition to prevent furtive and conspiratorial dialogues. I know that the interior lives of certain of the rocks have already bled into one another, and that if they do not yet directly converse, insidious premonitions are arising in their dreams. Certainly these premonitions are beginning to wear thin the fabric of the days, bedeviling their sequence, threatening their continuity, calling them to impossible congregations. Even I, poor I, the zero in the indecipherable deck, am beginning to see through the gossamer and into faraway times and distant places. This is unsettling. Strange vocabularies and accents intrude, as if their words and grace notes were native to my speech. I am possessed by the process, and must accede to those bizarre thrones of consciousness habituated by the demented, by shamans, by animals and by angels.

I arrived home from Alpharetta, Diva greeting me at the door, her tail held straight up, but turned at the top like a perpetual question mark, bitchy as usual, because I was imperfect. I was not a cat. (Well, I was not often enough a cat.) I was, in short, not Diva, and it was an insult to her greatness to submit to being cared for by such an oaf. This was typical, yet this time she had something legitimate to bitch about. Her timed feeder (in spite of the fact that I had been with her the whole time), which I had left out for her in my absence, was covered with ants — and not just ordinary ants either, but those pesky fire ants that sting and leave a toxin in the body that can accumulate to the point of fatality. They had entered through the back of the kitchen cabinet, attracted by some unsavory fast-food containers, which I had foolishly tossed in the trash when I left town. Now there were armies of them, superhighways of pseudopodia, in fact, connecting all the edibles in

the house, slithering into every room, where they found monuments of uneaten burgers, pizzas, burritos to worship and devour. Naturally I commenced a chemical warfare that threw up a cloud of toxicity enough to kill ants, me and Diva (the second time for both Diva and myself). It was trench warfare, a fight for every inch of ground, and no quarter asked or given, the ants nipping at my heels, and me dousing them in Black Flag. Finally, it was over, the whole of the disputed territory now corrupted into a vast killing field, unfit for habitation by Myrmidons or men, and in dire need of rehabilitation. Naturally, Diva was POed. Naturally, the ants retreated to their native lairs. Undefeated, because, naturally, the world has more ants than men. As the myrmecologists would say, in unison lifting straight-arms overhead in closed-fist salutes: "Ants rule!" Naturally. But I began to think of the vast numbers of corpses I had made, and to consider, if all of these concentrations of cultural poisons were really preferable to the pests I had destroyed, and who really, besides the ants themselves, would clean up the mess? So? So, what was it about my life, about all of our lives, really, that demanded so much control and death, and that attracted so much hostility from the rest of creation?

12/1/00 Friday's Rock, Moby Polyphemus

In Brussels, a Belgium woman attending our workshop on holotropic breathing™ had the following experience that brought about some remarkable insights into the behavior of whales, knowledge that she had not previously read or heard about.

After a powerful sequence of being born with triumphant emergence into light, things started to quiet down. I was feeling more and more peaceful and calm, and my experience seemed to acquire incredible depth and breadth. I had an increasing sense that my consciousness had a distinctly oceanic quality until I felt that I actually became what can best be described as the consciousness of the ocean. I became aware of the presence of several large bodies and realized that it was a pod of whales.

At one point, I felt cold air streaming through my head and had a taste of salty water in my mouth. A variety of sensations and feelings that were alien and definitely not human imperceptibly took over my consciousness. A new, gigantic body image

started to form out of the primordial connection to the other large bodies around me and I realized I had become one of them. Inside my belly I sensed another life and I knew it was my baby. There was no doubt in my mind that I was a pregnant whale cow.

And then came another wave of the birth process. However, this time it had a different quality than the previous episodes. It had gargantuan proportions, as if the ocean were stirred from its very depths; at the same time it was surprisingly easy, with all the nuances of these birthing activities associated with profound visceral understanding of how whales give birth. What I found most amazing was how they use water to expel the baby by sucking it into their genitals and working with hydraulic pressure. It seemed significant that the baby was born with its tail first.

Stanislav Grof, M.D.
with Hal Zima Bennett
The Holotropic Mind

Sometimes when I am studying the Lowestoft Wild One's strange portfolio, and riding these infernal trains from one hospital to another, I think of the poor patients these Gentleman Doctor Officers are asking me to treat with nothing more than words. "Malingers," some of the surgeons call them. "Shell shock," they entone, safely puffed up in their courage well behind the lines, "is not properly speaking a medical condition, but rather the disciplinary problem referred to by the officers as scrimshanking." Not a bloody medical condition! Their brains and spinal fluids have been subjected to a sudden vacuum, and then immediately after a catastrophic increase in atmospheric pressure. That, Doctors, Officers, you ant-brained boobies, is the effect of an exploding shell. The brain is shot to the moon and returned to the center of the earth in less time that in takes to say "What." Now let's do it all again, shall we, Brave Lads, and keep it up every couple of minutes for a day or two. Oh, I say, this is jolly fun. What say we make it a week? Oh, or a month? Zombies with minds as blank as the Generals' consciences. Hallucinations. Incontinence. Convulsions so violent, some have to be strapped down. Trembling and shivering as severe as a case epilepsy. Clawing at their own speechless or screaming slobbering mouths until their lips are blistered or bloody. Some blind, some deaf,

