

Swimming in the Morass: Appendix

The first books Lowry suggested I read were these: Man and His Symbols, Psychology and Alchemy, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, all by Carl Gustav Jung; The Hidden Order of Art and The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing, both by Anton Ehrenswig; Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard, Freud's book on Leonardo da Vinci as a child; Rosegarden and Labyrinth by Seonaid Robertson; The Forms of Things Unknown by Herbert Read; Hamlet's Mill by Santillana and von Dechend; and The Shape of Time by George Kubler. I jumped into Psychology and Alchemy, the Leonardo book, and The Hidden Order of Art immediately. By December I'd read Poetics of Space and Seonaid Robertson's book. At that point, or in January, Lowry suggested I look into anthropology, specifically at books by Mircea Eliade – I chose Patterns in Comparative Religion for a good taste – and at articles and books on shamanism and the art of Bali.

See the Bibliography for publishers and other books related to this study.

Here are some thoughts I wrote down last year:

“I want to say something about these writers. Some concepts that spoke to me ... Ehrenzweig's concept of unfocused attention (dedifferentiation); I thought it was the kind of spatial-physical-perceptual feeling I got when standing at Habitat near the white birches, my eyes and ears and hair extended (I felt) in all directions, my gaze unfocused, my ears unfocused, all the bird songs coming in, the soft leaf sounds, the rubbings of tree branches. He talked about scattering attention, letting go of the surface gestalt, falling into chaos, sensing a 'hidden order' underneath it all. 'It' could be a work of art, a painting or a piece of music. Letting go... not looking for order, clarity... letting go of that need to make sense. Every time he mentioned the word oceanic (which was very often) I got seasick, physically dizzy. I kept saying, 'I can't understand this at all!' But somewhere in me, I had set out to sea.

“Seonaid Roberston – during the very semester that I was doing this reading, I took a workshop with her at Mass Art. I had not yet read her book, Rosegarden and Labyrinth. The book was in many ways shocking. I had the feeling of being led gently up a hill, as she described the reasons for her

Ehrenzweig quotes Marion Milner in his book, the Hidden Order of Art. From that hin, I sought out her book, An Experiment in Leisure, quoted throughout this text.

study, her sensing of some powerful and totally satisfying (to the child working) work being done in her classes - her sense of something coming through the work, not on the surface, so to speak. At the top of the hill, she told me (the reader) somehow to look down. A gaping abyss far below loomed before me - a hint of the depths I knew I was preparing to explore.

"Bachelard writes about resonance, those places and images that people, all of us, have, that resonate deep within. 'The places we love,' the memories, perhaps not factual, but definitely real. He talks about memories from childhood, and memories that stretch back, perhaps, to 'time immemorial.' His whole book spoke clearly to that part of me that dreams, that daydreams, that muses and reminds...he felt like a friend and gentle guide..."

Making it Mine - Appendix

When I let out the large drawings I had "forgotten" the reason that I had used a tree in my little schematic drawing. I had skimmed over Eliade a bit, but probably hadn't yet read all these lines on the "centre" (these will give a taste of Eliade's book, which is full of riches and genuine respect for all the cultures he writes about):

From the chapter "Sacred Places" in Patterns in Comparative Religion, pp. 376-377, 381

"Buddhist tradition offers the same idea: creation began from a summit, from a point, that is, at once central and transcendent. 'As soon as he was born, the Bodhisattva planted his feet firmly on the ground and, turning to the north, took seven strides, reached the pole and cried, it is I who am at the top of the world.... (aggo'ham asmi lokassa), it is I who am the firstborn of the world (jetto'ham asmi lokassa)!' Indeed, by gaining the summit of the Cosmos, Buddha became contemporaneous with the beginning of the world. Buddha (by the very fact of entering the 'centre' from which the whole universe grew) magically abolished time and creation and placed himself in the timeless moment which was before the world was created. We will consider this in a moment every 'construction' and every contact with a 'centre' involves doing away with profane time, and entering the mythical illud tempus of creation."

The Symbolism of the Centre

There is a mass of myths and legends in which a Cosmic Tree symbolizes the universe (with seven branches corresponding to the seven heavens), a central tree or pillar upholds the world, a Tree of Life or: a miraculous tree confers immortality upon all who eat its fruit, and so on. Each one of these myths and legends gives its own version of the theory of the 'centre', in as much as the tree embodies absolute reality, the course of life and sacred power, and therefore stands at the centre of the world, Whether it is a Cosmic Tree, a Tree of Everlasting Life Or a Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the road leading of it is a 'hard path' sown with obstacles: the tree is an inaccessible place, guarded by monsters. Not everyone who tries reaches it, nor, once arrived, manages to win the duel he must fight with the monster mounting guard. It is the lot of heroes to defeat all these obstacles, and slay the monster which guards the approach to the tree or herb of immortality, the Golden Apples, the Golden Fleece, or whatever it may be. As we have had occasion to discover in earlier chapters, the thing that symbolizes absolute reality, sacred power and immortality, is hard of access. Symbols of this sort are situated in a 'centre'; in other words they are always closely guarded and to get to them is equivalent to an initiation, a 'heroic' or 'mystical' conquest of immortality.

