# DIALOGUE WITH BELIEF – ON KILLING BUDDHA AND OTHER DISCURSIVE MEDITATIONS

by

Rmon

© 2002 Vancouver, Canada

Foreword ..... 2
India and Nepal - On Killing Buddha ..... 3
Turkey – Seminal Confluence ..... 16
Bulgaria - The King's Return ..... 22
Romania – Medieval Madness ..... 28
Hungary - Cultured Corruption ..... 36
Poland - Where Even the Tramps are Moderate ..... 41
Denmark - Greetings in White Underwear ..... 49
Thailand - Pleasures of Original Debt ..... 55
Viet Nam - Riding the Dragon ..... 69
Cambodia - Living On One Leg ..... 79
Australia - Frames of Ritual Symmetry ..... 91
United States of America - Consummate Consumption ..... 116
Canada - Another Journey ..... 128
Afterword ..... 130

# Foreword

**Veliko-Turnovo, July 2001**

Kale and I are in Bulgaria at the moment, and will be here for another week or so; I'll update the Bulgarian travel-mail once in Romania: a procedure to be followed throughout the journey. My intention is to create a travel journal of sorts - impressions, thoughts about my perspective of each country as these relate to me as a person. Given digital efficiency &c, I can keep you informed during our lonely global orbit as immigrants to sterile Canada, while also documenting the experience for later reflection: discursive snapshots, if you like. Feel free to respond, disconnect, question or skim through the travel-mails; I'll continue writing until I hear otherwise...

My trip alone to Nepal and India, with a long standing friend through March - May this year has, however, not been documented formally, and I therefore write now a retrospective account so to properly complete the file.

# India and Nepal - On Killing Buddha

**March – May**

Whilst trekking in the Nepalese Himalayas, I indeed met Buddha on the road, for that was his name; a university educated, Bachelor of Commerce, fluent English-speaking Nepalese gentleman in his early forties. The experience was penetrating; mystical; moving. I believe my psyche altered, in some fundamental way…; he too, trekking alone, sadhu-style.

The day we met was the most beautiful possible, unusually clear - the clearest I had experienced yet. Our meeting occurred, serendipitous, it seemed, while I was fully immersed in the mountains - large and looming - on a particular stretch of the Jomsom Trek, reputed to be the most beautiful of all: stretching higher than heaven; snow pure white against shadowed hard rock, then descending steeply down towards flat riverbeds pebbled grey; pony-trains carnival-colored, twenty or thirty taut bodies in length at times… sharing the narrow, precipitous, boot-bending path, each weighted down by vital supplies to the little lodges accommodating Lonely Planet and Rough Guide junkies on holiday, such as myself.

And it was spring. The apple blossoms fragrantly pregnant behind ancient temple walls; flowers wild; weeds thick with pollen; geraniums in pots; assorted orchards; chicken coops clucking; fresh growing wheat fields waving alongside gently tending peasants smiling; pristine seeming - and yes, too damn good to be True!... God indeed seemed to unveil His?... Her?... Both, perhaps?… Nothingness, maybe?...Where to now my narrative, I'm forced to ask myself mid-sentence? Now, before I continue writing this discursive meditation, this dialogue with you, the reader, before you continue reading. Now, given the previous two months travel in that seminal subcontinent to the south, spawning ground of Eastern mysticism and its throng of godly interpretations, India...

For I had experienced in India firsthand that the Hindu worships the Great Goddess, in myriad forms - Parvati, Sarasvati, Mother Mary, Kali, &c, together with the male principle, Shiva, Ganesh, Christ, Vishnu, &c, as Infinite Synergy: the Christian, The Christ; The Way... The Truth... The Light, and, sometimes, and in India especially, The Holy Virgin: the Muslim, Allah, His Prophet, and his Sword: and the Buddhist... The Karmic Void. And only a few days previous to this momentous meeting with Buddha, while touring in Katmandu, and much to my surprise, I had also identified yet another belief-permutation, the Nepalese system of belief - a mutant form of Hinduism fused curiously with Buddhism, where, for example, the benevolent, hashish smoking Shiva of the Indian subcontinent magically transforms into the ferocious Bhairam (sp?) – wilful, punitive, exacting, moralistic.

Yet the Physiology of Place... the mighty Himalayas... and answers to some pertinent questions I was asking of The Universe, remained... Unanswered, in my opinion, by any of these Systems of

Belief. Yet there were the mountains; stark, fecund, real, substantial; buzzing with the patterned strains of pony bells, the harsh clicks of their impatient drivers, and my deepening pants of exertion.

And so I met Buddha on the road; wandering...

I had spent the first of the previous months snuggled amongst the green veils of the Indian south; enjoying the Darshan (direct experience of a god) of the Holy Hill in Tiruvalamalai (sp?), where rites of the world's most ancient formalized religion, Dravidian Shivaism, the most primitive elements of Hinduism, are still practiced; the hill - a gigantic lingam, I'm told, a sacred mound of rock worshiped by Shivaists, and the supposed instantiation of Shiva's vital Pillar of Light - phallic, protruding; simultaneously breasted, curved: Shiva, ever embracing Shakti (the generative, female principle), in some or other consorted form…; together - Eternal Energy.

With Western converts to Eastern Philosophy, I too circumambulated the Sacred Mountain on full moon, doing the Padikram (sp?), along with thousands of barefoot local folk, whole families - public; hopeful; working to harness, for themselves, The Good granted through Shiva's grace – in pilgrimage. Sadhu's also, walking barefoot ... ancient, ribbed-thin, yet some young, nubile even; others rolling their way to grace, literally, on chalk lubrication, spinning like oblong tops on the tarred road; and odd Westerners with begging bowls, some from rich, conflicted European families, I'm told... in costume, nakedly clothing themselves... playing sadhu, perhaps? peeping to see who? how much money? for the hard month ahead. Others, interpreting whimsically, it seemed: talking, always talking, always Discourse deafening afresh the echoes of even our highest mountains, here, in Tiruvalamalai. Talk of Not-being-the-doer, All - Fated Destiny, I'm told; and finding Nirvana in a haze of hashish and explained as aboriginal Shivaists training assiduously; justifying escapism, addiction, psychosis and personality disorder, it seemed to me as psychotherapist... trailing personal wreckage like pillaged, scattered pony trains, contents strewn haphazard, ever in search of Self, and wandering...

But to which destination? was my eternal refrain, as I sailed with my dear friend along Keralan waterways a few weeks later following a brief respite in Kanyakumari (sp?), the southern most tip of the tooth that is the Indian subcontinent, and home to the Swami Vivekananda (sp?) Memorial built newly. A temple and place of worship of the man who chose to disseminate Eastern ideas to the West, changing forever the colonial chauvinist conception of the Indian savage, and launching, unwittingly, the New Age Movement, The Age of Aquarius and the Western Disciples of AUMmmm.... One of these disciples, my companion… Talking; always talking; long...long journeys of Selves – our dialogue, decades long - for history with specially chosen companions is an artifact unto itself, and is never replaceable; Our Dialogue, this time, merging with our respective and mutual pasts, and our futures, interfused with Eastern ideas, Passionate! Inspiring! Seductive! - as never before, for me.

As never before, these ideas…, now! so very Alive! Now, anchored overnight on a stretch of Keralan backwater… where eerie reinforcement of Eastern mysticism drifts as atmospheric sentiment from the monastic music created by Keralan Christians worshipping Hindu-style along the surrounding shores, or upon their little island homes millennia rich - chanting hymns as mantra over loudspeakers for ubiquitous acoustic appreciation, chosen or not; Mosque's broadcasting simultaneous sentiments; so too, Hindu temples...which mandir (holy building)? to which god? difficult to know in the darkling moonlight...; yet, and it must be said, within my spiritual center, wherever that may be?… a strangely harmonious cacophony of belief heard, here - anchored above fragile jellyfish pulsating rhythmic beneath the rippled surface tension of the backwaters... like anachronistic space ships defying gravity; beautiful; formed; perfect as the mountains.

Here, in Kerala, where water and coconuts sustain the natives, and home to local girl-wonder, Amachi (sp?), The Hugging Saint, Divine Channeler of sacred Shakti power, embracing sometimes thousands of pilgrims both local and foreign, many Western, daily at her ashram along our watered path, where we paused all too briefly the following morning in "God's Own Land" - for that is what the tourist posters call Kerala. I had initially read this slogan in a Time magazine advert in February before leaving Cape Town, South Africa, my homeland, attempting to seduce dollared Westerners into its cleverly crafted web, its discursive devices as intricate and deliberate as the local fishing nets splayed delicate as diaphanous sea anemones consuming. Of course, scantily clad Indians, working ever harder to clothe, feed and educate in Western-style, dressed sadhu-like, completed the palm-treed, wicker-ed and woven, boat-punting picture. Thank you, Swami Vivekanande and your kind, the creative director couldn't have done it without you; nor could the Indian advertisers who freely assert the "Shakti Power" of detergents and toothpaste, Colgate included – for Brahma comprises all things, both scared and profane, and Energy is always Energy; as Belief is to Discourse; and Hope is to Future.

Nor could Amachi's Ashram exist without this Discursive Energy, which relies in part on the voluntary work of diligent guests drawn from across the globe, who manage now her vast enterprise in exchange for food, accommodation, enlightenment, and the like. And they come, willingly. Willingly “Washing themselves clean with the soap of selfless service in This Age of Selfishness", as Amachi's corporate slogan reads; inscribed in pretty print behind framed glass, strategically hung above stairwells and other places of forced focus. Indeed some recalcitrant, aging schoolgirls, delinquent spiritual dilettantes, it seemed – shaven heads, cloth draped white below Mohawk wisps protruding pigtailed, with British sounding accents -, attempted to shrug their duties off upon our unsuspecting shoulders. We squirmed our retreat, extracting ourselves... guiltily... protesting the brevity of our stopover, but not before lugging a few hefty heaps of cartooned instruction manuals detailing Amachi's particular Brand of Belief up and down that

stairwell, to officious, comely young Indian women ticking off registers of a sort with inviting, radiant smiles.

And wandering still across this vast subcontinent…, we moved from "God's Own Land" to the far north-west of India, on the intricate network of Raj railways, the transportation backbone of India and Colonial Britain's legacy left living still once Mahatma Gandhi's heralded passive resistance offensive rearranged the social order; a keen discursive tool emerging on the wings of Eastern Thought and highly effective as a practical discursive reinvention for yet another new time; and thereby, ousting the English exploiters, wrestling back their heartfelt independence from the clutches of colonialist chauvinism… - to New Delhi. Here, we enjoyed a memorable overnight stay at 'Guruji's' temple-home, a familiar friend to my companion, before moving on to the Kumaon Himalayas - specifically, Kasar Devi, near Almora – its region, the geographical and cultural source of the great Hindu scriptures, the Veda, I'm told, dated back some 4000 years, or so...

The Guruji, and I only know him by that name, is an initiate of the ancient Naat (sp?) Order; Brahman by birth, that privileged class of philosopher kings - passing religious rites and Divine Connectivity from Father to son, at least in his case. Agori (sp?) in orientation, Mother Kali worshipping, the Guruji understood all his cancer healing, I'm told, family counselling, depression lifting, wealth granting powers as originating from that great maternal source, The Terrible Kali - castrating benefactor of those who treat her right!

Inside the gentle embrace of his temple-home, our reception was warm and friendly, fatherly, and, indeed, my encounter with the Guruji resembling in many ways my few meetings with my companion's biological father, and interestingly, I'm told, her formative mother, long deceased, also much like Kali - a loving nurturer, and as with all our mothers, at times terrible too. As psychotherapist, I felt a fellowship with the Guruji, experiencing an affinity with the man: his role as mentor to the people…; those who threw themselves vulnerable on the temple floor before him. But unlike my mandatory clinical gaze, his eyes, here, now, blazing with Divine Passion midst hair and beard hung guru; his disciples clasping hands as if in Christian prayer, but, here, signalling 'Namaste', so greeting The Divinity within You and I, and within every particle and sub-particle - quark, ion or splintered extract of Nothingness, of our shared known and unknown Universe; Uncertainty, Hope and Trust alive in that small inner sanctum on the upper story of the Guruji's temple home; Belief, alive and breathing; Belief, active as atoms.

The Guruji's Temple - where he both lives and works, consulting almost around the clock, working as hard as any shop owner in India or, for that matter, government employee (a role he filled before mantling the Mother's power) - is built like a flagged ship; white with curved balconies stained by the insistent monsoon, anchored solid in the surrounding hills of New Delhi's principal garbage dump surrounding ubiquitous like coal-glowing; a glittering diamond of a place...;

beautiful; ordered; caring. A beacon outpost beckoning small thin bodies of bright-eyed families into the inner spaces of its two-storey high walls and rooftop terrace; some members of the congregation sick from bacteria rich black-waters which lie as stagnant pools everywhere, their mirrored surfaces reflecting rainbows in the thick sky tepid and balmy with moisture...; the unemployed; the failed; the miserable; the exhausted; as well as the healthy, the employed, the successful, the contented, the energetic… ensuring their ongoing good fortune Most Religiously!; indeed, Everybody - Chanting traditionally, singing, dancing and twisting their love and joy to their Guruji through millennia-deep, patterned dance steps and movements with instruments locally contrived. And He, paternal up there… like a committed parent hovering above the crib; gazing downwards, ablaze, expressionless as a Fundamentalist Freudian, from his balcony on high, from his private rooftop quarters, upon those bright-eyed followers below… and Believing.

Below too, sadhus crouching hunched in the incandescent gloom of evening, a different gathering altogether next to the families of smiling dancers. Their matted locks like snakes knotting designs, complimenting the elegant drapery of their cloaks; their skins glistening here and there like bits of bright silver-onyx shimmering in the humidity; amulets under dark-charcoal cloth, clasped; or, sometimes too, cloaks of brightest signal red and edged-black with golden cords tied loose; and, finally, one or two Western initiates, escaping ...Home Affairs, pain, responsibility: And All, smoking charas (hashish) in chillam pipes... copiously... rambling loquacious... thoughtless chemical lobotomy… syntax undefined… with memory … (Thought's natural muscularity slack and weakened into rambling rambles…) lost… into the Nothingness of Being which, I'm told by Eastern followers, cosmologists and astrophysicists alike, exists at the epicenter of Time and All Things Physiological; and Believing....

This time, the Guruji was not speaking, not speaking in words, that is - for it was that time of the year for meditation on stilling the flow of Discourse; for embracing The Void of All Nothing; and becoming aware of that epicenter, I'm told. Nevertheless, the man gesticulating vividly, chalked quickly on colonialist slate-boards commands to his ever attentive temple helpers drawn selectively from amongst the dark crevasses of the surrounding garbage hills, piling ever higher as even now dirt trucks and graders scrape, scoop and throw New Delhi's effluence like sacred scarabs sculpting jeweled-eggs ready to hatch fecund for the dwelling natives; garbage for housing, to be sold and lived off... and to infect with invisible microbes those sacred waters running through measureless waste, and to be cured, once again, in that spiritual flagship, that illuminated diamond of a place, built by the man himself, but commissioned through visions and instructions from the Great Mother, Kali, Herself, or so I'm told.... Her Admonitions!, delivered through intermittent dreams, informing of things to come, and healing strategy; for it is She! who does the healing work, I was told... this guruji, simply one of Her many conduits.

And as the pale afternoon waxed and waned into the evening of night, traditional massages followed a spicy supper - both delicious and provided by handsome attendants; then comfortable bedding and cleanest sheets in preparation for sleep. And all who attended our needs on that rooftop under the stars of early spring, that rooftop where we ate and talked and laughed and slept, appeared sober and healthy to me. One of the temple helpers, a very old man with a twinkle in his eye, but most, twenty-year olds, all doing their very best to please their foreign visitors to their garbage dump community; allowing us to drift off into other dreamscapes warm under a solid duvet… on that rooftop overlooking the village in the garbage dump. Such kindness. Genuine. Utterly believing; accommodating. For in the Hindu mythology, all things are sacred – reflecting the natural harmonies immanent within Physiology: reflecting the budding, the unfurling, the falling, and the final rot or crunch! of the leaf as it turns to messy loam, its passage and transformation made beautiful by frames of habitual reference alone, by dialoguing with Belief; male priests reflecting too these natural harmonies, by deliberately dressing as the female goddess and, in holy ecstasy, in trance, accepting the bounteous gift of Shiva's love through imagined anal intercourse, reflecting the natural sexual variety displayed in the animal kingdom – the swollen pregnancy of the male seahorse, or the same sex partnerships of the higher mammals, for example, many life long, where mutual stimulation of genitalia occurs orally, manually, genitally, or rectally, whatever the physiological convenience, whatever the pleasure, the evolved ethological ritual - in dolphins, bonobo apes, killer whales, and Japanese snow monkeys, to name but a few, along side heterosexual activity (yet staunchly silenced! as truth in Judeo-Christian readings of the natural world): here, in the deepest folds of Eastern mysticism, viruses, garbage, famine, war and even visiting queans like me are holy - Life is Beautiful, as they say in French films. Thank you Guruji, the Rs 2500 I gave in donations was well worth it. It sure beat the possible four star buying-power for one night's spirited entertainment. I'm only sorry to hear about the shady reports from your previous visitors, once lodged in Kasar Devi, complaining of misappropriated donations, missing money kept for Safe Keeping, and the like... I was also sorry to hear on visiting one of your favourite disciples the following day that albeit this was true, she still owed her business success - hard earned and enterprising, strategic, intelligent and creative - to you and to the Great Mother. When she spoke her appreciation, her heart seemed to beat so much faster then - she believes in you, unfortunately, and not in Herself. Her substantial accomplishments are thinly silent next to Belief, transmitted from father to son over 4000 years or so... I do however grant that there was no ill will, no pernicious intent - only blind tradition, sadly.

It was mostly cloudy in Kasar Devi once moved on from Guruji's temple-home, and a disappointment – and although appropriate for the season, my imaginings were ill-informed, exaggerating reports through personal distortion... Where were those incandescent snowy peaks higher than heaven, Everest inching yearly ever upwards in search of the Gods of Something, in that clash of continents drifting aimless through eons? In these fancies, retrospectively, it seems

that I may have been hoping to identify some strange alternative concord in these geological manifestations; in a symbolic effort that someone or something would miraculously tell me where my prophetic dreams, selectively confided to some, and still informing evermore strongly my unfolding personal path, originated? That is, dreaming in 1986 of Two Books in a desperate time of need: a dream-room saturated with Silver-White Light; me young and childish, younger than my actual years, but Benevolent Energy implying growth, encouraging my writing these huge documents in some future time – a promise of things to come; the cryptic pictures on the First Book's cover and within its densely-paged contents, predicting university library discoveries under the brief direction of conservative Afrikaans-speaking professors in South Africa some eight years later, in 1994! (Motives and Mechanisms, pub. 1985); later still, to discover that the dream's Second Book pointed to academic literature (The Discursive Mind, 1994) which had not yet even been printed at the time of dreaming, and only discovered personally by me in 1996! Huh...? as they say in the comics. I have never doubted this particular dream, and many… many others, also prescient, even now, and never will; they have steered me steadily, safely, truly - but I want to know how it works? like all the other Great Mysteries in The Universe, like Continental Drift. I certainly hadn't found any convincing answer, yet - although the Guruji, gesticulating, had acknowledged similar experiences when quizzed - and indeed Kasar Devi was no different...

Whilst resident in Kasar Devi for a few weeks, I became preoccupied with Mountain-bustin'! – which involved early morning rising as visibility is best, clambering illegal! onto neighboring balconies, risking falling from rocky cliffs and steep promontories above the deepest gorges, a veritable concertina of hills and valleys, here – sharp, contrasting -, hoping for a Mountain Darshan, a cosmic blessing, and some answers from those deities whom, I'm told, inhabit their snowy peaks – just a simple view of those fucking things!, the mountains, reaching steadily for Heaven...; white on blue, turning golden at sunset; liquid; molten; fading into pinks and purples; eventually... inching, I am told, ever upwards towards the domed-sky's hue of atmosphere.

And on a better than most morning, with misted-mountains hovering distanced, my travelling companion's friend - an Australian in his thirties, Chandra Baba, a Sanskrit name bestowed by his guru, now dead but active from beyond the grave, I'm told, ministering uninterrupted still to his disciples, led us like a shepherd to the floor of the deepest valley above which was perched our little pension; comfortable; contained; heated. Here, he bathed ritualistically in a rock pool as his living space had limited affordance; removing now sadhu cloth as slowly as his deliberate speech stylized telegraphic; his eyes, sleepy from resin essence of cannabis leaves rolled sticky between and scraped off the palms of local women – ignited and inhaled through lung-wrenching coughing suggesting advanced pulmonary disease!; cacophonic cannabis inhalation, a common practice amongst many so-called sadhu's throughout India - at temples, and any other conceivable place, it would seem... and always lung-wrenching inhalation ... gross-gulps midst wheezes too terrible!

Here, in Kasar Devi, hemp grows wild on the surrounding hills and is enjoyed for its many enriching qualities, its resilience and strength in rope manufacturing, for instance. It has been used for household purposes and Holy Communion for thousands of years by the natives, but now is cut down by suspicious officials and bonfired. As such, Beliefs are in flux; outlawed heritage burned... for another Future. Yet, Chandra Baba's dreadlocks are probably hanging thick still about his fine Caucasian features; proud signs of spiritual embrace; stylish, altogether like an anorexic model in a fashion magazine, the ‘sadhu-look’, perhaps - a well presented social identity shown off against a backdrop of slate-roofed cottages... sprinkled along contoured terraces folded upwards, downwards, flowing… sideward… as continents crunch ceaselessly, their concertina music un-hearable to our kind, except by proxy. He too had had prescient dreams, some involving healing. He believed his deceased guru to be instrumental in their conjuring, citing proof as improbable synchronicities experienced. He informed this spontaneously, without my asking, along with many... many other anecdotes spiritual.

Chandra Baba - an interesting and warm fellow, one of a multitude of Indiaphiles who speak as if in-love with the country: the attachment usually given to other humans, here, takes on new form; this innate, biologically driven need as mammalian animal, re-directed and re-shaped as many, many... different stories by an assortment of authors, seekers – like me - from distant continents. Some seekers finding health in skillful imbibing of morning urine and, of course, also enjoying community promotion to the ranks of spiritual hardliners; in salutary stories of salvation found in the arms of Hugging Saints; or stories of escape from pain and miraculous cures in holy places with holy waters; dis-ease of mind and spirit eased through clever discussion with sages in Mumbai apartments; the auditory hallucinations of manic-depression and schizophrenia recast as divine-communication; suicide in terms of past-lives; learning disorders as ego-death; sexual dysfunction as renunciation of desire; and interpersonal relationship problems as detachment. Here, to rename it, is to reframe it in wholly different terms – as Divine Health! Here, Western dysfunction is creatively sidestepped in agile social dances... as stories of rainbow people deep in the valley never met but who seemed to live side by side with us all; of dogs eaten regularly as leopards' dessert while walking wild, yet never seen; and, did you know that Herman Hesse once walked these valleys squashing?

The Indiaphile storyline recruits members to its distinctive metaphors even now, as you read. And why not? Freaks of all descriptions in consumptive consummation of indigenous fruits picked cheap sustain severe, rule-following local folk, sober – deliberately non-judgmental - but laughing loudly, despite good intentions, at the multicoloured, sunburned Caucasians with their strange hairstyles, piercings, mixed and unmatched clothing, and ever vigilant for opportunities of Dollars, Lire, Franks, Mark etc. - even exchanging pretty adolescent daughters for dowries rarely honored. Foreign men absconding, playing sadly the same irresponsible games which initiated their seductions, dancing as ever before, but now to the music of these concertina hills.

And as always... now, as before... Westerners worrying; worrying about money, money, money...never ending conversation of necessity never found, or just barely..., yet hanging insistently onto Belief. Anxious; lost; confused...; still believing in their chosen discourse; needing, desperately! acknowledgement of Self crafted through social presentation - acceptance offered in community as mutual authentication. An internalized blindness repeated endlessly; no reality checks except of Necessity..., incessantly knocking as impecuniousness…, irritated..., always, it seemed to me.

We also indulged in side-trips from time to time, away from our happy hut lasting a day or two over the month of our stay here - and ever Mountain-bustin'! Yet savoring only odd glimpses of those pinnacled peaks considered so sacred by the local Hindu; mystified in legends; pictured as gods on calendars for 2001; and meditated upon by me while recumbent in grasses; imagining Mount Kailash (Sp?), that seminal source of Shiva, The Source! The Ultimate Lingam! Not yet another rocky mound, I'm told... in distant Tibet, that media darling... But like all the snowy peaks, disappointingly shrouded in clouds except for early morning rising, and even then misted over…, always…, or so I imagined in the mood of the moment.

During these excursions, our sad taxi driver struggled ever harder to assist in locating Mountain Darshans; in his twenties, and like many of the young here, so hard working; Hindu acceptance and resigned to long, tedious hours of driving – bending, racing, overtaking with dangerous expertise. Krishna, for that was his name, trying on Western friendship for fit, charming though mixed and unmatched and like so many of the young in India - kind, very kind; seeking that golden dollared goose in conflicted contradictory beliefs positioning Self in metaphor. Disappointed in their local religions, but making Puja (worshipping) nevertheless, Krishna's generation appearing to find every opportunity to learn English; their chariot now – no longer Nandi, Shiva's Bull, or Vishnu's Garuda Wings - to only God knows where...? while parents arrange still, through ancient Indian Astrology, marriage partners accepted.

And in the shadows of this narrative noise, stood Tibetan taxi-owners and landlords: imperious, suppressed and self-seeking; importing brides from across the subcontinent; social prospecting for Caste, tradition and belief perpetual - so retaining identity in a home away from home; leading contingents of well organized kitchen boys and drivers complaining of exploitation as the Tibetans establish a new life for themselves. Some boys orphaned, bullied runts of the litter, enjoying compassion limited, "One of the family", I was told, personally, with a detached smile, "a haven" - yet one boy crying confidentially in my companion's arms, alone, a surrogate mother tending to the wounds of reported abuse ... All working, working, forever working... masters and slaves alike tethered by belief in Karma, just desserts for past wrong-doings; Detachment; Not-being-the-doer: no rest required, no time management, no investigation... just – Ritual Detachment and Destiny!

And Belief persists... this time in a deep cave, Patel Bubaneshwar (Sp?)... deep buried underground Womb of the Gods: stalac-mites and -tites coded stories of the birth of the subcontinent, The World, The Universe... and of Hindu Belief. These assertions strangely knitting together as convincing nonsense slithering like Shiva's Cobra…; a seemingly scaled, long, winding floor ribbed naturally by clay, water, temperature and gravity - the sacred serpent's back, I was told. So too, the caverns formed, by modern measure at least, in the collision course of continents crunching and geological activity - a holy uterus. Or, limestone drips dropping and dripping in a Trinity of Three... I am told, deliberately choreographed into the Dance of Gods by the gods for the gods as drips dropping upon three limestone linga white - Shiva-drop! Brahma-drip! Vishnu-drop! ... even now as you read... Drip! Drop! Drap!

For reasons pragmatic, I continued my travels alone from then onwards - to Nepal for two weeks and then back to India: Katmandu, Pokhara, Shimla. A sort of Sadhu Seeking... something? And it is then that I met Buddha on the road, but not before touring a few days in Katmandu, to the Splendid Palaces of old, only weeks before the young 20-something Nepalese Crowned Prince, in a hashish cloud, blew his own brains and those of the family royal, to pieces - he just didn't agree with their choice of bride!, or so I'm told.

From Swayambunath Stupor perched like a pointed finger on a fisted hillock in the Katmandu Valley, I could see these ancient regal monuments to feudalism, as through a telescope - a bird's eye view. I could just make out these edifices through the hanging haze, toxic fumes strangling subtly a capital city archaic, anachronistic... confused and thick with exhaust fumes. An urban wasteland. The product of poorly designed engines irresponsibly thumping late into the night...; dawn calls from heavy buses bullying their way through traffic thick; congestion on roads unthinkingly designed - unconscious legacies of histories already over. Yet everywhere people breathing still: tourists Western, Japanese... from all over…, many... many seeking solace on vacation; spending, alongside city dwelling families generations old; shopkeepers; rickshaw cycles; taxi cabs; communist demonstrators marching Red... demanding change - Improvement!… of sorts; a New Formula!... and, of course, Believing..., always.

And on the road, Buddha told me that he often hangs out at Swayambunath, and so too at Bodnath Stupor, a temple complex, a spiritual shopping mall, even more ancient and holy than is the former. Both are centered - pivoted about a Sacred Stupor; tall symbol of Mahayana Buddhist brandings; each successive level representative of Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether; the lowest level, a massive convex mound of concrete curved, then a solid base cradling cubes above and thrusting as a spire... finally... heavenwards; and holding, nested in its middle, the humanoid Gaze of God - artfully painted as two stylized eyes; Omniscient... Judging... Knowing... But What?... I found myself asking after conversing with Buddha for some hours on the road.

For I told him of My Dreams, and without too much thought, he answered; he already knew the answer - he had already been told. He answered me directly. And this is what he told me: "Dreams are Bad!... there is too much Pride... something is wrong if you dream... if you're having them... too much Pride!" The goal, he instructed, was to still the mind... no thoughts, no words, no dreams, hopes or fears... all Desire, Suffering. Dreams indicated unresolved Karma, he said... Something to be worked through before Final Absolution... before Bliss Benign. Feeling hurt, but unsure and still wanting to know more ... I continued to listen, and ask questions... probing, still searching... hopeful of an answer, still.

He had spent the previous few weeks in the mystical arms of Muktinath - an ancient temple complex high in the Nepalese Himalayas, above the tree-line, and the desert haven of Western trekkers and wandering sadhus, some of whom I'd already met along the path; begging bowled; barefooted; orange-shawled; cold seekers bent around fires small; alone in groups formed then dispersed...; and Believing.

Buddha was making his way back to Katmandu, where he lives with his younger brother in a family home, generations old. An old servant tends their needs - cooking, cleaning for the brothers following the death of his devout Tibetan parents some years before. After studying for many years, Buddha had worked for one year in his family's lucrative contracting business, builders of sorts - which his brother now runs full-time, before deciding to devote his energies exclusively to living the Buddhist Way: Embracing the Void Eternal. Intelligent and informed, Buddha had studied both mainstream Western subjects and the ancient Tibetan Buddhist scriptures. He practices now hours of spiritual exercise daily: chanting; meditating; engaging in spiritual discourses with Chosen Masters of the Way: Embracing the Void ... Always.

On asking him how his brother felt about supporting him financially, he laughed, immediately..., easily..., clearly a subject much visited, and said: "He's not very happy about it!" ... laughing Blissful. His sibling refused to discuss anything of matters spiritual, and apart from sharing alcoholic beverages together, an acceptable practice for Tibetan Buddhists, I'm told, unlike the staunch proscription in the Hindu south, as is meat consumption, the brothers were on dialogical sides of the spiritual coin: the one heads; the other tails. Buddha had bequeathed his share of the inherited family home to his brother in exchange for board, lodging and a small personal allowance. This freed him to embrace The Void. It gave him time to enjoy his present pilgrimage and hang out in the stupor-ed Darshan of Katmandu's ancient places of worship, and enjoy sundowners, as he saw fit... on his path towards Enlightenment.

He was unmarried, predictably, but spoke of very little else except Women, dismissing most subjects I raised for discussion ... Politics - but meaningless prattle! Commercial considerations of any sort - Codswallop! Cross-cultural comparisons - a load of old Crap! Analysis of possible computer applications for Sanskrit - Maya... Maya... Maya, and so on and so on and so on...

When I challenged him on the contradiction between his libidinal preoccupations and Beliefs Buddhist, he retorted: "But there's no DESIRE... I'm only talking about it". Oh, Yes? I heard myself saying, privately.

He believed strongly that any form of smoke inhalation was wrong as this interfered with the metabolizing of Sacred Prana, a vital ingredient in the path towards Nirvana, so I was told. And once again, privately, I thought ... Heaven only knows how any soul migrating towards Completion Blissful could possibly exist in contemporary Katmandu!? But I remained silent publicly - coaxing, testing... for he was Buddha, as capable as any of us, so I'm told, of being God... He had the training, the space, the dedication and generations of support, and by his own reasoning, lifetimes of practice... So I continued listening... still searching... And he continued talking.

He informed me, as time passed, playfully, smiling naughtily, that he enjoyed private sips of alcohol in his cabin at night, and indeed, he carried loose in a shopping bag an emptied plastic water-bottle filled with locally distilled apple brandy on our first meeting - to avoid spillage in his rucksack, he had informed me, for his brother. He nevertheless disapproved vehemently! when two young English girls sitting at an adjacent table crushed and rolled a charas joint. He was, however, predictably! most excited at the proximity of attractive females, and whispered surreptitiously: "Here come the girls!", on catching their fleeting glances in our direction as they sat down, all the time giggling Blissful.

I was losing interest in matters spiritual fast... I chose to trek alone from that point onwards: I embraced the mountains clear and inched ever forward on my solitary journey - one painful, knee-crunching step at a time....

I returned to Pokhara, to my comfortable hotel and enjoyed cable TV where possible..., as the intermittent but insistent power cuts made continuity difficult. And here, I experienced a sense of Inner Peace, of sorts. I now floated free in My Dreams of Silver-White Light; I was free to choose, responsibly, any interpretation I desired... Only I ever had or ever would have the answer to my own calling: An Echoed Question Answered, Truthfully. But my journey, my dialogue with belief, was only just beginning - I was still not able to choose any convincing answer for myself… I needed to explore further. This sense was reinforced again and again ... in Shimla, this time, again solitary in two star comfort, where I had the time and space to read Eastern Belief and conduct careful analysis, and, after due consideration, my scholarly investigations indicated the repeated presence of that most glaring logical fault, Infinite Contradiction: looped like a snake self-consuming; a mindless tautology traditional - it seemed to me…, at least at that time. So too, Stephen Hawking's Universe followed... episodically on Discovery Channel…, and guess what? Neo-Einstein's theories just don't add up! ... or, so I'm told. Of course, again, Endless Invention; Re-invention of Inventions... ; Cold-Dark Matter? perhaps...; Biological Models, not Machinations

Mathematical? perhaps...; Physics? Chemistry? perhaps… And all these formulations, all these assertions to The Way, always, always involving Talk; of this, I could be most sure. Even this, even now as you read these words, my writing a form of Talking to you, just another text - ripe for but a time, and coloured and shaded by the same. So too, Talking in Buddhist Silence...even that is talking, with consequences…, for a time…, and for action, always..., as I had discovered trekking alone in the mountains of Nepal.

# Turkey – Seminal Confluence

**June**

Well, Turkey and the Turks have been a lovely surprise. Istanbul in the month of March is charming - cool, shady, friendly and very exotic. Kale and I expected a heat wave but found a deliciously temperate climate; we expected Middle-Eastern hard-sell, as in previous visits to Egypt, but notwithstanding, were offered free drinks, meals, and service and felt in no way exploited by the locals. The ferryboat from the Golden Horn, near the city's tourist center, to the Sea of Marmara, an afternoon distant, hopped like a skimmed stone from one Prince's Island to the next, trailed by seagulls in its windless wake, its routing culminating eventually into a romantic horse-drawn carriage ride through the last of these islands - Mediterranean style mansions ensconced in wooded-groves surrounded by the gentle lapping of waves. After these experiences - from this new perspective, we decided to extend our stay in Turkey, and get to know this ancient confluence of Asian, European, Middle-Eastern and African cultures… a little better.

In Istanbul, we were fortunate to have found an ideal hotel location, positioned overlooking the Topkapi Palace, Aya Sofia, the Blue Mosque… against a backdrop of distant bays filled with ships and the slow rising hills of the surrounding city - textured with a growing modernity beside centuries old domes and minarets, and laced with foliage, walkways, outdoor cafes, strains of music and happy, handsome people. After enjoying our hotel view of the star Istanbul turistik attractions on our first night, while feasting on the first of the lovely lamb dishes which seemed to emerge from every eatery, grand and otherwise, like treasures from AliBaba's cave, each day that followed allowed us close up views of these prime cultural sites.

Topkapi's Harem Museum is 'fabulous', in the true sense of the word – it is no wonder that the Victorians waxed lyrical about Constantinople. To have been a Sultan, or his mother, his favorite wife, or princeling indeed seems wondrous, although we needed to remind ourselves, when overcome by waves of historical envy, that the remaining residents were almost always in the arrogant shadows of these favored characters, at risk for losing their heads, freedom, or testicles at a wilful moment's notice.

Aya Sofia - or the Church of the Holy Wisdom - is one of the world's most significant churches and earthquake resistant buildings; the geological and religious storylines merging even now into sacred belief - it's constant survival explained in godly terms, as Divinely Protected! This, albeit that Aya Sophia was deliberately constructed to withstand all but the most powerful of geological visitations - its genius engineers, Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, designing the building during the reign of Justinian, 535 years or so after the birth of Christ, I'm told, and who just happened to do an exceptional job - their civil engineering discoveries utilized on far distant

continents to this very day in order to harmonize optimally the immutable Laws of Physics for human well-being.

Once the spiritual center of the Holy Roman Empire - mosaics, arches and high, lighted windows, and, later on, co-opted by Islam as a mosque, Aya Sophia is inspiring as that intersection between Moslem and Christian monotheisms - albeit falling to bits, now, in the 21st century, and in need of constant repair. But not far off, and in good shape, is the lovely form of the Blue Mosque, a fine, unadulterated example of the myriad Moslem holy places looming unforgettably on every horizon, from every angle, in Istanbul; their elegant domes and highest minarets layered in a perfect symmetry of architectural mastery; their indecipherable scripting in blues and reds, greys and whites, feeling blessed in the extreme by Moderate Muslim Belief; a lovely dialogue of shape and form, these moderate monuments, with those already provided by The Universe; the bays, the hills, the trees… and the people.

Here, in Istanbul, we also had a chance to flee the traditional tourist attractions, and met a local guy, Eray, through the Internet. He lavished us with great Turkish hospitality, and introduced us to the night life of Taksim Square, and provided a traveler's tip as to one of Istanbul's hidden treasures – the Basilica Cistern – an underground church submerged like the Discursive Unconscious and built on the old Byzantium waterways; a dark cavernous place, eerie, dank with unexpected sculptures… including Medusa's head in various positions, emitting a restless-Brancusi quality, somehow, one of which is positioned upside down; a great place for a concert recital – Schonberg, ideal.

We spent our last day in Istanbul on the less turistik Asian side of the city, an ancient capital divided by large stretches of water and straddling the continents of Europe and Asia - where we climbed a hill midst the locals playing sports, dancing, and swinging Turkish-style from looped-ropes tied to the branches of trees, and having loads of fun. From this position, the views over Istanbul were spectacular although Virginia Woolf's gentle teasing of the Victorian romantic framing of the 'minarets of Constantinople' is certainly prophetic… given the very different picture-scape today; metal cranes, skyscrapers, TV towers and the like, compete for poetic sensibility here, now. That night, we attended an upmarket Turkish cabaret show, complete with local folk dancing – and, of course, the stunning Turkish belly dancers, some bellies more stunning than others, certainly, and at US$75 per head, the international belly dancing competition amongst the audience, a cheap fill-in for over half the show.

From the city that required thoughtful navigation through its wonders, the process of which Kale likened to playing the Age of Empires computer game, through its ancient places of worship, cisterns, palaces, town centers and docks, traveling through the courts of the Janissaries, Saracens and Halbediers, we headed south and east, deciding to extend our visit in Turkey given

its unexpected delights, variety and relatively low cost - to include the thermal waters of Bursa; the phallic moonscapes of Cappadocia; and the Greco-Roman ruins of Ephesus.

