

Interregnum: Fifth Week's Summary

. . . the true biography of an artist is that of his work. It is also the only story that does not end with death. Proust said of Ruskin: 'The events of his life are intellectual ones and the important dates are those in which he perceives a new art form.

Jean-Yves Tadie
Marcel Proust: A Life

In 1988, Editions La Decouverte, Paris, published *Phrasikleia: Anthropologie de la lecture en Grece ancienne* by Jesper Svenbro. I find arguments in this book, which bear directly upon this persistent problem of words and stones. Professor Svenbro's study delves with philological subtlety into the analysis of the inscriptions carved into ancient Greek sepulchral monuments, the so-called *sêma*. Not being a Greek scholar, and, in fact, having to rely on Janet Lloyd's 1993 English translation for the Cornell University Press, I nevertheless found provocative parallels between Professor Svenbro's speculations on Greek attitudes on reading and the problems I am encountering analyzing the text of week five's Rock Gazing Exercises. The question dogging my interest is simply this: who or what is speaking in these texts? And this is the same inquiry that Prof. Svenbro addresses in his anthropological study.

I have previously spoken of these seven stones as if they each have a persona. I have assumed that each persona has its own voice. Except in the psychological sense, via the abominable mechanism called "projection," this assumption appears to be completely absurd. Stones do not speak, and yet they somehow seem to generate speech in others. And so it is with the Greek *sêma*. Their stones, like my stones, often refer to themselves in the first person singular. For example, the protagonist of Prof. Svenbro's study proclaims: "I, Phrasikleia's *sêma*, shall always be called girl {*koure*}, having received this name from the Gods instead of {through} marriage." Am I, or is Phrasikleia's *sêma*, projecting? Since it is both rational and obvious that stones are *aphtongos*, that is, "voiceless," how else can these words exist? And yet, as Prof. Svenbro points out, that while "the *sêma* itself is silent, whomever recognizes it in passing by will speak. The stone will trigger speech." In the case of the ancient Greeks, the word *sêma* radiates various shades of meaning, i.e., *sign*, *signal*, *symbol* and *tomb*. What, then, is the stone, or rather its inscription, doing, but proclaiming its presence? Speech comes from presence, and only takes place in the present. The stones, or their scripts, serve the reader as notes on a page serve the musician. They prompt the reader, who is present as they are present, to renew their life by decoding them with the living instrument of the voice. This resurrection grants the *sêma*, and by association the person whom it commemorates, *kleos*, renown, or what we might loosely refer to as *fame*. But, as Prof. Svenbro, clarifies, "*fame*, though it is the common one, "is not a very satisfactory translation for *kleos*" because "*kleos* is the technical term for what the poet bestows on individuals who have accomplished something remarkable." And further on, the Prof. states "*kleos* belongs entirely to the world of sound. If *kleos* is not acoustic it is not *kleos*." Fame exists because it is bruited, because of its ability to resound.

The words prompt the reader to decode them, and to bruit the fame of the stone. Prior to this moment, the words are entombed. They are the funerary monuments of a once-living, i.e., once “present,” writer who is now absent. What Prof. Svenbro brilliantly expostulates is that the writer is effaced by the act of writing, in that he silences his own voice and gives it to another, that is, he bestows it on the reader. It is the art of speaking, of reading, and specifically, of reading aloud, that creates presence, that is to say, life. When the words of the stones are read, what is present, what is alive, according to the ancient Greeks, is not the writer, nor the stone, nor the signal, nor the script, it is the reader’s voice, the reader, who, through the act of reading, withdraws his own persona and projects the *kleos* of the inscription.

This activity of the reader can be denoted by one of several Greek words translated into English as *reading*. To borrow again from Prof. Svenbro: “the activity is denoted by the verb *ananemesthai* whose literal meaning is to ‘distribute.’” Thus, “whoever approaches the stone is expected to ‘read’ the name of the deceased, making it resound.” By reading, we proclaim our presence, and distribute life. In a more contemporary parlance, we allow our voice to “channel” an entity who existed, or who still exists, in another place and time.