A Room of One's Own - Appendix

For several years now I have been recording my dreams in "dream books." When I have time, or when the dream feels very urgent, I try to fathom its meaning for me. The feminist performance class was the first class I had attended that made use of dream images and dream sequences in an expressive way - we were able to give form and substance to dreams without "understanding" them first, either emotionally or intellectually.

Later that term I was presented with a question on my Comprehensive Exam: What kind of question would you like to see researched, and what has been done on it already? I asked about the relation of dreams to painting - had any research been done on using dreams as a way of tapping the unconscious in art classes? What was the potential of using dreams as a source? What I found was that, in the research area, most articles were written by

Jungian therapists. The painting of images is used in Jungian therapy as an aid to the process of self-understanding, psychic integration, and individuation. What I found most useful for my own work and understanding was a description of "active imagination." Once the image was brought out into a form that attained "psychological authenticity" for the client, he or she would live with and absorb the work non-analytically (assimilative contemplation) and/or would confront the resultant image, questioning it with, for example, "Who are you? What are you saying?" I later was able to use this method as I allowed some dream imagery to surface. My interest was clearly to "hear" what my unconscious was trying to tell me, and to let the cat out of the bag by giving the image a form. I didn't know where my dreams, or forms, would lead.

On June 2, 1980 I wrote about a painting I had done of a recent dream:

"It is not my ego that paints. My ego helps me gather together and pave the path for my light to shine.

"I look up and see my oil sketch of a dream. In the dream I visited a large multi-roomed wooden house with artists' studios in it. Oliver (an old friend) was there, and other painters. Two of them were about to make their monthly (?) pilgrimage down into the dark woods, through them, up the hill to the local cathedral. I looked over from the dilapidated wooden porch to the cathedral. The lights were on at the top. The couple suggests I visit there while I'm here at the studio.

"I remember looking at that sketch, 'listening' for the meaning of my dream. Somehow (I don't remember the dialogue I had with it) I realized that the painters had to visit the cathedral (a religious center, projected onto a church or within themselves?) and go to the top to receive light from the windows to the sky. Filled with light, they could return through the woods (unconscious? formlessness?) to their studios and paint with colors. They didn't make the colors. Somehow the light from above came into them and became the colors they mixed on their palettes. So whose light is shining? My light?"

Beginning the Expansion: Appendix

Dance Free - a place I had begun to go a few months earlier, looking for a place to move freely. People moving freely, to no end but that of letting out natural rhythmic energy to music. I could feel the connection to these scribble drawings - to the comfortable ones as well as to the wild animal-like rhythms. I knew that to others a place like Dance Free and a drawing full of heavy black tangled marks looked like chaos, like orderless primitive energy, uncivilized, definitely "unartistic." But I knew too that for me there was something very real and essential in both experiences - something connected to what, for me, art was all about. I couldn't "make anything out of this" on either a conscious or craftsmanly level. But I let the awareness sink down into me, to resonate, or rest until I might need it.

Dancing at Dance Free brought up more early childhood memories. From my journal, July 25, 1980:

"Dance Free not only lets 'me' out - it connects me to my childhood nourishment and love - music and dancing to it in rhythm - watching my parents dance. Watching Arthur Murray. I loved it. Romantic. Also the only classical music I heard as a child. That Strauss waltz...and Paul Whiteman playing "Rhapsody in Blue" every Sunday night. And the Pall Mall ad from Grand Canyon Suite..."

Pushing Everything at Once - Appendix

On the dark side:

What did all this mean to me -? I was starting to get feelings about connections - the alligator's teeth; the dead bird's claws and beak, the attack marks from the eggplant drawing, the nails in the cloth, scribble energy, growling, stamping, aggression, pain in my left hand and foot...Something about anger, aggression, evil, dark.

I was starting at the bottom, not sure what all this meant, or would teach me. I wondered about this "dark pure chaos" and my dark lady. Both from the dark side, but so different. Several days after the scribble drawings I dreamed: "Lowry saying my black woman is a sacred goddess but also sacred me. I understood him to mean the lack of physical energy in the making is a kind of idolization of the slow process or product. Not as egoless as scribbling. But I think it has psychic energy if not physical."

I was answering my own question. There was no right and wrong to it...as I was often searching for. They were just different ways to approach and tap the energy of my dark side. Later, as I would find myself speeding up to a very fast pitch in drawing or painting, I would call my energy "scribble energy." It seemed less frightening and more understandable now. And I wasn't afraid to slowly allow an image to emerge, without using much of my "body" or rhythmic energy. I knew that when "complete" it would have a kind of psychic energy that I could respond to from an inner place.

