

Returning Themes, Continuing Questions

M: I was obsessive about finding out what all this meant. Totally obsessive. My head was in a constant state of explosion, honest to God!...Maybe that's why I got the eczema! There was just too much going on inside me and I couldn't contain it – so I popped out in dots. (laughter)

S: You're probably right. I mean, stress does different things you know.... But you were doing a lot of work...

C: She'd bring home these little jars I gave her, with things like "excremental brown" written on the top. (laughter)

S: Oh no...

M: Not only that. I was really getting into the colors. Like a mole or something. I'd mix some – actually it would take me an hour to mix one that felt right – like nausea. I mixed a couple of nauseas.

S: So the color mixing was really taking you in deeper...

M: Yes. Deeper, higher, sideways...that's what I meant. As soon as I'd finish one, I'd have a dream or something ... some hint as to where I should go next. Like translucence. I went crazy with translucence – like from the Tiffany lamp – because I didn't have the patience to do overlays, glazes – I didn't know what color to put

What questions were really pressing? I kept wondering during this time about my whole tree, wondering what colors and substances belonged where. I wondered if any places or substances or shapes were particularly feminine, besides the obvious nest/eggs/breast images that were already there.

Below are several quotations from my Journal which show the way I was thinking and following up my questions.

From September 8, very early in my study...

Journal Sept. 8

"Carl and I took a walk. I noticed or thought about vegetation echoing realms of the spirit.

"We saw a flame-like flower, almost too intense and flowing to look at long. Is it the same 'thing' as my desire to dress in red feathers and dance? Is it a spiritual fire echoed in that flower?

"And the perfumes of the roses. Each echoes something of another world. The white pine must echo something of my own spirit...

"So the sacred grove is internal. It is an echo or a mirror. .

Do different people feel that different places are 'sacred'?"

A question in comparative abeyance at this time was the one of gesture. I was working large with a full paint brush...but would later return to my wonderings of the summer:

July 25, 1980. Journal

The clay resounding in my hands. Cold. alive.

Digging my hands in the sand at the beach.

Building, drawing in sand.

Stacking rocks in my studio. Or outside.

Drawing with big chalk in our yard. Adding grasses, berry Juice.

All those things feel like IT.

What is it? Ways of tapping the source...

In the yard I felt like a cave woman. The impulse came from a place that felt so old, ancient, precivilized.

I had noticed for a year or two my strong response to white pines, particularly a "grove" of them at Habitat in nearby Belmont. The "sacred grove" or place is mentioned a lot in Eliade's book, Patterns in Comparative Religion.

Underneath and no one color would look translucent. I had the feeling but not the patience. And I kept thinking about spirit. Can you imagine? There I'd be mixing shit brown and flesh and coal, all those down under substances, and my mind was saying, "Ah, yes, but what about spirit? What color is spirit?"

C: What color is it? Did you find out?

M: That's not it! I meant for me I'd start getting some sense of what it felt like. Pearls. Opalescence. I found that incredible little purse in there somewhere, in my favorite resale shop. Full of sequins, pearls – heavenly kitsch!

S: It sounds like you were in some kind of altered state. You know...

M: Well, something was altered. Everything got filtered through this one question of, "Where does it fit on my tree?" And, "What does it mean?" I mean when I started thinking about that high up stuff satin, pearls, you know...and then suddenly realized that black satin was sex! (laughter) I felt like my past was opening up. I thought about being 13 and my father yelling at me for wearing all black and looking like a "slut"... and then I remembered that hot pink shirt I wore... He couldn't handle it at all!

S: Gosh, I was so shy when I was 13.

M: Well, I wasn't sublimated yet I guess. I was really into my natural flow there...

By December I was beginning to try to mix colors from areas on my tree drawing.

Journal Dec. 8

"No wonder Lowry wants me to put the colors on the tree. I'll be more aware of qualities of colors that come from a certain realm. The glisten or mattness or graininess.

"Bone is hard, maybe grainy.

"Add real bone, chicken bones crushed, to my paint and see what happens. Wow.

"Or blood to the red!! Yeeks.

"Or hair to black. Body things.

"Shell-ness. Shell is down near bone. Maybe crush some.

"Need to have rosewater in the Pink.

"A painting that smells.

"Shit. Rose. Lilac.

"Or evokes smell. Evokes taste. Evokes touch...Bought a DINOSAUR coloring book for me, as well as a dinosaur book and small plastic Tyrannosaurus.

"Why not? Feed the center, right?"

On mixing "excremental brown":

I was still changing my son's diapers or pants daily and walking my dog on a "dog-walk" used by neighborhood dog owners. So "excrement" was a meaningful substance both in the present and the past and one I understood from inside and outside "handling."

On adding blood and bones...

This is a prelude of things to come.

C: What about the blood? Did you mix that one then?

M: I don't think I'd mixed it yet. No, I doubt it. It was later... I guess I hadn't gotten that far...

S: Gosh, Marilyn. It sounds like you were starting to understand... to get some kind of deeper knowledge of something than most of us have. I think about some things like this, but I don't think I'd let my mind go so far... so far back, or deep or something...

M: By then I guess it was like my mind was on its own track. Like it was disembodied (laughter)...