many, dumb as well. Ah, and that ghastly ten-thousand yard stare. Malingerers! Scrimshankers! Rubbish! I look at these poor chaps, and wonder if they shall ever be whole again. And wonder too as I thumb these engrossing pages, if, if the answer has been given me already, absolutely given! if, duced, I could just decipher it. The strain, this making a routine of horror, the hypnotic rocking of these death trains, I don't know what's causing it — ah, dash it all, but it's a poor doctor who can not diagnose himself, but blast if I don't keep tumbling into the strangest hiatuses in consciousness, in which for some period of minutes or hours, unknown to me, I seem to become, ah, duced, this is difficult, a completely different man. I am gone to what seems a real place, in which this whole thing that I call my duced life, seems but a fantasy, not even so solid a thing as a dream, but a figment of a figment, a revenant of a ghost. Now, I wonder what the devil my old nemesis Doctor Freud would say? A kind of autonomic self-hypnosis which serves as an escape mechanism for the beleaguered ego? The babbling fountain babbles, making bubbles of words. It shatters me this work, and makes me long for Francis, and sometimes even for Grace, thinking I need some flesh and blood comforter, and that these marginalia, these diary entries, if that's what they are, for there is certainly precious little that is scientific about them, and these incomprehensible glyphs swimming before me from this alluring, infuriating monument to my own obtuseness — damn it all, but they do engulf me. They do. Yet in some strange way, they comfort me too. I feel as if I am sunk in some freezing pitiless ocean, searching for some gigantic enigma, or entity, yes, blast it, that's what it is, an entity, some pallid and inexplicable cryptozoa, like that horrible Globster that washed ashore at Trouville, when all this bloody mess commensed. Ah, but no matter how large, how monstrous the mystery, the, ocean, by Gad, the ocean, it is so much more vast, a voluminousness that could hold all of this ghastly war, and all of its ghastly suffering, and, and, could hold all history, too, however Biblical in proportion, in its watery cavity, with no more displacement of its fluid, than a sand grain would make if it were chucked into the Channel. I find myself making apologies . . . to the men I try to treat, but cannot seem to reach? No. That would be the bloody decent thing to do, tell the War Office to go hang, and say straight out that the things that they are putting these men through, the horrors, the absolute horrors, are beyond the reach of any of our so-called scientific surgical or psychological procedures to rectify. But I'm not going to do that. No. Coward or pigheaded cad that I am, I'm going to keep riding these trains, keep showing up in wards where the surgeons look at me as if I were a bloody witch doctor, keep making reports and calculating statistics. And I'm going

to keep reading this strange cadwallop, too, and doing my absolute duced best to avoid going mad myself, as, no doubt that bloody daft COS at Lowestoft, the bloody Major, thinks I am. I shall salute his arse the next time I see him, see if I don't. The puffer! Still, maybe I should transfer back there, permanently. The Wild One showed there once. Perhaps he will again. But the confession, the confession I make to you, Francis, Grace, Wild One, you damn portfolio, the confession, or justification, I make to you, you ocean of mystery and misery, the confession I confide to no one but myself in these atrocious marginalia, addressed to no one, but perhaps some future version of me, some dreaming stone, who no longer has a name or a reputation or even a profession (Good God! What expertise could I possibly profess!), the confession, my confession, is this strange excerpt, that appeared, in the portfolio, as if by . . . Good Heavens! Is it as bad as all that now, words coming out of nowhere and insinuating themselves in this bloody book, and saying, no, by Jove, forcing me to say: This! This is who I am! You bloody West End bureaucrats! Don't tell me, standing there calmly at your authoritarian blackboards with your squealing chalk marks, of your bloody damned formulas for agony: "Gentlemen, if x = daily admissions, y , the number of days from commencement of admission, z , the number of days past the twentieth day, and n , the number of patients remaining beyond 21 days, which you should endeavor, Gentlemen, with all the alacrity that duty demands, to keep near zero, then the capacity of your hospital to receive patients, its flow rate, let us say, might be accurately determined by calculating: $n = x \times y - (5.6x + 0.9xz)$. Go to blazes with your bloody damn calculations! Counting men's lives and limbs as if they were your bloody chicken scratchings on your bloody blackboards! Finding the flow rate for flushing men to hell! Ah but, Gentlemen, you have your warplans, your formulas, your madness — well, Gentlemen, read on. This, this is mine!

I was never a hunter of whales; I never killed one, but I do admit to stalking them. Even in turbulent waters, I would set out in my little coracle, alone, in the season of migration, and steer toward the whale-track, battered by salt-seas. The clan had long since ostracized me, thinking me strange, because I would not kill. This blank socket, where I once housed an eye, was emptied by a rock-throw late one night. After that, I built my hut far from the village, in a remote cove, believed by common folk to be dismal and haunted. I still have the rock that blinded my right side. See. It has a spot on the back, like a blob of tar, or an eye. And the top has a chip, like the

blowhole of a whale. It is only a common beach pebble; I know that, but I took it for a favorable omen.

The seas breed the dissolution of the self, or rather they engender a parturition, so that the flesh-bound man is leavened with a kind of ferocious expectancy. He becomes pregnant with a natural force, with the *prima materia* of wind and water, his mind becoming a womb of potency. The villagers claim that I am ubiquitous. That they have seen me in my coracle, sailing beyond the bow of the horizon, and yet my body, rude with flesh and blood, would stalk a wife abuser in his hut, meeting out vulgar justice for his crimes. Mothers have claimed I came to serve as midwife, to ease the carnage of a dangerous birth. This may be true. I sense myself divided, existing separately in separate places, and yet collected in one fecund mind. The whales have taught me this with their weird cries.

I have been born in the body of one of these giants, as a shaman is born in his totem animal. In the whale-cow's womb, I saw fantastic lights, and female figures spinning to strange music, celestial harmonies enchanting me to life. I saw the slightest, pastel girlish bodies, in fabrics of lucent tissue, fairy-like. The girls were dancing, but not the heavy dancing with crude drums the villagers perform to charm their prey. These seemed more delicate than fluttering moths, and like the moths, they seemed to take to flight. And yet these dancers glowed with inner force, a strength more muscular than barbarous seas. Voices surrounded me with courteous lyrics. I suffered gentle agonies of spirit, sweetly assuaged by words with rhyming sounds:

"Which to rescue, no skill of leach's art
Mote him avail, but to return again
To his wound's worker, that with lovely dart,
Dinting his breast, had bred his restless pain,
Like as the wounded whale to shore flies from the maine."

I found myself in a room of sumptuous parts, staring out dumbly through a gold-framed glass, and saw one resting on a fine-spun couch, a woman, like a flower-spirit, glowing. Her amorous breathing echoed in my ear, like to the love-lorn soundings of the whales.

12/2/00 Saturday's Rock, Aesklepios, the Folly Master

I have suggested the artistic paradigm {for psychological therapy} because it satisfies the three requirements discussed in this letter. First, art forms madness rather than represses it. Second, the arts often act as the sensitive antennae of social injustice and moral outrage, keeping the soul awake to hypocrisy, cant, suppression, and jingoism. And third, the fundamental enemy of art is mediocrity.

James Hillman
*We've Had a Hundred Years of
Psychotherapy and the World is
Getting Worse*

Here's to the interloper's sacramental libation — words! After a while, he sees them in endless spasms of fluidity, the consciousness swaying its limpid kelp of meanings, far down, too deep to trouble with discernment. The rock has disappeared. The scenes, the beings, shift. The sentences are lonely escapades.