But what does all this have to do with the seven texts constituting week five of these Awareness Exercises? The texts of 11/24/00 (Friday’s Rock, Moby Polyphemus) of 11/25/00 (Saturday’s Rock, Aesklepios, the Folly Master) seem to prompt an explosion of signifiers that are certainly not mine — for that would bring us back to the doctrine of psychological projection — nor are they the stones’ — to imply that they are would be to sink us into the primitive folly of animism — nor are they the reader’s — for the reader is only a channel, an expressive channel, perhaps, but still only a vessel — no, words like

breached
eventide
bonbons
exorcist
ramrod
octopi
scarfing
clabber
libation
spasms
limpid
kelp
escapades
androids
larvae
lapidary
origami
slaughterhouse

viscera
kaleidoscope
kowitz
evangelist
entrails
assassin
polychrome
extravaganza

are not the projections of the writer nor the voices of stones, rather they are (may be? — ah, I am out of my depth here) vortices of renown gathered from many places and times, crowding into consciousness, and clamoring again for speech to give them life.

Now, this brings us all — writer, script, reader, listener — to the question of place, the question of time. And it brings me, in attempting to grasp all this, to the results of a series of experiments involving water and the moon. I quote from Theodor Schwenk's book, *Sensitive Chaos: The Creation of Flowing Forms in Water and Air*.

. . . water shaken in a vessel can be caused to move in such a way that the inner surfaces thus created all slide past each other in the moving liquid. As soon as the movement ceases, the formation of inner surfaces, and thus also the great impressionability, is arrested, and the "sense organ" closes itself.

Herr Schwenk claims that things in flow are "impressed" by cosmic influences as the various spirals and vortices of movement create innumerable receptors on their sensitive "inner surfaces."

By shaking vessels of water and activating the inner surfaces at specified intervals during a complete solar eclipse, Herr Schwenk was able to control the opening and closing of the fluid's sensitivity to the cosmos. To make the "voice" of these "encoded" messages visible (as, say, the sculptor, through his inscriptions, has made the speech of the *sêma* visible), Herr Schwenk sprouted wheat grains in each vessel. He then graphed the progress of each blade's subsequent growth against the water's "memory" of the impression of the eclipse. The results were dramatic and unequivocal. In the "region of the total eclipse," the grass blades' growth in the water so impressed are significantly retarded.

The mathematically minded or skeptical can check the statistical rigor of these experiments in Schwenk's book *Grundlagen de Potenzforschung*.

What Herr Schwenk purports to demonstrate is that things in "flow," like water in vessels, like air through the human larynx, like words across synaptic circuits, capture precise impressions of places and times. Analogously, I hypothesize that the fluid dynamics that made these seven stones have also encrypted them. The actions of words, even the strange words listed above, must do the same. And as the writer writes and the reader reads, places and times resound and come alive.

Now, the assertion of Fergus's Druid Dreamstone on Sunday, November 26th, 2000, regarding the five essential "items of knowledge required of every understanding person" begins to expand in import. By knowing the day of the solar month, the age of the moon, the state of the sea tide, the day of the week, and the calendar of the perfect saints, we are literally "in touch" with these activated inner surfaces of awareness — whether they are open and flowing or whether they are calm and closed.

If it is not the writer, nor the script, nor the reader, nor the listener resounding *kleos*, what is it? Isn't it space itself, and time itself? Isn't it the Word made flesh? When on Monday, November 27th, we "resound" the troubadour's speech on unrequited love, or on Tuesday, November 28th, we activate a Quaker preaching on the spiritual values of money, or on Wednesday, November 29th, we distribute the polyglot musings of a great danseuse on dance, are we not hearing the audible impressions of signifiers that have captured these places and times? And by so doing, are we not adding our own place and time to the brew?

But now we come to the desert, Thursday, November 30th, the place of stillness, the place where the maddening flows of impressions close. Now we know that Saint Anthony's agony is also our own. We know that an invisible hand is also placing perilous texts before our eyes, and making us want to cry against their onslaught. It is no wonder that the stones are glowing.

