

CALABRIAN JOURNAL

by

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Prelude

The real effort is to stay there, rather, in so far as that is possible, and to examine closely the odd vegetation of those distant regions.

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942)

Not only Ploy, but also her mother had written me from Rome using Van Holden's bar as a poste restante. Now the mother offered attractive new details concerning the vicinity in southern Italy that her daughter had originally urged me to visit. She imbued her letter with graphic accounts of "a community of people learning to live with nature, who camp in fields and grow foods biologically. They are mostly young people, many with doctorates, from all around the world."

She also spoke of the community's director, "a shaman who has given all his energy to a spiritual ecology." So it was actually Ploy's mother who made me determined to embark upon the lengthy journey south.

But it was Ploy herself who first broke the news that she had finally found her missing mother living in an up market section of Rome. How exciting, I thought, to meet the elder woman who studied with the Master long before us all. What a wealth of data she would be for the book if I only could get her to recall those years.

Naturally, Ploy had told her all about me. Thus in her letter, Ploy's mother expressed some concern about my "personal situation," which must have looked a little frightening to her. True, I was suffering fits of anxiety and blamed them on all sorts of irrelevant things like money, for example, and the fear of running out of it. But that was just my cowardice. My biggest dilemma was being without Ploy. And so getting the letter struck an upbeat chord. First was the prospect of finding a way to manage myself to the end of the summer. She suggested that going down to Capo Vaticano would help me find some natural grounding. The second great hope was that Ploy would be there.

I made up my mind to leave straight away. But when I peered in my wallet my eyes nearly popped out of their sockets – 'Oh no,' I thought, 'I'm out of money!'

I tried to suppress my mounting paranoia by imagining ways of getting back to Asia. And like a dope-fiend alone with his back room needle, I fixed my thoughts on returning to the Orient – the land of ashrams, cheap hotels, solitary beach huts and tepid blue seas.

Some days later a letter arrived from my dear friend the poet Robert Witmer, writing from his self-described "Gulag of Tokyo."

"Returns!" he quipped. "They're for undelivered letters and over-burdened taxpayers. Artists go forward."

He had somehow learned of my pending trip and, regarding this subject, his pen waxed lyrical.

How many artists found their well-spring in Italy? The god-like Michelangelo, the bourgeois-bashing Ibsen, the fire-ravaged Gogol, the broken eagle Keats...

O, but more than just names, Italy is light. It is light suffused through a glass of Chianti, light that is robed in shadows of Ravenna—the light that paints those stark Calabrian villages.

It was the first time ever that my mind was drawn to "Calabria."

A few days later some money arrived by anonymous postal money order. And just like that I was poised to depart.

The following evening I flew to Rome. I landed at Leonardo Da Vinci Airport and took the bus to the central train station. We passed the illumined Coliseum en route. It was early July and the air was sultry, the traffic thick, and the pavements rich in civic bustle. Cab drivers leaned against their cabs and smoked. But it was starting to get late. Grey complexioned youths with wine bottles sat on littered steps about the station. I shouldered my bag and

descended to the subway to find that the ticket machines only took coins, which I did not have. I lugged my bag back up to the pavilion but all the shops were closed. There were a lot of desperate people hanging about while policemen walked around in pairs. A mild paranoia crept into my heart and I was happy to espy two Norwegian college students sitting in a corner with their vinyl rucksacks. Between them, they were able to change my note.

I managed to alight at the proper stop and then walked ten minutes to the quiet residence. I pressed the bell and entered the gate. It was amazing to see her standing by the door.

"Yes, yes! Come in, Come in!" she said. She looked me up and down for a moment. "oh, so *you're* the one!" she said. "Just put your bag there please. Ploy insisted that I give you something." Then she smiled, reached up and kissed me on the lips. "Now," she said. "Come to the kitchen. I've kept some vegetarian food for you."

Her youthful Asian beauty was stunning. 'This isn't Ploy's mother,' I thought to myself. '*It's her sister!*' She was a living testament to the aesthetic effects of the Master's yoga. I found her remarkably relaxed as well, but at the same time alert and highly dignified. She was considerably more grounded Audrey Hepburn, a veritable Goddess. Isis revealed.

After her mysterious disappearance, she apparently wandered in cognito for many years before eventually coming to settle in Rome, in a fashionable five-room garden home that she shared with her Siamese cat Pompeii. Her exquisite apartments were choicely located among the wooded hills behind the Papal Palace. It was there that she came to establish herself as the city's pre-eminent yogic healer.

* * *

A few days after arriving in Rome, I went to call on the American expatriate artist Cy Twombly down in the ancient centre of the city. His home was on the narrow Via Monserrato a few minutes walk from the banks of the Tiber. Signor Twombly was not expecting me.

The streets are very old around there. I was amazed how all those ancient buildings could still be standing and worthy to dwell in. I noticed many establishments along the streets. These were galleries, biblioteques, coiffures and boutiques whose entire shop fronts were comprised of a single massive-thick pane of glass embedded into borders of ancient stone.

Signor Twombly's home was a 17th century palazzo. I ascended two flights of an old broad staircase and arrived to the huge wooden doors of the residence. I pushed the buzzer. A small young African servant opened the door and asked me to kindly step in. I told her my name and she disappeared. The room that I stood in was spacious and plain; it was an antechamber the size of a small gallery. It seemed to function as a nondescript threshold to the remainder of the apartments.

The room was decorated very sparsely as if left unfinished. The walls were also devoid of decor. Near to the door was an abstract sculpture. Along one wall were two enormous gold leaf frames approximately 12x12 feet in size. The frames not hung, but leaned side by side against the wall. They were empty like Zen paintings. Near the far wall was the bust of a Roman man poised on top of an upright column. For all its austerity, the room still boasted a very high ceiling, stylishly fitted with those carved wooden squares of the Renaissance period. This same subtle pattern reflected in the inlaid marble floor as well.

The maid reappeared and in a shy faint voice, explained that Signor Twombly was having his lunch, but that I could return in 'one hour' – or was it 'one o'clock'? She spoke in Italian and I didn't quite catch it.

Since the present time was half past eleven, I decided to go and return at one o'clock. I strolled through the streets and explored the open market in the nearby square. I purchased some bread and a carton of milk, and then sat on a bench in a tiny park near Ponte Sisto (ponte means bridge). I took a short rest and then rinsed my face in the public fountain.

I began to stroll through the streets again. My eyes caught sight of a Gypsy woman. She was begging for money as she slowly worked her way along the street full of inexpensive ready-made garment shops. I watched as she singled out a tall slender priest. He impassively gave her a coin. The Gypsy woman's skirt and blouse were distinctive, but not at all ostentatious or unkempt; she was clean and well groomed. By her manner of walking and style of clothing, she reminded me of the Rajput women of India.¹ I was soon to understand that she was a Spanish Gypsy, as opposed to, let us say, a Slavic Gypsy.

Gypsies have a different way of looking at the world. They often just take whatever they need without even asking. This is not necessarily regarded as stealing. For example, if a child of the Gypsies takes a piece of fruit, it is not an act of theft per se, especially if the fruit is heaped in abundance and the child is hungry while playing in the market. A mother, however, will not take things so freely because she knows that being jailed will jeopardize her family. Yet an underage Gypsy girl will take the risk because she knows that she will never be jailed. Therefore married Gypsy women stick to begging. They are commonly seen in Italian cities wending their way in an unstressed manner through the bustling streets of business districts. They reinforce the cinematic quality of life with a facet of human eccentricity.

Actually Gypsies do not refer to themselves as Gypsies, but "Rom," – that is, "the people." Accordingly, their language is called Romani. Yet not all Gypsies in Central Italy speak pure Romani. Most speak an argot vernacular of Romani blended with the Naples dialect of Italian. I learned these facts from a talented

young female journalist who was living next door to Ploy's mother. She often came to visit and engage me in lengthy talks. During my stay in the Italian capitol, she was deeply involved with investigative research on the life of Roman Gypsies. She would dress herself up as a married Gypsy and beg for money through Rome Central Station while a filmmaker colleague captured it on film. I remember the night that she came home smiling, so proud of the fact that she had managed to get herself arrested...

*

One o'clock was drawing near. I was in considerable need to urinate. The Tiber river was not far away so I walked toward the quay at the bottom of Via Armata Caterni. I crossed the avenue of swift moving traffic and skipped down the long flight of steps toward the riverbank. There wasn't a soul in sight down there; nor could I be seen from the footpath above. Nothing but the muted sound of traffic, the breeze through the trees and the swift flowing river. I was under the impression that no one ever came down there. And I wondered why. It was such a wonderful place. The river was flowing, summer grasses growing....

It was marvellous to finally empty my bladder on a pile of dead foliage at the foot of the stairs. That's when I knew that others had been down there – the pungent smell of rain-wet leaves admixed with dirt and fermented urine. As I continued pissing, my eyes took notice of a plastic syringe in the leaves near my feet. When I zipped my pants up I noticed more of those same discarded fixes, settled like twigs in chance arrangement. 'I wouldn't want to get my toes stuck in THOSE stickers!' I thought, wearing only thin-strapped sandals at the time. But as I started up the steps I saw the whole area was totally strewn with plastic syringes. There must have been more than a hundred down there. But I didn't have time to hang around and count...

When I knocked at Cy Twombly's residence again, tch! No body answered the door. I was crestfallen. I had gotten my hopes up far too high, now only

disappointment. I had built the man up in my mind as a sage: an exceedingly rare sort of American Patriarch who, quite unlike the novelist Jack Kerouac, possessed the good sense to live outside his country.

'So what to do now?' I thought to myself, standing in front of the unanswered door. I stepped to the window of the sunlit stairwell and gazed down into the inner courtyard. I pulled out a notepad and composed a short letter that amounted to the basic traveller's litany. I explained that had lived in Asia most of my life and never kept current with contemporary art trends. Then I wrote about the weeks I had spent Paris, staying in René Laubiès' sixth floor walk up on Rue des Beaux-Arts. That's when I first saw Twombly's work; at Gallery Di Meo, two doors down in the street. I tried to explain how discovering his work had literally stunned me and profoundly altered my aesthetic perceptions. I returned to the gallery day after day to gaze at the paintings with rapt mystic eye. René had already gone down to Nice because truly hated Paris and only stayed there long enough to attend the openings of his exhibitions and collect the late payments from "stingy art dealers who seem to think artists are supposed to starve."

One evening when he phoned, though, I started to rave about the sacred experiences I was having while viewing the works of an artist by the name of Cy Twombly. "Do you know him?" I asked René.

"Twombly? Of course! I'm surprised you didn't know him. He's one of the best artists. Oh, I'm glad you like him!"

From that time on I was dying to see more of Twombly's work. Six months later I found three paintings in a book at Watkins Book Shop in London. It was a costly tabletop volume entitled Cy Twombly. However, purchasing the book was not at all an option. A great turn of fate came a few days later while visiting the splendid Tate Gallery near Pimlico station. That's when I got to see a huge grey canvas with a slightly disconnected white chalk line moving horizontally across the centre. I went there and stared at it day after day.

Sometime later in the old Flemish City of Gent, I frequented the city's public library and made good use of its reference materials. One such reference book entitled Contemporary American Artists listed Twombly and his Rome address. Actually, René had already told me that Twombly was married to an Italian woman and living in Rome since the early 1960's. He also told me an artist's joke of how Twombly gave crayons to his infant daughter and simply let her scribble over huge unpainted canvases. But the father added the final touches. Though I hadn't any plan then to visit Rome, I jotted down Twombly's address all the same...

I was determined to call the following day and stated this clearly at the bottom of my note. I folded the paper and slipped it through the door.

I felt quite lonesome walking down cobbled lane. The shops were still closed for the afternoon siesta. I manoeuvred through a maze of lurid alleyways and made my way over to the Piazza del Popolo. From there I climbed the hill for a panoramic view of the Tiber River together with St. Peter's Basilica and the entire central portion of the city.

But I had walked too long in the mid-day sun. I was therefore pleased to find a well-wooded park with benches in the shade of chestnut trees, where chirping birds flew tree to tree and lovers came strolling arm in arm. I was terribly tired in body and spirit. I felt the same way I viewed the city: ennobled but haggard, pure but bittersweet. I reflected on the mellowing appeal of the girls; on the gentle, wine-dark lustre of their skin, how it made them look bruised before they were ripe. Fig-like beauty yearning for solace.

* * *

Signora Luisa Tatiana Franchetti was gracious and warm as she pulled back the latch and allowed me to enter her apartments. She was sorry to inform me that her husband had gone out of Rome early that morning to attend the

funeral of a woman who had died in the night. She mentioned she would also be going out soon, but had some time to talk with me.

She invited me to step through the antechamber to a large undecorated salon with white-canvas-covered chairs and divans. The shutters of the very tall windows were closed. This kept the room cool but also quite dark. On a large glass coffee table central to the seating, there were several oversized pictorial books on subjects ranging from Tuscany landscapes to Chinese Tang porcelains. There was a portrait-photo of the contessa as well. I noticed almost everything. My eyes were like two little thieves.

As we took our seats, she asked if I would like iced tea, to which I answered in the affirmative. We then sat relaxing until the small African maid with gentle features and short cut hair, quietly appeared with a clear glass pitcher and a single matching cup on a small round tray with a pressed linen napkin. The tea was chilled nicely, not too cold. I remember that single thick slice of lemon floating harmoniously in the clear glass pitcher.

Having carefully read my previous day's note, the gracious Signora Franchetti expressed curiosity about my life in India and the Far East. She told me she herself had visited India several times, but only as a tourist. "I enjoy to go there and do a little shopping," she said. After that, the conversation turned to Tibet and she started to give a lively account of a film she had seen in connection with the Dalai Lama's recent visit to Rome. The subject of the film was a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, the sacred mountain in Western Tibet. The trip was undertaken by an adventurous group of students and their Tibetan professor who lived near Naples. I was impressed by Signora Franchetti's knowledge of the names of the various rivers, lakes, mountains and towns, which she mentioned in the course of recounting the film. She had long desired to go to Mount Kailas, a place held sacred by Hindus and Buddhist and considered as the navel of the universe.

She also made mention of Monte Amiata, a place north of Rome where the Dalai Lama had gone to give teachings. A Tibetan style shrine had apparently been built near its summit. "It fits the southern Tuscany landscape beautifully," she remarked. She was clearly very enamoured of the place and suggested I go there to practice austerities. Then she hastened to her feet and fetched a map and then cracked a shutter open for a thin shaft of light...

Of course, I was dying to see her husband's work but unfortunately, that was not possible.

"Is his studio in the house?" I politely asked.

"No," she answered. "He usually just goes and rents another house whenever he gets some inspiration. And when he's finished he leaves."