But the schisms, and their fragmentary androids, in time, encase themselves in egg-like sacks — larvae within the sinkholes of their yolks, initiating inquests with enigmas.

They want, he wants, we want the final script, the lapidary chiseling on flint, not these innocuous toys of origami, bent paper planes pretending to some wisdom. The search for meaning is a slaughterhouse, where stone blades slice the seeker into strips, tissues and organs, fascia and viscera, Marsyas' ultimate humiliation, making the infamous kaleidoscope, where colors crawl about like heaps of ants.

This outcry of confusion is his penance. Outfoxed and exiled from the great conclusions, he kowtows to illusion's mimicries. Of paradox and swirling opposites, he is the humorist evangelist.

Send up a cheer, Hurrah! for these sweet entrails. Laud the assassin's final precipice. This endless polychrome of glittering sequins may hide, beneath their glass, authentic gems. The stone's face is a mask, a blank-faced fool, a calm disguise atop extravaganzas.

Pestered by the screaming of cannibalistic mice, Brünhilde Erhardt, trembling with palsied indignation, read the manuscript with a hyper-vigilant, hypercritical eye. It was filth, just as this place was filth — the *Hauptsturmführers* entire degrading *labor* a deliberate insult to the whole concept of the *Gesundungshaus*. But here it is, carefully stowed in its manila envelope and meticulously “hidden” under one of the more noisome specimen cages. Did he think that she wouldn’t find it? *Nein*, he didn’t think that. He was old, *aber noch nicht* stupid. He wanted her to find it, and he wanted her to find it in here, where he was conducting this wretched miniaturized and animalized version of what he repulsively referred to as the *Überlag Projekt*. The Dominatrix scrunched her wrinkled forehead and sutured closed her ancient papery-eyelids over her ice-chip aqua eyes. “*Ja, es ist gut*,” she whispered vehemently, imagining the tortures she would inflict on naughty *kleiner Blasius* in the rumpus room when he returned from his habitual morning walk — what was his putrid excuse? “getting energy” from the Bell Rock vortex. “*Neurzeit Schieß*,” unworthy of a man of his once towering intellect. The sun was right here, its power radiating as it had now for more than forty years from the Grecian bas-relief. What did he need Bell Rock for? It was disgusting. To be old, that was one thing, but to be senile, weak! Ach! It bugged the mind. They were all in league against her — that little *Häftling*, Esclarmonde, and Prinz, too, *ja*. *Jetzt* she would make him pay for this little excursion into intellectual debauchery. She pursed her leathery lips, her own little cruel version of a tight smile. *Ja, ja*, the Flayer would be flayed, the loathsome vermin. She could already feel the flog in her hand and taste the humind flow of her own hot breath inside the styrene of the rufter’s mask.

12/3/00 Sunday's Rock, Fergus's Druid Dreamstone

By 1960 the expression “superorganism” had all but vanished from the vocabulary of scientists.

Old ideas in science, however, never really die. They only sink to mother Earth, like the mythical giant Antaeus, to gain strength and rise again. With a far greater knowledge of both organisms and colonies than was available just three decades ago, comparisons of these two levels of biological organization could be resumed with greater depth and precision. The new exercise had a goal larger than the intellectual delectations of analogy. It now aimed to mesh

information from developmental biology with that from the study of animal societies to uncover general exact principles of biological organization. The key process at the level of the organism is now seen to be morphogenesis, the steps by which cells change their shape and chemistry and move en masse to build the organism. The key process at the next level up is sociogenesis, which consists of the steps by which individuals undergo changes in caste and behavior to build the society. The question of general interest for biology is the similarities — joint rules and algorithms — between morphogenesis and sociogenesis. To the extent that these common principles can be defined clearly, they bid fair to be recognized as the long-sought laws of general biology.

It follows that ant colonies are more than of passing interest to scientists.

Bert Holldobler and Edward O.
Wilson

*Journey to the Ants: A Story of
Scientific Exploration*

R.D. — The lessons that are too hard to be consciously learned have to slip through the crack of what Reich would have called the character armor (chitin), impaling us through sickness or fatigue, or otherwise finding a soft spot in moments of ennui or apathy. There is suffering, yes, pain and such, but this is more insidious — Diel's banalization, or what shamans in traditional cultures call the "loss of the soul." We become unfocused, numb, unresponsive, dull, call it what you will. We experience moments like the m-dash between words, voids, where not even torpor can take hold. We are like pages of a fading script, like those palm leaf scrolls in Tamil which are said to contain the biographies and the ultimate purpose of the chosen, but which, unfortunately or not, are being slowly eaten by ants. You work your tedious clerk job for fifty weeks; you scrape together the money you saved by skipping lunch and buying cheaper shoes, and in the fifty-first week, you jet to the subcontinent at the Guru's behest, fight the intolerable heat, the humidity, the swarms of bizarre insects, the pestilential miasma of the drinking water and the untreatable tropical intestinal organisms, then you submit to the priest-librarian your request for the fated leaf, the one that will reveal to you the secret, not only of this life, but of all your many lives, both past and yet to come. Then the priest comes back with a shrug and shredded

lignin. "Ants," he says, that one word standing for the immense, destructive and mysterious forces, which even Lakshmi can't control.

Being Sunday, I set out on my usual routine — rise, read the Sunday Chronicle, drive to Two Pesos for the breakfast fajitas — a ways away, but worth it to the addict of specific fast-food rushes. I drove the half-hour through the usual Sunday get-away or get-back traffic, took the appropriate exit, then, u-turned and came back home. Yes, I was sick, but only a little. I was "stuffed-up," to use the technical term, my symptoms no doubt attributable to the change in wind direction, which instead of blowing in from the Gulf as is usual in this clime, was now bearing down from the north, sweeping across dry land, and scattering God-knows-what load of pollens and positive ions. The point is, I was suffering, or, I should say, the body was suffering, a reversal of cosmic energies, which for whatever reason had triggered these enervations affecting my sinus cavities and mucus membranes. My breath was a little labored. But mostly I was just plain tired — stripped of vitality, depleted, spiritless, passive, dead.