S: Well, minds are in a way...

M: That's one of my questions. I mean... I would really feel these colors in my bones, in my body... but meanwhile my mind was asking questions like an obsessive machine... constantly, day and night. I couldn't really turn it off.

S: Do all artists do this?

M: I don't know what artists do. Even the ones I know don't talk about what goes on in their heads, about colors for instance. They talk about technique a lot... technique, technique...

C: Your weakness... to worry about your technique.

The resale shop near my house has mostly kid's clothes. I would wander in, looking around for a new book or shirt for Gabe... and often bump into some small item that called out to me very strongly,

Dec. 13

"Today at the resale shop I found a BLACK LACE MOURNING SCARF. What a gift. Yesterday I thought about white lace/marriage/purity. Satin, pearl, celestial. The feeling in my Christmas clouds. Satin, glitter, silver and gold. White feathers, white lace. Another world. Celestial. Stars up there. Angels flying by.

"Whew, I thought. Need some grounding. But a black lace scarf. DEATH. When I put it on, Carl said, "You look like yourself as a teenager in a black scarf."

Journal, Jan. 14.

"I bought a little clutch purse for a quarter yesterday, rationalizing the expenditure on such 'kitsch' because I could study the colors that create opalesqueness...fake, to be sure, like rhinestones but they point to the real. Rocks that are polished have 'it' too. What is 'it'? Not Just monetary value. Mica has 'it'. A certain resonance. Gabe calls silver, gold."

In Psychology and Alchemy there is a reproduction of a Chinese bronze mirror with a pearl at the center - as the symbol of Ch'ien - heaven - with the four cosmic effluences (dragons) radiating from it. Jung's book by the way is overflowing with references to the substances used in the transforming process of alchemy. The quotation below was one of those that "spoke" to me despite the fact that I didn't really understand it with my conscious mind.

"The body, or earth, in Saturnine blackness; the spirit in lunar whiteness, like water; and the soul, or air, in solar yellow. Then the triangle will be perfect, but in its turn it must be changed into a circle, that is into unchangeable redness. Here the fourth is fire, and an everlasting fire."

Jung, Psychology and Alchemy

M: I don't... I just can't stand the focus on it, you know. I mean how neat that line goes on is not like mixing the color of nausea. And I'd rather be mixing nausea than making a neat line... but I have to admit, I almost did my thesis on the idea of mastery, what artists think it is. Because I got such a heavy dose, it's like a ton of bricks I carry around. Be a master this, or a master that... and at one point I was really excited, I thought, "At last, at least I can master color." But I was wrong... so much stuff about purity and mastery is in me. I still get these fingers shaking in my head when I start to add... Like that alizarin crimson, you know. I love that color! ...or if I'd use too much yellow, or too much varnish or... I could go on and on.

S: But we all have that in a way. That idea that we have to be perfect.

The question of feminine forms/substances/meanings cropped up, the scarf and purse were women's things (!) embodying the high and low realms of my tree. I wasn't keeping the female question foremost in my mind at all. These dreams reminded me of another female dimension...

Here are my dreams and reflections from my Journal Dec. 22:

"Aunt Mildred had 2 more necklaces for me. A Buddha reclining in a wicker swing all carved of ivory or similar stuff. The other an oval or O with tiny red flamey feathers all around.

"I went to the Capitol (huge columns in front) downtown in Washington. I dragged a huge wooden oval thing up the stairs. The plastic handle broke, guard raced over. I apologized. Nothing damaged.

"That O is egg-like and like my old "automatic" shapes that used to reappear all the time. Vaginal? Egg? Zero? "Oh"? Carl said the red feathers sound Indian."

I began to experiment a bit with using my Jars of "substance" in my large cloud paintings.

Fifteen years ago I often found that my doodles contained repeated ovoid shapes, pointed at the ends. They had appeared in a few of my flower-center paintings around 1970...

Jan. 1. Journal.

"I understand a bit more of Lowry's idea - getting what's in here, out there. Colorwise. Today I mixed a brackish alligator green and a rock/slate grey. Then I painted with those and a bone white - clouds! I told Carl and he said, "You're an alchemist!" I hadn't thought of it that way. Just noticed that Jung quote about alchemists using eggshells, etc. Like a witch's brew. That's a bit what I felt like. And in my dinosaur drawing I even used some silver. Letting the heights fall and the depths rise. Lots of flips."

I was still worrying about mastery and how to be a master painter. Years earlier my mixed media canvasses had been criticized as "not pure," "too feminine," too much like "grade-school art." Here is my dream from December - January, as I was trying hard to figure things out and "master" painting.

"I'm in a museum, will meet J. there. Very large paintings in a dark place - I go nearer to see light add shade or darks and lights, silvery white.

"A nice looking youngish woman stands near me, says she's a potter or? I say I dreamed of one. I don't say I'm a painter. Later... I realize she's well-known. She's telling me about her primitive firing methods,

When I first mixed "slime," I had thought of this quotation.

"Richardus Anglicus rejects all the assorted filth the alchemists worked with, such as eggshells, hair, the blood of a red-haired man, basilisks, worms, herbs and human feaces. 'Whataoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap. Therefore if he soweth filth, he shall find filth.'"