I tried to express my feelings for his paintings, but in the presence of the urbane Signora Franchetti I felt like a babbling idiot. All the same, I think she understood.

"I know what you mean," she gently affirmed. "I was also taken very much by his paintings the first time I saw them more twenty years ago... And yes, you're right: there is really something happening in them."

She had given me nearly thirty minutes of her time. I felt it appropriate to bid my adieu. She courteously asked that I call on her again when I returned from my trip down to Capo Vaticano.

After leaving Signora Franchetti, I proceeded on foot along the quay of the Tiber. A cool dry breeze was wafting through the trees. At Ponte Fabricio I stopped and gazed at the dark green waters flowing below. I decided to descend a long flight of steps to the bank where the river rushed white along the picturesque Isola Tiberina: its ancient brown-brick hospice was originally a place of quarantine. From the bottom of the canyon-like walls of the embankment, I walked downstream until I reached the next bridge where I stopped and rested

on a huge cut stone. I gazed up stream where waters rushed turbulent beneath the bridge. Ponte Garibaldi was visible in the distance. Traffic crossing over it: seen but not heard.

Capo Vaticano

...[I]t is a tenable hypothesis that this advance of self-consciousness...may reach a point at which there will be an irreversible revulsion of humanity and a readiness to accept the most primitive hardships rather than carry any longer the burden of modern civilization.

T.S. Elliot, "From Poe to Valery" (1948)

1.

The major pretext for my snap decision to fly to the Italian capital of Rome, was Ploy and her mother's combined excitation about a certain community of primordial-animists living at a place called Capo Vaticano. Also mentioned was the community's director, an elusive and mysterious self-proclaimed shaman. I pegged them as fanatics the moment I met them.

Three of them appeared at the studio-residence my second night in Rome. They were eager to tell me all about their lives and to take to their camps around Capo Vaticano. Alfredo was the driver. He was the first one I spoke with. I found him loquacious and slightly annoying. We moved to the cool of the garden patio while his two attendant females stepped to the kitchen. They wanted to prepare the wild green herbs that they gathered from the nearby park on the way.

Alfredo's main function, then, was commandeering their "Vesuvius Observatory" mini-van on its regular nine-hour overnight shuttle between Rome and Capo Vaticano in the South. Alfredo had taken the appellation "brother" as a self-confessed envoy of their recently formed Neo-Franciscan wing. He accordingly dressed in dark attire with a vaguely clerical-looking collar. He also wore a carved wooden crucifix attached to a thin strip of leather round his neck. Alfredo maintained that his fledgling order would one day gain full sanction by the Pope.

The pasta was scrumptious. Afterwards I helped the girls with the dishes. This gave them more time to tell me about their people and the world revolution

that they sought to bring about. It was something first started by Mahatma Gandhi, they said, and later passed on to Dr. Martin Luther King. Since then, however, a certain rare person with many names had taken up the torch of social justice. I was charmed by the heartfelt conviction they showed, and by their innocence and purity. But I couldn't help but think about the violent ends that their Chief's great forebears had similarly met. Accordingly, it came as no surprise when I later found out that the director's own wife had been slain in Quebec.

2.

I must openly confess to a morbid curiosity and a penchant for ignoring clearly inauspicious omens. From the very first moment I laid eyes on these three, my guardian angels rushed to my side and screamed at the tops of their insubstantial lungs – "HEY BALA, DON'T BE STUPID!" But having by now flown all the way to Rome at the beck and call of Ploy and her mother, there was little other choice than to see the thing through. And so confronted with the daunting force of mystery, I abandoned better judgment and plunged headlong into the spellbinding realm of come-what-may. I accepted the ordeal as a necessary means to amass an important series of conceptions in a manner not dissimilar to the doxographic heritage. Thus in the spirit of the science method, I submitted to the given and chronicled myself getting very carried away.

*

With the passing of days I found myself tumbling hopelessly in love with the city of Rome. But this love was unrequited and terribly painful.

I started to see a lot of Alfredo. As soon as he learned that I loved to go cruising he phoned me up at every opportunity and invited me out for a tour of Rome. I always said yes. I found those uncut versions of the city far richer than anything Fellini, Rossellini or Pasolini could ever hope to capture on film.

I quickly discerned Alfredo's character traits. His ruling passions were driving the minivan and talking on the telephone. If not currently talking to someone on the phone, he was surely driving around looking for a phone booth. In this way, I saw a great deal of the city.

We found each other's company amusing. While on the road, Alfredo would constantly be checking the time on his wristwatch. I was never quite sure about where we were going, though; not that it mattered. He didn't seem to know himself. He would suddenly announce that he needed to make a call and pull off the road as soon as he saw a phone booth. After five or ten minutes of talking on the phone, he climbed back in the minivan and continued driving.

Spending so much time with him touring the city, I was exposing myself to his proselytising zeal. Yet aside from all of his holy Joe homilies, I don't think Alfredo actually sought to recruit me. The Iriadamant didn't really need new members. They were probably too large in number already. More than new members, they sought philanthropic recognition and thereby support. Being at heart residual-Christians, they deigned to accommodate the civil population as an act of irenic compassion. And so their going through the motions of trying to convert was something like a cultural atavism. Their diatribes served two efficient ends: they repelled the unworthy and sustained the deserving. Their adamant convictions were ultimately crowned by the glorious notion that they—and they alone—were the ultimate answer to the world's horrendous plight.

But was there any true love in their disciplined efforts? They held their fellow man in utter contempt. The true human being was "primordial man," and they saw themselves abiding at his cutting edge.

*

They had many secrets that they could not talk about. Alfredo was also keen to reaffirm this—that held many secrets that they could not talk about.

Instead, they liked to talk about the United Nations. It was the "United Nations" this, the "United Nations" that. They bragged about all the awards they had won for their outstanding ecological and humanitarian projects. How they had walked, for example, the length of a nation and planted a tree each kilometre of the way – each sapling planted to commemorate the death of an African child who had perished by famine.

Alfredo finally finished making his phone call and climbed back in the minivan all smiles. He had just received very important news. A special conference of the American Indian Movement was set to convene the following month in Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Alfredo grinned because he'd just been picked as a member of the Iriadamant delegation. He immediately began elaborating their plan to attend and plant two hundred trees. One sapling tree in commemoration each Oglala man, woman and child that was slaughtered by the U.S. 7th Cavalry on December 29, 1890 at the Wounded Knee Concentration Camp.

I was starting to get a splitting headache.

*

In actual fact, I felt a bit retarded in the presence of the exceedingly intelligent tribals. A strain of linguistic genius ran through them. They all seemed to speak about six or seven languages. It is a common experience for a native Anglophone who happens to spend some time Europe to find he is sitting with a group of people who have all switched to English simply to accommodate the disadvantaged monoglot.

Late one afternoon Alfredo got incredibly lost while hunting for a particular unknown address. I did not feel the least inconvenienced. We headed eastward across the Tiber then cruised through a maze of sensuous tenements, pressing

ever closer with each new turn. Dimple-kneed women passed by everywhere clutching hold of sacks for the evening meal.

'So why was I leaving this city I adored?'

A few nights later the minivan was packed. We bade adieu to Ploy's lovely mother and made a final jaunt across the sumptuous city, now swooning in the hues of delirious light. The sun was setting and Rome was afloat: a mélange of ethereal turquoise and gold. 'So why am I leaving this voluptuous city?' I really had to question my sanity here. But we were off to gather herbs from the sylvan hills, to sleep in genuine tepees at night, to drink from the fount of primordial springs and bathe in the pristine Tyrrhenian Sea. We were heading toward the highway on an all-night journey to sun-bathed region called Calabria.

3.

The Iriadamant had been living on the side of Mt. Vesuvius for a year before they went to Calabria. At least the male camp had been situated there. The females and the children had pitched a little north at a place called Montelanico.

It was late Saturday night when we approached Mt. Vesuvius by minivan. But we first had to pass through the outskirts of Naples. It reminded me of the Indian town of Gaya, so messy and crumbled, but alive in mystique. I was hoping we would stop at a shabby little coffee bar and get ourselves a nice little espresso to sip. But the Iriadamant, like the Mormons and the Vaishnavas, didn't drink coffee or tea. At least not in principle.

So my only view of Naples was with very sleepy eyes through the dirty back windows of the crowded minivan. As we passed along the twisting, potholed streets, I noted old men just sitting on porches, amber-hued street-lamps swarming with insects, scabby dogs in the garish shadows sniffing round

uncollected garbage-heaps. The winding road eventually narrowed and slowed considerably as we ascended toward the lip of the volcano.

We parked right in front of the Vesuvius Observatory, which appeared to be abandoned. Everything was dark there. The moon was very dim. Alfredo went inside. I asked them why. "He has to make phone call." We waited outside in moonlight faint enough see rising vapour from the crater.

We took the time to chat a bit. Besides Alfredo and the present narrative voice there was one other male, a Belgian, plus the two accompanying females in the van. The females were returning from Turin in the North where one of their fathers had fallen gravely ill. The second girl, a German, only went along to ensure the Italian girl would return. They graciously cut cool slices of watermelon and offered them to the Belgium man and me.

Alfredo emerged from the haunted-looking Observatory. Without saying anything, he started up the minivan and we twisted our way back down the mountain road. At one clear vantage point, we saw the lights of Naples and the long curving contour of the bay beyond. This prompted the German girl to express her dream of the future day when all those lights were replaced by the fires of primordial people.

"Wouldn't that make a lot of smoke?" I asked.

It would take some time before I fully perceived the cult and occult importance of fires. A major aspiration of the Iriadamant was the global proliferation of campfires.

4.

I soon came to see them as shamanic guerrillas involved in a grand metaphysical insurrection. But was their war not construed by pure imagination? They spoke of "enemies" as elusive as hell. They lived an intense incognito

existence and planned every move in the surreptitious war tent. Their exalted objective was to launch a massive intervention on the Sahara Desert and transform those sands into a wooded paradise. They championed a working philosophy of life wherein the earth was seen as a spiritual canoe en voyage to the Pole Star. But the primordial route had been confused and lost in post-glacial centuries when people stopped living in harmony with nature. Today, it is only the primordial peoples who retain a link to the essential science. It is they alone who are technologically equipped to guide the planet to its genesis, the Sun. Yet primordial people have been trampled under foot by so-called modern civilization. They have been labelled heathens or animalistic savages. "Righteous" wars have been waged against them. They have been butchered, raped and sold into slavery and were now on the brink of utter extinction together with their sacred indigenous homelands and their knowledge.

Who can turn away and pretend that man has not gone utterly astray? Theos Bernard was right on the bean in writing that history has not been the stuff of evolution but "devolution." Has modernity brought man any more happiness? Absolutely not. History is nothing but the chopping block of war. For five thousand years and more man has been killing man. Man is indeed man's own worst enemy. But will man have stopped this patricidal slaughter in five thousand years to come? I don't think so. Will man have ceased his slaughter of nature? Don't count on it. So how have we come to this lamentable state where despoiling nature is the logical extension of each and every gesture of our daily lives – from washing our dishes to flicking on the light switch. We have fashioned a culture of utter violence, a culture that butchers sensitive beings for the vain satisfaction of our hunger pangs.

But violence and pollution come not from without. They ooze from within the hearts of men. Does man sow seeds for the sake of Earth? No way. Man plants seeds for his own future dividend. Every man regards himself as numero

uno. So you who sing aloud, "O Earth, My Love!" but are blinded to the smugness of your own self-righteousness. You will never get others to amend their ways. O haughty Cult of the Primordial Shaman, your guilt trips are worse than industrial pollutants. But have no fear. No. Mother Kālī fends for Herself. Her enigmatic being is infinitely deeper than the paltry-thin layer of soil she offers Her children as a playground on which to expunge themselves.

5.

The first ten days at Capo Vaticano I stuck very near to the female camp. I typically set off with an early morning party to gather wild herbs and fruit or to cut tall aquatic plants in beautiful knee-deep muddy streams.

I ventured alone those first ten days no further than the nearby Ricadi village, a kilometre-hike down a narrow dirt road from our pine grove encampment. The road passed through groves of olive and fig, and along private gardens bordered with cacti. I stared at a tiny old stone-and-mud house with grapevines creeping over weathered latticework. Inside the gate was a sun faded Fiat parked at a tilt at the side of the house. On the vine-covered terrace sat a small dinner table with freshly pressed red-and-white chequered tablecloth.

After two weeks, I began to scout the vicinity of Capo Vaticano. This was mostly on foot. But to extend my inspections I started to hitchhike, or "autostop" as it is known in Europe. I would walk twenty minutes then stand by the road as it turned coming out of St. Nicolo village.

One day I decided to explore the winding road running northward along the coast to Santa Dominica. Two young guys were delighted when they spotted me. They pulled right over and let me slip into the back of their bright red Alfa Romeo sport car. They immediately apologized for their "very poor English," but in fact the driver spoke it fairly well. They had come to Calabria on a two-week

holiday from the northern industrial City of Milan. From the way they were acting, I must have appeared as a mythical being from a heavenly realm.

They reminded me of many Italian youth I had previously met in India. I recall one time on the banks of the Ganges at the super holy town of Varunasi. Sitting round a fire on the ghats one night, they impressed me by all their childlike innocence and the reverence they held for Dr. Timothy Leary, their American folk hero.

"Have you ever been to California?" they asked me.

"No," I told them.

"Is California a separate country?"

Similarly, the two who had just picked me up esteemed California as a fabled land of dreams come true. "I would like to have a California passport some day" said the driver.

As we wound our way along the high coastal road, the speed of the car was steady and smooth. The air through the windows was salubrious and fresh. I could see down the cliffs to the crystal blue waters. Every now and then, I spotted a cove. The sun was smiling. The world was turning. Nothing was hectic. We were happy just to be.

When we finally arrived to the Santa Dominica, they pointed to a footpath that lead down to Giardinello Beach. "Ciao!" said the driver. "See you later!" shouted the other guy.

I walked down the very seep path they advised and came to narrow and secluded beach. It was excellent for swimming.

Some days later, I came to discover a lesser-known shore called Il Tono Beach. It was actually the closest beach to the camp, and that was great because

I didn't have to count on hitching to get there. It was spacious, undeveloped and wonderful for bathing.

I normally headed out early in the morning. I always made a stop at the grocery store near the junction right below St. Nicolo village. I routinely purchased a litre of milk together with a piece of whole wheat bread. As I turned off the road things at once turned quiet. I was always on the lookout for an ideal a spot where I could sit and rest in the morning cool. A little patch of grass in the shade of an olive tree normally proved quite pleasant. I would spread my mat, sit down and display the makings of a princely hobo's breakfast. My system was as follows. I always carried with me a big glass jar. The jar served multiple purposes. First, I poured some milk into the jar and then added some instant freeze-dried coffee. I replaced the lid and shook the contents vigorously. I would then partake of a cool coffee-shake together with bites of freshly baked bread. I would spend a little time in free abstraction and then recommence my hike down to Tono Beach. I slipped through the rain pipe that passed beneath the railroad tracks and the broad blue sea was right out there in front of me.