The trip to Alpharetta

There is a precise, technical word for the loose accumulation of flesh that greets me in the hotel bathroom's multiple mirrors: *fabiform*, *def.* "shaped like a bean." This trait, like so many others, I share with hoards of American males who have managed to crawl through time on a fast-food diet and reach the milestone of their fiftieth year. I review this small, obvious, and seemingly insignificant fact from my room at the Holiday Inn Express at 5455 Windward Parkway West, Alpharetta, Georgia. (The seven stones, with all their lapidary wisdom, have traveled with me, their seven envelopes carefully wrapped in an old, unraveling Abercrombie and Fitch sweater.) I iterate this observation because the mirrors here tell me that the past week has added to my girth, my fabiformness, if you will, and have made me realize how much I miss Mary Ann, and how unlikely it is that I will ever be considered attractive to another woman. This realization makes me hate the body I have constructed for myself with a lifetime of bad habits, a half-century of kowtowing to the demands of my advertising-duped entrails. I now know that every day, perhaps every moment of every day, offers a choicepoint, and it seems that I, like so many others, have reached those bifurcation nodes and more often than not chose poorly, even perversely. Perversely, I know, I now find myself longing for the wasting promised by the doctors as a symptom of my cancer. But, here I am — in Alpharetta — a Human Bean, one of the many bloated, unsproutable seeds that will erect no magic stalk to the giant's never never land of stealable treasures. I have been here for the whole week, first to take Sadhana, Inc.'s workshop on Conscious Breathing (of that, more anon), and second to . . . well, the truth is I don't exactly know (as they would say at the C.B. workshop, "at the conscious level") *why* I have stayed — unless it was to gorge on

aperitifs, pasta, ensalata, and dolce. I only know that the breathing exercises have opened up a floodgate of intuition, which the sleeping exorcist of my reason could not expel, and which seemed to compel me to remain. This compulsion has included a weird kind of pica for Italian cuisine. I have sampled most of the Italian restaurants of the town: Buca di Beppo's and Fazoli's on Mansell Road, Fratelli Di Napoli's on North Point Parkway, Altobeli's on Old Alabama Road, and, of course, Vinny's, just next door to the hotel, on Windward. I am not Italian. I know no Italians. I enjoy, but am not generally addicted to Italian food. I do like Italian shoes, perhaps the pair I have been wearing has been not so subtly guiding me. I can only explain this week-long obsession with my anticipation of the probably apocryphal legacy from the Italian Doctor in Arizona, Sandro Lingam, oops!, I mean Sandro Lieto. It is as if the Universe (Uni to her close personal friends) wanted me to be in precise places at precise times to overhear conversations at adjacent tables. (Ah, finally my rudeness pays off. I have always fantasized about owning a restaurant with microphones hidden at each table. For some reason, I adore eavesdropping on conversations that would bore me to tears if I were actually forced to participate in them.) And what did I learn from this gluttonous spy-fest. Plenty.

I learned that Alpharetta has a whole heap of red dirt, and that that oxidized earth-skin is being furiously excavated to accommodate a building boom whose speed and intensity, if not height, would shame Nimrod. And I learned, too, that Apharetta's main citadels, however busy the surface developers might seem erecting support infrastructure, were beneath that red dirt, in miles of cable underground. Alpharetta is the heart of the largest fiber-linked network in the U.S, and it is the nesting place of information processing and technology giants: Nortel, AT&T, Equifax, MCI, Digital Equipment Corp., Lucent Technologies, Automated Data Processing, Hewlett Packard, Siemens, and last, but certainly not least, *vis-à-vis* this country's unfolding electoral drama, Choicepoint. You could say that Alpharetta is a kind of cultural brain dedicated to information gathering, processing, and control. For all those fretting the outcome of the recent seemingly indecisive presidential extravaganza, let me assure you, that if the conversations that I overheard at Alpharetta's Italian dining establishments have any validity, the outcome of this election has never really been in doubt. The president, it seems was chosen long before November 7th, and that the plus and minus charges whizzing through the networking nodules of Alpharetta's vast android brain have long-since determined the pattern of our merely human future(s).

At Buca di Beppo's, while scarfing down the mortadella, pepperoni and pepperoncini of the Di Beppo "bend at the knees" 1893 salad, I overheard some 30 somethings (would-be alpha male types of which there seem to be many in Alpharetta) talking about how pissed Marty was to have that A-hole from the *Guardian* sniffing around about the voting list purge in Florida. There was plenty of fratboy laughter, some use of the N-word — which my years in Texas taught me to recognize as Old South Money or pretensions to Old South Money when pronounced 'nigra,' — and the usual mish mash of clabber around the animals they had killed and the women that they claimed to have boffed. All this of course was hardly significant enough to record. These were mere verbal aperitifs, bonbons to help stave off the limpid tide of my personal loneliness. But midway through my side dish of 3 "big as your head" meatballs, I began, in my carnivorous stupor, to

realize that the conversation might have something to do with the disputed presidential election.