Bursa is located on the less traveled side of Turkey, not far from Istanbul, and has a range of thermal baths as its main attraction. Here, we did very little other than visit the Turkish baths - quite an experience. The sexes are divided into 'his and hers' facilities, and a small towel provided for voluntary modesty – and once naked inside, you spend your time in the hot waters and steam rooms sweating, watching the Turks wash themselves endlessly like grooming apes at the waters' edge, and gaze stupefied at the tiny centuries old brickwork which forms the building blocks for the overarching domes which hang like sultan-skies filled with suspended Aladdin's lamps hovering magically within their roomy interiors. Once you are well and truly done as a steamed vegetable, and in need of certain resuscitation, you re-enter the central arena – here, an attendant rubs you down, wraps you up in meters of hot toweling, and delivers a chaise longues upon which to rest. Certainly a most relaxing exercise - on our first visit, we slept for almost three full hours!

From there we bused our way south-east to Goreme, a small holiday town in central Anatolia, an ideal destination in the Cappadocia region, as the surrounding district comprises the strangest geological formations imaginable - long phallic-shaped towers of rock thrusting like massive erections from the Earth, carved by The Universe, and re-carved by human hands and tools designed for the purpose - into homes, wineries, and into churches; some still active with eggs and crucifixes on alters, and crude frescoes rendered on crumbling ceilings and walls as the earliest renditions of the Christ beside those more developed and polished shapes and forms, from later ecclesiastic eras; and all these constructions, with little windows, doors, stairways and balconies overlooking landscapes of grey-gravel, red-rubble, or their colorful intermingling… into brown-hues of all tints and shades.

The Christian community, one of the oldest Christian settlements on Earth, have been living here since the turn of the first millennium anno Domini, to escape persecution, I'm told, although the most dominant faith in the region, now, is Islam, by far; but a brand of Islam shot through like marble with these earliest Christian vestiges, and, from cursory anthropological investigation, also the determined chemistries of more ancient local beliefs, for example, the ubiquitous 'evil-eye' talisman, staring… everywhere - a narrative hangover from another time; as moralities are to story-lines; histories to position; and Unconsciousness to Time.

This strange geology began its distinctive formation millions of years ago when two volcanoes at different periods belched forth ash over hundreds of kilometers of primordial land - resulting in varied strata of mineral deposit; Time, weathering and specified chemical reaction allowed for the formation of an odd mixture of hard and soft rock. The roofs of the faerie-castles - their local metaphor, are therefore constituted by hard, oxidized mushroom-shaped helmets on top of softer,

sinewy looking, five-storey columns - their muscular forms easily sculpted into safe, functional dwelling places by their inhabitants – our discursive ancestors.

Indeed, the whole Anatolian region has been home to formative human settlements, and very probably one of the primary cradles of civilization, by all anthropological reckoning - a principal location in the Middle-Eastern spawning ground of Belief; Turkey, and its fated geographical positioning at the world's crossroads, has seen countless cultures conquered, colonized and absorbed by this malleable, and now consecrated ash. As such, beautiful Byzantium frescoes based upon Christian stories from the 11th-14th centuries A.D. rub shoulders with the crude excavations of original Hittite troglodytes, thousands of years B.C.. How many? who? and just what?… nobody quite knows, but their crude termite territories are their physiological and discursive testimony, for sure.

And the few hardy souls who inhabit still these cool interiors live much the way they always have, here, now - storing grapes and other fruits, livestock, poultry, farming implements, and other wherewithal necessary for completing their little farmsteads of pigeon coops, vineyards, apricot orchards and goat herds; all, replete and ripe for plucking, stomping, picking and milking; the apricots, dotted-orange midst an array of wildflowers unnoticed by seemingly repressed, darkly-clad Turkish women - sulking, suspicious, depressive -, riding on the backs of donkeys or in simple carts driven by dour men with moustaches, who become amazingly animated at any utterance of Dollars! Drinks! or Madonna!

And now, here, in Goreme, some two thousand years later, tourists too can rent these national monuments as accommodation given the recent building Renaissance during the latter part of the 20th century, when location lead budget travel burst, for better or worse, upon the international stage, and showing no sign of retreat. And the ancient resident families of Goreme indeed fight to keep pace with these changing winds of fortune, mostly with each other, I'm told, for referral privileges and the like. Their lodgings are aesthetically decked out now with fine arches, ramparts and regular rooms, and, yes, we chose to stay in one such dwelling and do cavemanly things; the vague, filtered light bouncing off the cheap Turkish carpets and machine stamped metalware elegantly holy with Islamic scripting, and off the fake crystal chandelier and fired–clay candlesticks – an experience to be savored as one sips a reasonably priced cocktail in the afterglow of evening.

In Goreme, we met and spoke in-depth to Zelda from Cape Town, one of the many unsuspecting foreign women who have fallen into these handsome troglodyte traps, I'm told - entombed by their sultanic Turkish husbands, the last of a long line of cave dwellers building still, for evermore; a conflicted unity of people besieged together in this holiday town which dies in the snows of winter - in the cataclysmic confluence of cultures… which is modern Turkey.

Supposedly democratic, but racked by civil strife and constant, debilitating infighting at the highest levels, I'm told; freedom, liberty and forced conscription for 18 months in Turkey… to protect Gandhi-like Ataturk's sacred Western edifice – Democracy!; where tender teddy bears dangle softly, lovingly in every bus and taxi, enshrined betwixt Christian cross, Islamic scripting to the Great Mystery, the Holy Virgin, and the Playboy-Rabbit; freedom, religion and forced conscription – a contradiction behind every grain of sand and ripening grape, in this dreamscape of Time.

In Ephesus -, an overnight bus journey away on the west coast, a splendid ruin of sensual, hand-sculptured torsos and pillars and amphitheatres, colonnades, cloth and decorative paintings, and the archeological site where an intact statuette of Priapus, the Greco-Roman god of procreation - guardian of gardens and vineyards, and personification of the erect penis, its form huge against his smaller body, a phallus life-support, seemingly, and the sensuous head of Alexander the Great, mighty warrior, leader of men and practicing homosexual, were both excavated from the microbial claws of Time - we encountered the Australasian alliance (ANZAC) with the Turk which only served to sharpen this sense of contradiction, further.

Indeed, many souls from Downunder make a sort of pilgrimage to Turkey, and, more specifically, to Gallipoli, that famous battle site resurrected cinematically in the 1980s, as Ataturk made a special point in forging a kindred spirit between the two democracies - both victims of imperialist machinations, and therefore, brothers in arms. Unfortunately, after some careful questioning of both national groupings, responses suggested extreme confusion as to the nature of the alliance - yet claim to be Aussie for one moment in Turkey, and you are treated like an old comrade. The fighting spirit, a discourse of compatriots - where it matters not who The Enemy! is (or might be), so long as there is one - seems to have joined the countries in Friendship… and War!

Furthermore, on questioning Zelda, a Turkish resident of many years, now, as to our tentative ethnographic observations that many Turkish women seemed depressed, yes, in the clinical sense - bent, bowed and miserable –, the men and women of the town appearing at odds with one another, the iron-rule of the one, the pathological counter-rule of the other, we found full support. The reality of this discursive pattern, reinforcing itself again and again, from multiple positions and perspectives: by our young tour guide, Alex, for example, in his early twenties, who befriended us and offered us the services of discrete Russian prostitutes outside the well patronized public house, who spoke of his parents' ongoing conflicts and his terror of marriage, the contracted caresses of Russian ladies preferable to the plaintive shackles of a symptomatic women for the remaining years of his life, he informed; and by the overworked pregnant mother of two who ran our troglodyte guesthouse, her husband out all night and sleeping all day, my brief reference to her seeming exhaustion worthy of her idealization and here husbands threatening

looks, even at the public house towards the close of our stay in Goreme - which he frequented as the desert bird the brook.

And it seemed to me, here, in Turkey, that old discursive patterns do indeed die hard, no matter their Contradiction, their Incongruence, their Disjunction… and, in turn, like it or not, make poor bedfellows; democracy and patriarchy; Madonna and yashmaks; Muslim cries over the town and lethal brews of rakkie (ouzo). So, one of the highest inflation rates in Europe, fear of the declining lira now calibrated in millions and devaluing ever further, uncertainty, confusion – who to be?… how to be?… what next?… makes the ancient Anatolia, cradling still civilization ever evolving - though slowly, one of the loveliest, fascinating, cheaper tourist destinations I have yet had the privilege of enjoying. We had a ball! Thank you Turkey, and give me a call if you need any discursive engineering.

# Bulgaria - The King’s Return

**July**

I was nervous crossing the border into the first of the Eastern Block countries given my internalized narratives surrounding Communism - Would I be meeting steely faced militarists hell bent on removing all pleasure from my life for all time? Would the border officials demand papers unexpectedly and act without justification and throw me into some horrible hell hole, on whim? Would grey, dank buildings gobble me up and spit me out onto the street, to be swept up by a conveyer belt of broomed-workers, wretches tethered forever to drudgery in an Inferno of sorts? Or, worse still, would the post-communist social fallout infect me like radiation poisoning, and twist me into some macabre slave or prostitute perhaps? I really didn't know what to expect!

But fact was stranger than fiction ...

We crossed into Bulgaria overland from Turkey, and were forced to complete hundreds of laborious forms... by the Turks! Indeed, the Bulgarians didn't seem much interested - our papers were in order, and that was it. We therefore continued our march along the kilometre or so of custom check posts balancing our luggage on our heads, African-style, in search of some or other form of transportation to Sophia, the capital of Bulgaria. Tired, sweating and panting, necks aching, we asked official after official for direction to a transport depot of sorts, surely... at the border post? They all pointed disinterestedly towards the vanishing horizon, dismissive and irritated at our interruption of their middle distance stares, their concentrated paper checking, or their avid conversations with uniformed colleagues, telephone liaisons, and the like.

We eventually chanced upon a little outpost of shops selling Pepsi, Miranda, and other brands of marketed chemical waste from the West. After a much needed catching of our breaths, we noticed a 70's style Mercedes Benz with sheepskin seat covers, driver yawning in shorts behind the wheel. We asked him if he knew how to get to Sofia which at that point seemed like some distant Oz. And thank all the gods, he did... in his taxi... and we should hurry as the train was leaving very shortly from a small town some 30 minutes from the border! We hurriedly ensconced ourselves in the fur and drove at breakneck speed through countryside which looked disappointingly like the South African highveld near Johannesburg, where I had spent most of my years growing up. It was also midsummer, and hot; I was beginning to feel at home. But not for long.

The train station was populated by aliens entirely unfamiliar with the English language or even the Roman alphabet, for that matter. Every destination on the minute station board encrypted in the Cyrillic code; that is, 'P's for 'R's, and dyslexic 'R's for 'A's, and so on. Their confusion may indeed have been understandable given our discursive divide but they unfortunately also lacked any

ability to decipher sign language, or make conceptual connections given contextual clues of any sort: a train... a timetable... a time... to their capital city... SOFIA... their proximity to the border post ... surely? I had experienced better inductive reasoning from children of five with learning problems. Their deficit was only shadowed by their extreme lack of interest - like bored mice emerging from dusty rooms with blinds, before disappearing mysteriously again through yet another grey door into the dusty depths of their labyrinth. I was beginning to suspect that the Bulgarians didn't have much of a service ethic...

We hung around for about 90 minutes before agreeing to yet another taxi ride - to Plovdiv, a bigger centre, the second largest city in Bulgaria which also happens to be en route to Oz. Similarly attired, our silent blimp of a driver sped through the highveld-like landscape and didn't abduct us. He did however intermittently detour (suspiciously!) between the square ramshackle houses, their red roofs fading in the heated-haze, balancing like cubed skittles: uniformed; decaying; falling.

On arrival in Plovdiv, we discovered that The Lonely Planet was out of date; the promised pension agency non-existent (and any logical street numbering!) and accommodation prices inflated. We had no choice - three star accommodation at US$70 had to suffice. We had catered for these kind of emergencies (or possible abductions) and were prepared for the worst like assiduous boy scouts. But what we weren't prepared for, however, was the offhand service from the woman at the reception desk: no choice of room, no preview or even discussion..., just a dangled key midst nail-filing, a steely gaze, and petulant mouth out of Rocky Horror. A veritable Super-Model; make up, designer wear and attitude to match. Indeed Vogue should have been out recruiting in Plovdiv! Wherever one turned, dark-headed beauties abounded; long-legged and booted, strutting in miniskirts and snarling: "Gnaw!" or "Klozed! or "Feenish!" whenever any feasible opportunity presented itself.

This impression of Bulgarian female domination continued the following day whilst touring the art gallery, a few museums and main city squares. Paintings, drawings, old and new, revealed rough renditions of female angels, wings a-fluttering, cheering despondent soldiers, looking decidedly plaintive and battle weary, framed next to miserable looking farmers, crops burnt, destroyed, gazing heavenwards towards the Angels: hopeless male souls seeking solace from female forms dangling salvation like the missing Christ in the booty of their embracing bosoms.

So too, massive sculptures in city squares supported giant angels promising salvation from thrusting breasts beneath crowned heads symbolizing the indestructible Motherland - forever uniting Bulgaria in their squeezes - Nurturing Nationalism!, if you like. This Unconscious (implicit) Discursive Theme seemed reinforced repeatedly from different positions, in different media, in different institutions, and through different ages: a narrative artifact discovered replete. Yet decidedly Alive! if the Bulgarian-booted brigade were any indication.

And living too around the neck of every one of these scantily clad vamps, as they moved expressionless from hair salon to cosmetic shop, from manicure to pedicure, while absentmindedly waitressing in skirts even too short for the most rebellious schoolgirl, while impatiently unlocking museum doors closed during hours indicated open on boards adjacent - hung a small crucifix nuzzling. Religion breathing still between those wanton mounds; alive and well in Bulgaria, it seemed... and always has been.

These ideas were supported on closer account analysis conducted a few days later during conversation with befriended locals, suggesting a persistent Bulgarian Christian Orthodox allegiance despite the failed Communist regime's attempt to stamp out any vestige of spiritual sponsoring for the Here-and-Now or the Here-After. What I was told in hushed tones at Sunday School was indeed true, it seems: school-going children were actively dissuaded from religious practice... The State! was all. But guess what...? surprise, surprise..., these same children, now young adults, nodded and blinked, as expected of bright-eyed innocents, during the all powerful sermon delivered in Red from classroom pulpits ... and then went home, and under Mother's insistent guidance, of course, said Grace before supper and their Prayers before bedtime.

Here, in Bulgaria, no Bibles needed to be smuggled in by diligent Christians from the West with nothing better to do. No satin white carrier pigeons strapped with precious Gospel cargo were required to fly across borders hostile in the wake of Godless fury. Christianity was very much alive and very, very well indeed. Clearly discourse dies hard. It might vanish from sight but only waits its turn before once again resurrecting itself - a Collective Unconscious made Conscious. But only if Teacher! Mother! or some other arbiter of right action allows; like seeds in a desert awaiting the rain's return.

This was made abundantly clear a week or so later - in Veliko-Turnovo, the ancient capital of the Bulgarian Kings, a few hours bus ride from Sofia... Yes, we eventually got there.

Sofia reminded us of Cape Town's CBD but without the sea; we were a little disappointed, expecting a great cultural capital of Europe and found, rather, mediocre restaurants and cafes with eternities of bad service next to clubs emitting weary Western BASH!BASH!BASH! boogies. Over the next few days, however, we did discover a wonderful exhibition of Egon Schiller's paintings together with a collection of Gustav Klimt's drawings at the museum of foreign art. The latter included studies and preparations for the masterful paintings I had only appreciated as prints previously. Scrutinizing the living artifacts of these modern masters of Western art - up close and personal - was indeed exciting; the deeper aesthetic structures often hidden in reprints emerged like fingerprints under the detective's brush.

Similarly, we enjoyed an excellent performance of contemporary dance by a Bulgarian company who resurrected Vivaldi's very tired Four Seasons by subtly fusing the narrative injections of post-modernist styles with cryptic political and social comment. The performance would have been the

poorer for not including the distinctive Marxist related themes which blew through the choreography like a cold wind: the bitter winter of Communist artistic and creative suppression, biting rotten the limbs of artists forced to devote their considerable talent and heritage to the mindless glorification of The State! before re-awakening through a springtime of innovative freedom; though, and it must be said, the antithetical narrative strands enriching the tapestry of movement as each season enriches the other - through necessary juxtaposition.

Bulgaria was indeed beginning to display its hidden gems despite the performance taking place in the most confusing theatre complex I have ever had the misfortune to try and enter, navigate and find a seat! It was built at the height of the Communist reign as a public amenity, yet the locals still find it just as confusing, I am told. It is situated in one of the many sprawling parks in Sofia which now harbor desperate muggers after dark, who hide amongst the great Communist sculptures - some edifices five storeys high - which attempted, once upon a time, to persuade the general populace of the dictum's of Das Kapital. Now Manifesto Mottos have been torn off, inscribing rude scars midst muscled bodies building, squared chins thrust upward, Determined! Here, there is no cosmetic patching, only scars with no replacement slogans - only half-hearted graffiti screaming "Joint!" "Hate Japs!" "Punk Rules!" and the like; bad copies of Western defacement, like the hairstyles and lingerie, and local stores filled with cheap liquor and cigarettes, and little else.

These scars seem deeply felt by the young who shared openly their sense of futility and pessimism for the future of Bulgaria: corruption chewing like a wart virus resistant to all radiation, thriving rather on the fallout manure. Corruption!; a discursive template repeated from a century past for securing the natural imperative to Self-Determination, understandable then... but crippling now the young who still feel victims of those macro-powers Believed Bigger than themselves, like sad talent awaiting a Spring; yet another legacy of their discursive past... waiting ...waiting... waiting... for something bigger than themselves to show them the way... like the Democratic Party elected after the fall of Communism (failed!), like the Re-Elected Communist Party after the fall of the Democratic (failed!), like the returning Bulgarian King whose party won by a landslide in the most recent election.

From Sophia, we moved on to a much needed rest in Veliko-Turnovo, now a charming university town, sprawled ruddy-orange lichen-like; fired-clay roof-tiles undulating along vertical cliffs, every tile different as a richly textured old violin breathing. This seminal town is rooted-redly along a few horseshoe bends of a river; a watery rope folding back and forth upon itself, and fast flowing tributary of the Danube, that mighty East European artery. Altogether quaint, truly, its green lush surrounding monasteries, churches, wholly medieval castles and forts aplenty; renovated interiors Bulgarian black - Bible Black - with glowing scenes from the sacred scriptures of this Orthodox Christian line; distinctive, proud and Branded Bulgarian. A Brand hard fought for in savage battles

of old; won with God's support, naturally, to protect His Word, so I'm told. His ultimate protectors - exchanging Good for Good: Righteousness for Rain; Rectitude for Rein; Reverence for Reign - The Bulgarian Kings! The ancestors of the present dynasty; Slavic wolves defending jealously their rightful land, their Motherland.

On arrival in this ancient capital, once principal seat of Bulgaria, I immediately attended the local poly-clinic to have an awkward mole removed from between my very upper thigh and scrotum (as I say, "Awkward!"), given persistent rubbing and chafing during touring activity. I sat and waited in line for service, like all the other patients, elderly folk mainly, limping with stick in one hand and a full carrier bag of doctor-tipping goodies in the other. After being escorted from one cheerless room to the next, expressionless heads shaking and fingers pointing ever further down the passage, or to the next floor, I eventually lay legs splayed like Little Red Riding Hood on her wedding night discussing the pros and cons of virginal conception in sign language. The operation was somewhat laborious – doc. decked out with surgical mask and all, nurse knife ready with determined lips... to remove a mole?

The operation was a rip-roaring success, no doubt, and feeling local-anaesthetic sleepy, watched mouthlessly as a large Bureaucratic Matriarch brandishing a thick book of treatment pricelists, descended from the administrative halls above and spent a long time arguing with the diligent doc.. Like a chastised child he blushingly pointed at my passport, mentioned "foreigner" and kind of... "Why don't we just say he's Bulgarian"... while the Alpha Female continued shaking her head, perusing persistently through spectacles flashing florescent. But after a long... long time, and on hearing I was prepared to pay hard cash, no insurance policies, social security or whatever, Mama Bureaucrat eventually capitulated, and as she left, he smiled shyly and said: "Boss!", and I nodded, saying, "I know"... We both laughed. It seemed a pity that he had no choice but to be shackled to socialism; he'd indeed make a Fortune! in the West: a true medical showmen with sales skills to boot.

Recovering, limpingly, I could see from our two star hotel overlooking this lovely land, in the distance, the center of the village: a folded island of cliffs - dead center - an ideal observatory for wolves; a watch tower. And on this pivot, a new Art Gallery has been freshly erected, from scratch, like a church of old, similarly fashioned but not a church. And at the very core of this pivot of cliffs, is a giant sculpture of Four Horseman - built in the 1980s before the Communist Crumble, and depicting Four Bulgarian Kings; those Father's of the nation who wrestled control from other packs who challenged, and who emerged victorious as distinctive genetic lines from the 1300s through four proud dynasties, thus taking their rightful place amongst the tribes of Europe. And in the center of these towering monuments, handle horizontal, pointing razor sharp towards heaven, is a Mighty Sword shaped as an inverted Crucifix. And standing clutching a human infant beneath this inverted form, beneath a perfectly proportionate Crucifix, at least in

appearance, is a woman - Mother Bulgaria - so the curator of the Art Gallery informed, depicted as in every church, in every fort, and in the substantial iconography of the many...many ecclesiastical artifacts on show at the local ethnographic museum, as Madonna & Child.

# Romania – Medieval Madness

**July-August**

The train to Sighisoara - the birthplace of Vlad Tepes better known to you and I as Count Dracula, was filled with holidaymakers thronging in vast droves. In every conceivable space surrounding the many villages through which we passed; on highway verges and traffic islands; under thick cabled pylons; along pristine river banks; on concrete storm drains - were the Romanians. A people who understand their genetic line as emerging in ancient Rome, were now a mass of summer bodies for all the world to see - white naked; tangled together in tangas tanning; frying like pale sausages turning first red then brown as the Gypsies whose unmistakable genetic stamp burst out boldly intermittent; a different strain on the people-scape - Romania, their homeland. The Romany: fond folk of Western freedom-fantasy; origins traced to the ancient Hindu people, their rituals and way of life akin to the Harridan Caste, the wandering Untouchables; and Outcastes too in Romania since times medieval. And their respective stories, Romanians - fused together mysteriously with Myth and Magic, the Muslim, Orthodox Christianity, Communism and an emerging Democracy and Free-Market economy... and, most certainly, with Collective Madness too!

We avoided the Romanian capital, Bucharest given shady reports in the Lonely Planet, and instead, made our way directly to Sighisoara from the station having arrived by train from Bulgaria. The town is a perfectly preserved Medieval Monument complete with cobbled streets; a clock tower perched above stone walls and Roman arches; Gothic-grey Lutheran and other churches; two or three storey dwellings with roofs low slung like burnt-orange boats capsized and decorated with witch's hat turrets and chimneys, a distinctive Romanian medieval architectural style, and patterned with overlapping shingles like dragon hide. And within these old walls on a hill overlooking the larger town, more modern without but preserved medieval within, are cobbled squares filled with people moving about - children playing; folk selling beverages and meats on sticks; souvenir shops; tourists, beggars, priests and artists... - A Breughel painting; a stage-prop medieval with modern actors acting out scripted stories.

And here collective madness brews anew as Dracula! The Devil's namesake. Count Dracula!, a medieval mass hysteria re-written along with Wolves and Witches and Demons and other evils of rural superstition active as story during the East-European Dark Ages. Yet this tale from over one and a half thousand years ago is alive and breeding still in the new millennium despite the fact that Bram Stoker's vampire chronicle is a work of purest fiction, written in Ireland and stoked with unreliable tales of Transylvanian medieval history whispered by his Hungarian homosexual lover

in the late 19th Century. Yet Drac is indeed Bac! in his cradle at Sighisoara and his castle at Bran; a castle historians tell us he never even visited!

But that does not indeed deter droves of tourists from around the globe from visiting afresh Bran Castle, a few hours train ride from Sighisoara with its Dracula Market selling wacky wares of all descriptions - toothed masks dripping blood, bat-hats and devil-horned caps, and clay castles patina-ed old. The market together with the adjacent reconstructed medieval village feed like greedy crows beneath the castle's dark shadow and the ever gloomy Transylvanian sky on the applauding audience twisting like steamy entrails in long queues amongst the greenery of the lichen-laced, moisture-mossed European forest. Indeed the ousted Communist government identified Bran Castle from among many others as being sufficiently Dracula-like to warrant substantial renovation and attract a tourist clientele... - despite it only ever being a 15th Century fortification protecting a sensitive trade route, and later, home to the Romanian royal family. A modern myth manufactured; deliberate discourse constructed shamelessly!

And the people come... in hordes... hungry for Medieval Madness; vampires sucking maidens dry in the eternal kiss of death: Mortido Manifest - frustrated libido living still in Imagination Unconscious, or so Freud would have us tell. That is, adult infants morbidly attached to their maternal breast; unsatisfying sweet milk of Life sucked empty and breasts bitten bleeding; blood as milk sustaining Life turned Bad Object!

But perhaps now, a modern explanation, better informed by genetics: simply, hunting… gathering mammals eating; the genetic program of old and young homo sapiens alike, harnessing vital bio-chemical ingredients; sustaining species-specific nutrients supporting Physiology, that Chariot of Consciousness…, and of Discourse. Like the tourists chewing masturbatory gum as they wander through the Disneyland of Halls, photographing one another's smiles baring canines in aped grimaces, before the flash of the flash entombs their transient shapes and forms like the living dead onto silver-ions or digital coding rearranged as image - though, most certainly, slowly fading… eventually…, into the indifferent kiss of Time sucking like Gravity, always; or like the young families on holiday enjoying the Jack and the Beanstalk creepers ascending walls, and hanging like the African baboons of my wild childhood seen and feared in the gorges and hills of my homeland from balconies securing vantaged-vistas – and like our genetic isomorphs, the towers erected high for spotting The Enemy's! attack; Attack! ever imminent, genetically programmed vigilance ensuring the Survival of the Most Cooperative species, and, it must be said, individual members of those species.

The Enemy! always out there... always, always Territorial; an Imperative - as center is to sphere; and point is to pyramid - like bacteria, or like beans, or giants, or dragons plummeting to Earth, always tugged by Gravity's Force. Where upon another time, these same mostly trustworthy beans and bacteria pulled lovingly to Earth, germinate once again together with their attendant

stories, always, sustaining the next generation of horror movie-addicts, and bookworms, who become once again members of secret vampire societies and patronize the Medieval Pageant held at Sighisoara during our stay, and held every year during the summer. These, all, Primitive Enemies recast; re-synthesized into stories scary: pierced jugulars by sucking vampires replace real threats of chiseled predatory canines, saber-tooth cats now remembered, fleetingly, as stone; or human-hand manufactured spears from competing, fellow tribes, or dissident members of our own, Piercing! - like those that tore through the sacred flesh of Jesus, so I'm told...; or the panacea stakes that pierce the bloodless hearts of the Living Dead in Dracula Stories! I'm told…; releasing, mercifully, the Life Immortal… - into the Blissful Oblivion, the Nirvana of Death; where Mortido lies still and black as a subterranean ocean thick with dissolved salts, and adding taste to Life - its flavor lost in the tedium of immortality as the Black Hole centers our Galaxy; and as the Big-Bang pea-kernel relies upon Anti-matter for its very being, and Ours - or so I'm told; and as the breathing dead cease their dull living in Medieval Madness resurrected, and it must be said – Unconsciously!

Our species forever in the grip of Biology; that is, Ethology - not the instinctual drives of fixated neonatal oral-libido, of Freud's Unconscious - this too a late 19th Century story-line; a fiction created along with Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde, Dracula, Frankenstein, The Fall of the House of Usher, and other Gothic novels, novellas and stories of all kinds: a Gothic pseudo-science. Yet Psychoanalysis too has a modern following of converts, the story breeding still. Our species, forever preserving its Kind, its Stories, its Beliefs... driven biological imperatives Unconscious like lizards... cloaked as Religion, cloaked as Medicine, cloaked as Purity, cloaked as stories of all kinds, and adopted... even Genocide, re-adopted, here, now, anew.

Indeed Neo-Fascism breathes bestial in the Romanian south, in the small villages; Medieval Monuments mixed modern and home to three young Romanians and a peripatetic Englishman visiting – intelligent, English-speaking, and our companions in the Fagaras mountains for almost a week...

We met them at repeated intervals on our journey from Sighisoara in the populated lowlands to the hutted hiking trails amongst Romania's highest peaks – our destinies somehow intertwined in strange synchronicity. Heavy rain and hailstorms unwanted created dangerous paths murdering only days before two unsuspecting hikers, plummeting to their deaths in the jagged jaws of the indifferent mountain. Home to wolves who run wild, and enjoying the rare privilege of witnessing, empirically, their existence, as two beautiful creatures: one hunting, striding strong overland; the other, purest white above in a craggy tower, watching; a lupine couple together, a duet band; and together with Kale and I, our hair wet with mountain shower, we all embraced the morning. A dangerous place; Eternal; Mystical... a place where Nature Demands Respect!

Forced indoors together, the conversation alive and animated, competent and skilful, all of us curiously sniffing out the other... assessing; checking; defining; a circumstantial alliance against our mutual enemy gnawing bitter outside.

The two couples - Addy & Christina; Matthew & Lavinia - had known each other for many years, and all under the age of 23, were on university summer vacation, a respite from Computer Science, Economics, Fine Arts and Law, respectively. The girls were dark and attractive; Addy short-cropped bottle-blond hair and blue-eyes; Matthew red-haired and very English. Not wanting to miss this golden opportunity for solid account analysis, I asked the foursome early on in our meeting whether they believed Romania to be improved since the fall of the Communist House. Indeed, they all did. I had expected this response. Addy's next comment however took me entirely by surprise. That is, Romania would embrace a best possible future through Fascism! as outlined in Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler! - Addy's Master-Plan for Romanian Renewal - Kill all the Gypsies, Jews and Hungarians, from the youngest gestating fetus to the oldest living member on crutches! He truly believed this. The two females Fully Agreed! since the Gypsies were dangerous thieves! pimps! pushers! charlatans! ... and study scholarship favorites in the new democracy; this odious mob, they believed, invading the length and breadth of Europe with foul expansionist plots. And Jews and Hungarians..., money-mongering sponges who gave nothing but debt back to Romania! When I asked them how one might spot a Gypsy in the crowd, they answered immediately, knowing exactly how: "By the smell, of course! By the stench! The overpowering smell of shit! By the bad shit smelling!" And this said like wolves with voices, marking territory; discursive fences, gates and ditches - demarcating social identity.

Addy dismissed American culture as a decadence and included psychotherapy in his denouncement. Americans he believed unequivocally a nation of arrogant mongrels (and he used this very word) who spent their time forcing the world to follow democracy pretended; simply disguised expansionism. As a thorough-bred Romanian, of pure blood, uncontaminated by mongrel-mixture and two thousand years of history purifying his aristocratic breath - he believed that Americans should keep their place! And like Milosevich, the Yugoslav Bosnian-Butcher now currently on trial for Crimes Against Humanity - whom he fully supported and considered a misunderstood American pawn, he was prepared to die to preserve his breed. He was prepared to pay the highest cost of all, like Jesus... although he also dismissed any form of religiosity outright, with yet another waive. His parents had been firm supporters of Communism and he together with them agreed with anti-religion sentiments. The girls too found religion repugnant; screwing up their noses when the subject was broached directly or tangentially in the conversation.

Like a cross-cultural television talk show in a wet tent, on cold wet earth - the girls the adjudicating audience - moderate Matthew's skillful retorts together with our circular questioning

refined evermore Addy the Romanian Aristocrat's beliefs. His discursive world emerged slowly like ancient coffins excavated from a tomb of tribal savages buried en mass: His parents forceful idealists in constant battle with their two boys; the younger fighting an ever losing battle through scholastic rebellion, and Addy through embracing Fascism. His parents supported his beliefs as do many Romanians, though by no means all, but feared for his safety given that few passionate Fascists remain alive for long. Entirely unconscious of the tautology of their belief - Forced Righteousness! - the family battled on constantly. And in this discursive incubator, this narrative matrix, this meta-story-line hatched nihilism as Nationalism - as Genocide!

Genocide: a religion renewed - this old god re-invented and once again, worthy of sacrifice fought: a tautology of madness millennia long. In the name of some or other cause the tribes of Europe must battle on for Supremacy - Unconscious and Unknowing still, many, it seems. And authoritarian parenting, the intolerance of difference, the active Creation of Evil through the invocation of righteousness - as in Romanian Christian Orthodoxy; as in Communist Dictatorship; or as in the Nazi Fascist questing for the pure, golden-haired thoroughbred - its discursive origins founded on a lost Atlantis, on the Atlantis conjectured and penned as real by Plato, that arbiter of Right Knowledge! respected so by his Greek and Roman disciples, though utterly Erroneous!, it must be said, as supported by all modern investigations. And, as practicing homosexual, as were many of Plato's fellows before marriage, Plato chose to remain single and solitary and father instead stories of idyllic Atlantis and the concept of The Soul, almost 400 years before Christ - with all its resulting consequences for the world, and indeed, Romania; consequences for the eternal fight for genetic supremacy in Europe, like the nips and snarls of alpha male and female wolves, the royal breeding couple, like Medieval Kings and Queens, and modern movie-stars battling the media - the fight continues.

A genetic program reinforced through discourse chosen; unlike Buddhist Pacifism, unlike Tibetan turning with the force of the Chinese blow, so harnessing its power and the spreading of the Dalai Lama's discursive seeds across our planet, and, probably, one day, across our solar system and galaxy, and even beyond; or the deliberate dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa which breathes, even now, as you read, to a wholly majority government – here, in the Romanian south, Forced Righteousness! persists beyond reason. And so Freud's Repetition Compulsion is here understood anew - as patterns of force repeated endlessly, collectively, and interpersonally; that is, when disguised and unconscious, madness breeds anew... like Count Dracula's immortal kisses... into stories lived by the living dead; agency-less; change-less; life-less; joy-less.

This truth observed again, in Sibiu, another medieval village visited on our circuit to the Fagaras and back to Sighisoara for the Medieval Pageant, where medieval madness represented itself in yet another form. Here, a mother and adult son in his early twenties passed us in the street – both elegantly dressed. Far too elegant. Too elegant for 2pm on the public square. Inappropriate: her

fine red lace; signal red dress; red siren shoes; wide hat sweeping red sideward - a basket of red flowers; gold jewelry flashing danger as a reptile's color code, her crucifix jeweled red and hung huge about her aging neck like an axe. Her son, hippo-arsed and overfed; shaven-head, bum-clean; an overdressed plum-pudding in matching red-purple tie and trousers' cuffed with black-bowler shoes; and another monstrous crucifix, lancing tie and finest cotton shirt together; an over-scrubbed infant shining like a Christmas cracker. A dyad inappropriately tethered still. He, following Mama in Red, frightened of every word; of Hell! and Eternal Damnation! Development arrested by forced-fear mediated through discourse; mediating by belief like Dracula sucking.

And quite by chance we happened to meet up again in a coffee shop some thirty minutes later. And Red Mama, aligned with both God and Stalinist State – Unequivocal Red Crucifix Flashing - snatches her cell-phone after hearing me complain about the poor service by the waitress, and speaking a mixture of English and Romanian, calls the Police! She found my attitude far too forward for a foreigner: "Throw him in Jail!" she demanded. She was most surprised when the police put down the phone. But not as surprised as I.

Indeed madness breeding... mad women in Romania, many...many if Lavinia's testimony is anything to go by, this, despite Addy's dismissal of psychotherapy: "Just get on with it!", he had said... And yet on the other side of the square, a little later on that day in Sibiu, another woman, in her late forties; thinnest T-shirt and no bra; hair-cut crooked; disheveled; shouting obscenities at the restaurant bouncer in Romanian for some forty minutes, midst giggles from the diners. We watched as the two players acted out another game of force; her shrieks becoming ever louder and more obscene as judged by the tittering crowd; his physicality heavier, more and more brutal; eventually shunting her like a train coach to the back of the restaurant; he returned with blood on his shirt, disappearing quickly to change. She continued to goad him from a distance before disappearing into the wings of the medieval stage once again, the lesson unlearned.

And around the corner, a lovely Romanian Orthodox church that indeed brought tears to my eyes, its loveliness so poignant: a glittering of glimmering goldenness outlining masterful frescoes and motifs; rococo revisited; lamps golden and threaded bronze; Turkish domes with suns swirling; great ceramic bowls filled with fresh flowers from mountain meadows; Christs and crosses gilded and woven meticulously into wreaths and watered scenes of mountains with craggy cliffs biting. And in the great open space of the golden whale womb typical of Romanian Orthodox churches, the people stood in queues for Mass; for the transubstantiation of wine and bread turned Holy in the yellowed halos of light pouring in through the high domed circles of stained-glass at the very highest levels of the interior; reflections bouncing exponentially off one another; refracted eternal dances of light; light lighting paintings, people and priests frocked black as night alike. And the doors of the inner sanctum were open then, and on the alter full of gold and silver toys polished to a brilliance making it difficult to see clearly; to see clearly the model churches, the miniature

golden cows and sheep and angels, or the silver gifts of the Three Wise Men frozen in story as props on a stage. And once mass was finished, after all the Saints had been kissed, after Mother Mary had been acknowledged as the Divine Mother, like Diana in ancient Greece and Rome, and Ma-Kali in contemporary India, once the thronging crowd had thinned - the priest in midnight black closed firmly shut the doors of that sacred inner sanctum with determined force, righteously! No evil like Genocide, Dracula, or his grim servants, The Wolves! could enter, here. The children remained safe. The rules clear; constant; enforced for millennia, now.

Once back in Sighisoara, on the first night of the pageant, as an opening ritual, we attended the Lutheran Church's organ recital performed by one of Romania's most accomplished musicians. This stark edifice raw next to the Romanian Orthodox visual orchestration, yet the auditory modality similarly inspiring Mystical Experience; and augmented nevertheless by incongruous Turkish-Islamic carpets hung neutrally as decoration, their symbolic meanings uninformed but there nevertheless - unconsciously. The carpets, an earlier discursive appeasement during invasion ensuring survival; roots forgotten but lending still warmth to the repertory. The Minister, simply dressed as an admin-clerk holding his Bible, firmly, like a precious file; from which he read in German at intervals between the Voluntary and Fugue; his eyes, passionate and twitching.

We saw him again later on in the crowd, while walking through the hordes of youngsters sporting Dracula masks and devil-horned caps; T-Shirts with marijuana leaf logos and "Life's a Bitch and then you Die!" slogans; bottles of heavy alcohol in the one hand and cigarette in the other; leather belts with studs and hair shot through grim green and potty pink; shaven scalps and poorest peroxiding; and amongst them, irritated residents with dark rings under their eyes pulled by champion pit bull terriers on strong leads, collars spiked inwards - a misshapen flock celebrating 2000 years of Romanian breeding. And principal player in this modern-medieval crowd - this dialogical but mismatched seeming mass of people talking publicly and privately - the Lutheran Minister, clutching his black bound Bible eyes ablaze... the saving of souls a tough job indeed, most certainly, in the birth place of Count Dracula!

And then the Pageant ended with an Apocalyptic Bang!... With a fireworks display at the finale of that great epic poem from the Middle Ages, The Camina Burana, rendered anew by the 20th Century composer Karl Orff as that great piece of music from The Old Spice television advert. An adequate performance by middle aged men and women who had the unenviable task of delivering refined discords, arias, recitatives and complex string, percussion and wind solos to an audience mostly under 23 years old. They struggled through, heroically, like epic demi-gods waged against by that enemy, Outrageous Fortune!; from one aria to the next, midst aped vocalizations from the audience; mocked and taunted by blond-boys fresh out of school and the two Gypsies embracing in the trodden grass underfoot. But the Gypsies and the boys remained until the very end of the performance... The Gypsies becoming more meditative as time passed,

seeming to be lulled by the music; the boys, remaining jocular and raucous until the very last frenzied sky rocket exploded like an atomic warhead above the medieval town preserved as a living monument on the hill.