My class in glass ran from mid-September until mid-December. Even at this distance (over a year), I am not certain of its meaning for me. I learned a few techniques: sandblasting, grinding and polishing, and enameling on glass. I didn't really have ~something I wanted to say" with the medium, so I did a lot of observing, thinking, and playing. Striking to me was the fact that, though glass on my tree seemed upward (that's why I chose that particular class), related to purity and geometry, I had absolutely no inclination to construct anything pure or geometrical. In fact, the criticism of one piece I did, a glass lady with "jewels" of found metal chains was criticized for its lack of maintaining the purity suggested by the piece of crystal I was using (a hint of things to come). The most interesting thing to me was that this glass lady, whether "successful" or not as a "work of art" was very similar to the dark lady I had constructed in the Transformations class 22 months earlier... similar in that it echoed some sort of ritual frontal standing female figure, some sense I had inside me. I had a feeling that, as nails and wood had gone with the dark lady, this one wanted jewels and black velvet. Some new questions were budding inside me - what is jewelness all about? Why does this glass piece suggest velvet to me? What underlies my inclinations?

I never figured this all out. Many months later a dream image did put together the two women. In April 1981, I noted in my journal: "Dream last night. An African lady glass statue with a black crow's feather on it. Whole and holy." By then, it seems, my psyche was trying to integrate the purity and clarity of clear crystal with the darkness and death suggested by Africa and the crow. Trying to pull some of my high and low expansions into center.

Glass was, I realized later, not only at the top of my tree, in the graceful glass swan and pure prism. It warmed the whole center in the Tiffany lamp (for this I'd need a stained glass course, I thought) and bits of broken dangerous glass littered the ashpit and alley lower down. Things were not quite so simple here - I wanted to at least pigeon hole the medium, but here as I found elsewhere too, everything felt very slippery.

Later that term I was able to use glass to combine some images I had been working with, through a familiar means - painting, with a new medium - glass enamelling.

I did a small watercolor sketch of two dinosaurs dancing beneath a huge cumulus cloud. I used my new “resonant” colors, and translated the whole into glass enamel on glass. Successful for what it was, I had little inclination to follow this track, combining painting and glass in that way. I left this class feeling confused and very open-ended about the medium.

Bachelard writes in his wonderfully warm chapter on nests:

“On the inside,” writes Michelet, “the instrument that prescribes a circular form for the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird. It is by constantly turning round and round and pressing back the walls on every side that it succeeds in forming this circle... The house is a bird’s very person; it is its form and its most immediate effort...”

And another quote by Fernand Lequenne (in Bachelard) harkened back too to my original questions about the sources of forms, their relation to my body. Lequenne, walking with his wife, saw a warbler’s nest in a bush. “Mathilda knelt down and, holding out one finger barely touched the soft moss, then withdrew her finger, only leaving it outstretched... Suddenly I began to tremble. I had just discovered the feminine significance of a nest set in the form of two branches. The thought took on such a human quality that I called out, ‘Don’t touch it, above all, don’t touch it.’”

from Bachelard, Poetics of Space

Letting Go - Appendix

This is the prescription that Dr. Sagov gave me. (Notice how non-religious the orientation is).

RELAXATION RESPONSE

- 1) In a quiet environment, on an empty stomach, sit in a comfortable position. This is your private time.
- 2) Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face - feet, calves, thighs, lower torso, chest, shoulders, neck, head. Allow them to remain deeply relaxed.
- 3) Breathe normally through your nose. Become aware of your breathing; of the air moving through your nose. Don't overbreathe. As you breathe out, say the word "one." In...out, with "one."
- 4) It is normal for other thoughts and feelings to come into your mind. Just let them be. Don't push them away; but don't pay attention to them either. Be indifferent; adopt an "oh well" attitude. The Response is not a test of concentration.
- 5) Continue this practice for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes open. Do the Response once or twice a day.
- 6) Some people find it easier to do this after exercise.

A little more on bones, their “history” for me, their resonances. From our tape:

M: 'Cause I kinda know when the bones came. They came when I started meditating, didn't they? I wasn't doing bones...ahh, I was! I thought it was when I started meditating, but it was Christmas when I mixed that bone color. Bone-pearl color.

And I was playing around, and I must have mixed lots of bone colors...but bones were (pause) in my tree drawings. There was a skeleton under the ground.

C: Oh, yeah.

S: So it was there all along?

M: Yeah, they were already in my drawing. A skeleton was under the ground. A dead body's bones.

S: Was that related to your fears? Or was it...

M: No, it was when I was trying to open myself up, to the imagery that existed for me, under the earth. For me. I don't know how to say that.

S: My feeling toward bones is of beauty, basically, and so that's where I came from, seeing your bones. And it just occurred to me that it came from a whole other place in you.

M: It did come from a whole other place, but I love bones.

M: It's neat that you asked about bones, because...I realized that after I did all that stuff with bones bones bones, and I boiled bones...that, one of the two or three experiences in art school...and I was in art school from 1964-68...was that, in my second year we had to take home bones. We had to learn to draw all the bones from memory, and to articulate them, to draw a skeleton from memory. The neat thing was that we learned to draw bones, and we learned that bones spiral. All bones spiral.

S: They do?

M: You didn't know, right? They do a real spiral, they twist. I have a bone that shows the twist fantastically. It twists like a tree.

C: Want me to get it? It's in the sunroom.

M: (to C) Yeah, the one hanging. Get the one hanging.