The path down the cliff was a series of switchbacks that brought one closer to the sound of sea waves. South along the coast was a boulder-heaped point and grotto where the ancient Sibyl once sat ensconced in her wave-slapped cavern of fortunes and doom.

6.

From the very beginning, my stay with the Tribe was a highly calculated imposition, both for the Iriadamant and me, I'm sure. The night that I boarded the minivan in Rome was like jumping on the back of a hungry tiger that was hauling me into depths of the jungle. Now I was holding on for life—what else could I do?

But I soon grew weary of them always saying "We." "We" do this, and "We" do that, as if personal thought and behaviour were inconceivable.

7.

They referred to both their language and their people as Iriadamant. I would describe their language as a kind of French Creole comprised of varied linguistic borrowing. Much was taken from the Algonquian Language group, particularly as spoken by the Micmac people of the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland in Canada. But Aztec, Spanish, Tibetan and some African loan words also went into their imaginative argot. Given its French pronunciation, I assumed Iriadamant was a term they had coined. I was naturally curious about its morphemic components. Iri- is certainly of Greek etymology. But derived from what? Iris, "rainbow" or eirenikos, "peace"? Concerning -adamant, this is also Greek-derived. But it interestingly entered French in two varied forms: adamant, "unbreakable substance" and diamant, "diamond."

8.

It was the Iriadamant's commitment to the liminal life that allowed me to easily identify with them. Another area of shared experience was the heightened vision that came from inhabiting the peripheries of society. In this respect, we were comparable to anchorites and outlaws on the run. And with the dislocated vision of a roaming thief as he peers through the windows of a fancy store, I was steadily amassing the data I had come for.

9.

So there I was in the Land of Splendid Light, lodging in a tepee, red man style. We were living on a hill with a breathtaking view of the small volcanic island called Stromboli, set like a jewel in Tyrrhenian Sea. The tepee, or gwam (from "wigwam," I presumed) was their basic dwelling structure. Gwam was the

generic term the Iriadamant used for any form of primordial shelter. This always implied a specific formula.

They were accomplishing many important things in Calabria by living as close to nature as they could. They spent their mornings collecting wild vegetables, berries, fruits, herbs and firewood. This is how they managed to meet their basic needs. They relied very little on the marketplace. Their major expense was fuelling their minivans, which they needed to transport themselves in order to hold their frequent gatherings.

Males and the females lived in separate camps. I personally preferred the female camp, which was also the designated camp for visitors. But they often got together for late night powwows with lots of music, song and dance. They all came bedecked in Indian style clothing and enjoyed wearing headbands, tassels and beads. They formed a big ring around the sacred campfire and feely exchanged anecdotes, newly composed songs and hand-made gifts. These were certainly meant to be joyous affairs. I particularly remember the night of my arrival. They embraced me like a long lost kindred soul. The entire tribe rose to their feet as to beckon me around the fire and receive three kisses from each and every member. This was no hurried ceremony. Sixty people attended that night. The powwow lasted until the break of dawn.

10.

The highlight of a powwow was the Chief's arrival. The magnetic force of his presence was palpable. Though small and slight in physical proportions, the grand feather bonnet heightened his prominence.

The Eurasian Chief gave an animated discourse, touching on the latest news from abroad and various outer important matters. When he finished talking, the songs began. As I sat there beside him that very first night, he explained the various goings on of the powwow and did his best to galvanize my thinking with

primordial conceptions. He affirmed his people's unswerving solidarity with all primordial peoples of the world—particularly those denied their natural rights to follow nomadic lives. It was abundantly clear that they sought nothing short of complete legitimation and reparation for all primordial peoples of the planet. He also took the time to underscore issues of non-violence and deep-ecology.

He divulged their purpose for being in Calabria. They had come there to plan and train themselves for their most spectacular project to date: to reverse the spread of desertification across the whole of Saharan Africa. Here we have the single overriding aspiration that kept them in Calabria for more than a year; prepare to live among tribal peoples, create one thousand experimental base-camps, develop innovative organic techniques and accomplish their epic re-forestization mission. Such findings were to vouchsafe the future of humanity.

But it was ultimately the Chief's charismatic personae that made them endure such Neolithic conditions. Not merely loved, the Chief was revered and adored as the paramount indigenous wisdom-holder. Having tapped the source of ancient knowledge, they worshipped the Chief as the new messiah who was guiding not only the Iriadamant, but steering the entire globe, indeed, back to the fabled primordial paradise. The omniscient embodiment of universal knowledge, "He understands everything!" they openly claimed.

Yet anyone possessing such an earth-shaking knowledge was a horrifying threat to "the standard authorities." Therefore, they cloaked their lives in secrecy: their recent history, their day-to-day agendas, and exactly why the Chief only moved at night, chauffeured stealthily point to point in a rust-colour Mercedes-Benz sedan. Through this point of view, the Iriadamant wore the feathers of a highly politicized entity. Enemies were evident, no doubt about it.

11.

In essence, the chief was a prophetic figure, as opposed to an enlightened guru type, so commonly found among cultic groups. To be utterly frank, they regarded the Chief as nothing short of Christ Himself. One of his names was, in fact, "Cristal." He was therefore prone to revelatory episodes and highly proficient in generating new and intriguing twists whenever the narrative required fresh velocity.

12.

With time, I learned more about their history. They were essentially expelled from France and Belgium. In Belgium, the Chief was arrested and jailed for a list of charges, ranging from vagabondism to holding false documents, from impersonating a priest to trafficking in illegal arms. To be prudent, however, I hasten to add that the police eventually dropped all charges.

In Belgium, they called themselves Ecovie (eco-life). There they published *Le Canard De Tilff*, a homemade newsletter that detailed their activities. It seems to have run about forty issues. I later came to find the entire collection concealed in a box at the Hacienda. That was right after they fled Calabria....

Just before the break of dawn, the Chief left the powwow, seated in the back of his rust-colour Benz. No one knew exactly where he stayed.

13.

The Iriadamant enjoyed no modern forms of diversion. Radio, television, newspapers and books were all out. Leaving the camp for ice cream or coffee was also highly frowned upon. Still, once in a while in the early morning hours a female group would squeeze into a minivans and drive down to Grotticelli Beach for a bath. From there they would carry on collecting herbs and fruits.

Considering all of their noble austerities, I found the tribe quite gray complexioned. There wasn't that brilliant tone one would hope for. I wondered why. Had they dwelled too long in the shadows of existence? They viewed society with the greatest of contempt, and spent their time rather putting things in order for the astral departure and recorporealization that primordial perspectives underscored. Their nutritional tenets cannot be overlooked, nor can their perpetual Ramadan fasting. The Iriadamant only ate and drank after dark.

14.

Manifold rituals attended their quotidian activities. They assembled in a clearing each morning facing east to observe the rising sun. They assembled there again facing west at sundown.

They cooked and ate exclusively with earthen and wooden vessels and utensils; they never used metal. They always cooked on open fires. Even so their oft ornate vegan preparations were ritually displayed before they were served.

Communally speaking, the Iriadamant were linked to one another in three main areas: work, feeling and thought. They were also encouraged to share these aspects of their lives at regular mid-day assemblies. They were particularly prompted to share their dreams, that is, dreams of the day and dreams of the night.

15.

It was after all natural that they kept many secrets from me. Who was I to know? Was I a member of the tribe? In any case, that's why I learned about the accident two days after its alleged occurrence. The first thing I heard was that the Chief had been "wounded." However, two days later I came to understand that he had actually been shot close range in the head. He was standing in a phone booth

in broad day. He was bundled into the Benz sedan and rushed to a secret camp in the mountains.

Was he dead or alive? The female camp was absolutely popping with anxiety. With great trepidation, they waited for news. In the mean time, I tried to learn more about this secret camp in the mountains, but no one seemed to know very much. Just 'somewhere in the mountain,' was all I could get. They were very tight lipped.

The days that followed were mentally torturous. Finally, a little bit of news trickled through. 'The Chief was on his feet again,' someone said. 'But very wobbly.' There was cautious relief, but all remained edgy.

Incidents like this occurred within the first weeks of my arrival at Capo Vaticano. Thus, my initial applause for the Chief waned noticeably after these early episodes. 'Why?' Because as far as I was then concerned the Iriadamant was a herd of cows being led by the nose.

How had he succeeded in commanding such respect while wielding such dominance upon these individuals? The Chief's most obvious manipulative tool was telling mammoth lies. Horrendous images were suddenly projected; a point-blank shot in the head, for example. Members were immediately told the following three things:

1. Do not to give the incident a second thought.
2. Do not to discuss it with anyone else.
3. Do not to leave the camp alone.

Thus, due to what was nothing less than a failed assassination, nobody dared to leave the camp, especially alone—except for the present narrative voice. As a matter fact, from that day forward I made every effort to spend as much time as I possibly could away from the camp. I therefore increasingly moved

about freely. I had been in the area for three full weeks without seeing any of the outlying places. I almost always moved alone.

Tono Beach continued to be my main destination, but I always sought alternative routes. I also hitched to nearby towns. Yet I have to admit that I got a little scared when walking alone down isolated roads. For the tribe had specifically warned me against this—with menacing inferences of furtive hired killers. I furthermore confess to a few nervous days when I seriously considered returning to Rome.

I conquered the fear by focusing my mind two key points. First was the apparent inevitable violence that lurks in the heart of every form of cult, be it spiritual, social or industrial. Second was the highly revealing fact that cult is at the gristly roots of culture-itself.

16.

The Iriadamant regarded themselves as martyrs and saviours. They swore allegiance the Chief's prophetic vision and to the crucial mission he conferred on them, vis-à-vis, to pilot the lost canoe of the earth and return to the glory of its genesis – the sun. They and they alone were privy to the knowledge descendent from an antediluvian paradise. They were consequently fated to suffer persecution.

What fanatics! I thought. I was becoming fed up.

Then why do you stay with them? My conscience kicked in.

Because Calabria is lovely, sisterly and sweet. Yes, and being one male in a camp of thirty females is a facet of the opera that cannot be dismissed.

Then why don't you write about their kinky sexuality?

We shall speak on these matters in time.

Were the cops not informed of the Chief's bloody mess?

What's the difference; anyway? He is back on his feet again. Returned from the dead.

Fine. Then look at the sunny dry climate that embraces you, the thyme-scented hills and bright blue sea. Your physique is resounding; your skin well browned. You have more than ample time to write. Your guru is with you all the time.

17.

The cloud-covered dawn granted rare filtered light, hence shades of colour I had never seen. I was standing at the roadside waiting for a car that would give me a lift to the town of Tropea, nine or ten kilometres north along the coast. A sleepy-eyed guy in a speedy little Fiat took me half the way, and then dropped me off on a sharp bending road that looked too risky for any car to stop. Then suddenly a farmer stopped right beside me.

"Get in!" he shouted and I jumped in the back of his vintage minivan. The unhurried pace of his driving pleased me. He seemed to know everyone he passed along the road and shouted out greetings and honked his horn. He was jolly-as-could-be and talked non-stop to his white-haired wife who was sitting up front with him. They were hauling wooden cratefuls of Chinese peas to be sold at the market in Santa Dominica. He steered he talked and cranked his head everywhere, looking out the windows, imbibing life.

I stood by the road right in front of the market and another car took me to the centre of Tropea, my exact destination. It was still quite early and the bank wasn't open, so I took a little tour of the seaside resort.

I instantly fell in love with the town full of charming buildings and picturesque cobbled lanes. On a steep narrow road curving down toward the sea, I entered a beautiful pink and blue church. There were two robed priests celebrating the Mass, but not a single person in the humble pews. I took a few

minutes to inspect the interior, which utilized gold to an interesting effect. I was struck by the long white vestments of the celebrants, standing at the altar and going through the motions of a mock human sacrifice. They were parsing the sacramental flesh and blood in advance of the rite of communal cannibalism. But they had no takers that cloud-veiled morning of lambent light sublime.

I continued walking. I took my merry time. I circumambulated the entire town until I made my way back to the central piazza, distinguished by the ancient obelisk.

The lanes were alive now with morning shoppers and a flood of tourists sitting in cafés. I observed them immersed in their private thoughts, or languidly reading the Daily Gazette. As I crept through the square like a jungle savage searching for a prey to appease my hunger, I was drawn to the unabashed stares of a maiden, inexplicably succulent and prompting mute alarm.

*

When the bank finally opened, it took about an hour to go through the procedure of changing a one-hundred Dutch gilder note. The apparent inefficiency reminded me of India. But with cash in hand I purchased bread, cheese and orange juice. I found a little park with a vacant stone bench and there I enjoyed my delightful breakfast.

I began to explore the town again. I walked down lanes too narrow for cars. There were others well shaded, quiet and cool. As the sun rose higher, the cloud-veil thinned and formed into billowy masses of white. At the edge of the sheer-faced wall of the Acropolis, I gazed down into the tranquil sea. The turquoise waters were perfectly clear, and I presently decided to make my way down there.

South of the harbour, the road ran right along the base of Tropea's citadel-like cliff. Opposite the road was the narrow beach. I spread my mat on the

curve of sand and rested in the cooling shadow of the cliff. As I lay on my back, I gazed to the summit and discerned ancient dwellings there softly restored; some of them were virtual glass-encased caves, adroitly built up, one atop another, the colours and the textures blended in seamlessly. Thus had the summit of the cliff been elevated some five or six stories above its original height.

I found Tropea considerably richer than the coastline south toward Capo Vaticano. It was much more densely populated too. I stripped to my loincloth and took a little dip in the tepid blue lagoon. I swam some distance to Grotto dell'Amor and sunned my body on a flat warm bolder. I reflected how great it was just to be alive there, camping in the pine scented hills by night and exploring the byways and beaches by day. I was living one of the most sublime periods of my life.

By now the sun was nearly overhead. I dove into the water and swam back to the beach. I quickly dressed and hiked up to the town again. But the town was in siesta and everything was still. The open market was totally deserted except for numerous discarded fruits and vegetables strewn about the vacant square. I made a quick search and came away with an impressive plastic bag full of tomatoes, eggplant and assorted fruits.

18.

As defined by Mircea Eliade in his classic work *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Paris, 1951), 'shamanism is the magico-religious complex, most fully developed among the nomads of Central and Northern Asia. Essentially, shamanism is an ecstatic experience put to the service of society.' With the help of certain spirits, the shaman leaves his body in a trance-like ecstatic state. Music and dance often induce this. However, it is important to draw a clear distinction between the "shaman's" task to control these spirits while immersed in his state of ecstasy, and the "medium's" intent to be possessed by

them. The shaman, then, is able to ascend to the celestial realms and sometimes descend to the realms of hell.