Jung, Psychology and Alchemy

See a later chapter - The Response - for some similar thoughts in response to my show.

but I can't concentrate, alienate her a bit.
Then she's lying in dirt, working with clay
and talking to her friend. She says. 'I love it
when the music comes through me,'

"Then, Carl and I are flying in
something. We lean out, and fall into a river.
Shallow, deep part nearby. I walk in muddy
part for a while."

When I had this dream I thought,
uncomfortably, that perhaps I would feel
more "music coming through" if I weren't
trying to "master painting" and be so pure
about it. Lying in dirt and walking in mud -
surely signs that I would come down from
those clouds pretty soon.

Something New Brewing

M: Sometime, during the time of January, I started following some sense that I wanted to do some basement paintings. Starting from the cockroach! It was still from the cockroach!

C: Yep, it was from the cockroach.

M: Because the cockroach... I did that drawing around November...everything was very claustrophobic and it was very intense. I was doing a whole lot of clouds and cockroaches and dinosaurs! And that cockroach drawing of a cockroach trapped, trying to come out of a drain.

S: Oh, wow...

M: It was like a memory. If not a memory, it was the feeling of my basement, with dark boards and, ugh, bugs. Scary to me, very dark, little window. Whew! So. I wanted to do basement paintings, but they weren't working. I think I was more focussed on the painting, it was my whole problem... I was more focussed on producing paintings...

S: Rather than on what's coming up...

M: Rather than getting deeper into the experience. Because of course it is scary! Here I am saying people don't do it 'cause it's scary. It must have been scary...So I had these paintings, and I was all hung up with what

There was no real break here. I was still mixing jars of substances - I tried a canvas using some of my jarred colors and some things I liked to "play" with - ribbon, etc. I broke up some egg shells and snail shells and glued them right on...

Journal, February 10

"My test canvas has a scarf, Dap with writing ('white bird') and textures in it, beads, ribbon, spray painted doily ghost, shells mashed up, egg shells, a whole snail shell, and oil paint. Gold and silver and bone and blue/black. Washes and solids..."

I started out with a memory of my own basement from childhood. But soon I wrote in my Journal:

"Yet I'm beginning to ask about not just the exact dimensions and inhabitants and objects and light of the basement of 6275 Enright in 1948. What about basement-ness? Darkness. Being underneath the level of the house and ground. Being in the dark Inside the earth, protected from the earth in a way. But the bugs come in anyway. (A witchy cackle comes through me)."

painting is supposed to be, and I was putting in all these lines. But meanwhile some process was starting, because I was buying things made of metal, because I thought metal had to do with the basement. I was buying things like nails. Maybe not the perfect nails, but I was going into hardware stores and sort of, futzing around...

C: You tried to buy that claw, in the nails.

M: Yeah, I tried to buy this claw. I went into Masse's (laugh) and with the nails they had this tool

C: A scooper.

M: This three-pronged tool

S: Oh, wow.

M: And I said to them, "Can I buy that?" And they said, "Oh, no, they don't make those anymore." That's what I really wanted! This claw. It's just like my whole thing. I've got this pheasant claw in the other room to show you, I love claws! Who knows why?

M: So, what happened was, on my paintings, which were so-so, I cut Carl's hair one day and I took the hair in, and I glued some sort of circle...and then I glued...a small bone, a couple of bones; I just stuck them, chicken bones. Meanwhile I was starting to clean a lot of chicken bones, I don't know why...Just for no

Bachelard writes:

"As for the cellar...it is first and foremost the dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths.

"When we dream of the heights we are in the rational zone of intellectualized projects.

"But for the cellar, the impassioned inhabitant digs and redigs, making its depth very active...When it comes to excavated ground' dreams have no limit."

Bachelard, in Poetics of Space

Notice the claws on the underground bird in my original tree drawing. And my later mention of claws after the dreams of crows (Beginning the Expansion). I had a real gut level, kinesthetic response to them and still have. In my show I used real claws from a pheasant, and a menacing metal claw-tong I got from a chemistry supply store.

See the appendix for part of our tape discussion on claws.

Working with the dark basement imagery and the light flowing "feminine" materials was bringing up a serious issue, reflected in my difficulties with "resolving" a painting:

Feb. 11 Journal

"The work in progress. Having a better time as I allow myself to add Carl's hair, gold lace sprays, flesh colors to a basement canvas. A dark velvet oval in the middle of the drain. Makes me wonder what that drain is all about. A flash free association takes me to my vagina. But why the evil bug nearby? A male? A penis?

reason. I had...some...affinity to bones. I was trying to follow an instinctive response. The same thing with the nails. I thought, "I have a response, I'm gonna try to follow it...without asking myself why." And the tricky thing is, how to go... as Lowry would say, how to be more in that direction. If I liked nails, what particular nails did I like... how to get to the, more and more, basic, simple...it's still kinda tricky to me, and I understand why he was saying that, 'cause you get, kind of, hung up at any point.

So, I obviously have emotion about this...

C: Why? What?

M: I just remember that time. It feels so tedious. I must have felt tedious at that time.

C: I remember. You felt like you were getting nothing done at all.

