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Nigredo

by

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fig i
Melencolia
Albrecht Dürer, 1514



“That is perhaps what we seek throughout life, that and nothing more, the greatest possible sorrow so as to become fully ourselves before dying”.

Celine. Journey To The End Of The Night

INTRODUCTION

People through finding something beautiful
think something else unbeautiful
Through finding one man fit
Judge another unfit
Life and death, through stemming from each
other seem to conflict as stages of change
high and low as degrees of relation;
But since the varying tones gives
music to a voice and what is, is
the was of what shall be,
The sanest man
Sets up no deed
Lays down no law
Takes everything that happens as it comes
as something to animate, not to appropriate,
to earn, not to own,
to accept naturally without self-importance
If you never assume importance
you never lose it".

Excerpt: The Way of Life
according to Lao Tzu

Witter Bynner

Alchemy is the art of transformation. The work of the alchemist is to bring about succeeding changes in the material he operates on, transforming it from a loathsome, unrefined state to a perfect and purified form. To turn

“base metal to gold”

is the simplest expression of this aim and at a physical level this involves chemical operations.

The profusion of alchemical texts is astonishing as are the discrepancies between them and the cryptic nature of their utterances. But all this and the fact that no two writers on the history of alchemy ever agree with one another I will not get involved in, I will instead concentrate and hone in on one small element but what is regarded as the ‘pivotal’ stage in the physical alchemical process, the ‘Nigredo’.

Despite its importance in the process, printed information specifically on the subject proved hard to find, my research involved having to wade through a profusion of alchemical texts and indexes in each of which only a few pages or paragraphs on the ‘Nigredo’ were to be found.

The importance of alchemy for the historical development of chemistry is obvious, but its cultural importance is still so little known that it seems almost impossible to say in a few words wherein that consisted. In this thesis therefore, I have attempted to outline the spiritual and psychological dimensions which are germane to the theme of alchemy, with specific reference to the Nigredo. The point is that the Nigredo is rather an undercurrent to the spirituality and psychology that rules on the surface. As the base material worked upon and the gold produced may as readily be understood as man himself in his quest to perfect his own nature.

“They say it is something which exists everywhere in nature, but is generally regarded as worthless, it has a body, a soul and a spirit; it grows from flesh and blood; it is made of fire and water. It is a stone but it is not a stone, unknown yet known to everybody, despised and yet unimaginably precious, coming from God but not coming from God”.

(Cavendish, Richard. “The Magical Arts” .1984. p.149)

The Nigredo, the initial death and blackening of material is the essential first step on the road to creating gold, as in the opening quote, it is the unbeautiful which makes us aware of the beautiful, it is the decay involved in the Nigredo phase that subsequently makes us appreciate the beauty of gold. Thus I have attempted to outline in the opening three chapters of this thesis the Nigredo as a discipline which can be translated into:

1. Physical life
2. Spiritual Life
3. Psychological life

and if any of these elements are taken out of context and said to represent the significance of the alchemical process then the wholeness and true quality of alchemy in relation to man, it should become apparent, is lost.

The illustration of this process I had always intended to do through examining the work of an individual artist. Deciding on the choice of artist, however, proved to be no easy task. Numerous artists, I began to research including Avis Newman, Shirazeh Houshiary and Anselm Kiefer. The Nigredo which is only a very small but essential stage in the alchemical process it seems is treated in a similar fashion by these and other artists. The Nigredo it could never be said is the central issue of their works, but its relevance in an interpretation of their ideas, it could be argued, is of pivotal importance.

These artists had all one thing in common in that I had seen their works within a three year period in the Douglas Hyde gallery, Dublin. On meeting the director of the gallery and the writer of the catalogue essays on all three forementioned, John Hutchinson, I finally decided to focus my attention on the Japanese artist Toshikatsu Endo.

Toshikatsu Endo I chose on the basis that the simplicity of his work allowed for a concentrated reading of the subject of Nigredo in his process without being out of context with his imagery. Endo's work I felt

best illustrated the triple (physical, psychological, spiritual) nature of Nigredo.¹

Endo's work though posed one very basic problem - unlike the other artists he never mentioned alchemy in any context, thus the opening chapter on the artist explains how many critics, and the nature of his work, link him to it quite easily. The Nigredo, it should become apparent provides a new level of interpretation in relation to Endo's work (my research into Avis Newman and Anselm Kiefer in particular became very enlightening and enabled me to decode more easily Endo's sculptural forms).

As black leads to white in the alchemical process the natural conclusion and objective of this thesis should become obvious, that is, things get worse before they gradually get better; or, it is conflict which makes us become conscious of peace.

I feel it appropriate at this time to state that religions world-wide are based on such ideas of purgatory. My own spiritual background in right-wing Protestantism with its philosophy of being suspended in a moral suffering with Christ in order to reach divinity, will soon be realised and become apparent due to my many biblical references. But religions beyond Christianity are based on similar concepts; attainment "of the yonder shore" beyond the fathomless sea of suffering, it is in other words the struggle for, Nirvana², and when I refer to God it is only because of my own spiritual background and could as easily be Buddha³ etc., as all religions seek this one goal (nirvana), to be transcended from earthly impurity to heavenly perfection - our Nigredo will eventually become

¹ Whereas Kiefer concentrates on the physical, Newman on the psychological and Houshiary the spiritual, Endo's work simultaneously it could be said embodies all three.

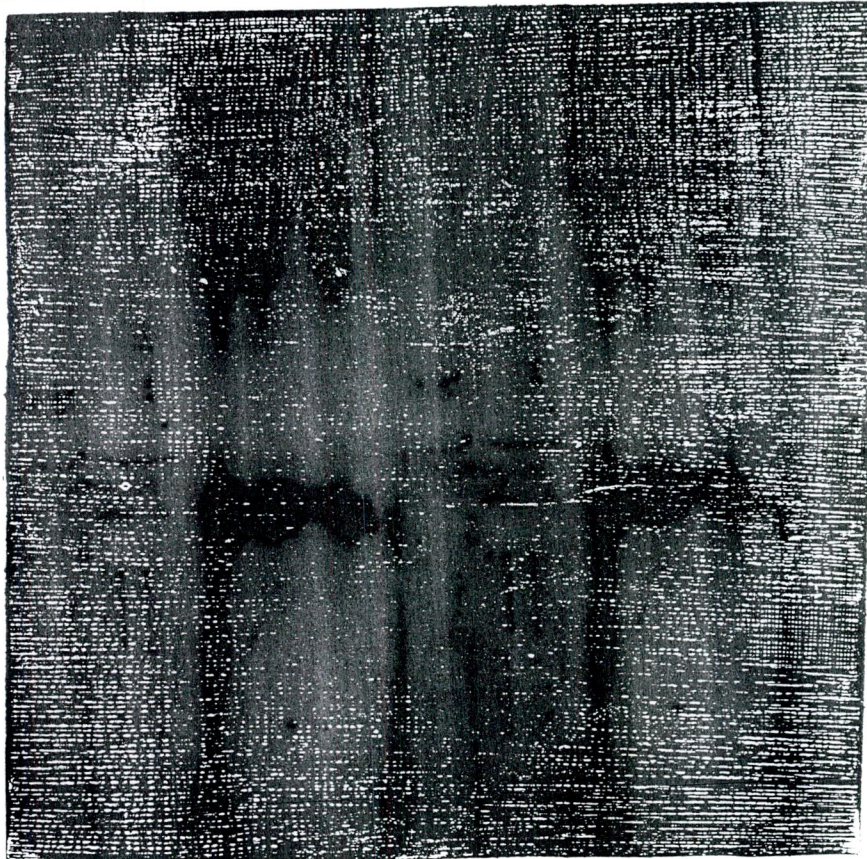
² Nirvana; which means dying to this "life" of birth and death and hence dying to "death" in its essential sense, is a "life" in its essential sense. Or again, if the essence of being-in-the-world be taken as a "being-into-death" (to adopt a term from Heidegger) the Nirvana points to an essential conversion away from it, a breaking through this being-into-death.

"As a taking leave of this essential cycle of birth-and-death, nirvana is a rebirth to true life. It is new life. And here, for the first time, true infinity appears".

(Nishitani, Keiji. 1982, pg 177)

³ Buddhism in particular I will refer to due to Endo's religious background, as a similar concept to nigredo is contained in Buddhism - "Sunnyata".

“the philosophical garden in which our sun rises and ascends”
(Jung. **Psychology and Alchemy**. 1989, pg 238)

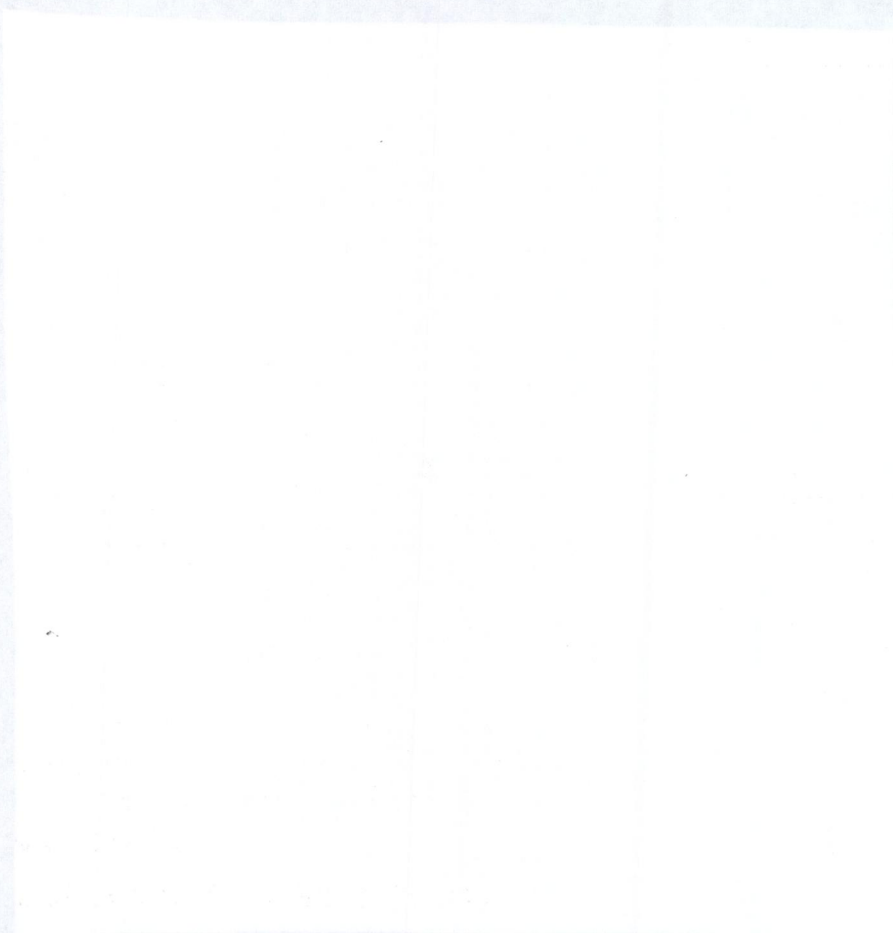


168.

Et sic in infinitum

fig ii

Nigredo: 'Black' Death and Putrefaction
Et sic in infinitum



CHAPTER 1

Physical Nigredo

"I have accomplished the action of descending the fifteen steps towards the darkness and the action of ascending the steps towards the light.

The sacrifice renews me, rejecting the dense nature of the body. Thus consecrated by necessity I become a spirit ... I have suffered unbearable violence. I have been dismembered with a sword. My bones have been mixed with my flesh and burned in the fire of the treatment and so through the transformation of the body, I have become a spirit ... I build a temple as of white lead, as of alabaster, having neither commencement nor end in its construction. Let it have in its interior a spring of pure water sparkling like the sun . . .

Take a sword and find the narrow opening which is the entrance to the temple. A serpent lies at the entrance, siege the serpent; kill him, flag him and use his body as a step to the entrance. You will find what you seek, the man of copper has become a man of silver and if you wish will become a man of gold"

The Dream of Zosimos

A Gnostic Graeco - Egyptian Alchemist

Panopolis 300 AD

(Cavendish, Richard. "The Magical Arts" .1984. p.164)

My reason for opening with this dream is because it helps show at first hand the obscure nature of the whole phenomena known as the alchemical process. In this process there was the alchemist who saw the varied degrees of perfection in metals going from lead, the most impure, up to gold. He then set about freeing these impurities and transforming the impure to a higher state which all existence naturally aspires to - this aspiration being described as the 'Lapis' or 'gold'.

As the dream explains, this process was not some easy path but rather was accompanied by pain and suffering (sacrifice). The initial destruction of a 'body' of metal by intense heat in the 'athanor' (alchemical furnace) is the reduction to the prima materia; that is the first moment of creation, when everything was a formless indeterminate

mass. According to alchemical doctrine, the much sought after rebirth is always preceded by a return to the source of Life

“that from which a thing is naturally made through that same thing it must return again and be dissolved and broken up into its own nature . . .”

