

2. digression

if at our most ecstatic moment
we are more like the blackness
startling the paper than the one who inks,

more like the dust than the light
streaming through a room,

more like the blue-white marble
in the undividable void,
no larger than a paramecium hurtled
into the ocean of a water drop on a slide,

more like the written, the etched, the awled
than the hand that holds and aches and over-awes,

so that consciousness, self and free-will
are less like light than a self-free will –

and the sun-worshipers were more right
than the priests of reason or consciousness,

and the soul can stand to feel
the stars only at a distance
because their impossible beauty
revolves in what we are at bottom,

and Beckett was right to scrawl
“I alone am man and all the rest divine,”

then the “I” scatters utterly out of self
toward the unbearable power of
that farther, purer wilderness –

3. Transcendental Meditation in Mr. Rissinger's 8th Grade Science Class

“Ya wanna be my guinea pig?
All ya gotta do is lie on the lab table
and I’ll teach you TM...”
my friend Charla implored
with such intent, womanly eyes
that the next thing I knew
I was hearing the class twist leftwards
in all those right-handed desk-chairs
to watch me stiffly lie down.
Her voice surprised me —
it sounded so smooth
as she told every muscle in me
from my feet to my face to
“Gradually release...”
Flipping slowly through her note cards,
she painted this scene for me:
“You’re hovering above a light green valley,
a river shaking sun across its waves,
grassy banks dabbed with violet
and orange-white flowers,
fragrant buds in the trees,
luminous clouds and streaming sun.”
She put me at peace — as planned,
but when she said,
“You feel you can go anywhere you want,”
her cards got stuck together,
“Oooops — ...Uhhmmm — uh, you — ah...
You *can* go anywhere you want.”

That was the last thing I heard
— the fake valley was gone,
and my class, the table, the teacher,
and my body were elsewhere —

I felt like doors opening
and blowing apart like curtains
yet I was walking a wide desert plain
on a narrow path into the bright red sun
just over the horizon aglow
with orange, violet, and deep blues
feeling that who I was there
was not who I was here.

The alkali floor was cracked, hard and warm,
but the slight wind comforted me along the trek
and I was not alone; on my right
was a woman or man in a hooded robe
— someone I'd never seen
yet knew well, somehow
if I could only see —

 I felt the face
would have been so calm
because the peace I felt then
was so much deeper than I was.
It comforted me just to know
such ways to feel could be.
Needing no words, no desires,
I was free — the sky and dust
were all I wanted
— I began to see her face,
began to see who she was,
to feel how she felt
— I would have stayed out there
with her forever...

 But Mr. Rissinger prodded me,
shouting so hard in my ear it ached:
 “JEFF! SNAP OUT OF IT!!!”

4. post-mortems

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

I jolted up in pain.

Then Charla asked with deep concern,

“Where did you go? You were
— out — for twenty minutes...”

After I told it all,

Mr. Rissinger stammered, hypothesizing
quite creatively, for once:

“Malfunctioning neurons...

must have induced

a vivid kind of dream...

Jeff was sleeping probably.

But it wasn't verifiable,

it wasn't even TM.

It was not a trance,”

he propounded without persuading.

The bell rang and everyone scrambled
except Rissinger whose hard frown
drooped under his dark mustache:

“Were you faking, Jeff?”

“I — I swear — it happened.”

He closed in, his face one great glare:

“Would you *swear* you were telling the truth?”

I practically heard his hard science head etching “F”
in his fat black gradebook by our names,
but still had to say, “I — uh, just did.”

Supremely annoyed, he stalked out.

Charla laughed nervously,

“Oh. Jeff, I just remembered...

I don't wanna embarrass you or anything,

but *everyone* saw, so I oughtta tell ya...

You — you were — standing out a lot.”

Her eyes fell away, suddenly coy.

I was mystified —

“Uh, I mean, for a while you got an erection...”

“Whaddaya mean — *everyone*?”

“I think that's why Rissinger believed you.”

“Oh no! And whaddaya mean — *for a while*?”

She gently prodded me toward the door,

“Twenty minutes, maybe?...”

“Oh no!”

“You were ‘outstanding,’”

she smirked and burst out laughing:

“I didn’t know you had such a big talent!”

5. elation (some variations)

— deep in the body
near the thickest vertebrae

the gates of the sexual open
where the self can leave
when the cosmos comes in

flooding over the edges of self
with warm and awful ego-death

sundering the self
at its most vibrant
moment

clinging to
its dissipating even if
only for an instant
to be pure —

and when elations come
to a self held so tenderly
that it slips its husk

before it learns it can't
trip and trance
untethered from flesh,

the body catches on
and surrenders every place
a body has

to know the sublime
through human roots

without even grasping
what's come
as if it were sex —

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and when elations come — deep in the body
to a self held so tenderly near the thickest vertebrae
that it slips its husk the gates of the sexual open
before it learns it can't where the self can leave
trip and trance when the cosmos comes in
untethered from flesh, flooding over the edges of self
the body catches on with warm and awful ego-death
and surrenders every place sundering the self
a body has at its most vibrant
to know the sublime moment
through human roots clinging to
without even its dissipating
grasping what's come even if only
as if for an instant
it were sex — to be pure—