"What an underlying theme! A bug trapped. The bug nearby. But I imagine hordes of them flowing in and out of the drain. Sperms? Dirt? A dirty feeling to what comes and goes. On another level that hole is a center. A black echoing center. Hollow. Water at the very bottom. Like a well maybe.

"I laid a lace scarf and red velvet ribbon atop the roach canvas before. feminizing the male bug. It looked like the wolf hiding in grandmother's clothes.

"Funny, Some underlying theme has to do with masculine and feminine in myself. Do they fight? Does one fear the other? What is the relationship?

"The feminine flowing canvas with shell, scarf, bone, beads, lace feels so easy.

"When I work on the basement locker and drain in one canvas I get into trouble. Aha.

"The drain feels female. But the harsh wood and basement floor feel male, harsh, sharp. They seem separate. A large bone area separates them now. Hard to pull together. No wonder!!"

At first I bought all kinds of nails. I didn't always have the patience to wait for the things that were truly resonant.

The color mixing alone was bringing up more feelings and memories about the female/feminine of my own self.

Journal Feb. 13

"Something about flesh. The off-white bone colors that evoke my own flesh. The deeper fleshies and pinks laden with flesh, femaleness, cosmetics, Where did the cosmetic industry get those pinks for all the rouges and lipsticks? When my mother was young, the fiery reds and oranges were on all their lips and nails.

"Now the bronzes and soft pinks. Much closer to something in me. Something delicious. Some sense of my own self, my own body. That Jung quote about the earth having fleshy insides. I love it!

"Need to 'nail down' the scarf. Maybe I'm more in the mood for nails (yea! nails). Get some chain!"

I must have been feeling "in hot water."
I was getting a little nervous about what I should and shouldn't be doing:

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Journal
Feb.
11

"I am doing my right work. This journal is my work now. Not just my paintings. My thoughts. My fears of exposure. Somehow I get a little less afraid as I let out my 'feminine' side more. Maybe 'they' won't like it. But I won't be trying to prove I can be what I'm not. All male. That's why a fleshy female dinosaur or? sounds good."

That Jung quote:

"Man is generated from the principle of Nature whose inward parts are fleshy."

from Tractus Aureus, quoted by Jung in Psychology and Alchemy

I was really shaking things up. On Feb. 13 I had this "excavation" dream:

"An excavation at 3:00 a.m. outside our window. It started as a square or rectangular hole in the street. Workers around. Then it got bigger, exposing an enormous subway station or tunnel, Lights, action, people under there. Then a backhoe/bulldozer bumping our front window continually, causing the window to bulge in but not break. I say, 'Gabe would love to see this.' (the excavation)."

Feb. 17 Journal

"I'm wanting to use real bones in my paintings now. Buying that metal hook in Sears really loosened up my sadistic/dark side. Cackle cackle. Using Carl's hair helped too. Now I need to use nails, bones..."

Feb. 21 Journal

"I realized that if I hadn't (1) let myself buy that hook I wouldn't have (2) thought of metal all night the other night (3) gone to Pill's and bought the metal stuff the next day (4) glued it onto canvas, put nails into DAP, and (5) remembered those old tools... My affinity for those tools is as strong as my affinity to lace. Wow. "

"I began to live in a quite different way than I had ever done, to trust the shadow side of life..."

M.C. Richards, The Crossing Point

"If you submit yourself to your idea of God, that's not the ultimate submission, for what about the Devil? Of course, there were those old practices of sacred prostitution and the myths of gods who loved a mortal woman; surely those expressed the truth of the universal female desire to be possessed by the best one knows - that was all right in a less moral age when your god had not yet become the embodiment of goodness, when he was still liable to fierceness. But when man's conscience had so far developed that his god became a god of goodness and paternal love, then submission to the idea of Him lacked the completeness of surrender, for it meant shutting out evil, and therefore still being afraid of it. To submit yourself to an alien force that wished to destroy you, this seems the only ultimate security."

Marion Milner, An Experiment in Leisure

Letting Go

M: I was doing these little things and I begged my advisor to come to my studio...

I said, "You have to come to my studio because I have these tentative little things." I had glued a piece of lace down to my canvas, and a little bone the back of a chicken, a chicken back I was just starting this and I was a little uncomfortable...so he came in and looked at my paintings and...my paintings weren't doing anything...Just a few spots had something. He essentially told me to follow those few spots. He said, "Leave painting behind, and go after this."

M: I can tell I'm feeling uncomfortable...

C: I think it's because you have feelings about that time...that time was very uncomfortable. Why don't you get on to that period where you were meditating already?

M: But this is the crux day!

S: You should say this then...

M: I had been pushing my painting. But we thought everything happened from when I started meditating. Well it hadn't! I had already been into nails...

S: Bones...

M: Mixing slime. I had been doing all that stuff Carl. Even bugs! I even asked Carl for bugs, real bugs...

Journal Feb. 23. Talk with Lowry.