(Fabricus. Alchemy. 1989. pg.17)

The prima materia was a dead featureless mass from which all characteristics had been extracted including colour, black being regarded as the absence of colour. First matter can only be described in contradictory terms - it has no qualities or properties. First matter is what is left when all the characteristics of an object have been stripped from it. Hence when metals were melted they lost all individual characteristics and became liquid. They were said to be 'prima materia' and could now be transformed.

(The alchemical belief in the ability to transform came from Plato and Aristotle's theory of the four elements, fire, air, water and earth. All creation, it was believed, came from these four elements, and the difference between materials was a result of the different proportions of each of these elements combined within it. The theory therefore was the essential belief of the alchemist because it permitted the possibility of transformation i.e. if gold is a mixture of the four elements all other metals are mixtures of the same four elements in some different proportion. By changing the proportion in the mixture through heating,

cooling, drying and liquifying all other metals through this process could too become gold) ¹

The initial phase of this alchemical metamorphosis is seen where the primal material is broken down and the elements set in conflict with each other, in order to reach a harmonic relationship, two opposite elements are combined in a closed retort and subjected to heat - a new synthesis a 'conincidentia oppositorum' can occur. This in the dream is the "dismemberment with the sword" - the outward form is destroyed by fire or special acidic preparations. Sometimes this is described as setting the two dragons at war with each other Fig (iv). Thus the male and female principal of the matter was released and can be reunited in a stage often depicted as the marriage of King and Queen.

Through initial conflict and division, energy becomes available, a source of fuel for the entire operation. Further treatment of the substance in the vessel by heat leads to its 'death' a moment which signals the onset of the first stage of the process known by the adept as Nigredo: called the black crow, ravens head, black sun and symbolised by a dead and decaying corpse, a black bird, black man or slaughtered King. Fig (v).²

The Nigredo is the critical first plateau of achievement, as the dark, darker than darks, this black of blacks is the first sure sign that you are on the right path. This initial stage is said to be filled with:

"pain, rage, killing and putrefactions, matter is destroyed, and opposites dissolve into the liquid Nigredo"
(Rosental, Kiefer. 1987, pg 127)

The phase is announced by the alchemist as the return to pre-cosmological chaos, massa confusa Fig (vii), it comes before the moment

¹ Gold as we shall see, was said to grow from base materials within the earth, the alchemical transmutation was therefore a speeded up process of evolution.*

² Reference: Cavendish. The Magical Arts. 1984, pg163

of rebirth, perfection or redemption, it is the darkest point before the light. Behina Knapp whom Mircea Eliade quotes, describes it as:

“the blackening process comparable to chaos, the massa confusa that exists before separation of the elements, it is a state in which matter is reduced to an almost liquid condition or has become a quality of prima materia”

(Gilmour. *Fire on Earth*. 1990, pg. 32)

The vapour given off during purification hovers over the material in the vessel. It penetrates the first matter, animates it and creates the embryo which will grow into the Lapis. Black and decomposing as it was the putrefying first matter was potentially the marvellous stone and the alchemist took the words of the Song of Solomon a reference to it,

“I am black but comely, o ye daughter of Jerusalem”

(Songs of Solomon. Chpt 1:5)

The whole alchemical process is built upon the Nigredo; all nature is renewed after dying and that in order to sustain life an organism must first die.

“except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit”.

John. 12:20.

The seed when in the earth died and only when it rotted did it release the life principle which caused the new growth (the scene depicted on the death card in the Tarrot). Richard Cavendish tells us that in the Middle ages it was always accepted that some life resurrected from all death:

“frogs were generated from rotting mud, bees and other insects from the mouldering corpses of animals, wasps from dead asses, beetles from horses, locusts from dead mules etc.”.

(Cavendish, Richard. *“The Magical Arts”*. 1984. p.164)

The Nigredo stage could be described as the night time, the blackness which after being endured is proceeded by dawn the second stage in the process known as “Albedo” or white. Once the blackness has reached rock bottom it is connected with a feeling that something is breaking through. It is signified by a move to the ‘spirit’ which has been

extracted from the matter and reforms the whole work. Empathy emerges from the pain and despair consciously suffered. The white Albedo will be followed by the culmination of the process "Rubedo", reddening or sunrise. Only when our eyes are opened from darkness do we appreciate the dazzling light of a new day. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, there is a much deeper spiritual and psychological correlation encoded in this transformation of base metals to gold. But regardless of what level you read into the process the aim was the same as the physical act to make what was loathsome become beautiful:

"- the secret or unknown, natural incomprehension, heavenly, true, more certain than certainty itself, the arcanum of all arcana - the divine virtue and efficacy which is hidden from the foolish, the aim and the end of all things under heaven, the wonderful epilogue of conclusion of all the labours of the Ages - the perfect essence of all the elements the indestructible body which no element can injure, the quintessence; the double and living mercury which has in itself the heavenly spirit - the cure for all unsound and imperfect metals - the everlasting light - the panacea for all diseases - the glorious phoenix - the most precious of all treasures - the chief good of nature".

(Gilchrist, Cherry. Elements of Alchemy. pg 6)



fig iii

"Gilding the Queen in a Hermetic version of the Zeus-Danae myth: a violent coitus filling the love object with lumps of gold"





fig iv
The Prima Materia as the dragon, being fertilized by the Holy Ghost



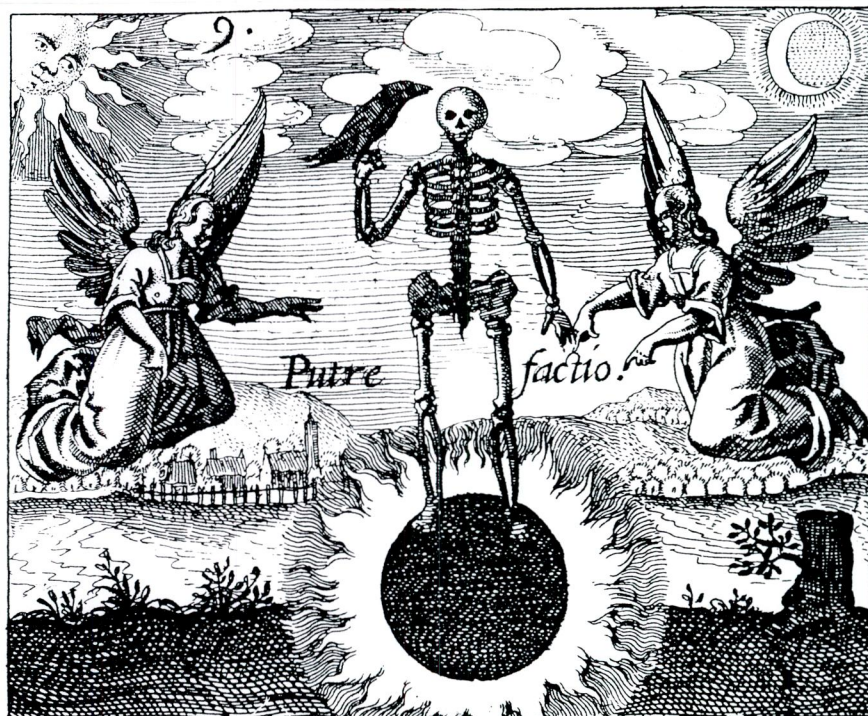


fig v

The Nigredo: eclipse of Mercurius senex, exhaling the spiritus and anima.
The raven is a nigredo symbol.

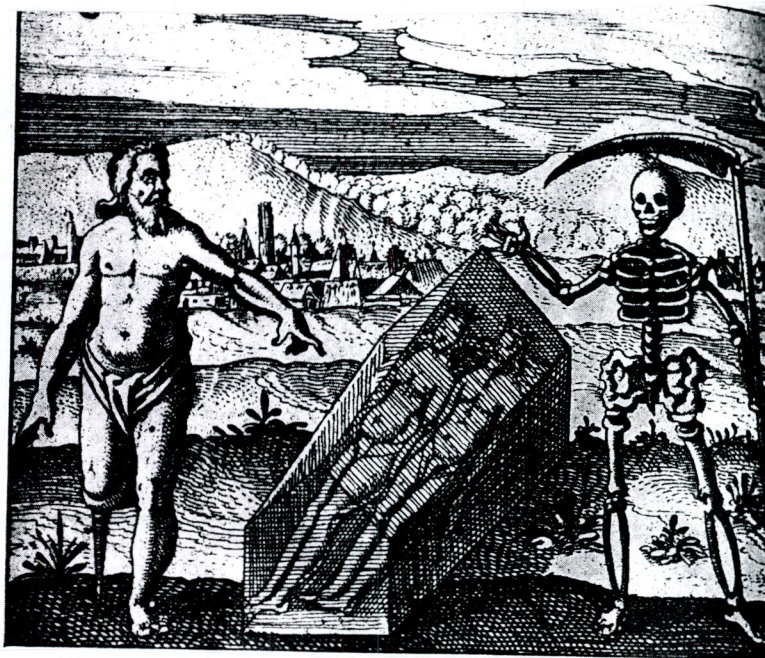


fig vi

Mortificatio, or nigredo and putrefactio: Sol and Luna overcome by death after the
coniunctio



CHAPTER 2

Spiritual Nigredo

"For at the first time when thou doest it thou findest but a darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing, thou knowest not what saving that thou feelest in thy will a naked intent unto God. This darkness and this cloud, however thou dost, is betwixt thee and thy God, and hindereth thee, so that thou mayest neither see him clearly by light of understanding in thy reason, nor feel him in sweetness of love in thine affection and therefore shape thee to bide in this darkness as long as thou mayest, evermore crying after him whom thou lovest, for if ever thou shalt see him or feel him as it may be here, it must always be in this cloud and in this darkness".

(Cloud of Unknowing. 16:19)

"To be in the cloud is a wonderful grace of God yet here one sometimes suffers greatly one suffers because this cloud is an impediment an obstruction as something which keeps the contemplative away from God whom he loves and wants to see. It is suffering too because the natural faculties want to be active; they crave knowledge and deprived of their object, left without clear knowledge of God or creature they suffer".

(The Book of Privy Counsel. 171:22)

In these writings which are the foundation and core, which form the backbone of the orthodox Christian doctrine of purgatory, ie. pain and suffering building a bridge towards Christ, we see how the ancient adepts describe how we only know what we have once it leaves us.

"the divine darkness is the unapproachable light in which God is said to dwell".

(The Book of Hidden Divinity. 3:16)

Alchemical process and religious mysticism have many ideas in common. It can be closely related to certain ideas east and west, in myths and rituals associated with these traditions, the value of gold is its purported capacity to provide a universal remedy for ills; to serve as the elixir of immortality. Gold in other words in the alchemical process is the promised resurrexit after suffering, the eventual escape from the

labyrinth of death and destruction (Nigredo). Although in hermetic understanding all prima materia grows to gold in due course and man himself will evolve towards greater consciousness as part of a natural process, yet the change is usually too slow for individuals to perceive and experience: alchemy seeks to accelerate this change and bring about the possibility of completion within a personal lifespan. The alchemical process hence translated as a spiritual discipline is concluded on the basis that everything contains body, soul and spirit. From its earliest recorded history, alchemy has contained all the ingredients necessary for a discipline that is to be practised within one's own being as well as in the laboratory retort. The physical alchemist's aim is to free the soul and spirit of matter and to reunite them with the body in a new and exalted form. Alchemy of the spirit puts the greatest efforts into the illumination of man himself and many regard such physical and tangible results as of a secondary nature.

The Nigredo translated in spiritual terms lays the emphasis clearly on the role of contemplation within the alchemical work and tends to draw on religious and philosophical teaching. Man is made in the image of God and contains the seeds of soul and spirit within him¹. These are to some extent imprisoned in the body. In order to release them that they may grow to perfection he must summon up the will and intention to start the work and make the initial effort to dissolve this apparent unity. As Gershom Scholem when observing the similarity between alchemy and religious mysticism wrote

“only when the soul has stripped itself of all limitation and in mystical language has descended into the depths of nothingness does it encounter the divine”.

(Jason. Anselm Kiefer, Catalogue, Douglas Hyde Gallery.)

¹ There has always been the belief dating as far back as the Garden of Eden that with in every man lays a spark or remenant of God, a spark of the divine has fallen from paradise and is imprisoned in all existance and that it is only through experience of darkness that we can once again become aware of the light.

The light within is associated with the holy spirit in Genisis where the life principle, the divine air was breathed into Adam by his creator.

The alchemical operation was explained as the mystical path through which the individual could become one with Christ. As in the act of Nigredo the fire that heats the material is like the

“furnace of affliction”

that Jesus had to pass through when he was rejected and insulted by men¹. When a stone falls on the sun it only causes it to burn more brightly, this is the spiritual significance of pain and suffering.

“What is pain?” asks Heidegger.

“Pain indeed tears asunder, it separates yet in such a way that at the same time draws everything together, to itself”.