I got home, ate a bowl of cereal, went into the bedroom, and flopped down on the bed, Mary Ann's bed, which I had preserved, untainted by the heft of my body for lo these many weeks of her absence. I thought I might read, but the paragraphs were too massive, and the book was too heavy in my hand. I slept, for God knows how long. I was in that drugged semi-fantasy state where dream and reality inextricably commingle. I heard a tap on the door, and my wife tentatively entered, holding what looked to be a colored-paper funnel, like the kind used to hold bouquets of flowers. She was trying to cheer me up. This was unusual, but not unprecedented, and in my grogginess, I looked up, touched by her solicitude. The funnel was void of blossoms, which was just as well, considering the hypersensitivity of my upper respiratory track to plant residue — so, instead, it was the paper itself that she was presenting. She had spray-painted a few stiff sheets with festive hues and was proffering them as a healing gift. I opened my eyes wider, pleased, and appropriately cheered. And then I realized that the spray-paint was still sticky, and that my pants too had been misted and were tacky, as if she had done the spraying in the room where I slept. This seemed strange. Then I noticed that the room itself had changed, and had, in fact, been redecorated, patterns like the petraglyphs in the desert Southwest had been stenciled on the floor. My God, how long had I been sleeping? And then I knew it — I was sleeping still. I woke up. Mary Ann was busy in another room. I went to the bathroom, thinking, 'Oh, it's Sunday, it's the

day of the Dreamstone, the day of worldly lassitude.’ Then I noticed that the bathroom, too, had been painted. The paint smelled fresh, and the colors were quite imaginative and bold. I was admiring the transformation, when the old, familiar doubts took hold. I was in bed asleep and dreaming still. The trick was clever. The dream-maker was careful not to make things too chimerical — nothing overtly symbolic — the conversations were logical, the rooms changed, but were reasonably familiar. Even the little twists of waking up, of feeling the sticky paint with the tip of my finger, of smelling the fumes, all this was carefully calculated, all very ordinary and all utterly eccentric and bizarre.

Of course, Mary Ann was far away. The house, except for Diva and the television, was empty. But the mirror in the door of the armoire, and the rocks that I had stowed there, proved that I was not really alone.

F.D.D. — Yes, that was the trick: make things close, but not so close as to be exact, create a beguiling verisimilitude, but not a mirror image. You had to catch on, but not, of course, wake up.

R.D. — You! The Dreamstone! What are you trying to teach me?

F.D.D. — That you must become unstuffed, unstuck to drift into these parallel dimensions. You had to have the experience "in the round," and not simply played out in your imagination. We had to give you that very real little tingling in the pit of your gut and you had to think that you could suddenly awaken and annihilate yourself.

R.D. — Well, you've succeeded. I have that feeling, and now I'm both sleepy — and afraid of sleep.

F.D.D. — I must say, I am gratified by our success. By the way, how's your breathing coming?

I found that it was clear, but I did not feel compensated for the betrayal and the uneasy feeling that I might be sleeping still. I wanted back on solid ground. I wanted to end the experience and the conversation.

R.D. — Thanks, but no thanks. Good night, or Good day, or whatever, Good bye!

F.D.D. — Not so fast, don't turn the page. We're not through yet. There's something else I want you to look (if you'll excuse a stone using that expression) *into*. Let's call it your homework for the coming week.

R.D. (suspiciously, trepidatiously) What is it?

F.D.D. — Ants.

R.D. — Ants?

F.D.D. — Ants. Let's see, there's a quote, (distantly, as if searching inwardly with some difficulty) it's from another window.

R.D.— Another window?

F.D.D. — Excuse me, what you call a "day," a "date." Yes, here it is, for Saturday, November 25th, 2000. "The search for meaning is a slaughterhouse where stone blades slice the seeker into strips, tissues and organs, fascia and viscera, making the infamous kaleidoscope, where colors crawl about like heaps of ants."

R.D. — That was only a metaphor, and besides, that was Saturday's not Sunday's business.

F.D.D. — Dreamstones are not particular about these subtle spreadsheet grids confining time. It's *all* my business. Another quote, then, the obscure words of an obscure author, "Then the priest comes back with a shrug and shredded lignin. 'Ants,' he says, that one word standing for the immense, destructive and mysterious forces which even Lakshmi can't control." A bit overblown perhaps, but on the whole, marginally elegant, even apropos.

R.D. — But apropos of what?

F.D.D. — Yes, of what? As I said, you should look *into* this.

R.D. — Ants?

F.D.D. — Ants.

12/4/00 Monday's Rock, Sandro Lingam

dream chamber: a device for making physical the paths of metaphor in a neural network. The *expansion* dream chamber consists of a container (a poem, a novel, a human body) comprised of longing (hormonal flux, perceptions) and aspiration (air, words). The chamber is cooled suddenly by adiabatic expansion (thereby deflating the ego and generating disappointment), which causes the vapor to become supersaturated. The excess moisture is deposited in drops (tears, sweat, in extreme cases, even blood) by the pressure of synchronistic events. The resulting pattern of droplets can be captured in words and studied “in stasis”. Thus the chamber has become one of the primary instruments of scientists of awareness.

Various Scientists of the
Collective
A Dictionary of Elementary
A.S.

R.D. — I had a dream in which I was about to enact a strange ritual of awareness before an immense mirror, which was also a westward-facing window full of sunlight. I noticed a presence — a lithe woman I knew, but I could not say from where, a dancer lying hidden on the floor, beneath a low table stacked with enormous portfolios. When I spotted her, we laughed. She asked if I had seen her drawings of me. No, I had not. But then I began to excitedly relate how I had dreamt that we were in a class together, and that she had clandestinely made many drawings of me. These drawings were simple caricatures on small sheets of paper, not much larger than index cards. There were 20 or 30 of them, maybe 40 — me talking with other women, me talking with men, me in groups, me alone, me in profile, me full-faced, me from the back of the head. (One drawing showed me wearing a Band-Aid on my forehead, about where the infamous “third eye” might be. But I could not remember ever cutting myself there. Another was simply that of a skull, my skull apparently, but comprise of crystal, not bone.) I was telling her all this as she was showing me her real drawings. They were full-blown, four-color process lithograph cartoons as large as movie posters. They were laid out in color groupings, each grouping corresponding to a certain type of personality and a certain season of the year. I was a “Pastel Spring”. I tried to follow their captions. ‘What is the storyline?’ I wondered, distracted by my own inner narration and trying to pick out the plotlines for “my character.” The room we were in was a house at the top of a tree, or