"Let go of my paintings," he says. "Deep level poetic images. Savagery and awfulness of my chicken carcass on the gold lace and bug lying in its own puddle...they don't have to make sense intellectually, but just feel right." What I really did was to totally STOP. That's what it felt like - like pulling the emergency switch on a speeding train. I treated myself as if I were sick...it was the only way I felt I could give top priority to that kind of stopping. I asked Carl to drive Gabe to school for at least the first week of school, every day, so I wouldn't have to speed myself up in the morning. I agreed to walk and feed our dog...not much else...and then I would sit right down in my favorite chair for 20 - 30 minutes and meditate. Every day as my top priority, often twice a day. I already had experience with meditating...but thinking of myself as a "meditative person" and actually doing the work, or the non-work, of daily meditating...that is a very different thing.

(see the appendix for more on meditation)

"To wait quietly and watch for images, for those pictures and metaphors that the mind itself threw up, this seemed to be the way that understanding grew..."

Marlon Milner, An Experiment in Leisure

"The art of the alchemists requires that they pay close and sustained attention to what is happening in 'the vessel,' that is to say in 'heart consciousness.'"

M.C. Richards The Crossing Point

C: Yeah. I got bugs from the lab.

M: And I asked that woman to save cockroaches from her apartment. I was going to glue them onto my painting, straight, as a texture. I didn't know how to get my fear out straight, but I was nevertheless on the right track.

.....
My adviser said to me on the morning of this day, which was... February 23... "Leave painting behind... It will make you very anxious, but just follow these little things, where you're really at." In the afternoon I went to see Dr. Sagov, and he said, "You do have eczema, you are under stress, you'd better take it a lot more seriously, and start meditating every day." So that's what happened. I didn't go back to my studio for months. I left everything there, in its exact state, all the shmushed-up stuff, and I didn't go near the place. And I started meditating. But somehow, I don't even think the bone image came up. Flesh... I started meditating and images would come up. But I knew right away that I had to go get a bone. I said, "I have to get a really big bone!" And I wasn't doing any work. Everything was happening internally, in my mind, so I got really obsessed!

.....
I had written in my journal that I would do "no work." It was amazing. I had mornings free and I wouldn't do any work. I'd meditate and take a walk... and go to Savenor's and get bones, because that was fun. And boil bones. It was not only fun, it was

Journal Feb. 25

"I cast "the cauldron" today. The only way to do anything from the nothing I feel is to let out my offerings. Small, very humble. Just me...

"An opportunity to let people see what comes out now, old mixed with new. I thought of using my baby name tag. Got it out and cried and cried. Thought of building a grave-like structure for my dead relatives. Putting their pictures inside or on it. Putting flowers there. They die during the week of the show."

The first few days I meditated I was filled with sadness and a sinking feeling. I let myself go, let myself sink into my own self. And death images kept "filling up the screen." Bones...I had an intense desire to get a huge bone. And strange images I could only draw small hints of; one was a keg of flesh-like material with pins sticking out and a fissure or crevice down the center...Here is a journal entry from February 26:

"Yesterday. So many death images I wanted to give form to. The dead hanging rabbits. Aunt Mildred dead and hooked to machines, puffy, white. Tubes down mother's throat. Critical care unit. Graves of my father and aunt.

Savenor's is a gourmet meat market in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Julia Child reputedly buys her meats there). I could not resist, after a few days of meditation, going to Savenor's and procuring an enormous cow bone - a cow femur, to be exact. I boiled the bone for an entire day...its essence filled the kitchen. At 10 p.m. I took a whole roll of photographs of it in the pot, with and without its "flesh." Then, late at night, I meditated. I "saw" myself chewing on this bone like an animal. I went in and asked Carl to photograph me in that "pose" - which I later used in my show announcement. We even have a tape of the bone boiling noisily in the pot! The whole thing was intensely satisfying ... satisfying in a very different way than "art work" was supposed to be....

Satisfying; but it wasn't "ART."

S: There was no pressure for performance...

M: There was no pressure for anything. I can't describe how different it felt. I mean I'd walk around, walk the dog with no thoughts in my mind. That was when I started noticing... it was like... my eye would catch on something, like a piece of rust. Rust! And I had never wanted to mix the color rust. I felt nothing with burnt sienna, the color. But real rust, and some were those beautiful rusty things that look like Arabic writing, or gestures, you know.

S: From rusty cans, the way it rusts away, I've seen that.

M: Well I have a lot of rust in the other room. (laughter)

S: Were you still wondering about your tree then...?

M: It all stopped! I mean the meditating just lowered me down a bunch of notches. That's it. I sort of felt actually lowered down in an elevator... maybe I was moving down into my body more. Some kind of inner very down under place. And I'd see out from there, like another person was in me.

C: She even started to carry a little bag...

M: It's true. I brought in a pile of this stuff one day... rust, bones washers... I had started picking up washers, circles... I brought all this

"Torn flesh. Mutilated. Fissures in flesh.

"Nails sticking into and out of flesh.

"Furry stuff. Ball and chain image...Death. Life. Heavy...

"Joseph Beuys on my wave length. The deeper meanings of substances. Warmth and cold more meaningful than space. Warmth and cold having to do with life and death, soft organic, hard crystalline, expansion and contraction. These kinds of things I can understand!"