(Taylor, Mark. *Disfiguring Art*. 1992, pg 278)

Hence the conflict induced between the warring elements in the alchemical vessel was an emblem of the activity of nature itself, without conflict there could be no movement, no difference between created beings and no motivation to bring about change and improvement.

This nothingness is comparable to the moment known as “Tsimtsum” in the Jewish doctrine of the Kabbalah, a moment when God withdrew into himself and left being to create the earth. The alchemical Nigredo when interpreted on such a spiritual level could also be said to suggest that God has left (the void of blackness), this unavoidable lack is terrifying for all who desire the presence of fulfilment on the arrival of salvation.

Descending into the depths of nothingness is comparable to the darkness and near death of Nigredo which is paralleled in life by difficulties and pain strewn along our path. But like the Nigredo which we have just examined in the physical alchemical process these difficulties when interpreted on a spiritual level are there for a purpose, in fact they are the essential quality of life; as only after darkness can the

¹ Alchemy - the art of fire, though goes even deeper than this, for we may infer the Hebrew and Christian position that fire is the sign of God's presence. Throughout Biblical references God manifests himself to man as fire eg. the burning bush - Moses; the pillar of smoke by day and fire by night to the children of Israel etc.

illuminosity of a light be once again fully appreciated or alternatively when living in darkness we can look and be guided by the light.¹

Hence the human experience of purgatory makes, according to William Johnston, the saints in heaven rejoice, though sometimes bitter to men it is pain which leads one to God as the near extinction of Nigredo leads to Albedo in the alchemical process. This is what made St. John of the Cross sing

"O night that guided me, O night more lovely than the dawn"
(Johnson, William. **Mysticism of the cloud. 1978, pg 53. Religious Experience Vol 8)**

If the Nigredo is comparable to purgatory then we could say it is the true example of knowledge by negation.

"For unceasing and absolute withdrawal from thyself and all things in purity, abandoning all and set free from all, thou shalt be bourne up to the ray of divine darkness that surpasseth all being.

(quote from Dionysius)

Here we may infer a spiritual condition in which the soul is dark from the lack of knowing and that if we are to feel in experience the presence of him that is above all things, the contemplative must abandon all knowledge in order to enter the darkness where God is, a state comparable to the 'Sunyata' of Zen Buddhism.

(Nishitani. **Religion and Nothingness. 1982)**

Hence it could be said that the human experience of Nigredo on one level could be our abandonment of conceptual knowledge allowing the mind to become dark so that through experience God may pierce the darkness with ,

"a beam of ghostly light filling the contemplative with an intense and inexpressible joy, knowledge and love".

(Johnston. **The Cloud of Unknowing. 1978, pg31)**

This abandonment of knowledge is comparable to many tribal practices. Take for example the Huicol tribes of Mexico. Their main ceremony or prayer offering called "Nierka" involves a death which

¹ Aivanhov, Omram Mikhaél. *Spiritual Alchemy*. 1986, pg 62

results in a spiritual rebirth - the hunter seeking the sacred deer. At the climax of their ceremony a member leaves the sacred ritual to enter

“the night of his vision”

as he dances alone, another female worshiper leaves to find him in the darkness. The two encounter each other in a wide meadow and she finds herself being lifted onto the shoulders of the man. As they dance she feels herself transformed into a slain deer. At the moment of her symbolic death she is released. As she lets go of all prior knowledge a great “Nierka” (vision) appears to both the slayer and slain, as

“together they become one spirit as they travel through the portal of visions”

(Halifax, Joan. *The Wounded Healer*. 1992, pg70)

If we take the Nigredo as comparable to the absence of God

“our experience of the divine is our experience of desertion”

(Edmond Jabé, Taylor. *Disfiguring Art*. 1992, pg 78.)

as that good makes us aware of evil

“as the shadow continually follows the body of one who walks in the sun”

(Jung. *Dreams*. 1982, pg 270)

hence it is only by spiritually dying and losing God that we come to acknowledge him, this spiritual Nigredo is hence our means of transcendence. We could conclude that light doesn't dispel fear but rather as Patricia Bickers concludes in the opening essay of the Avis Newman catalogue (“Vicious Circle” pg15) that light and dark are

“held in uneasy suspension between no thing and something”

Edmond Jabés conclusion was that

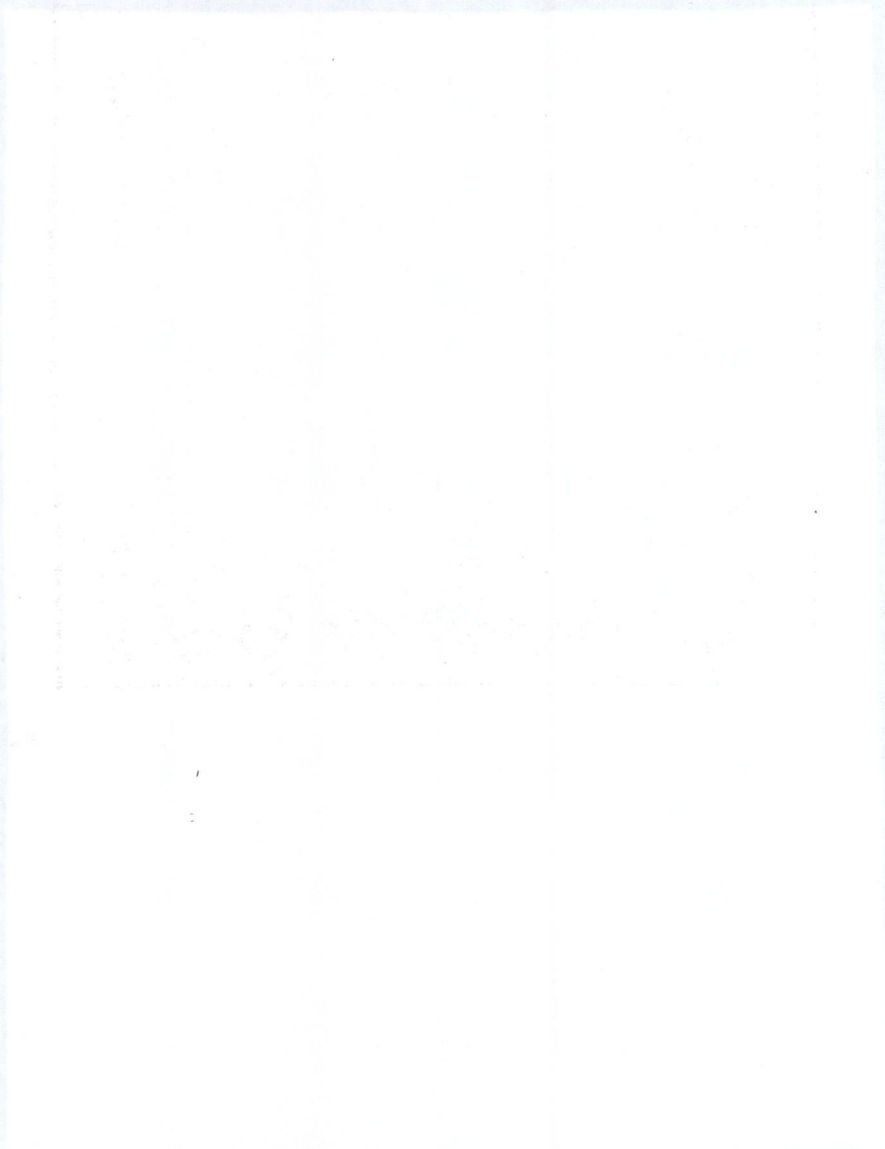
“true knowledge is the recognition that in the end we know nothing”

It is what in Sufism is termed “Isthmus” in that it is only because of the existence of the horizontal that we become aware of the vertical, from matter we become aware of spirit, from the human the divine, from the

manifest the unmanifest. In our experience of Nigredo our "Isthmus" is the juncture where light begins to metaphorically grow as a result of darkness.



fig viii
 Magic powers of a solified emperor: 'From the dead he makes a living.'



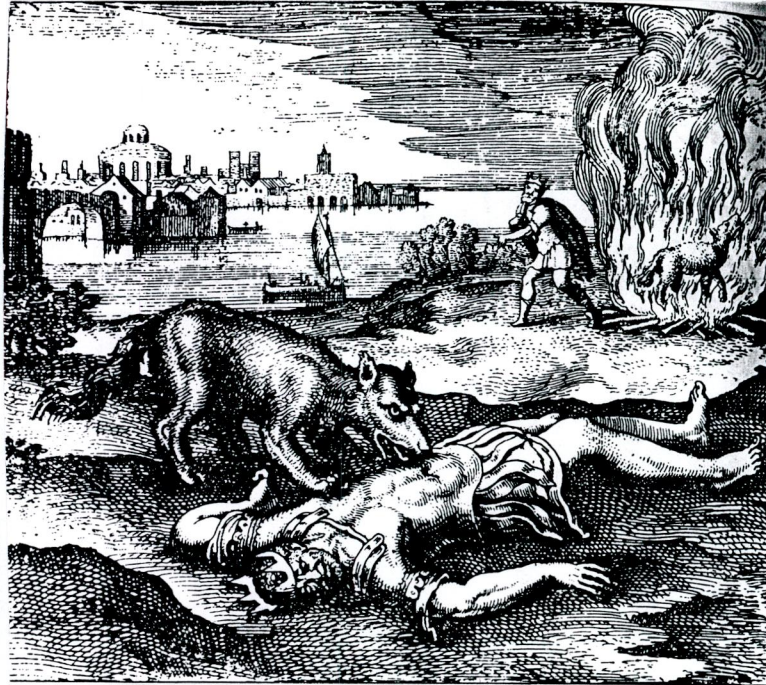


fig ix

The wolf as prima materia, devouring the dead king. In the background, sublimation of the prima materia and rebirth of the king.



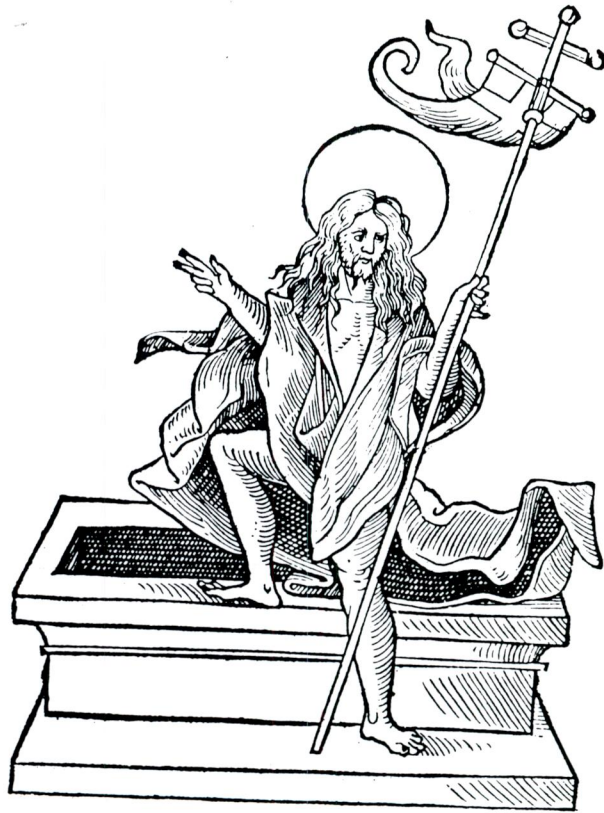


fig x
The Risen Christ as symbol of the filus philosophorum.



CHAPTER 3

Psychological Nigredo

"obscurum per obscuris, ignotius per ignotius"

(the obscure by the more obscure, the unknown by the more unknown)

"The psychology of the alchemist is that of reveries trying to constitute themselves in experiments on the exterior world . . .

Alchemical gold is a reification of a strange need for royalty, superiority and domination which animates the animus of the solitary alchemist.

. . . the dreamer does not want gold for some distant social use but for an immediate psychological use to be King in the majesty of his animus"

(Bachelard. The poetics of reveries. 1971, pg 72-73)

The alchemists, as they laboured with serious efforts to discover the secrets of chemical transformation, whilst still grappling with the problem of matter when their exploring consciousness collided with their unconscious were confronted by the dark void of the unknown (chaos); identical with the putrefaction and dissolution of the impure metal; the descent into the Nigredo acquired in the symbolic language of the adept the parallel meaning of an act of regression into the maternal depths of the psyche,

"the reflection of a parallel psychic process which could be projected all the more easily into the unknown chemistry of matter, since that process is an unconscious phenomenon of nature just like the mysterious alteration of substances"

(Jung. Psychology and Alchemy. 1989, pg 34)

"now we know that cosmogonic myths are, at bottom, symbols for the coming of consciousness - the dawn state corresponds to the unconscious, in alchemical terms it is the chaos, the massa confusa or Nigredo; and by means of the opus, which the adepts liken to the creation of the world, the Albedo or Dealbatio is produced, the whitening which is compared to the full moon or sunrise. It also means illumination, the broadening of consciousness that goes hand-in-hand with the work.