“I thought Vin Weber was going to have a hissy fit when Rather projected Gore in Florida.” ‘I’ll poison that S.O.B., sure as shit,’ he says, ‘see if he don’t wake up with anthrax in his wheaties, I ain’t about to let one of my bought boys get uppity on a deal that could cost us the White House.’

“And was Safir there?”

“Ya, sure, and Fagan, too, and me just a goffer trying not to bust a gut when they start ooglin’ over K.H. like there was a snowball’s chance they could get through that cake of make-up and suck face.”

“You think Jeb’s playin’ sticky finger there?”

“Oh, my Jeeeesus, she’s a good Christian white woman sure as the Pope’s Catholic — but I got my suspicions.”

By the time I finished with my Buca (“stretch pants are your friend”) Bread Pudding Caramello, I begin to connect enough of the dots to think that the headlines about court decisions and absentee voters were about as important to the story of the election’s outcome as a pig’s feelings are to a bacon-eater. I returned to my room at the Holiday stuffed, ah yes, and overstuffed.

The next night, at Fratelli di Napoli’s, while forging though the Calimari Fritti and Mussels on my way to the Veal Piccata, my passive escapade into conspiracytheory-and-fattycalorieland continued. I think I must have blacked-out from my meal of mini-octopi, at least for a moment, because I thought I heard the most astounding things about the new (still officially un(s)elected) President’s plans for the future.

“Choicepoint’s gonna get that doe-mess-tic security gig sure as Momma’s gonna get the vapors in August. They ain’t gonna be a lib’ral’s toenail clipping or dick-spasm that ain’t scrutinized to a fare-thee-well by Big Daddy Cheney and his cohorts when the Shrub gets in.”

That night, back at the hotel, I lay flat on my back, trying to digest, and had a vision of rows and rows of wooden crates lined up in a dark warehouse, and each little veal-calf was peering out through the bars with Ralph Nadar’s milky, soulful eyes.

I drove around Alpharetta the next day in my white mid-sized rental car, winding my languid way through the tidy industrial parks and the monotonous new suburbs, like a ribbon of disconnected kelp drifting through the twisted currents of some secret, ominous tide. I wonder how it ever came to pass that boxes of concrete or clapboard painted in neutral shades of gray and beige had reached such an ascendancy in this culture. How in the world did “nice” get to be a word that could stand in for “bland” in any neighborhood