To place himself into this ecstatic state, the shaman draws around him supportive designs and keeps at his side certain totemistic props that are symbolic of the shaman's voyage. Take the drum, for instance. It not only produces the ecstatic mood, but is also symbolic of the bridge that leads him there. This is why designs on the tympanum of tribal drums commonly depict a central star, or Pole Star, around which the universe spins. Through such an accordance, the shaman gains bearing and aligns himself with the Cosmic Axis, the ecstatic elevator shaft to the sky. Now, the Iriadamant possessed similarly designed tom-toms.

For tribal cultures dependent on waterways, the canoe has the totemistic meaning of a "soul boat." Similarly, the shamans of East Toraja (Celebes) are believed to travel in their "rainbow boats" when voyaging to the realm of the sky deities. For other shamans, birds are used to symbolically depict their astral vehicle. This naturally explains the use of feather headdresses and wings in ritual dances.

A sacred geography is also employed. The shaman's physical surroundings are arranged to promote his affinity with the cosmos. This is why the Iriadamant's Calabrian camps were said to follow a standard primordial design. They referred to the four directions, or compass points, as "poles." Their point of intersection marked the camp's essential axis. Males were to live in the northern portion, females in the southern. The East was the pole of the rising sun and therefore the place of entrance to the camp. It was also the place where visitors stayed. The West was the place of the setting sun and, accordingly, the sector of the tribal elders—but also the place of children.

Not just the overall layout of the camp, but each individual dwelling, as well, gained its bearing from the geomantic centre of the camp. Every tepee was

therefore plotted on its own a sub-axis at a calculated distance from the essential axis. Tepees were a standard 7 x 6 meters in dimension. The axis of the tepee was its central fire-pit. Heat and smoke rise vertically from the fire and pass out the flue at the conical point. In this way, the fire was a totemistic prop. The ascending smoke was symbolic of a ladder. Its escape out the flu was symbolic of the shaman's ecstatic journey.

19.

During my six-week stay at the female camp, I was the longest termed guest to sleep in the visitors tepee. I therefore saw a number of people come and go, particularly through the peak summer weeks. There were several nights running when the tepee housed up to ten people. Most of them, however, did not stay long. In fact, some freaked out and left in a hurry.

Now, there was also the very exceptional case of a woman and her son who had stayed with the Iriadamant for more than a year, in spite of the fact that they were not tribal members. The Iriadamant particularly loved the eight-year-old boy. His name was Jan. This good-natured lad had taken to the Iriadamant language and customs just like a native. It was therefore mainly because of Jan that his outlandish mother was tolerated. Her name was Bia. She was Dutch. It was in Belgium, the Netherlands' immediate southern neighbour, that Bia first met the Iriadamant. She had gone there to visit her brother Eric who happened to be sharing a cell with the Chief. From that time on, she started letting certain Iriadamant male members come and stay in her Amsterdam house while they waited for the Chief release.

Now to the extent that Bia and me were dwelling on the eastern pole of the camp, we lived there together for about six weeks. We did not, however, share the same gwam. Bia had arranged her own little sub-camp about twenty steps away from my full-sized gwam. Her well-kept semi-private living ensemble

comprised two pup tents pitched side by side and a tiny garden kitchen of her own design. The garden was a rather impressive little patch that yielded three varieties of aromatic basil together with tomatoes, oregano and mint. She decoratively bordered it with bright coloured flowers. She also designed a makeshift kitchen by extending bamboo poles from a hedgerow and curving them around to form an egg-shaped enclosure with a single narrow passage. At the centre of the egg, she built a small fire-pit with assembled rocks. This kitchen was very much Bia's own space, a place where she could rest, drink coffee and smoke. She could also make food whenever she wanted, undetected by her highly regimented hosts.

Bia was profoundly flawed, like most of us—a cranky, often-insufferable character ruled by a passion for thrifty fun and adventure. Now in spite of her incessant and querulous banter, we basically stayed on amicable terms; at least, that is, until the final week when she nearly drove us bonkers at the Marquis's Hacienda.

20.

I nearly always rose from sleep before the sun, and made good use of slumbering Bia's kitchen. Starting the fire was extremely easy; a carpet of pine needles covered the camp; and a lovely cup of Italian coffee was done in five minutes time.

Soon thereafter a girl named Cletal would usually pop her head over the hedge, and ask if I wanted to accompany a female party to go and collect wild berries, herbs or fruits. Cletal was the official Guardian of the Fire, but she also functioned as the work schedule girl.

One fine morning we hiked along a path that cut across a freshly charred post-harvest field. Then we came to a meadow that overlooked the sea. It was there we found the grove of neglected pear trees. Someone had scouted them

the previous day. Having first determined that they hadn't been sprayed, they asked permission to pick the fruit. However, unsprayed fruit trees normally meant that the fruit was either blighted or full of worms. But the party of pickers didn't seem to care. We collected it all, the worse with the bad, and ported it back in baskets and sacks. I was sceptical. 'Why were they investing so much labour to gather fruit that you couldn't give away?'

When we reached the camp they immediately began to meticulously slice off every little edible bit of meat, then they spread it all out to dry in the sun. A few nights later, they proved to be delicious. My question found an answer.

Bravo.

Another curious Iriadamant custom was the cooking of their rice, lentils and millet twenty-six hours before they were eaten. Now, due to the tendency of food to turn sour, this naturally gave their food preparations a distinctly acerbic flavour. When I asked the head cook (a Japanese female) "what primordial significance this practice might hold," I was made to understand that partially decomposed food was easier for the body to digest.

After three straight weeks of this decidedly experimental cuisine, I was delighted to open that plastic bagful of fresh tomatoes, eggplant and fruit I had scavenged from noon-time-square in Tropea. I envisioned an awesome *salsa primordiale* and immediately set forth to realize my dream. O heady green olive oil, divine in body. O dried wild oregano and thyme of the hillsides. O chunky granules of grey-white sea salt scrapped off the rocks at Grotticelli Beach. O fresh picked basil from Bia's little garden. It all went into my impromptu recipe concocted in a dented, old soot-black fry pan; the ultimate challenge, not spilling the contents while feeding the flames with resin-scented pinecones.

There were times I found at Capo Vaticano, when the sun just so and the vapour just so, and my mind in such a way that the desiccated grasses fringing sombre cane field or shaggy thatch over windswept beach hut, assumed a secret incandescence of its own. And as I looked to those landscapes, entranced and enwrapped, I truly did fear should I look too long, those sun burnt yellows might burst into flames; and they *would* embroil, too, into curling hot licks if not for the cool breeze balming off the salt sea, gently undulant, ethereal blue.

It was the Sunday afternoon right after the Chief nearly got his brains blown out. The tribe announced an ad hoc powwow. It was scheduled to be held that very night at a secret location in the mountains. The entire female camp were set depart at 4 o'clock that afternoon. They would reach the site some five hours later on foot.

'On foot?'

It was actually one of the female guests who tipped me off to the evening's program. I was just coming back from a day's exploration around Tono Beach when she saw me approaching along dirt road. She was bathing by the well at the edge of the camp and she called me over to tell me the news.

"So are you going?" she asked.

"Hmm."

By the time I received the news "officially," from Cletal, I had made my mind up not to go. I hadn't yet said it, but she sensed my reluctance and tried her best to spice the thing up, explaining how important a "conference" it would be. She was speaking to me in her simplest Italian, which by then had become our personal lingua franca. We were after all standing on Italian soil, and she knew that French wouldn't get her very far. As for her English, it was minimal at

best, and her willingness to learn even less. The situation charmed me. She had learned Italian as her first foreign language, and therefore understood the problems that it posed. It was due to Cletal that after five days I could start to understand her Vulgar Latin tongue.

She summoned her charms and begged me to attend, "Prego signor. la vostra presenza è prego importante."

"Non desidero andare." I smiled ("I don't want to go.") But she wouldn't let me back out gracefully.

"Prego signor!" she imploringly repeated.

"-NO!" I said. I could not have been blunter. I watched as the arc of her lips turn downward.

Her cool disposition suddenly grew warm. She tightened her forehead and lapsed into French.

"-C'est inconcevable!" She blurted in French. She crossed her arms and looked away.

"Che cosa è il problema della ragazza bella?" ("What is my pretty girl's problem?") I asked.

She glanced about uneasily and shrugging her shoulders. She exhaled through her nostrils in short exhortative gusts. Then amazingly she suddenly blurted out in English,

"Every body must go! Understand?"

She was flustered but adorable, speaking her English. I simply couldn't help but burst out laughing, which only made her turn bright red. I kissed her lips.

As if routed by a clash of unclear sentiments, she staggered away; but returned in a very short time with an interpreter.

In a tactful but completely disingenuous manner, the interpreter affirmed the official position: "Because you have received our official invitation to attend this evening's important conference, it would be a great pity if you did not attend." She was firm but calm.

"I am very honoured by your invitation. But I'm sorry, I have a prior engagement."

She then expressed how "conflicted" they would be about leaving me behind in the camp all alone. "I would only be right if someone to stay with you; but then they would have to miss conference too."

"Not to worry," I said. "I plan to sleep on the beach tonight."

They walked away stoically.

'-Touché!' I thought. In fact, the unexpected notion of sleeping on the beach immediately inspired me with a great sense of gladness.

I immediately stuffed my overnight bag and started walking toward the road again. After two quick rides and a downhill hike, I was sitting on the placid sands all alone with the pastel sun sank slowly in the sea; then the rising full moon from behind the hills. Its cooling light cast long, soft shadows off the broken boat half-buried in the sand. I spread my mat at side the boat and used it to block cooling hints of breeze. I recalled the words to "Oxen of the Sun"ⁱⁱ

Lapping wavelets, glistening stars
Sitting on the sands of thoughts recumbent
Senses healed, breathing stilled.
Coming to a long sought place...

I slept profoundly with marvellous dreams and woke refreshed with the first faint glimmers of rosy dawn-light. I walked a hundred meters to the shabby beach bar. It wasn't open. It didn't matter. I sat contented at a crudely built table and waited as my bare feet felt the cool sand. A shoulder-high banana tree rooted

in a pot lent verdurous tones to the driftwood and litter. The scene was a dream of placid clarity bathed in the pale cool light of morning sun. The happy sea was a wide band of blue...

Sometime later I heard the distant hum of an engine trailing to the sounds of prancing children, muted shouts of olive-skinned families coming down to the edge of the sea....

22.

There was a tedious string of scorching hot days. The sun was unrelenting, the hillsides dry and colourless. There was not a hint of pending relief in the form of a cloud or a trace of rain.

One silent afternoon I walked along the dusty dirt road to Ricadi village to buy a carton of milk. But the shop was sold out. I must have looked disheartened to the kid who worked there. "No problem," he said as if to console me. "Come back in an hour and we'll have it."

I had not had a single bite of food all day. I was feeling uninspired and painfully luckless. I was simply not able to adjust myself to the Iriadamant's perpetual Ramadan regime of only taking food and drink after sunset because they said it gave them energy all through the day.

In the dull piazza beneath a towering eucalyptus, I took my seat on a concrete bench. Across the square, two young girls looked pensive and bored as they sat in chairs beside an old door. They eyed me curiously. Thread-thin fissures of light started cracking and I looked to the grey-blue sky above. I noted the riffs of muted thunder, electrical aridity analogous to the dry heaves. When I looked across the square again, the girls had disappeared. I felt a few drops of rain on my arm, but pluvial relief was not forthcoming. The air, however, cooled a bit, and so did my blood and the functions of my brain. A delivery truck stopped in front of the store.

Back at Bia's garden kitchen, I started a fire and prepared myself a cup of one hundred percent milk tea. I sipped it slowly and paused to reflect how glorious it was to cook for myself. As the tea and the lactose splashed my bloodstream, I found myself formulating three curt writing-points vis-à-vis my notes on the Iriadamant.

1. Their petit-bourgeois sense of shame.
2. The unwillingness to simply enjoy their lives.
3. The basically beautiful life they live as opposed to the confusion as to why they live it.

But how could they be happy when people all around the globe were destitute and starving? How could they ever take pleasure in life when the earth was on the brink of ecological calamity? How could they return to a normal life when their city-rich parents would only wag their tongues and reprovably chant, "We told you so!"

But the ultimate conundrum was the Chief himself, their beloved Good Shepherd and exalted Sham-Man by whom the basically gifted group was allowing itself to be pulled by the nose.

23.

Via Provinciale was the name of the road that led down the hill to St. Nicolo village and beyond. It made a wide swing coming out of Ricadi Village as it started its steep descent. Quickly on the right came the turn-off road to Orsigliadi Village. It was there, at the beginning of this turn-off road that I usually began to hitch a ride. There also stood an ex-voto shrine. I would like to describe it briefly.

The shrine is in the manner a triptych icon, an arching wall sectioned into one single central and two flanking panels. The panels depict three separate scenes immediately following the crucifixion. The middle panel demonstrates Jesus on the cross with a bright yellow ring of light around his head. His brow is

bloodied, His right side gashed, with blood oozing out. Jesus' mother, along with two male disciples and a Roman soldier, stand at the bottom of the crucifix. The panel on the left shows Christ expired. His anguished mother holds him in her lap while the two male disciples stand to the side. They all evince the same yellow radiance. The panel on the right shows the body of Christ being laid to rest in a small cave-like sepulchre. The entrance of the sepulchre overlooks the distant sea. Mary is being consoled by someone, while the two other men hold the body of Jesus, one at the head and the other at the feet, as they lay him on the floor of the sepulchre.

Now the shoulder of the road was wide near the shrine. This made it quite a good place to hitch a ride. But still there were times when I had to wait long, and there was little else to do but to gaze upon the triptych, which, incidentally, was encircled by a low iron fence. I found Sunday mornings the best occasions for examining the humble ex-voto shrine. For one thing, there were much fewer cars on the road; and for another thing, the few cars that happened by were typically on their way to church.

One Sunday morning I was obliged suspend my very long examination of the triptych and walk the whole way down to Tono Beach. It was still quite early. The shoreline was cloudy. A stoutly built Moroccan man was sitting alone on the empty sands, busily preparing big armfuls of garments that he planned to peddle up and down the beach. We shared a few words. I wished him luck.

24.

I caught myself coveting local coloration, those sun-faded sattwic siennas and yellows reminiscent of the ochre-hued anchorites of Asia. This streaming elation was furthermore boosted by private applications of beautiful yoga; no mere stringent adherence to austerity or scornful rejection of the world at large, I placed myself at the artless crux and relied on the grace of come-what-may. In

stark repudiation of the bourgeois affliction, I fed on the breast of Providence Herself. Immersed in a passion, a forbidden fruit, I found it far too compelling to oppose.