# Hungary - Cultured Corruption

**August**

Visiting Budapest, the Hungarian capital, was like perpetual dining at the very finest restaurant in Europe, off the most delicate hand-crafted Hungarian porcelain, gold-gilded butterflies and flowers with colours like stained-glass and named after Queen Victoria, the proud owner of the first set over a century ago; cutlery, antique silverware filigreed to perfection resting on an immaculate embroidered tablecloth, napkins stitched and rings engraven with the crests of Kings; on a mixed salad of the choicest edibles - fresh - sprinkled with croutons, and assorted cheeses, yellow and white, hard and soft, exotic nuts crushed over quail eggs nested between greens both home grown and flown in at speed from the greater Europe; - with the vilest effluence from the Danube as dressing!

The haughty arrogance of the citizens of Budapest at first seemed quite appropriate as the city is most certainly as elegant and regal as we were led to believe, by the many... many reports from varied sources. Yet if one considers that Budapest is on the curve of the Danube, nestled at the outer edge of the Roman Empire, and conquered and re-conquered again and again over two millennia, an aristocratic city, the seat of Kings, and a sensitive European nexus - a cultural pivot through which the great civilizations of western, central and eastern Europe have passed, depositing their art, their science, their craft - and their grime, one considers that this justification might not read the case.

And perhaps this divided loyalty - as a bastion of the highest achievements of European cultural endeavours, and the constant and persistent tide of attack and assimilation, invasion and incorporation - explains rather, why restaurant owners and waiters schemed together and bullied unsuspecting foreign diners such as ourselves; why fellow audience members at opera and ballet concerts mocked and tittered behind their hands; why exorbitant art gallery visits revealed no viewing chairs and inoperable installation art pieces, and even less reparative interest; and why all accommodation related information by agencies and reception personnel alike was either flagrantly amiss or creatively embellished upon actual delivery. And that when these handsome - well tanned, oiled... and gymed-up - fashion mannequins were challenged by our forced reciprocal positioning!, they simply dismissed the matter, with a surly flap of their manicured hands, and said in close to perfect English: ”Oh! That's Europe in the summer...” Was I dreaming or did they believe this mistreatment their God given right? Later account analysis checked out this possible explanation for our Outrage! counter-transference (of the ethnographic kind) given their abusive behaviour and discursive history, and real animal defensiveness given our limited budget! - and the case indeed obtained.

As the first country in the eastern block to resist the Communist dictatorship in the late 1950s, the Magyars, the original Hungarian tribe, demonstrated their unerring mettle. Since the 1300s, the Magyars have ... eventually, warded off all other competitors to their land, nicely centred in Europe, replete with erupting hotsprings from faults in the fertile Earth's crust, and watered by the sensual muscularity of the Danube and its myriad off-spring. A land worth fighting to protect and maintain; whatever the cost...

And these sentiments are plainly stated on the audio-guide recording provided at the Cathedral of St Matthias, wedged beneath the Royal Palace and overlooking the Danube, and seminal home to the Hungarian Catholic church and housing a picture of an enormous King cradling a diminutive Christ in his arms... no, NOT the other way round! The King is stronger and altogether considerably more God-like in appearance than Christ; The Saviour, rather, a dying, bleeding vassal... seeming. The King, however, is supposed to be God the Father, although garbed out exactly as his mortal Hungarian correlative on Earth.

The opulent King's Palace, now a national history museum and art gallery, is an off-white stone construction drizzled blue-green by the oozing tarnish which flows from the shields of bronzed roof-plating, statues of giant vultures, and reindeer slayers proudly coveting their quarry at the edges of expansive courtyards and balconies overlooking the city. Both constructions – palace and cathedral, have been re-stored; re-novated; re-built; re-constituted; re-furbished; and re-invented for the 21st Century - both lying smooth and sleek, horizontal and vertical, an X and Y Axis of power; palace domes round, cathedral turrets funneled and pointed as the steeple - and tethered together now on the city's west bank by strings of visitors. And still clinging to both cathedral and palace, re-constructive scaffolding climbing like cubist cobwebs obscuring – skewly, the deliberate symmetry of the architectural discourse of the year 1898 - the year of The Magyar millennium celebrations and the culmination of the general beautification project aimed at the embellishment of Budapest's buildings, in the hope of providing the Hungarian aesthetic edge in Europe, a kind of architectural cold-war... Yet only a half a century later, during the German occupation in World War II, bombing raids by the Allied Forces rather aimed towards their destruction... And only to be restored once again for the steady stream of tourists who drift into these re-newed relics like spawning sturgeon in summer, their black wallets over-flowing eggs bursting in the mouths of the awaiting caviar fisherman, well rehearsed and expectant, sharpening their knives and licking their red, cherubim lips in anticipation.

And on the east bank of the Danube, directly opposite - almost, the Parliamentary Seat; easily mistaken for a giant cathedral, a larger St Matthias, and similarly decked out in white Restoration masonry - a deft array of cemented crochet {laced; frilled}, woven together with dribbling blue-green figures and figurines from classical mythology. And on the other side of the Danube, St Matthias parades similar fine statues of The Saints; Jesus; Mary; and a very ordinary looking God

the Father - and of course, the magnificent Magyar dynasty Heroes: deified and glorified; the Divine Succession of Kings; their position indubitable; Absolute Rulers of Hungary, I'm told, and... dare I say, The Universe!

And in their wake, their descendants, the people of The Magyar, the tribe now the citizens of Budapest and our hosts, take up their rightful positions as Europe's elite, no matter their contribution - as bus driver, gallery attendant, usher, receptionist or waiter... And not a morsel passes your lips and down your gullet without a raised eyebrow checking your manners, the position of knife and fork on plate between mouthfuls or between sips of wine or while chatting. Nor does one piece of uncoordinated clothing go unnoticed; or a sweaty forehead; unkempt shoes; a missed morning shave; or bad breath... And always a dignified dismissal sweeps the object of their disdain subtly aside - as has occurred once too often to themselves - the Mighty Magyar! - by the Turks, Austrians, Germans, Russians... and the list goes on... before their subtle defences kicked in, once again, to restore what is rightfully theirs. Their infallible ability to absorb cultural intrusion and re-invent it as Art, as Culture..., or Corruption..., whatever their fancy..., remains undisturbed as the geometry underlying the ripples of water patterned in the converging, buffeting wake of sightseeing vessels which continually ply the Danube weighted down by foreigners with cameras.

This Hungarian creative intelligence is clearly indicated by the long list of master composers such as Bartok and Lizst, the constant stream of concert violinists and pianists invited to perform at the great music venues of the world for centuries, the high representation of Nobel Laureates in physics, and, similarly, distinguished mathematicians, and not forgetting their association with Einstein... But now here lies the rub - it took all the efforts of the egalitarian Americans to seat the horde of pugnacious, competitive Hungarian physicists in one room in order to mediate knowledge sharing so that the atomic bomb (which helped put an end to World War II and, hopefully, its often thought, to all wars) could be built. Were it not for this mediatory intervention, it seems that the Hungarian geniuses would still be jostling for position as number one...!

Of what? ... I ask myself... For what? To be King of the Universe? Or is their eternal interpersonal challenging just an ongoing defensive measure against persistent cultural intrusion; a discursive practice serving physiological protection of Life and Territory. A constant mobilization of the Territorial Imperative; a hyper vigilance; now beyond need but internalized nevertheless and turned against themselves (a hell of a pressure being Hungarian in Budapest!), each other (account analysis indicates the same interpersonal positioning between Hungarians), and the rest of the world (through cultural elitism). A defensive strategy so internalized that Hungarians just can't see the picture for the technique; hear the melody for the trills and tricks; know the belief from the rhetoric and the ramble; or differentiate the corruption from the winning... At every point:

a rip-off and loser-contempt (so I'm told, by the people themselves); a meta-belief - Always: May The Best Person WIN and The Rest Be DAMNED!

Hardly surprising then that Communism sustained an early blow by the Magyar, and even less surprising that the only public vestige of the Marx-Engels legacy is at Statue Park - a ferociously marketed installation art piece on the outskirts of the city: Arrival at a symbolic Berlin Wall; it leads nowhere, after walking along a gravel path artfully designed as a succession of figured eights representing the ubiquity of Communist ideology, and populated with Communist propaganda statues dislodged from the streets of Budapest after the fall; and centred around bright red flowers planted in the shape of the soviet star. Yes, an aesthetic amusement park - over-marketed and mis-represented as judged by the comments in the visitor's book and the unreasonable entrance fee.

Yet perhaps this labyrinthine interpretation of Communism has a deeper root, as does the Hungarian preoccupation with Labyrinths more generally - such as those in mathematical proofs, and the system of artful passages, chambers and stairways burrowed deep beneath the Royal Palace which too is constellated as a labyrinth in which the visitor can lose and re-find themselves. Once refuge against the ever present Enemy! intruding, this secretive sanctuary is now yet another tourist attraction: A journey through time - Stone Age through to Information Age; from Monoliths, Reindeer Worship and Early Christianity through to imprints of cell phones and lap-tops and giant coca-cola bottles as would be artifacts discovered by possible archaeological investigators in some future time.

But looking back in time through the matrix of Hungarian discursive history, at the trajectory of their narrative evolution, as an outsider looking in, perhaps the recursive labyrinthine metaphor is rooted rather in the implicit discursive practices within the Hungarian culture, at least in Budapest; in the Discursive Unconscious: that is, always a dead-end as a function of the never ending journey of discursive deadlocks; no one interlocutor ever the winner, except briefly, once in a while, some never; the so-called winner, always alone; ever vigilant of a clever foil, dupe and dummy; constant alerted arousal leading nowhere except to the dim centre of emotional oblivion - the heart of the labyrinth, A Void.

Yet on the dialogical face of this Deadlocked Discourse, as a Culture Capital of Europe, dare I say... The World! The Universe! (oops! I'm sounding Hungarian), Budapest was a rare treat indeed. From the original paintings of Marc Chagall - a long revered fellow of the brush; to the Kiev Ballet's performance of Swan Lake on a blue lit stage looking every bit the pond amongst the hugest trees on Margaret Island, in the centre of the Danube and connected with elegant bridges which hop as pebbles skimmed... and hang suspended; or the London production of the Rocky Horror Picture Show, new and updated yet fabulously antici... patory; or operetta titillations in the summer off-season gleaming and glistening with popular operatic performances sung by

chiseled voices emitted from bosoms bursting and bowties bouncing; or the whirling, multicolored, clip-clap-slappity-stomp-clapping dances to Hungarian folk tunes by local performers; or solid renditions of serious music of all sorts... Budapest is well worth a visit. But bring your life savings and your credit card, your own caviar in a carrier-bag - and a machine gun with a silencer.

# Poland - Where Even the Tramps are Moderate

**August**

On leaving Poland from Krakow station at six in the morning, I was forced to share a small alcove between two sleeping tramps - one on either side - and await our Baltic-bound train. After a few minutes, the younger of the two, perhaps 40-something, awoke coughing, raspingly... With scarcely a pause and still with his eyes closed, in one fluid motion, he reached into his shirt pocket hidden away beneath a very fresh looking tracksuit - efficient black, the jacket patterned to form a waistcoat as vividly decorated as the Catholic churches which thrive everywhere in Poland like mushrooms shaped as the Pope's hat, he too a Pole - for his first cigarette of the day.

On opening his eyes, he continued coughing as he quickly tuned into the temperate morning while still puffing his nicotine fix. Briskly retrieving a pair of immaculate socks flat-pressed inside the protective folds of a plastic supermarket packet upon which he had been sleeping - his mattress and ironing board - and now fully awake and active as a casting fisherman, the socks two glistening sardines stretched over his bare feet with alacrity. He rolled the packet up small together with an expanse of light plastic sheeting, the covering under which he had been sleeping; and inserted both into a large, durable nylon carrier-bag, his pillow for the night.

Leaning forward, he awakened his elderly colleague who had been sleeping soundly throughout the flurry of activity and insistent coughing attack - gently but firmly. And after a considered interval, assisted the stiff, slow old man in carefully folding and packing away a bright red and white blanket as pristine as any Polish flag newly printed. Still coughing with yet another cigarette in the corner of his mouth, he suddenly leaned over in my direction to restore a fallen day-trip rucksack to its rightful place amongst our heap of luggage en route to Copenhagen. I thanked him; he smiled graciously; before assisting my harnessing the much larger, awkward and heavy rucksack with the bulk of my belongings as Kale arrived back from breakfast-shopping and rushed me off to catch our train. And as the well groomed second class coach tugged its way through archaic Krakow and into the green rural lands, pastures ordered and abundant - I thought to myself – “Wow! Even the tramps are moderate in Poland...”

We had enjoyed the lofty Tatras peaks of the Carpathian mountains, the sporty eastern Alps which straddle Romania, Slovakia and southern Poland, before bussing back two and a half hours to Krakow for six nights, the obligatory international rendezvous. The mountain village of Zakopane is host to multitudes of Polish and international holidaymakers all year round...; attracted by the emerald splendour of glacial lakes and forested hiking trails in the summer, and by ideal ski-slopes of optimal snowfall during the winter months which stood now inert, the ski-lifts modern-metallic Jacob's Ladders in kinetic hibernation, awaiting the seasonal return of the

European and North American jet-set to stimulate their reawakening and resume once again their gentle rhythms of service.

And now in late summer, during school vacation time, peals of laughter resound through the valleys green and sparkling with silvered summer showers, releasing their pearly loads timeously and left hanging on the steepled fir trees like enthusiastic Christmas decorations early arrived. At first, the persistent Polish laughter irritated me, indicating suspiciously submerged storylines unwanted and best forgotten in mirth. But closer inspection revealed that while corrupted tears certainly also existed in the Polish discursive fabric, The Bad seemed balanced - overall - with The Good; the laughter genuine, indicative of authentic well-being; mutual regard; caring; balance.

In this land children are cherished - orphanages, foster-parenting and social welfare intrinsic threads within the elaborate tapestry of the Polish social design. Everywhere, human shepherds tend small flocks of children like nanny-goats with kids, and are included wherever possible - At folk weddings dressed in their Sunday best where parents get responsibly inebriated along with the wailing folk singers decked out in elaborately embroidered clothing like playing card figures; the men trousered thick baize, black-booted and waistcoated with feathered round hats, and women bodices red-laced with long black skirts, and both, shirts pleated and white as choir frocks. And on long walks demanding strength and endurance in order to imbibe the secret delights of the mountain scenery and gushing streams bubbling with joyous chatter. On funfair rides safe and secure, designed as giant clowns and magnanimous octopi. And at the edges of lakes, irregular transparent disks like hard minted-sweets - their trapped bubbles silver fish swimming in schools centimeters beneath the mountain mirrored meniscus, here poaching protected and sacred as Japanese carp in mountain monasteries... and stubbornly enforced by authority omniscient.

And so too the young lady at one of the internet sites stubborn as the mule that carried Jesus... Rude, abrupt and plain pig-headed! when the computer mouse suddenly packed up mid-document, a faulty reoccurrence on the machine which I had unsuspectingly chosen; me, the bewildered victim of willful technology... Yet no warning, no compensation, only the bill and a charge: “You should have been Saving!” So too the hotel reception clerk who muddled our accommodation arrangements exchanged but a vague apology and another less comfortable room, along with a mulish grimace suggesting the words: “So shoot me if I'm human!”

Yet these seemed the exception, not the rule which proved to be one of consideration and service. For example, the very same frustration occurred at another Internet facility the very next day and this time sincerest apologies were met together with full compensation. So too, drinking by some of the local men, starting at around 9am in both bars and street cafes and imbibed along with breakfast, seemed effectively managed and moderate; the practice off-set by acceptance,

modesty and decency, a permutation of the holy action trinity; of the Catholic discursive engine: Sin; Confession; Forgiveness; Sin; Confession; Forgiveness... forever and ever... And Sin indeed an essential, indispensable component; as spark is to fuel, and fuel is to drive...

It seemed that Moderate Catholicism permeated all things large and small in Poland; no person interviewed or observed extolled the virtues of The Way, but all were well acquainted with its central tenets. Each interviewee independently considered this attitude most common amongst their people. The churches were full on Sundays and whenever services were held. On Saturdays, the main cathedrals processed splendid white weddings back to back; while tourists wandered about ogling the gold, the gash, and the vermilion spread thick midst the cluttered clamor of icons and organ pipes; and old Polish ladies entirely unacquainted with the marrying couples gazed upon the ritual with moist, voyeuristic eyes. And in these varied observations, a strangely ordered chaos seemed to emerge in the social narrative; a healthy balance of synergy between old and young; rich and poor; the emotionally equipped and the less endowed - a thriving eco-system of reality: a Diamond Discourse multifaceted; impure; faulted but shimmering nevertheless with White Light.

And this light of moderation appearing like an angelic visitation as early as the 16th Century in the Polish discursive tapestry, in the Royal Palace at Krakow filled with some of the most lavish treasures yet seen on our travels in Europe - The message: Democracy; Kings elected from all over Europe; Divine succession relegated secondary albeit a Catholic rooted country surrounded by neighbours harbouring holy hubris. Yes, this system potentially a little chaotic, confusing, corruption sensitive... yes, yes, yes... but the meta-intention good, whole and considered; that is, Let the leadership of the flock move like water in the mountain streams; like the falling snow on the Tatras slopes; like the slithering scrapings of modern skiers swift as jets between trees high as steeples bound for heaven.

And perhaps now this intrinsic cultural knowledge - once upon a time novel, foreign, uncertain - over centuries has softened the more rigid values and social conscience of Fundamentalist Catholicism, supplying confidence and agency to individuals like oxygen to fish in bowls, so empowering the collective; theirs the choice to Act! free of constraint and the asphyxiation of absolute authority imposed.

This perhaps the reason why it took the Poles to initiate the first effective revolt against the Communist dictatorship in the late 1980s - Stubborn Intransigence! - the dialogical obverse of solid Catholic values filtered through a fine notion-net of Individualism! standing them in good stead; the Polish spiritus mundi seeming to shout out loud: “Enough Already! It's not working, can't you see? Wake up and smell the sour rye, for God's sake!” And as history records, this trend spread like warm butter over the bread and pastries of Eastern Europe and, in time, over the breasts of Mother Russia herself.

And so too this meta-belief - Moderate Catholicism Democratized - seemed plainly visible from an entirely different position... In the exquisite restoration work in Poland, which is not only superbly finished with care but, more importantly, never attempts to pretend that the restored object is the original. The Royal Palace in Krakow is a masterful orchestration of old and new elements woven together; duets of stonewalls and concrete ramparts hovering over historical foundations illustrating the depth of centuries; figures redolent of Rubinesque corpulence languish beside fountains and cherubs on ceilings in rococo halls but subtly rendered after the techniques of Impressionism; and in these gilded halls young musicians play still 16th century rondos, fugues and inventions on lutes and mandolins, adding to the ambience and their pocket money; and what is newly embellished is acknowledged alongside authentic relics and structures, whether a Medieval music room, a Renaissance reception hall, or the Art Deco en suit bathroom last reveled in during the Nazi occupation; and The Dragon's labyrinthine lair underneath the castle, a cavernous secret passage way of old, relies only on artificial lighting and natural drips dropping damp, the moisture mossed over and photosynthesizing under lamps hanging like muted suns, the native holes and dimples of these rocky bowels bound together by imagination spiced by the tight-winding descent of the spiraled stairwell as Medieval as mead, which leaves one feeling dizzy as a teased dragon dainty once finally arrived. And The Dragon is outside - where it should be - a tasteful modernist sculpture in bronze, on its haunches and emitting real flame in half minute rhythms for children clamoring and tussling for front row position in photographs snapped by parents with shinning cameras, smiles and picnic baskets.

And so too a few kilometers away the ominous sounding Salt-mine!, is still tastefully active and filled with salt-sculptures of little gnomes and dwarves, princesses, princes and priests; Copernicus who changed forever the world's view of itself and ushered in the Modern and Post-modernist Ages, and, with it, the discoveries of Empirical Reality and, eventually, Einstein; silent saline lakes dark and thick and cold; and a whole cathedral chiseled from the living salt used for services and weddings and the inspiration of wonderment. A place of worship: opaque and transparent; lighted from above, below and behind; the floor green and white salt slabs chessboard laid; and relief friezes and figures of Mother Mary and Jesus on the Crucifix Catholicised alongside bleeding hearts and chandeliers of shimmering shards of salt glinting like diamonds collected by dwarves in fairy tales.

And a soft scratch of a finger over any surface and tongue tip tested reveals the salty authenticity of this catacomb. Once the King's treasure house of precious food preservative, our guide informed, the chemical patron saint of sea voyages of discovery, spreading commerce, smallpox and The Word around the globe; this, the physiological beginning of Globalization, effected by Jesuit priests and ordinary folk seeking their fortunes - like Kale and I - in New Worlds. And no doubt there will be others on other New Worlds, like Mars, Europa or on planets or moons yet undiscovered, in centuries or perhaps even decades to come... The Territorial Imperative driving

the successful reproduction of the species wider and further a field in the past, now and forever... Always biology cloaked as Belief, as Honour in the Unknown Conquered, and the Territorial Imperative sustained; this drive against Space, yet another The Enemy! genetically programmed, vanquished briefly only to reappear again, as Talk, somewhere... This time, by the helmeted tour guide leading us through the labyrinth, torch in hand...

The new and old; the younger and older; the innovative and the traditional; the Us! and the Them! the nice and the not so nice;... all balanced like the tram lines suspended throughout Krakow as reliable, inexpensive conveyances - In Fine Balance - whether rushing off to a free music recital at the archeological museum by the youth orchestra of Newcastle, England, of Schostakovich and Beethoven and sponsored by a Polish bank. Or a visit to the Jewish quarter where crafted paper cuts reveal an odd alignment with astrology and notions New Aged in the museum filled with Semitic religious artifacts of gold and silver; silver-gold threaded tapestries of King's Crowns and The Word sacred and guarded by embroidered Lions, Griffins, Eagles and other predatory animals of the desert both real and imagined, and now so often the emblems of Western Corporate Giants who sponsor democratic election candidates for Alpha Ape.

And as in all religions, the precious objects and riches symbols of the veracity and influence of Belief and Kin, here, Jewish Faith and Fold, the People of the Book; The Book always protected in jeweled gold guarding the One and Only, Absolute God once Unnamed and still unprovable except through social action and prestige, yet the only authority to which the Jew will bow, authentically. Forever the People of the Book, the Jew emerging side by side with the Muslim and the Gentile in the desert, that scrap of infertile land dusted as dead chalk and seat of acrid contention still after millennia; indeed discourse dies hard!

Yet the Jewish faith, its monotheism, in particular, encouraging discourse around the intractable sacred word through circumcised thirteen year old boys learning To Read, To Think and to Critically Comment on the text, so paving the way for the great minds of the contemporary age, schooled and encouraged over millennia to “T'ink!” alongside rabbi rhetoricians, mere consultants to the unshifting text; some persuasive, others not - their congregation, the discerning customers keeping checks and balance in their ongoing competition. And Rivalrous Competition and clever outsmarting of the authorized way, the implicit story-line across so many Jewish religious stories - David and Goliath, Cain and Able, Jacob and Ishmael, Joseph and his Brothers: God and Satan... and the storyline continues... if you just “t'ink a leedle!”

Or a modern art gallery filled with Swiss installation and performance artworks as cultural exchange where video screens hang suspended from ceilings as boxes filled and unfilled by the artist herself, crouching and hopping - from one screen to the next - over a sea of blue air-filled forms resonant of waves on liquid and bouncing to the touch of the viewer together with audio-recordings of gurgles and splutters from transparent tubings of green ooze... The whole room a

suspended immersion in a white painted void - a Buddhist womb - of make-believe. Yet Nirvana balanced by choice in the form of a locked and painted white door - a part of the room itself - emitting agonizing screams of distress heard but unreachable.

And so too here at the gallery, old Evil refracted through the lens of art as the plastic carrier-bags used as the moderate tramp's pillow, but shaped now in the gallery as puffed seats for reclining and viewing videos of installation art about water, angst and appetite; here, deliberately chosen for size and scattered as the piled suitcase displays removed from Nazi Death Camp victims so remembered behind glass at the Auschwitz Memorial Museum not far from Krakow. And here, in the gallery, juxtaposed with - Love, Art, Youth and Lest We Forget! -, to effect effective perturbing and shifts within me - the observer, and my reality... And the tram journey home indeed altered, somehow - psychedelic -, a shifted state of awareness and perception mystical in meaning for both Kale and I: sitting, for example, only a meter opposite, a dowdy fifty year old female, her brain now a curious organ brimming with creative possibilities, inside; her fashion, wrinkles and lipstick an unknown universe to be discovered as the White Lights passed like fish in an aquarium, outside...

And yes... lest I forget, Auschwitz Itself. Some two hours away in buses packed with visitors who are not all identifiable as Jewish by feature. A true and complete Genocide remembered for the likes of Addy the Aristocrat who denied that the Holocaust! ever happened: “Just good old fashioned American propaganda!”, he had said, but nevertheless fully supported the idea, as you know. This memory, presented here in Poland with sufficient impact and cushioning for those gnashing monsters lurking imprisoned in our genes; like the dinosaur fossils of Tyrannosaurus Rex in Spielberg's movies; or the strategies of male chimps in the jungles of Africa revealed in the ever popular Discovery Channel prime-time; or Cro-Magnon men and women gnawing on baby bones of slower, gentler Homo-erectus, the rival Homo-sapiens line; or the wholesale slaughter of the San and the Khoi people, the indigenous inhabitants of Southern Africa by the invading Negroid tribes from northern Africa as they moved ever more southwards in search of better grazing for their cattle; or, the near extermination of the Red Indian and Aboriginal people all over the European colonized world; or, most recently, the lethal quest for territory at the turn of the millennium by the Tutsi over the Hutu in Rwanda.

And All! acting out belief chosen and discourse navigated ethology...

And I am therefore forced to ask a question quintessential. Will the Auschwitz Memorial work as an effective deterrent to future Genocide? Will there be Others?... How will the lighthouse of Reasoned Choice and Consciousness navigate the territorial imperative in time to come?... How will we choose to construct Madness?... As Holy Hero or Sad Suicide... Which?

Certainly, in Poland - the very site of epic mandatory murdering - I witnessed Catholic civility, moderation and caring chosen; our ultimate human nature not this nor that but rather the fact of

agential action considered; belief unpacked and deliberately chosen for optimal functionality midst the endless vicissitude of the two great realities: Physiology and Discourse.

And so too a Moderate balance identified at Auschwitz through sufficient mourning; sufficient acknowledgement of Pain Tortured; the Acknowledgement of Pain as real and deliberate as Catholic Witch-hunting, The Inquisition and The Tithe before the Counter-Reformation. And here, at the museum, acknowledged and remembered by the suitcases stacked like empty building blocks; Heaps of hair for mattress stuffing, longer strands selected and woven as shawls and carpeting on voyeuristic display for the enthralled audience, others braided like trophies dismembered from squaws captured and lost like pigtails in an abattoir; Round rimmed spectacles like insect eyes and legs removed and experimented with by children playing in the sun; Mounds of baby-shoes in special piles in display booths behind glass illustrating The Horror!; and in another booth, adult 30's style foot-wear elegantly tapered, high-heeled and mixed with the sensible, both well-worn; Telling photographs of gassed inmates on their arrival in the Auschwitz trains, each with varied expressions, their Death-Snaps! abstracting character of self, of personal identity, and captured like fossilized footprints - forever..., some detached looking through bubbles of disbelief, others pleasing childishly, some unmasked suspicion, still others defiant, or resigned to knowledge of certain death, others hoping still, and still others dismissive, secure in their belief of martyrdom rewarded; Commemorative wreaths against walls outside living quarters stained with the blood of adult victims shot as schoolkids in detention for transgressing rules of concentration camp order; And submerged voices dimly intoned in the macabre re-orchestration, in the supposed prophylaxis, of German dissidents - not many, very few comparatively but victims of Genocide! nevertheless.

And these submerged voices? To whom do they belong? The answer - to followers of the Jehovah’s Witness belief who claim that mainstream Christianity albeit Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Charismatic... the whole lot, simply botched the storyline, and No! Jesus didn't die on the cross, it was a stake, and so on... and Practicing Homosexuals. Of both victim-sets... scarcely a word mentioned.

And walking between torture chamber and solitary confinement cell, between brothel and gas chamber, I asked myself but Why? Surely, All! should be remembered Lest We Forget! - so that it doesn't happen again... But, perhaps, both sets of murdered people are not Judeo-Christian enough?... Perhaps neither Catholic enough for the Poles, and judging by the substantial Jewish contribution to the commemorative commentary... nor Semitic enough?

Belief as always... present and readable; and here, implied in the silence as a shadow implies the form. Simple. Gypsies - mentioned; Poles, Russians, Hungarians, Italians and other countries with exterminated soldiers of war - mentioned; Jewish victims - mentioned. Now this is a trick question: How are the Insiders and Outsiders clustered; what superordinate abstraction exists?

Ethnicity; Nationality; Religion; and .....? .....? (please fill in the missing words). Yes, all mentioned in lights yet only once (the very smallest murmur of commemoration, whispered...) for .....? and .....? And where? On the display board of symbols worn by the victim-sets, those Others not Aryan Gold (in the smallest, most obscure corner of the vast memorial); that is - Yellow triangles for Jews; Black triangles for Gypsies; Pink for Homosexuals; Purple for Jehovah's Witnesses, and an arbitrary array of creative permutations for The Others as per Nazi packaging. (And not mentioned even once in any form whatsoever - the sterilized Negroid Germans!)

It seems the lesson has indeed remained unlearned and Violent Fascism - active or passive - remains incubating; most of the tourists seemed to enjoy the show and I witnessed only two other people crying visibly.

Once returned by one of the many commuting buses to Krakow, Kale and I enjoyed a stiff injection of Polish vodka, the refined version of the sacramental wine in Catholic ritualistic practice and I got horribly drunk! Stay away from the Polish vodka. It's cheap. It's available. It's lethal. And the Poles make great drinking partners. And in the haze of intoxication, The Universe turning clearest white, it seemed, we both decided that all in all - for better or worse, richer or poorer - Poland would be a great country to open a budding business and harness the emergent economic power of the East European market, now free at last to choose its own destiny... Knowingly, as the bear fishes the salmon, and astronauts breathe in space.

# Denmark - Greetings in White Underwear

**September**

Inside the late 19th century, slim-bricked apartment building in the very heart of Copenhagen, a sleek lift of glass swept us silent as a whisper through a turning cylinder of pale, fine-grained wood and muted chrome reflections to the front door of our guest house on the fifth floor, the liquid crystal display 9:23am exactly. We rang the bell and waited. The door opened - eventually, and a sleepy-looking, mildly irritated man - tall, toned and in his early forties, wearing nothing but a clean pair of white Y-fronts (resurrected WWI Government Issue) - mumbled greetings in perfect English, chin raised and smile flickered.

His cultivated attire echoed the guest house advert on the Internet and in the Copenhagen Gay Guide he provided gratis later on that morning with fleeting (but nevertheless, convinced) mischief - Of two muscled 20 year olds, hair cropped and tousled; arranged haphazard, cozily draped together with golden teddy bear; both wearing nothing but the same Calvin Klein underwear as our host, and contented grins of well-being; the monochromatic, black and white photograph (except for the golden teddy bear), showed the seductive couple gazing directly at the viewer with confident knowingness; an invitation to gay travelers to bite into and suck the juicy fruits of wonderful, wonderful Copenhagen; licentious sister of Sodom and Gomorrah since the early 1970s, and harbinger to the Sexual Revolution which swept through the West at the 20th century close like falcon after the falconer.

He coolly gestured us into a long, rugged-wood passageway filled with plants in pots with blond, thick-bodied flowers; unfinished art school projects suggesting promise; framed architectural draftings carefully colored and matched to models in glass-boxes on windowsills overlooking the river below; a nervous shaggy-dog resembling a short-sighted muppet waterfall; angular abstract expressionist paintings not quite skies, suns, birds and cloud, but seeming so; and an uncomfortable looking bench, cushion scattered with ginger cat - curled, soft and silent - sleeping, and revealed later on to be stuffed, stitched and quite dead. The dead cat, simply another playful decoration to enhance the illuminated slot machine (rigged for guaranteed failure!), and a cast-copy of Michelangelo's King David - wearing nothing but a Viking battle helmet with the hugest horns, and white-feathered boa. These, stage props amongst the boxes and laundry in the adjoining sitting cum bedroom of the hairy-chested 25 year old, one of four peripatetic co-hosts, who wore nothing but a pair of Levi jeans and chameleon smile during our six day residence in early autumn.

The confirmed Internet booking made from Poland given digital advice and warnings of Danish proactive culture, secured the best price over location in Copenhagen; our early arrival,

unexpected - check in time officially 12 noon. We were therefore invited to make ourselves comfortable and relax in the lounge cum dinning room full of designer magazines, hardcover books of male only soft-porn stars in classical costume and compromising positions, latest issues of Sparticus (the well-thumbed gay contact publication replete with cruising information, ideal pickup zones - parks, bus stops, steam baths, public toilets, beaches, bars, clubs, where to be strung up, beaten and blanched, and so on), and avail ourselves of the kitchen facilities until our room was vacated and readied for occupancy. Which we duly did.

And on filling a much needed glass of cold water from the communal fridge, I happened to walk in on conversation between our imperious host and yet another Calvin Klein clad fellow - a guest - slight and ordinary looking with an American accent and spectacles: "So did you shag Bradley last night? / No, please! I'm into men, not little girls"..., turning his flashing gaze in my direction, and approving the cumbersome hiking boots, dirty hair, Camel-man stubble, and disheveled denim clothing - the unwanted result of a night sleeping on the Baltic ferry floor due to costly cabin accommodation. I retreated nervously and relayed the interaction to Kale; we both agreed to stay given the unbeatable location over price ratio, and use the opportunity to acquaint ourselves with the international gay community as emigrating South Africans from the tail-end of Africa, but decided - all considered - to begin our Copenhagen tour earlier than intended while our private haven was prepared.

The tourist advice office turned out to be a distinction model for budget traveler assistance, and provided volumes of free booklet information. And it is here that I discovered that never was a Viking helmet wrought with Hell's Horns erected... Never! A complete misconception! A visual misnomer... and perhaps, I wonder... an historical discursive slip? A slip supported in elaborate illustrations in history books, and Hager the Horrible Sunday cartoons -the story of Anglo-Saxon battle in western Medieval Europe, the hour of that rough beast - The Mad Dragon! The Devil! - of the northern lands; home to the seafaring tribes of Scandinavia - powerful oars-men, skillful boat-builders and navigators who, weather permitting and accurately read, could row the shores of Britain... in but a day and a bit. And Wage War Atrocious!

And throughout western Europe, this berserk fight sustained, maintaining the Dark Age of Reason - in Thought, Art and Technology - and, similarly, the evolution of Social Practice, in deeds, stunted for one thousand years over, until - eventually, after centuries of pillage and rape, plunder and restless sleep, where targets, the holiest of Christian, places filled with treasures, filled with precious metals, gold and silver, jewelled, and the finest craftings of light elves, artifacts prized; these, in monasteries and churches, in abbeys and convents, in shrines and temples, and everywhere under heaven in the green lands of greater Briton and Gaul. And it came to pass, too, in obversity, that The Dragon was calmed, and finally vexed from nightmare and bloody cradles rocking, in these western lands, finally - and converted to Christianity through the Danish King,

Harold the Bluetooth, mourning his dead parents. And that story, then as now, rune encrypted on the Jelling-stone at Jutland, of that conversion momentous, the turning from Odin, the Valkyries and Valhalla, of the warrior rewarded in the hereafter for deeds terrible; to the awakening time - of The Ten Commandments; Love They Neighbour as Thy Self; The Way, The Truth, The Light; The Bible; and, Diplomatic Relations between Chieftains of kindred spirit.

Belief, chief now... of Popes, Priests and Kings Divinely ordained, and of warriors trained and tethered and paid; all bowing acquiescent to holy order unproveable, but (Thank God!) beyond contention; a submerged first premise, an impasse, illogical; so endorsed, a whole discursive system, irrational but in the wake of which, order bringing and unifying - nevertheless.

And on the other side of the continent, in the stony desert where the shadows of indignant desert birds still reel and snap and prey, Islam was but short born - through the channeled writings of the Prophet Mohammed, Allah's Quranic conduit. And this Scripture too... uniting the warring tribes of the desert in Medieval irrationality, so providing a fighting flock of One, division mended through submerged truth tables and empirical methodology - into fiction useful... Both Judeo-Christian and Islamic social grammars born in the desert once fertile until the Earth wobbled; and in the dropping darkness of reason, these discourses blew like seeds in the widening spiral winds of change, to islands, peninsulas and continents far distant; and once rooted, took on new shapes and forms like the evolving bodies of lions, tigers and cougars, in the heads and social practices of Viking, Arab and Red Indian, where too the once pure Blond, Black and Auburn DNA (now quickly forged from an ever widening palette of dyes in superchique Copenhagen) slowly mingled.

The Danes, Christian Protestants, we're told, but unlike their Fundamentalist blood-brothers of contemporary America - not the vaguest glimmering of extremist belief or of Cause! - of Revelations, of The Dragon, in which ever guise, Communist, Fundamentalist Muslim or otherwise - in any person met.... Simply dismissed. Except perhaps by the Royal Family, their crowns crucifix crested, but mere visual mention compared with the historical iconography of other European nations, or the Evangelist preachings of the mid-west and southern states of the USA.

Here in Denmark, now, Viking tattoos proudly worn by many men and some women, their distinctive dragonian patterns wrapped and imprinted on their fleshly envelopes like the ribboned seals of first generation Scandinavian Kings; those mighty warriors ruled by Thor, Thunder and the wandering Sun. And curiously, origin to my paternal genetic line, though Nordic, to be exact - "Tonbruge" meaning "wall around a town", I'm told, and later Anglicised following invasion and natural discursive evolution. And, as do family names and other words, so too The Word evolves. Of those interviewed, the young deem Christianity unnecessary, or, for that matter, refrain from

taking their Viking history too seriously. A new belief leads now. But what? That, is the question.... in a country well accomplished.

Indeed, Wealthy - one of the highest standards of living in the world, but also highest taxation (PI 46%; VAT 25%); and Healthy - an elaborate medi-care system freely services the health requirements of all citizens, typically gym-toned, yoga-stretched, and peddling their bicycles in droves through unpolluted, rain washed streets when the sun is high; and Wise - a significant percentage of the population university educated, and leaders in wireless digital technology; and Kind, too, as protectors of refugees and displaced others from around the globe although, of those interviewed, considered grossly unfair when handed out to lazy, unskilled foreigners unemployed and on public welfare - understandably. And, Lest I Forget - Tolerant of Others... Not a blink against gay marriages; fully legalized in Denmark though thinly adopted by the substantial gay community itself, so I'm told... gay politicians typically marrying, so to win the Queen's invitations to tea, and few others bothering with this formal institution, though the Queen is dearly beloved as a symbol of Denmark by her people.

The Danes are however, bothered, indeed obsessed - first and most - with STYLE: a discursive anamorphic cylinder bending everyday visions into minimalist dreamscapes; smooth new worlds of creative imagination, their orbs shot through with bubbles fixed in rainbow crystal, solid and unstirring. Indeed, Styled-Minimalism ubiquitous - everywhere - from shaving gel, raiser, toothbrush, or toilet paper; bath plug, faucet, nail clipper, or banking mall; grocery bag, garbage truck, candlestick, or light bulb... everything! A visual macro-discourse, suggesting... that is all.

And with working hard..., and doing a damn good job, in whatever capacity. From the friendly Smorgasbord Takeaways on every street corner - a cheap delicious array of health breads creatively garnished with crispy salads, cold meats peppered and sardines oiled, cheeses varied and grated, sliced, spread and sprinkled, then topped with a finish of pink shrimp, bean sprouts and a smattering of yoghurt, and enjoyed by wall painter, conductor, silversmith, sweeper, and Kale and I alike - to the service in bars and restaurants and from bank tellers, the advice given by bus drivers, and directions asked of shoppers in well planned malls.