M: (to S) So. I remembered the bones from my figure structure class. But we had another class, a very unusual class, where the guy wanted us to do something that had meaning. And that~ hardly happened in art school. This was an off-beat guy, and it was his first year there, and he had everybody go to the store and buy a knee joint. To buy, at the grocer's a knee joint, and boil it! A cow's knee joint - boil it, and get all the meat off, and draw it. Then we had to do a series of drawings changing into another medium.

Well, I didn't do well with the development of it, 'cause I was stuck on the look of it. It was...beautiful! I Just kept drawing the knee joint, and the knee joint...all my drawings looked the same! And it had the patella too! You know, the little bone...(but these beautiful)...way that that it attached. And here comes Carl with part of the knee joint of a cow...I can't believe how gorgeous this it, look at this. Look at this bone...do you see this spiral?

S: Yes, I see it goes this way.

M: Yeah, like a tree.. And all trees spiral, which I learned in art school.

S: Do you know, Just about everything seems to spiral.

M: Everything spirals. And I have this book now which I've given Lowry. Everything has the golden section in it. Everything! All flowers, all of our body, relationships of notes to each other,.

S: You know when you have those flashes of insight in your life, when you really know something, and things become clear. That...I remember, driving along in Utah, in the middle of the night, talking with this total stranger, other strangers being in the back, Just all of a sudden realizing that the whole...crux of matter was spiralling. That that's what we were continually doing, a sort of upward spiral.

S: I think...maybe it (the bone image) came from fear, 'cause you were talking about the cockroach, and then the cudgel...and that image, to me, it's like a bone.

M: Right. We, remember? (to Carl) we have a picture of me like this with the bone...I picked it up like this, like I was going to beat Something to death. It was very...primal.

S: It seems like the bone is almost the opposite of the cockroach fear. It's the conquering of that fear. The cudgel, I guess. 'Cause that's what drawing it was too. I think it would be so satisfying...

M: Drawing the cockroach you mean?

S: Yeah, to be able to do that.

C: Recognizing your aggression.

M: Well, that's what they're both about. That's what I meant.

S: But more than that: conquering an ancient fear. I think fears you have from childhood are much huger in some ways.

M: I wonder about that too...because everybody's afraid of the dark. All kids are afraid of the dark! I used to be afraid of a closet in my house. I still don't like opened closets at night.

Acting on the Inner Imagery: Appendix

From our tape:

S: Also, you were talking about drawing, which is a dry thing. This...using the real thing...is somehow facing it more.

M: In some way. I have that question too.

S: Maybe this is like the onion...uncovering...maybe your original question about where your forms come from is being partially answered.

M: It is being partially answered.

C: 'Cause those slits in the liver were more immediate than any of your drawings of nudes.

S: That's what I'm saying. Maybe it's not that one thing led to another, but that there was an uncovering!

M: Asking where my forms came from is such a...a loaded question.

S: Your forms now are more realized. You can touch them, dig into them, smell them...

C: And they're also flesh. You're made of them.

S: And blood. Which is very important, for women and vaginas...
(laughter)

M: That's the kind of stuff that was coming out.

C: Also wounding. Those were real wounds they weren't like the imaginary wounds of the vagina...

M: You're saying the stuff I saw in the liver was similar to things that had come out automatically before...like going backward?

C: But more specific...

Further Work - Placements: Appendix

One night our friends were over and I said, "Come in this room and see my jar of blood!" The woman looked at my little jar of blood colored oil paint placed on the satin mourning pillow...a bone or two stood on the shelf nearby...and she said, "My God, you're a witch!" or something like that. The man was receptive, and I said I'd had an incredible fantasy of blood flowing onto my head. He brought me a book on the New Testament background, to show me the following description of a rite from the mystery religions in which a bull is sacrificed and its blood flows "purifyingly" onto a priest:

"The following passage describes the rite of the taurobolium in which the worshipper was drenched with the blood of a bull...the taurobolium described here by Prudentius was carried out not as a means of initiation (into the Mystery Cult) but for the purpose of consecrating a priest (of the Great Mother).

"Prudentius, Peristephanon, X. The high priest who is to be consecrated is brought down under ground in a pit dug deep, marvellously adorned with a fillet, binding his festive temples with chaplets, his hair combed back under a golden crown, and wearing a silken toga, caught up with Gabine girding.

"Over this they make a wooden floor with wide spaces, woven of planks with an open mesh; they then divide or bore the area and repeatedly pierce the wood with a pointed tool that it may appear full of small holes.

"Hither a huge bull, fierce and shaggy in appearance, is led, bound with flowery garlands about its flanks, and with its horns sheathed: yea the forehead of the victim sparkles with gold, and the flash of metal plates colours its hair.

"Here, as is ordained, the beast is to be slain, and they pierce its breast with a sacred spear; the gaping wound emits a wave of hot blood, and the smoking river glows into the woven structure beneath it and surges wide.

"Then by the many paths of the thousand openings in the lattice the falling shower rains down a foul dew, which the priest buried within catches, putting his shameful head under all the drops, defiled both in his clothing and in all his body.