perhaps it was simply a small structure, like a well house, surrounded by trees. We were dappled with sunlight filtered through English lace curtains and shimmering leaves. At first I was dressed in a bridalwhite poncho, and she in a faux-leopard-skin leotard. Then we were both naked. I said, "It seems as if the celebrated Ms Star is obsessed with me." We both laughed again, knowing this was not true. And yet, in the dream, it was true. I awakened (did I awaken?), in a cluttered room bedroom that was unfamiliar to me. 'The troubadours were journalists,' I thought, 'for them the body of this or that other did not matter. What mattered was the curving of the words as they met the counter-curve of an obsession.' But my body felt otherwise, and somewhere close, but in another time, another's body was crouching, like the words of an as yet to be written poem, preparing to pounce upon mine.

12/5/00 Tuesday's Rock, Serenity Pitt, the Zen Master

In Belgrano Street I took a cab. Sleepless, obsessed, almost happy, I reflected that there is nothing less material than money, since any coin whatsoever (let us say a coin worth twenty centavos) is, strictly speaking, a repertory of possible futures. Money is abstract, I repeated; money is the future tense. It can be an evening in the suburbs, or music by Brahms; it can be maps, or chess, or coffee; it can be the words of Epictetus teaching us to despise gold; it is a Proteus more versatile than the one on the isle of Pharos. It is unforeseeable time, Bergsonian time, not the rigid time of Islam, or the Porch. The determinists deny that there is such a thing as a single possible act, *id est* an act that could or could not happen; a coin symbolizes man's free will. (I did not suspect that these "thoughts" were an artifice opposed to the Zahir and an initial form of its demoniacal influence.) I fell asleep after much brooding, but I dreamed that I was the coins guarded by a griffon.

Jorge Luis Borges
The Zahir

More pacing today, turbulent-belly pacing, pacing like that of an animal caged. Perhaps it is my increasing identification with Diva that has given rise to this anxiety of being trapped, and it may be that this has something to do with my heightened sense angst. Here, in the gut. But this *it* — this

feeling in my gut that sets my mind to racing and my feet to moving is something that has been plaguing me all of my life, or at least all of my adult life. Oddly, it is the fear of being eaten, a fear that is exacerbated whenever I think of money, and especially of my current chronic lack thereof. Visions are pouring through my head of slaughterhouses, of fisheries, of deforestation projects, of oil drilling rigs, of strip mining operations, and attached to all of these is that growing voraciousness in my belly that says "eat, eat or else . . ." I know well enough what the "or else" means. Diva has been underfoot all day to remind me, or to egg me on, giving me that yeow yeeow barking attitude of hers, her tail curled at the top in its little hook of a question mark, her crocodile lip turned up to show the one fang in her characteristically condescending sneer. It is as if she is saying to me: "It's about time you got it." But as usual, I don't have a clue. I only know that I am in pain, and that I must do something to mitigate that pain, must institute some act of aggression or avoidance that will blanket this surging ache. Towards evening, I turn, hopelessly, but by now habitually, to Rock Gazing, and the stone's presence appeases what it cannot yet cure.

S.P., T.Z.M. — It is with humble honor, Friend, that I have the privilege of addressing Thee on the sanctified espousal of money and spirit, a matrimony, that Thou mayest be satisfied, occupies a hallowed place in my affections. For I can assure Thee, Friend, that it is a matter of which very many learnèd brethren have but little understanding, nay, a matter in which they harbor much prejudice, and in consequence of such, they tend, therefore, to misinterpret certain of the scriptures devoted thereunto, and thereby, like to those blind Pharisees who bar the door to heaven, they too prevent both themselves and their unfortunate listeners from attaining a prosperous felicity. One holy assertion in particular sets their minds and their phrases wandering in mazes of fallacious doctrine and false words, and this is, Friend, the apostle's pronouncement (1 Timothy 6:10) that "the love of money is the root of all evil; and while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." But note, dear Friend, if I may humbly clarify, how Saint Paul most pointedly referred to the "love of money," and not to money itself, as evil's root.

Money travels in this fallen world, Friend, and is therefore, as are all things engendered in this vale of sinners, an admixture of earthly corruption, of which we all bear the stain since the misadventures of our first parents, and

of heavenly light, which light was returned to us through the blessed and bloody sacrifice of our Master and ever-faithful Friend, Jesus. We know full well that money casts an intriguing shine on all the insidious lures of this world, the indulgences in sensuality, or in intoxication, or in vain ostentation, or in other such like evils of which the prophets in every age have forthrightly forewarned us, according to their divine light and heavenly duty. And yet, how few have shed their inner light on money's heavenly half. For true it is, Friend, that money, being a thing admittedly mixed with corruption, has also, as does even the blackest sinner, its righteous attributes. And it is this righteousness, as faithful Friends and Christians, that we are beholden to study and extract. For is it not, dear Friend, our Christian duty, to take up that which this world has corrupted, and make it clean for the sake of Christ and our fellow laborers? For we would know, since scriptural guidance is less forthcoming (though its treasures are discoverable by the diligent) what is the proper and heavenly-sanctioned use of money, and what indeed is its sanctified purpose, and finally, but most importantly, how may its properties be used to enhance our honest search for the Inner Light?

This, dear Friend, I will put to thee simply, afterwards expounding the particulars and intricacies, and by the way, during our expositions, pointing out pitfalls and unwholesome allures. But first I will humbly direct Thee to that wisest, and also to that wealthiest, of the Lord's servants, who has in Ecclesiastes 7:12 spoken truly and simply of the righteous use of money. "Money," saith the Preacher, "is a defense." And herein lies the providential key. Money is security for ourselves and for those we hold close to us, and also, in cases of Christian charity, for those in dire straights, who may stand imperiled through the circumstance of possessing too scanty pecuniary resources. Or for those whom men, but not our Creator, assign to the misnamed "lower" order, our fellow creatures and guides whom we have wrongfully slaughtered to augment our Vanity. For do we not, dear Friend, as we gather together in the Meetinghouse, sitting quietly and with good patience and trust awaiting the visitation, do we not, I say, find our minds oftentimes distracted from the needful luminance betokening our salvation, and dwelling instead, involuntarily as it were, upon some physical need or threat which might quite readily be relieved by the procurement of necessary funds? Thou knowest, dear Friend, from thine own experience, as I do from mine, and as the Master himself knew when he sent Peter to the sea to take up the fish within whose providential jaws lay that talent destined to pay the tribute, I say, Friend, that Thou knowest and knowest truly, as an inborn gift of thy soul, that the Good Master never intended to impoverish his beloved

children, nor to make us suffer the want of any needful or innocent thing. Therefore, the Master, has also sanctioned the use of money as a defense to give to us that Security, and even that Serenity (if I may borrow my own name as an illustration) which settles us so forthrightly on the spiritual way to betterment.