Captivated glorious day after day by salty seascape and the arid terrain, I went long while neglectful of Ploy. I would then fall terribly lonesome for her and fret over whether I had hurt her feelings by failing to evoke her immaculate image. Such crushing remorse compelled me to issue telepathic signals. But I got no response.

Frequencies were jammed around the Iriadamant. I then grew anxious and started to imagine what would happen if she vanished and never reappeared.

'How horrible!' I grieved. 'To lose her forever! My ephemeral wife of enigmatic purity, holder of the power at the navel of the sky, likened to the infinitely faceted jewel laid open at the heart of a flowering lotus. O why had I forsaken her beatific figure, her wondrous cache of archetypal secrets?' Then "Clairaudient Voices"ⁱⁱⁱⁱ resounded in the background.

O fading, fades; she fades and I,
Whose kinema pans in the focused wind
Where veins impulse in the straw bed dawn
And bird song mutes in the unsought cool.
In listless colours of unwont calm,
Uncertainty's shadows of unwont calm
Like a bruised young fig of unwont calm.
Calling through the window of unwont calm

Chanting:

Scribe it from the lofty sea view terrains
With your mystic plume and dew,
As I fade from view...

And the angles sang:

The roots are taking over.
The shoots are taking over.

The trees are taking over.
The leaves are taking over.
The seas are taking over.
The skies are taking over.
The world is taking over.
The life is taking over...^{iv}

Om effemeral antara matrika swattwa linga garbha
Om effemeral antara matrika swattwa linga garbha
Om effemeral antara matrika swattwa linga garbha

25.

AGAIN I WENT TO SLEEP ON TONO BEACH; it was the night of the August full moon. But I was not alone this time. Bia had gone down that afternoon with Emnis, a German-born Iriadamant female. But they didn't tell anybody where they were going – not even Jan, Bia's eight-year old son.

Why? Because being a full-fledged tribal member meant Emnis didn't want the people to know that she was spending time away from the camp.

And how did Jan and me come to know about this?

Bia left and note in the biscuit tin:

I am camping on Tono Beach with Emnis. Please bring Jan in the morning if you come.

I explained the message to Jan and then paused. He stared looking up at me with baited breath.

"Tomorrow morning? Forget it." I told him.

He didn't look happy.

"Let's go tonight instead."

"–Okay!" he shouted.

We left right after the evening meal. The huge white moon was rising above the hills as we made our way out to Via Provinciale. We stood by the triptych and waited for a ride. The first passing car pulled over and stopped. "Hey Jan!" the driver shouted with a welcoming smile. We climbed in the car. "Where's your mama?" he asked.

The moon was high in the clear night sky as we stepped on the sands of Tono Beach. We looked down the beach and saw the two women sitting on their bedrolls near the broken boat. Bia was surprised at our sudden arrival but Emnis appeared upset over something. Perhaps she was embarrassed about succumbing to her cravings for slice of pizza and an ice cream cone. Well, whatever her reason, she chose not to speak and passively-aggressively went to sleep.

The light was enchanting as it brushed across the phosphorescent sands. The sea was as quiet as milk in a saucer. Except for the licks of stealthy kittens. Then Jan and I took a little naked dip and pranced about the sand like guileless savages. Next we erected twenty small megaliths assembled from the plethora of smooth round stones half-buried in the grainy brown sand. As a fluency of chiaroscuro light shown down, the piled-high stones lent ethereal tone to our makeshift silent movie set.

With the first faint glimmer of rosy dawn-light, the bonsai pagodas proudly greeted me. I sat cross-legged as they stood all around me like alien sensors for absorption of prana. With each long alternating breath I drew, I gained in the serenity of bliss-beyond-elation. I suddenly remembered the Eskimo Shaman:

My body is all eyes.
Look at it! Don't be afraid!
I can see in all directions!

Regrettably, Emnis was annoyed upon waking. I could hear her as she bundled and snapped her belongings in an overly conspicuous huff and puff. She

stood by the boat and sarcastically offered, "Have a nice day!" and returned to the safety of the pine grove camp. Jan and Bia departed soon after.

Around mid-day, I also started back. I made the slow climb to the top of the switchbacks and turned to salute the Tyrrhenian Sea. As I started again, I turned to behold a solitary fig tree heavily laden with fruit. She stood at the edge a freshly ploughed field as if personally offering her sweetest pick. As I stood beneath her strong, shapely limbs, eyeing her fragrant purplish flesh, I was moved to reflect upon Ploy's tender underside.

26.

Life in Calabria was tonic and free. I often reflected on the writer Jack Kerouac, that patriarch in Middle America. I thought about his times on the bum in Salinas in the 1950's, heating tins of pork and beans and roasting weenies over roadside campfires. I felt appreciation for his poetic lamentation over 'not being born a Mexican or a Negro.' Why? Because "the best the white world had to offer was not enough ecstasy...not enough life."

I longed for the company of all my friends with whom I could share these bucolic exploits. Not just Ploy, but her mother more and more, and Tanti, and Synthia and her daughter Binah. I also felt the need to talk to Van Holden. I was lonely as could be and wondered how they were, as they *too* probably wondered about me.

My belly grumbled as I made my way on foot toward St. Nicolo village.

The store near the train station was regrettably closed, but the owner left some semi-damaged fruit and tomatoes in a wooden crate outside the door. A furlong further, I came to the spring that poured into an ancient cut-stone basin. I cleaned off the nectarines and juicily devoured them right on the spot. This gave me the power to resume my hike up the burning grade to St. Nicolo village.

However, after St. Nicolo the climb was even steeper as Via Provinciale ascended toward Ricadi and the pine grove camp of the Iriadamant. With the extra weight of my overnight things, the hike proved much more strenuous than usual. I halted mid-way beneath the shade of an oak tree. My body and face were laced with sweat but the breeze from the sea brought cool relief. The tree itself was sprawling and huge and stood at the front of an old rustic farmhouse. There was a very tall hand-painted sign near the house saying, OLIO di OLIVA – PRODOTTO LOCALE.

Fortunately, I had already scavenged the tomatoes enough for a sizable evening meal. Abundant garlic and sundry herbs were already waiting in Bia's kitchen. The only thing lacking was an onion or two. Then *ah!* I saw one, hidden like an Easter egg among the dry shrubs at the side of the road. The locally produced Tropea onion is renowned world wide for its deep red colour and delicate sweet taste. It is also known to fetch fine prices in the gourmet markets as far away as Hamburg, London and Tokyo. According to Bia, when the harvest comes the entire region overflows with onions; so much so, here three months later there were onions still tracing weed-fringed roadsides. She said, "The farmers load their trucks so full that they just fall off when they take the turns. Squirrels don't like them. The dry summer air preserves them very well."

I managed to gather a half a dozen onions by the time I reached the turn-off to the camp. From there I strolled leisurely along the dirt road. With the change in tempo I began to reflect how, given a some audacity, a person could live quite well as a scavenger in Calabria, at least through the harvest-rich months of summer. I stopped by the well at the northern edge of camp and poured cool buckets of water over my body. The camp was quiet. Most of the women were in late siesta.

I decided to schedule the remainder of my day to prioritize things that I needed to accomplish. I would take a rest while the sun was still high and then

sip some tea and do a little writing. When shadows lengthened, I planned to perform my *bhucha phra-athit*, or the Classical Siamese Sun Salute, in the secluded western sector of the camp. I was also very firm to start the cooking early, as I didn't like stumbling around in the dark.

Yet, first things first, I gathered the fuel.

27.

Pine cones, needles and dried cow dung were the sources of fuel in Bia's garden kitchen. Thus was life made astoundingly easy when camping in a pine grove adjacent to an orchard where two healthy milk cows freely grazed. Yet, the campers exhibited total indifference to their neighbouring bovine pair. Their facile rejection of these two large beasts was, I found, symptomatic of a deep-rooted hang up.

Dietetically speaking, the Iriadamant espoused an inflexible vegan regime. They therefore abstained from all animal products, except ice cream when no one was looking.^v

"Okay," I told them. "If you want to avoid eating butter and cheese, that's fine and dandy, from the dietary stand point. But why aren't you using cow dung for cooking? Would you rather burn expensive fossil fuels to power your vans while searching for firewood?—Come on!" I said. "Everybody knows that the American Plains Indians were totally reliant on the American bison; and no way less on bison *dung!*"

But the Iriadamant wouldn't listen to reason. Were the customs of the American Plains Indian, perhaps, not primordial enough to warrant emulation? I may as well been talking to a cow.

A week or so later, though, I made a little breakthrough. A young Bavarian-born female among them was deeply involved in making pottery.

Problem was, her pots kept breaking in kiln. She had reached wit's end and asked me for advice.

She was burning wood in her in her makeshift kiln.

"Your kiln is too hot," I said. "Stop using wood."

"What else can I use?" she asked.

Why not use what the Indians use? I mean Indians from India."

"What do they use?" she asked.

"Cow dung."

I explained the preparation. She tried it and it worked.

There was another contradiction in the Iriadamant's resolute shunning of the cow. This was openly exposed by their full affection for for brandishing strips of well-tanned cowhide in the form of ornamental armbands, headbands, pouches, moccasins, vests and sheathes. These were typically embellished with colourful tapers, feathers and beads, and proudly wore at gala powwows.

The Iriadamant's deep abhorrence for the cow revolved around the animal's domesticated status and two repulsive attributes stemming thereof. First was the perceived unnatural alliance that was forged between man and the bovine beast. They believe this coincided with the fall of primordial man. Second was the horrifying implication that man himself was a domesticated animal, harnessed and corralled by civil society. Thus, the out-and-out denial of their dung-producing neighbours was a reflexion of their fear of self-recognition.

Now, the Iriadamant females were conversant in astrology. Some of them, in fact, held knowledge in depth. One fine day someone made a passing comment on the high percentage Tauruses among them. The data confirmed my working assumption that their anti-cow rhetoric was largely self-deceptive. Had they now

advanced to the crucial new stage where the animus spirit was sufficient to itself?
There was little apparent need for males.

28.

I was starting to absorb the frustration I observed. Puzzles needed solving. As for example, why had they come to settle in Calabria: to establish their primordial encampment, merely? It was certainly not for rearing up children. No, another had died that winter, I learned, and now there were only six remaining, in spite of all their ritual sex, which leads us to another incongruity. They really didn't want to make any more babies. Babies just reminded them they're just a herd of cows, and cows don't factor into insurrection's blueprint.

They continue to convene around the evening campfire to chatter, chomp and chant their songs. They adored giving rise to dithyrambic soundscapes laced with maenadic keens and cries. Mysterious forces were surely at play here; mystery indeed was the crucial manure.

29.

Four good-looking Hungarian university students arrived to the camp one bright sunny day. They were two guys and two girls. However, after a sleepless night in the gwam, they were scratching their mosquito bites and on the verge of running away. In order to keep them one more day, a cultural tour was quickly arranged. The students would be taken to the main male camp near Santa Dominica to inspect the Iriadamant's special contribution to what they themselves termed "anagriculture." Scientific laboratories and interesting crafts would also be displayed. Having never even heard of the camp at this point, I consulted Cletal. She had never been there. "Adiamo," I said.

The camp was positioned on a steep, shapeless hill directly exposed to the afternoon sun. Its arid prominence lacked real beauty but commanded an expansive view of the sea.

We arrived by van to the base of the hill. It was the only cultivatable part of the camp, which they had turned into a flourishing garden oasis. I soon came to see this was no mere tour; but a true initiation to agrarian traditions that were older than Mesopotamia, and where the cult of the earth was clearly in vogue.

They guided us with care through a labour-intensive series of circular designed cultivation plots. The distinctive mark of their principle design was the alveola, or honeycomb configuration. Each garden module, just as each gwam, was founded on a circular hexagonal pattern, uniformly seven meters in diameter. There were numerous and exacting technical concordances pertaining, particularly to the cardinal compass points and to a registry of numerological proportions derived from the units of seven and twelve.

As previously described, a vertical pillar signified a theoretic axis or shaft that rose from the central fire of a tepee and passed out the flue of the conical roof. By attuning one life to the central axis, one first gains a fundamental linkage to the ground. By perceiving this axis as a cosmic pillar, one gains, by extension, further connection to the heavens, as well as to the hells. The flue of the gwam, then, signified a ladder or passage of flight to the boundless psycho-metaphysical realm. Even so, it is the personal prerogative of the shaman alone to ascend to stellar zone during trance.

The Romanian writer Mircea Eliade found "shamanic flight" to be a

universally disseminated idea connected with the belief in the possibility of direct communication with the sky. On the macrocosmic plane this communication is figured by the Axis (Tree, Mountain, Pillar, etc.); on the microcosmic plane it is signified by the central pillar of the house or the upper opening of the tent. This means that every human habitation is projected to the Centre of the World.^{vi}

This notion of "extra-terrestrial communication" has, according to Eliade, also been expressed through the myth of a

...[P]aradisiacal age in which human beings could easily go up to the sky and maintain familiar relations with the gods. The cosmological symbolism of the dwelling and the experience of shamanic ascent confirm, though in another aspect, this archaic myth. They do so in this way: After the interruption of the easy communications that, at the dawn of time, existed between mankind and the gods, certain privileged beings (and first of all shamans) preserved the power to actualize, for their own persons, the connection with the upper regions; similarly, the shamans have the power to fly and to reach the sky through the central opening, whereas for the rest of mankind the opening serves only for the transmission of offerings.^{vii}

From what I observed in Calabria, the Iriadamant unquestioningly accepted communication between heaven and earth. This therefore explained why their ceremonial offerings, prayers and—for lack of a better term—séances, all took place around the central pillar or opening, as determined by the axis of the fire and the flue. It is also revealing that in the Iriadamant Language, words for "fire pit"—foyer and fuoco—held the added meaning of "focal point."

Now, an exceptional trait of Iriadamant culture is the occurrence of a people who projected not only their human habitation but also their gardens to the Centre of the World.^{viii} Here perhaps we see their greatest contribution. At the centre of each hexagonal garden-module, a large long stone or menhir^{ix} was set upright in the soil. Though contrasting functionally, the central menhir was the exact equivalent to the gwam's central fire pit and therefore signified the Cosmic Axis. Laterally, the menhir served as the locus, or hub, for the six projecting radii, or spokes, which extended outward 3.5 meters to the hexagon's periphery. Yet, as a replicated module appears never singly, as spread macroscopically across emerging unit-sets, primordial plots mirror the honeycomb structure. In this way,

the topographic survey of a camp reflects this uniformed alveolar mass of modules socketed snug and flush in the structure of a honeycomb.