And, of course, having a good time,... In whatever form chosen by those doing the enjoying; in specified, demarcated zones in a city of a million different tastes. In Christiana street where students and old hippies with brain damage congregate and consume varied concoctions of the cannabis plant - marijuana joints ready, rolled and safeguarded in green, tapered plastic containers, hashish cakes sliced like cow pats or ready mixed and rolled in red containers, and brews in bottles with leaves on labels. This alternative community tolerated and dubbed as "social experiment", a semantic re-description for active legalisation of the weed, formalised approval an unnecessary dis-cord in the general social harmony - deliberate tipoffs by the police themselves preempt the annual raid.

And a good time too in the red light district where sex is sold to willing slaves by men and women moving slow thighs, the greater Copenhagen smut free and filled with the quiet meditations of couples in love, and children in bicycle-baskets peddled by pregnant mothers with expressions of silent philosophy on their lovely faces. Or in the Erotic Museum - in the centre of Copenhagen - simply listed along with art galleries and national history exhibitions for a tasteful journey into eroticism through the ages, and from across the globe. The exhibition essentially documenting the Danish vanguard to free erotic expression, from Marilyn's dress to the separated Shock Room, container for the Most Sordid of Sordids, sign posted with warnings and entered at the Individual's Discretion... and truly, Shocking!

And, lastly,... Minding their own business,... Earning good money and simply getting on with the task of living... and leaving others to get on with theirs. Perhaps Denmark a sterling instantiation of that measure recently identified by contemporary economists - The Gay Index: that is, the positive one-to-one relationship of community gay tolerance and thriving modern economies; as minimalism is to elegance; fibre to fabric; crease to leather; Thor to Thunder and Lightning; or hydrogen to our nurturing Sun.

And in reflection, Kale and I too got on with our business... here, in Copenhagen, of touring through the playground of Hans Christian Andersen...

To the heady collection of sculptures in white marble, perfect as clouds - of Greek, Scandinavian and French traditions, one of the largest collections of Rodin outside of France; these holy worshippings of truth and beauty and, indeed, their very testimony, in the NY Carlsberg Glyptotek, founded by the wealthy beer brewer, Carl Jacobsen, at Art's turn towards Modernism - so documenting this journey with those preceding; And the Tivoli amusement park filled with things that fall and crash... safely, ensuring exhilaration with money back guarantees; Wandering agog through the Illium shopping complex, patronised by Queen Margrethe for a Royal Shopping experience of spaceship cutlery, demurred R2D2 dustbins, and shop presentation like installation artwork - where static crystal and glassware refract through the lens of audio-visual footage of bubbling brooks trickled over dark pebbles in the melting ices of the Danish countryside, moving and babbling in multi-sensual concord through Time; The Royal Treasury and Rosenborg Castle at the alpha family's palace brimming over with chests of collected lootings and craftings - crucifixes few and gemstones many; The Changing of the Guards, clipped and beveled as cotton writing paper waiting to be born again by poet pens in new Bethlehems; Boat rides on canals and stretches of harboured coastline... pausing briefly to greet The Little Mermaid, and wave at our reflections like Thumberlina in the giant modernist library building, a black diamond set within a silver-sky of gently sunlit clouds, seagulls and aeroplanes; And marvel the design ingenuity of the Bible-black protestant church, edged by a sturdy ribbon of gold spiralling skywards in a narrowing gyre, and crested by a golden orb bright as any desert sun, Christiana street's closest neighbour;

And enjoying wonderful, wonderful food and super-fast Internet cafes, friendly havens of young blond men and women, strategically chatting up prized brunettes in Danish and/or English, laughing while forging together skilful witticisms and future pairings; And deciding together, that indeed, of all the lands visited or imagined, Copenhagen beckoned most strongly as a potential rooting place.

And simply leaving others to seek teddy bear solace in the black holes of love chronicled in Sparticus, the holy book of contemporary gay culture... In black holes where solace, no doubt, is never found, only a vicious circle of pragmatic compression; fantasy promised but, sadly, undeliverable - but a soap-bubble fruit bowl, easily punctured, and as close to real fulfilment as men seeking real men to seduce; or people anywhere Demanding! the voluntary gift of Love from intimate partners; or squaring the circle, or trisecting the angle.

In Copenhagen, I learned that it is for others to decipher for themselves the rules of social grammar necessary for contented coupling; to discover the unseen events obtained from $E= mc^2$ and identify why boys have nipples; to develop the discursive skills to be happy and whole as the sky and sculpt as do clouds their social worlds; and live their lives with full consciousness and responsibility, by embracing their species endowed personal agency, and so make love with The Universe.

# Thailand - Pleasures of Original Debt

**September - October**

A pregnant dome of humid, grey-green sky hung huge and heavy above us, the moisture omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, climaxing - intermittently - as thick-warm spurts of sudden tropical rain; a deluge bursting like ripe guava in the mouth; relief - finally, this forceful celestial fountain over the land once named Siam, washing the pasted sweat from the crevasses of our clothing, our hair, and our bodies bloated as buddhas by noodles spiced and lubricated with enchanted oils... Everywhere, drenched and wet and slippery; turning the jungle floor to clay and slime and cascading rivers of engorged water brown as blood; exposed veins feeding the undergrowth dense with coarse vines like floating hair; pipes of wanton liquid forcing their way, circling, weaving thrice and more about massive turgid trunks - curved, rigid and hard - and clutched firmly by creepers tight and unrelenting, their leafy heads, domed and pulsating like the fans once waved by muscular bodyguards cooling Siamese royalty in the slow, sensual rhythms of jungle heat; the foliage ribbed and webbed as the wings of demon lovers with flashing eyes, indebted necessarily in the world of others, by karmic sins - unknowable - from lives past; these, questing souls bearing gifts of reparation, of homegrown opiates, incense and lulling incantations, to River-, Mountain-, Cave-, or Rain- god, to hybrid Buddha-, Jesus-, or King- god, to gods of all descriptions; now, as payment options are properly honored by ever grateful offspring, now, as narcosis offers mischievous deities seductive dreams of pleasure under the arching domes of porcelain shrines, now, in deep repose, innocuous and deactivated, finally, their willful mischief limited, bound by pleasures as they dream peacefully, contentedly within their miniature palaces on pillars made in factories and sold in shops - seen from bus, train, taxi, or tuktuk, while boating along narrow canals, or walking, cycling, or climbing stairs... Everywhere in Thailand - Religion speaking aloud.

Yes, quite real these little walls and towers, these small birdhouses glowing mystical under the hot moon of Thailand, shielding their inhabitants, the deities, undisturbed by the persistent tuktuk traffic of night through deliberate sedation, the ritual means refined over millennia. These, diminutive copies of the glittering gold and green, red, yellow and white Buddhist temples of Bangkok and conspicuously visible on the periphery of every Thai dwelling place and financial institution, every industrial, trucking or government building, at the entrance to restaurant or snack bar, school, roadworks or massage parlor, outside hotels, guesthouses and hardware stores, in the center of tilled, sown or weeping, reaping fields of opium or rice... Everywhere.

In Thailand, Folk Animism harmonizes a strange symphony and song, a mingled measure of Belief, of Polytheism ancient as the hills of enfolding greenery, caressing shoulder to sensuous

shoulder, that most rigid and unrelenting formalized macro-discourse - Theravada Buddhism: a severe system of religious practice spawning the Terrible Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, highest count of holy suicides yet recorded in modern history; comprising master teachers, holy orders, irrefutable and incontestable scripture, unvarying interpretation as read by The Masters of different ages, indebted karmic reincarnation and agential determinism, and unwavering adherence to 'the middle-way', The Way of the Sangha, the Council of Elders. These, powerful souls, leaders of the Thai, initiates of many life times chanted, fasted, meditated and ritually practiced, I'm told - and so! any public contradiction of Their Word, such as in the media - punishable with lengthy Imprisonment, now, in Thailand and read in a local newspaper article supplied by Thai Air whilst visiting the ancient monarchy.

Indeed - this strange narrative, this Siamese talk, its wail and moan, articulated by men and maids, gay and straight, young and old, rural and urban, northern and southern, Burmese, Chinese, or Brahmanic influenced, all alike - akin and attuned in their Orchestrated Belief; played on discursive dulcimers, electric guitars and synthesized drum sets Siamese in origin; on quadraphonic sound systems blasted from the peaks of cooling jungle mountains, or in half intermittent bursts from the deep romantic chasms of prolific urban karaoke bars, or dance halls in Bangkok or Chiang Mai; or, by hidden speakers all over Thailand, which lull the anxiety of dollared foreign guests like a cooling sea in an eternal summer of vacations in paradise found - where even ugly strangers are free to choose willing, attractive, smiling, and very able partners, for a week or two or three, from long lines in so-called dating clubs Internet advertised; or, simply piped as gentle auditory lubricants through cheaper Asian models during the throes of creative massages performed in parlors and charged for by the hour. And sometimes, too, at the weddings between Western men (usually) and lovely Thai women veiled and dressed in white lace, photographed in endless smiling poses besides multi-tiered wedding cakes of pink and white and silver icing like pre-Raphaelite brocade.

And the public presentation of this Talk; the concordant mingling of classic Siamese with Schonberg into strange symphony - has one overarching leitmotif, a repeated cadence bewitching as opium in its effect, an eternal refrain echoed again and again like the shadows of waves, singing as Coleridge and Bosch, Freud, Genesis, Revelations, and The Ramayana - of that sky domed garden of pleasure, of Earthly Delights, The Id and Temptation - a place known to all from dreams and legends, stories and schoolboy talk, discussed by Rimbald, the Popes, and Madonna, joked about in social gatherings during evening talk, spoken of directly, but mostly, tangentially, publicly, but mostly, privately, by day and at night, a place sought out in conversation and/or enacted if but for one ephemeral moment; that place - a place where all Desire is satiated, a place where the milk of paradise flows like a sacred river until all is drunken; a place that goes by many, many names... Physiology; Shangri-La; Utopia; Nirvana; Heaven; Hell; Valhalla; The Womb; others too... and, of course, Xanadu!

And in Thailand, the King, Ram IX, incarnation of Vishnu, fellow of Christ, Buddha and Mohammed, according to seamed Hindu-Thai Talk of old, a distinctive brand of belief, decrees through speeches loud and long, many a stately law, position or act with far reaching social consequences. And is never opposed... so I'm told, and only steps in when the democratic process - new to Thailand - breaks down. When factions just cannot reconcile for the general good; when the pleasures of those in charge are the expense accounts of the lower caste, those Others higher in karmic indebtedness but favored now in Western democracy; when pre-existing belief, held collectively, historically, informally and unconsciously... repeats compulsively... in collected democratic assembly, under stately concrete and steel domes air-conditioned like caves of ice - His Royal Highness decrees, and is obeyed. For he is loved, revered and respected... as The Word; the ultimate arbiter of right action; deified, dignified and distinguished from the common crowd, his soul migrated - purposefully, resolutely, determined but freely - to the financial year end, the February printout of the Thai karmic statement, his sum of good deeds writ - by definition, by his role and very presence - in black on the final page of the Siamese ledger of cosmic debits and credits. Listen they must! and listen they do!, the Siamese, to The King and The Council of the Sangha in democratic assembly.

And hanging besides the shrine indoors - the one for the Buddha, or Jesus, or Mother Mary, thematically replete always, with but slight variation - a picture of the King; floating midway on the waves of bamboo woven into walls of herringbone patterning, and topped by banana leaf roofing, or on rough-plastered walls of ever active three star hotels, for luck and loyalty; always, the face of the King of Thailand, like the sky in floating clouds of dated calendars and resembling Prince Charles of England, both in content and form, in countenance and demeanor - the ‘big-eared, skew-eyed, goggled-glasses, sober-jacketed, I'm-not-really-here’ look. He hangs beside the statues of Buddha, and offerings of magical herbs, intoxicants and other consumables to the little gods of the larder; whether in Bangkok or in the most lowly abode on stilts hovering above the pigs that grunt and the chickens that peck, where dogs whine and bark, and the luscious mud is filthy, flashing first black then grey as the dark earth dries on their edible flesh in the sun’s persistence, deep within jungle gorges where only resolute missionaries and the new wave of insatiable Rough Guide backpackers choose to go.

Here, where the migratory hill tribe people live with the land - Off frogs and fish in streams, off caterpillars evolving inside the hollows of bamboo, all delicious when cooked just right, I can vouch; but not for the crickets nesting in cupboards, snakes in holes, or scorpions hiding under rocks and in crevasses, in shoes and clothing and turned into fortifying wine in bottles on shelves - or any of the other jungle edibles resembling even one atomic protein particle of the god regulated pantry.

Here, in the furthest, most northern reaches of Siam, at the very borders of Myanmar (Burma)and Laos, deep in the south-east Asian hinterland, in the back and beyond of classroom reason, the ancient ethnic hill tribes - the dominant Karen tribe, with its Red, Black, and White, Long Necked, Long Eared subdivisions; and the quite distinct, Lisu; Mao; Lasu; and Lahu tribes, each of varying Asian descent - some more Chinese, others more Indian or Burmese, or mixed; and the Shan, the original Thais - their origins a mystery to even the most accomplished of anthropologists - live and breathe and believe under the pregnant dome of heaven.

And each tribe and even subdivision, its own language system, entirely incomprehensible to the other, typically; each its own distinctive religious practices and pantheon mixed and matched with Animism (always!), Buddhism (next), and Christianity (few); and idiosyncratic social mores for rites of passage such as marriage, leadership and induction as adult member and other status rituals - these, myriad and complex.

Little tribal intermarriage occurs, therefore - just too damn complicated, so I'm told... often bringing bad luck to the whole tribe, and upsetting the little deities, the ultimate agential determiners, a fact amply accounted for in a million magical stories - of witches, giants, gods, fish, fowl and food, of fornication, defecation, urination and mastication, of fleeing, fighting and fidgeting, laziness, learning and bravery and forgetting; in stories celebrating human trickery, of the gods, of each other, of gods with gods, of stealth, strategy and tact; of Victory! over Life Sustaining Elements, and over Death itself in the Life Hereafter; over natural enemies such as snakes, scorpions and tigers, and overlords from competing tribes. The Burmese feature strongly as oppressors in these stories, a Totalitarian Regime still present in this land today, and from which we were barred as South African citizens, our country of origin championing now human rights too forcefully for Burma, perhaps? (we were never told), the storyline indexed by the hill tribe tales and submerged like sharp river rocks in the Burmese discursive unconscious, still.

Indeed Discourse dies hard.

These tales, the natural operation of Fantasy, of linguistic re-construction through active imagination, discursive elaboration, lexical items dislodged and relocated as marbled stone into shrines and palaces and ashtrays, and eventually, this fabrication – Conventionalized into Belief! The oral story-telling tradition is alive and well still - and these stories, discursive artifacts for study up close, this quaint discursive form which exists in Thailand today, exemplifying, for me at least, one of the more purified confrontations with the Ethological substrate underpinning all belief, and so too, all dialogue with belief; that intermediate zone - varied as the twilight of every evening - between Physiology and Discourse.

Here in Xanadu, under the dome of sky, in this land of earthly pleasures and of considerable pain - where people dream and work and tell stories; where they die from tropical sickness and plagues engineered in prismatic dew drops; or opium addiction slowly petrifies the young, the

virile, the nubile like old wood turns to stone; where old customs are dying and the young do Anything! to escape the social identity of "farmer", a simple creature enslaved to the willful gods of Fire & Lightening Striking; Earth & Harvest Failing; Water & Irrigation Flooding; Air & Smallpox Infecting; and Ether & The Shadowlands of Death and Dying.

The hill tribe stories serve as much social instruction as entertainment in the damp fire-lit nights of monsoon when the Rain-god is in orgy, or when caressing the soothing shade of banana leaf huts while snatching cursory respite from the exhaustion of rice paddy worship, when a toke of opium is shared together with fellow workers, back-broken and overheated like the primitive tuktuk engines in Mae Hong Son. And a sizeable quantity left always, untouched by addicts even, in the little palace on its pedicel at the paddy's center, or amongst the poppy flowers of mauve, pink and white and purple - sympathetic colors these, to the woven fibers dyed and spliced by hand into elaborate tribal headdresses iridescent hued, or into long skirts and aprons decorated with strings of beads, or for bags, scabbards, jungle knives, or pouches for babies, or for tobacco and pipes of bamboo, and all sorts of totems and threads and things; people, poppies, and palaces on pillars - One.

These, fields of life sustaining grain, leaf and resin filled pod; rotated annually, weeded, nurtured, harvested and dried; packed and stored safely from scavenger and microbe vicious and greedy as infants at the breast. And relocated, entirely, thrice every decade or so - to ensure the ongoing fertility of the soil, and to appease the little gods of the land - who become restless... I'm told, by Nature, given the passage of time, when even persistent gifts of finest opium, food and alcoholic brew are ineffectual; when offered beside the Buddha, the Cross (in some missionary mined villages) and the burgundy clocks ticking out of time as framed pictures of the Alpha Family on the herringbone wall, aglitter in jewels, regal red and white and purple, sashed and very Western looking; or the King, Queen, Prince or Princesses, or the King's Grandmother, for that matter, garbed in military uniform and looking fierce as the protecting gods battling the demons of the naughty night and fickle field.

And the King subject of endless storied conversation of Thai stealth and fortitude: the Chinese, the Burmese, the European Colonialists, and others in the long history of the Territorial Imperative - very active here in south-east Asia where the pickings are rich - all outwitted and out maneuvered; all cast out, one way or another, by Thailand - preserving its virgin autonomy; colony to no other nation, ever; always, Thailand; intact; united under the benevolent rule of the King of Siam. Their leader. Their emblem. Their beloved social identity. Their Discursive Preserver.

Yet this pleasure dome is shifting on its unsullied foundations, as the discourses progressively dislocate; novel story-lines infiltrating... mingling unedited and unconscious like water molecules in the tight social cauldron of modern Thailand. Where sporadic shootings from anonymous

vehicles form part of the daily murder tally - one of the highest ratio counts in the world for Crimes Passionate! A bullied servant wrecks cold and calculated revenge against an ungracious master after decades of swallowed mistreatment - the preferred discursive form for children, employees, temple worshipers, and other subordinates in the strict hierarchy. Or, factory manager of superior caste corrects the etheric balance through violent means when time honored manners, courtesies and acknowledgements of rank are transgressed, or even questioned - a bow insufficiently deep; a gaze held a moment too long; a restaurant table chosen too near or too far from a dissenting other; a sentence pronoun misplaced, or other lexical items carelessly chosen from the spectacular array of authority transforming linguistic devices, unrivaled by the majority of language systems in use anywhere in the world today; and a myriad other social landmines, tripwires and booby-traps immanent within the Thai discursive-field.

I am told that in Thailand, one never says what one means, and never means what is said. A contrary storyline is forever seamed within another; the public and the private discursive levels, by definition - Disjunctive. The Council of Elders, The Sangha, encourage strict allegiance to these time honored practices; implicit support for their cosmology. It is expected that - at all costs - one should smile, be happy, laugh often, demonstrate clear, decorous deference to all manner of superiors, especially those of spiritual persuasion, and ones parents, and never, never, never, ever drop your guard. But mostly... do not Confront Directly! Smile... when you hate! Agree... when you don't! Laugh... when you're scared. Nod... when confused? And Never Contradict! your Elders. Always show gratitude. Especially towards ones Parents who are owed many life times of original debt; that indebtedness acquired by the fact of your birth alone; the gift of life graciously bestowed by your Parents, so providing the thankful opportunity for karmic reworking, reparation and recompense; a debt to be repaid throughout your life, until death, and even beyond, I'm told, the account remains unsettled and in collection by your debtors... always.

And given this text - this reading of the physiological realities of intercourse, conception, birth, caregiving and the protracted active parenting period - the genetic legacy of the great apes; this, the necessary physiological trajectory for the developing brain too wide in its bony encasement for the human female birth canal, its critical mass vital, of necessity, for linguistic evolution, for the development of symbolic thinking processes, for decontextualized cognition, and thereby, optimal adaptation possibilities for species-environment congruence; for instance - where these same apes once hidden from tigers in trees and vines of the jungle, can walk now in space, out there, beyond the atmospheric cocoon, beyond the meteoric shield, and escape lethal microbes of mass destruction engineered by themselves, following instructions like recipes from scientific manuals, in laboratories, to outwit The Enemy!, to propagate their brand of belief –, we must not be surprised that so too, decontextualized cognition paves the karmic path…, with consequences.

For instance - a child from poorer families may be sold into prostitution, unprotested, to assuage their karmic debt, and furnish the parental home with TV, fridge and mobile phone. Thus, it is believed, the individual forgoes yet another horrible rebirth, as quadriplegic spider or antennae-less cockroach, or the starving first litter bitch forced to drink her own milk along with her six ravenous puppies in a last frantic effort to sustain her emaciated body while the hill tribe family, Karens of Buddhist sympathy, enjoyed the whisky bought with our money in exchange for a lodging in "Paradise" - and here I quote our very capable, English-speaking, hill tribe guide, Diing Kang (Dee-ing-Kung). He, a jungle car-salesmen par excellence; a grinning, grinning villain extolling the virtues of the Thai way, never a criticism - social problems simply glossed over with pleas of poverty. No bad seen, heard or balanced. Only the public face, never the shadows. Only the fact of the many royal rural projects aimed at enriching the meager lot of the karmicly indebted poor; these royal projects... well marketed, well broadcast by His Majesty, the King, himself, from his Stately Pleasure Dome in Xanadu.

And Xanadu's modern capital, Bangkok, filled with foreign tourists who contribute no less than one full half of the gross national product in a richly endowed and fertile country where most citizens live below the bread line. They come to gaze upon the splendid Buddhist temples, the Royal Palace Pagoda, the auspicious seat of the highest divinity, higher than even the King - The Emerald Buddha. Only a fraction bigger than a human's head, and dressed like a doll in an elaborate play therapy room full of hypnotic suggestion, for the season - summer, winter and the equinoxes -, and paraded on the starry ramps of conventionalized semantic elaboration, on poetic license, and the goodwill of ignorance. The Emerald Buddha; representing through discourse, through story, the sacred heart of Thailand; its spiritual thermostat, its cosmic barometer, its measure and regulator, its critic, therapist, and the orchestrator of Thai social temperament; the moral order; the purity, the retreats by rivers, the violence, and the abundant Thai clientele who share the massage parlor facilities along with foreigners in thick fast pants breathing.

For Thai men, the services offered by prostitution are simply part of a time honored tradition; a corollary to the deliberate detachment that is nurtured between husband and wife; a middle-way; a respectful distance, preferred. Too much passion - loving or hating - invites bad karma, I’m told: a palette of grey hues preferred; numb detachment, its mood and melody - its authorized emotionology. All Desire, Suffering. True Salvation - to be found only in the ascetic monasteries of the forest. The rest... be damned. No middle-way here - in for a satang, in for a bahtt. Acceptance. Prostitution. Gratitude. Pedophilia. Deference. Murder. Renunciation. Neglect.

And foreigners take full advantage, these Pleasures of Original Debt.

Paul, an Englishman in his forties, his age informed of his own accord thrice or more, over drinks, and so too the story of his pathological family circumstances left behind in England. Of ongoing incest by his ex-father-in-law towards both his ex-wife and his two little girls. Of the very messy

divorce and endless failed attempts to win her back, she now in her late thirties, now on social security, under psychiatric care, and shacked up with a 20 year old serviceman, with whom she lived only three months of every year. His confidence shattered, his social isolation extreme, his anxiety of being negatively positioned by others - of being stigmatized in the emotionally defensive discursive community in which he had been raised, and in which he still chose to live - Paul had returned to Thailand for his annual holiday. Having enjoyed the pleasures of the flesh once before on a brief solitary visit during the rocky years of marriage, and feeling at the time, predictably, being Anglican and married and all, Guilty as Sin - he had but one idea in mind: to be wooed, bedded and bounced by a smiling Thai girl with surgically implanted breasts, reedy-body, capped teeth, spiritual... detachment, and a very ready to please, being Siamese - attitude. Sadly, predictable! on both counts. The problem's origin - unconfronted; unaltered; unknown .. .. submerged; still.

And another nameless American, probably in his fifties or early sixties - whom I never met directly - but was forced to listen to at length during breakfast at our hotel filled with foreign men of all ages and descriptions feasting toothy Thai girls at very reasonable buffet prices. The nameless American spoke insatiably of his ex-wives, his endless alimony commitments and his miserable female inflicted demise from the happy state of bourgeois bliss. This, to his short, middle-aged female Thai companion resembling a turtle with a pigtail. She, together with her two teenage children - clothes sizzling, factory fresh, shelf-folded, Reebok logos and labels dazzling the eyes to slits of the suspicious looking boy and an ever smiling girl - proceeded to demolish every last morsel on the substantial banquet stretching over meters upon meters of linen-hung tables overflowing with chrome, plates, flames and food ready for scooping. She'd wait for any hiatus in the fast flowing rhythms of his speech - usually while he was inserting a mouthful of food or wiping the froth from his chin - and standing up slowly… with her empty plate or bowl in one hand, the other, poised as conciliatory gesture upon his shoulder reassuring her return, she would identify with her radar gaze the next zone of the dinning hall for subsequent gustatory attack. Once alone, he would wail instead to her daughter - she smiling and laughing and nodding at everything he said, while the boy blinked like the dwarf carp trapped in the earthenware flowerpots filled with clear water, hairy roots and purple water lilies which decorate the palace, temples and homes of the well-to-do in Bangkok. When mama returned, he continued his woeful monologue and the children disappeared with one barely perceptible maternal nod - no doubt, both youngsters eternally grateful, forever indebted.

And in Chiang Mai, Kale and I curious and feeling somewhat left out of the sexual carnival like shriveled old prudes at a debutante ball - visited a Men Only club. We and a room full of others, the audience to a live sex show for the price of a simple drink. The boys barely out of their middle teens, hill tribe tattoos inscribed on puny shoulders and faintly muscled backs; teeth skew and pimples scattered like dying stars over their indistinguishable faces, worked hard at maintaining

erections which inevitably failed as they paraded like conveyor belt sushi dishes for the appetites of mainly foreign and some Thai patrons of The Art of Gyration with Chrome Pole. One old quean in his fifties, badly cut wig and trousers up to his neck, awarded 10 US dollars for every tumultuous ejaculation reached by the boys… buzzing around him like the flocks of swifts and bats which swooped and skimmed the guano splashed rocks in fast circles inside the mouth of the hugest cave system I've yet witnessed, just outside Sepong, a nearby hill tribe village.

The caves; awesome and barely touched by commercialism, seemingly measureless in their dark interiors, stalagmites and -tites like multi-tiered waterfalls; cascading ice walls descending upwards and melting into the black void of ceiling; and supported and girdled round by mighty towers thick as temple columns, many times taller than a man; through which a sacred river runs .. .. Sacred to the animist tribes who punt tourists on bamboo rafts bound by jungle vines across large flat stretches of water like sunless seas. Here, I parted from Kale and Diing Kang for rest after a long trek through rain drenched jungle - every step a potential dislocated back, and because I found Diing Kang irritating. Kale wanted more. I wanted less. So we parted for three days; with much exchange and sharing on our return to Mae Hong Son.

During my solitary sojourn - my spiritual retreat - I asked one of the punters to escort me to a distant Shan village for an elephant ride, and on the way, he and I became friends. He, a little bird of a man to whom the doves would call in return from the fragrant hills as he blew his own human breath through calluses cupped in cooing hands.. .. the cooed call rebounding.. .. rebounding back like a phylogenetic echo answered. We mimicked the sounds of the jungle together and he enjoyed my rooster call. We shared the mind of nature, with barely a spoken word in common - gesticulating, miming, intoning and animating the breath of The Universe in new and diverse forms. We swam together in the sacred river after our long journey into the hills, before separating into the twilight sounds of the living jungle as the evening star centered the blue-velvet dome of darkening sky above the entrance to the cave, and framed the swifts return.

And the following evening as I walked through the jungled forest to enjoy at close range the flow of the swifts to their muddy roosts, and billions of bats rested and hungry beating their webbed wings in unison as they forged a smudged trail into the dawning night, I chanced upon the little bird-man returning from a day of punting in the dark womb of the mountain. We exchanged our respective pleasures at re-meeting before he touched his stomach and mimed his need for supper, prepared and waiting at his home in the village. Touched by this synchronicity which seemed Universe sent, a timely addendum to our shared ritual of Nature's pleasures - its polyphonic harmony; its mingled measure; its Oneness - I continued on towards the cave in an expansive mood. And from out of the primitive twilight, from out of the blue-velvet cocoon of heaven - Serendipity sprung once again. There, at the entrance to the cave, engrossed in the spectacle of flight, was Denton, an ugly Englishman, face mangled by unknown fate into a pitiful

facsimile of the odd reflected images one sees while breathing life into soap bubbles through circular hoops, as they waver and wobble into spheres of perfection like spilled water in space. Kale and I had met Denton briefly some weeks before at the Mae Hong Son Guesthouse, and exchanged brief conversation. He had informed us that he was finding it difficult to leave Asia. Qualified to teach English as a foreign language, the ever popular TEFL registration, and in his early forties, I would guess from the greying flecks in his hair, he believed, as one might expect of an English native, that it was time to settle down somewhere, properly. Yet an invisible thread bound him to the south-east Asian subcontinent imprisioning him like a pupa'd caterpillar. A few slips of the tongue, and his certainty that I was sexually preoccupied with him given his identification of the "Kale and I" coupling language, which was so far from true that it was not only laughable but decidedly worthy of psycho-dissection as projective identification - pointed towards severe sexual identity problems. From the shimmering fragments of his discursive slips, he too was clearly well served by eager Asian girls - paid or unpaid; happy to benefit from a free lesson with a first language English speaker and potential Western benefactor, or better still, husband.

Unfortunately I had agreed to show him the path back through the jungle to the road, and was forced to endure his snide stupidity longer than I cared to. I always try to honor agreements. His patronizing manner and defensive disposition quickly cracked my embalmed rapture, my Epiphany; the swifts; the bats; the little bird man; the domed round of bluest black and silver; the returning... Burst! into Disillusionment. I left him in a foul mood; angry at the intrusion - The Ripping! The Breaking! The Puncturing! of my Pleasure Dome.

The following morning, I rose early after a restless night and retraced the jungle path to the cave, but this time I continued further along the path, deeper into the jungle, passed the cave, towards a monastery I had previously seen sign posted beneath the omnipotent foliage, obscured beneath mosses and creepers and damp leaves. The institution emerged through the translucent green as a simple, efficient construction of wood and corrugated roofing, a solid foundation and floor bounded by open walls and banisters. As I approached, a warm voice greeted me, bidding me welcome and indicating where I should enter. After removing my shoes, I climbed the short stairway onto the platform and identified the main temple of the complex - a large Golden Buddha in deep repose under a multi-tired canopy seated on the far left of a raised meditation stage which ran the entire length of the wooden floor and shone like a vision once seen - so I'm told - in a different forest, some 2500 years ago in Bodgaya, India.

Eyes closed and turned inwards, crescent moons above the faintest indications of a smile (at the corners of the mouth), a decidedly androgynous chest, curvaceous waist and rounded thighs draped and covered, the shoulders bare and broad and strong - an object of worship; a model; an icon; a representation of an ideal form; to be emulated; to be sought after by seekers seeking in forests. Around the statute's base, flowers and petals withered and fresh; images of decrepit

saints, sinewy and slight, fading in the wan colors of old photographs stained by ever active candles buried in decades of disintegrating wax; incense burning a thin trail of smoke like an unsecured Jacob's Ladder curling back on itself as it falls; and the faintest breeze rustling the morning still jungle.

Outside the temple, beyond the central courtyard with its shallow circular reservoir of clearest water, beyond the little kitchen and school rooms, beyond the meditation huts with their little balconies, door, one open window and space enough for one adult, or, perhaps, a novice and an elder monk - lay the jungle and everything else. But here, on the temple platform, inside, turned inwards, the sounds of the jungle were distanced, and filled rather with the chattered Talk of the head monk. An agreeable fellow in what appeared to be his early 60s, bent, thin and flaccid, and slow and deliberate; omnipresent smile; omniscient purple haze about his moist eyes - the color of age; the color of authority; the color of dreams. His robe loose, limbs pendulous, synchronizing a swaying gait, hands large and sensitive, rearranging the brown green-yellows of shoulder draped cloth as the damp reshapes the mosses of rocks, and liquid limestone sculpts caves of ice.

He spoke a simple English, and asked me where I was from? how long in Sepong? where I stay? and if I like? and so on. His questions were no different to those so persistent, from so many all over Asia, typically deflected - sometimes too roughly. Here, on the temple platform, however, I surprised myself, allowing him deeper engagement, moving beyond the prolix, the platitudes and boredom, the repetition, and inevitable frustration, and chose to engage with the threads of his limited discourse, the intention spinning like a bobbin behind the words. He was warm. Simple. Pleasant. I placed a small donation of bhat among the other coins on the alter. He thanked me.

During our interchange, an idiot geriatric servant carried in pots of food through the service entrance near the kitchen outside the temple, and arranged them on little trolleys beside grass mats running the length of the meditation stage, along its base, on the temple floor. On each mat, six places were already set as if for a meal - large brass bowl, rounded and decorated with engravings depicting The Ramayana and some other mysterious encrypted Buddhist characters, simple spoons, plastic chopsticks, one or two flat stainless steel plates, pitcher, and tumblers.

The servant noticed me, eyeing me suspiciously and eventually gestured that I should leave the temple. The head monk smiled and laughed quietly, indicating apology through demeanor, through his pause - like a music score rest note, and in the subsequent cadence - pointed to his own head in gesture, that universal symbol for mental derangement, then - firmly - directed the idiot to continue his duties. Like a beloved but misbehaved child, the idiot persisted in testing the boundaries of the directive - my being there a transgression of ritual form in the first instance, and clearly confusing for his limited cognitive skills - concrete and unabstracted; rigid and inflexible - before resuming his well rehearsed routine. I was enjoying the interaction; the goodwill; the

pleasure dome forced apart the previous evening knitting together like a magical fracture again; quickly; painlessly; under the roof of the Buddha and his monk. We were steadily being joined by the other members of the monastery on the temple platform. All male. A young sturdy looking fellow in his early twenties flipping through a magazine; two youngsters, perhaps 10 and 12 years of age assisting with preparations; and two adults with sombre faces of middle years, detached and ambling about, staring at nothing in particular, doing nothing in particular, pretending not to be curious as to my presence. All, clearly anticipating breakfast. On checking this out with the head monk, I began gathering my rucksack and hat and turned towards the stairs to leave - when he asked me to stay a while and eat with them. I was a little surprised but hungry and happy to accept his kind offer; his gesture of goodwill.

He took his position directly beneath the Buddha - still; silent; there -, as each monk sat to his left, in chronological order, in seniority, and then me... at the very end, along the adjoining wall, slightly left of the entrance to the temple, beneath the shelves filled with crockery and cutlery, bowls and tumblers and paraffin lamps. From my position - the entire ritual observed. A rare treat. And a tasty one. The idiot servant couriered gifts from the head monk to me - coconut milk in a plastic bag tightly sealed and fresh, a spoon, a sticky sugar pastry. The idiot confused but obedient, nevertheless, in the spin and the weave of the beneficent cocoon that is Buddhism and original debt; that is kindness to a passing stranger; care for the frail minded; education for the young; order to chaos; authority; repayment opportunity; emotional affordance.

The monks; staring into the jungle, munching their food with obvious relish, talking little, if at all. The idiot servant, gentle amusement as he and the trolleys of food moved from the head monk, passed each monk in turn, in order, and finally...to me. The youngest monk left his place first, well acquainted with the ritual, it seemed; unable to eat all his food as was I, but not wanting to seem unappreciative or incur further cosmic debt, he put a bowl aside for later consumption and disappeared with the remainder of his soiled utensils. The others continued eating and as they finished, left the temple with utensils and leftovers - sometimes substantial. The head monk finished last then motioned me to follow the others into the main courtyard.

Here, they were washing dishes besides the circular reservoir in ritual: first the leftovers were scrapped off onto carefully placed pieces of cardboard for the pack of fat dogs in residence - fussy eaters who ignored my substantial donation of rice, preferring the fish and vegetable stew remains of the others; then clear water scooped out in a plastic tub to wet the dishes; a squeeze of blue detergent; a thorough rub; another scoop of water; rinsing off; and turned over to drain and dry on the faded wooden table in the soft rays of the sun edging imperceptibly through the arch of the leafy-blue canopy above. I mimicked them exactly.

On returning, the head monk pointed to one of the youngest devotees and an elder, both sweeping out the temple, and through gentle laughter said, " Son". He held my gaze for a while

and I thought that perhaps I read in his eyes a suggestion of the reincarnation story-line, one which I had attempted without success to discuss in our earlier conversation before breakfast. He had made every attempt to understand as comprehension of my meaning seemed important to him. Perhaps now he had finally understood my meaning? And in the interchange now, a strange sense of Past Life, perhaps he my father? or he mine? some past relationship indebted as all Relatedness between the finite sets of objects - the ontology - of The Universe must be, of necessity: Unless identical, all discrete entities are in some or other conflict, by Nature: the grate of clawed hoof or sole on gravel; the combustion of oxygen as lungs inhale and release, or as the electrostatic pulse of muscles propelling water over gills in silent oceans burns together with the chemical violence of luminous lamps on stalked fish as their light breaks the black of ocean trenches ripped apart between continents; so too right now, the synaptic interchange purest violence as you read, or as you talk and think in private, as neurons discharge, recharge, damage and decompensate - ever so slightly - with each perception, each thought, each dream and move; each moment of consciousness, a movement forwards… in Time towards entropy, senility and blue rinses; so too human relationships, conflicted, the divorce rate approximately 50% across the Western world. Mutual indebtedness, but one reading of Violent Physiology. A reading beyond reproof. First premises submerged in an infinity of possibilities. Interpretation... Endless. Decidable by Authority! alone. By faith. By belief. By The Sangha. Good intentions, yes. Obverse fallout - the shadow of the intentional object, the shadow of the Dome of Pleasure that is Thailand, of the Holy Order - sadly this, too.

The monks clearly had their daily tasks to complete; I knew it was time to leave. I said, “Goodbye”, the decompensated version of ‘God be With You’. The old monk smiled, and silent for a while, rehearsing his words privately, unspokenly, said finally: "See you again". I smiled in appreciation and gave a shallow bow as is the custom in Thailand, which he did not return; he the superior, and I think, a little surprised. And then waving in the Western way, I retreated back into the jungle, back to my little cottage by the river flowing over stones as they crack and break and grind into sand and silt for rice paddies and opium fields and forge caverns seemingly measureless to man, in the dark.

And the river flowed passed my balcony, a window and a door, and a little more - through the forest, through the caves, through the fields of poppies and people, through the twist of river owned in sole proprietary by the River-lord and filled with fish as large as human infants. Simple carp typically forming part of ritual Thai diet, but these, deadly to eat, for some or other reason - unresearched - known to the River-lord alone. Worshipped, appeased, sedated, he and his enchanted fish; feeding off handfuls of pellets bought from persistent vendors and thrown into the aggressive waters by seekers of all nationalities in the tourist season, and then nourished by their own offspring when the season turns and the tourists migrate.

And this same river; flowing towards Bangkok on the coast through canals and waterways…, passing the house of Jim Thompson made from unadulterated teak - carved and crested like a terrestrial boat in a sea of greenery. Jim Thompson - collector, lover and active patron of Asian antiquities; the man who introduced Thai silk to the high fashion houses of the West; Siamese history recorded, documented and displayed at international museums; south-east Asian glitterati provided a venue and vehicle; neophyte intelligentsia acknowledged, encouraged; the strengths of the marginalized weaving workhorses harnessed; their submerged voices brought into relief like the stories carved in dark wood or stained into the butterfly wings of batik which still fill his flag ship on the canal; this all - so I'm told - through dignity, style and aesthetic appreciation within the gracious gatherings at his home; - Murdered! Murdered! without a trace, without a sound, without any explanation... in the folding hills of Thailand.