For does He not provide, for the word "provide" is derived from the Latin tongue and means to "fore see." And therefore, the Lord has given his own name, *viz.*, the name of Providence, as a covenant that he means to provide for our needs. For has he not provided gleanings of corn for the fowl of the air and the riches of the soil for the lilies of the field? So too, Friend, He shall certainly do, as he has so promised, the same for his human brethren, if likewise we keep our bargain, providing kindness to all Creation and exerting ourselves with prudent employment, while remaining always thrifty and unostentatious in our disbursements. Security, Friend, that is money's heavenly purpose, and by means of interest and of sound investment (though we must refrain from usury as a practice spawned by Satan and therefore sullied by the twin horns of Arrogance and Greed) it is our right, nay, our heavenly duty, to compound our Capital by means of lawful fiduciary instruments, and by so doing strengthen our Defense. By this means, we may provide for our physical and encourage our spiritual support in perpetuity.

Security, Friend, that is the word to remember, for it is wedded to the just use of money as friendship weds the friend to the Heavenly Friend.

12/6/00 Wednesday's Rock, Grace Maryanka

I missed nothing of the show which was taking place as much offstage as on. Standing between the two middle boxes, I felt quite at ease at the heart of the maelstrom, applauding with my friends. I thought there was something wonderful about the titanic struggle which must have been going on in order to keep these inaudible musicians and these deafened dancers together, in obedience to the laws of their invisible choreographer. The ballet was astoundingly beautiful.

Valentine Gross, on the premier
of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du
Printemps*,

Suppose the *prima materia* of life was “astonishment,” a self-immolation that destroyed the human mind and body as we know it, their twin towers of flame fueled by the accelerant of historical “progress,” i.e., everyday life as propagandized by the advertisers and politicians. Now, further suppose that the goal of the artist’s or the mystic’s or the madman’s discipline or ecstasy is to ignite those hulking mirrored mounds of overbearing detritus. The way to art may be toil, but art itself is flame. To the conventional mind, art is always a terrorist act. It must be hidden under the lacey and harmless subterfuge of culture, frilled over with the costume of entertainment.

These were the kind of ideas that kept floreating through my mind today, as I walked around the house, almost on tiptoe after yesterday’s ineffectual struggle with the concept (alas, for me all too immaterial) of money. But no matter what care I took in my movements, every step and motion seem to be an assassin. And what were my movements, ungraceful clompings that they were, killing, if not time? And then I had an even more horrendous thought, just as I removed Grace from her envelope for our evening *tête-à-tête*, my cloddish movements were killing taste; they were killing style. This realization brought every motion of my body to a sudden, shuddering stillness. And from that stillness, I could hear Grace speak.

As an artist, one cannot take anything, as you say, “for granted”. *Non, non*, nothing is granted, even placidity must be practiced. All that we want from Nature is her power, everything else is artifice, an *accomplissement*, a discipline — ah! — but it must appear *naturale*, perhaps even unconscious, *non?* as when a leaf flutters to earth, so effortless, so refined. That is the way. The body must be tortured, made to submit, and the mind also, the same. *Par exemple*, the *assiette du pied*, the sole of the foot, as you say, sole *et* soul, the same word, flat to the floor, *mais* only for *un instant*, and then it moves, *sur la pointe*, on the toe, *unnaturale, oui*, but of course, that is the point! The dancer’s placidity, the seeming serenity, *s’il vous plait*, is earned through practice. From childhood she strives to turn the leg out, *en dehors*, we say, to the audience, so they may see, not the angle, never the angle, but the line. For the dance must be lightness only, never the angle, never the sharpness, but the lines, the moving lines, all moving in the *élément du temps*, as the leaf is moving in the breeze, but our leaf is filled with motive, flying up, up, and never falling down. Do you understand now? It is *contre la nature* for the human *ordinaire*, *mais, pour l’artiste*, it is life, it is freedom, it is the *esthétique divine*.

So God makes the birds to fly and the great hot-blooded whales to swim in the icy seas, yes? but this is also *contre la nature*. For God is also *un artiste*, is He not, making the impossible possible? That is the way.

When Grace finished her little dissertation, I sat in the rumpus room for a while, in a bell of complete stillness. She was so present. So immediate and authentic, how could what she was saying not be the truth? How could it possibly be an act?

12/7/00 Thursday's Rock, Giles Nagual

The attributes of liminality or of the liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since the condition of these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there . . . Their behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they were being ground down to a uniform condition . . .

The symbolism attached to and surrounding the liminal personae is complex and bizarre. Much of it is modeled on biological processes . . . the symbols that represent them are . . . drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism and other physical processes that have a negative tinge . . .