"The earth is still. It does not act of itself but is constantly receptive to the influences of heaven. Thus its life becomes inexhaustible and eternal. Man likewise attains eternity if he does not strive vaingloriously to achieve everything of his own strength but quietly keeps himself receptive to the impulses flowing to him from the creative sources."

I Ching, commentary in Bk. III on the Receptive. Trans. by R. Wilhelm

stuff to Lowry and he said, "Right on, get yourself a special satchel!"

S: you're so lucky. I mean to have someone like this.

M: I know.

After I had collected several washers I began, from the same "inner sense" to reach down for larger circles. Many refused to budge...they were gas and water meters (squares and circles) that were going to stay put.

See the appendix for taped dialogue on bones.

See the next chapter for more about that day, and for more ways that I began to "act on" some of these powerful images.

Acting on the Inner Imagery

S: What does the liver symbolize?

M: You know how I did it right? Do you know about the dream?

S: Tell me.

M: Sometime around the time I was meditating... actually for about a year before that I had sanctioned myself to do this experiment. I wanted to find out what would happen if I drew or sculpted my dreams. I have that cave...

S: I like that cave.

M: Somewhere, I had a little teeny bit of a dream. Carl's brother and his wife were in it...and somewhere in the background I or someone else put a large liver...someone later said it must have been a placenta... I thought it was a liver...into a bowl or pan or pot of water, stirred it around with a stick, and the water turned red. That was it.

S: Wonderful.

M: It was such a small part of my dream...but the image was so powerful that I felt that I had to... do it! First I tried to make a liver out of plaster, which I have in the other room.

S: I don't think that would work...
(laughter)

M: Why not?

What was actually happening from that time in late February when I stopped "working" is hard to describe chronologically or linearly. I seemed to drop down into myself, through time and space, "down and backwards", I thought later. I continued for months to pick up things that spoke to me - from the street, from stores...the real change was that I would do only what felt necessary, and nothing else! If I thought, "I ought to do this," I wouldn't do it. This chapter and the next describe inner events - dreams, images - and things in the outer world - bones, livers, gas meters, odds and ends from anywhere and everywhere I went - that helped give form and sense to the imagery that arose from my turning quietly inward. I began to use my camera out of necessity; the things I would see couldn't be taken home, or the things at home couldn't be kept: they'd rot.

The liver/placenta making the water turn red was one of the images that demanded to be "let out" of me. Another was the hunk of flesh mentioned previously...

"...then these images would emerge that had a peculiar feeling of depth and stability, and which banished all longing for the past...There was also another quality about them, they seemed to be deeply rooted in the whole of my body...Because of this feeling that they grew out of the whole of me I had called them "organic images"...Also they had none of the remoteness of abstract thought, I never had to stop and say, this is all very true and interesting but what has it got to do with me - for in some curious way they were me."

Marion Milner,
An Experiment in Leisure

"The mind is able to relax, but in poetic reverie the soul keeps watch, with no tension, calmed and active."

Bachelard, Poetics of Space

J.H. Van Den Berg, quoted by
Bachelard in Poetics of Space:

"And noting that things 'speak' to us and that, as a result of this fact, if we give this language its full value, we have a contact with things.

S: It's just not the right texture or...

M: Well, you should have been here telling me, 'cause I was workin' really hard sticking tubes in this wet plaster, to make it look like a real liver...

(much laughter)

M: If you had had that dream, what would you have tried?

S: Something really slimy and slippery. Something that moved...Jello maybe, I don't know.

Also to put something you made into the pot, stir it up and make it turn red, I think that would be great. To really re-enact the whole dream.

M: Well, I went in to see my advisor. It was just after I had started picking up the rust and had stopped doing any art work...that time he told me to get the satchel, the same day...and I brought in the rust, the washers, some bones I think, and also this plaster maul I had made...I'd had this image in my mind of one of those round things with spikes, you know, and I'd made one of plaster that later fell apart...and this "liver" which was still damp on the bottom, and I handed it to Lowry...and he said, "If you want a liver, go get a liver!" Lowry is amazing. What art teacher would tell you that...to go get the real thing! He is really amazing.

Journal February 25

"Something about pink fleshy stuff. I haven't tried the new putty yet. Nervous. Putty or paper mache or paper mache pulp. Painted pink.

.The feeling of juiciness. Vaginal juice. Inner flesh.

"Contrast with dry flesh or hairyness. Little wiry curly or straight hairs. Or pins. Nails or screws puncturing, soft pinkness. A very strong image in me, wanting to be born somehow. Some masculine penetration into pink softness and roundness.

"A small idea. Do some small ones. Feels private, secret.

"The orientation to what is secret.

"I'm a bit afraid to let these out to be seen, but I haven't even seen them yet out of me."

I ended up constructing that "hunk of flesh" out of a hunk of tofu, pouring molasses on it, coating part of it with vaseline, and sticking wires into it - very satisfying. Then I took pictures of it...the bone had been the first of these insistent images. I realized bones had been resonant/magnetic to me for a long time. Here is what I wrote on March 15 about bones:

"Man is generated from Nature, whose inward parts are fleshy, and from no other substance."

C.G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy (quoting from Tractus Aureus)

"All we communicate to others is an orientation towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively."

Bachelard, Poetics of Space

See the reproduction of tofu/flesh.