How does found a primordial plot? Before a site is ever established, a fundamental calculation must be made in order to determine of the plot's essential centre. This primal locus of the specified locale acts as the inceptive reference point to which all ensuing sub-plot centres are aligned. According to H.G. Quaritch Wales,

One chooses certain places where one rises a mound of earth in order to concentrate in it all the latent energies of the periphery.... It seems probable that originally a natural hillock was chosen to represent the great earth god and around this the city grew up.^x

30.

After our lengthy tour of the gardens, we hiked up the steep windy road toward the camp. Half way up on a terraced ledge, technicians and artisans had pitched small gwams as live-in workshops and laboratories. The first tent we visited was that of a trained geologist. He displayed various instruments for determining the components of the soil. His ardent pursuit was to rediscover the lost technique of Calabrian ceramics, world acclaimed in ancient times. His problem was the same as the Bavarian female—his pieces kept cracking in the kiln.

Next, we came to the tent of a carver, or better expressed, a totemistic artisan. I established an instant rapport with the man. He mainly worked with wood and bone. He displayed a few of his eye-catching pieces. "These are not considered objects d'art," he explained in a blend of English and French. "Even though the objects hold aesthetic quality, they are not at all intended as aesthetic expressions. The principal quality is not the object's beauty, but rather the intrinsic function" he explained.

"And what is the intrinsic function" I asked

"The intrinsic function is always totemistic."

"What do you mean by *totemistic*?" I asked.

He smiled. "During the process of creating a totem the maker's own energy goes into the object. This energy is most the important thing."

"Why?"

"Because the energy intends to produce a particular effect. This is why a totem is essentially a gift, because only when it's given is the energy released. This places great importance on the moment it is given, which is also the moment of energy transference. In this way, the time that the totem is given is just as important as the time it took to make it. But the effect of the energy is also influenced by the attitude of the person who receives it."

Among the various objects displayed, a wooden spoon with moon-face handle stood out. I picked it up. "This spoon is not an ordinary utensil," he said. "It would never be used for eating or cooking. It has a specific ritual use."

"Like what?" I asked.

"It is an instrument or tool of concentration to help the shaman connect himself to the astral plane of disembodied souls. We use such totems to monitor the movements of primordial spirits and to guide them back into the fold of the people."

"Could a book be written as a totem?" I was curious.

"Of course," he said. "That's the only way to write a book."

31.

The very first night that I met the Chief, he spoke of these same phantastic matters: transferring energy through the giving of gifts, and discovering the

presence disembodied souls and guiding them back to the fold of the people. He had recently found his long-lost mother in a puzzled state of cultural oblivion, and said that he was trying to guide her to the safety of the Iriadamant. She was the long-anticipated Ajinogumi or Ancient Coming Mother whom the people had been waiting for, for centuries. At one point during that first night's powwow, someone in the background coolly announced, "Two new tulkus have just been detected."^{xi} Everyone paused and looked to one another.

Now apart from such stories being highly intriguing, they impressed me even more as being seriously irresponsible. They nonetheless confirmed how thoroughly susceptible the Iriadamant were to the metempsychotic narrative. They spoke of themselves in terms of many lifetimes and gazed to the future in resolute conviction of their imminent recurrence. These shared beliefs further galvanized confidence and strengthened their sense of being a people who had clutched and journeyed since time immemorial. Still, many were lost to the genocidal slaughter and the heinous Diasporas perpetuated on them. When they spoke of their people (**le pople, in French**), they tacitly affirmed their identification with all primordial peoples of the world.

32.

I refer again to the first night's powwow when the Chief expressed his views on sex. It was a calculated good. Its principle ramification was offspring, which aimed to increase their feral ranks, but mainly in the sense of "bringing lost ones" back to the fold. He spoke of these things in a casual manner as we shined the same blanket sitting round the fire, as everyone was singing and exchanging gifts. "We don't have marriage," he said outright. "We just have sex." He then explained the basics of parentage. "Every child has twelve pairs of parents. The carnal parents are the least important." This cast traditional bourgeois relations in a new revealing light. It also gave sex a novel twist.

The general procedure was this. When a female wished to bare a child, she attuned her menstruation to the phases of the moon until her period of fertility conjoined with the moonless night. She then chose a male as her carnal partner and gained the commitment of eleven other couples who would take responsibility for the child's upbringing. Parentage was therefore a broadly shared affair through the cooperative involvement of twenty-four consenting adults. The child was by no means the sole possession of its carnal parents, according to this design.

Therefore, once the aspiring carnal mother had obtained consent from the other twenty-three, the soul snatch ritual was set for the appropriate moonless night. They conducted the ritual in an extra-large gwam, actually created by conjoining two normal tepees at specific points of their outer perimeters. This thereby formed an almond-shaped segment in the overlapping space of the tents conjoined, a highly concordant zonule in-between of narrow berth and congress secure.

The twelve males together with the Chief entered one tent; then a dozen females entered the second. With fires ablaze in both central fire-pits, a steady resound of entrancing drums continued unabated for the longest time. When everything was ready, the conjugal pairing slipped into the narrow space between the tents and churned a passionate vacuum between them.

Some weeks later, I gathered more data as concerned their so-called ritual sex. Remarkably, however, the findings evinced no effective emphasis at all on sex, or even reproduction. The entire trajectory of the data I amassed drew singular attention to the philanthropic project of recovering lost primordial souls. Thus, the concentrated energies marshalled in the ritual aimed at coaxing disembodied beings back into the wombs of their female members.

Bia and Francis were my main informants. Both of them had been in fringe association with the Iriadamant for a number of years. Francis, a financial consultant by profession, was the most lucid person I managed to speak with the whole of my time around Capo Vaticano. He had maintained contact with the Iriadamant since their very in the early 1980's in Paris.

"At first I had a really big interest in them," he said. "My wife not so much. But things were very different then. At that time, their focus was operating health food stores. They sold their own line of biologically grown products. The Chief was the banker. I helped him with the books. Most of them were camping on open land, on the outskirts of Paris, just sleeping in tepees. But they were still in the city; that's the thing, so they didn't follow such a strict regime. They call themselves Iriadamant then either. That is a much more recent thing."

However, Francis' wife became a permanent member. They were already married eight years at that time—a happy couple with their five-year-old son named Luc. He was now thirteenth. When he showed up with his father a Capo Vaticano, Luc hadn't seen his mother in more than four years. That was in Ceuta, Spanish Morocco.

According to Francis, when the tribe left Paris, in late 1984, they were three hundred members strong. There was singing and fanfare to celebrate the commencement their southward march. Television stations covered the event. That's when the Chief announced his plan to walk around the world in support of the Primordial Revolution.

They first spent time in the French City of Leon. Then they went to Spain. After that, they crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to the Spanish North African enclave of Ceuta. From there they desired to walk across Morocco, but the

Moroccan authorities stopped them at the border. They camped in Ceuta two full years while awaiting visas that never came.

That was where Luc and his father last met them. Francis was candid and clear about Ceuta. "First of all" he told me, "imagine that Ceuta is only about nine square miles in size. It's just across the narrow strait from Gibraltar with a natural harbour. Other than that, it pretty much thrives on being inconspicuous low-tax haven. That's why the Chief phoned me up one day. He wanted me to help him set something up. I brought Luc with me. We flew to Tangiers, and then taxied cross the border. The Chief was petty desperate. He needed to establish an official residence, mainly for tax purposes. It was simple. All he had to do was buy an apartment; which he did, and automatically qualified for a fifty-percent break on the already very low Spanish taxes. He didn't even have to live there. They only want the money. But they wouldn't give him Spanish citizenship. In any case, it seemed to be a pretty good deal, and everybody had a place to take a shower."

"And as a matter fact," continued Francis, "Everybody visited Morocco during that time, but only as individuals. The tribe was always trying to go across en mass, with a showy display of feather headdresses, tribal dancing to tom-toms, and all of that. They wanted to get the attention of the press as they did in Paris. It was too naïve, and then everything became more difficult. Like I said, it was actually no problem to go to Morocco. In fact, most people preferred it there. They speak a lot of French and everything is cheaper. So the problem became getting back into Ceuta, because both the Moroccan and Spanish police made a hobby out of strip-searching young Europeans on the pretext that they might be carrying hashish. "

During their two-year sojourn in Ceuta, membership dwindled to its approximate Capo Vaticano number. "It's an interesting point," Francis said. "In three years, I hardly see any new members, and almost no one quit."

The tribe was staunch. After leaving Ceuta, they went through several complicated years. Troubles reached their peak when the Chief was arrested, charged, and held without bail in a Flemish asylum for the criminally insane. The case dragged on. Would it never come to trial? Finally, in a bold affirmation of his innocence, the Chief announced a suicide hunger strike. On the fortieth day of his protracted fast, the Belgium prosecutors dropped all the charges and quietly expelled from Belgium. He was happy to be out, but where to go? For reasons unknown, he had already managed to get himself expelled from the neighbouring countries of France and Germany. Thus, the Netherlands became his immediate port of refuge.

He appeared unexpectedly at Bia's house in Amsterdam. "When I opened the door," she recounted to me, "he looked like a person who had just come out of a Nazi concentration camp. He stayed in my house with a few other guys for about a month. Then they came to Italy because it was the safest place to operate. But they had to be careful when they crossed any border. They told me they would hide in the back of the car."

34.

Soon after that in the fall of 1989, Bia and Jan first went and stayed at the female camp in Montelanico, near Naples. The males were also staying in the area, but in a separate camp on the slopes of Mt. Vesuvius. This is where they started their primordial sex.

Concerning the subject of ritual sex again, aside from the Chief my only other informant was the gossipy Bia. She confirmed that the ritual "group-sex stuff," she called it, was only a recent addition. "In the beginning they were very easy going about sex. It was a kind of 70's attitude," she said. "That's when the men and women lived together. Then they were about spreading VD. Maybe that's why they started living in separate camps. I don't know. But whatever the

reason, it raised a big question. If men and women don't live together, how can they make babies? I think that's why the Chief came up with the group-sex thing."

The first large-scale primordial sex assemblies were introduced around the November new moon, 1989.

"The sessions would last all night," Bia told me. "Couples would be going in there, one after the other!" She spoke effusively as we sat over coffee in the shade of the pines one cool afternoon. She gave detailed data concerning the Chief. "He would come out of the gwam in the early morning looking totally exhausted," she recalled. "And then, he would sit down as casually as you are sitting now and tell me everything that happened in the night. He was so funny! He would brush his hands with a light clapping sound, and say, 'Well, we got four more tulkus to come down last night.' Then I said to him, 'How can you be sure? I mean, don't you think they need more time in there? Maybe you should let them play around a bit.' But no. He was certain. "I saw streams of light coming down from the sky,' he said."

As I listened to Bia's incredible report, I felt myself succumbing to the Chief's great allure. There is no denying his astonishing nerve had a kind of riveting effect on me. The Chief was brilliant theatre. What is more, the extraordinary grip that he held the people was exactly his ability keep them enthralled. He never appeared as the same person twice. He possessed the power to recast himself in response to each new act of the opera, and in times of insipidness when revelation waned, he would pull down a mid-act curtain of stealth and cause everybody's spine to shiver as they braced themselves for the next violent episode.

"What's needed is deed," he told to me that night. "My energy heals, it does not convince."

35.

It was the glorious promise of making babies that encouraged Bia to forge deeper bonds with the tribe. "But before I followed them down to Capo Vaticano," she said, "I returned back up to Amsterdam and collected all sorts of bandages. God, I was acting totally crazy! I imagined the whole camp would be filled with groaning women lying under trees and having babies. 'How could I miss it?' I thought to myself." For after their experiments in ritual sex on the spring-blossom slopes of Mt. Vesuvius, the tribe were expecting twelve new members.

"But you know what?" she said; and then paused before saying. She lowered her voice and looked around the area just to make sure that no one was listening. "*Not one single woman ever got pregnant!*" We both broke out in uproarious laughter.

36.

It was due to the Marquis's philanthropic patronage that the Iriadamant ever got a toehold in Calabria. All the three main camps that they established there were on the Marquis' extensive properties. These were:

1. The female camp west of Ricadi village.
2. The male camp south of Santa Dominica.
3. The anagricultural research camp on the grounds of the Marquis' hacienda itself.

The last of these camps was explicitly for the purpose of researching and developing experimental gardens. It was here on the evening of its inauguration that I first laid eyes on the good Marquis.

It was just before sundown when the Marquis appeared wearing polo shirt, Bermudas shorts and leather sandals. I could tell right away that he was generous man. I watched as he walked down the damp dirt path on his way to

attend to some menial tasks. He appeared to possess a heart so big that his brawny chest could hardly contain it. He was also the type that was easily duped.

The following night the Chief paid a visit to the female camp. Only his driver and secretary accompanied him. The brilliant polyglot enjoyed speaking English and apparently came just to chat with me. However, certain topics were placed off limits—his sister, his mother and their yoga master.

The females hurriedly finished their dinner and gathered around to hear the Chief's words. There were several interpreters interspersed among them to translate our English dialogue into French. But there was no *our* dialogue; only Chief soliloquy, aimed at the wider audience, for sure. I understood immediately his power of speech and its strong reliance on a cunning glibness. He was a confidence trickster, no doubt about it—a sham man, par excellence.

His discourse turned to the previous night's function and he cracked a few jokes about plump Marquis. He sarcastically remarked how his "beneficent patron" had excused himself the night before—"Excused himself on his own hacienda!" The females all tittered in response.

"I found the Marquis quite a humble guy." I had managed to squeeze a word in edgewise.

"Oh!" The Chief remarked with some surprise. "You mean you talked to him?"

"No," I replied. I shrugged my shoulders. "I just *read* him," I said, "I..." I at once regretted having chosen those words, but they were already rendered *wrongly* into French: "Bala read the Marquis' aura," and they whispered among themselves for a moment.

He would not be upstaged. The Chief reached back into his arsenal of wizardry and immediately launched a terse recitation of Marquis' previous incarnation as blue-blooded leader of the local Italian Communist Party in its

struggle with Mussolini's fascist Brown Shirts. The ruffians took their opponent hostage and forced him to drink a pint of castor oil and to eat a live toad. They ordered him to publicly renounce his views, under threat of death. But the young Marquis remained defiant. They brutally beat him within an inch of his life and tied him to a stake in the central piazza. They sliced off his tongue with pliers and a razor then soaked him with petrol and burned him alive.

37.