(Jung. Aion. 1991, pg 148)

Laws which were perceived and attributed to matter belonged instead to the unconscious. Thus the alchemists arduous mining becomes a symbol for their penetration of the crust of consciousness and for their discovery of the treasures hidden beneath it in the darkness of the unconscious.

“everything unknown and empty is filled with psychological projections, it is as if the investigators own psychic background were mirrored in the darkness, what he sees in matter or thinks he can see, is chiefly the data of his own unconscious which he is projecting into it. In other words, he encounters in matter as apparently belonging to it certain qualities and potential meanings of whose psychic nature he is entirely unconscious.
(Jung. *Psychology and Alchemy*. 1989, pg228)

Although, as Jung himself tells us, part of the unconscious can to some extent be assimilated into the conscious personality, there are many features which offer resistance to the individuals moral control and as a result are impossible to influence. These resistances are usually connected with the act of projection. The projection by the alchemist of himself into matter is not recognised as such, as Jung says

“The recognition of projection is a moral achievement beyond the ordinary”

(Jung. *Aíon*. 1991, pg 9)

(it is this fact which makes projection an experience of the unconscious)

“projections change the world into the replica of one’s unknown face”

(Jung. *Aíon*. 1991, pg 9)

Thus the alchemist began to become psychologically the piece of metal in the vessel,

“know says Ripley (an ancient alchemist) that your beginning, should be made towards sunset and from there you should turn towards midnight, when the light ceases altogether to shine, and you should remain ninety nights in the dark fire of purgatory without light. Then turn your course towards the east and you will pass through many different colours”

(Jung. *Aíon*. 1991, pg 149)

Carl Jung attempted to elucidate the symbolic structure of the opus alchymicum and in so doing he shed light on the developmental process that goes to construct the individual or human personality;

- the individuation process

“what the symbolism of alchemy expresses is the whole problem of the evolution of personality, the so called individuation process”

(Jung. *Psychology and Alchemy*. 1989, pg 34)

Jung formulated this

“I hold the view that the alchemist's hope of conjuring out of matter the philosophical gold, or the panacea or the wonderful stone, was only in part an illusion, an effect of projection; for the rest corresponded to certain psychic facts that are of great importance in the psychology of the unconscious. As is shown by the texts and their symbolism the alchemist projected what I could call the process of individuation into the phenomena of chemical change”.

(Jung. *Psychology and Alchemy*. 1989, pg 482)

Interpreted in terms of the individuation process the Nigredo symbolises the bout of profound depression occurring in the middle age. According to Jung, the prima materia may be conceived as a symbolic expression for an initial psychic situation he terms

“the meeting with the shadow”

Jung has termed this strange change that occurs in the unconscious during mid-life “lebenswende” a term which translated heralds the beginning of the second part of life. Fig.xii.

“By sacrificing the ego's mundane goals and accepting what comes, the individual is acknowledging dependence on something beyond the ego, which lives in and through him”

(Storr. *On Jung*. 1990, pg 88)

Individuation undertaken normally in mid-life is initiated by the self regulating principle within the mind when the “animus” (masculine, intellectual) is dominant. As a way of restoring psychic balance individuation involves a reconciliation with the “anima” (feminine,

emotional). The process frequently coincides with conflicts, which can only be resolved with an attainment of a new level of consciousness, or as John Hutchenson puts it¹

“the subordination of subjectivity to a higher goal”

individuation being the search for wholeness and totality that each individual aims for. Positive and negative impulses are brought together, conjoining consciousness and unconsciousness, matter and spirit, intellect and intuition.

Anthony Storr makes a statement that

“alchemy is also a metaphor of embryo genesis . . . indulging in a form of compensation . . . to emulate the female capacity to create life”

(Storr. 1990, pg 229)

at this point the true disciple understands and decides to change - like the scorpion when confronted by death - he inflicts the death wound on himself. Dying to the world below in order to be born to a new spiritual level of consciousness:

“The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego - personality for no-one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort, to become conscious of it involves recognising the dark aspect of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self knowledge, and it therefore as a rule, meets with considerable resistance:

(Jung. Aíon. 1991, pg 149)

Whereas the contents of the personal conscious are acquired during the individuals life-time, the contents of the collective unconscious are invariably archetypes that were present from the beginning. The most accessible of the archetypes and the easiest to experience is the shadow:

“where despicable parts of the self had to be confronted and integrated”

(Storr. 1990, pg 235)

¹ “Jason” Anselm Kiefer catalogue for the Douglas Hyde 1990.

The realisation that one's sun has reached its zenith and in the future will sink and finally disappear does not come easily to man - it is attained only through the harshest of shocks. The profound psychological transformation accompanying the onset of the second part of life influences the ego which propels the individual into a depressive reaction, where he is overtaken with darkening moods of dejection and hopelessness.

One figure who it could be said psychologically embodied the 'shadow' was Franz Kafka. A diary entry in October 1921 when he was 38 years old describes how he felt

"I don't believe people exist who's inner plight resembles mine; still, it is possible for me to imagine such people - but that the secret raven forever flaps about their heads as it does about mine, even so to imagine that is impossible"

(Sharp. The Raven Conflict. 1980, pg 49)

In alchemy as we have seen, the raven is a symbol for the Nigredo Fig. xiii, which here corresponds psychologically to the shadow, or rather the encounter with the shadow which manifests itself initially as depression. Jung comments:

"the alchemists called their Nigredo melancholia, a black, blacker than black night, an affliction of the soul, confusion etc., or, more pointedly the black raven"

The principle of the art according to one alchemical text is

"the raven, who flies without wings in the blackness of the night and in the brightness of the day"

(Sharp. The Raven Conflict. 1980, pg 49)

The alchemists raven "flies without wings" so in a sense it is grounded. Kafka's raven flaps about inside his head (looking for attention) forever of the ground. Kafka's image of the secret raven manifests the shadow -

"that portion of a man's psyche which roots him to the earth and draws new strength from below"

(Sharp. The Raven Conflict. 1980, pg 50)

The shadow, out to bring Kafka, like others down to earth but instead is up in the air. Psychologically in the most simplest terms Kafka's conscious was at odds with his unconscious. He was said to embody the Saturnine characteristics - he was depressed, he knew despair, felt heavy and helpless, he suffered and experienced life as a prison.

The individual is in the womb¹ fully turned in on himself and he undergoes the mystical death identified by the adept with melancholy, a state of helpless dejection. By following the lure of his restless unconscious psyche, he finds himself in the wilderness, where like Jesus he

“comes up against the Son of Darkness”
and prays

“Horridas nostrae mentis purga tenebras, accende, lumen
sensibus”

(purge the horrible darkness of our minds, light a light for our
senses)

(Jung. *Psychology and Alchemy*. 1989, pg 482)

The regression and introspection is often so slow and deep that it seems to turn into a profound death-like depression, where desolation and dismemberment are felt as actualities,

“self knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently
requires much painstaking work extending over a long period”

(Jung. *Aion*. 1991, pg 149)

The adept is in a state of spiritual rot in which the spirit or spark of life abandons the body and soul. He has to surrender to the destructive aspect of existence where extraction of the soul and the black, blacker than blacks is felt (Sharp. 1980, pg 48) where fear of disintegration, hollowness, fragmentation and dissolution of the ego is experienced as equivalent to the mortification and putrefaction of the Nigredo phase. Johannes Fabricus claims that

¹ The departure from the light world of ordinary waking conscious associated with suffering and death takes many forms. In Japanese Buddhism this process from conscious to unconscious is termed “tainishuggó” exercise within the womb.

"alchemical Nigredo symbolism provides the answer to the mystery of the imagined 'unmentionable crime' of the psychotic depressive"

(Fabricus. Alchemy. 1989, pg 103)

Jung when drawing a parallel between alchemy and psychoanalysis wrote

"It is better indeed to discover behind one's lofty ideals, narrow fanatical convictions, all the more cherished for that and behind ones heroic pretensions nothing but crude egotism, infantile greed and complacency. This painful corrective is an unavoidable stage in every therapeutic process"

(Cavendish, Richard. "The Magical Arts".1984. p.161)

As Gaston Bachelard says regarding nocturnal life,

"there are depths where we bury ourselves, where we have the will to live no longer. In these depths we brush intimately against nothingness our nothingness"

(Bachelard. Poetics of reveries. Pg 5)

In our decent into the static depths of the psyche, into the darkness of our soul, the painful return to the source of life, where consciousness itself is burrowed into; to reveal the repressed material of the unconscious where we are compelled to pay attention to sadness and mourning, precedes a reconstitution; recovery and like the alchemical Nigredo leads to a renewed awareness, or as Kafka wrote in one of his "reflections on sin, pain, hope and the true way"

"Man cannot live without an enduring trust in something indestructible in himself. Yet while doing that he may all his life be unaware of that indestructible thing and of his trust in it, that something indestructible"

(Sharpe. 1980, pg 66)

this is in psychological terms what Jung called "the self".



fig vii
Chaos.



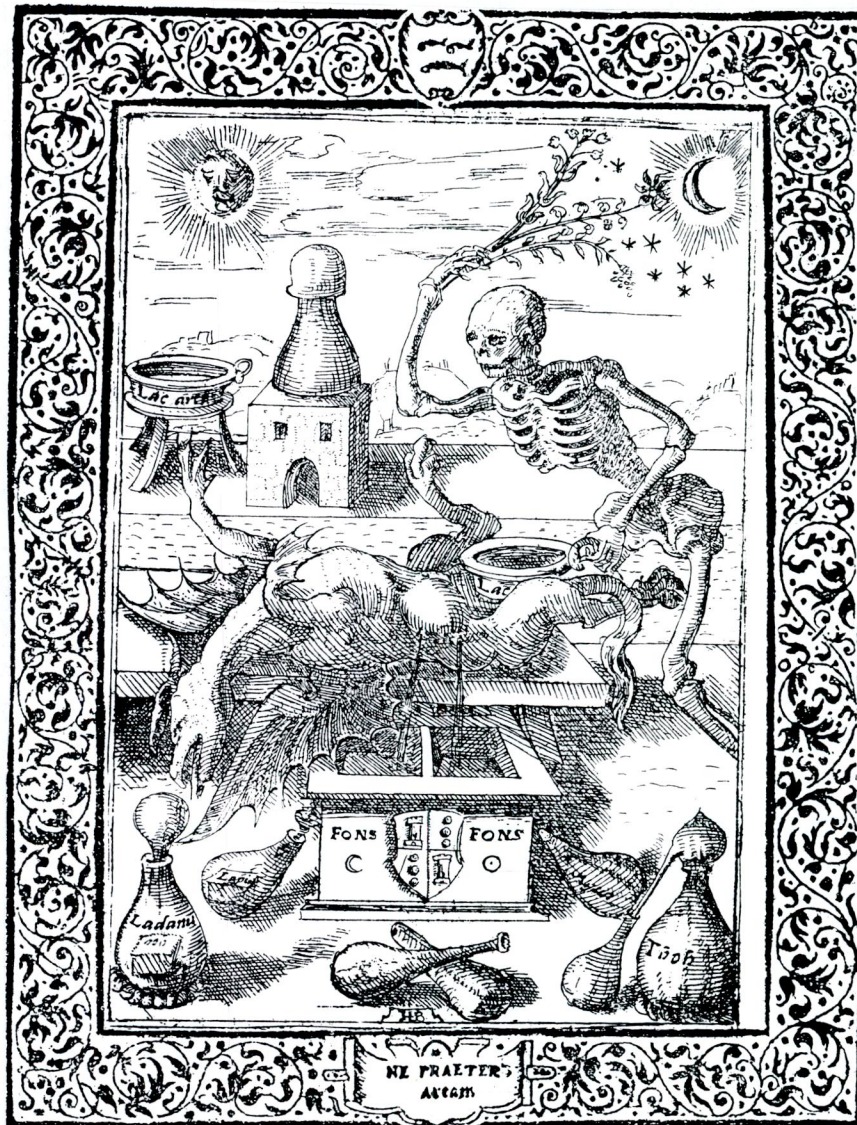


fig xi

The Hermetic conquest of Death: psychological integration of the death trauma.