And the tourists pay good money for a viewing of his beautiful home; for the tours conducted by orderly guides, seated in neat rows, beneath the rotating fans, beneath the smiling manager.

# Viet Nam - Riding the Dragon

**October**

Constricted to a mere backbone; pressed against the eastern extreme of the south-east Asian sub-continent, Viet Nam (*) curls itself up like an adolescent-dragon into what little space remains. Cambodia and Laos to the west. To the north, its fire-blasting progenitor - China (Gong!). Its bloody-talons releasing not long ago its resistant lizard-ward. Its strangle-hold of over one thousand years near fatal. The welts and scratches of this historical squeezing, thick and deep and swollen - festering even now. The unwanted foster-parent proliferating in the vast territory of the mainland above. Mother-culture and narrative off-spring forced now to re-invent themselves. Or fade into extinction like the dinosaur fossils re-surfacing in the past, and presently, from the yellow-dust of the Gobi desert ripped apart by indifferent flood-waters as they reflect the light of an impartial sun. Their shapes and forms, the objective correlative, the physiological inspiration for those fierce-some Beasts of Prey; Divinity; Regality; Authority; and The Lucky - The Dragons of the Far-East! And together with the Phoenix (Peace), Unicorn (Kindness) and Turtle (Longevity), this mythical monster symbolises one of the four essential pillars of (Viet Nam-ese) Taoism, and marks an essential position within the historical discourses shaping the cultural form of Oriental Worlds - those lands furthest east, as read from a European colonialist position. Indeed the descendants of China's first Emperor, Fu His - it is said - sported a dragon's tail and his successor, Shen Nung, a dragon as father. So too - I'm told - the Viet Nam-ese people the progeny of sexual congress between a fairy's child, Au Co, and the male off-spring of a dragon, Lac Long Quan; the Sino-Viet Nam-ese macro-discourses fusing subtly, yet also separating as might a significant tributary from a great river.

These storied-myths of origins, a narrative index of the ruthless Sino-enslavement which all but starved Viet Nam of cultural autonomy as might an anorexigenic parent an adolescent youngster struggling for selfhood. Later - in the European colonial era - the French simply followed suit; a denigrating first-love; a bad-object repeated. Then the Japs, very briefly. Until a novel discourse emerged from the pen of a modern prophet. His entreaties heard like a benevolent voice filtering through the sweatful groanings of a bad dream. Through the millennia-long pain, Marx beckoned. Mao Tse Tung answered. And a little later on, so too Ho Chi Minh. The Sino-Viet Nam-ese macro-discourse mapping symmetrically, congruently onto communist discursive constructs given the legacy of the Mandarin Meritocracy: a ruling elite of scholars sitting exams and qualifying obedience from the people. The mandarins ruling together with a genetic leader, The Emperor, drawn from the ranks of The Imperial Family. So too now Communism in Red China: The Party and its Leader know best what the people require - what is good and right for them. This same developmental symbiosis, this trajectory diluted though very present still in Viet Nam today; the

Communist-Socialism that exists now, its discursive isomorph; echoing the discursive past like a fossil found. This, a very different discursive legacy from that of Christian Europe, from The Eastern Block countries travelled. Predicting different uptake. Different outcomes. A different Unconscious. Different social engineering requirements. Another journey.

But before this could come to pass, before Viet Nam could move from adolescence into adulthood and begin to re-invent itself, before it could begin to re-arrange the pattern of its scales, the lie of its wings, experiment with new gases, new flames, different colours, and ignite a distinctive fire of its own making, America entered the conversation - Loudly Democratic! And understandable from the Viet Nam-ese position, perceived as yet another sadistic, exploitative Other. Another The Enemy! Another cultural constriction dictating which style of scales to don; which body parts to pierce; and the very meaning of matching claws. And in 1975, after twenty bloody years (and protracted by Hollywood like flavor-lost chewing gum), the American super-power, as you almost certainly know, Vanquished! by a mere slip of a nation.

This desperate fight fought caged, rib upon rib, eyes flashing in the dim-darkness of tunnels modelled after a Vietnamese Le Corbusier (a diminutive homunculus) and excavated from the living earth as burrowing bacteria leave their traces in ancient bones, here the Vietnamese people continued to organise, strategize and metabolise - underground - in earthen pipes with alcoved rooms no bigger than a Westerner's grave (or a small desert cave). Whole families continued to co-exist in the gloom-lit dark. Women gave birth and reared their off-spring under a soil-sky. Above, on the terrestrial stratosphere, The Americans laid a carpet of irregular bomb craters like punctuation marks in a poorly constructed sentence... Leaving deep scars on this once fecund earth as do imprints on adult skin tagged deep after repeated onslaughts of acne vulgaris suffered during hormonal transition in adolescence. In the ensuing years, The Viet Nam-ese never before free from foreign domination and abuse, not for over 2000 years, protected their napalm-ed land, their foundling independence and autonomy - Jealously! They do still. And in some places still nothing grows where once were craters.

The nations legs are weak and thin. Solids easily upset its stomach. Bankruptcy threatens repeat. Necessity presses inwards - everywhere. International aid is un-repaid. Now American, French, Chinese - tourists of all descriptions - are bussed through valleys that once were burned; led by obligatory guides through tunnels where once soothing psalms of Lenin-ese were talked and sung and heard. But changing discursive practices - free-market directives by foreign debtors after full blown financial meltdown in the mid 1990s - slowly, learned.

Unsurprisingly then, we were led around Viet Nam like a brood of dragon-hatchlings. Herded into uncomfortable buses. Squashed seats. Broken. Holes where should be rivets and screws. Jammed into tours. Forced into communal meals (mostly tasty but nevertheless unchosen). Into hotel rooms. Off boats. Into boats. Off again and into another bus, smaller. Driven a few streets

easily walked. Off that bus. Into another bus. A bigger bus. Forced together with other tourists. Some likeable; others not. Forced to converse and repeat the standard talk: Where're you from? Where're you going? Where've you been?... And on request for a few days extra, outside of the rigid schedule, Alone! Well, okay, if you must but only if the tour modules so allow. Only if permission is granted. Only in tourist areas. And only if you're good!

From the northern capital of Ha Noi once named Thang Long, or City of the Soaring Dragon, where old men signifying belief and history with long-white Confucian beards stare as if hypnotised by the undulating reflections of willows weeping and waving on the shores of its central lake - we were escorted on our first guided tour to the Perfume pagoda, a splendid temple-cave, further north. A truly lovely place of meandering rivers along which we were row-boated by peasant girls in limpet-hats and introduced to the Triple-religion of Viet Nam. This, an odd brew of (one) locally flavoured Animism suffused with formalised Taoism; (two) Confucianism, a belief-product imported from China, emerging around 500BC through the philosophies of the man himself - he the originator of the mandarin system of governance and its associated moral order; and (three) the Mahayana Buddhism-brand - the discursive ingredients from further west - from India, Ceylon, Burma, Siam and transmogrified in Nepal, Tibet, then China, into the Greater-Wheel, where it is believed the most holy, the truly Enlightened, return from Nirvana to perform good works in community, leading others along the eight-fold path of righteousness, and do not enjoy bliss eternal as is believed by the original, rival brand. And these three narrative streams curiously confused, combined, combobulated through the Viet Nam-ese narrative-cauldron, through Talk, and cooked into a palatable brew of belief; the Triple-religion elixir of the people; and still practiced today under the broad umbrella of Communist-Socialism, religiously tolerant though state-centric. While on tour we met two small-town Irish girls… Catholic by upbringing and pleasant enough but, unfortunately, bowed beneath the burdensome shackles of sexual-guilt and for whom The Dragon had a very different symbolic meaning. So too the Caodai religion. This, a curious re-infusion of the Triple-religion after French invasion - Catholicism replacing Taoism as the third cardinal ingredient. But to the Irish lasses - impure; spiritualist in orientation; a contending pope… and treated with avoidant suspicion like a dog a striking snake.

Following the smoky-trail of oriental thought to the north-eastern coast, our dragonian guides of the lesser kind led us to Ha Long Bay, or Place Where the Dragon Descended, together with a whole troop of tourists from every part of the globe, mostly 18-30 year olds, but also other age groups. A place of unchallengeable natural beauty… Jagged, ragged rocks rising-rounded and resolute, ranging as far as the eye can stretch; like dragon-fins running a shining length of scaled-back, and seeming to float like stage-props upon the rippled-sheet of ocean-blue... The water warm as the bathing blood of dragon-slaying heroes who populate so many human myths across diverse cultures. And like Sigfried of the Scandinavian epic dramas, I was immune to all the

discursive onslaughts and missiles hurled by my touring companions and instead submerged myself and my whole body into this lovely liquid refreshment, while feasting upon dragon-fruit flesh. Its pink-burgundy, green-edged skin brushed as if with water-colours; outer-peel finned and winged as if deliberately fashioned from Taoist dragon iconography; and its white-translucent inside shot through with tiny black seeds floating symmetrically, equi-distant one from another like little dragons in embryo. The eating, a quenchingly-sweet experience. But this, only possible, as with dragon-slayers of all kinds, as my hide grew ever thicker and ever stronger, as my warrior skills became ever more honed with each laconic interchange and finned-vista. And like our Scandinavian hero, there was but one vulnerability which penetrated my very essence. But unlike the arrow which pierced through the flesh of his back, my susceptibility enjoyed the soothing penetration of the Light of Love; like a surgical laser sent by The Universe, a corrective phenomenon re-directing and liberating my vital energies. Its operation strange and mysterious. But unfortunately before that fateful happenstance and like our hero, the immunity came at a price - I had to slay a dragon first!

And this dragon came at me in a number of forms, one of which was a labeling Nederlander who demanded tiresome response from all those around him to his stereotyping-stupidity, and seated directly behind me: Americans?... Lost the war and deserved to - they think they own the world; Are you from Japan?... You must be a computer whizz; Danish?... Yes, I thought so, personality of an ice-cube; Belgium?... We don't like them! English?... Yes, I also think that the Viet Nam-ese tea tastes like dragon-sweat; A white (or someone who looks white, like Kale) South African?... Oh! a bunch of white supremacist racists; A South African that doesn't want to talk?... A white supremacist racist! And in yet another from, an Australian beach-comber who bragged about his ten years of travel all over the world indulging in the identical conversation with different people with greater or lesser command of English. Moving from sub-group to sub-group until he had been through the entire bus or any others that perchance came his way, and pausing a little longer to stress his point with docile but nevertheless astonished looking 20 year old European girls, he would preach long and hard as to the pitfalls of settling down too early. He recursively clarified that he didn't need love or stability - the world his oyster and he its pearl - yet waxed lyrical about the wonder that is Melbourne and the joys of basket-weaving, toilet-cleaning and pizza-delivery. He too had a well-defined checklist for every conceivable nationality which he unfortunately believed his duty to share with even the most resistant listener. Yet another form involved the German individual who never ceased criticising the travel arrangements in loud castigating, jeering tones, snorting disparagingly and rolling his eyes in disgust, questioning loudly how the Vietnamese could possibly have won the war, and so on. He however tended to become confused by arrangements when they were perfectly clear to everyone else, and then blamed the guides. Sure the situation was irritating at times but we were guests in a country still learning the skills of adulthood, for good reason, and of this fact he was clearly Unconscious. And

another irritation - the bevies of French, Spanish and other young girls who stuck to themselves when they imagined courtship and then grew very interested when boundaries were clarified by male others. And gay travellers who assumed that Kale and I should necessarily share their world by dint of membership despite our complete lack of interest in the who was hot and who was not game. And the flocks of other individuals… many sweet and well meaning people - but with severely limited English language skills who felt that they could usefully avail themselves of the educational services of fellow travelers. And within this crazy-cacophony of Earthlings babbling, all of us curious and questing, seeking, searching and wondering, all acting out our biological program - the Territorial Imperative - some more consciously than others, clearly, while Osama and George sharpened their hero-swords, re-wired their bombs and spread their Word like seeds, I did however experience one fascinating interpersonal interlude. This, both invigorating and uplifting - albeit somewhat strange - with a fellow traveller in Hue, the very central vertebra of the Viet Nam-ese Dragon's back. Let me tell you the bizarre tale.

At the close of sleep on the night before a tour to choice sites along the Perfume River, I dreamt that a dark-haired girl with a ringing Irish accent, a playful sense of humour, and sucking upon cigarettes assiduously, was in deep conversation with me; our relationship warm and nurturing, supportive; The Light, white-silver. In the dream, I reflected as one might during a kind of informal therapy session that she was "sick of it!"; she laughed and repeated, "Yes, I'm really sick of it!" After awakening, I considered analysis of this vivid, seemingly meaningful dream, its Silver-White Light, and wondered as to its latent meaning; I could not identify anything specific.

After a hurried breakfast, we were escorted along with some other guests to a narrow, blue boat with a large carved, orange-painted dragon-head bow, moored within walking distance from our hotel to a river jetty. Weary of being lumped together with unwanted others, conversation varied as one toilet roll is to another, I deliberately avoided any interaction and chose instead to learn from the locals and infuse the hypnotic rhythms of ripple, reed and water together with my psyche, my Consciousness. I chose rather to focus attention upon the punting, rowing, chugging peasants who passed by the open window in conical hats like sea-shells; slim-boats laden right to the water-line with sand mined from the riverbed in woven baskets like discs and used to re-construct their war-torn land; the syncopated flashes of silvered-water flowing over taut muscles like mercurial sculptures; rapid-breathing bodies disappearing, re-appearing with hard-earned booty from the surface below; the languid pulsations of our simple engine nudging the dragon-head slowly forwards along its liquid path.

Just before lunch, after various pagoda punctuations along the Perfume river (where we were whisked-off by drivered-motorbikes through dense countryside of paddies and peasants, cattle and cones, palm-trees and coconuts… as on the backs of winged-lizards covered in leathery-scales and knotted with straps to steady and seat through knuckles gripping bloodless; deposited

before hungry cash kiosks; rushed about crumbling mausoleums with expanding gardens, through rigid-red frames of squared-doors beneath fired-clay temple roofs clawed and elongated against the grey-light sky; hurriedly circling lily ponds floating islands of twisted-trees as centres like the cracking blue-brushed vases resting upon dark-lacquered tables shining as silver beneath the dust in Triple-religion temples; snapping miniature bonsai-worlds of highest foliage-covered mountains nested with miniature models of tiny pagodas and embraced by sheets of water in trays of ovals and circles standing solid on curved, carved legs above paved floors cracked by weeds to augment my very fallible memory) I noticed an attractive dark-haired girl of around thirty, whisky-coloured eyes, light summer dress - black - with black sandals… Smiling.

She was enjoying refreshment at the numerous tabled-stalls peopled by persistent peasants plying everything … Always! I never bought a thing, unless wanted; I never wanted anything forced; their marketing methods strategy-less, un-schooled, self-defeating; exhausting; non-optimal. Her companions, a girl-child with her mother, reflected her glowing smile while she paid the inflated retail fee and began making her way back to the boat along with the other passengers returning from their dragon-rides - hair re-styled along the horizontal. I warmed to her immediately and before I knew it, became engaged in conversation which sang to the lilt of Irish melody and quick-witted mirth. Yes, it was then that I identified her as the girl in my dream. Her name is Sylvia.

Feeling somewhat bewildered albeit that I had previously experienced prescient dreams of startling detail and perspicuity, as you already know, I decided that this time I would set up a kind of empirical experiment; apart from my word, there had been no proof of their authenticity of which to speak. Further, I endeavoured to ascertain why this particular dream connection had been made, identify its mechanisms and content as I might any other social or psychological phenomenon - such as armed conflict and violence - as a social scientist, as research psychologist. So I immediately informed Kale as to the details of the dream and he tuned in to witness the unfolding events, functioning as both witness and co-researcher...

Shortly after we returned from one of the pagoda visits - to a large group of passengers who had remained behind in the boat, some of whom were enjoying Sylvia's charismatic company, Kale sitting close by and carefully observing the proceedings, and me, deliberately silent in the wings - Sylvia of her own accord, and for the very first time said: "I'm just sick of it! I'm just sick of travelling. I've cut my journey short. I'm going back home in 10 days time. I've seen enough temples and had enough of hostels and buses and trains, the whole lot! From now on, and for the rest of my life, it's three weeks and three star accommodation only! I'm just sick of it!". Everybody laughed at her humorous presentation, as did she. Kale’s eyes widened and he looked at me incredulously. He began talking to her. Finding out more about her. She still however had not lit one cigarette.

As we disembarked for the final pagoda visit, Kale and I wondered if we should inform her of the dream; I was a complete and utter stranger in the middle of Viet Nam and did not wish to startle or upset her, yet wished to investigate the phenomenon further, in more detail. As the three of us continued chatting on the way to the temple complex, both she and Kale grew progressively dismayed at the striking convergence of our respective global circumnavigations. This serendipitous affinity provided the ideal point of discursive entry, or positioning, it seemed, for the news. I told her about my dream. I also asked her if she had ever had dreams of fore-knowing. This question was based upon other experiences of a similar nature, not many but always very poignant and accurate in their predictions; that is, the fact that those of whom I have dreamt in the past have often had similar experiences themselves. Indeed prescient dreaming is a well documented phenomenon. Joseph's dreams in The Bible, for example, and in the religious and/or healing suppositions of countless other cultures - the Shamanic practices of many African cultures where sangomas are called to service through pre-cognisant dreams of a directive nature, and which I have had the privilege of experiencing firsthand, before knowing anything of their nature, as well as related practices in South America and the Polynesian island cultures - and recognised too by Freud's great compatriot, Carl Jung, a prescient dreamer himself. Her eyes narrowed and looking somewhat startled… understandably - poor soul, and justifying her response with a gentle disclaimer that she usually refrained from discussion of the topic, admitted that she had dreamt of her own father's death one year before its occurrence when in late childhood. Furthermore she told us that she had predicted the exact circumstances of his death, which were most unusual. She said no more about this. Although most curious and intrigued - understandably - I did not press her as to the details since the whole scenario was clearly upsetting for her and I felt that I had already overstepped the boundaries of social propriety.

She did however go on to say that she had felt terribly guilty as a child, fearing that she might have caused his death as might a witch or other malevolent magician and not merely prescient to his death, an inevitable reality. This too is very understandable. Children are typically egocentric in their thinking and logical inferences. This developmental pattern is well documented. A familiar instance of the phenomenon is the tendency of children with divorcing parents to feel responsible for the parental split-up. I have experienced this time and time again during the course of clinical work, and it is also solidly documented in state of the art psychotherapeutic literature. It however seemed to me that like children of divorce who never confront or properly understand these distorted inferences, Sylvia was a risk. In adulthood.

Unconscious (un-explicated, un-packed, un-mourned and un-re-integrated) guilt (emotional assessment of belief through experience) can persist as an adult and result in myriad non-optimal psychological defenses. Masked depression (sense of loss) or anxiety (sense of guilt) may comprise escapist avoidance and interfere with agential up-take of stable discursive positions. For example, the formation of a cohesive (con-junctive as opposed to dis-junctive) personal

identity (who I am to myself - eg, benevolent-malevolent, creative- destructive, etc) or, social identity (who I am to others - eg, partnership or work-roles; cooperative-adversarial, giving-selfish, etc). These discursive disjunctions might interact complexly through life development and contribute to adjustment and partnership related problems in adulthood. Unless properly confronted and understood, these problems of the psyche may persist - like an un-diagnosed vertebral fracture in childhood never re-set; subsequent muscle development and alignment may be skewed, pre-disposing debilitating arthritis or other somatic problems in early, middle or even late adulthood.

The fact of this psychological picture per se seemed to provide the first empirical cue to the research question - Why this Dream? That is, prescience itself is simply a phenomenological reality in The Universe - its exists. And like a back trauma or schooling, it results in specifiable consequences. How we understand this physiological reality is up to scientific enquiry - such as this.

Perhaps Einsteinian constructs (Discourse) may assist us in this endeavour? We think that we know from Einstein's constructs that Time is not linear. So too we think we know that The Universe is made up of objective, measurable material (Physiology) and codified too by this same great mind into atomic and sub-atomic particles of electro-static energy spinning in relation to one another. This same energy manifesting as your thoughts… now as you read this print on paper or cyber-screen, the paper itself, its misprints, the glass, its distortions on the screen as natural and artificial photonic particles dance together in exponential reflection, as their energy is absorbed and dissolved in the rods and cones of your eyes, transmuted into perception and idea, and then re-awakened, again and again, through memory, through imprints, even in dreams while you sleep; your breath now and your hand-movements now; as a wall and its window; as clouds; as sky; the light of the sun with its seven minute pause on its journey to the heat sensors in your skin as you hunch against the cold, pausing only to massage the restless moon and transmute the gassy chaos of Venus into the wink of the morning star; and other suns, stars light-years distant but seemingly pluck-able from the black; and the galaxy whirling as a buckle in the centre of Orion’s belt; and this energy too, most necessarily, at the very beginning of Time and Space, to the hypothesised Big-Bang and its measure-able radiation which is only now reaching our Earth, though The Universe has been born and evolving for billions of Years: all these manifestations bound together by the Energy of Love. So too My Dreams.

If photographs on postcards are pictures of people and places, perhaps too prescient dreams imprint … onto and into, within and about, somehow riding a whirl of atoms unknown and undiscovered, unconscious and still to understanding, as yet. But nevertheless … as through the lens of a camera; refracted like light through water (remember your broken shins whilst paddling in clear, shallow pools); refracted like the folds of Time - an entity married to Space - and

received by brain structures unknown as yet, as might a photograph beamed to your PC through the Internet while you type with your fingers. You, the off-spring of this spousal continuum.

These neurological structures, perhaps, a regular neuron with dendrodendritic connections? Experimental neuro-psychology indicates that a full electro-chemical discharge along such a neuron which is interconnected with billions of others through violent synaptic interchanges - the very physiology of thought - can be initiated through electro-static energy surges (eg., an artificially produced electrical field like table-lamps that shock you; or those that occur naturally like lightning) outside of the body; no chemical mediation is necessary as in all other synaptic connections. Once initiated within the human brain, chemical transmission takes over as is usual beneath the cranium and skin, in the brain and the central nervous system; connectivity established between the hind-, mid-, and fore-brain; between the visceral, the proto-reptilian (our dinosaur inheritance) and mammalian superstructures; between Body, Emotion, Ideation. Perhaps prescient dreams are complexly related to these inter-connecting mechanisms? As Internet is to PC; The Universe to the Human Brain? As Modem is to PC; Perhaps Eyes, Ears, Nose and Dendrodendritic connections are to Human Brain? Perhaps?

So much for the structures, of the Physiology in addressing the research question. But what of direction? Why this dream, at this time, with this person? Let me tell you a little more about Sylvia, about my state of mind at the time, then you decide.

Sylvia was in quandary. An intimate partnership of seven or so years on the rocks. A career path veering awry and scattered and unfocused. Yet a wealth of personal attributes. Attractive and vivacious as a black diamond. Intelligent. University educated in accounting and financial analysis; scholarships all the way. Substantial work experience in London and Geneva. Gifted in mathematics. So too as a potter of clay. An artist. An academic. A successful business women. Involved with a man of mixed-race. Eloquent in speech and fluent in French. Irish born and raised, now living in London with regular visits to the great cities of continental Europe. Sylvia, a true person of the Modern Age. An Earthling of the 21st century. Her conversation moved easily from topic to topic, from person to person, from position to position … too easily, in my opinion. But of course I said nothing. I was observing, researching. And on the last full stop along the Perfume river before heading homewards… midst rectangular-doors of red and arching bridges over lily ponds painted the same red … having shared now some of our mutual secrets, made public some of the private, a little always withheld, remaining in the shadows of unconsciousness, as always, between speakers of even the most intimate of kinds, necessarily, Kale and I discussed our business plans for Canada with her. She, the ideal foil. And to abbreviate a long story, one that will be told at length in some future time, no doubt, Sylvia, critical, considered, informed - provided invigorating support for our projected Canadian venture.

Her supportive encouragement came at a time when I was feeling unsure, uncertain, vulnerable as to my path forwards. Was I being over ambitious? Did I really have the necessary skills? Feeling the tug of years as I near my fourth decade on the planet. Feeling the weariness of novelty. And so on. We've all been there sometime, no doubt. Like a dragon tired of flight. Tired of blowing fire. Tired of being hunted. Tired of shedding skins and scales and things. Tired. Doubtful. Infirm. Unsure. But the synchronicity of this Lighted-Dream with this considered international affirmation - in the middle of the dragon's back, in Hue, Viet Nam, that distant war-zone of childhood remembrance imprinted from pictures and stories in my father's magazines and cinematic epics shaped by silver-ions … dispersed doubt like a handful of mercury dropped upon a crystal orb. Once again I felt I was breathing in time with The Universe, my heart once again beating time to Its vital rhythms. I felt restored. And loved. And directed. I attempted to reciprocate the gift. I felt that I too could be of assistance to Sylvia. But the circumstances were limiting … a crowded boat and thumping engines, and I therefore provided some cursory suggestion towards counselling, where Sylvia might explore her discursive world and its history properly. Travelling had solved none of her life dilemmas, as she had hoped it might. The only solution… to turn inwards… to become Conscious before re-embracing The Universe and beginning a truly skillful dance as a truly Enlightened, agential human being. And as we parted on arrival back at the home-jetty, she, I and Kale tired and worn out after our strange encounter on the Perfume river, after our moving discussions and pagoda punctuations, Sylvia lit her first cigarette of the day. She took a long, hard suck before exhaling the smoke through her nostrils and mouth… the smoky-trail dissolving into the evening sky like old fossils turn slowly into sand.

(*) Note: as properly written in Vietnamese; few words have more than one syllable.

# Cambodia - Living On One Leg

**October**

Forgotten... but silent... patient…, land-mines lie buried in the jungles of Cambodia biding their time...; mechanical predators hell-bent on wasting their next ambulatory victim of triggering weight... Cows and goats and horses grazing intently, or their singing shepherds or waggon-drivers, their riders, the village milkmaids and their laughing children; an odd journalist, a willful tourist straying from the well-worn paths cleared for safety, or those who seek, find and detonate for a fee these ferocious monsters of forest and field - deliberately. Or a proud ex-soldier of a thirty-year war unfinished yet...; social conflagrations exploding - Suddenly! - from time to time. Still. Or any other unsuspecting mortal crushing the foliage fresh beneath their tread whilst inhaling easily, naturally…, absorbing automatically..., the abundant oxygen produce of the extensive photosynthesizing cocoon of leafy-lungs exhaling...; the jungle breathing fecund in the soil-rich comfort of its south-east Asian river-basin home. The discombobulated quadrupeds, collected or slaughtered for first-grade protein but no longer milk and cheese and romantic rides; the bipeds, their fleshly contents buried together with varied ceremonies - some honored with still more explosions from canons and guns and aeroplane jet-engines. Others, fitted-out with fancy crutches from Red Cross supplies or prosthetic devices of plastic and hinges and careful coloring, or simple sticks fashioned by loving relatives from jungle-thickened bamboo - whom we saw hobbling about with sad but determined faces.

Or, where necessary and possible, the sustaining affordance of life-support machines; or psycho-active medication; post-traumatic-stress-disorder support groups; individual psychotherapy. These, Corporeal Realities: all, depending on physiological damage storied by discursive positioning in the World of Others. With Consequences. Whatever the fix. Best avoided. A Waste. Land put to better use. Energy, in-efficient. Non-optimal. Engineered, poorly, discourse. Natural flow - interrupted. Dis-connected. Dead. Ended.

We therefore flew directly to Siem Reap, a small rural settlement adjoined to the largest temple complex in the world, well touristed, safe and secure, and located in the far north of the Cambodian river-basin. The town skirts the shores of Lake Sap (the watery-heart of Cambodia) which, in monsoon, our seasonal co-host during our ten day visit, is at its most dilated; annual flooding provides optimal quantities of water brimming with itinerant nutrients, creating conditions ideal for the cultivation of bountiful crops of rice beneath tall palm trees, so feeding hungry peasants and greedy warlords alike, to repletion, before contracting back towards its center, further south, once again.

The temple complex, Hindu in origin, or more specifically, Champa, the south-east Asian interpretation of the Indian discursive import, inhabits an area of around ten square kilometers: some sites small, a mere mossy-mound of cut-rock; others, huge pyramidal edifices with towering pillars and gigantic statutes wreathed by broad orange-ribbons and, as one penetrates more deeply into these colossal monuments, still more gentle faces suspended in rocky-space, but these, no body and magnified a hundred times at least and smiling still in contemplative inner-bliss like the benevolent countenances of parents gazing upon their needy infants only just learning to focus the muscles of their eyes, and open and closed corridors and balconies with steps so steep and high that you are scared to climb up and then all the way down again for fear of falling to a certain death or serious injury, both legs and arms and hands and all your nails required to exercise a complete visitation to the inner sancta on the highest levels of these gargantuan constructions, where the impasto patterning of eerie green-black organic chemistry on grey-stone, its ageless patina, seem to dialogue with the surrounding jungle and water and clouds, its ordered chaos extending over carved relief-work surfaces of ancient Hindu deities living still in the hearts and brains of people, in some or other form; and yet other temples within the complex, intermediate in size, but in the uninterrupted process of being quietly consumed by trees, their root-systems like silver-rope waterfalls strangling, reducing to rubble their foundation of convenient footholds between the cracks and broken building blocks - monoliths - scattered and strewn about by the forces of Gravity, that nuptial priest to Time and Space and You and I: and all - each separate rocky protrusion, each sun-hung, moon-hung monument of worship, each stony erection and edifice, larger and smaller, brighter and duller - is bound together by a massive system of thick walls and high gates and connecting bridges over moats filled with protective stretches of water turning the color of blood as the sun sets and the moon rises over the lush green of the jungle blackening like a wound-healing scab, and the tourists and vendors and priests and charlatans, guards and guides and everyone else, return to their dwelling-places, along with every other diurnal creature of water and forest and atmosphere - to supper, sex and sleep.

And whilst being whizzed about on the back of fast-dodging motorcycles - my technique and confidence as passenger growing with every bending, bumping, bouncing moment - the drivers, boys barely in their twenties, working hard, resolutely, determinedly, attempting to carve a niche for themselves in The Universe, as do You and I and all other human beings, I began to consider how indeed we might create an Optimal Global Community of cooperative Earthlings, each standing firmly on two legs - not one, or none - each utilizing all of our Universe given Physiology, all of our resources - collectively and individually.

The war-torn rage of the past in Viet Nam and Cambodia, the latter triangulated in a voiding narrative nexus, a vilifying vortex of Belief - between the ancient Royalist faction claiming Champa origins; Maoist Communism (China); and Western Democracy (USA) -, and the resulting

vacuum, slowly filling with the snarls and growls and moans of Jungle Lore, scripted by ruthless warlords as a form of ritual aggression, an archaic discursive practice emerging on every continent at some or other juncture in history, and isomorphic with similar rituals in the animal kingdom - the contests for territorial domination and mating privileges. And this pathetic south-east Asian social tragedy, together with the looming threat of global catastrophe - the Western-Islamic discursive disjunction in a Post-Modern yet mutually dependent global society, and, of course, all the other Violent Conflicts coloring our relatively short history as a distinctive species on this planet, their content filling rooms upon rooms in museums and palaces and mausoleums alike, in all the countries visited - seem to point towards serious consideration of this reality.

And particularly so after cursorily researching Cambodian politics past and present, their protracted war, the alarming quota of civilian casualties - You and I - and discovering, sadly, that indeed very little was actually ever achieved. The status quo remains intact - as before - power is still in the hands of a few. Warlords and fear and corruption still the moral order of the day. So too the Communist-Socialist experiment in the Eastern Block of Europe, and in Russia - What was achieved apart from torrential bloodshed and theme parks on the outskirts of Budapest? What? So too Nazism, yet its neo-movement experienced first-hand in Romania with yet another twenty-year old seeking meaningful co-existence, seeking a position in Discourse, in Physiology - a location within their wholesome interface. Me too. And You. All of Us. Would it not be more useful to channel our natural energies towards bringing life to Mars, just for fun - for the pure joy of being Creative! - or exploring the liquid oceans which may lie deep beneath the frozen crusts cracked and crystalline as here on Earth, bound together by the same Energy of Love, of Europa, one of Jupiter’s many moons?

So to this end I digress a little now, and explore belief from a Functionalist-Developmental perspective, a Brief History of Belief, if you like, “brief” being the operative word. And in this undertaking, I attempt to knit together some assumptions gathered on the Nature of Belief (albeit already known to others) as I have understood It during this global circumnavigation over the past year, and in the process of generating these discursive meditations, during this Dialogue with Belief.

In Copenhagen a temporary exhibition at the National History Museum presented an outline - Wholistic Synopsis - of mainstream Anthropological Knowledge of nascent human cultures as these have emerged around the world, particularly in relation to cave-paintings rendered and preserved as the reasonably, but nevertheless primary intact cultural artifacts of our earliest homo-sapiens ancestors - in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, Australasia, as well as on isolated islands, archipelagoes and other shifting landmasses which dot and splash the great oceanic expanse stretching across our planet surface - these landmasses, Nature's paints and inks and glues mixed and matched by chance, like those thrown and flicked and sponged by the

abstract expressionist artists of the century past as they gave new form to capacious canvasses through careful selection of cuts and pastings so augmenting their troglodyte artistic heritage as geological forces, the sea and its profusion of creatures sculpt and color the Earth's inconstant coastlines. And in typical 21st century style, an interactive graphical interface between the participant (discursive subject) and the exhibition material (discursive content) formed the basis for information dissemination. This, a novel and engaging discursive practice - and a step onwards and upwards from the dreary Victorian efforts of two centuries past, some of which, most unfortunately, are still with us today.

And the question posed the participant - on the graphical interface of one of the many glass-screens coded in a number of different languages: Danish, German, Italian, Spanish, French, Japanese, English -, and on the basis of those cultural features the researchers' claim to be shared by all early societies, asked for the one defining characteristic of humankind distinct from any other living counterpart on Earth, as multiple-choice. The choices (more or less) included: 1. Language (coded signs) and Communication; 2. Tool-use and Problem-solving; 3. Artworks and Creativity; 4. Humor and Pleasure-seeking; 5. Spiritual Practice and Religion. Which item would you choose?

And contrary to my expectation, only the final item qualified. No doubt this model can be discredited on the grounds of Constructedness, and indeed this formulation, this nosology, this discursive construction, requires rigorous, critical de-construction, and so on, but given the Functionalist position from which this analysis - this discursive meditation - is deliberately contrived, in terms of my personal experiences whilst traveling, it seems a useful point of departure to begin the knit; as stitch is to wound; and nail to canvass and Cross.

I was told that all cave-paintings contain certain formal features: the life forms, plant, animal, and mineral which comprise the surrounding environment, as well as renditions of the human body in action as it moves through Space and Time, sometimes distorted as in dreams, hallucinations and trances, sometimes grafted together with animal parts and other life forms, and also, non-representational forms - that is, depictions of strange squiggles and circles and dots and other geometrical shapes. These non-representational forms, it is conjectured, may ironically represent endotropic imagery, or those generated by the sensory apparatus of the eye connected with the visual cortex of the brain, itself - by the pulsating capillaries of vital blood, and the retinal activity of rod and cone cells converting light energy into image concerted with cortical structures - as when you close your eyes tightly and press the eyeball firmly, and then release… Yes, those little images of after-light. And all these shapes and forms, constellated together into meaningful wholes - elements and sets - by stories.

So too all cave-paintings appear to have served primarily the purposes of Religious Belief - of Ceremonies Sacred and Rituals Righteous, as one of the many efforts to wrestle control from the

surrounding environment and harness its resources for survival - as in any ethology. Religious practice - just another attempt to influence, in some or other way, the willful Forces of Nature through rites performed by shaman entranced, intoxicating, enrapturing their naïve audiences through story-lines, through Belief or patterns of Belief: So too in Scientific Discourse, research procedure and its practical consequences replace ritual and ceremony - efforts to split the atom and tame its power, to engineer genetically idiosyncratic, compatible medicines, or conduct laser surgery with no cut, gash or scar, or the shedding of one bloody droplet red as crushed rubies; or, for that matter, efforts in the social sciences, in pursuit of ideal foreign affairs or economic policy, conflict resolution procedures, organizational psychology, marketing methodology, customer relationship management, familial structuring and interaction practices, and those between the sexes, and the discursive practices adopted by psychotherapy, for instance, and so on.

And it seems therefore that as a function of advanced symbol-utilization, semiotics, and most especially, Social Language (Discourse), - albeit but an elaboration of basic animal communication evolved and generated within the mammalian structures of the brain, in specifiable sub-structures of the neo-cortex -, together with tool-use to sculpt and mold and shape the nurturing matrix of any surrounding environment, a necessary co-occurrence - that The Universe has achieved a certain Critical-Mass in Evolution. This Critical-Mass, akin to Einsteinian constructs where the whole and its interrelated moving, movable parts and positions, is greater than the sum of these, and so, given to specifiable consequences: Religious Belief, a Gestalt, an artifact of evolution with consequences for survival; consequences for functionality - dysfunctional, functional, optimally-functioning; consequences for Good, and for Evil.

And some human societies graduated from hunting and gathering and performing ritual activities in high, protected caves overlooking expanses of pristine land, where optimal vigilance against predatory attack both animal and human could be agentially actualized - this, an activity common to many animal species and especially the Great Apes - the chimpanzee (pan troglodytes), the bonobo (pan paniscus), the gorilla (gorilla gorilla), the orang-utan (pongo pygmaeus), and, as I say, the human being (homo sapiens): All social (living in collectives, troops), simultaneously aggressive and nurturing (a third of all male chimps are murdered in territorial battles, and their mates, brothers, mothers, and sisters mourn), capable of seeing the funny-side, of humor (hooting, “laughing” hysterically if a troop member falls unharmed from a rock) and seeking mutual pleasure (grooming, playing, chasing, teasing), intelligent (environmentally flexible, adaptable, relying on memory and learning from past events), symbol-using (communication rituals - bums turned on subjugated rivals, urination a sign of subservience, both life preserving, and accompanied by specified grunts and screeches and barks, a form of “talking” together with “body-language”), tool-using (dis-mantling, re-constructing the environment - a specific width of grass plucked and inserted into variable holes of ant nests to which the insects cling like juice to a lolly-stick): all, characteristics augmenting the problem-solving, the creativity of the proto-

biological programs already harnessed by other species of animal, the bower birds of Australia, for instance, meticulously decorating their nests with a specific shade of blue-objects, or magpie collections of shinny-lovelies: all, efforts to survive and propagate their species: all, under the super-ordinate sway of the Territorial Imperative!

And in line with this Great Spirit, this inevitable trajectory of Change, these ritual beliefs and practices appear to have become progressively streamlined (Storied) into the Great Monotheisms and other Canons for Right Living that organized and systematized and, indeed, realized the achievements of the Agrarian Age - the age of grapes and grasses cultivated upon grounds-wild... Places selected and engineered for their sustaining fruit, then crushed and cleaned and processed into brews and bakes, waters turned into wines and spirits, and grains into breads and cake; and both into Sacraments, Covenants and Ritual; of crop rotation, mineral supplementation and irrigation; of woven fibers shorn from goats and sheep grazed, feathers plucked from ducks and chicks watered; of mattresses stuffed, and flesh slow-roasted over wood-coals chopped or fossil-fuels dug, drenched with bastings of fats refined and herbs gardened; of naive thirst watered from unseen, unsmelt, unheard underground wells excavated, divined by the gifted, we're told, and drawn by the bucketful on pulleys of finger knotted ropes, manufactured: Places designed for living in harmony with Others..., assistance in digging and planting and forging better implements for these purposes - by mining, crushing, extracting, and melting metals from rocks found in caves and rivers, in questing for ideal shapes and forms, mutually; in searching for that magical sword, forever strongest, forever most reliable and efficient, best for protecting children with matted hair - in some or other form, The Enemy! - always out-there...; men and women and children working together in parties or ruthless armies, always trying hard-er, ensuring a job better done, and so earning respect and communal caresses - as might alpha apes groomed in the shade of trees by aspirant others, who stretch and yawn in languid bliss, and kings and queens and aspiring princes who grant rights and lands and knighthoods: Places filled with temples and churches, castles, mosques and mausoleums; priests and priestesses, and the blue-blooded nobility, devotees, congregations and church committee meetings on Mondays; and Angry-gods! punishing the hungry, the infertile, the diseased, and wretched, the ill-ruling and ill-fated - and rewarding the Good with grain and gain, and the Righteous with relief from pain, sometimes.