The night I photographed the bone boiling, Carl had taken a picture of me holding the bone as if it were a powerful cudgel. See the appendix for more on bones from our taped dialogue.

So...I went to Savenor's...

I got such a kick out of it. I wrote in my journal, "I am doing my art at the meat store! My art supply store is the meat store!" I loved it.

S: But uh...how primal, or something.

M: Savenor's is so gourmet though...it's such a hot shot place...

S: I know Savenor's. It has a primal smell...

(laughter)

M: But this is really heavy, 'cause this is when one of the most shocking things happened...wasn't it when I went to get the liver? it was...

C: You were sick, for two days after that, like practically a migraine headache...

M: What happened...this was kind of weird, but I was just starting to...get in touch with my animal side, or something...I went in very innocently, I had been there once before to get my bone...that's the only time I had been in there.

C: With me, just briefly...

M: Briefly. So I go in during the day, and Jack is there. You know, twinkly, looking like Santa Claus. You know the guy.

S: Uh huh.

"Working with bones is so satisfying to me. I feel as if I'm in the presence of the Master. What Master? Whoever designed these strong sinuous simple yet complex structures. The detail, the evocativeness, and the feel of them in my hands as I scrape and peel at them to remove slime and cartilage.

"I feel so lucky to be allowed so close to something that feels so mysterious.

"Strange irony to connect this experience to the most satisfying memories of art school in 1964-8. Taking home the cow bones and drawing them for my figure structure class, hearing the teacher talk about bones (and trees) spiraling. The mystery was there, right there. Then, the assignment to get a cow's knee joint bones and boil them for hours before drawing them. The hugeness of them.

"When I read a bit about Shamanism last spring I was struck by the term "rebirth from the bones." It didn't mean much to me. Why bones? Because they last so long?

"I am feeling something about bones and death and life. Something I have no words for. Perhaps that is why I feel the need to set them out in boxes, in piles, in photographs.

"Here again the animal's bone symbolizes the mystery of life in continual regeneration and hence includes in itself, if only virtually, everything that pertains to the past and future of life."

Eliade,
Shamanism

M: And I told him, "I want a big piece of liver." He said, "For what?" and I said, "Because I'm trying to make my dream" (laugh)... "that's alright that's o.k., bring'er out some liver!"

(laughter)

M: So he brings out finally, it took like fifteen minutes.. while I'm standing there waiting, I notice these sides of beef hanging in the back room...quite intriguing to me, I mean intriguing, like when you're reading in a book and a picture, like, pops out at your head, it says read me...

S: Mmmhmm.

M: Like that. They're way in the back room but I was looking back there...and while I'm standing there waiting for the liver; a guy brings out a small animal like a lamb.

S: Oh...

M: And cuts it on the saw.

S: Oh wow...

C: Fur and all? (laugh)

M: Not fur and all...it was a small...it was not a cow... and somehow I thought it was a lamb, I don't know why...and the thing was, that I got very very very, uhmm, I guess I wouldn't say shook up, I got very compassionate for this lamb...

S: Mmm...

"Photographing the large bone boiling was also totally satisfying. The aliveness of that bone dripping fat all over the stove, glistening in the pot; the sound of the fat and water bubbling frothily, the steam rising up like smoke.

"I need to do something with charred bones. In one dream Lowry said, "Protect the universals in bones and ashfulness."

"I want to pile bones, as I Just did in the dish in my kitchen.

"I want to string them and hang them and 'decorate' with them.

"I want to make musical instruments with them.

"The dream of David Lund and the huge painting of the huge bone. Go back and find it."

"...to follow up passions, then, every little passion for a flower or a shell or a wild duck, is it collecting all your scattered self?"

Marion Milner

I really felt, when Lowry told me to get a real liver, that his idea was undermining to what is (or I) usually thought of as a "proper" or traditional way of dealing with an image. Me didn't suggest painting it or drawing it...and sculpting it had been a total failure. When I said, "But it won't last!" he told me to photograph it, or do a movie...

M: At the same time that for weeks I'd been cackling and identifying with my aggressive, menacing, sadistic, animal side. It was like, something about the two feelings together really wiped me out for days.

S: Like a fight between...

M: That was about the most, that, and when I went into the junkyard and saw that thing for the carcass ...

C: You were really feeling strong. You'd been with this bone, chewing on it, you know. And you thought, "Ah, I'm feeling really strong, I'm going to go back to the meat market...and you walked in the door, and saw the lamb.

M: I started crying, practically. It was really quite disturbing ...it really has a lot to do with my thoughts after my thesis show about good and evil...it was like there I was, my heart or something; I mean what part of me is responding there, it's like my human...some part of me that's empathizing...

S: Also you're animal, and there you are, being cut up!

M: Right.

M: The crux was that I felt there was a real...it was like...

C: You couldn't put it together...

M: I couldn't put it together...

Here is what I wrote in my journal:

Journal April 2

"I am very shook with the memory of the lamb being thrown on the table and put through the electric saw.

"The guillotine

The lamb of God

The memory of the, chickens/rabbits hanging in the butcher's window. Maybe that's what it is.