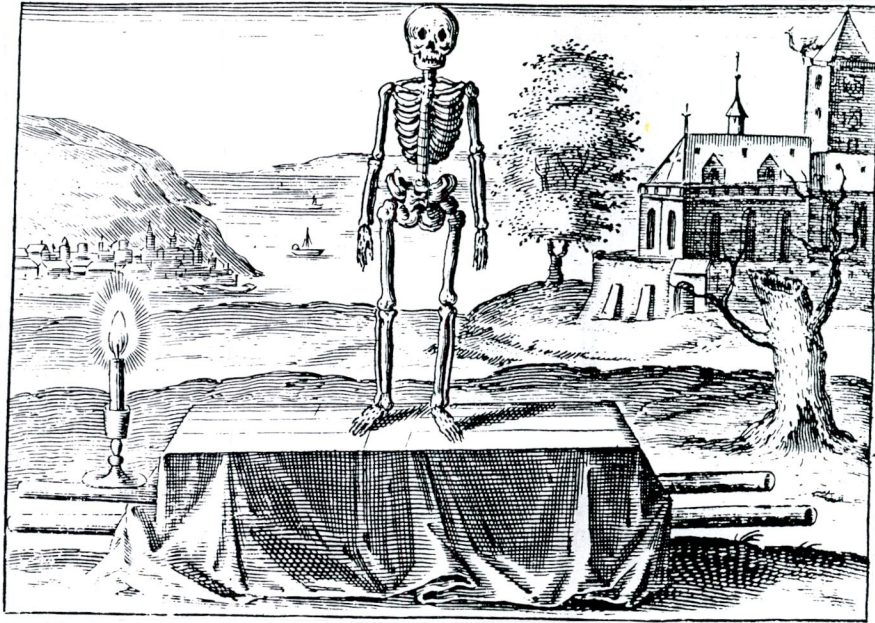


fig xii
Blackening of the sun at its zenith: 'In the midst of life we are in death'.



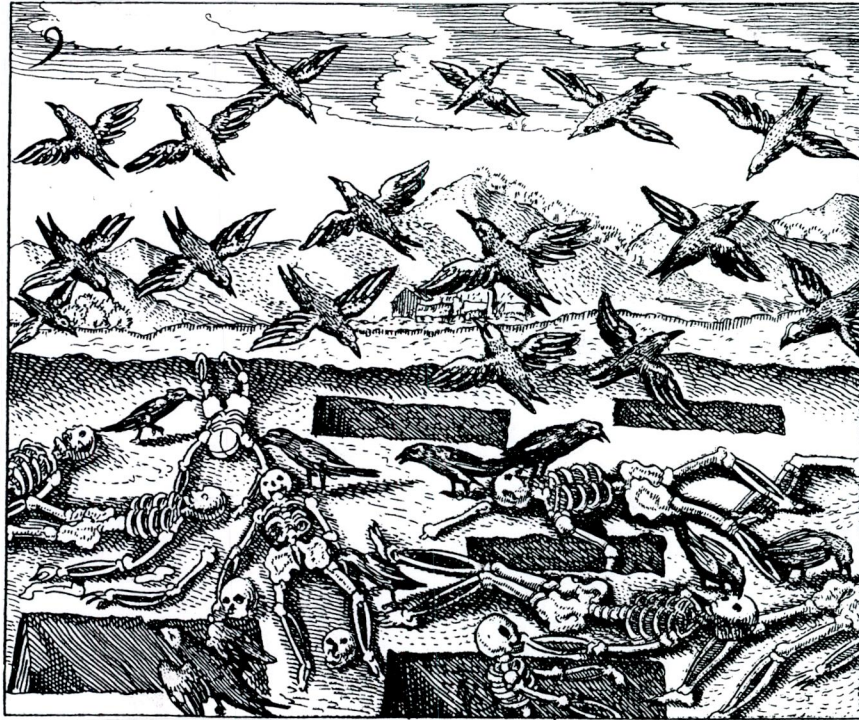


fig xiii

Fears and horrors of the damned: the stench of graves and putrefying corpses.



CHAPTER 4

"Pleroma"

The relevance of Nigredo in the works of Toshikatsu Endo

Fire,

"the ultra living element. It is intimate and it is universal. It lives in our hearts. It lives in the sky. It rises from the depths of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up like hate and vengeance among all phenomena it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in paradise. It burns in hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse. It is a pleasure for the good child sitting prudently by the hearth yet it punishes any disobedience when the child wishes to play too close to its flames. It is well being and it is respect. It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad. It can contradict itself, thus it is one of the principles on universal explanation".

(Gaston Bachelard. The Psychoanalysis of Fire. Pg 7)

Toshikatsu Endo is a young Artist born in Japan (1952). The bulk of his works consist of circles, squares, cubes and rectangles. These simple forms are reminiscent of minimalist art, however this similarity does not extend to his material nor does any means of formal analysis give us any understanding of the work. This minimal quality as I will attempt to outline later is also to a certain degree bound up with Zen Buddhist concepts which permeate Japanese culture and Endo's work, ie. the removal of extra and unnecessary material in order to achieve essence. He works mainly in wood, often combining it with water and usually subjecting it to the ravages of fire, thereby effecting transformation both in his sculpture and more importantly in the way we perceive it. His work it could be said has no parallel - it is constructed on an inner ideology bound up with existence.

From reading magazine articles and artists statements, the impression given is that there is nothing light-hearted about Endo, nor

the spiritually charged sculptures he creates. Somehow the works look like cult objects rather than sculpture made by an individual artist, but Endo himself is the first to admit this

"My works are not markedly individual in appearance. They are not the result of a desire to express my individuality rather I feel that they are something more universal"

(Interview with Endo. A Primal Spirit. pg 49)

The works though contain a brooding energy, a harsh sublimity, a quiet beauty and would appear on first contact to be based around the Japanese idea of Shibui:

"the state of unadorned elegance and refinement that is attained by a conscious redirection of the forces of nature"

(Earth = Air ≠ Fire ≠ Water. Douglas Hyde Catalogue)

ie. Bonsai, cutting roots of plants so by this purgatory they are kept small and beautiful.

Toshikatsu Endo it must be pointed out never makes any overt references to the alchemical state of Nigredo. Unlike other painters such as Anselm Kiefer. Kiefer portrays an obvious alchemical vision - his works are a catalyst for change¹. I would argue however that Endo's sculptures, his rings ^{Fig XV}, barrels ^{Fig XVI}, coffins and hallowed logs ^{Fig XVII} arranged like some archaeological artefacts or offerings in some pagan ritual immediately assume some association with Nigredo in all its forms as corruption for regeneration seems to be his metaphor while fire his idiom and as Mark Rosental says pg 109

"an alchemist must be someone who can master all four elements, most especially the secret fire in which a substance is placed to be transformed"

It is this which makes John Hutchinson conclude

"Endo's thinking is aligned with the tradition of alchemy"

(Earth = Air ≠ Fire ≠ Water. Douglas Hyde Catalogue. pg 8)

In alchemy, as we have seen, opposite elements are brought together and combined. When subjected to heat, a new synthesis is achieved. The Japanese critic Fumio Nanjo when writing about Endo's

¹ Anselm Kiefer even titled paintings in the mid eighties - 'Anthanor', 'Nigredo' etc.

work in the exhibition catalogue for the Nordic Arts Centre, Finland, concludes

"all stories related to man have come into being due to man's natural imperfection. Our lives are spent in eliminating this imperfection, the aim being to merge with the universe, the final goal being the humble ecstasy of death, people admire unions that try to abolish imperfections, marriage that is the union of man and woman, peace that is the union between states, friendship, a bow to God.

The ultimate and extreme form of union is nothing other than losing oneself, it is death, destruction.

(F. Nanjo. Nordic Arts Centre Catalogue. pg 28)

all this achievement of synthesis, union of opposites which is the basis of alchemy is clearly suggested by Endo's work when one approaches it on the basis of his own writings and commentaries, as John Hutchinson writes

"for although he does not directly refer to the alchemical theory either in its medieval form or in Jungs psychoanalytical commentaries the parallels are obvious".

(Earth = Air ≠ Fire ≠ Water. Douglas Hyde Catalogue. pg 13)

Endo himself makes some comments which could be interpreted by an informed mind as references to alchemy. In his statement titled "On Hollowness" he compares this hollowness to the eye of a hurricane which

"accelerates the boundary centre into a furnace of transformation"

(On Hollowness. Exhibition catalogue for Contemporary Sculpture in Japan III)

the furnace of transformation as we know is the alchemists 'Anthanor'. One drawing entitled "to Circle" 1991 represents this notion. ^{Fig XIX}

It should follow that through exploring Endo's interest in the fundamental elements and his own physical manipulation of matter the degree to which he himself and hence his art can be identified with the alchemical state of Nigredo and the alchemist. This then provides us with the platform from which Endo believes he has the power to

‘transmute’ through examining Endo’s energetic alteration of matter, how through burning and cauterising his sculptures etc. Endo just doesn’t depict the alchemical state of Nigredo, but it could be claimed, quite literally becomes an alchemist. Endo, like the alchemist attempts to work the materials of the earth into new formations all the time exploring the physical cum spiritual nature of his matter suggesting that material is merely a transitional state on the road to transcendence, in which he acknowledges and hopes for a reunion with the divine. Although Endo like Anselm Kiefer believes that transformation must in the end take physical form, a rift in their alchemical visions occurs as Endo would appear to be much more aware of the not-always overt psychological dimensions involved in Nigredo. Psychic transformation is very deeply embedded in Endo’s process and hence is a major constituent in his role as transformer. This could be explained by Endo’s religious background in Zen Buddhism as unlike Kiefer, his divine or absolute would be within, where as Kiefer attempts to deal with what is outside and beyond himself. It could be claimed Endo in his work to some degree marries the spiritual and psychological Nigredo to the point where they almost become one. Endo enacts the Nigredo simultaneously on three fronts.

The most obvious of Endo’s linkages to the Nigredo; the blackness of his burnt and scorched sculptures caused by the ravages of fire (dictionary translation of the word Nigredo), could be described as similar to the works of Avis Newman as the charcoal seems to absorb the light unmerifully ^{Fig XX} and as one alchemical writer says of the colour black,

“There are four principal colours the first of which is blackness, and it is of all the colours the most tardy in making its appearance.

The time during which this blackness is developed is very long and so is the time during which it disappears. But it is for only one moment that the blackness neither increases nor decreases. For things find rest only in what is in the end of their being. But blackness is not the need of our substance.

The advent of blackness is like the coming of the night which is preceded by a long twilight when the last ray of light has faded away, the blackness of night has come, only our work is more tedious and the change is therefore still less perceptible. The colour which appears must be an intense black. My answer is that the tincture which is extracted is as a matter of fact, not black but a dazzling white and that the blackness is produced gradually, through the action of the water on the body out of which it draws the soul (the tincture) thus giving the body up to decomposition. It is this putrefaction which imparts to the tincture its black colour, in itself the tincture is brilliantly white."

(Philalethes. From a Brief Guide to the Celestial Ruby. 1989, pg 207 - 209)

If Endo's cauterized blackness is like Nigredo which in the end will be brilliantly white it doesn't destroy but purifies; his fire of destruction also magically revivifies as John Hutchenson describes it in relation to Endo's work,

"new understanding is ushered in through scorched portals"

(Earth = Air ≠ Fire ≠ Water. Douglas Hyde Catalogue. pg 13)

Endo's use of fire fulfills as burning only makes wood more resilient, hinting that the sculptures such as the majestic yet solemn epitaph Cylindrical II ^{Fig XXI} which seems to contain energised nothingness will actually last longer than ordinary wooden forms. On a symbolic level Fumio Nanjo claims they will last for eternity existing beyond time. "Fire on the Earth " was the theme adopted by Kiefer to reflect his ambivalence towards fire possessing positive and negative aspects. The land that once supported life is scorched but like the "strun and brand"¹ means of agriculture this apparent negative destructive manifestation of fire, like Endo's turns into positive cultivation as the land is made more fertile

"all flesh that is derived from the earth must be decomposed and again reduced to the earth which it formerly was; then the earthly salt produces a new generation by celestial resuscitation"

(Fabricus. Alchemy. 1989, pg 98)

¹ An agricultural method, where the vegetation is burnt but from this destruction the ash enriches the soil and new growth is made possible.

At the same time black which as a colour is ultimate and absolute imposes on the works a spiritual tension. Endo himself says of his use of fire to blacken

"I never think about bringing out the life in wood, rather I use it as a substance to its fullest extent and in the end I often burn my works to complete them"¹. Fig (XXii) (Xxiii)

I think of this final burning as a form of burial, marking the completion of a work, it is as though I'm holding funerals all the time, burning the wood feels cruel, like burning a sacrifice. It is a somewhat sadistic act, but at the same time a holy one".

(Endo. A Primal Spirit. 1990, pg 55)

"I learned about removing, superfluous elements. The removal of unnecessary elements makes a given form more powerful . . . after everything is removed only the absolute remains".

(Endo. A Primal Spirit. 1990, pg 55)

Further examples of this burning include Allegory II which looks like some coffin that resisted destruction on some funeral pyre. The scorched black surface of the wood creates beauty which is simple and serious and it is this which causes many critics to discredit Endo's work as "Natural Romanticism" but like the alchemical Nigredo Endo's process is not complete. His transformations will never be concluded as traces of the operation are present ie. charred wood smells of tar and burning.

The scene is one of devastation, a nothingness, a void (Sunyata). Endo's sculptures although vastly different in appearance to that of Anselm Kiefer's it could be argued are similar on one level; in that they are both obsessed with absence, as absence implies presence, something having once been there, which is better than never having been there at all. But Endo's works unlike Kiefers do not represent the desert - rather they are the sites of desertions.