"Yea, he throws back his face, he puts his cheeks in the way of the blood, he puts under it his ears and lips, he interposes his nostrils, he washes his very eyes with the fluid, nor does he even spare his throat but moistens his tongue, until he actually drinks the dark gore.

"Afterwards, the flames draw the corpse, stiffening now that the blood has gone forth, off the lattice, and the pontiff, horrible in appearance, comes forth, and shows his wet head, his beard heavy with blood, his dripping fillets and sodden garments.

"This man, defiled with such contagions and foul with the gore of the recent sacrifice, all hail and worship at a distance, because profane blood and a dead ox have washed him while concealed in a filthy cave."

The footnote to the last paragraph then states:

"All hail and worship. The consecrated priest, emerging from the blood bath with the gift of divine life (drawn from the sacred bull) himself becomes divine and is therefore worshipped. Those who receive the taurobolium could be described as 'born again for eternity.'"

And another footnote:

"Profane blood. It must be remembered that Prudentius was a Christian and that to him the blood was profane ('villis') and the whole rite not only repulsive but blasphemous."

from C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background: Selected Documents.

More on the circle:

Herbert Read, in The Forms of Things Unknown, discusses the circle image in the chapter "The Reconciling Image." He describes the circle of ocean waves around Achilles' shield, and then writes:

"(It) is the uroboric snake, the primordial ocean ringing the world, the source of creation and of wisdom, familiar to us in the myths of Egypt and Babylon. It is the Great Round whose significance Erich Neumann has elucidated for us: the Archetypal Feminine, 'which is and contains the universe.'"

Eliade in Patterns in Comparative Religion, writes:

"The same sense of cosmogony is also apparent in the construction of the mandala as practiced in the tantric schools. The word means 'circle' the Tibetan renderings of it are either 'centre' or 'what surrounds.' The thing itself is a series of circles which may or may not be concentric, inscribed in a square. Inside this diagram, outlined on the ground with coloured thread or trails of coloured powder, images of various tantric divinities are placed. The mandala is both an imago mundi and a symbolic pantheon. The initiation consists in the neophyte's penetration into the various zones or stages of the mandala. The rite may be looked on with equal justice as (...) an initiation by way of ritual entry into a labyrinth (...) All these sacred constructions represent the whole universe in symbol: their various floors or terraces are identified with the 'heavens' or levels of the cosmos (...) Every consecrated place, in fact, is a 'centre', (...) where there exists the possibility of breaking through from the level of earth to the level of heaven."

When I looked into Dante for the last part of the Inferno, I found this description of Virgil leading Dante down the back of Satan (this is a long quotation, but good reading):

"At his command, I clasped him round the neck.

He took advantage of the time and place,

And when the wings were opened wide enough,

He laid firm hold upon the shaggy flanks.
From shag to shag he now went slowly down,
Between the matted hair and crusts of ice.
When we had reached that point just where the thigh
Doth turn upon the thickness of the haunch,
My leader, with fatigue and labored breath
Brought round his head to where his legs had been,
And grabbed the hair like one who clammers up,
So that I thought our way lay back to hell.
'Hold fast! For it is by such stairs as these,'
My master said to me with panting breath,
'We must depart from such great wickedness!'
Now through a rocky cleft he issued forth,
And made me seat myself upon its edge;
He then walked carefully up to my side.
I raised my eyes, believing I should look
On Lucifer as I had seen him last:
But lo! I saw his legs were uppermost.
And if, indeed, I then became perplexed,
Let me be judged in ignorance by those

Who fail to see what point it was I passed!

'Rise to your feet,' the master said to me,

'Long is the way, and difficult the road:

The sun returns already to mid-tierce.'

It was no palace hallway where we were,

But rather a vast dungeon in the rock

Uneven was its floor, and dim the light.

'Before I turn my steps from the abyss,

Dear master,' I said now that I had risen,

'Say a few words to lead me from my error.

Where is the ice? And how is Lucifer

Thus fastened upside down? How has the sun

So quickly moved from evening into morn?'

And he replied: 'You still must think yourself

Beyond the center, where I grasped the hide

Of that fell worm who perforates the world.

You were upon that side when I went down

But when I turned around, we passed the point

To which all weights are drawn

from everywhere.

Now that you have come beneath the hemisphere

Facing the region where dry land prevails,

Below whose culminating point was slain

The Man who lived and died without one sin.

Your feet now rest upon the little sphere

That forms the other aspect of Giodecca.

Here it is morn when there the evening falls;

And he whose hair has served us for a ladder

Still remains fixed as he was fixed before.

It was upon this side he fell from heaven:

The earth, which first projected outward here,

For dread of him, made the sea a veil,

Retreating to your hemisphere. Perhaps

The land where we now are, in fear of him

Rushed upward too, and left this vacant space.'

A place as distant from Beelzebub

As his whole tomb's extent, lies there below.

It is not known by sight, but by the sound

Of a small rivulet that there descends

Along the hollow of the rock, carved out
By its long, twisting course and slight incline.
Upon this secret path my guide and I
Now trod, to seek again the world of light;
And caring not for rest, we mounted upward,
He first and I behind, until I saw
Some of those lovely gems that heaven wears, .
Through a round opening far above our heads:
Thence we came forth, again to see the stars."