And these same agrarian stories - of right living, of wrong living - now tilt the balance of power in the nuclear, genetic engineering and super-fast computer age - the Information Age..., inappropriately. Their consequential range - their praxis - stretching now beyond a jungled-community or desert-village, beyond a nation, beyond kingdoms or even an empire, beyond continents and oceans, beyond their initial boundaries and realization, beyond …

And after much sore-footed tramping through museums and galleries and palaces and parks and things, where the world's contemporary narratives and, of course, their histories, are encased within protected housings with balconies and views and vistas of various sorts, usually overlooking nurturing sources of water where once wild birds and animals quenched their Universe given thirst - a plentiful larder, a primeval supermarket for the original human inhabitants, it seems too that the Great Canons that shaped the discursive forms of agrarian civilizations, the dominant narratives of consequential morality, the macro-discourses, those still dominant in shaping our contemporary world - Judaism, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam (in order of uncertain historical emergence) - served a bio-ethological purpose. As humankind's tools and signs developed and evolved as does all Physiology, our very Nervous System testimony to this reality, it became apparent that indeed many hands make light work but equally so, too many cooks spoil the broth, the bake and the brew, the sacramental bread and wine, or coconut-milks distilled with sweet juices of crushed flowers and turned into sugared-crystals, wrapped in cotton-spun cloth and presented as deity offerings in reverential awe at the alter of ground-control. That simple!

In the Agrarian Age, moral order relied on a new kind of belief (Re-Storying) for a larger scale of human Endeavour and Enterprise, later, the appellation of many a ship and starship still under the yoke of the Territorial Imperative! - and like these mechanical inventions, required careful, deliberate, conscious and valid construction. Myriad pockets of isolated extended family groupings hunting and gathering - sometimes yoked together by clan-ship, sometimes not, sometimes incestuous and sometimes not, some not even certain how falling pregnant occurs, genetic engineering left to the vagaries of chance and good fucking fortune, and their ritual beliefs and even language systems so disparate that no cooperative social activity possible, nor harnessing the power of The Universe - there always - simply waiting (with a benevolent smile an Its face) to be discovered - required a new story-line. If cooperative activity could not endure one to one correspondence with language and dialect diversity, not possible it seems as discourse has been, in the past, too local, too face-to-face, and mostly, too locked in by local discursive community membership, by local social identity, to truly unify vast numbers of others, of competing communities of people using and talking about common resources and The Enemy! - then at the very least, a Communal Belief-system, essential!

So: For the twelve tribes of Israel - the Nameless J… - but defined, nevertheless, in concept through implication, as The One God; monotheism subsuming all Animist Beliefs prior through the divinations of that great patriarch, Abraham, though no substantive proof remains of his existence - but nevertheless, we're told, that it is through his Divine-Directive, his needs and wishes and their violent protection ordained by the Nameless authority, selectively revealed to him alone and Holy Others of the Torah, that the Judaic narrative traces its rootings and positionings, and continues to fight its battles against persistent persecution - for justice, for existence…, for

territory: And in India - Hinduism and its concerted chaos of 330 million gods, many of local Animist origin, or Christian or Islamic, for that matter, and so too the deities of many other cultures absorbed like starlight over its long, dense history, all subsumeable, singing in chorus, in polyphonic harmony, under the baton of Brahma, firstly, and Vishnu and Shiva close behind; the sun and the moon; the form and the void; being and nothingness: Chinese Taoism - the magical beasts of Animism laughing together under the luck of the Dragon, the goodwill of the Emperor, Yang, Nature's active principle, and the Tigeress, Yin, the female aspect; both, modeled on the Way, the Daodejing; taught, developed, canonized by Laozi and other shamanic saints, through contemplation and elaboration of local occultist mysteries from herbed-forests deep; of Heaven's Thunder breathing, of Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water containing, directing; through ancient astrology divining; feng shui guiding; acupuncture healing; tai chi defending...; and always in pursuit of the Infinite, the macro- in the micro-cosm, the Immortal in the everyday, the Unknowable, the revitalizing Elixir of Life: Confucianism - mapped onto Taoism and so operationalising its magical mysteries into a pragmatic politic: Buddhism - an anthropomorphic re-interpretation of Hindu thought; a middle-way, its stringed-symphony neither too tight, nor too loose… just right, in balance - clear, concise, secular and do-able, in the here and now, systematized and bringing further moral order, social order to the polyphony of Hinduism and Tao-Confucianism: Christianity - a permutation to Judaism, its Messiah found and so preaching, converting, tribalising through missionaries missioning contrary readings of the gospel - Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant - through words containing messages of good will to all men and ye of little faith, the way to truth and to the light of the most valid of knowledges, and turning the other cheek... - this last directive, though, contradicted by the evangelist, Paul, who in his prophetic addendum to the gospels, in the Book of Romans, made provision for Christian policemen, presidents, prosecutors and soldiers, and other keepers of the peace… to protect, I'm told, The Word: And Islam - where Muhammad, so the Holy Book of Islam tells, followed in the muddy footsteps of Adam and the dusty trails of those other prophets following - Abraham, Moses and Jesus, the corporeality of all but Jesus of Nazareth corroborated by nothing but the frailest of archaeological evidence, and considered The Prophet's direct genetic line; yea, through Abraham of the Jews and Gentiles, Muhammad was born, and more specifically, and with Judeo-Christian Biblical claims concurring - directly from Abraham's son, Ishmael, first begotten to Hagar, an Egyptian slave, and not Isaac, Abraham's second born, of his wife both sacrosanct and legalized and until then wholly infertile, Sarah; the latter, conceiving, gestating and straining to full wailing birth this womb-fruit when 90-something years ripe, so the scriptures of rabbis, the Holy Bible, and the Koran tell... - through blessings from God, through Abraham's charms, through his seeds... scattered like stars in the sky, where right now the Milky Way spins about its black-hole kernel. Wherewith it came to pass that these loin-seeds made manifest now, this contentious progeny, rivals to the holy throne of ground-control and righteous-rain became, as young rams in

rutting season clash their horny-heads of bone protecting, the respective tribes of wandering herds-people multiplied together with their flocks by night and by day, in the light and in the shade of sweet-leafed bushels chewed and swallowed and shat out again on their stony-fields of pleasure and pain recurring - in their nomadic supermarket chain, and through divine-directed sacrifice, Abraham's test of faith, though interrupted, the bony rip of contention became; yea, because truly it is this - This!... that has been scripted contrary in the respective texts sacred, and made Poly-textual discord manifest between Islam and Judeo-Christianity, between these still wandering tribes as they fly to meet and greet one another - this one and that one - across continents of divide... telephoning, teleconferencing, or text-messaging their exact time of arrival in their distinctive garb. And in time to come, as it came to pass, and, most importantly, through holy trance, once again, through the whisperings of the angel, Gabriel, Muhammad re-wrote the script that features ways to social order. And in this particular re-write - Violence, I'm told, a last resort, circumstantial, females liberated from the repressive social order that paved its way in heavy shackles; Muhammad's manuscript well intended, his words unifying the war-some tribes of stony-field and wandering expanse where deep wells lay hidden, known to the selected few, the chosen, like benevolent nipples nurturing. As did Abraham’s, for a time at least, as it is written in the soft sands of that same Nameless wilderness, in that same alluvial confluence of Sumerian(Aryan), Babylonian, and Hittite narratives, those dominating through Time's wind the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia's discursive legacy, the rival contemporaries of the pharaoh-ed Egyptians of the Nile and its delta, all of whom, for multi-millennia past, had been co-habiting in agrarian abundance and civilized splendor replete.

And I am told that indeed it was through the sacred narratives of the Near-East that the fundaments of Judaism, Christianity and Islam evolved, and it seems too, Hinduism - emerging in the second millennium BCE, before the common era, through the wanderings of Near-Eastern merchants, the Aryans, and their final cataclysmic invasion, and near wholesale discursive subsuming, of the Dravidian Shivaists who had, until then, been tilling the fertile Himalayan foothills of the Indian sub-continent and practicing, since 6000 BCE, the world's oldest known formal religion, the aboriginal narrative artifact - the seminal agrarian artifact. Here, in the Near-East, in the confluence of many rivers rich in peripatetic nutrients, then the great epicenter of the Western-world, the so-called 'cradle of civilization', where papyrus-pages of hieroglyph-ed scrolls and tablets of cuneiform-ed clay, writ large to holy honor - to Ra-Amon, his birthing egg, and the scarab rolled Sun; to Marduk-Bel, god of thunderstorms, his dragons bestowing eternal life, and Ishtar, daughter of Sin, the moon-god, her lion love, military strength: these characters, Divine Keepers of the Astrological Heavens, of the Sun, and other starry constellations, the annual flooding of the Great Rivers, and El Nino - the first protagonists, the first Canons to Right Living, recorded by a selected few, as Script; and it is upon these grammars, these discourses, these roles and dramatic lines, that many of the great unifying texts of humanity were founded - as

pterodactyl is to bird; tyrannosaurus rex to dragon; shaman to priest, doctor and scientist; and Orion's Sirius, Jupiter's Venus, and Leo's Regulus... to Three Wise Men. But this same cradle rocks now to different beat, another rhythm - of sun hungry tourists from Europe, and New Age converts from the west coast of America who soak up the crumbling pyramid-power and hear the ghostly growl of the re-headed Sphinx... - its leonine body, I'm told, a considerably older relic from an earlier agrarian civilization of people talking about supper, sex and sleep and lost to Time. And just a little further south, in Africa, where hunting, gathering societies still abound, their discursive forms kindred to those other First Nations living still in the jungles, deserts and snows on other continents, and happily, I'm told, that the first homo sapiens uttered their first word - I wander what it was? And now in this same desert once fertile as the watery-jungles of Cambodia..., sound the irregular rhythms of bombs detonated..., deliberately..., blasted for nothing else but the weary stench of burns burning, bones cracking, and skin stretching in pain, and painted in reds and blacks and blues, browns and greens, by flying limbs and missiles hurtling, splashing haphazard their innards like fallout from those crashing apocalyptic warheads - Asteroids! which orbit like willful predators the dark heavens expanding now... as you read..., above; their celestial bombardments re-shaping continental form, and, in concordance with Wholly Order, their co-habiting species forced, once again, to re-invent themselves..., or Die.

And on the far right-hand side of the world map, the one modeled by Victorian cartography, the one with Europe at the top and in the middle like a chapter heading off successors to Gutenberg's printing-press, that fateful re-invention, if you observe this map very closely, you might see the Far-East evolving in its own distinctive image, though far from center, though far from Greenwich Mean Time. These books, and lots of them, manufactured more and more easily in the later half of the millennium past, and sold in shops for the first time, for a profit, to an emerging, literate middle-class. Many imprinted with that map made famous by the British Empire and all the other European Colonialists seeking new lands, new markets, new converts to the contending brands of Christianity, new discursive locations in new story-lines of honor. Bibles and books of all descriptions loaded into ships with names and sails like inverted clouds, shaping rather than being shaped by the winds of change, though paradoxically, in dynamic partnership, a mutual-win understood, deliberately, responsibly. So, by royal and papal decree, people crossed a floating sea - though the Eastern-world kindled its own holy fire, and long before the West, invented block printing and rockets and other missiles launched ever higher and higher… with an explosive mix of charcoal and saltpeter. The twain - East and West - meeting in Buddha, conceptually, apparently, as the British fought for tea, and the East for hire. And West and East - writing their own brands of new age poetry, so to inspire the quest for new worlds, the search for new meanings, the mission for new souls and new markets..., and its sibling - Science, for agential aspiration, consciously..., well, somewhat.

And these great trading nations of the quick-shrinking planet ate and fought and fucked in the Chaucerian sense, in brothel, or crowded ship, and cross-bred and believed and converted and slept and supped, and, of course, Talked all the time to themselves, silently…, sometimes shouting to themselves, silently…, in private, and in public, too, by decree. And when they sought to change the rules, when battles of Independence were, heroically, fought, or when missionaries in autocratic classrooms new ideas from books with binding taught, or, through better invention, the path to supper made short-er, and sweet-er, they always Battled! All bound together by the rhymes of Speak and Read and Write; but, sadly, Unconscious! Uncontrolled. Sporadic. Learning, slowly. Unknowingly. By endless trial and error - like the clans clashing before Noah's flood, when the Sphinx was new, when the world was wetter, before it was colder, before getting hotter once again, and so on, I am told.

And in the wake of Feudalism, Industrialization and Colonization, all logically obtained from agrarian incentives, as tools and signs developed through phylogensis, as the Territorial Imperative! dragged ploughs by men and then by horses, crushed grain between rocks and then in granaries, turned sticks into guns, oars into sails, and speak into write - Democracy was born on the wings of Christian belief. For in the Christian Canon directing the tightly-bound ethic of the medieval world, every individual was endowed with a direct, inalienable right to The Love of The Universe - provided they were good (depending on text), paid their taxes, royal and papal, sometimes hefty as hell, and went to church between Crusades against the heathen, the Muslim, knocking at fortress gates and disturbing sleep through deliveries of new ideas: 'faith and reason', 'miracles and healing', 'inscriptions and carpets', never again irrationally indivisible, never again so, by faith alone – and so, the seeds of revolution had been sown!

Thus it came to pass as Time cubited, inched, metered, and byt its way through the sacred continuum of all things and no things, that Christian script and its features, were re-written, re-shaped and re-formulated, con-joined to point of near fiction, it must be said, with notions of the Classical World, of Greece, mainly, and Rome, both once in the geometric shadows of the stately pyramid and the hooded fangs of the asp. And in typical missioning style - its legacy -, Democracy as idea spread like the discursive seeds of The Prophet, or the pennings of Shakespeare and Marlowe and Copernicus, and the Bible of King James, that patron of words, and fell upon fallow and fecund ground (depending on text), alike. And it came to pass, once again, that Entrepreneurs read this text to understand that indeed all men were accorded equal opportunity, yes, indeed, equal opportunity to apply this very individual love to their own advantage, in the holy democratic order, in the Egalitarian Society of Others, where "I" was now Philosopher King, the arbiter of right action: Acumen superseding heritage; Savvy, feudal servitude; Original Thought, original sin; and, it must be said, the red-blooded birthing of empirical observation, the hunt for true knowledge, and the gathering of valid information..., and, of course, its many splendid interpretations - by Scientists, of various creeds and kinds.

But within this new magic, as in all things..., The Shadow of Evil lurked; inside this bubble of (I), within this potential space, this potential optimum, this implied personal agency and advocacy yet to be properly claimed... but When? is the ever pressing question, this Evil lurked as moral consequence in the mines of foreign lands, where natives supped and slept, and built palaces on pillars for the little gods - now forced into slavery, to conversion, and gratitude and lung disease. So too in the factories of Europe and all over the planet. Indeed slaves of minimum wage supported an emerging, burgeoning, splurging middle-class of established rich beating time on their drums, just for fun - and stretched with human derma!

And simultaneously…, in the trajectory of Eastern Time, under the domed-sky of the Mandarined-Emperors, in their elongated feudal shadows, the rhythms beat upon the tympana of various Buddhist drums, on its multiple but, nevertheless, laconic brands, feuded and mingled and mixed with local assumption as do telephone cross-wires - as one messenger reports to another; and remained, by western comparison alone, quite sustained... Until the Thinkers of the Age of Rationalism, The Enlightenment (as Eurocentric narratives tell), spoke their mind given their inalienable rights as individuals, as original thinkers - and thus spake they. Yes, quite consistent the East until Karl Marx, - from the land of Gutenberg, on the figurative back of books and augmented memory, augmented discourse now beginning to flow like the winds of trade, the currents of the seven seas, and the bloody fluids coursing through the web of pipes in your skin right now -, wrote Das Kapital, and the discursive world wobbled on its gyroscopic axis. Yes, a lovely piece of deliberate Discursive Engineering, but good for some, some stages, but certainly not for all. As Fascist as Democratic Capitalism. As Righteous as Religion. As Conscious as Freud. As Blind! to its Own-Constructedness as an artificial lung. Yet Missioned. Untested. Limited. With Consequences for You and I. And Cambodia.

And as I arrived at the gates of the world's largest temple complex on the back of a carefully, considerately, competently driven motorcycle - through the truly magnificent ruins of Angkor Wat, and witnessed, firsthand, with my own eyes and ears and nose and skin, and my own internal dialogue-ing, the effort and ingenuity, the pain and its purposeless, its ephemeral masquerade as Truth, as Beauty and Honor, Worth, Order…, and Contempt - its monument to Belief -, … I wondered at the strange irony that the world’s mightiest testimony to Belief, its loudest voice, its most pausing instantiation, spoke from the same luscious land, from the same enriched earth and serene stretch of watery-field, as one of the world’s most hopeless, pointless discursive conflicts, one of the most meaningless wars ever fought, and, on request, it must be said, paid the guides seated at the gate - with sad but determined faces -, in US dollars.

# Australia - Frames of Ritual Symmetry

**November**

Of respect for the oldest surviving human culture - the Australian Aboriginals - we refrained from climbing the slippery, fickle-hued back of Ayers Rock - Uluru -, the Earth's most massive monolith, striped and sleek as a tiger shark prowling bloody oceans of ancient sandstone. Though it lay nested - invitingly; a bright-burnished primordial pebble gleaming beneath the gentle lacquers of unseasonable rains, their vapors descending like aerial tears onto a grey-green ab ovo bushland setting. This rocky monument rests at the very hub of our smallest continent (or biggest island?), its irregular circumference endowed by an extensive coastline faintly outlined southwards, along its north-eastern curve, by the planet's largest living organism... - the Great Barrier Reef -..., the singular living entity observable as you walk the etheric atmosphere of the moon and gaze back towards our home. We spent but a month visiting this natural wonder of elemental superlatives, vowing our return; Australia - a delightful surprise!... if you dare.

An elongated axeltree 345 metres high and 9.4 km in circumference - this superincumbent slab of red-brown-grey arkosic sandstone is but one of a litany of sacred sites that spread once like wild-fire through their eucalyptus hunting-grounds the Songlines of our planet's most resistant continuing narrative. Originating 70 000 years ago off the proximal beaches of south-east Asia, the sea level 50 meters lower then..., before the last Ice Age, before the insulating belt of water rose about Australia's shores and the dry deserts formed within her ruddy heartland - the Aboriginal songs spread with spearhead symmetry from the far north-western corner of the continent... southwards, and to the east, all over this vast country shaped like a cloud and boasting an area the size of Europe, now a modern first world nation, and home to but 18 million immigrants, legal and otherwise, from everywhere on Earth.

Yes, I am told that these territorial incantations were once sung across the entire landmass where once the highest mountains, higher than even the Himalayas, inched upwards like slow, icy flames as Australasia broke free from Antarctica's frozen grip... fragmenting into shoals of archipelagos along its edges, and drifting, northwards, into the warm Pacific waters, the world's greatest ocean, 65 million years ago. But these mighty heights, eroded by the wheels of Flux and Fortune's flow, turned to meager red-brown mounds, their cracked domes resembling geriatric heads wreathed by crowns of yellow-grey-green grasses like balding hair blowing in the winds of shift, and intensely sacred to Aboriginal men of sun-ripened age; their geographical limits outlined through discursive song, their transgression, punishable by Ritual Death! - and still practiced to this day. Ritual retribution of this most extreme kind - supporting the highest per capita murder rate in the world.

But now these canonical caricatures of sandstone - Kata Tjuta, "the place with many heads", 36 to be precise - have been re-named The Olgas by invading immigrants from alien landmasses further north - and their manner and kin, their science and their art, their belief and their form - Despised! - Utterly! - as contagion; perceived still as nothing more than ransacking monsters, looting thieves and missioning miscreants of the most loathsome order; defilers of the Aboriginal holy land, their barren-beat once tightly bound by a subtle balance of sonorous songs like spokes in a giant wheel; their lilting lines strings woven together by diverse language systems as divergent as Oriental tongues to lingoes of Indo-European origination, some 500 distinctive tribes - Aranda, Bidjandjadjara, Gurindji, Gunwinggu, Kamilaroi, Murngin, Tiwi, Wailbri, Wurora, and Yir-yoront, to name but few.

A First Nation of 300 000 men, women and children, their approximate numbers unchanged in this third millennium anno Domini, so I'm told, their songs though somewhat fainter - but as determined! - filling still this undulating land of primitive rock, some of the oldest on Earth, with the Aum-like vibrations of the larynx and didgeridoo. This, the most stable continent of all, relatively free of geological catastrophe, I'm told, from quakes and squeezes and eruptions, and rich in iron forged at the centers of ancient stars..., and now, as rocks, rusting a deep fire-coal red through oxidation, through the subtle alchemy of fire, earth, water and air mixing like genes and cultural storylines everywhere; their glow, brilliant as the sun sets and rises again like the sea surrounding.

Their pragmatic harmonies, the Aboriginal Songlines, etched deep within the lie of a land much walked whilst hunting and gathering..., a land of considerable distances, even bused at your peril. Then as now, these pragmatic harmonies functioning as maps, as instruction for geographical features encountered, owned, feared - those to be avoided, those to embrace, where territory begins, and where it ends...; through ululating cadences, the hiss and their roll, the drop and their fall, their pausing, and their rising again, Fortissimo! - their ridge, their valley, their points of rest..., their hill, their mountain, and their Danger! - remembered: So whom to fight, and whom to marry, to punish or guide, or rest in pause, on these kangaroo hoppin' plains..., flaked/torn/crumbled by the heat of a moving round; as impartial to change as Time beaten upon a crude anvil by rhythmic hammers forging spears of metal, though never here, in this most southern of all inhabited continents - invented. These territorial Songlines, though, informed by a quintessence; beneath the red dust, far beyond the wheeling stars, transcending all manner of the corporeal, the empirical eclipsed, entirely - by the Earth Spirits of Dreamtime: their auspicious, incontrovertible will arrested but briefly in Realtime as ritual stories of copious complexities. Sung and spoken as song and word; or, similarly, painted in the shadows of overhung rocks, or on tree bark unrolled as parchment, or scratched into quixotic sands with sticks and fingers and feet as iconographic symbol: as perfect circles, their centers like wells of water comprising deliberate dots... of many colors... wrestled from earth provided pigments, winding paths spreading outwards from center in

orderly fashion, through zones and jurisdictions and spaces inhabited by the totemic creatures of the Dreamtime: by real people, though - in Realtime - through the ritual symmetries framing ground-control, as coded by intelligent beings abstracting; their assumed positions promoting wholly harmony; internal consistency… for a time.

Though never a script, a writing of any sorts... yet revealed. For many sacred secrets are kept safeguarded by rigid tradition continuing...; un-whispered, un-revealed, or -spoken or -known.... by the Aborigine; deep within rich-red burrows warmed by fires in the rural forests of Night, their revelation, punishable by gruesome ceremony; snarls clandestine; chants sacrosanct; unrevealed symmetry with Past, continuing now, as you read yourself into a future, as do They, through different frames of ritual reference. Not a word for Why?, nor Yesterday, or Tomorrow, in any of the 250 Aboriginal tongues... Time is indeed relative here, as it is said, a concept, a position in discourse, Narrative, a History..., with consequences for action, for you and for me, in Realtime – now; as vast deserts form; tiger sharks chew; and death stars in hypernova murder from thousands of light years distant.

And as it is with Uluru, the aesthetic mood of Kata Tjuta - their coloring, their incandescence, their features - is light dependent: the time of day, the season, the rainfall and cloud-cover, the viewer, the squint, the lens, the observation point, and the Talk about the Outback - your Position; Adopted; Chosen. And as in a shifting dream, when you lose and regain your frames of reference, as if by magic - now hot-coals framed within a furnace door; now a distant shape in some dark forest black; a bat-wing etched, a startled hand; a fearful eye, a searching voice; a growl or bleat? - a luminescence in the gloom, whispered; a sound, seen; a touch, tasted; a chain forged? - by the sinewy forms of fire-light shadows, clinking... - the Aboriginal People of Australia now live in a different time: under a flag framing the Southern Cross constellation as white iconographic stellar shapes on a broad navy-blue sky background - off-center; the Union Jack superimposed into the upper left-hand corner of these southern heavens depicted, snuggled up against the authoritative pole, like a chapter heading in a book on Georgian criminology, or the cozy warmth of a joey's maternal pouch - for Safety's sake.

And until 1788 when the sons of Albion - the English, representatives of the discursive artifact seemingly most dominant as Humanity’s voice since the British Empire’s falling - first arrived on the Endeavour under the star-guided navigations of Captain James Cook and his trusted (intimately) Lieutenant, Zachary Hicks, the Aborigines had been living in total isolation. On his arrival, Cook documents that the Aboriginal folk utterly ignored them - barely pausing for a chronometer’s second from their routines and focus; un-acknowledged, un-wanted, un-welcomed... ! Cook notes that the natives remained unimpressed by gifts of glass and shinny trinkets of any glittering sort, and mostly, if not entirely, desired but one overriding, unrelenting, unmitigated wish: That Cook and his crew just fuck-the-hell-off their land and return from whence

they came! And indeed, I am told, this attitude still persists to this very day in Australia - undeniably.

I was also told through Speak (tour guides) and Write (books) that most Aboriginal people live almost entirely off social welfare - incapable? or unwilling? to cooperate with the Invader!, hesitant to take up novel discursive practices - None!, if their ideal should be realized. For example, I was told by our central Australian native - diligent student of Aboriginal culture, White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant tour guide, in his early 20s, Andrew, that Aboriginal children go through the more recently contrived rituals of schooling by morning, and by afternoon and evening, are initiated into those other rituals much older than King Menes, Abraham, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the four kings named George, or Cook, Blake, Darwin, Queen Victoria, Nietzsche, Freud, or Einstein, Wittgenstein, Queen Elizabeth II, or Piaget, or You and I, or anyone else, for that matter. And like the unwilling, defiant youngsters dragged to my wearying psychotherapeutic rituals, physical and psycho-social problems abound within their small numbers - succumbing, on the whole, for instance, to an earlier death when comparing mortality profiles presented by other modern Australians.

In Alice Springs, not too far from Uluru, whilst enjoying a kangaroo-steak lunch, I obtained my very first 'sighting' of these mysterious people - and I use this word deliberately, for that is all that occurred. And so too (independently) for Kale, who, with a determined smile and blood-brotherly identification as a black South African, attempted (a little later on) to flame the fires of discourse in a nearby public park filled with families of men, women and children, older and younger - age and gender groupings VERY separated one from another (as is the Aboriginal way), each grouping forbidden knowledge (even fragmentary), of the sacred rituals of the other groups (or the specific roles of individuals within these) - to ill effect. Indeed it was all too apparent later on in our journey through central, north- and south-eastern Australia, that Aboriginal women turned their heads (shutting their eyes extremely tightly!) on tour bus pauses, when observing certain points of geographical or historical interest - For it was Forbidden! to gaze upon these sacred sights (by females, youth, or those of differing clan) ... with consequences... And sharing just one precious moment in the Continuum of Time with an outsider (such as Kale or I)... simply Asking for Trouble! (from the authorities).

These notions, informed by Andrew the following morning at dawn's cracking… around the hot engine bonnet of his four-wheel drive motor vehicle, the iron-rust ablaze on the outskirts of Alice Springs, while he and his loquacious tour manager lodged their respective hangover damage claims with the bevy of impressed looking European females, and a fellow male from Liverpool, our touring companions. This braggadocio delivered as might a herd of red kangaroos their respective kicking strength during the season of rut; or contenders to the ejaculatory prowess of the demigod, Min – ‘the eternal firm one’ - of the giant aboriginals of the land of Palestine, the

infamous Rephaim, I'm told, walking once the Fertile Crescent where sweet waters gushed and sang idyllic beneath now petrifying palms.

And as island is to continent, and PC to storyline, from my position, inside the open air restaurant along the main street, en route to the park, on this first day amongst the most ancient discursive community on Earth, my scientific curiosity bubbling beneath my diner-role - a trail of unusual looking people walked by, each barefoot as a new-born baby... : One or two old men with wild-grey-black hair, blowing like fresh grass in the wind; and two families some twenty minutes apart, both familial groups in single file, their social symmetry on a number of features, near identical: an adult male, at the vanguard, moving as if through an etheric river, as an astronaut might on the surface of the moon; followed, slowly, by two or three other males of similar age, seeming somewhat distracted… in his wake; an adult women, looking, somehow, especially fierce, but with an air of indifference; children, both male and female, of various ages, obedient youngsters and adolescents, sucking upon their fingers; the youngest, perhaps 6-8 years old, crying bitterly, loudly, unrelentingly - the mother and elder siblings chastising the youngster in no uncertain terms, the mother waxing fiercer with every deluging sob. And then they vanished… (as if I from a dream awakened).

This maternal relationship asserted its presence all too clearly once again, later on in the streets of Sydney, during the last 10 days of our visit. An Aboriginal mother, walking together with a Caucasian female friend and her brood, roaring, at the top of her lungs, directly into the ear of her male child, perhaps 10 years old, constricted to near choking by his awesome weeping: "Stop it right now! Shut it! Do you want me to fuck you up! I'll smash your brain in! You're like a girl! Now shut it! I said SHUT IT! GIRL! Did you hear me! I said SHUT IT! I'll FUCK YOU UP! SHUT IT!" I never did find out if his monumental lacrimation shutdown to her satisfaction - we had a bus to catch, as did they.

It must be said, however, that as a simple observer traveling through parts of Australia like a dislocated African wasp blown in on some misplaced hurricane, I also witnessed great love from Aboriginal mothers, as well as their fathers, towards infants and toddlers: stroked and kissed and pampered - the little ones; smiling, gurgling and bubbling over like freshwaters drained from desert brooks in skins shimmering; cradles of love cooked over coals ebullient, their love burning bright in the bushlands of Immortal Night.

Seeming neither Negroid, Caucasoid, nor Mongoloid - the politically incorrect, much debated, disputed and reviled but, nevertheless, traditionally accepted, homo sapiens subtype classification, our genetic nosology, I'm told -, yet more similar to You and Me than different, as are all primary species subtypes..., and their myriad genetic mixings, the Aboriginal people appear quite distinctive - a subtype of their own as observed by both Kale and I -, and on further

reading, corroborated by scientific investigation, as Australoid. This intra-species distinction appearing to exist at both a priori philosophical levels: both Physiologically, and Discursively.

And while this probable physiological reality is positioned within an egalitarian storyline, now - thankfully! -, in contemporary Australia, this was not always the case - Aboriginal Australians are living still in the evil shadow of a persecuted past. And here I quote from one of the many guilt-laden texts which inform this recent past, this particular extract pitched at contemporary children in the senior primary standards, that impressionable age group enjoying the benefits of multicultural schooling in many modern countries, and especially here in Australia, one of the largest multicultural societies on Earth: one out of every three citizens is of non-english speaking national descent. The extract is available on the Internet (#) for all to read, and as such, it seems, is positioned as reconciliatory rhetoric, which I wholeheartedly support – though, and it must be said, the social persecution has indeed been Horrific!; the extract, a substantially softer discursive filtering. A closer deconstruction analysis reveals a subtle agency balancing both positions, together with Time's Turning, by a primary social engineer - The Educationist: three crucial questions must therefore be asked – What submerged discursive artifacts lie hidden like stonefish within its rhetorical deep? Is the effort effective? Is it optimal?: "Their skin and hair are both dark. ... Aboriginal tribes didn't usually stay in one place for long, moving to watering places and setting up camp there. Aborigines lived in family groups and clans. Each clan has a place on their land where their spirits return when they die. They have to protect these places so they won't upset their ancestral beings. The men were custodians, tool-makers, and hunters. The women took care of the children and gathered and fixed their food. The Aborigines used the land wisely and knew when to harvest the many plants they ate. Dingoes guarded their homes and helped the men hunt. The Aborigines were also traders. There were trade routes across the country. They traded stones, shells, boomerangs, and ocher, a yellow paint pigment. Along these trade routes they would have exchange ceremonies where they traded, sang songs, and danced. ... At the time when Sydney Cove was settled by the British there were 300,000 Aborigines in Australia ... (and) (s)ince they didn't have a system of government, no permanent settlement, and no land ownership, the British made them move. Many of the Aborigines got smallpox, measles, venereal disease, influenza, whooping cough, pneumonia, and tuberculosis and died. European invaders cut down forests and brought foreign animals to Australia. By 1860 there were 20 million sheep in Australia. The cattle and sheep destroyed the Aborigines' water holes. White settlers and Aborigines were at war for the land and water. By 1900, traditional Aboriginal society was still in small groups in central and northern Australia. In the early 1900's, laws to protect the Aborigines were passed in every state. They also made restrictions for the Aborigines on owning land, where they could live, and even to whom they could marry. In 1967 the Australians voted Aborigines real citizens. They were given the same rights as everyone else. In 1971, Geoffrey Bardon, who had a close relationship with a local tribe, and one of the few non-Aboriginal people who was allowed to

take part in the rituals and ceremonies, began painting a wall mural with his students and some tribe members. This was the first example of shared Aboriginal artwork besides bark paintings. After that, the Australian government realized that Aboriginal artwork was a resource and tried to conserve it. This is how they live today and still try to keep their culture alive."

Aboriginal art is indeed lovely. At the Aboriginal Cultural Center bathed in the aura of Uluru, before completing a half circumambulation of the great rock itself in the soft embrace of the unseasonable rains, as Ritual - I was utterly ignored by two grey-haired women: each, carefully…, patterning strong, thick parchment, creased and colored and resembling the textures and patina of tree bark, with tiny painted dots… - their wet imprints marked with the blunt ends of sticks dipped with creamy pigments suspended in plastic containers like egg-cups..., as has been their custom - for tens of thousands of years -, long before the Crucifixion, long before Noah's Flood, or Sumerian cuneiform, or the first sand-scratched hieroglyphs that eventually built the Cheops Pyramid and seeded its popular Sound & Light Show technologies…, reverberating now through the urban forests of Night in another desert.

And from the busy airport near Uluru, one of the continent's largest tourist-income generators, we flew as aeronauts to the furthest eastern boundary of the state of Queensland, suspended in the moist atmosphere above the barren earth of Northern Territory, traversing the spectacular distance in but a few hours. We passed through the Tropic of Capricorn, lulled by the comforting song of jet engines in dynamic alignment with the laws of physics, combustion, and reason, heading for the 17th parallel south of the equator, to the white-sanded tropical shores of Cairns, the metropolitan gateway to the north-eastern Great Barrier Reef.

The GBR similarly draws Earthlings like iron-filings to a magnet… to its coralline-centers…; thousands… of (individual) reefs… strung together… by the strange meanderings… of diverse submarine creatures, and the calcareous skeletal remains of their generous hosts, gracious as Jesus… - tiny creatures called polyps and hydrocorals: mantels of limestone textured to the eye as the lamb's fleece. The corals are cemented together by algae and a variety of aquatic moss animals called polyzoans; cemented in symbiotic embrace through the binding energy of mutual love and biological double-wins - the living corals relying upon single-celled plants (zooxanthellae) for energy generated by vital sugars, created, in turn, through the proto-energic resource of the sun, and the intrinsic photosynthetic processes evolving over billions of years within their inner being. This energy enables the corals to remove dissolved limestone from the water, using it to build the hard exoskeleton around themselves…- as the Shepherd shears and Weavers weave; as Scripture binds and Mystics divine; as Verses rhyme and Poets compose; as Orc frees and Urizen constricts; as Id drives and Superego judges; as Speakers speak and Rhetoric (…?).

As the reef builds…, the coral animals in the lower layers die off, as do narratives, through Time, and like the innate, genetically programmed babblings of babyhood, leave behind their hard limestone skeletons and so create the recognizable varieties of coral structures which grow on the reef… - "staghorn"…, “brain"…, "table" – all aptly named. The composite reef comprises 2,900 discrete reefs… stretching for a distance of about 2,300 kilometres, and 72 kilometres across at its widest point… This enormous living being, this integrated organismic symphony of the ocean, its turquoise sheets spilling over branched frames of lazy bronze, the growing result of hard corals on eroded land formations… - valleys, hills, ridges - …, which, millions of years ago, were exposed above sea-level to the elements of another embalming cocoon, the paleolithic atmosphere. And although now the coral thrives in the warm, clear waters off Australia, like so much else in our Universe, relatively little is known about its origins, or those of its very first inhabitants, underwater or otherwise. By way of eco-tourism and our visiting the GBR, costs and local custom occasioned a hurling, churning, heaving boat laden with fellow plungers of the deep - of every conceivable nationality, constitutional susceptibility to mal de mer or malignant neoplasm of the skin, and age group; all, headed for a daytrip of snorkeling on the reef or longer scuba-diving excursions of up to a few weeks; a phantasmagorical experience indeed among the persistent auditory feed of a local music radio station stuffed to the gills with gut-wrenching advertising: "Reemember leestners, eet's 'Poet's Friday' at the Peetzza Plaace this week. Join us for 'Poet's Friday' and geet your ferst two drinks free of chaarge. And just in case yeer waanderin’ what the (beep)'s 'Poet's Friday'... no worries mate, we know as much about poetry as a wichety grub weeth a hang over, and we don't give a kangaroo's toss about Shelley, Keats, Blake, or Coleridge cos it's 'POET'S Friday'! Now yeer reeally theenkin’ what the (bleep)’s he talkin’ about. But no woarries, mate, cos P-O-E-T-S Friday meeans: Pees Off Early, Today'S Friday! So bllloakes and sheeilllaas, join us for the greatest pees up in town next Friday. And leave those anthologies behind! Naw excuses! Be thair! 'Poet's Friday' at the Petezza Plaace in Caairns.”

Both Kale and I were seriously sea-sick on the outgoing voyage of our overnight package cruise, all we could afford, though the cold buffet looked delicious. The forced diet of firsthand cultural exchanged was, however, not as savory. These irksome pizza and other broadcasted offerings were further flavored by a nipple-pierced 20-something staff member, his very pedestrian tattooed chest revealing a distorted man's face, sporting an outback bush hat and rendered as if by the hand of a 'Poet's Friday' patron during full drunken epiphany – though, strutting about like a stripper finalist at the plethora of Women Only Shows at the local rave clubs and bars! This cultural banquet continued with a shapely dessert, in the form of an attractive young Australian women, in her early thirties, perhaps, if those telltale eddies beneath the surface of her well-tanned skin were anything to go by, and in a bad mood, if her tone and snappy retorts belied islands of submerged discursive malcontent. Though, and it must be said, just the day before, on the outgoing leg of our voyage, she had shouted, at regular intervals, and, with heartfelt

conviction, together with her tattooed compatriot and other ferociously joyous crewmembers: "You call this a 'Job', mate?".

Now, whilst gulping down headache tablets between knitted scowls and buffet preparations, and bellowing over choppy waves into persistent gusts of wind to those naughty 10 year old snorkelers, who, erring on the wrong side of caution, were drifting precariously close to the serrated reef-edge, its limestone skeletons fanned like swiss army knives on display; midst spiked sea-cucumbers and the gnashing jaws of giant clams like paleoanthropic genitalia, and their mobile counterpart, the tiger shark, partial to everything, literally, including small boats in a buoyant bed of psychedelic pool noodles diced with smatterings of wetsuit rubber and flapping flippers; a 21st century profusion of tasty protein, a sea-food delicacy spread as never before seen in predatory evolution, wrapped and ready as a takeout, and from the tiger shark's position, like a forest of sea-weed salad tossing as camouflage, and floating dark and daring as the Night; though heedlessly indifferent, this primitive monster of the reef, to the turquoise surface seen from the clear depths below, more lovely than even the sky casting shadows in the waters beneath, their refracted energies twisting together like flames through the simple circuitry of its antique brain - yes, between all this, our attractive Aussie women managed to relieve her mood with a little shipboard romance.