in the country and be accepted as the fulfillment of the American Dream? How did we come to adopt the cubicle as paradise? Come eventide, I found myself at Altobeli's (est. 1988), and dined on the Salmon Rosêmary with a dollop of "fried garlic mashed potatoes", "sopro lo lato", steering clear this time of any of the three veal offerings (Francese, Marsela and Romana) and enjoying (well, tolerating, at least) the piano stylings of Lionel Lyle at the black and whites. My habit of eavesdropping, somewhat chastened by the atrocious information I had gleaned on the previous evenings, was, I am sad to admit, so engrained in me that you could say that I unconsciously absorbed certain conversations while traversing the slippery audio slopes of Lional's overly-lavish renditions of 50's Italian pop songs. During the course of the evening, I imbibed some unspeakable libations of prognostications about the world's political future along with the superfluous embellishments of fatty arpeggios. Words from adjacent tables came to me as smoothly as the Vaseline nozzle of an enema to a stoved up invalid, but their coherence and overall sense was really too outrageous for the rational mind to swallow. The phrase "full spectrum dominance" and speculations on a Unocal pipeline through "Taliban-land" (whatever that means) along with snippets on how "George senior has the fix in with the "bin blah blah's" (something or other Arab-sounding, and other verbal meanderings that I couldn't quite catch, and which at the time I thought must have something to do with the owner of the restaurant.) The owner, by the way, was one Al Bashiri, who may or may not have been Italian. He graciously circulated through the diners and even stopped at my table to inquire after my "satisfaction," intoning his words in suave accent that I could not pin to any specific region on the globe. He left a card with me identifying himself as a member of the "Alliance of Wedding Professionals," and I wondered if I was giving off some kind of "father of a prospective bride" type vibe. I thought of the tragedy that Mary Ann and I had so long ago endured, and my heart sunk further into its thickening blanket of cholesterol, stunned by the grief of what might have been. The character of the place was different from that of Fratelli di Napoli's or Buca di Beppo's. The menu listed its entrees as "gourmet" and there were white linens and carnations on the tables. Ironed napkins, folded like wedges of origami, peaked elegantly, like some breed of headless, miniature swan, from the water goblets' crystal mouths. The waiters wore starched white shirts with black ties and addressed the male patrons as "sir." Lots of O.P's. about masticating salty cheeses and veal while complaining about their various alimentary canal dysfunctions. And yet — how can I say this without unduly insulting the good senior citizens of Alpharetta? — there seemed to me to be something sinister beneath all this upper middleclass surface gentility, something that could bite the heads off babies without missing a beat in their conversations about "them Falcons' chances for the playoffs." I was beginning to get more and more creeped out, not so much by Alpharetta *per se*, but by the whole tenor of the nation, which managed to exude an almost predatory stench while at the same time giving off a flowery perfume of utter innocuousness. I did not feel so well when I returned to my room at the Holiday Express, and after a brief session of Rock Gazing, I fell back, dizzy, on the bed, wondering if it were possible that one man could epitomize the sickness of an entire nation. The king mattress's bedspread was crowded with cabbage-sized exotic flowers, and each of those blooms morphed into a human face as I tried to regain my sense of equilibrium. These were the faces of the damned — children, women and the elderly mostly — unknown to me, foreign, and etched with unspeakable

expressions of physical privation. I wondered who they might be, and a voice, not mine (perhaps one of my stones, breaching the confines of its envelope) simply said “refugees of the coming wars and ecological disasters.” I felt nauseated and the emerald-mist and dusty-rose Zuni-zigzag print on the armchair was not helping. A kaleidoscope of polychrome visions ramrodded their way through the last vestiges of my tenuous grip on external reality, and suddenly I found myself by a dry streambed in what once must have been a forest, but was now only factory dust, stumps and irradiated ashes. The round stones of the streambed, white with some unidentifiable desiccated viscera, were intruded upon by what seemed to be the skulls of enormous bears. As I looked on these relics, I began to breathe in the same pattern that I has been taught at the Sadhana workshop, but my breath formed a sickly green vapor-cloud before me, which smelled, appropriately enough, like rosemary.

Next morning, still drugged by a mercifully dreamless sleep, I slunk down to the lobby about tenish for the Continental Breakfast buffet. (I wonder, do they really eat this stuff on the continent?) Like the other patrons (mostly men in suits, important men, men who had, not only jobs, but careers!), I marveled at the plastic wisteria vines festooning the wall above the Formica-covered sideboard, and felt relieved to know that spring, scentless and immortal was no longer confined to the fickle whims of nature. I left untouched the bowl of suspiciously perfect Delicious apples and Dole bananas. Instead, I piled a gob of cream-cheese smeared bagel chocolate-glazed donuts and bearclaws in my icfree ice bucket and retired back to the lair of my room to savor (?) my sugary feast. I brewed myself a cup of java in the mini-coffee maker (conveniently provided, along with a hairdryer and phone, on the bathroom’s vanity), having to add a load of chemical whitener and sweet and low to soften the acidic edge of the cheap, stale caffeine-laced Robusta grind. I then proceeded to watch CNN, mute, and eat, as was my custom back in Houston. My plan was always the same: gorge until my gut was full of wheat, fat and sucrose and my head was emptied of thoughts and fears. The donuts passed. The hours passed. The faces on the screen, banner headlines streaming below them, passed. And I saw all, like the evangelist, through a glass (i.e., a cathode tube) darkly. I tried hard not to derive any significance from the conversations I had overheard in Alpharetta. I tried hard not to piece together, from these shards of phrases, a future that smacked more of hobnail boots and brown shirts than any conception that I had hitherto cherished of a Norman Rockwell America. But the weaver kept weaving, and all I could see was that silly senseless smirker in a white Stetson smiling over smoking shifting sands. The s’s kept hissing, the serpentine phrases kept writhing round the sotted synapses, and I kept slipping and sliding toward the salacious consensus abyss. Toward dusk, I ventured out for grub, choosing for a restaurant, in keeping with my weeklong theme, Fazoli’s, situated conveniently, as the yellowpage ad boasted, at the Northpoint Mall.