¹ This burning of the works is usually done with ceremony out in nature sometimes on a lake, in a forest or on top of a mound of earth. This ceremonial event is always private.

Endo's use of the Nigredo in this respect reflects its spiritual and psychological aspects in the quest of its salutary powers. As Edmond Jabé writes

"You do not go into the desert to find identity but to lose it, to lose your personality to become anonymous you make yourself the void. You become silence. The real silence is death and this is terrible".

(Taylor. 1992, pg 207)

The implied desertion in Endo's work brings to mind one piece in particular by Avis Newman; "Birdbox" ^{Fig XXIV}. The title implies that a bird might find a home through the hole. The truth though is that the bird would find its way barred by invisible sheets of glass and even if it were able to pass through the hole it would find itself just as homeless on the other side - in permanent exile. To Edmond Jabés the desert and experience of exile were equivalent to "effacement and silence, death and void". True knowledge he believed

"is the recognition that in the end we know nothing . . . the nothing is also knowledge being the reversal of all, as the air is reverse of the wing".

(Quoted by Richard Stamelman. Jabé Reader. pg XIV)

The work then rather than representing natural romanticism, instead gives the impression that something is always slipping away, always missing beyond history, beyond myth. Endo like Kiefer pursues or is pursued by something other that is neither near nor far, neither immanent nor transcendent. Never present without being absent, this beyond is what Endo's sculptures struggle to represent. To Edmond Jabés it was this act of questioning not the search for answers, that contained the promise of openness and redemption. Could the ash and charred wood that remained be translated as being similar to the ash found on Kiefer's painting, that is the last trace of some immemorial disaster and as Maurice Blanchot writes concerning disasters:

"The disaster ruins everything all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch anyone in particular. I am not threatened

by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me - or other than I who passively become other. There is no reaching the disaster. Out of reach is he whom it threatens, whether from afar or close up, it is impossible to say the infiniteness of the threat has in some way broken every limit.

We are now on the edge of disaster without being able to situate it in the future: it is rather always already past, and yet we are on the edge or under its threat, all formulations that would imply the future - that which is yet to come if the disaster were not that which does not come that which has put a stop to every arrival".

(Taylor. 1992, pg 292)

Endo, I suggest, similarly to Avis Newman believes the act of creation is quickened by darkness and then the subsequent need for atonement. His sculptures may promise an experience of self loss; like the Nigredo, a return to the primordial darkness that covered the world before God created light. Endo's Nigredo then I suggest wants disappearance to come forth, as Maurice Blanchot writes:

"the work requires death; the source, to be in the work,; it demands that in the ending which initiates all beginnings swell up as the essence of all swelling all unfurling and flowering"

(Blanchot. Douglas Hyde Avis Newman catalogue. pg 23)

The critic Fumio Nanjo concludes of Endo's work that

"We are dealing here with a unique kind of primitive ritualism which has been part of art throughout history . . . it embodies a firm belief in Arts ability to convey something that is common to us all".

(Nanjo. Nordic Arts centre Catalogue. 1989)

Endo's work then like the spiritual and psychological Nigredo is what I would term the universal search for wholeness which is recollected in our minds, for as Endo himself says it may be called anything we please:

"God, absolute zero or divine but we all strive to achieve some higher gold, god or beauty".

(Endo. "On Fire". Nordic Arts centre Catalogue. 1989)

The projections made by Endo into his matter are never in anyway clearly hinted at but such personal issues are irrelevant as all that need by interpreted is the achingly profound sense of absence

coming from his dealings with Zen Buddhism and its ideas of Sunyata. Sunyata proposes a new set of 'meanings' fabricated solely out of 'nothingness' and the courage of desperation. I would interpret this emptiness or void as a direct co-relative with Nigredo in all its forms as Buddhism's removal of the unnecessary to achieve essence is comparable to the decent into blackness. It reminds us of what ancient Zen traditions call:

"life inside the Black Mountain or living in the Demon's Cavern"
(Nishitani. *Religion and Nothingness*. pg 33)

Endo himself states that the purgatory inflicted on his work (like that of Nigredo) is his desire to fill this emptiness, void:

"My desire to work as an artist began from a certain sense of absence a feeling of something lacking. Then the act of making these works has something to do with complementing the sense of absence".

(Endo. *A Primal Spirit*. 1990, pg 49)

Endo's work like the alchemical seed dies in order to live, like the turning black in Nigredo is a step towards white, as he says

"when a place becomes dense (black) a vertical light appears on that spot"

(Endo. *A Primal Spirit*. 1990, pg 49)

Endo then it could be said

"suffers a wound that will never heal, the menacing proximity of a vague and empty outside a neuter existence null without limit, sordid absence a suffocating condemnation where being ceaselessly perpetuates itself as nothing"

(Taylor. *Disfiguring Art*) 1992, pg 269)

and as Carl Jung writes of nothingness:

"I begin with nothingness. Nothingness is the same as fullness. In infinity full is no better than empty. Nothingness is both empty and full. As well might ye say anything else of nothingness, as for instance, white is it, or black, or again, it is not, or is it. A thing that is infinite and eternal hath no qualities, since it has all qualities. This nothingness or fullness we name *pleroma*. Therein both thinking and being cease since the eternal and infinite possesses no qualities".

(C.G.Jung. *VII Sermones and Mortuos*)

CONCLUSION

A Klee painting "Angelus Novus"

"The angel of history's face is turned towards the past where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awake the dead and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise: it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress".

(Benjamin. *Illuminations*. 1968, pg 257 - 258)

As death and darkness descend on a paradise which was formerly lit by golden vision, the eternal youth becomes the skeleton. This 'single catastrophe' we may conclude is comparable to Nigredo expressed in its most powerful symbol, that of the 'black sun' (sol niger), light is extinguished as the universe turns cold and lifeless. Wreckage piles upon wreckage and the conclusion you would assume is complete destruction but as we are told, this experience is what we call 'progress'. In the state of Nigredo when blackness seems to push matter to the point of extinction its this apparent destruction which will be our means of moving forward. Although like the angel, the matter may have no control and be in a state of impotent exile, in a condition comparable to the heavy sloth of depression, we will recede from this numbness and quiet despair, leaving it behind.

"like scorched earth in order to start anew, a flame rising from the ashes"

(Kuspit. *New Subjectivism Art in the 80's*. 1988, pg 109)

In every process we must learn to expect that everything gets worse before it eventually gets better, the darkest point comes just before the light, we must learn not to be like the legend of Orpheus, who descended to Hades to fetch back his dead wife Eurydice. The Gods of

the underworld granted to give Eurydice her life back on the condition that Orpheus not look back to see her, in other words not seek confirmation of renewal until the journey was done. He had to trust, to let go of fear. Unable to do so Orpheus failed and lost Eurydice forever.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica)

In the act of Nigredo we are aware of absence and we hope our loss can be made good, for we should know that in the times when nothing was happening our world was truly beautiful. If we submit to the process and accept dying in order to live, learn not to fear the negative, we know that the white stone, the Albedo or whitening second stage will always follow:

“to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving him that receiveth it”

(Revelation 2:17)

The process of Nigredo, while not without moments of optimism, does not allow us much ease but it is by following these unknown passages and paths which will lead to the experience of rebirth and renewal. We must learn not to fear the negative. The process is one of intoxicated surrender to one's true inner self.

“The true self will transform the disorderly rabble into a pageant of harmonious movements, tune their hyena howls to the symphony of a paean and their reasonless rage to self-controlled rapture”.

(Cavendish, Richard. “The Magical Arts”.1984. p.168)

That which will appear after the darkness and filth of Nigredo will be a new self, a new earth, rising as if out of clean waters, peace, innocence, happiness and freedom from what has gone before (conflict). Silver is the metal of the moon and the subsequent arrival of the Albedo will shine in the alchemists being like a moon in the night sky turning darkness to silver. Like Christ's crucifixion is followed only by triumphant resurrection.

Omraam Mikheal Aivanhov compares the Nigredo in his book
Spiritual Alchemy to

"the caterpillar who is ungainly and ugly but after closing itself off from the world in its cocoon it looks into the depths of its own being and is transformed into the beautiful butterfly, or the grain of sand that through the pain it causes to the oyster eventually creates the pearl".

(Aivanhov. *Spiritual Alchemy*. 1984, pg 49)

When all the outer forms are worn away what remains is the 'source' the underlying spirit "Rhizome". It becomes impossible to view nature without simultaneously viewing ourselves.



fig xiv
Fountain composed of nine pieces. 1989



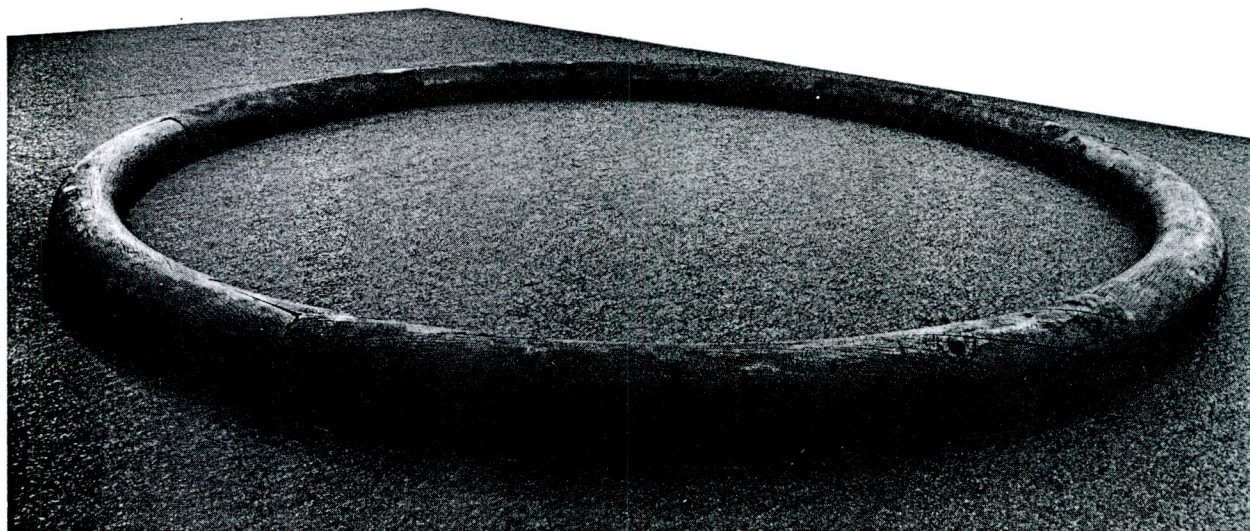


fig xv
Untitled. 1987. Wood, fire, tar.





fig xvi
Untitled 1983/88. Wood, water, tar.



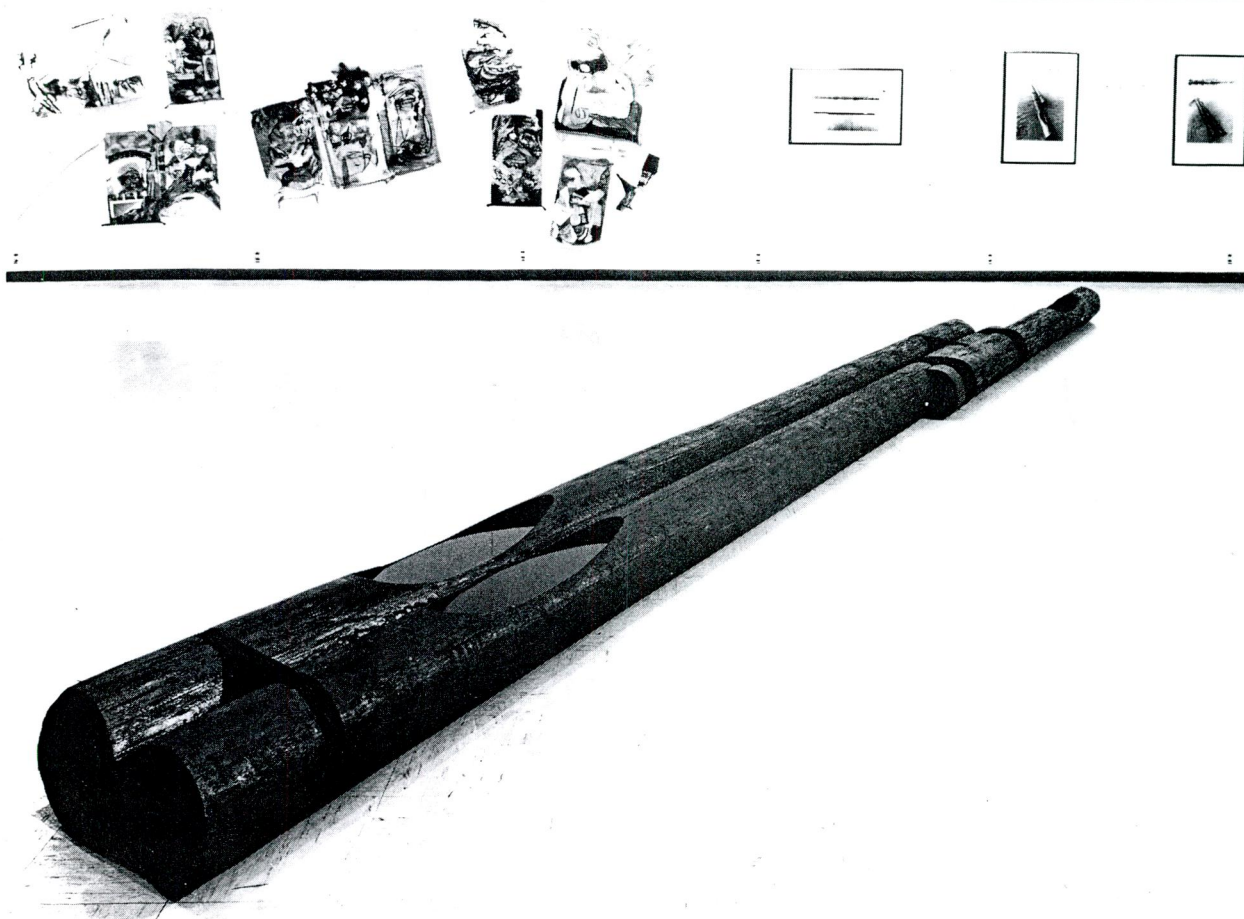


fig xvii
Untitled. 1983. Wood, water, fire, rope, tar.