But how?… - you may well ask.

I know not his name, and I'm not sure that she ever did. He was handsome, certainly, 21 years old, if a day; and Polish, as informed to all; laughing, all the time, as he and his buddy were very, very stoned on marijuana. The courting couple were an ongoing source of fascination for everyone on board who, perhaps like me, believed they were, finally, about to witness the realization of the dreamy adverts celebrating the unchecked joy of libidinal pursuits on this, the world's most geographically endowed tropical island. Every media of any kind in Australia seemed to support, in no uncertain tones, the carnivorous sexual appetites of all, and chiefly, the Australian female. A random flicking through the cable TV channels presented muscular men leaping out of advertised suntan lotion bottles… squeezed by anticipative women rubbing their thighs and licking their moist lips!; red-leather clad vamps with the tiniest ankles strapped into the sharpest stilettos, ribbed and studded by latex braziers colorful as peacocks, their breasts crushed to near bursting - and promoting designer condoms!; and, lest we forget, another juicy slice of commercial advice - the saucy ways of dressing up the lamb, as well as her selected man, as she undresses him for dinner!

And in every talk show, local comedy program, radio, television, print interview and article, overheard conversation, the news - everywhere! - fornication, of one sort or another, the all engrossing topic, the voracious female position, most especially - a thematic ubiquity unfailingly uncompromised. A true commitment. A certain social identity. The male physique, a penetrating

preoccupation in Australia. Though, if our random appraisal count of the queue-thickened chaos of the post 9-11 Melbourne airport terminal - whilst checking in for our Alice Springs domestic flight, is anything to go by - few of noteworthy specimen. It seems that, once again, the blindness of discourse amounts to All! So, as consequence: Sydney is home to one of the largest groupings of promiscuous sodomites on the planet; Aids and 'bare backing' as rife as the forest fires ignited by bored Australian youngsters, as well as various adults, during this dry holiday season over Christmas; both condom free riders and delinquent arsonists excited by their own destructive power, a thin compensatory antic masking their inevitable fear of impotency: so too, the passions of the outback flame upon Hollywood screens frozen in symmetrical frames of delusion, as Gibson and Crowe bawl from the sinewy backs of wild horses, or camels, for that matter, both introduced by the interior's settlers and roaming now the central plains freely, from their broad Fitness World shoulders, from their un-calloused feet, and their manicured hands..., gliding like white foam on waves of the future into their fame and fortunes, into the contemporary Spiritus Mundi, and, like it or not, into the mind-set of You and I!

So, predictably, the roar of our attractive thirty-something Australian female subsided to a deep throaty purr, almost feline gurgle, as the couple's social intercourse progressed unchecked amongst those smitten by the mal de mer and the will to assiduous skin tumor incubation. Her scowl unraveled like the woolen jumpers of patient protestant grannies reworking their knitting-pattern designs in the many small towns of the populated east coast; or, as aboriginal women might unroll parchment filled with the ageless patterns of totemic artwork in ritual ceremonies observed. Her heavy ink-slashed schedules of those swimming and those missing became softer, her pens turning, magically, into sticks teasing, their sharp points blunting with every coquettish gurgle. I never did find out if the flirtations of this courting couple developed into the stories told of true life lovers - I had a dive to catch, with Willy.

A diving instructor of Aboriginal descent, Willy - stoic, concrete, specific, and inspiring my trust -, taught me the delicate art of continuing to breathe whilst submerged within the merciless frame of an alien environment... and revealed a paradise regained. And apart from random snorkeling in seaside tide pools and playful imaginings in the suburban swimming pools of childhood South Africa - when incubating in the Land of Wasps, a backyard family pool rival only to a double-garage and video-recorder -, scuba diving was a first time experience for me; and snorkeling per se, a first for Kale - given both his cultural divide as a black South African, and preference for virtual realities.

Between initial gasps and frenzied flipper splashing, Kale and I eventually mastered the serene skills of the aquanaut, and, pausing between snorkel-breaths, mid sounds resonant of open heart surgery and meters of respiratory piping, would exclaim: "This is amazing!" – and, once again, disappear beneath the shifting surface of the Pacific ocean… to gaze upon this submarine oasis

of seeming stasis. A Promised Land; a place of fire corals; moray eels; and angelfish - their names sounding as if the enchanted visions of a mystic poet had been published as magical ice-cream flavors revealed from the depths of a waking dream, then, fantastically, been animated into living flesh, bone and scales: smoky German blue blush; black marble pearlscale; sunset plush; koi blush; black clowns; and silver clowns; double dark blacks; zebras; and zebra laces; smoky turquoise blushing; gold marble pearlscales, and so on.

And, by the patient hand of a member of the world's longest continuing culture, dreadlocks floating above his bubbling…, mask-framed face like a benevolent octopus… free… to express his revolutionary engines at long last, as are we all through our common humanity, freer of Gravity's yoke than ever before given contemporary narratives of change, embracing the currents of Time and mixing a rare discursive flavor indeed…, beneath the shadow of that moving hull on its taut chain anchored in the pale turquoise light of The Universe - I was led, like an oceanautical lamb - aqualung, weight-belt, thumb, index finger, Eustachian tube, and deliberate intent -, to where once my shepherd's genetic forefathers roamed perhaps as hunter-gatherers, on dry land.

Willy escorted me for a very reasonable fee, I might add, amongst the rare denizens of this aqueous playground - the pilot fish and its white tip shark; the sea-turtle; the spotted ray; and barracuda; and the dozens and dozens, schools upon schools, of other exotic-hued individuals of the breathable deep – whom, with my very own vision, I apprehended, in vivo, for the very first, but needless to say, not the last, time. It was one of the most fabulous experiences of my life.

And during the course of this written reflection, this deliberate discursive meditation, my thoughts, my private discourse, my burgeoning relationship with the lace coral, the sea sponge, and the colorful comb jellies, all growing there, on the reef, through bio-chemistries, and here, right now, through the words that I am typing, right now, on this keyboard, those which you are reading, at this very moment, now, in print, those semantic shapes and forms revealed through the courtesy of Time and Neurology - I came upon the passage quoted below while researching on the Internet (##). Its content and grammatical form is pitched, once again, at the senior primary level, and, as such, has the quality of Innocence Enlightening. It reflects my personal experience of being led perhaps like the Little Prince and the Flower, she rooted and he pacing upon their shared earthy orb, through the narrative shaping their and, consequently, our Mutual Social Universe, by virtue of my dialoguing as reader then, writer now, and personal agent, always; or being led into an ocean nursery, a hydrous wonderland of physiological filtration, through the unconscious nuance of Word and Expectation, by a breast-stroking Lewis Carroll, and his dog-paddling March Hare, both gasping for breath a-splutter … I should imagine.

The linguistic touch of the extract is subtle as the pale blue transparency of the simple mushroom-cloud shaped 'box jelly fish' - its tentacles radiating up to 3 meters in length, shooting itself along at speeds of up to 4 knots in a jet-like motion. Like the tiger shark, this energetic

animal is only rarely seen on the reef, but if entangled in its venomous defense, it will kill you! in a matter of seconds…, usually as a result of excruciating pain so overwhelming, that shock typically leads to drowning before alarm can be mobilized. Why this diaphanous living cloud has evolved such lethality - its predators foiled by a mere fraction of its venomous power, and so too its easy prey – is entirely Unknown? The extract reads:

"…Types of Sea Life

Many colors and shapes of fish can be seen in the Great Barrier Reef. Bright blue-and-green parrot fish have strong beaks, allowing them to chew up coral and spit it out as sand. Scorpion fish, which sit on the bottom near the reef, look like the surrounding rocks and sand. The trumpet fish has a pencil-like body and often rides on the back of other fish. Some fish, such as the glowing angelfish, swim alone. Other fish travel in schools. Darting back and forth through the sparkling waters, these tightly knit clusters of fish search for food together. The actions and colors of these fish help preserve their safety. Most fish have enemies that they try to dodge while catching food for themselves. Some fish are protected by poisons. Lionfish have poison in their fins. The stonefish has deadly spines. …"

I never did quite frame this ocean floor. Never did see all those perils lurking there. And never will, their shape and form. These, I can but imagine - if I dare!

From Cairns we bussed our way down the east coast towards New South Wales and Sydney, Australia's largest city, stopping off briefly together at Frazer Island near Hervey Bay, the world's largest sandbar, where the sea is too dangerous for swimming, I'm told, the surf thick with hungry tigers, and home to the most genetically unadulterated pack of dingoes on the continent - before parting for 10 days along divergent paths: I headed by bus for Byron Bay and the counterculture of Nimbin; Kale flew to Sydney for the annual Microsoft Insight conference, and enjoyed the kind hospitality and pleasant company of a newly emigrated South African colleague, Etienne, hunting fresh business opportunity, as were we as immigrants to Canada.

We met two other South African expatriates in Australia, he on the GBR, and she on another cruise, around Sydney Harbor. Both countrymen, compatriots, fellow nationals… people, what you will, had identified our national origins through the familiar flat-vowel accent – similar, yet quite distinct from the Australian english rendition, at least to the ear of sensibility. I cannot remember their names…, but their respective sensibilities linger still like the sweet 'n sour flavoring in the many cheap Asian eateries scattered throughout Australia, or the dessert of their emigrating kin storied by both similar and different narrative lines…, Italian lemon sorbet.

She together with her husband were permanently resident in Sweden and visiting a long emigrated sister in Australia with her elderly mother who still lived in Durban, a city along South Africa's luxuriant sub-tropical east coast, its climate akin to Sydney's, for the old lady's 80-

something birthday celebration. The members of the family had assembled in Sydney, as all but one of the four children had sought their fortunes and adventures abroad, the father deceased. She and her mother were lunching together on the boat, as were Kale and I; and after becoming acquainted, we chose to spend the best part of an hour chatting through matters of serious mutual concern towards our excursion's close; the tall, modern skyscrapers and fashionable houses of Sydney seeming broken… and fallen into pieces… like the twin towers of the World Trade Center, in the frenzied reflections of the cove-crinkled estuary, fringed by foliage like flesh-folds of hairy fat - this mirrored perception, undulated together by the ship's rippled wake and its mergence with the shifting moods of our supportive ventilation; the Opera House elegant in its sucked prawn-shell kind of way, appeared almost toppled over into a whimpered concertina sigh of mediocre neophilia; the Harbor Bridge, climbed along its phallic-curved edge by dotted humans small as lice…, constructed inline with the cold minimalism of the modernist erections surrounded and broken by imported greenery like hair, the natural plants destroyed and dislocated, its copied neo-classical visage dimmed through juxtaposition - by Expectation: set after the splendid televised pyrotechnics of the millennium celebrations; the framed ritual of Time's climax… as fireworks spurted into the crack of Dawn, dimming now the pavements of this world capital, this city of economic substance most proximal to the International Date Line, which, as such, had provided arbitrary punctuation as a tense CNN/BBC moment ripe for explosive fallout; a moment deliberately constructed and packed with premium commercial footage - as after the Gulf War and, predictably, the other episodes that followed … it seems.

The other countryman met, our diving compatriot and catalyst to this dysphoric engagement with matters of serious mutual concern - a man of medium height, overweight, a little older than myself, I would imagine, living for the last decade in London, and working in computers, we were told - informed Kale and I that, internationally, South Africans are considered arrogant and rude, and not especially liked or respected, making business dealings difficult through stereotyping. This judgment, he observed, the just appraisal of public house drinking behavior, a general lack of refinement and manners, and the antics of the South African cricketers, especially, and other sporting teams, on visits to the United Kingdom. He then added with the interpersonal sensitivity of a boomerang in mid kill: "Thank god MY accent is not strong!" Feeling a little perturbed by the dim spectre of this international shunning, this seemingly inevitable discursive positioning and my future career prospects in the New World, I decided to check out his personal location in the world of others, his frames of social referencing.

I was not surprised to discover that he was divorced and alone and a package software installation technician with the creativity of a checkout till. I also asked him… by the way, by way of comparison, how the international community viewed Australians: "Oh, they're also considered rude and arrogant but they're allowed to be… they're the greatest sporting nation on Earth. They always win. And people respect that, and so they're expected to be rude and arrogant, selfish,

uncouth, and uncultured… all that sort of thing, you know…" And the English, what are they like? "Oh, they know how to be decent, so they don't like South Africans, but they're amused by the Australians… they think they're sexy".

He then went on to ask how we could possibly be conducting a world trip given the steadily declining value of the Rand, our South African currency. I replied that we had earned it through hard work and strategic positioning, and that, similarly, if accent was such a marker of fate, I would take a lesson from the lovely Charlize Theron, Hollywood movie star and academy award nominee, originally from Benoni, Johannesburg, our mutually shared childhood home in South Africa, and develop the appropriate phonetic inflection; and just to be sure, would stretch my neck like an African giraffe in Fantasia, and rise above whatever challenge came my way, if necessary, and, in the process, through no deliberation, burped my metabolizing lunch as it supplied much needed energy to my dive-weary muscles - in unexpected punctuation! – and licensing a delicious poetry of rare order. He blinked like a cash register: assigning value to the dyspepsia, the rudeness, the arrogance and, predictably - totaled the sum (ding!). He excused himself politely, wishing me good luck in my ventures and, in my sweetest voice, I calmly retorted: "Thank you, but I'm not sure that I need any luck, only hard work and strategy". He blinked again. I smiled politely. We said our good byes.

My innards felt as sour as old grapefruit grown in the red-soiled valleys of Rustenburg, not too far from the bedroom communities of suburban Johannesburg… where he and I had spent most of our lives as speaker and doer and thinker and human being; insecurity now running burning like a weak but poisonous acid through my sense of personal and social identity; my internalized talk; and its talking.

I chose to hate him. But said nothing … for a while.

On sharing this experience with Kale, and some days later with the Sydney met people of South African discursive origin, Etienne and our lunching friends, it was clear that South Africans do indeed have a checkered reputation internationally, and are, typically, judged as defined above, and prejudicially typecast. This, typically, seasoned with peppering from the mindless money-mongers of the international media - leveling one or another sort of racist allegation, or charge of violent disposition, or a hatched rhetoric explaining their unwholesome interface; these puerile, ill-informed judgments deliberately shaped to fit the trends of the time and sales guarantee; the shareholder's avarice sated like warlords. Unfortunately, these discursive artifacts punted by the media seep destructively into the unspoken thoughts of those naïve others comprising the international community, directing interpretation for instance, when South Africans choose white over brown bread; yellow over white paged telephone books; black and white photocopying over color copies; or comment upon the fact that Aboriginal Australians have been known to start bush fires given their close relationship with fire-setting and hunting over many thousands of years on

the continent, sometimes precariously close to Sydney. Indeed this tribal custom contributing an entirely idiosyncratic ecosystem as a result, influencing even the very genetic legacy of the resident animals, further customized by the more recent immigration from Britain. This judgmental framing despite the fact that South Africa is enjoying a majority governance of almost a decade, and one of the finest examples to the world of healthful discursive engineering, conflict resolution, and racial reconciliation, though not perfect, yet (whatever that may be?).

From the internal position of our small grouping of South African discussants, from their point of view, these negative ideas, these so-called national identity 'traits', were simply experienced as self assertiveness, as intrinsically socially functional speech acts, and, moreover, to be highly useful as both business and interpersonal communication skills, generally speaking. This, indeed, an essential ingredient for human conflict resolution and management; that is – not speaking one's mind, maintaining a rigid politic, a sure recipe for ongoing, un-resolvable interpersonal tension! So true to discursive form, we all acted as contributors to this informal re-negotiation of Belief, a kind of jigsaw focus group, if you like, an authentic collective conversation mirroring real process in the interlocutory world of others.

The Stereotype's Appraisal cited situations where the social turgidity of propriety, for example, in Scandinavia, Australia, and, the latter's discursive progenitor, Great Britain, derailed smoother face to face communication, task completion, new business acquisition, or formation of more efficient or, simply, mutually agreeable, discursive practices; through transcending, accepting, re-aligning our frames of mutual difference and similarity, their shapes and forms, through talking, understanding, contracting, fulfilling, then getting on with one's own business, or repeating…, like a shampoo wash, immediately, if necessary, within the next little while, or not at all, depending on situation, constitutional type and preference, the natural detergent of the sea more suitable, perhaps, to a frequent swimmer, and so on.

And without which - it must be emphasized – people can only, Replicate! The Past, so promoting, progressively… unconsciously, inadvertently, unwittingly… the rigidifying class stratification of the contemporary status quo identifiable in many discursive locations of the world - not least of which is London and other parts of the Great Britain, where racial violence is second only to football equivalents. By not employing these confronting discursive practices, it would inhibit actively lessening this evil – The Evil of Social Immobility – ; the evil of un-negotiated, inflexible interpersonal Noun-ing… un-balanced by discursive transition and its elaboration through Verb-ing; of Passive Voice Constructedness, not Active Voice Constructing…; of The Formed and The Shaped, not the Shaping and the Forming; individually, and as groupings, through communities, with nationalities, and inter-nationally. Thereby, avoiding the illusion of Social Nouns repeated as has happened… time… and time… again, throughout civilized history, and indeed By Virtue! of civilized histories – unconsciously… And to this end, a noble person might have to venture onto

the wrong side of propriety… for a while; being so-called rude or arrogant… for a while; hating… for a while; the balance regained again, eventually… for a while.

Where as, for example, the Australian sense of inferiority beside the narratives of their islands of origin in Western Europe - centuries ago - lingers on, quite needlessly, it would seem to me, unchecked to this day…; that is, if the critical commentary leveled by the Australian political satirist, Max Gilles, in his brilliant one-man show experienced at one of a multitude of sumptuous Opera House theatres is anything to go by. This discursive nipple revealed still further by the curiosity of the young and searching from the British Isles, or the many books devoted by their fellows to this most southerly continent, shrouded in the impenetrable clouds of discursive mystique. This attraction formed and shaped through historical hangover, of uncles and cousins and great aunts and other characters of kindred narrative history; blown in ships by the winds of trade and indifference and insufferable societal oppression to these far distant shores…, and evolutionary home to the ten most venomous serpents in all the civilized world! – before Shiva or King Menes first donned a cobra-crown protecting, before Eden's crashing demise – they were there, slithering.

These brave convicted folk certainly revolutionaries of an unintended sort; unintentionally escaping the antiquated feudal skeletons underpinned and locked within the immanent narrative superstructures of industrialized Britain; voyaging across scurvy-seas more vast than ever before encountered by the common-person. This, after American soil ceased to serve the precise same; The New World, the British penitentiary system's destination in centuries passing: "Just too rebellious, too troublesome, my dear: a new bestial wilderness, if you please, Your Majesty, required: sought and found by Cook, Your Excellency, to be outfitted for a King's convict-dumping ritual: a place, um, Lord High Executioner, so, ahh.. chancy, dangersome, hairy, hazardous, jeopardous, parlous, perilous, risky, treacherous, unhealthy, unsound, wicked, so grave… so insecure, so, um, precarious, and uncertain, so… perhaps, um…, unsafe?: so very haphazard, so hit-or-miss, so random, so critical, Your Royal Highness, um, and, yes, so, ahh…, very menacing,…, um, so serious, so threatening and, well, ah, Your Majesty, in the end, um, so very, very, very… um, what word does the fit, um, ah… , let me see, aha, indeed yes…, Your Majesty, so very - Remote!, Your Worship, ah, yes, so… Remote, the ideal frame supporting Pernicious Symmetry!…, Your Majesty, um, yes, perpetually… so very, very Remote, indeed!".

And so, escaping the castle walls and ramparts through criminal deportation; the greedy overlord through the idiot judgments of overworked magistrates; medieval witch hunts through crimes against nature; and divinely ordained servitude through the wholly erroneous pronouncements of the mad science of phrenology: "Bu' what the 'ell, mate, we're in this t'gever, so we might as well make it work, alright me 'ld shipmate!?, and while we abou' it, we might as well invent our own accent… get rid of this stigmatzin' one, and make our new beginnin'… well, official like, kind of,

you know, me ‘ld mate,… and become the greatest sporting nation on the face of the planet, and celebrate with award winnin’, homegrown cabernette wines, okay mate?! If we made it in that gawd fawsaken ship t’gever, we can make it ‘ere t’gever, no worries, mate, and be’ver king of them natives!” And how true this came to pass on these kangaroo hoppin’ plains, yet…, unfortunately, the poisonous imperialist legacy seems to live on as unconscious narrative; as a shadow is shaped by a form; as Uluru resists the general erosion; as rocks beneath shape the forms of snow above; and in other innumerable ways, here still: the Australian flag though, as the title page of the book that is modern Australia, testimony to all these lower order instantiations, this discursive history, flying in Canberra like the narrative fountainhead of a subterranean River of Words.

And as traveling South Africans suspended in discursive time and space, along a continuum of social possibilities, of potential narrative positions, of varying energies and functionality, we were so much more aware of the misinformed conceptions of people living in other parts of the world, our small fractured grouping bound together as electron frequency is to proton, as dialect is to English, by our flat-vowel accents – our english, the reframed legacy of Apartheid Stupidity, its shortsightedness informed as is all Matter in the Human Universe, by Belief, by Discourse Unconscious, and our now Conscious Realization of its iniquitous naivety. Though, and it needs to be said, many of us Enlightened to the system’s iniquity even as young children, before the broader public shift; I, for one, beaten up on occasion for my liberal sentiments voiced in the public arena of the classroom, these internalized through the discourses present in my childhood home, always; and Kale, caught between the jaws of discursive disjunction, given mixed-blood positioning and his Caucasian seeming presentation to the face of public perception, this in the rough schoolyards that ignited the system’s final demise – though all this… utterly Unconscious! to the judgmental tribe-like naivety of media flamed asininity.

Conscious awareness, and active re-negotiation of discursive space and time, its matter, shape and its form, and, eventually, our underscoring wholehearted triumph despite the inevitable extremist grumbling, encouraged us unanimously in deciding after much open-honest-contesting-real talking, that we were indeed proud to be of South African discursive origination, intending to spread our distinctive narrative legacy like coral spores on a springtide; like the white snows falling somewhere always on the highest mountains on every continent throughout the world, falling onto the same darker-faced rocks, eroding harmoniously, ceaselessly in the mutual frame of their freeze; to form, eventually, an entirely new landshape - where no snow may fall, where the rocks may turn rust-red or granite-grey, or marble to an interfusion of coloring surprises through the gentle lacquering of soft rains falling, seeding a bio-chemical legacy, a various palate of cryptogamic plants inscribing as punctuation marks a plethora of finely constructed sentences yet to be written as contented congruence on the world’s face, in the inevitable New Global Community of Others, its time come round… for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness or

health, after one million years of discursive evolution, I'm told; to be written upon their uneven surfaces like tablets of stone, for another time…, as the multi-hued corals pigmented by the local minerals and submarine splendors of the reef eventually transmute with sands blown in from the desert heartland, into the long, stretching beaches which frame the pure rainwater lakes of Frazer Island like moonstones in a setting of yellow gold; as acid bites the metal; ink prints the paper; cogs tick the clock; Belief directs your gaze; and Expectation!… renders The Wording.

It was raining possums and koalas on our well organized, professional and very informative daytrip to Fraser Island - to the extinct Aboriginal sacred site marked by cliffs of many sandstone colors, anchored by a quaint story about 'a rainbow, a serpent, a nubile young women, and a possessive suitor'; to the conservatory-like rainforest nested deep within the heaped dunes like piles of nutritious gold dust, and although the smallest in the world, the only one growing to this density and height on a sandy base, rendering a unique herbaceous order within its ecological frame; and to indigenous scrub and woodlands carefully back-burned in places, for safety's sake, re-growth, and ecological maintenance, modern Aboriginal Australians sometimes actively requested to participate, their expertise required in this home to the scribble-bark tree, marked as if by a child experimenting with a sharpened stick and grappling with the challenges presented by Piaget's pre-operational phase of intellectual development, and home too for many a fowl, frog and, of course, ferocious nasty lurking or basking somewhere, I'm told, everywhere in Australia, though these we never did witness, empirically…; and if Wittgenstein is correct – never could, ultimately!

The raining reached kangaroo and emu proportions by the time we reached the freshwater lakes, and a few of us, those with raincoats, mostly, were not going to miss out, and so braved the pelting of the ample drops gathered as clouds over the giant sandbar and thrown down like spears, walking the necessary 400 meters or so from the demarcated bus parking. In this case, the rules and regulations of the national park were strictly adhered to by this particular tour guide. A decided exception to the laxity of every other guide we had encountered in our travels beneath the Southern Cross. The previous guides had transgressed professional boundaries in ways that were quite foreign to Kale and I. Sometimes to the point of inhospitality, though never irresponsible or dangerous. But not this guide and his well disciplined trainee, both strong and tall and very handsome. The guide was excessively eager to please, and extremely knowledgeable on matters of history, fauna and flora, and the rules of the park ranger. He knew the exact penalty fees for their transgression. And like a benevolent prison warden, he informed, entertained and bored us with persistent monologue as to the transgressions of other drivers…-; the overenthusiastic holidaymakers racing along the golden-sand highway, circling the island in their hired 4X4 fun-mobiles, pausing only briefly to gloat with hordes of others at the rusting iron wreck of a beached ship dissolving into the sand and surf… like a slab of slow fertilizer sent inadvertently by a senile Urizen, forgetting, predictably, to swallow his medication.

Kale, fortunately, was in possession of both his forethought and raincoat, and I, neither, it seemed; so, on arrival at the lake's clear, clean boundary splashed into converging haphazard slip…, slap…, sloppings of circular motion by the raindrops, I was completely drenched, and began to feel a little marooned under the pale shelter of some nearby trees as I contemplated the forthcoming touring events, the ferry's return, and the next three hour imprisonment in the jaws of the transmuting terrors of air-conditioning, sodden clothing, luxury seating, legalistic tour guides, and a bus-full of cautious, responsible adults from across the planet - who knew their limits. Then, in the full frenzy of aerial bombardment, and my mounting gloom, I noticed a somewhat dumpy looking women walking as if in a dream across the granules of sand smoothed to the eye as a frame of beach…; in her bathing costume, smiling with mischievous delight, and clearly thoroughly enjoying herself. I heard the words: "Now THAT'S a good idea!", from the recessed computer-like speakers of my internal narrative, and then, as if a file in the same folder, a related image suddenly burst into my consciousness as might an image on a superfast computer screen, of a set of spare beach clothes tucked away in my daypack - costume, shorts, vest, towel - that I had forgotten to remove the day before, and promptly, seizing the watery moment as directed through unerring refrain in the film, Dead Poet's Society, joined her, clothes and all, in the faint vegetation-strained fluid, warm but not hot, cool but not cold, just right, as Goldilocks discovered. It felt as one might imagine the Waters of Babylon, those of Eden… before The Fall.

We splashed and frolicked like prehistoric anthropoids in a strangely oriental setting; the simple reeds gracefully arching through the crazy circles of water on the surface, becoming ever more transparent, meditative, as the storm took brief, intermittent rests between crescendos; and in these peaceful moments, the landscape revealed the spearhead forms of the distant dunes, shaped and cupped like a nurturing necklace of breasts; their encircling containment embracing the lake (and the two of us) as if in the serene squeeze of a pair of universal arms, those of the divine goddess Diana - her Roman naming, or Artemis - her Greek, or Mother Mary - her Christian; the two of us laughing, and paddling, and introducing our respective biographies, while tasting the piquant sweetness of water saturated with life giving minerals until truly drunken… and becoming friends.

Amanda, this charming Australian women's name, a jewelry designer in her own business in Sydney, wife to a protestant minister, and mother to two nubile daughters; the one daughter - not her favorite, always a bit rebellious, just like her father, and definitely not in line for her handspun gold and diamond fairy-tiara destined for the elder daughter's crown, as pretty wedding decoration - had scheduled the ceremony for the early new year. Amanda had decided to acquaint herself with the natural gems of the island and other east coast destinations, as way of maneuvering the wedding ceremony out of a local park and into a proper church through her punitive absence from home - a spicy hors d'oeuvre to her threatened absence from the entire ceremony!… if her will was not honored. She too was traveling with her mother, and also

happened to be the same age as myself. And, predictably, and true to form, her carpe diem talk supported and shaped her intelligent framing of the drenching moment; her speech acts reinforcing her entry onto the pristine stage of the moonstone lake beach setting - her citing the fact, for example, that many people in their middle adulthood, designers, scientists, writers, artists, and academics, had but begun their chosen pursuits at this age and, in the end, had made enormous contribution to their selected fields of endeavor, citing the Parisian neo-impressionist, Paul Gauguin, by way of illustration.

But I was in danger of falling in love with Australia, perhaps becoming too attached to its wild beauty and quirky character; the certainty of our relocation plans to Canada becoming evermore contingent; the sense of a burgeoning Asian market not far away, the Australian culture scoring high on the Gay Index, while Kale's cursory exposure to the computer industry in the country suggested that Australians are comfortable with assistance flown in from outside the irregular borders of their – relatively speaking - isolated continental cloud. These friendly, sometimes very handsome people, linked by the genuine goodwill of 'mateship', the common plight of humanity seeking an optimal community existence, a new order, a new discursive continuum. This particularly so once overlooking Sydney from the lofty crow's nest of its central Tower, the highest vantage point in the city, seeming to oversee all the places I had visited since first arrival here.

To the south-west, Melbourne, its public transport filled to brimming with gamblers dressed as Ascot racing enthusiasts - elegant, excited, twinkling like the polished stirrups of Albion's steed, as he and Orc might fight to free themselves and The People through agential creativity; through action, from the verbal shackles of Urizen and rigid ritual loveless and uncompassionate. Though, and it must be said, Australia experiences a disproportionately higher incidence of pathological gambling to many other countries; balancing liberty responsibly - a difficulty here, and indeed, it would seem, in any place where humans choose to live, linger, and learn.

So too, to the exotic north-east, to surf-crazy Byron Bay filled with suntanned 'schoolies' in wet string-bikinis and bulging bathers, riding the surf together, exploring and spending their energies together, getting drunk and having seemingly inexhaustible fun, together - sure, why not? But I didn't appreciate sharing a dormitory room with an aging single mum and her 7 year old son – smuggled in, whining a little before being shushed to sleep, single-mum counting all her money, wept beach-bags for an hour, attempted to entangle me with her woeful lament, got nowhere, scowled, became very noisy, packed up her bag of tears, disappeared for two hours, and returned with a square-jawed young man not long out of school, it seemed, with a red, long-peaked cap pulled down low over his face and with whom she seemed only reasonably acquainted, and, in a thick-whispered voice, bemoaned the broken bottle slash sustained from a fellow fun-lover, and the others threatened, while I pretended to sleep: "Ai doan't knoa whai she hairs it een for mee? laak Ai'f bergled 'er or sometheen…? shee's MAAAD!", then left once again,

partied till dawn, and returned to provide her child with breakfast in the common room before the reception staff resumed their sentry positions, the sound of party music still Bang! Bang! Banging! away in my sleepless brain.

So among the green pastures, the wooly sheep and jersey cows of Nimbin, some two hours distant, I rested in the shade of good company, and solitude; as I desired; of respect. And in this pleasant shade, I heard Greenpeace radicals reshaping, reformulating, reinventing our world; a better place… imagined, for You and Me and Our Global Family; a more effective shade of green, with better effect. The smokeless talk rendered bubbling solar paneling markets of endless proto-energy; budding hydroponics growing super grades of everything, efficiently; noiseless cars producing oxygenated air, recyclable water and adequate mileage, purposefully; while psychedelic granny's peddling the main street, jived to the moan of Rastafarian reggae and beatnik beatitude, still. And these languid souls from all over Australia, and Germany, Scotland, England, and more – drawn, it seemed, as if by magnetic north…, though in search of true north, these sensitive bearings always difficult to distinguish given the easy pull of Idealism - yet, and it must be said, attempting in good spirit and faith, informal community, and most, responsibly. Though, predictably, and it must too be said, hardcore freeloaders set this searching compass needle truly a-spin; boundaries pushed; natural limits pushed; expectations set; caring punted though unrequited basic need, it seems to me – my solitude, for instance, harassed for a joey-peak: "Just a dollaar, sir, awe com'on, he loast his mum"… and, for a price, the clawed pouch of swaddled-cloth began to hatch limbs and snout and ears peculiar among prints of kittens arrested with lambs; seemingly at peace together… for a while, at least, before the bite of consequence dared wake again… as it always will.

And to the south-east, indeed within 700m or so of The Sydney Tower, shaped from that distance as a needled-syringe, the nudist beach, one of many beaches en route to the windswept cliffs of the estuary headlands, and, in November, jammed to brimming over with sun-worshippers, and where we enjoyed an unfettered, deliciously refreshing swim after a long walk along the cliffs. Though not so refreshing, but certainly intriguing, the thunderous bawling of a naked women in her forties, reasonable curves, presentable shapes, shaven crotch, and tanned a rich brown, and shouting, repeatedly: "HELLO GORGEOUS!" at regular intervals to nobody in particular, perhaps hoping to be noticed by the sexually disenfranchised. Nearby stood a well-toned, attractive, blue-eyed, turd-tanned man of similar age, chatting to another fellow burned tumor-pink, the ultra violet rays scalding the former's long relaxed penis like a pork sausage cooking, the vesicles thickening to explosion with the expanding heat of his blood, the circumcised head turning an engorged ruddy-purple, and indeed, needless to say, looking distinctly painful! It seemed to me that he was either as rebellious as a caged Tasmanian tiger, a masochist, or both. It also seemed, therefore, that, in consequence, his persistent pulling upon the organ was aimed simply at relieving the intensity of his pain. And to this the lip-licking, hip-tilting, bitch-barking woman bellowed across

this Sydney Bay beach: “HEY! ‘WASHBOARD’… LEAVE IT ALONE. STOP PULLING IT ! LEAVE IT ALONE! JUST LEAVE IT ALONE ! HEY, YOU! ‘WASHBOARD’, LEAVE IT ALONE. JUST LEAVE IT ALONE ! Her mantra was reinforced by an elderly man sitting besides her (in potbelly form) sipping something, who repeated her attention-seeking line, supportive as a chorus to a diva on the nearby Opera House stage, its audience probably within earshot too given the volume of her barks, but his, a hoarse voice, adding a little variety to her otherwise unvarying refrain: “HEY ! WASHBOARD, LEAVE IT ALONE ! HEY WASHBOARD, STOP PULLING IT ! LEAVE IT ALONE. ITS GOING TO FALL OFF ! STOP PULLING IT! HEY WASHBOARD !”.

Washboard ignored her entirely. He appeared to be as switched off as a bored dingo. But she persisted. Make no mistake. She persisted. The old dog hoarsely chorusing. The thunderous bark of her courtship remaining undiminished for some twenty minutes. All the while Kale and I sat quite naked in the shade of the cliffs, utterly intrigued. Eventually…, as a function of auditory or tactile pain, or very possibly both, Washboard sauntered away, his eyes clouded by the glazing effects of heat and noise, his penis quite raw, the color of sliced lamb cooked rare, and into the seclusion of some adjacent rocks, a shaded shallow burrow from the sun. Shortly afterwards, her shoulders slumped a little in disappointment, it seemed, her elderly companion making comments about snakes and tunnels, literally, in his croaking timbre, they began to pack up and leave the privacy of the cove. And just before they began climbing the long stretch of stairs up to the flat plain of the protective cliff-face, to the well-trodden pathway leading back along the cliff-edge, to Circular Quay, the heart of Sydney, she gave one final howling bay: “GOODBYE GORGEOUS! SEE YOU NEXT WEEK”, to nobody in particular, and, predictably, no one returned her earthy farewell.

Thereafter Kale and I enjoyed another liberating swim; the gentle sounds of the cruise ferries in the distance; the accompaniment of the odd whack and swish of rigging and hull, as the local yachtsmen repositioned their vessels in and out of the gusty breeze, eyes turning briefly towards the bolder-baking, body-basking, water-washing sands… for a peek.

And finally, like a compass pulled by the magnetic core of The Universe, to its center, in Dreamtime, though north-west of The Tower in Realtime, my mind wandered to another prescient dream that I had experienced, when touring the rocky mounds of Uluru and Kata Tjuta; whilst asleep upon the soft red-powdered sands of our bush-camp - buried deep inside the snuggling warmth of a blanket-filled swag, a large canvass bush-bed, designed for comfort and safety from creatures that prey in the desert of Night. Its large rectangular frame, ritually rolled up by me each morning, unrolled in the evening, then positioned together with my fellow bush-sleepers, the other members of our tour, like a many-handed clock around a burning fire as protective hub - its energy subsiding from wood…, to coals…, to ashes…, from night through morn, then rekindled for a billy-boiling, bacon-searing, egg-charring breakfast.

The dream occurred as do all my prescient dreams, after a good sleep, just before waking: I dreamed that I met a young man, though indistinct in the dreamscape, an every-young-man, as it were, in a maze of passages, of sorts, and he and I, bound up together in some convoluted discourse; and on inevitable parting, he clearly said: “It was wonderful talking with you, we really must keep in touch”. The clarity of this parting verbal exchange together with the interpersonal atmosphere marked the dreams most distinguishing feature; the atmosphere, imbued with a powerful interpersonal sensibility - of warmth and camaraderie; of kindredness and friendship; of sharing and knowledge valued: the Light in the dream turning… progressively… more silver-white… a darker beginning, its luminescence awakening me at crescendo.

That day we were scheduled to approach Uluru up close, but rain foiled our plans. Instead we walked through Kata Tjuta, and here I met Uli, in the middle of a narrow pass between two of the huge domed heads, certainly a passage of sorts, the rain-lacquered rust-red rocks channeling the path along which we and other touring parties and individuals were forced to walk - for least disturbance, through this, the most sacred Aboriginal site in the area. I had been discussing Aboriginal lore with Andrew, our guide, and, overhearing, Uli had become interested, and spontaneously engaged together with us in conversation; his green eyes sharp and vivid; his English exceptionally fluent, with a hint of accent from somewhere on Earth. Thereafter, he and I continued our talking, indeed, only stopping once having arrived back at the car park, Kale joining the conversation mid-way through the walking. And on his parting, Uli said the very words I had heard in my dream that morning, his physicality, the interpersonal sensibility, identical, and, consequently, I was only able to recognize the dream’s prescience a few minutes after our parting… in the afterglow of reflection and consideration.

Interestingly, Uli, from Hamburg, Germany, and networked throughout Western Europe, also integrally involved in computers and the digital economy, and uncertain as to his next step professionally - and as with Sylvia (see Viet Nam), he wholeheartedly supported our planned research into the field; he too had experienced serious problems regarding the human dimension of the people-technology interface. This prescience together with the dream about Sylvia but one month or so before, gelling all my energies and banishing Urizen to the chasm forever… um, well, then certainly for a time, though growing, my confidence, my purposefulness; my resolve, becoming more convinced as to the certainty of my path forward into the future, into Time – I felt as strong as a tiger shark, and protected as a lamb, and equally enlightened…, though still as ignorant to its directive source as ever before? And right then and there, too, neither to the north, the south, east or west, Kale and I enjoyed a sprawling seafood platter in the Tower’s reputable restaurant… - this towering perch rotating once every hour above Sydney, and ideally designed for a viewing of this, the most beautiful of all the cities visited on our global circumnavigation to date; its smooth circulation… blending together viewing positions of the late afternoon sun, its final setting and fading into this particular evening sky; stripes streaking here; puffed mushrooms

billowing there; the benign-looking clouds first waxing into relief before fading again; their orange-black-white coloring against a single-star backdrop of blue… fading purple… then black… then into many stars of flashing silver points.

