Please recognize the traditional religious phrase disguised under the mutated logogram. Silently form the logogram on your lips. Enjoy the freedom of the new formulation. Now we shall proceed to another phrase.”

The former phrase vanished and a new one appeared. The voice on the tape provided instruction as before. One after another, the phrases came and went: THE KLANDOM OF GOD, THE BRIGGING OF GOAT NOOSE, THE ZONE OF GOAD, DEBT ON THE GROSS, THE THROWN OF GOT . . . .

I was fascinated, but also disturbed. “I don’t know,” I said to my host. “This is intriguing. But something inside me feels uneasy, as if I were blaspheming or something.”

He laughed.

“Not really,” he said. “Quite the contrary. Words and phrases become blasphemous themselves when fastened upon. They lose their transparency, their sense of discovery. Then it is necessary to disunite ourselves from them in order to proceed to new discoveries.

“The same is true of visual images. Therefore the system presents alternate and quite opposite pictures of such abstract concepts as God, messiah, faith, love, and so on. For example, God may be represented by such various images as a gull flying over a rocky shoreline, a gleaming supercomputer, or even an empty screen with no picture at all. Love may be seen as a mother cradling an infant, as a government employee working late at his desk, or as a killer standing over his victim. The viewer is forced to recognize the infinitely wide range of instances in which love assumes different forms, even hatred and aggression.

“There is one wrinkle in the system I would like to show you but can’t because we’re having some mechanical problems the engineers haven’t cleared up yet. See this little instrument—”

He handed me a metal object similar in shape to a ballpoint pen.

“This is a laser pen. It writes with light, and can be used to alter patterns on the video screen. Certain exercises are provided in which the student is asked to perform his own mutations directly on phrases and drawings flashed before him. The machine then responds by further altering the phrasing or configurations, and requests the student to follow suit. I have seen a clever, imaginative student make up to nine or ten ‘plays’ with the machine before it moves on to a new problem.”

I had to admit that I felt two emotions simultaneously, one a sense of awe and excitement at the sophistication of the process (despite the mechanical breakdown), and the other a feeling of