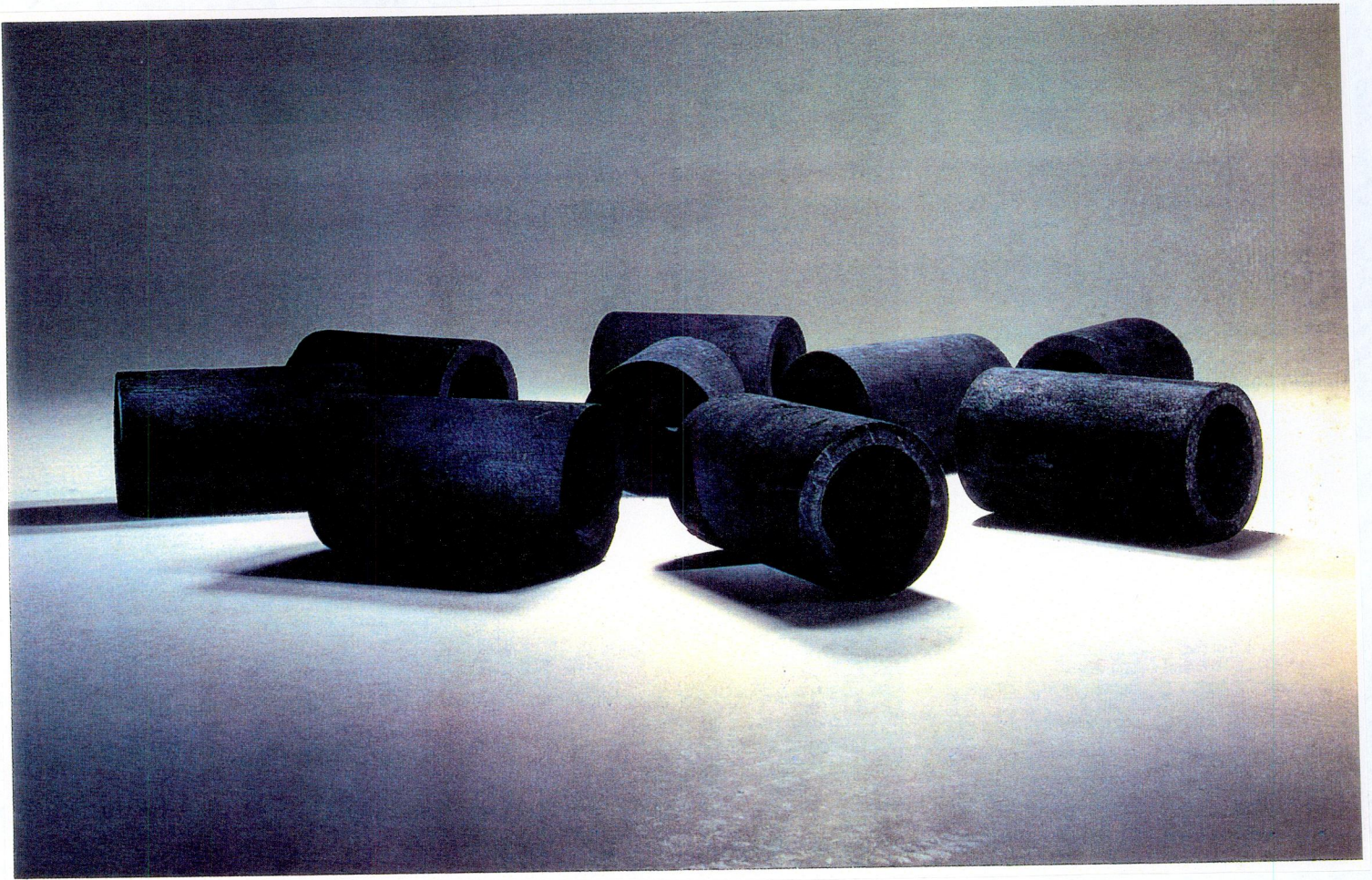


fig xviii
Fountain. 1989. Earth, air, sun, wood, fire and tar.