At Hartsfield International in Atlanta on my journey here, along with the post-Thanksgiving hoards, I found myself swamped by a herd of conventioners from the Amusement Park Industry, men and women whose sole focus in life is discovering how to entertain the American Family. Now, as I walked into Fazoli’s, I wondered if there were an actual corporate braintrust whose shadowy job it was to mesmerize children with some kind of weird combination of reproducible ketch and dietary fat. The place was

swarming with the hatched-out larvae (maybe the tragedy of my marriage was a disguised blessing) of Alpharetta's covens of young professionals. The place was a pandemonium of bloodcurdling screaming, temper fits, bodies rolling on the floor, and so on, and not all of it by children, which to me seemed ironic for people who were ostensibly having fun. The ad that I read promoting the establishment had boasted that it was "not your typical quick-service restaurant," but I could find no evidence of the truth behind that statement. It was one of those places where the employees are called "team members" or "associates" (mostly teens or welfare-to-work single mothers), who are encouraged to rah rah the C.O.R.E philosophy (Competent Organization with Responsive Empowerment) of some enormous corporation that pays them minimum wage and requires them to wear logo T-shirts and baseball caps that say things like "real Italian — real fast". The festive Italian atmosphere was maintained with lots of red, white and green stripes and a variety of press-on wall murals sporting the appropriate ethnic theme. Large jars of oil and dusty wicker baskets of plastic peppers were strategically situated around the impervious-to-damage floors, tables and walls. One particularly grotesque but typical touch was the "art work" of the actual child-patrons. These were the crayon-colored line drawings of what were supposed to be lovable cartoon company spokespersons, viz, "Tony Tomato and his Pasta Pals". These drawings were scotch-taped everywhere to the walls, even in the bathrooms, and fluttered in the general bedlam like unanswered Tibetan prayer flags in an unholy desolation. Tony was one of those Disneyesque figures, so-prized by Americans as lovable mascots — his belly and head a single amalgam, in this case, consisting of a large, smiling, distinctly fabiform, tomato. Tony had flexible pipecleaner arms and legs, and his turned-out feet (loosely second position, French school) were housed in curious balloon-like combat boots, each imprinted with the letter "F." Tony's arms, with their three-fingered gloved hands, were held in roughly the fourth position, the right, *demi*, and allowed to drift akimbo to the side, while the left, *haute*, elevated a mini-version of himself, a tomato, which Tony's eyes ogled hungrily. I am not sure what the corporate message to children was supposed to be: 'eat your own kind?' I think my Rock Gazing has begun to make me see deeper messages in the pervasive public icons that I previously accepted in the overall flow of Americana. I cannot say that I am altogether pleased with this added "depth" perception. Perhaps my brain tumor is simply driving me sane.

Taking the menu's suggestion to "wrap your appetite around a Submarino and you'll know what we mean by Sub-stantial," I ordered what I considered to be a modest selection, the "value-priced" turkey, and tried to shake off the premonition that I would be visited by the spirits of abused birds later that evening as a part of what was coming to be a very uncomfortable digestion process. I had placed little foam earplugs (my "mute" button for external reality) in my ears to dampen the perpetual din of the place, and also to eschew any possibility of overhearing something "untoward." My precautions were working well, and I was enjoying, as I now did the news broadcasts, the pantomime antics of the other patrons, mostly moms and kids, the Dad's off, I guess, conquering (too literally I now imagined) the world. It was a curious experience. I had the feeling that I was watching the revenants of some hidden disaster whose consequences the victims had not yet awakened to. The worldwide axiom regarding spirits is this: "the dead do not know they are dead," and as I watched the denizens of this incubator of corporate profits