Alan Watts in The Two Hands of God writes about this place and this journey:

"It will be recognized that in Dante's Ptolemaic cosmology the bottom of Hell is the narrow end of a conical pit, reaching to the center of the earth, and that antipodal to this pit is the Mountain of Purgatory. Satan's abode is therefore the very center of the cosmos. It seems, then, highly probably that the symbolism of the stream and the secret path are initiatic,"

Furthermore the long, twisting course of the stream's path is reminiscent of the recurrent theme of the labyrinth through which the hero or neophyte must find his way to freedom. To discover the secret path is to discover that as the center implies the circumference, so Hell implies Heaven, and Satan implies the Lord."

Watts is alluding to the "unity of opposites." Jung's thought on the chains binding us contains this same sense of the two aspects, the unity of opposites...echoing my original problem of "working with the tensions."

"Man may have lost his ancient saurian's tail, but in its stead he has a chain hanging onto his psyche which binds him to the earth, (a) chain of given conditions which weigh so heavy that it is better to remain bound to them (...) That we are bound to the earth does not mean that we cannot grow; on the contrary it is the *sine qua non* of growth. No noble, well-grown tree ever disowned its dark roots, for it grows not only upward but downward as well (...)

The difficulty lies in striking dead centre. For this an awareness of the two sides of man's personality is essential, or their respective aims and origins. These two aspects must never be separated through arrogance or cowardice."

From Jung, Psychology and Alchemy

The Show Looming Up: Appendix

On water - when I first sat in the gallery and imagined a pool of water, I came home and read about water in Patterns in Comparative Religion and later in the I Ching. My comments are interspersed with quotations:

Water -

My sense of the gallery space with bones and caskets is that it needs to have water. Water dripping or a dark pool of water, irregular like a pond or?

Eliade writes of water:

"Principle of what is formless and potential, (...) water symbolizes the primal substance from which all forms come and to which they will return either by their own regression or in a cataclysm. (...) Water is always germinative (...) it precedes all forms and upholds all creation. Every contact with water implies regeneration: first, because dissolution is succeeded by a 'new birth,' and then because immersion fertilizes, increases the potential of life and of creation. In initiation rituals, water confers a 'new birth,' in magic rituals it heals, and in funeral rites it assures rebirth after death. [This connects immediately to my bones and "caskets" - M.B.]

"Then, too, since prehistoric times water, moon and woman were seen as forming the orbit of fertility both for man and for the universe (...) Even in Paleolithic times, the spiral was a symbol of water and lunar fertility: when inscribed on a feminine idol, it united all these centres of life and~ fertility (...) The spiral, the snail (a lunar emblem), woman, water, fish, all belong essentially to the same symbolism of fertility, which applies to every level of nature - "

This connects with bone for me in a surprising way. My enchantment with the spiralling of bone. The magic of the spiralling.

On my original tree drawing, as I got lower and lower - the alligator moved on slime and mud. That was the lowest I got to.

Eliade writes about water cosmogonies:

" (...) The plant or the tree rising from the mouth or the navel of a Yaksa (a personification of fecund life), from the throat of a sea monster (Mahara), of a snail or of a 'flowing vase.'"

The Mahara is my sea monster!

And further he writes of water as a source:

"The waters on which Narayana floated, carefree and happy, symbolize the state of rest and formlessness, the cosmic night. Even Narayana is asleep. And from his navel, that is, from a 'centre,' the first cosmic form comes to life: the lotus, the tree, a symbol of the life-giving but unawakened sap, of life which has not yet attained consciousness (...) In older versions, Visnu, in his third reincarnation (as a giant boar), goes down to the depths of the primeval waters, and draws the earth up from the abyss." This is what I feel like I'm doing with all these bugs, bones, and dark "tools."

From the I Ching, p. 525. The Hexagram. Ta Kao/Preponderance of the Great.

Under "Appended Judgments."

"The hexagram represents wood that has penetrated below ground water; this gives the coffin image." [Striking and surprising connection of coffins and ground water. To my conscious mind, the coffins have no connection to water].

Not long after I wrote the above, I had the dream described below.

Here is a complete transcription of the discussion about the mountain-cave dream.

M: The mountain in my dream looked like a cone and it was white, slippery, icy...like an ice cream cone maybe. Gabriel and I were driving up the side on a narrow curvy path in a little sports car and the car got impaled on a little rock. And somehow Gabriel or I was bleeding...and a light skinned black man was nearby and I said, "Will you help a white person?" He got a malicious grin on his face, and the next thing I know we are in a cave,.. maybe we're still on the outside but I think inside...a dark place; and a woman, maybe a black woman, is chasing me out, saying, "You don't belong in here!" And she's got a knife, in her hand and she cuts both of my hands, slit, slit, right here (pointing to skin between thumb and forefinger). That sounds like a really heavy - a really symbolic dream, right?

S: Was there more to it?