Victor W. Turner
*The Ritual Process: Structure
and Anti-structure*

I awaken this morning from a dream, that seemed packed, as dreams often do, with many disparate elements, elements that somehow were unspooling from one central, and possibly quite arid truth. In the dream, I was Rock Gazing, when I was distracted by a raucous cry coming from outside. When I looked out, there were two enormous ravens the size of human beings sitting in the hackberry tree, screeching and scrawking for my attention, with voices almost like bawling human children. I went and put my face to the picture window, and as I did this, one of the ravens flew away, the tree springing heavily from the release of its weight, while the other suddenly

grew very ragged and decrepit-looking, its feathers falling out so that only its skeleton remained, the bones powdering to dust, as the tree grew green. I was pondering all this when I realized I was still holding Thursday's rock in my hand. Then I noticed something about Giles Nagual that had eluded me before: a spiral etched into the rock. I touched this spiral, and it began to leak, and then to gush torrents of water, and not just water, but, tears. The water began splashing on the floor, and for a moment I feared that the room would fill up and I would drown, but just then I saw what looked like a gopher that Diva was chasing in one corner, which in his panic to escape, gnawed a hole in the floor, so that the waters whirled round and round, catching me in the flow. I "returned" below in a reverse flood of those tears that I had once surfed to birth on, struggling, just as I did the first time, when I emerged from my mother's womb. Below, I found myself in a dark basement, wadding knee-deep through warm, thick liquid. The basement was filled with all kinds of pipes, angled and bent and jumbled high and low in all directions. In that flickering netherlight I could hear muttering and cursing, and I followed this sound to its source: a gnarly looking old plumber banging away angrily on one of the pipes. Atop his overalls, he was wearing what looked to be a butcher's apron, as it was covered with blood, blood that spurted forth every time he applied one of his wicked-looking wrenches to the pipes. He turned to me in an exasperated manner, and I noticed, with a shudder, that he had only one good eye, and that with a tiny orange ember burning far back in the socket, the other eye having been gouged out by what I imagined was an unfortunate meeting with one of the many pipes jutting out in this perpetual gloom. In the middle of his forehead, above his eyebrows, his still-opened, or re-opened fontanel pulsed obscenely. "You are a fool to come down here," he said, "At this very instant, when you are wasting time trying to find the source of your tears, the child is upstairs stealing your food." I awakened very hungry, and realized that I had no money and nothing in the house to eat. To divert myself, I went to my computer to review the Rock Gazing texts, and found that the new entry below had been added while I was sleeping.

It crept over the eastern ridge, dabbing the sky's edge red, awakening the glow hidden at night in stones. Dawn in the desert envelops the student and Master. A voice, not wholly either of their voices, makes its awareness felt in their shared silence.

Last night you dreamt of spirals carved in rocks —
So many puzzles to decipher, and

Only the dreams within you hold the answers.
Some call these petraglyphs "Sipapu,"
The place of emergence, the place of birth.
But we are born in dreams, in dreams of dreams.
As when the gopher emerges from underground,
Making a passage for placental waters.
Think how this well, this eye, within the desert,
Gives solace in the labyrinth of living.
So many layers of spirals — and all connected.
The gopher is the cousin of the raven.
The raven is the cousin of the ant.
So many raindrops making just one river.
So many thoughts within the loop of thinking.
So many visions in the single I.
There is no place to turn, no thing to see,
Where something is not turning, looking back.
This is the meaning of the spiral track,
The question in the answer that you seek.

G.N. — The two birds, the one female, which flies, and the other, male, which is talking and diseased, unable to breathe, are the images respectively of spirit and body. When the second bird transforms itself into a form you love — the black cat that you lost with innocence — you see a personal portrait of your death. And the man in the basement, fixing the faulty plumbing, telling of synchronicities, while staring out of his single eye, the left, the jewel, his words were a commentary on the spiral. The dream is specific, the map of the underground, the map of the womb, the route of the child who comes to steal your food, that is to say, your soul. All of these dreams, which cast light on each other, have come to show the process of awareness.

R.D. — But it's all so arbitrary and confusing.

G.N. — The content is confusing, cultural, each person guided by confusion, glyphs that contain precisely coded promptings, which steer the fetus through the labyrinth. The labyrinth itself, the spiral's process, occurs in every culture, and is clear. The spiral is the form connecting worlds.

Then the sorcerer has the student trace a spiral, like one of those carved in Sonoran desert rocks, which match precisely others found round the world. The student, as if electrocuted, quivers, almost, but not quite, paralyzed.

G.N. — To traverse the maze, one sees that one line starts where one line stops. There are four stops, which means, that there are two lines. These two travel around each other, turning, like ravens flying, but never touching. One has to travel the path as it is given. Nothing in the world can connect these lines or separate them. The design is not the product of cunning. It is given. We trace these lines in dreams. One line is birth. One line is death. The lines shape tubular spaces, times — waking times, dreaming times. To trace these lines is to travel the path of power. One cannot stray. One cannot sleep. This is the discipline of dreaming, tracing the images exactly, as the ants must follow the tunnels that they've hollowed. So does the mind evolve, extracting fantasies from the hides of stones.

Interregnum: 6th Week's Summary

. . . “it is an abominable thing for a man to commend himself”; —
and I really think it is so.

And yet, on the other hand, when a thing is executed in a masterly kind of fashion, which thing is not likely to be found out; — I think it is full as abominable, that a man should lose the honour of it and go out of the world with the conceit of it rotting in his head.

This is precisely my situation.

For in this long digression which I was accidentally led into, as in all my digressions (one only excepted) there is a master-stroke of digressive skill, the merit of which has all along, I fear, been overlooked by my reader, — not for want of penetration in him, — but because ‘tis an excellence seldom looked for, or expected indeed, in a digression — and it is this: That tho’ my digressions are fair, as you observe, — and that I fly off from what I am about, as far, and as often too, as any writer in Great Britain; yet I constantly take care to order affairs so that my main business does not stand still in my absence.

Laurence Sterne
*The Life and Opinions of
Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*

All cohesiveness is gone now. The stones are liquefied. I feel a kind of twisting, winding, spiraling turgidity in these seven texts, as if my consciousness was being swept through a rich and possibly toxic brew that gets darker and deeper as the vortex of the stirring descends. The mixture of dream, myth, personal and impersonal history, along with the conflicting, explanatory, and didactic voices of the personas — all of these disparate elements are sweeping me down, and dulling, not brightening my awareness. I am being drowned in a murkiness of paradox and contradiction, tangled in filaments, which seem tight enough to bind, but when I try to follow a single strand, it turns to liquid in my hands. The whole process is seizing me with

a strong urge to categorize and sort. And yet, where do I begin? And what category is not already utterly tainted by its opposite?

On Friday, December 1st, we have the narrative of some sort of shamanic possession, a kind of transmigration into the totemic body of a living whale. We pass through the darkened and jostling mirror of the sea. We find ourselves in another realm, another body. But then there is a reversal, or what Jung would have called an "enantiodromia" — that psychological oddity which seems to dictate that if one falls deeply enough into some strong affect, say, of force or of hatred or of brutishness, then the magnetized tip of these emotions becomes overcharged and flips poles, reverting to delicacy or love or refinement. In the belly of the whale, the troglodyte suddenly hears Spenserian verses and is mesmerized by ballet.