"Innocent blood.
Death at the hands of the butcher?
Who kills these animals?

"My animal self loves to gnaw on bones. My human heart cries for the lives slain. Pain. Cruel death without reverence or thanks.

"Was being an Indian any better?
Saying thank you to the creator of the animal.
Thank you for this food.

"Desire to view the back room.

"Like the corpse room of a hospital.

"What is death?

S: In you.

M: In me, and I felt that as...a real difficulty and in fact that was like some task I was going to have to tackle...

S: Yeah.

M Because it was extremely disturbing...I got a headache...I don't know if I got one of those "one side" things which I did some times...one side on my body would be in agony, some times the right, some times the left...

S: I remember that...

M: Meanwhile, I don't think I had the headache that very night...

Meanwhile, I brought home this piece of liver which was six pounds, out of twenty! They'd brought out this piece of liver like this - twenty pounds! ...I still don't know why I had the dream; I didn't know if my liver was dysfunctioning, or what was going on, but I followed this desire to do something with it. I still wanted to follow the dream, put the thing in water, stir it around and have it turn red...It was 10 o'clock; I got out this liver and took pictures of it for two hours.

Nowhere in there was I exactly able to duplicate the dream, which I found frustrating, but I also let myself off the hook. I said, "I'm right here, right now with this liver;

"Some part of me is 'after it', after some understanding...I think I'm going after death with a vengeance. Will he/she Bet me? End. Disintegration. Ego-less-ness. The border is getting me - the body parts, tubes, the border between life and death. A liver looks alive. The cow is dead.

"My superstitious self says, 'Why are you so preoccupied? Preparing yourself for an early death? The blood on the pillow. The tombs. Ashes. And now, organs! Jesus, Marilyn - Don't bring it down on yourself!"

"But it's in me. I need to see something more clearly.

"The jewel at the bottom. Is it just a wish?

"My aching stomach. With tears in it."

April 4, 1981. Journal

"...Talking to Carl - it all came out.

"The me chomping the bone, heckling

"The me crying for the lamb. It would be a lamb!

"Blake's poems - 'The Lamb'
'The Tygre'

"That's it. How can I be both, relate to both? MC is right.

"But the source (of life) is underground and therefore the way leads underneath: only down below can we find the fiery source of life. These depths constitute the natural history of man, his causal link with the world of instinct. Unless this link be rediscovered no lapis and no self can come into being."

C.G. Jung,
Psychology and Alchemy

it's on this board in front of me, and what I'm really responding to are these slits in the liver. I always respond to these vaginal forms...there were no slits in my dream, but the liver was in front of me and I wanted to take pictures of the slits and pictures of the fat and pictures just...of the liver. So I took these pictures and then - I put the liver in the bathtub - and I poured blood, blood oil paint on it, 'cause I wanted to duplicate my dream. Well, I still couldn't get the whole bathwater to turn red.

C: You weren't very satisfied with that, as I recall.

M: I wasn't. The pictures looked neat. I wasn't satisfied 'cause I wanted the whole bathwater to turn red!

S: Also, didn't you want a roundness of the pot? You know that's a bathtub it's more contrived that way. It seems you would really need it to be a pot.

M: You're right. I wanted the dream...

C: You didn't get what you expected out of it. You got something quite different.

M: But that's what was interesting. At every point I kept having to let go of something.

S: And you let yourself be carried along.

"The bomb really is inside. If all that is going on, what a constant struggle at a deep hidden level."

Journal April 4 ~

"The liver felt/ feels like my body. Body. Strange - when I took it out of the fridge to photograph - the simplicity Or my dream gave way (I let it) to my response to the slits and tubes and fatty bits on the surface. The surface toughness compared to the cross section receptivity to touch. Prints held in it. Yuk. Vaginal slits. Surgical fissures. Again an echo of the drawing of the hunk of flesh with pink juiciness, nails and the fissure. Maybe they are the SAME!! What an idea. Flesh is flesh.

"I stuck nails/wires into it to photograph. The tofu I photo'd may be closer to my drawing but liver is closer to my body.

"What is the body of Christ?"

"The blood flowing into the water in my dream - so provocative.

"Feels meaningful on a low level.

"Flesh, blood, water."

"The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away."

Bachelard, Poetics of Space

"...the psychologists and psychoanalysts...cease to see anything in the poetic image but a simple game, a short-lived, totally vain game. Images, in particular, have no significance for them neither from the standpoint of the passion, nor from that of psychoanalysis. It does not occur to them that the significance of such images is precisely a poetic significance. But poetry is there with its countless surging images, images through which the creative imagination comes to live in its own domain."

Bachelard, Poetics of Space

M: And I even had to let go of my dream.
Here I had to let go of my fears of "doing"
dreams, let go of my fears of using real
things so I could get the real liver, then I
have to let go of the dream?

S: Right. And let go of your fear of
focussing on vaginal slits.

M: Right.

C: You weren't afraid of that - you had been
drawing them for years. (laughter)

M: Yeah, I had been used to drawing them...

S: But in a bloody liver? That's a whole other
realm.

M: Sarah's got it!

So I put the thing in the bathtub. Then I
- put flowers on it; it was like it had died, and
I put flowers on it.