A few weeks' later, rumours were abuzz again. There were indications that a major decampment was about to commence. Nobody actually told me "officially," I just overheard someone talking to Bia. They would abandon two big camps in Calabria in favour of establishing smaller ones in the hills around Rome. Exactly why and when this would happen was anybody's guess. Nobody offered straightforward answers. When I asked them exactly who made the decisions, I received the customary "We" for an answer. "Councils" were their axiomatic decision-making body. But decisions weren't not reached by majority rule; neither by compromise or trite consensus. "Everyone had to see eye to eye," they said; everyone had to see the correct path.

The following morning everyone was told to be ready to depart that very evening after dinner. But then again, well, it wasn't sure. "If not that night, then the following morning." It was hard to imagine how more than forty members could all just stand up and leave at once. But like everybody else, my bag was packed. I mean, not that I had any plans on leaving. Gossip was rife.

Four days later on August 15th, the imminent departure was suddenly on a back burner. Now the big discussion was whether the males would attend the huge International Boy Scout Jamboree to be held that month in Calabria. Yet everybody's boxes and bags remained packed and placidly stacked near the trees

at the side of the unpaved road. The stuff had been sitting there five days and nights, waiting for the big orange bus with Belgium plates to come and collect it.

The general morale was the lowest I had seen. Everybody docilely went about their tasks as if they planned to stay there all their lives. The days were now so parched by heat that by 10 a.m. the entire population was overcome by a dreamy inertia. An eerie silence enveloped the camp—intruded on only by the arid breeze and the penetrating high-pitched *rheees* of cicadas. The atmosphere got so unbearably tense that a few of the females broke down weeping without apparent reason. Something was dramatically amiss.

Those mid-day rests were long and still. I found my place in the shade of the pines in the tranquil northern sector of the camp. The lyrics to the song "As Japanese Ingest" kept springing to mind.

Let the motion of the trees
Om-biblically connect U 2
Incestral spirits in the breeze....

Passing through the straw fields
Faint apparitions through
The dry, wispy noontide breeze....^{xii}

As I sat cross-legged enstatically entranced, the divine primordial kami of Japan paid gentle visitation with their blessed infusions of bare nobility. Clothed in robes of undyed silk and serenely masked in theriomorphic countenance, the primal sister and brother couple arrived with bestowals of transfiguration's boon. The amorphous Sun Goddess Amatersu and the Rude Wind Spirit Suzano also showed. Finally, Maitreya knelt before me revealing his resplendence and conferring his bliss. He gently clasped my wrist and stood to beckon me across the Bridge of Ascension. "The way is clear. We invite you come."

'How could I spurn such an offer?' I reflected. 'But I'm simply not ready to abandon all ties.'

Maitreya gleamed approvingly, "That's all right," and then added with assurance—"It's an open invitation."

They sprinkled my being with golden dust. Then I bade them adieu with my palms pressed together. Tears of gratitude streamed down my face as I was made to reflect on the memory of my guru. Recalling his kindness greatly stirred my faith, I was greatly stirred in faith.

38.

On the 17th of August, two important letters arrived at the Ricadi post restante. One was from England, the other from Crete. There was suddenly strong inducement to leave Calabria. I only had to forge an exit plan. I had just been offered a cottage in Sussex, and I fantasized thumbing it all the way. The second opportunity was far less credible. The complicated factors, though, enfolding that scenario also lent to it forceful appeal. Would I cross the mountains to the port of Brindisi and sail for Iraklionc by way of Piraeus?^{xiii} As I wrung my brain to secure an exit strategy, I fell to the chronic state of anxiety that arose every time I started going broke and I craved to be back in the arms of Asia.

The following morning bright and early, a slightly amazing event took place. The entire population of the female camp uploaded their belongings to the big orange bus and then slowly disappeared down the dusty dirt road.

Bia, Francis, Jan and Luc were left behind to watch the camps. They had given Francis the keys to a van and asked him and me to stay at the Hacienda. They wanted him to tend the experimental gardens. They said some men would return in ten days. Bia and Jan, on the other hand, were asked to watch the now evacuated female camp.

We all sat down near Bia's tents and discussed the situation over coffee. It felt quite strange, we all concurred. And as we cast our gaze upon the now abandoned camp, we similarly wondered, what was there to watch?

"So why did they tell you to stay here?" asked Francis.

"Because the Marquis never permitted women to stay over night at the Hacienda," she said.

News of the Iriadamant's departure spread fast. Within hours, local men started snooping around the parameter of the camp. By default we decided we would all stay together, even though it went against the Marquis' wishes. Yet as soon as we arrived to the quiet Hacienda, we perceived the imminent dilemma we faced. I would now have to throw away my poet-colored glasses?

From the very word go, Bia drove us batty with her imbecilic gibberish and repulsive habits. I speak here of utterly revolting things such as soaking her menstrual-stained panties in the aluminium pot that was used for cooking rice. I cannot for the life of me ever recall a person so lacking in the basic social senses of discretion and dignity, as Van Holden's younger sister Bia. She was beyond doubt playing in a league all her own.

Francis and me called a private council and decided to conclude that she was mentally retarded. There was no other way to stomach her presence.

A few days later, Francis told me that he needed to book his train back to Paris. Regretfully, he also mentioned this to Bia, who immediately decided she would take the same train. "From Paris I can get another train to Amsterdam," she told him. They were planning to leave at the end of the week.

Later that day, we had a private word as we drove up the coastal road to Tropea. We had to change some money at the bank.

"Francis," I said, "do you know how Bia's normally travels by train?"

"No. What do you mean?"

"She never buys tickets." I said.

"You're joking!"

"No. I'm serious. She told me all about her well-rehearsed tricks to get out of paying, even the conductor catches her," I said.

"Oh no." he sighed.

"It's like this," I said. "When she knows she's been caught, she signals to Jan who collapses on the floor with his knees pointed inward and his body all contorted. He sucks his thumb and cries. At the same time, Bia strikes an imbecilic pose with her eyes strained open and her mouth held agape. And then she lets some spittle drip from her lip. She says makes the conductor feel so weird that he just walks away and pretends it never happened."

It was nice to get away from the camp, and from Bia. After changing money, I invited Luc and Francis for a drink at the Caffé Acropolis. We sat in the shade on the quiet terrace with a stunning view of the calm blue sea. I was feeling quite happy with money in hand. However, just like the last time before I went to that bank, it took about an hour just to change another one-hundred Dutch gilder note. I felt sorry for Francis who had to wait so long. He had handled his business in a matter of seconds by simply flashing a plastic card. I was very intrigued by the novel system. Novel at least to me, that is. I had heard of such things as electronic money, but never viewed its practical merits up close.

Francis then explained how common it was for people to use plastic cards in Europe, and how his monthly salary went straight into his bank account electronically. "With the same plastic card I pay all bills, and take out it cash from machines when need it. This is all you need," he said. He handed me the card.

I eyed the plastic card with intent. Was it really I who was so naïve? Was plastic money really such an innovation? I was a doubtful, if not vexed. After all, the Chinese had been turning out "paper" money since the ninth-century. The Venetian adventurer Marco Polo spent decades in China, and wrote about his tour of Kublai Khan's mint. I recall his facetious report about The Khan "possessing the

secret of alchemy in perfection" and how those "pieces of paper were solemnly issued with a host of official signatures and seals as if they were pure gold or silver." Now a thousand years later, has the scheme improved? Have thin plastic cards and computerized ledgers deepened in anyway the fundamental hoax?

Two slender maidens in panther-print bikinis strode through the silence of the shaded terrace. They moved down the catwalk shoulder-to-shoulder in divine comportment and majestic eyewear—passing from the shadows to the sun, and away... The narrow strip of sand at the bottom of the acropolis was dotted with multicoloured parasols, and packed full of bathers splashing in the shallows. As I took it all in, I began falling prey to the ethereal light that blesses the entire region of Calabria. Stunned by its ecstasy, reeling in its splendour, floating on its artless purity adrift serenely disengaged in spiral ascent over delicate cloud-like steps to the sun.

39.

The previous twelve months of incognito wandering had led me to many an amazing locale. These were precious, golden months to be sure. They dealt great trials of endurance nonetheless. The Hacienda was a classic case in point. My ten-day stay was an extraordinary experience. Indeed, having to haul so many pails of water to sustain eight thirsty garden plots was an extremely laborious and time-consuming task; but then, just to abide in the lovely Hacienda turned all that toil into mere child's play.

The walled plantation was a veritable paradise richly endowed with natural opulence. It had lush vegetation, sweet water springs, abundant timber and clean fresh air. There was row upon row of citrus trees, their trunks well pruned and smartly whitewashed. The traditional mezzadri, or sharecropper families, had lived for generations within the walled estate in their simple stone-and-mortar cottages nestled among the rolling vineyards. Local archaeologists had even

unearthed an ancient burial mound with stone-hewn sarcophagi. I explored secluded trails on foot and passed through groves of olive and pine. I once lost my way and chanced upon a cottage gracefully hidden by cypress and palm. In the broad summer fields overlooking the sea, they often set piles of dead foliage alight. Smoke scudding silent over tilled terrain lent cinematic touches to the sylvan quietude.

40.

Such bucolic settings were rudely disturbed by the cankerous presence of Van Holden's sister. One early morning she was shrieking in the distance. Francis and I immediately ran there. She had just been caught stealing bundles of wood, and a sharecropper woman was confronting her directly. On top of that, Bia wouldn't give it back. Still, it wasn't Bia's theft that made the woman so fumed, but the caca piles and the sullied tissue scattered about the general area. The woman's indicating arm told the story. We all turned to Bia with accusing eyes.

"It wasn't me!" she said in flat denial. Then she pointed the finger at Jan— "*He did it!*" She mumbled a few quick words in Dutch and Jan immediately hit the ground weeping. He was faking it of course but the tenant woman fell for it.

Stunned by the display of unabashed insolence, the woman was speechless and began to shake. Francis and I intervened with apologies. It acted to allay the woman's nervous. But then Bia immediately went on the offensive. "How dare you claim that I shat on your property!" she shouted with enormous indignation, and then dramatically spat near the woman's feet. Thank god, her husband appeared on the scene. He spoke to his wife in a calming tone. The words "blonde gypsy" were all I could catch.

Francis and I again made amends by carrying the bundles back to the house, and by expressing to the couple our deepest regrets in whatever Italian works we could marshal. They both acquiesced with understanding smiles.

Back at the camp, she grew so enraged, we thought we would never hear the end of her invective; how all her life she was never allowed to do the things *she* wanted to do.

"The world has been always against me!" she spewed as a viper pinned in a corner. "My father was against me! My mother was against me. And now criminal brother is against me!—*I'm glad he went to prison!*" she shrieked at the top of her lungs.

She kept this up at such a frenzied pitch that Francis finally breached his cool demeanour. "*Bia, you're a pig!*" he shouted right at her. I hooted loudly as I tended the fire.

She seethed in fury. The veins of her hate-scarred face bulged big as she stood near the tepee flailing her arms. "*I'M GOOD!*" she screamed. "*It's the world that's bad! – IT WILL TAKE ANOTHER HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE A PERSON LIKE IS BORN TO THIS WORLD AGAIN!*"

"—*THAT'S WAY TOO SOON, BIA!*" Francis yelled back. I laughed so hard I nearly fell into the fire.

The following morning Francis and Luc woke early in order to catch first train to Naples. They stopped at my tepee before they left.

"I can't take it any more," he said with a smile. "Ring me when you get to Paris," he said.

"I will," I said. "Take care." They were gone.

'Oh no,' I thought. 'I'm all alone with her now.'

By noon, she started asking about Francis and Luc. But I totally refused to acknowledge her inquiries, let alone her existence. I suppose I was giving her the silent treatment. I simply had no energy for her. She was just like a black hole sucking me dry.

By the time the sun was sinking in the sea my clothes were washed and neatly folded; my body was bathed, my face clean shaven. I was planning to leave the following morning well before dawn.

Bia had prepared some vegetables and rice, then she sheepishly offered me a heaping bowlful. I could feel she was trying to make amends; so I took it. As we ate the food, we started to soften and before too long we were laughing again; especially at ourselves, admitting how totally bananas we were; and it's true. When people take themselves too seriously, they tend to over focus on pointless things. This causes them to bottle up nervous tension, which expresses itself through anger and resentment. To me, life is more like a caring mother. Better learn to relax and trust the mother. Why waste time in harbouring vengeance? As crucial as it is to forgive other people, it is even more important to forgive your self.

Suddenly Bia soon lapsed into a final fit of viciousness. She stood near the fire and pointed to the sky.

"I'm warning you!" she shouted, and looked me in the eye. "If you ever tell anyone or write in your little book that *I was the one who shat over there* – well, next time something bad happens to you—*just remember what I said.*"

We therefore insert the following stipulation clause:

In all due respect to the truth of the matter; and no less so with regard to Bia's hex; we assert the facts plainly, and in no uncertain terms; that, based on the absents of conclusive evidence, it shall neither be assumed, presumed nor in any way inferred that *Bia was the one who shat over there.*

41.

With dawn's first light I shouldered my bag and commenced walking North through the town of Santa Dominica. Shops were not even open yet; but luckily,

a café was. I downed two cappuccinos and continued walking to the northern edge of town. I stood there nearly twenty minutes before I got a ride to the centre of Tropea. From there I walked along the high winding coastal road about 45 minutes until I came to a very sharp bend in the road. This was also right in front of a baron's lavish estate. I stood in the shade of tall eucalyptus trees until a guy in a sea-blue Benz picked me up. He was playing a tape of Augustus Pablo. He took me 10 kilometres to a fork in the road. From there I had to walk along a fast moving highway. It was nearly impossible for a car to stop there. The sun was getting high and the hike was exhausting. Finally, a herd of goats crossed the road which made all traffic come to a halt. A nice old man in a beat up truck gave me a ride. He was on his way to a little town.

"I have to make a delivery," he said. "But if you don't mind waiting, I can take you further down road."

"Fine." I said.

We coasted in quietly across a gravel parking lot. He switched off the engine and pulled back the hand brake. "I'll meet you back here in thirty minutes," he said. "You can have a look around the town." Then he stepped out of the truck and slammed the door shut.

The mood of the place was especially quiet. It reminded me of an off-season hot springs town. I saw poor people standing in a straggly queue, waiting for an out of town bus to arrive. Then I noticed a peculiar looking man. He was standing next to a dusty parked car. He acted as if he were waiting for me. I felt a little strange. A tout? I wondered. It was almost as if I had met the guy before? He seemed familiar. Déjà vu.

I stepped to approach him. He grinned to receive me. His physique was lithe; his face a little sleepy. He patted his pocket. "Hillside herbs," he said, "an excellent hobby." He nodded and turned his head up the road. We walked side by

side along the residential lane and then came to what was formerly the town's main street "...before the new road was built," he explained. The shops were all vacant; a car was hardly seen.