On Saturday, December 2nd, this trend continues. The constant oscillation between the serious and the comic, the exalted and the banal, and then the sudden rush from the gigantomachia of creation, *i.e.*, the seas, the whales, is somehow processed through dreams inside of dreams and is then telescoped down on Sunday, December 3rd, to the size of an ant. The Vedantic sages assert that when one reaches Maharloka, the place of the magnet, the atom, one may pass at will through the door connecting the material and the spiritual worlds. They say that the adept comes into possession of the so-called ascetic majesties, one of these majesties being Mahima, the power of magnifying anything, and another being Anima, the power of reducing anything. This, I would guess, is supposed to make one feel powerful and free. But I feel stretched and constrained. Perhaps this is why the adepts post demons and angels to guard the door from the uninitiated. I am not made greater from the vastness of the whale, but dispersed. I am made smaller. I am chopped up. I am stalked, captured and butchered. I am reduced to the faceless, ever-busy, never cogitating body of an ant.

On Monday, the 4th, I see myself filleted into little snapshots, a shuffling of the caricatures of that empty, flat, tiny head I view as mine. Each head is seen from a different direction, like comic mug shots, which not only capture front and profiles, but also odd and seemingly irrelevant angles. The image (the feeling?) is that of a compulsion, a repetitive act that is made meaningful/meaningless/meaningful/meaningless in an apparently endless sequence that varies only according to the focus of one's attention. The dream portrays a kind of empty eroticism, whose purpose is not

consummation, but tickling, a friction that makes one laugh in the midst of torment.

Then, on Tuesday, this obsession with misplaced unconsummated sex is replaced by an obsession with money. This text seems to promise that some force of the universe will provide a cornucopia of scrip or coin that can miraculously (or cunningly) appear to provide for all of our material needs. Again, as with the whales, there is the image of the sea as Providence, the depths from which Saint Peter's fish rises with something shining and valuable to give us. In fact, here, everything seems to be given, to be a gift, but the next day, Wednesday, the 5th, we are swept back to that torturing artifice of discipline, where every aesthetic moment must be dug out of the immense, implacable force of nature, the dancer's elegant step made supple from the intractable hardness of stone or made firm from the fluid wrestlings of the sea.

Finally, Thursday, December 7th presents us with chaos and then order. The text refers in a complicated third-person manner to my dream of the night before. But then, by way of final explication, presents us with the simplest spiral form.

The Zen Masters send their apprentices on a search through the unspeakably nonsensical turmoil of the koan, so that every category of awareness at last becomes mere brain mash, a gurgling and opaque fermenting mess that the Master stirs first one way and then the other. Just as the understanding forms a funnel, which finally shapes the mass, the gruel is delightedly roiled in reverse. For the successful (if that word, or any word can be said to apply to this training) Zen practitioner, this bubbling, absurd search for meaning ends in the simple blankness of satori, the thing that you hear when you blot out sense and sound.

Mary Ann's Call

Sometime this week, Mary Ann called, I think it was Monday, but these old humps of time, like ancient and eroded volcanic cones, no longer rise above the plain of my ordinary consciousness, although it may be that some chamber of subterranean heat still bubbles below the surface of a day, not so much with memory, but with a hidden potential for eruption at some distant point in the future. Still, I was excited. In my desperation and loneliness, I had called her a few times, but this was the first time since she left for California that she had initiated contact. Apparently she had called when I was in Alpharetta but did not leave a message when I failed to answer the phone, a fact, which to me, indicated the tentativeness of her intention. She chatted me up for a few minutes, making small talk, asking about my health, grousing about the undecided presidential election, praising the weather in Berkeley etc. etc. and then she got down to what I believed (initially) was the main point of her call. She said that she had been doing a lot of reflection, as she called it, after Diva's death. (Diva was sitting on my lap during this conversation, "resentful" of my divided attention, which by all rights should have been solely focused on Her — I did not mention this "fact" to Mary Ann.). The upshot of this reflection was that she, Mary Ann, had decided to make some radical changes in her life (I drew a spiky breath sharply between my clenched teeth here, thinking: 'Now the hammer falls. Now she tells me that this is the end.')

But no, she went on instead about changes that she was making in her diet, — (going vegan, whatever that was) and about a trip that she had made to Mount S— (I forgot the name, some so-called "sacred" lump north of the Bay Area). Seems she had visited a Naturopath named Richard Anderson (that name I remember, since all men are potential rivals when one's lover is distant), who had encouraged her to "cleanse" herself. What followed was a long harangue that mixed metaphors of metaphysics and physiology in a way that made it impossible for me to discern whether, when she said that she was "cleaning out her insides," if she was referring to examining her conscience or taking enemas. Perhaps both. The truth is, I was only half listening, as was my usual custom, since I was devoting at least 90 percent of my attention to finding an opening in the wall of her speech where I could slip in my request that she return home. No such chink in her verbal citadel appeared, and before I could say anything, the real nature of her call breached its leviathan like features above the gunwales. She had found a job. A heavy spade in my throat fell down with a sickening thud and struck the soft flesh of my heart.

Now I knew that the whole rest of the conversation was a prelude to this harpooning. Needless to say, I did not ask M.A. to return. When I hung up the phone, I saw myself in the armoire mirror, fabiformed, diapered, sitting disheveled in my ratty old terrycloth bathrobe, a phantom amidst the mounting debris of fast-food containers. Here I was, mired, in of all retro places, Houston, Texas, in the middle of a house saturated with ant poison, and I now wondered aloud to myself, how in the world, if I really did care for her, could I ever have considered asking Mary Ann to come back? She had escaped. She had surfaced. She was doing well. And I, like some tube worm at the bottom of a fetid ocean of dysfunction, was only burrowing deeper into the abyss. I would have morbidly continued this self-deprecation, had not Diva, disgusted by lack of proper veneration, suddenly hauled off and petulantly bit my hand. I did not protest. This was an old and accepted form of correction. I endured my punishment meekly, like all devotees of chaste and unattainable lovers, returning, this time with concentration, to the adulation of her shining form. "Breathe," I said to myself," as I stroked her fur, "turn your breath into a circle of redemption."