M: That's all I remembered. But the dream bothered me so much that in the evening I asked Carl to help me with it. I wanted to get back into it. So...I imagined myself back into this cave place, looking around, seeing what was in there instead of being chased out by the lady. It was like a visualization; I imagined myself back into my dream state and I said, "Here I am in this mountain-cave." The feeling I got was of some other things that had happened some times that I had meditated...I could almost hear people being tortured. It had happened a few times before, and I would get a feeling - like uh, uh, "What are you playin' around with, baby?!" I'd get a feeling that I was innocently, naively, and blithely going into these dark areas, and there were some very scary parts of myself that were a little bit...too hot to handle. Or, maybe I shouldn't be there. In my dream this lady's saying,

"You don't belong here little girl. Get outta here!"

S: And slitting your hands...

M: So, I go back in. I wasn't going to take no for an answer.

S: So how did Carl help you?

C: I just listened.

M: He Just listened, but someone was there, So I imagined myself back to this place and it was...dark murk and I was on the back of some kind of sea serpent and I could hear...it was like torture chambers. Occasionally I would get that feeling that there were torture chambers, on my dark psychic side. I'd Just get that sense and a...haunting, scary feeling. Well, that clay (after the dream) I think I got sick. That's why we did it. So I called Faye and she said, "This is your boundary issue again, Marilyn. Get out of there and you don't have to do that and you can go back to the side of the mountain and build something. Just cut out of the dark place, you don't have to be there right now." That was in June. About a week after that, during Lowry's class, I was showing him some sketches I had done for my show. I said to him, "I've been getting sick sometimes. I think I'm identifying with my dark side. I can't get out of it,." I told him my dream quickly and how I went back in... and he said, almost verbatim, "You have to bring these things out."

M: When Lowry said that, it was kind of what I felt. But to some people...it would scare them to death! Here I go into this place, I hear these haunting things - and it's the same stuff I let out in my show: that hanging thing...this sense that there's some awful guillotine-like, things that really frightened me when I was younger - like Tale of Two Cities.

S: It is scary...we don't understand where our power lies. We're afraid we can hurt other people, and ourselves. with our thoughts, our energies...

M: I don't know. it's a tricky question to me. I've been following this thing and when I try to run away from it, like in that cave, and Lowry says, "Bring these thing out"...for me it's like the bringing out of them took away some of those fears. But to bring them out means you have to face them and facing them means you have to go against all these superstitions...that facing these things means being swallowed up by them. Facing death means being swallowed up and dying-- bet that's a lot of the reason that more people don't toy around with this.

S: Right.

C: It's safer than sky-diving.

M: I guess it is.

Letting Out the Show: Appendix

M: I was thinking that today - wondering why I have obsessions with the image of strangulation, with things being bound? And things hanging. And I asked myself, "Does this have to do with the way I died in a past life?"

S: Or what you saw? Or the way you lived?

M: I thought, where does this come from? It seems to be almost like an inner image. Some psychologists would say, and I would say too, that this comes from the way I felt as a child, that I was very much bound up... And now I'm feeling maybe it's something even a little bit deeper than that.

S: And maybe the way you reacted as a child had to do with a past life experience.

C: I read something recently about those feelings being your memories from pre-birth.

S: Or from birth itself.

M: Yeah. That's very restrictive.

C: Certainly strangulation is often a part of birth.

S: And also the way people are born is pretty traumatic.

M: I love forceps (laughter)...and that's how I was born. I liked that...

S: The claw?

M: I brought home that thing that you (to Carl) got me from the chem lab: this kind of thing, you know. Probably the same kind of thing that pulled me out of the birth canal.

S: That's probably that love/hate relationship. (laughter)

But I wanted to go back to something about that claw - something that I saw in the Bread and Puppet theater this summer. They're very political. you know, and this year they're really against nuclear weapons, but all through art, and through the deep subconscious light and dark imagery. And this one image: the thing that had the bomb came out. It was about twenty feet tall, metal, and skeletal-like but very cold looking. And it had these claw hands that were huge, these prongs that went up, very terrifying.

M: It comes from the same place, something almost like archetypal imagery. Why does it affect you, you know? Some things affect people on such a deep level that it's not personal anymore, it's something else...

The Response: Appendix

More of the taped dialogue:

S: You know, I was thinking...if you had taken that to butcher's convention or something like that, what would the response have been...I mean, they would have understood it better. I betcha . . .

C: That's an interesting question...

M: They mighta said, "Right on!" ya know, who knows?

C: Well, when Marilyn went to the junkyards...she was...feeling fairly strong about what she was doing and. .when she would go to talk to a guy in the junkyard, and he would say, "What do you want?" she'd say, "Well, I wanna do these sculptures which are re-enactments of my dreams."

M: That was that one place. They didn't bat an eyelash!

C: A couple of places. Two guys responded, and were curious about it, and I was there, I saw...they were really tuned in! I thought, "Wait a minute, these guys don't have Ph.D.'s!"

M: They're not even artists! They're just, like interested..."Oh yeah? You're gonna make a sculpture?" Well, sculptors go there all the time and I didn't realize that. I was feeling real embarrassed that I was going to a junkyard because I wanted to do a sculpture, you know.