This glorious southern stage so resonant of the Southern African twilight - and so mixing a mystics magic for me in its reminding; its ambience redolent of the shaman-like tribal rituals practiced by the African folk in my country of birth, their original forms diluted now with Christian rhetoric, and witnessed so often in the sparse suburban forests of my childhood homeland…; there and then, where the sun would be setting beyond the local stream, the surrounding foliage, and the houses so similar to those of the bedroom communities of Sydney and Melbourne, while there as here, then as now, Night… revealing itself once again.

Yet the sweeping, folding, crinkling estuary and its surrounding lush so very different too; the effulgent light bouncing in mischievous fun onto mirrors of ocean and skins of glass and metal, so bright, so powerful, so alive with promise - that this sub-tropical paradise of constructed modernity stretched as a phantasm, hard to grasp given the experiences informing my position as a South African boy. Its sheer size… coupled with a rare sense of current style, – aesthetic centeredness –, alone inspiring a sense of wonderment. On the one side of the ferry harbor, for instance, the Museum of Contemporary Art hosting an exciting series of exhibitions – photographs of local 60s suburban culture, snapshots re-construed digitally through the mature eye of their maker; and, a sophisticated array of installation pieces by Japanese nationals, grappling with the relation of modern technocentric culture, the past, and meaning-making: and on the other, the egg-shell glow of the Opera House…, so brittle seeming, yet sturdy as the enchanting performance of the ballet Coppelia danced within its parabolic walls, we its audience; its ingenious structure somehow supporting vistas of balconies and restaurants overlooking the stringed-lights of Harbor Bridge held sturdy as if by Aboriginal shaman wizardry… in the etheric balance of two crescent moons, upon which people, filled with the inspiration of this southern metropolis, still climbed to dizzying heights in the revealing darkness - to gaze upon the twinkling patterns of the suburban forests of the Night like the eager mystics and poets of Dreamtime, everywhere, and in every time; to gaze beyond into the Immortal Void - framed through ritual symmetry, by the twin energies of Constructive Imagination and Loving Compassion - the Tiger and the Lamb. Harbor Bridge indeed burning bright here at night - linking one sky-bound cosmopolitan cove to another through a knit of engineering eloquence at the bay's narrowest point; arching into eternity, this link, into the Dream-forms of tomorrow, and beyond; yet bound - it must be said - as are we all, by the tense constraints of Real-forms, the here, the now: indeed, at its very center, its hub, its axletree, its compass and turning point - Real Words - alone, shape ritual frames of symmetry…; as then, as now, and all the forms we Dare to Be!

#(http://library.thinkquest.org/28994/abhistory.html)

##(http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/online/2000/grade5/sea.txt)

# United States of America - Consummate Consumption

**December**

From the moment the American couple boarded our vessel anchored off Big Island - the most southerly belch of black lava in the Hawaiian fleet, west of Kilauea, our world's most appetitive volcano, below Mauna Kea, the most voluminous mountain rising highest from the slow cracking tectonic plates of the ocean floor simmering far beneath like molten cheese, – they never ceased eating. Hardly had their dishes been emptied… before yet another was piled up with more wanton grub; their deftly nimble, fat-bloated fingers… snatching, spooning, stabbing and squirting to the shivering anticipation of hovering jowls and cascading chins, darting eyeballs bulging with unleashed desire; their heavy, labored footsteps shuffled upon tiny sneaker-wrapped feet, budging their monstrous flesh monuments about the small deck like automata on a Ford assembly line. Relentlessly, they gobbled their way through the efficient, endless spreading of superstore selections – through fruit-jammed breads, jellied cold meats, overdressed salads, stacks of assorted crisps and sweets, and a full bar of every gassy beverage and juicy concoction imaginable… as gustatory accompaniment to a simple snorkel off the diluted-blue-ink coastline, sparkling like a Christmas two-for-one entrée special in the tropical sunlight of December – and clearest testimony to their shared physical and mental Pathology.

Indeed, this middle-aged, middle-class, middle-income American gentleman and his wife, but the champions of a multitude of insatiable stomachs on board that morning …, before a leisurely return to shore - for lunch - at an array of well organised and advertised franchised eateries, thick with diners like hot gravy over sizeable portions of crackling pork and roasted potatoes, buttered vegetables garnished with yellow cheeses… for extra, extra flavoring. This sea-dipped gathering - almost entirely native, and randomly representative of all fifty states of the union, their demographic profiles largely similar to our award winning consumerist couple - and, commensurately…, and most certainly, predictably, many also suffering from clinical disorder; that is, Obesity – dangerous, disease inducing levels of excessive body fat; which, officially, measures in at epidemic proportions amongst the more than 300 million people living in the United States of America, the world's only superpower, I'm told.

Epidemiological research by the USA medical authorities has indicated this alarming disease statistic for decades. This unhealthy ratio count extends across all gender, age and cultural groupings, some more prone than others, but is highest amongst children under 12 years of age. Yet despite this knowledge, the incidence of lifetime overeaters is still gaining percentage points in the USA; as are superstore share prices; the tally of television commercials; and superpower enemy counts.

As consequence, on board an American Airways flight from Honolulu to San Francisco, we were forced to endure a personal interview by an overweight, patriotically diligent, middle aged women with an American accent, a sweet smile, peroxide-blond hair, and a nervous tic… on the captain's instructions: "To ensure your safety since 9-11, and help you feel more comfortable… etc… if you spot anythin' suspicious, or anythin' at all that makes you feel uncomfortable, you must! immediately alert the airline crew." As such, our foreign sounding speech was unveiled for all to hear, and from then onwards, Kale and I were watched like a four hour television commercial promoting packs of half-priced Giant Double-Decker Bacon Egg & Cheese Burgers with EXTRA fries AND FREE Cherry-Caramel-Nut Sundaes… mistakenly broadcast into a sweaty gymnasium at one of the poorly (comparatively) patronized Hawaiian health resorts.

So too, we had no choice but to endure a half hour flight delay shuttling between Maui and the Big Island, given the full security search of a geriatric American couple - their seat numbers spewed out randomly by the check-in computer program like a grand lottery of airborne terrorism. This, despite the fact that random checking procedure appears to be as useful as a shoe-bomb - as judged from all available public evidence. They were searched from head to foot, including the interiors of all prosthetic limbs and aluminium crutches, and bullied by interrogating questions in pidgin-English hurled by a Polynesian-American male security guard…, their responses thin and shaky between asthmatic wheezing attacks.

But perhaps all these security related activities were necessary? It was not for me to judge; needless to say, I was but a visitor from some global nether zone - or, perhaps, an armed freedom-fighter with a serious attitude problem, or, possibly, loaded with discursive and pragmatic wherewithal aimed at destroying the happy collection of Republicans concurrently enjoying the just desserts of 60 years post the Pearl Harbour episode, its celebration occurring during our visit to Maui. That is, post American entry into World War II; post the mass production and sale of weaponry to the allied forces in Europe, and herewith, the beginning of the true end to the chronic American economic depression that had dragged on through the 1920s and 30s; harbinger to the communist-hatin', spy-thrillin', witch-huntin', rock-n'-rollin' 50s; the mass-manufacturin', libido-liberatin', racial-revisin', hair-hangin', commercial-hammerin' 60s; the market-gobblin', oil-guzzlin', democratisin', interferin', globalisin', superpowerin' 70s and 80s and 90s and … beyond?

Provided this unexpected co-occurrence, the day before Bush Senior and Tom Hanks shared the stage of fond remembrance with veterans and commercial breaks on CNN and FOX, we visited Pearl Harbour. It was packed. The overwhelming majority, American, mostly elderly, though by no means all; but everyone, seeming to share the proud salute to those who justly fought against The Enemy!, the Japanese, after surprise attack on 7 December 1941 – this event, and I'm sure you need no reminding, harbinger to the first atomic warhead deliberately developed, tested and detonated by Americans in order to kill extremely large groups of people, quickly - and dropped

upon the unsuspecting population of Hiroshima; this technology, now mass produced in America and, like so much else, by their example, proliferated around the planet…, even now as you read; as nutrition is to MacDonalds; thirst to Coca Cola; communication to Microsoft; and snorkelling to 7-11.

Tom seemed close to a dramatic display of tears after the naval brass rendition of his national anthem, and the attendant stirrings of deliberate ceremony - his animal juices clearly running amok at the prospect of partaking so centrally in the creation of tribal membership, its orchestration faultlessly blind to its own construction. Our four minute viewing of this televised spectacle was, however, interrupted… by the air conditioning overkill in the Honolulu domestic airport restaurant, and we therefore retired to the pleasantly foliaged atmosphere of the benched garden at its centre… before succumbing to serious flu and moral outrage.

My sense of moral measure had been tipped the previous day whilst standing in the lengthy queue of sightseers, including what seemed like a whole battleship of veterans – each dressed in white naval socks, shoes and knee-length white pants, Hawaiian shirts, peaked sailor hats embroidered with “Pearl Harbour Survivor” for all to see and identify, and their proud, dotting wives bursting into supportive tears at regular hormonal intervals - for entry tickets into the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbour, located on the outskirts of Maui’s capital. Entry to the memorial is free of charge and visited by 1.5 million people each year, and therefore requires that visitors stand in a queue for an hour or more, and no bags of any sort are allowed. This security protocol is understandable, certainly - yet the memorial is also entirely devoid of baggage holding facilities, the likes of which I have witnessed in no other place on Earth during our travels, and so created a double wait for Kale and I, forced to take turns in guarding our bags… or leave! – a testimony to American (… ?).

And it was under these circumstances that I was forced to overhear the conversation of an American couple standing directly behind us: “Husband - I can’t understand why all these foureigners wanna come to our country and also wanna destroy us. If its not the Japs then it’s the darn Commies, if not them, then its the darn Muslims; Wife: I know, I know, I wish (getting louder) they would jus' staay awaay!; Husband: (even louder) Yerr! Its jus' JEALOUSY! That’s what it is, its jus' PLAIN DARN JEALOUSY!”.

This blind belief in American moral rectitude was served up throughout the tour of the memorial, where, firstly, a short film explaining the events of 12-7 focused upon the Pacific expansionist intentions of the Japanese, the wholly unjustified aircraft carrier bombing, and the brave and brilliant counter attack by America. No mention whatsoever was made of America’s persistent interference into the Japanese expansionist strategies, a millennia old battle for markets and living space in the Far-East, and the relative lack of interest by the Japanese in American territory per se. An alternative position on these events reads, and I quote verbatim from reports of

historical documentation (see (#) below for source reference): “The USA did not go to war until December 8th, 1941, the day after the infamous bombing of Pearl Harbour. Tensions had been mounting between the USA and Japan since the early 1930s, when Japan took Manchuria. Later that decade the Japanese were to continue to expand their borders in South East Asia, aggressively. The area they took was labelled the "Southern Resources Zone" as it aimed at helping the Japanese economically. In 1937 they went to war against China. All three of these events incited President Roosevelt who, on July 27th issued an Executive Order, freezing all Japanese assets in the United States and stopping all trade with them. A year earlier, on July 2nd 1940, he had passed "The United States Export Control Act" prohibiting the export of basic War Materials to Japan. The Japanese believed that these were hostile moves by the USA but did try to keep the peace between the Nations. The ambassador of Japan even relayed a reply to peace discussions to the Secretary of State one hour after the Pearl Harbour bombing had begun.” (#) (http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~wausie/Pacific.html)

This trend continued after a brief boat ride deposited visitors upon a walk-about memorial built over the sunken wreck of the USS Arizona, a giant gravestone to the young sailors (average age, 19 years) who had died there, and shaped like a cubist rendition of a femur – dipped in the middle and rising continuously on both sides; the low middle section representing, we were told, the dark hour of The Enemy’s! attack, and the higher ends, the American triumph over adversity: further, on entering the memorial at one end, one walks along an open deck to the far side of the white concrete edifice, formed after a church sanctum with stained glass windows - angular trees and branches cut into the walls of an enclosed square; symbolic of the tree of life, and spiritual continuance in the face of death, and national rebirth, I was told.

It seemed to me however, given an alternative reading of the overall shape and form of the memorial, that its creator might have unwittingly represented the unconscious swinging of History’s Pendulum – the macro-discursive repetition compulsion:– of American interference into the foreign affairs of other countries cloaked as democratic watchdogging; of ideological prescription disguised as freedom preservation; of market-mongering sold as improved quality of life and protection of global assets; and further, that the tree in its sanctum, far from renewal, seemed rather to perpetuate the unconscious Agrarian emphasis upon genetic lines of social control, property ownership, and a belief in an all powerful supernatural benefactor ensuring the fruitful cultivation and ongoing fertility of demarcated territory multiplying – which, of course, must be protected, usually by young men who like the Christ, must give up their lives for the continuance of family, tribe and clan. It seems, accordingly, that these young people are therefore elevated to hero status in social memory so that others may be persuaded - through rhetoric of this ceremonial sort -to repeat these discursive practices, compulsively, unconsciously, and indeed, most finally – with conviction.

The film, “Pearl Harbour”, further testifies to this unconscious discursive reality: it begins with two boys in the Agrarian fields of an American farming community; a family history of war and heroism is sown into the narrative from its outset; later on, as young men, the boys embrace an all consuming conviction to fight for the protection of their territory, their country; Agrarian themes of pregnancy and reproduction are discursively seamed into the plot; personal loss for the greater good, for the homeland, comprises the pivotal dramatic tension; Judeo-Christian metaphors supporting these Agrarian territorial imperatives repeat throughout the movie…, and culminate in the young hero’s Christ-like posture during his death scene anchored by appropriate wording; the other young man survives in vivo, while the genetic legacy of his dead compatriot is replicated through a male off-spring - last seen frolicking like a newly birthed bobcat beside protective parents, all smiling fondly into the twilight, as they stroll upon a stretch of ground into the closing sequences of the film.

“Pearl Harbour” was released early in 2001, before the events leading up to America’s so-called New War, and enjoyed immediate success world wide, but particularly in America. At the year’s close – predictably - it was rated as its most popular film. The actors went on to become heartthrobs of heroic stature, and the martyr, in his subsequent movie, has taken up a character role with a similar storyline, though – thankfully! - a fraction more cynical, and with the incipient fragments of self-reflexive critique. Its early release together with many television reappraisals of nuclear threat and the cold war era, the full unedited release of Apocalypse Now, and so on, suggests that the millennium turn had created a certain restlessness within the Western World’s discursive unconscious – led by America. In the Western World, the American cinematic productions and their various characters function as primary arbiters of right action or moral imperative, mediated through public discourse as entertainment; these productions also reflect existing discursive trends within the western international community – they both lead and reflect; as dialogue is to speaker; and tongue is to word.

The preoccupations of these popular productions suggest, possibly, that Judeo-Christian prophecies of the Apocalypse - Judgement Day and the Second Coming -have required some or other fulfilment, if this Agrarian belief system is to sustain credibility – and, to the discursively unconscious, its non-fulfilment…, experienced as a serious matter… of Life or Death: consequently, heretics will be wanted -"Dead or Alive!" - as they say in the old westerns, and on FOX reports from the White House. It seems possible, therefore, that the fabricated narratives of the cinema provided one such outlet, the events of American history another, and the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, the Global Economy’s high command, yet another. I was therefore not surprised in the least when, on CNN, an American women with a mid-western accent thanked Bush Junior publicly for, and I quote, “this godly war” - where upon, he grinned like a shy prince of the realm and received a standing ovation from the Republican thick audience; as Honour is to Belief; Position to Storyline; and Moral Outrage to Unconsciousness.

Yet I found myself asking who indeed are The Americans? What social collective comprises the Land of the Individual; of Inalienable Rights; of Personal Freedom. Who are all these people who hang their Stars & Strips as little flags fluttering from 4X4 motor vehicles, drape them like giant tablecloths from wooden balconies fronting the street, tattoo their shapes and forms upon shoulders and breasts, and manufacture whole surfboards in their image? Let me relate my experience… so that you might decide for yourself, as the reader always does, what it is to be An American, or, for that matter, Un-American… a phrase we hear from time to time in the ubiquitous Americanised discourse – both public and private, it must be said - of the 21st Century.

As an emigrating South African to the continent of North America, steeped in the discourses of international racism, and poised at a critical interval of personal and social identity augmentation, and, as consequence, their necessary re-interpretation, I was perhaps sensitive to the fact that the Polynesian-Americans of the US state of Hawaii, are demarcated along with a host of other social grouping categories in the public arena of American identity – Black-Americans, White-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Italian-Americans, Native-Americans, Islamic-Americans, Jewish-Americans, North-Americans, and more. These particular subcategories are listed ad hoc off the top of my head from remembered public talk whilst visiting the country, and are therefore by no means representative. Similarly, a cursory analysis reveals that these informal categories cut across racial, linguistic, national, historical, religious and geographical conceptual demarcations – a linguistic epithet appended to 'American', and so positioning each individual person into some or other sub-cultural category… in a random, haphazard fashion, it seems. Yet, it must too be said, this indiscriminate labelling is used liberally in all public presentation of identity; for instance, the radio news broadcast I overheard in a local superstore concerning the epidemic incidence of obesity - Hispanic-Americans most prone to the disease, I'm told. The verbal common denominator appears therefore to function as a rhetoric, persuading social unity, cohesion and identity… and, why not?

In Hawaii, however, I also discovered that concurrent with this consummate common denominator-ing, individuals within these random subcategories did not always wish to be so positioned, and worked assiduously at separating from the all subsuming, collective identification. By way of separation, some of the Polynesian people living in Hawaii have created whole islands – literally - of autonomous culture - where no outsiders apart from true blooded Hawaiians are tolerated within their communities; an ironic inversion to the native and slave laws which plagued American legal mandates until reform in the 1960s. Further, two local first year university students, and fellow members of our touring party, Manny and Guido, originally from New Jersey, New York, having lived on the east coast all their lives, introduced themselves as hiving from the Dominican Republic - though decidedly second generation American citizens, and very interested as to where "the whites" lived on the Big island. Our tiny Polynesian-American guide reframed this linguistic labelling as "Caucasian", and spoke nostalgically of working in Australia, as did the

west coast born and bred Caucasian-American guide, an ex-male nurse, who wore a very 'outback' looking bush hat and generous smile, and took over touring duties the following day. On the third day, yet another young guide - blond, bronzed, and built – and raised on the American east coast, had given up a lucrative career in the financial industry - his university education status announced within minutes of entering the 4X4 tour mobile - to hunt, gather and fire-fight on the Big Island; that is, he caught fish and surfed as often as possible, owned a small holding and together with his wife, cultivated fruit trees and vegetables that needed constant attention in order to yield effectively, and had almost completed training as a fire-fighter to replace tour guiding as a consistent form of income generation. He too strongly supported Hawaiian independence from the materialistic mainland, and attempted to persuade shopping at the fresh produce market rather than the hard-staffed, impersonal efficiency of the cheaper superstore, though failed; the Dominican Republic-American youngsters, and another fellow traveller, a serious, considered Singaporean lawyer also in his twenties, wished urgently to stock up on less nutritious, cholesterol inducing, food-laboratory manufactured alternatives – their uniform, fatty chemistry deliberately designed to deceive the biologically programmed human taste and olfactory organs; entrancing enticingly… the Unconscious, and thereby, … enriching entrepreneurial enterprises…though, entirely… subliminally, it must be said.

Perhaps Hawaiian-Americans are different from other Americans? I began to think. Different from East-coasters, West-coasters, Southerners, Northerners, Midwesterners…, to name yet further socio-nominal formations; these US social markers, often disparagingly rendered through talk by the intelligent, well spoken, well informed young individuals we met on our visit - all searching for meaning and optimal ways of being on these, the most remote islands in all the world; their shaping formations, directing the course of our travelling companions' conversation like the thundering molecules of seawater we witnessed… forcing their way through newly cast lava pipes… bursting up and out, and into cauldrons of steaming waterfalls cascading over new geology like seminal soup; I'm told, the creative work of Pele - Polynesian Goddess of the Volcano.

She is feared and worshipped by native Hawaiians and the young blond, bronzed and built men and women of privileged mainland biography, who climb and surf now her peaks and shores, alike; and where upon, in some deep, emptied lava pipe hardly a decade formed, the dark entrance to which a touring Polynesian local and his lovely young daughter - the final members of our party with us for but a day - would not even dare approach, I unwittingly disturbed a colourful triangle of material - no bigger than a female pubic wedge, carefully hemmed along its edges, the hems extended as long again into three flattened cords, and beneath this strange object, some kind of organic goo – and cautioned, in no spare measure by the grinning guide - to leave it well alone if he were me. Which I duly did.

We were further advised the next day by our blond leader on a crunching ordeal of a trek to the very edge of a tumbling river of molten lava glowing like menstrual blood upon the black-skinned thighs of the goddess herself, not to remove the smallest shard of the abundant cold-dark matter from the islands given similar sentiments - Pele is not known for her gentleness. To this, Hawaiian postal workers wearily testify, I'm told, from the desperate letters detailing bewitchment and bad fortune attached to an unstoppable flow of parcels… filled with returning shards of lava tinkling like bits of lightweight glass, their rainbow-black tincture streaked with filaments of gold like yellow hair - a bizarre metamorphosis as Fire and Air congress as Earth – and in Hawaii, considered the flaxen locks of the temperamental lady… the filaments separating out from their black foundation and blowing into arbitrary windswept styles on the alienscape…, like a massive cowpat punctuated here and there by quick-rooting primordial ferns with an appetite for life and living.

These young American individuals, different from others met on our travels, it seemed - different in their expectation of happiness; in their belief in the right to personal fulfilment, and heightened sense of personal agency – their sense of being… able to steer their own lives like a private automobile… into a direction of their own volition; of being able to take up, creatively, their own chosen positions and storylines, and invent their own rules…; to determine their own future…; and suck like noisy wasps the last nectar droplets dribbled from purple-red hibiscus flowers filling the river-cut gorges of Hawaii, which open and close everywhere their damp tropical petals in forests newly rooted upon steeping ground of loamy lava nutritious as mothers' milk… potentially.

The Hawaiian land splashes forming anew even now as you read…, building belch for belch as the blocks upon blocks of new shopping centres are set upon their formative foundation - trading places reminding Manny of New Jersey (and me of the suburban communities of middle-class South Africa); these trading places, so recently rooted… upon some of the youngest territory on Earth…; rooted until the next catastrophic tsunami trembles the water…: A slight surface wave born as a gentle ripple of echoed laughter from a sea- or earth-quake… somewhere in the depths of the Pacific or surrounding continents and islands…, and, in time…, its rotating energy climaxing… eventually… after thousands of miles of whirling force and steady underwater island-mountain climbing… as a tremendous tidal Crash!… upon these neonatal beaches burnt rainbow-black as overcooked cheese or the scattered remains of a submarine warhead programmed by Belief.

Tsunamis can strike the Hawaiian coastline from any direction…, at any time…, and their presence, their specific force - difficult to identify. Like the globalizing conversation…, one rash word uttered by an arbiter of right action, of some collective representation, and captured by the television media on film like a tectonic shudder upon a seismograph… for inevitable reoccurring

broadcast, and re-interpretation…, reverberates across thousands of units of distance, however measured – with consequences.

So too the dynamics of our tour group: Manny - constantly belated -; for the first time, on our way back from the excursion to glowing lava hissing its way into the sea - Fire and Water congressing as Air... and transforming into lethal clouds of sulphuric acid -, during our first evening together as a touring party, and holding us all up after a lengthy buying spree at the superstore followed by must-have milkshakes and burgers; the following morning, whilst conducting banking and purchasing suitable clothing; the next, re-routing flights, and effecting bus cancellations at the last minute; or otherwise, hair washes, medical treatments, phone calls home to parents, and a host of other seemingly life threatening preoccupations. This, despite repeated calls for timely attendance by all.

The young lawyer, sharing the cheaper dormitory accommodation with Manny and Guido, and initially allied with them to form an inseparable youthful threesome, talking together like characters out of an international South Park cartoon, began to throw tantrums and demand his rights as fellow tourist - letting slip, through deliberate innuendo, that Guido and Manny had been intoxicated on marijuana in the evenings, and, as such, had broken the law, and were, therefore, contemptible on two counts of moral misdemeanour. Where upon, Guido, in turn, throwing caution to the wind, became more assertive of his personal right to self determination, and, thereby, listed a whole arsenal of drugs he would be swallowin', snortin' or shootin' had these been available, and indeed, announced his intention to pursue their intoxication at his earliest convenience - with an air of single minded determination. With this flagrant criminal announcement, the lawyer then defected to the older but, nevertheless, more supportive camp - Kale and I - who had remained detached and neutral throughout, my position as 'doctor' held in high esteem by all, medical professionalism indicating a kind of aristocracy in Americanised cultures, it seems, and perhaps we had, understandably, though incongruently, been considered a little aloof… at first.

These interpersonal formations shaped entirely by discourse, reached their crashing climax whilst clamouring over the live lava flows, unevenly solidified into weaker and stronger shells above boiling stardust, a cracking covering over a bubbling yoke fed by an umbilical lava pipe released from the mountain's summit.

The lawyer from Singapore, who had coped fairly well until the vociferous confrontation, preferring decorum and decency, it seemed, generally, and unsure now, perhaps, of his fate with an aging beach boy who had given up the fruits of the financial world to roam and probe lava flows day after day, an incubating drug addict, and freshly budding sociopath, became slower and slower, falling further and further behind. After tripping up a couple of times, cutting his hand, and becoming ever more fearful…, he, sensibly, stretched a pair of white-woolly mittens over his

delicate Asian hands. Of course, for this, he was mercilessly teased by his two east coast adversaries - for being a pussy and resembling Mickey Mouse, which he most certainly did. Where upon, our blond guide - the unprecedented quality of the lava flow on this particular day flaming his hunger for fire and adventure to voracious levels as the excursion progressed, his maturity-quotient plummeting with every dangerous, crunchin' step - joined in the fun.

After these discursive events, the young lawyer, walking now at a steady pace - slightly ahead of Kale and I, would turn his head at regular intervals towards us… mouth tight, eyes desperate, rolling them in the direction of the others, tapping his temple meaningfully, and - stopping every so often - would repeatedly ask for our safety evaluation of any route proposed over the brittle lava shell by our leader… - over the oozing orange furnace below, fierce vents appearing suddenly from nowhere, it seemed, their seeping sulphurous fumes smelling like hard-boiled eggs and spelling Danger! only seconds before their heat stung your knees, then arms, then eyes... as the Earth's molten innards confronted you deadpan in their pulsating glory -, our leader… fading like a glowing blob of creamed-custard on a chocolate-fudge pudding into the widening distance of the volcanic escarpment.

Kale and I attempted to remain neutral so as to reach the very best view of the lava flow, and still return alive to base camp. The Singaporean finally decided to wait alone while the rest of us continued without him to enjoy the full Creation Spectacle – an incredible experience of gushing, unstoppable lava, shamelessly selfish in its burning descent as it cooled and added to the layers of dark dribbled fudge below, turning orange-black, then burgundy-black, before finding, finally, a silver-black resting place of substance, the ocean rim semi-circling wide as a massive mixing bowl beneath a misted dome of cool, impartial sky.

And on our trek back across the cuttin', crunchin' dark-side-of-the-moonscape, I found myself reflecting over this leg of our Hawaiian tour, over the discursive realities met along the way, and remembered the very first evening… and began to make connections...

Our Polynesian-American guide, in his forties, swearing us all to secrecy like a cartoon delinquent outside the inevitable superstore and fast-food franchise, his single minded determination quite clear, leaving no room for contradiction though phrasing his statement as a request for permission, had purchased, packaged and guzzled down two extra-long cans of beer wrapped surreptitiously in a plain brown paper bag provided by the liquor store; one of the many places of trade still open for business in the neon lit shopping mall, its new parameters still undergoing expansion next to a busy highway under construction… swollen with the buzzing energy of big beams beaming and huge honks honking in the early traffic of Night; as Atlantis is to Auschwitz; Revelations to Israel; and Campaign Funding to President.

Our brief stopover in San Francisco, before departing the USA for Canada, was uneventful; its media punted vista seriously disappointing next to other cities encountered upon our travels; the

miles upon miles of warehouses and efficient, well constructed highways - soulless; and the Golden Gate bridge - a mere pretzel in the distance. Though the easy adaptation of Kale's friend and long standing educational compatriot - a South African-American - to the near identical campus life of Berkley, clearest indication of the contemporary and future globalisation of the American Way – I experienced as very encouraging. His easy incorporation into the community, and his fellow students' genuine warmth, interest, and integrity, was reassuring to me as a prospective North-American, and seemed to point towards a possible optimal way forward for Earthlings, generally.

Here, as in Hawaii, a purist preoccupation with an Optimal Way of Being existed in their talk, billboards, campus clubs and so on; the unwavering belief in the Right! to its pursuit; the belief in its real accessibility; its actualisation… through acts of directed personal agency, through Strategy, Responsibility and Choice: this, the focus of concern amongst many of the young and privileged Americans of San Francisco, it seemed, in but the briefest of passing - Microsoft, for example, dismissed as an over marketed, underdeveloped and mass swallowed package, in favour of IBM and Apple products, for instance, supporting careful research together with social conscience, and a global community consciousness.

Travelling provides plentiful time for reflection of all sorts - indeed, a rare privilege I had not been in a position to savour as readily in my personal past. And from this inner personal position – from this centre – albeit moving from one piece of territory to the next, from ground to air, through various airspaces, and back again, I found time to read and reflect upon the videotape transcript, first recorded by Osama bin Laden after the 9-11 episode, later seized in Afghanistan by the Americans, and released as worldwide evidence for public scrutiny by all.

Under the watchful gaze of my fellow airline passengers, what struck me most of all in the transcript, was the use of wholly different discursive metaphors to those of the West – Osama's emphasis upon his dreams while sleeping, for example, and his choice to interpret them as divine directivity, and his recurring repetition that the infidel – foreigners - vacate the Islamic holy sites – Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem -, midst endless: "Praise be to Allah". A simple directive. Unconfused. Focused. To be obeyed or not obeyed. This, the only question.

On the other hand, the newspapers provided by the North American airlines were filled with complicated rhetoric - The Enemy! identified in multiple guises, arguments for and against America's New War bandied about like essay preparation during a college seminar, or product analysis before market launch in some skyscraping boardroom - the words: "… it should be understood …", a persistent refrain. Between all the vociferous journalistic positioning, the cocktail banquet of righteous concern, the menus of discourse between writers and readers from all over the world…, their contending agendas mixing haphazard recipes for severe, chronic global indigestion of sorts, it seems - with all attendant consequences… -, one article caught my

eye, and, perhaps as a function of my recent experiences on the volcanoes of Hawaii, I thought, with a decidedly South Park flavouring to its discursive serving; its sentiment encapsulated through the course of its scripted features by the following curious speech-act: “well, boo hoo hoo and yada yada yada!” – a pugnacious fart to white-gloved pacifism.

# Canada - Another Journey

**December**

And here I am, finally - immigrated; an individual from another tribe elaborating my personal narratives in Vancouver, Canada... Along with so many Others. Alone. Free. Apprehensive. Hopeful. A New Discursive World... challenging the limits of my personal agency in ways still unknown - a different journey; demanding another story. And as another journey, as a newly arrived immigrant - I have little left to say, as a traveller here.

Little to say about my attuning ear, and the Canadian accents which sound quite distinct from those of America; different as the Irish lilts from the discursive strains of England; or the musical arrangements of Mozart from Hayden; the brush strokes of Renoir from Degas; or estuary waters tasted from that of the sea or those of the far northern glaciers melting into trickling brooks, thundering streams, and finally, the broad, silent Frazer River emptying into Vancouver's Georgia Strait, one small peninsula south of English Bay and its narrower, landlocked arm, Burrard Inlet...; their waters rippled by ships and seaplanes, and edged with high, orange- and blue-painted cranes and oddly-green-yellow sulphur-dust piles heaped as ready-flour.

Little to say about what I have been told divides and unifies the people living on either side of the longest undefended border on Earth..., as it cuts across the very torso of the north American continent: by Canadians, I'm told, those who share their continent further south - money-mongering, loudmouthed hooligans!; by Americans, those further north - impoverished, uptight reactionaries! But what's new? From social observation during this circumnavigation, as a global traveller, no tribe especially likes another, it seems - indeed, social identity appears to depend upon it!; as puck is to ball; kilometres to miles; French to English; and orthodoxy to fringe. So too, Burrard Inlet's meditative form divides the tall skyscraping city of Vancouver through its middle like a pregnant belly, into the newer and older discursive communities of British Columbia; the established, and the newly arrived; the Caucasian, and the Asian; the cautious and the closed; the past,… and its future. Yet the two sides of the bay are linked as if by a neutral flag... By the routing taken by the sea-bus and its moored intersection at the Waterfront harbour-station which connects up with the gliding sky-train... meandering as a gently whining river of pale-fibreglass and smooth-concrete on high, solid stilts through the greater Vancouver district... its dashes of primary colour fading into the predominant pale-white of its benevolent coaches… framing silver-flashing windows and blunt noses… weaving a tranquil melody about the ground bass of snow-covered mountains; their accompaniment veiled and unveiled by whimsical rain-heavy cloud over enduring pale-blue sky, or occasional snow-flakes challenging the city's everyday forms to an enchanting fairyland of powdered-ice.

The sky-train's violin-song is strung like a 21st century leitmotif upon its raised track - its coaches coupled in threes and fours and fives and filled with Mandarin-speaking people, English-speaking people, First Nation people, South African people, Sikh people, Korean-speaking people, and many other kinds of people, all speaking, talking publicly and privately - You and I. And from its raised platforms, people walk their way to and from pale-painted wooden homes with high pitched roofs slanted for efficient drainage; schools chorusing with protesting teachers and the inculcation of Rights!; shopping centres scripted with writings both eastern and western; colleges everywhere; workplaces adequate; and distinct, located communities... self-chosen.

Self-chosen by immigrants emigrated by choice... to this New Discursive World; a self-selecting meta-community made distinct by this choice alone; as a mosaic picture chooses the tile; and a splash, the arrangement of liquid molecules. A collective in search of a new image of social identity, and, in turn, necessarily, personal identity; an identity augmented by Otherness... by the magic rendered through juxtaposition, by the myriad, multiplying communities of modern Canada, who, now, even as you read, are changing their shapes and their forms - here, at this journey's end.

So too, now, I have very little to say of the many prescient dreams that I have experienced since arriving - guiding, directing, perturbing in their cryptic way; or the significant amounts of small change that both Kale and I have been finding everywhere in Vancouver, usually in series of twos, seemingly far more significant than chance would predict...; indeed, very little to say now that my journey has altered course, now that my planetary orbit is complete, now that my global search for answers, to meanings, is sufficiently contented - and a new leg of my personal journey as human being living on planet Earth begins.

For I must make my home here, for a while - I am not just passing through. And it's not gonna be easy... to find a comfortable discursive location, to make my voice heard, here, among so many others, and still maintain public and private harmony through skilful social conjunction, to maintain equilibrium in an ever shifting, competitive Social Universe of Change. But that is another dialogue with belief. And here I would leave, now, this particular dialogue, by quoting a recent haiku-like poem that I penned - on instruction - during a writers' workshop held at the annual psychology conference of British Columbia, where I sought to establish employment connections and replenish our dwindling coffers - where I came to realize how Similar, yet Other, I really am, here, in Vancouver, and what serious challenges await... on the discursive path ahead - on this new journey of my own choosing:

Silver-mountain snowing
Talk arranges
New

# Afterword

**Vancouver, April 2002**

Dearest Omniverse

I have decided to leave any further revision of the Dialogue, for the moment – I can tweak and twist it into more shapely form as my technique improves over the years; I'm in no hurry.

Modern day writing is much like painting or engineering any piece of visual art in that the artist-engineer is in a position to work as if seamlessly through the passage of Time afforded the easy-editing possibilities of word processing technology. It is in this sense that Dialogue with Belief represents an instance of post-modernist conceptual art; that is, a finite set of grappled themes, argument and the deliberate orchestration of aesthetic devices employed across sensory modalities to enhance meaning and its intended sensibility; each discursive layer attempts to inform the other as the jigsaw fits the picture.

Through the particular articulation of discursive agency in the Dialogue, I have attempted – principally, to reconcile subject matter typically conceptually polarised - aggression and religious practice, for instance, or 20$^{th}$ century socio-political trends and their historical co-evolution with discursive artefacts (unconscious storylines) from antiquity. There are many such attempted narrative integrations. By way of heuristic, therefore - as Tool is to hammer, paintbrush, needle, liquid crystal and alliteration, certain themes underpin the travelogues, the discursive meditations. And although the text and its features are certainly finite, ultimately, I still find myself as reader unravelling submerged narrative threads within the deeper grammars of the artefact as I shift my attention over readings –… the depth of Discourse, it seems, is deeper and more embracing than the darkest void of all nothingness. And, similarly, by way of argumentative persuasion, I attempt to re-animate the everyday objects of corporeal matter, of Physiology, and transmute these through the power of rhetorical language, through Discourse, into new forms, and new realities.

In this wide-weave I borrow from all kinds of divergent conceptual terrains believed distanced and attempt to spin persuasion like a magic cobweb through the mind of the reader, actively positioned as both personal agent, and as passive recipient of the Dialogue's rhetoric: its grammars shaping the reader's consciousness through verbal engineering, through poetry, through dialogue with belief: just fleeting associations, perhaps, at some arbitrary nexus of experience, or sporadic re-readings perused carelessly whilst defecating through the cool fog of morning.

As such, I have attempted to reflect this integrative thematic weaving from the micro-, through meso- and macro- systems of the text by: making public my personal experience as writer, this, most central, and the position of post-modernism more generally; my grappling with personal insights related to discursive psychology - as subject, psychotherapist, theorist, writer, artist and person; my social identity as "traveller" and the process of recording and translating everyday life into text; and the operation of the discursive devices of the very text itself, that is, solipsistic commentary and augmentation using rhetorical and poetic devices borrowed from literature both scientific and fictive.

The Dialogue is therefore multi-layered in demonstration of the machinations of the discursive engines which drive our assumptions of Self and comprise our fundamental reality, our Discursive Worlds – as human being; social being; personal being; and physical being. In this way, the reader is invited to participate in a gentle transformational process as these devices thread their novel linguistic fibres into discursive tapestries strangely spun through displaced semantic into metered symphony of new arrangement; both unconsciously, implicitly, as well as deliberately, explicitly.

I have therefore deliberately placed submerged referential metaphors throughout the text – both across the Dialogue and within each discursive meditation, each chapter. For example, On Killing Buddha is referenced by the 60s cult book, "If you meet Buddha on the road, kill him"; Seminal Confluence, the phallus; The King's Return, the wolf; Medieval Madness, human ethology; Cultured Corruption, the labyrinth; Where Even the Tramps are Moderate, Psalm 23 and the fish; Greetings in White Underwear, WB Yeats' poem "The Second Coming"; … and I'll leave the rest up to you. There is much more submerged within the text of each of these dialogues, these discursive meditations, far more – I quote the above referential metaphors by way of illustration only. I hope that your discovery process will be as exciting as was its writing – it makes for more engaged reading and fulfils the overarching goals of the project as a post-modernist interactive art piece. Specifically, my words serve as metaphor for the agential possibilities latently nested within the discursive universe; like stitches threading together explicit and implicit levels of consciousness within the finite ontology of the text, the reader, the writer, and, of course, the discourse; as light is to facets, crystal, jeweller and warp-speed; and post-modernism is to Virginia Woolf, Marcel du Champ, Arnold Schonberg, Albert Einstein… and others.

The generative energy delivered through the creative process has reciprocally enriched the ongoing development of my personal identity; through the very process of engaging in the Dialogue, and I have grown in many ways - my understanding of the workings of the Discursive Unconscious has been elaborated, for instance, as has been my experience as a traveller,

through semantic re-description of my local experiences, through internal dialogue with myself, and its ongoing existence as a living discursive entity, as a book. But mostly, I chose to indulge in Dialogue with Belief as a function of the purest pleasure; I thoroughly enjoyed constructing the Dialogue and look forward to your inevitable textual re-positioning of my offering.

Love forever
Rmon

April 2002