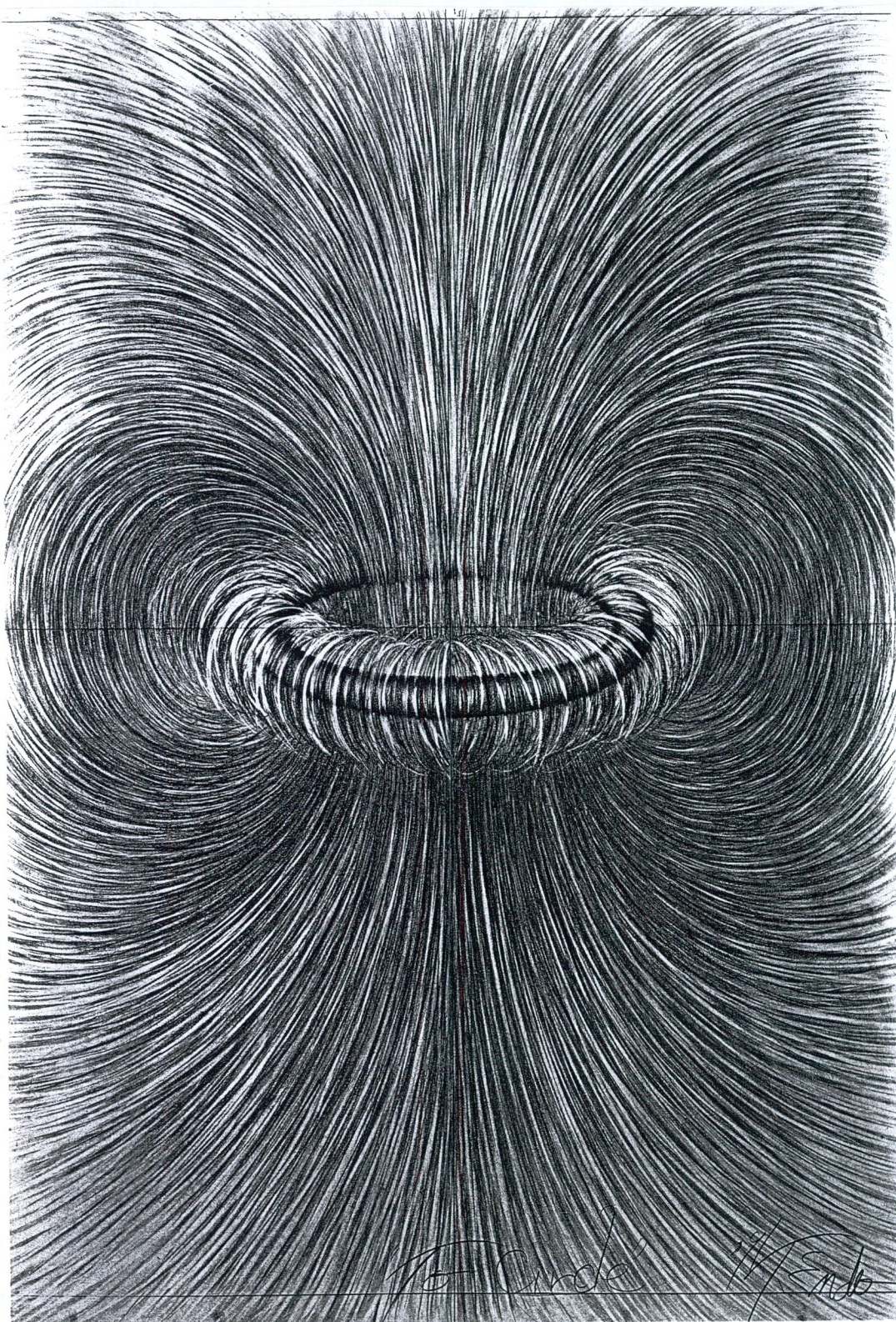


fig xix
'To Circle'. 1991



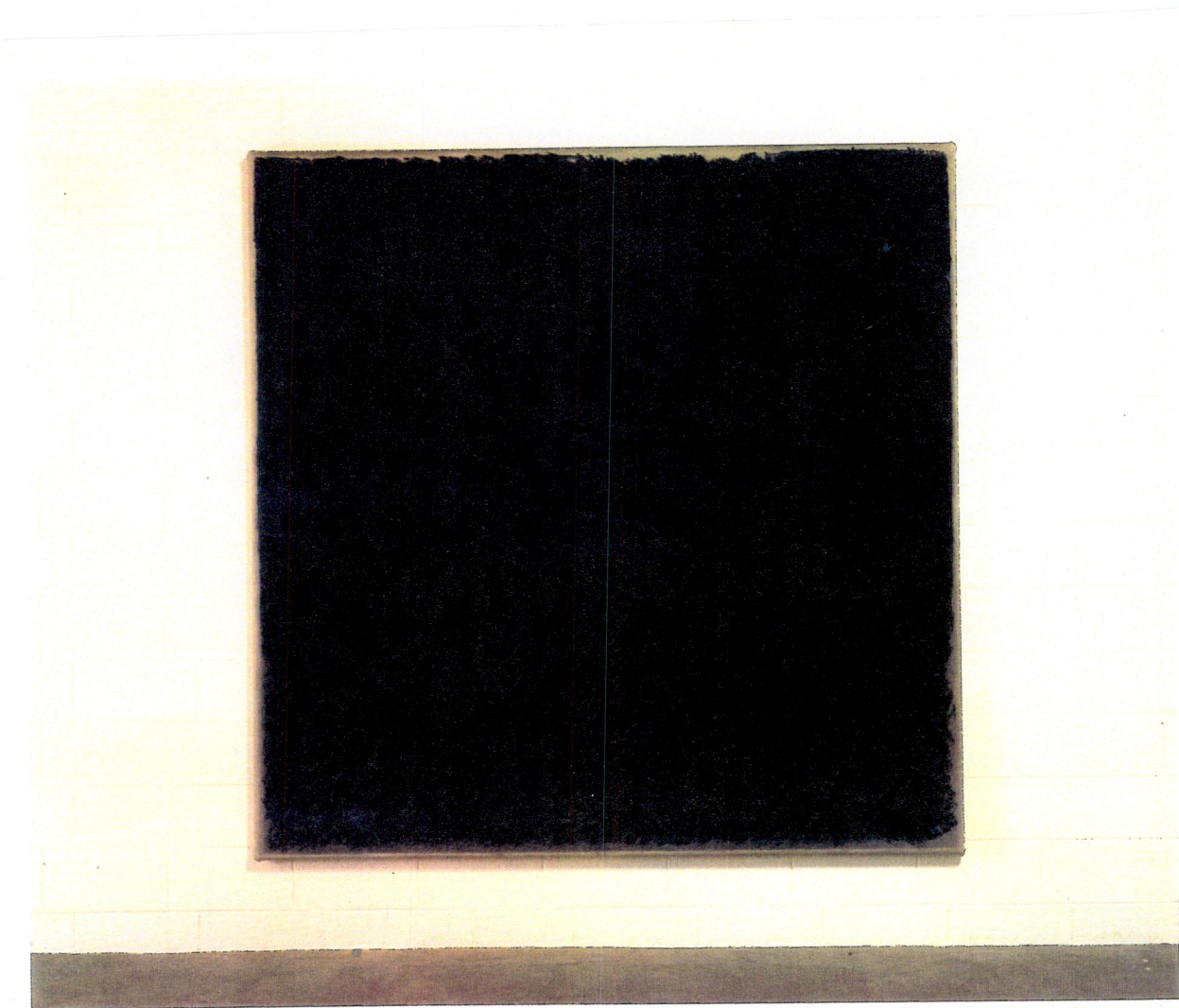


fig xx
Title Unknown ! (Vicious Circle) 1992-93



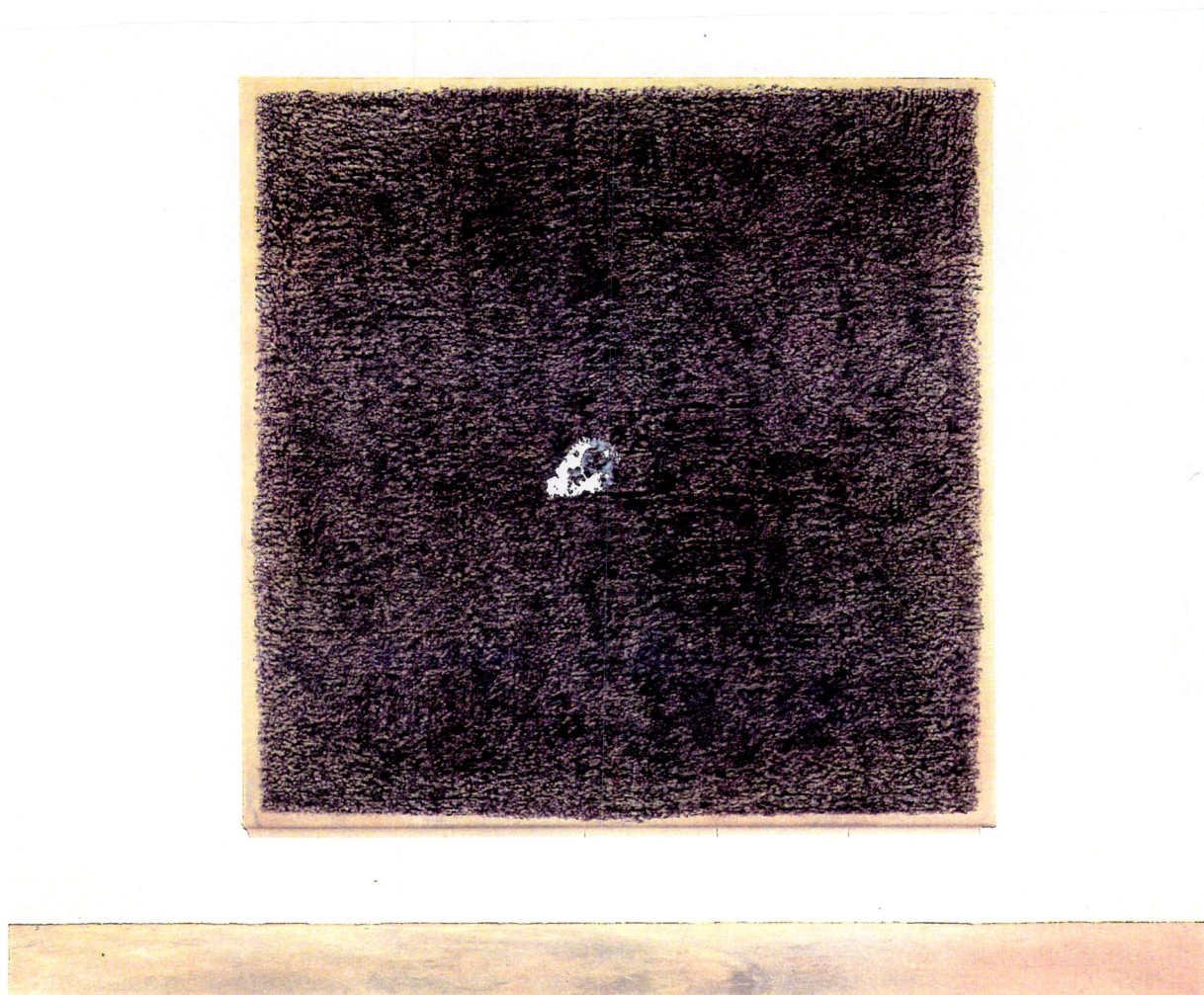


fig xx
Title Unknown II (Vicious Circle) 1992-93

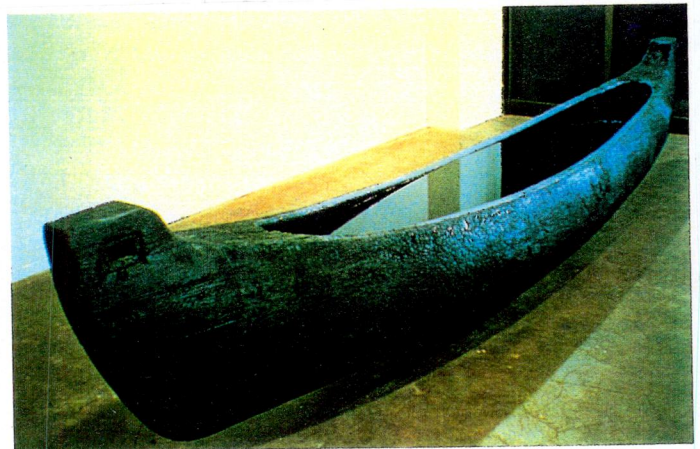


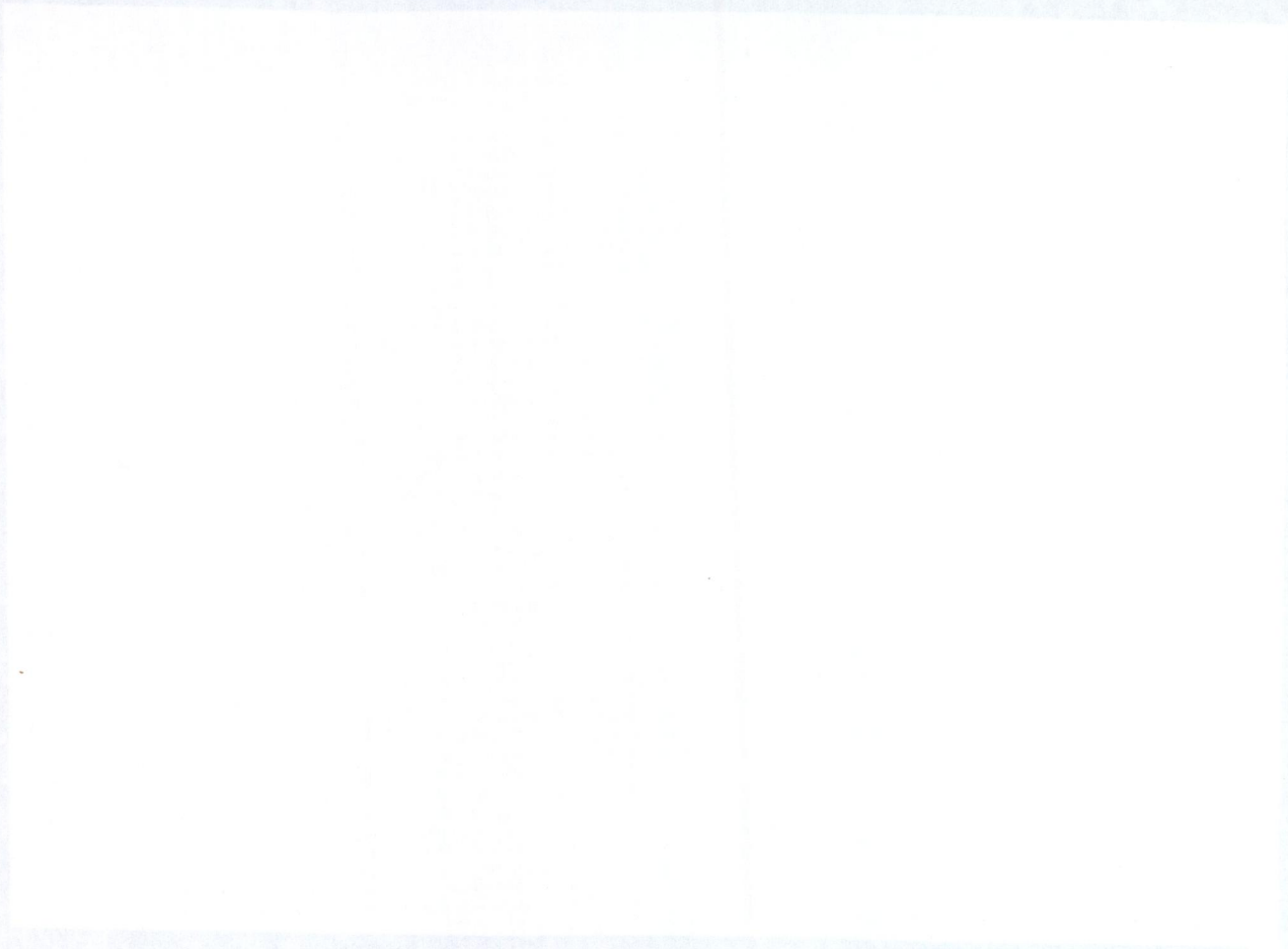


fig xxi
Epitaph cylindrical II. 1990. Wood, iron, tar, water (fire)



fig xxii
 Allegory III. 1988. Wood, water, tar, fire





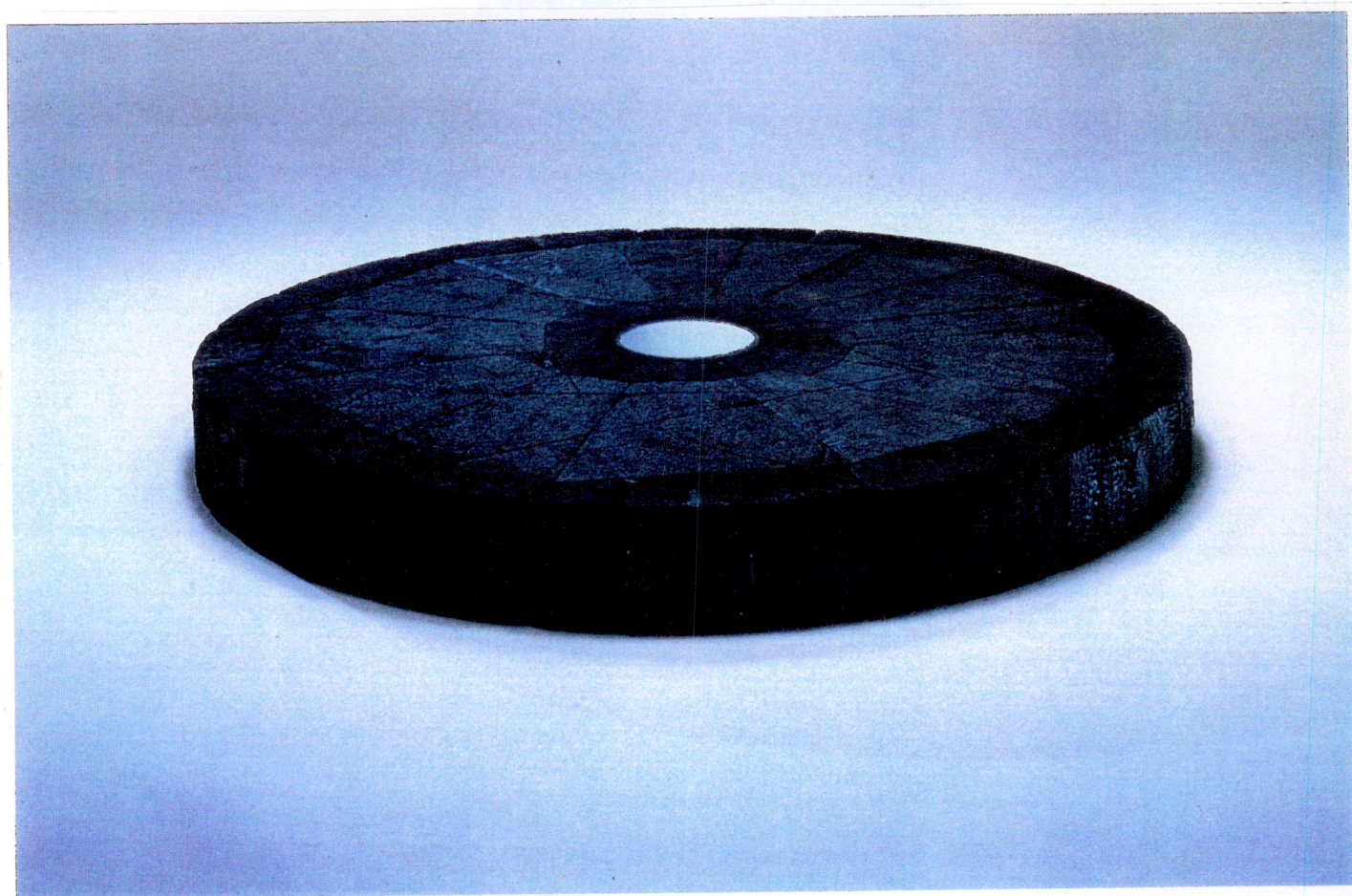


fig xxiii
Untitled. 1989. Wood, water, tar, fire, earth, air, sun.

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