disguised as a restaurant, I fell into a kind of trance, in which the soccer moms and their asthmatic progeny began to speed forward in time, not in a generalized sense, but toward a specific moment, a moment somehow planned for by their scheming and absent husbands and fathers. What was this moment? I saw them all watching TV sets, and all were focused upon one image. And as they watched, all of the children and their mothers were infected by a single realization, that the flesh of their flesh was a mirage, that their hands, when they held them over their faces to shield them from what they were seeing, were falling into ashes. The dead suddenly realized, that, yes, they were dead, and that the earth, dispersed now to atoms, was whirling away through the blackness of space, all of their dreams of suburbia, with their SUVs and fast food and Disneyfied aspirations, reduced to a drifting borialis, unwitnessed by any physical eyes, and lamented only by disembodied ghosts. No wonder, I thought, these children are so often crying. Yet, what was this image? But that I could not see. And as I tried to focus my internal vision, I was interrupted by one of Fazoli's valued-priced team members, standing before me, Red Riding Hood-style, with a wicker basket full of the menu's "unlimited" breadsticks, all phallic and golden and brushed with garlic butter. I ate. I was growing accustomed to the intrusion of non-ordinary mental states by now. And I had realized that eating quelled them. The children, silent and roiling, resumed their roles as consumers. The mothers continued enacting their roles as mothers. I had a piece of "chock-full of chocolate" cheesecake and returned to the motel, determined to embed myself in the most mundane of activities until a hopefully imageless sleep usurped my awareness. And yet, I had to look at a rock. I had to gaze upon a portion of reality too opaque to be anything but profound. I looked, I wrote in my journal (it was Wednesday), I turned out the lights and I watched the blue digits of the radio-alarm clock click one after another toward the deepest pit of night. I think I did sleep, but the sleep was like a long fall, as if I had leapt from a burning skyscraper, knowing that the impact of the dawn was an assassin, waiting for me, and for all these others whom I judged so harshly, with some hard, ground-zero-choicepoint of disaster. Oh America! America! Where is your future going, where has it gone?

On Thursday, I spent the day playing, rather idly, even absentmindedly, with a Tarot deck I had purchased at Sadhana, Inc.'s gift shop — one eye on the mute TV and one hand in the ice bucket filled with an all-day supply of Continental Breakfast items. It was the Rider deck, and I kept asking different questions, and laying out different spreads, attempting, in the meandering hours, to correlate the drawn card with the silent events taking place on the TV screen. I don't know what I expected to unveil. Certainly not any truth about the future. But I did notice an uncomfortable synchronicity. Every time an image or reference to Bush or Cheney or one of their "associates" was made, the card that was showing was "The Tower." I hoped against hope that the meaning of this was that the men of Alpharetta had been mistaken, and that the election had not yet been decided. But, as I am learning, it is unwise to hope. It is not my gift. And eventually, as the afternoon wore on, I reduced any personal feelings about this probably meaningless coincidence to zero. (There was another card, of course, for that.) As evening arrived, I experienced the need to venture forth for something more Sub-stantial than bagels and pastries, and, feeling spent by my wider tours of Alpharetta, chose for a restaurant, Vinny's, walking distance (but nobody here ever walks) from the motel. Vinny's, as it

turned out, was more than just your typical Italian restaurant, it was also a “Steakhouse.” I ordered the grossest cut on the menu and devoured it in silence. Nothing happened at Vinny’s. Nothing at all. I don’t even recall the décor of the place. I had visited the slaughterhouse and sampled its fare, and now I decided it was time to be going home.

All of the above I recorded dutifully, only to discover upon my return, and my review of the Week Five texts, that I had never left. Or if I had, it was as a doppelganger who traveled to Alpharetta, while another me sat at home demurely petting my cat. I had read about the ubiquitous nature of certain saints, bi-locating Padre Pias and such, appearing here and there in space, without regard to any separations in time. The fantastic nature of such enterprises, although legendary, did not seem to me in any way possible. But here I was, with a few extra pounds of souvenirs from Alpharetta’s Italian eateries, plus my Tarot Cards from Sadhana, Inc.’s giftshop, my suitcase unpacked in the bedroom, and my chair still warm from where I had been sitting, night after night, both in Georgia and in Texas, in the deep, deep south, rock gazing.