Aftermath: Appendix

From our tape, a description of an early "experience of light."

S: I don't want to think that it's over. I guess that's part of the human dilemma, immortality...I wouldn't be me exactly, but maybe some part of my spirit would be hanging around.

M: It's not nonsense. It's not nonsense that people have spiritual experiences. It's like that thing that happened when I was in school that time, that strange separation from myself. Didn't we read a book recently about experiences of light? Isn't it that Eliade book that I have?

That Eliade book on androgyny has a whole bunch of things about experiences of light. One time when I was in undergraduate school I was working in an office, filing...it was very boring work, alphabetizing IBM cards hour after hour...when all of a sudden I just, was in another space. This was the only time it ever happened. For years I tried to get it to happen again, but it never did. I was right there, my body was there, but I was somewhere else. And immediately the light was grey, misty grey. As if I was in my spirit or something...and I was "getting" ideas. The funniest thing was that I understood why light bulbs are used in cartoons to mean ideas. (much laughter) It was like I was getting...a shower of light, but what it was was ideas, huge ideas. I understood the whole university...

C: I thought you were going to say universe.

S: So did I.

M: I understood that everybody in the university was after truth, every department was after truth, and that was o.k.

S: In their way.

M: The neatest thing was that I somehow thought about dying, or the idea came to me and, it was like - I became a star. Bam! I took off right out of Washington U. and became a star. It was instantaneous, and I said "That's what happens; that's what will happen when I die!" Isn't that weird? Now I didn't think of that as "chosen" or "not chosen"; I thought maybe that's why happens to people when they die. When I had the experience it was like becoming a new star. I took off and bam, turned into a star, and that was the whole experience and then I came back. It might have lasted one minute, that entire greyness, shower of light, understanding that everyone was after truth, and becoming a star and I was back there doing my file cards.

S: That's wonderful.

And more on the source of the work, and what it means (from the tape):

S: What's so confusing about all this is that it's your unconscious, also our collective unconscious, also all the stuff we can't begin to deal with...part of our animal selves, it's part of our higher selves that haven't even evolved yet...part of so many things....

C: Did you have some feeling about the connection between the superconscious and the animal subconscious?

M: Just lately... well, my show was a lot about my animal self. I don't know...but certainly what I was getting more in touch with was, what "cultured" people would call my animal self. I certainly wasn't...using my intellect. It's like...like cavemen...there I am with that big bone. Now what is making me do that?

I would think that's some sort of genetic connection we have to cavemen, to people who picked up these big things and beat something to death. Maybe it's connected to dinosaurs. Don't our genes go back to dinosaurs? Fish? The same messages are coming through us...

C: The dinosaur genome...the dinosaur is a vertebrate and we're vertebrates. Vertebrates' genes are so close as to be almost identical. There's not much difference...

M: Between us and a dinosaur!

S: Just a few little quality changes.

C: Just a few little changes...and you get the difference between Tyrannosaurus Rex and Marilyn Bromberg Banner.

S: Of course you'd be afraid to go back to that, because in this culture it's not acceptable.

M: It's not acceptable as art...where is it acceptable? Maybe if you do research on dinosaurs...Certainly, identifying with cavemen...you know, we're supposed to be evolved.

S: But you know, we can't evolve anymore until we get back and admit, and face this part of us, embrace this part of us, and say this is us too....and, see the beauty in it!

M: That's it, that was the biggest surprise. Sarah Just said it, the end of my thesis!

What About Education? - Appendix

Through the year I've jotted down ideas about curricula - things taking off from forms or materials that individuals respond to, things beginning with the memory of a favorite fabric or favorite sound.

I thought about holidays, the deeper meanings of our holidays. Are they holy days - is that the origin of the word? Or whole days, days for helping us be whole? I imagined asking students to think about the meaning of Christmas - not the historical meaning, but the meaning of light, of the coming of light, the meaning of Christ - who/what is Christ? Maybe some use of the Bible...or some thought given to the sense and meaning of darkness, the feeling of inner darkness as well as our experience of long nights...and then the coming of light after the long winter darkness. Perhaps some research into the meaning of Santa Claus, or reindeer, of the meaning of the North Pole.

I thought about Easter, springtime, renewal, resurrection... about myths about the deaths of gods and sons of gods (see Fraser's Golden Bough).

I realized that on Veteran's Day we might talk about war, death, the politics of war. That on Hallowe'en we have "popular" images full of the shadow side of our psyche - black cats, skeletons (in the closet?), graves. witches, ghosts ..

That on Thanksgiving we might think together about the present, whether we are thankful at all, for what and to whom. Do we have the blood of the turkey on our own hands? Do we think about the source of our food?

I am most aware of some feeling in me that "I don't want to teach them anything" - that is, that I might nurture what is in a student, but I can't give what is not already there. As the I Ching states, "The character ('truth') is actually the picture a bird's foot over a fledgling. It suggests the idea of brooding. An egg is hollow. The light-giving power must work to quicken it from outside, but there must be a germ of life within, if life is to be awakened."

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