"So what is your interest in Calabria, then?" he asked. "You can ask me anything. I'll cooperate fully."

We walked on further and then turned down an alleyway, which soon fizzled out and we were standing in the dirt. We exchanged a few more casual words, and then he directed my attention to the hillsides "...carelessly resting fallow," he said. "Sketch these," he advised, and then he cryptically concluded. "Avoid human dealings and just sketch these."

He stepped away solemnly as if he were leaving, and walked across a weedy front yard. He passed beneath a tall leafy spruce tree and stepped to the porch of a small plain house. There was a skirmish of sparrows high in the tree, and here and there, the high-pitched rheeeds of cicadas; then the squeak and clack of a screen door slamming.

The driver returned to the truck with a smile. He explained that his customer had given him some money to take me all the way to superhighway, the place from where I imagined I would to hitchhike all the way to Milan (and what a fiasco that would be).

The driver took his merry time along the winding coastal road with its picture postcard views of the sea. But then we slowed to a crawl as we neared the town of Pizzo. It was a market day and the hairpin streets were jammed with all sorts of sellers. In fact, the driver purchased a great big fish right through the window of his truck.

I was deeply impressed by the little august town, aglow in the glory of its heroic past. I marvelled how that venerable fortress had endured uninsulted by the ravaging claws of time. Here was art in its highest form, as signed by the

nameless hand of patina. But was Pizzo a tiny principality, merely? Or, a golden reliquary harbouring ancient myths and puzzles? As we traced our luminous course through Pizzo, I wanted to jump right out and remain there, and relive those myths and solve those puzzles. I would find a room with a view of the sea. I would take cosy sanctuary in cognito. I would rise up cairns on the beaches and the hillsides. I would stalk the cool alleys in the pure of the evening. I would avoid human dealings and dream.

42.

Hitching a ride at the superhighway entrance proved to be an utterly hopeless task. Hundreds upon hundreds of cars passed by; nearly all with northern Italian plates. I stood there with my thumb sticking out for hours determined not to quit; but no one stopped.

I finally decided to cut my losses and began to lug my big bulky bag along the old and hardly used two-lane highway. Well, maybe it was old but it was very well paved, and when the rare car or truck ever *did* come by it was flying so fast that I risked getting clobbered as it shot by swooshing up a cloud of dust. I walked and walked for hours on end. I was going a bit mad from the heat of the sun, but I didn't seem to care. I just kept walking. I didn't even try to stick my thumb out any more. I possessed neither a map nor the slightest idea where I was even going. The only thing I knew, I was heading north. Beyond that, I didn't really care. I was thinking of my journal. How to bring it to conclusion? I needed something strong to affect a resolution. In this way, the self-inflected penitential trek is but the sculpting installation of poetic movement, a systematic implement of plot resolution chanced upon while foraging the ending of an episode.

I was running still on the morning cappuccinos. Their lightness afforded me a persevering buoyancy. I walked for miles without a thought in my head. Eventually delusions of power assailed me, and I thought about walking all the

way to Milan—and beyond. Then came surging waves of pain. These were not so much physical as they were ontological. I tried to look them square in the face. 'Okay,' I thought, 'Maybe the situation *is* getting pretty bad; but something this bad can't last forever. Ten more minutes or ten more hours—sooner or later relief has got to come—but then the situation could also worsen—Even so,' I thought. 'It is simply unfounded to think that pain can go on forever—how scary to think that. What could such a notion possibly be based upon?' Now I think I know. The fallacy of memorized pain is what it is based on; the wrong-headed notion that every single episode of human hardship amounts to an insidious damage quotient. Don't believe it. Bemoaning the present is in no way analogous to an emotional scar per every moment rued. 'But are you sure of that?' — 'What, you would rather imagine this whole bazaar as a grand infringement on your inalienable right to not to endure hardship?'

In any case, cogitations such as these were probably what kept me from dropping dead as I continued my tramp beneath the boiling sun. I focused so intently on the pain-in-itself that the body took care of almost everything else. I was actually having a splendid time.

Now and then cars stopped, but always of their own accord. They were always so polite in asking me if they kindly could give me a ride. They were local people so the rides were very short, but it was nice to have a bit of relief from the sun. I remember one man had very good air-conditioner. It was on so strong I was freezing to the bone. What relief to be out in the blazing sun again.

I found the scenery dull around there. I was missing the sea already. There were quite a few of those big agricultural business ventures around there with sophisticated overhead sprinkling systems and American tractors ploughing endless furloughs. The final guy who picked me up, though, gave me a rather confused look. I suppose he figured I was crazy or something to be walking alone under the sun like that. He would take me to Lamezia Terma, he said. "You can

get a train all the way to Milan there." I told him that I actually wanted to hitchhike. Then he raised his palm in disbelief. "Come on" he said. "Italian trains are cheap!" But when I meted out the 60,000 lira for the ticket, I reflected how the sum was nearly equal to the whole of my Calabria expenditures.

43.

The quiet town of Lamezia Terma was nearly at the end of its long siesta as I strode in purified by my morning penance. It was a tiny town with pellucid air. It boasted a broad and well-paved street that was lined with palms and carved stone benches. The colour scheme was stunning. Sun-faded yellows and desert-browns as heaven-sent gifts to soothe my soul. It was just the sort of town that the writer Knut Hamsun would likely arrive to unannounced, and then proceed to forge havoc and mysterium for their own sake. He would definitely have like the shaded square and the simple stout houses painted pale-red. It was an ashram town and it made me think of India; elders leaning out over second-floor banisters.

I looked at my ticket and remembered it was a Friday. It was Friday afternoon. The streets were cooling. By six p.m. there was a festive air in the square. The local chapter of the Communist Party was sponsoring youth athletic competitions. Groups of men hung long red banners across the street as trophies were displayed on a linen-covered table. There was beer on sale in the garden too. The gleeful sounds of children were amusing, moved by the wind as it passed through the trees near the fountain where girls cast furtive glints and whispered into each other's ears.

The train was packed full of Italian holidaymakers returning to their workaday lives up North. I sat on a tiny fold-down stool and leaned against the wall for most of the night.

At daybreak, I witnessed the approach of Milan with its clamorous motif of industrial density. I had torn myself from the peace of Calabria. These were quite two different countries, indeed.

Arriving to the busy Milan Central Station, I was desperately fagged and starving for food. I still had bread from the night before but I needed more than that. I left the station to see what I could score.

The immediate up-town business district was both uninhabited and bleak. As I walked along an avenue I came upon a heroin addict sitting on a blanket in front of a closed office building. He was a long, spindly, blonde-haired figure with gaunt grey face and a smouldering cigarette distending from his lips. His eyes were closed but his head kept nodding slowly down then up again. His résumé was scribbled on a torn piece of cardboard. CZECHOSLOVAKIA – NO MONEY.

In spite of its architectural opulence, the whole vicinity of Milan Central Station possessed a depraved and seedy appearance. Directly in front of the station itself was a curious, unkempt and half-planned park. It was the only place with shaded grass to spread a cloth and eat my food. Then I stretched my body and took a little snooze. Before too long the sun was shining in my face. I decided I had better go and check the train schedules. As I stood, I noticed a plastic syringe half hidden in a clump of grass near nettles. I reflected how the user had courteously stuck the point of the needle into the earth. Glancing about the immediate area, I saw many more of those disposed of fixes together with their packaging, torn and littered.

I checked the timings of various trains and found one for Athens at eleven p.m. — Okay, it was settled. I would pass through Yugoslavia down to Athens, sleep one, and try to Van Holden on the phone. If he wasn't on Crete, I would fly back to Bangkok.

45.

I gave long reflection to the barren park directly in front of Milan Central Station. The presence of the park was the cause of the station to suffer a sort of constipated fear. In spite of the station's Fascist grandeur, there was only one toilet for public use. This was reached by climbing a narrow flight of steps, at the top of which sat an eagle-eyed woman behind a table with stacks of coins.

Everything mimicked a state of high anxiety directly symptomatic of the occupied park. It appeared in command of its own sovereign enclave; an open forum for the cult of the ransomed; its rituals and protocols prefiguring the spectre of a lawless, savage time to come. There was a certain Hellenic drabness about the place. The air itself reeked of mutilated irony. A derelict pigeon with soot-stained feathers fluttered at the base of the broken fountain. Missing one foot, it hobbled across the pavement with forceful rubbings to inflicted bone.

Yet the rough-edged lines of the scary little park grew bolder still as the night drew near, and as its celebrants languished in the vehement logic of striking poses in the neo-realistic style. As I netted random glints with a hand-held lens and accompanying scrawls on outcast parchment, my head was besieged with the sound of scissors and the image of a writing like the making of a film where the movie in the brain bears weight on the knave who solemnly seeks to expose it to his audience.

For what, after all, could one wish to conceal? One's baited scripts, one's idiocies, one's hammered-down subtext of lurking taboos; one's secret wars

where the press ain't invited and human rights are beside the point? One's ice-cream cones?

Pasolini, Pasolini, your nation stumbles without you.

The last sinking rays of sun vanished slowly. My train was to leave in a couple of hours. I would enter Slovenia by the darkness of night and pass through Belgrade the following afternoon. I would cross through Macedonia the second night and arrive to Athens that following morning.

I was terribly exhausted from the night before. My mind became fatigued and disparaged... Will this capricious movement never come to rest, this compulsive lust to all the time be moving, like a hostage without ransom, like a ticket that explodes, like the maenad-hounded Orpheus?... But is it passion's attraction or fear's pursuit?

I suddenly recalled an extraordinary passage from the writings of de Sade; that baffling, fey, psychological equation that had always escaped my comprehension. Until, that is, the evening of the day I spent hanging out at Milan Central Station.

The primary and most beautiful of nature's qualities is motion, which agitates her at all times; but this motion is simply the perpetual consequence of crimes, it is conserved by means of crimes alone.

Thus, fear is the primary crime of nature, who targets virginity and creates this world, variously known as you and me. But there is no real punishment aside from the crime, which is fear-itself, and which can only occurs in time. This is how fear manifests as nature, which is thought (which is time), the motion of the mind. Thinking is the agitated consequence of fear.

Now the up shot to this is that the whole of this opera, this asylum of the world, which is nothing but the mind, comes encased in its own imponderable mystery. However, unlike time-fuelled anxiety and fret, the mystery contains

neither object nor direction. We are all of us essentially karmic convicts whose confinements terminate only when the thoughts do. Thus human existence is essentially thought as likened to a bogey in pursuit of itself.

There is no other way to resolve this equation. When fear is no longer, neither are you.

I looked up from my notebook it was 10.55. Yikes!—*My train!—It's leaving in 5 minutes!*

I shouldered my bag and darted up the long flight of stairs toward the open terminal. Throngs of people lingered about kiosks full of beverages, bonbons, sandwiches and magazines. I suddenly remembered that I still had some lira so I stopped and quickly got a bottle of water. I continued swiftly toward platform 9 when I suddenly spotted an ice-cream vendor. Wow. I stopped and pointed to some flavours. "GRANDE!" I told the guy—"PRONTO, PRONTO!" Then I threw a large bill at him and I looked toward the train. It was starting to move. "*COME ON!*" I shouted, but he dallied with the change so I dashed off without it and jumped onboard in the nick of time.

I was pleased when I finally found the window seat. I was sharing the compartment with a single French girl and three lovely Africans—a mother travelling with nubile daughters. But first things first, that pillar-tall ice-cream, which I avidly consumed in their awestruck presence.

The motion of the train made us all feel cosy. It was already late so we switched off the lights and locked the door. Everybody managed to stretch their legs out, to cover themselves with blankets and doze. I gazed at the lights out the window for a while, then switched on a reading lamp and pulled out my notebook. It was time to log my final reflections and bring this Calabrian Journal to its end.

Endnotes

¹ For more on the relation between the Rom and India, see the present writer's "Doms - The Original Gypsies" section of *Mystical Eroticism*
<http://www.sritantra.co.uk/me/me.htm>, yogasritantra, 2001-2006.

ⁱⁱ Utsuwa. *Hostages in a World of Color*. Mini disk. Tokyo: Kakure Records, 2002. Lyrics by Recluse and Utsuwa

ⁱⁱⁱ Utsuwa. Lyrics by Utsuwa.

^{iv} Compare Lee Perry, "I am a Madman." On *Battle Of Armagideon (Millionaire Liquidator)*. Album. UK, 1986. There is another version with Mad Professor. 12 inch single. UK (1986).

^v Honey was even frowned upon because beehives were normally man-made contraptions and the honey was therefore stolen from the bees.

^{vi} Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1964: 264-6).

^{vii} Eliade, *ibid.*

^{viii} Eliade, *ibid.*

^{ix} Eliade, *ibid.*

^x H.G. Quaritch Wales, *The Mountain of God: A Study in Early Religion and Kingship* (London, 1953: 43-5), has tried to show how the earliest form of "simple animism" was grounded in the perception of the sacredness of earth. Later this primordial animism evolved to a "religion of sacrifice" and man made supplications to his vastly amorphous divinity-as-nature. Still, according to Wales, in want to establish a site of sacredness where sacrificial offerings were transmittable to divinities living in alternate cosmic zones, 'one chose certain places to rise up a mound of earth in order to concentrate in it all the latent energies of the periphery.' In primordial societies every territorial unit has its own particular earth divinity corresponding to the group of people living there. It so occurred to Wales that originally a natural hillock would have been chosen as the site to represent the great earth goddess, and around this the town would have grown up. Not only a mound, but a tree as well was required to represent the spirit of the soil, as animists feel that the place where a well-grown tree has survived is the point where the fecundating energies of the earth are concentrated. Now, "sacred mounds" are not only seen as concentrations of nature's mysterious potencies, but as "centres" (mandalas) as well; that is, focal points symbolic of the Cosmic Pillar, or "axis of the world" as the means by which ones sacrifices were ably transmitted to divinities abiding in alternate cosmic zones.

Mircea Eliade in his *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1964: 220), perceived such mounds as prototypical mandalas functioning simultaneously as "image of the universe" and "manifestation of the divinity." But mandalas serve a third function as well, as the "receptacle" for the gods. He furthermore reminds us that

in Vedic India the gods descended into the altar... [T]his conception was extremely widespread [...] existing beyond the frontiers of India and even of Asia; the symbolism of royal cities, temples, towns, and, by extension, every human habitation was based upon such a valorisation of the sacred place as the centre of the world and hence the site of communication with heaven and hell.

^{xi} Apparently, the Iriadamant had borrowed the Tibetan term *tulku*, literally, "transformation body."

^{xii} Utsuwa. Lyrics by Utsuwa.

^{xiii} Rome, incidentally, had ceased to be an option. I had phoned Ploy's mother that same afternoon and all I got was her voice machine. "I am now in Lugano," was all it said.