

VIA NEGATIVA

The only thing I remember is that you were
pitch blue, dormant as the rifles

in the lacquered drawers behind you.

Whatever occupied the body went on without
the body. That, even I could discern.

A condition like sleep,
but you had passed the border of sleep,
found a break in the fence and kept on

so deep in the trees we would never find you.
That's how I think of it, brother.

Cloudy tomorrow and 53. Cloudy Wednesday
and 60. Periods of sun and 64...

This is what we look forward to.
Not that the predictions are accurate,
or knowing anything about anything
is accurate.

It is a starting point.
With you, there is no starting point.

We begin and begin and begin again.
It complicates us all.

Brother, I think the super predator
is man, how we consume
and consume each other, nothing more than
the myth of ourselves,
our own feral creations,

that the thought of ourselves is our selves.

And thinking that, I feel phosphorescent,
tentacled and chartreuse, adrift in

the center of something that
won't shut off.

It pulses and rests, pulses and rests
like waves pummeling the shoreline
of a coast wooded and desolate,

or more like wind teasing its fingers through
the horse diamond's oblique grasses.

I can't say how for sure.
But I feel outside myself.

I know the containment of the skin is limiting.
I've seen how the body
is merely an outline in the street.

It's as though the hair on my arms were
growing coarse, my skin taut, resilient.

Brother, I feel more animal than ever.

I keep noticing the leaves twitch,
the nervous bodily discourse of prey.

If I passed right here now
into that forest with you,

I'd dissolve into dirt or atmosphere
and continue, like you, without mass
or weight. I know I
would continue.

You are absence, yes, a hole of sorts,
defined by what
surrounds you. A zero,

an abstraction. This is the only way
we can know you.
Pythagoras desired to explain the world
in numbers,

as though the coordinates of a place
or a quantity could be distilled
 to emotion,

sensibility, a mood, a color.

Brother, I feel weird saying it,
but for me, 1 is white, 2 is blue, 3 yellow,
4 purple, 5 red, 6 blue, 7 gold,

8 black, and 9 sun-colored,

I can't say why.

Like why you can't see the sky in front
of you, only from afar,

or that the barges weighed with so much
cargo float so easily,
more definitively, upriver.

As if it were an equation
to solve, triangulate our relationship
or lack to you

via something solid and dimensional
as the room you left, this photograph.

And nothing. There is no tertiary position
from which to gauge.

It's like that barge, the heavier it is
the more water is displaced.

That's what we are to you, a displacement.
The more we think of you,
the more we are disembodied.

If the ghost of you keeps growing older—
does it grow older?—
I can't conceive what urland you'd inhabit.

The school 23 years empty now?
The factory, dropping brick by soot-caked
brick into the river?

At the bottom of the air shaft?
I bet no sunlight reaches
the bottom of that shaft, brother.

It's inflammatory, this condition.
Thinking perpetuates itself.

A seed falls and immediately
roots again.
And then another
and so on, exponentially

until a vast patch of briars weeds up,
netting everything.

Or swimming in the sea, the way one feels
intimate with the salt and brine
and necessary minerality,
and absolutely lost, too. Departed, somehow.

For some reason, I don't picture you at the sea.
I imagine you following the singular runs
of deer, scouting

teaberries, or lazing on a fallen coat
of spruce.

Under that spruce,
I know that if I were cut open right now
like that deer I put a bullet through,
I too would cover everything in a wash

of chrome all the way to the mountain.

I would remain something glacial, a fixture
of landscape,
evaporating and precipitating
myself upon myself.

Gone and remaining.

I'm sure now that *when*
is a function of *where*, that time

is a function of place.

We used to go down to the air shaft,
prop a dead tree or mangled car part against
its corroded exterior

and clamber up to the rusted chain link,
the shaft like a cathedral
we sprawled over
watching mass,
if the dome were transparent,

and mass the rainwater and gunk
alchemizing at the bottom.

You could hardly see bottom it was so deep.
You could plummet your voice down
and it would return someone else's,

its acoustics televangelical,
its low-voltage radiance
filling you.

Any junk muffler, dead branch, or rock we
could navigate through the links
we'd let fall
just to hear that thing swallow.

In that sound, you rethought yourself.
You were afraid for your life
spread-eagled atop its rickety geometry,

a star on a Christmas tree,

compelled.

You became something knifelike,
precise and purposed, almost
miracled, hearing the earth summon you
in its guttural tongue.

I don't know why, brother, but I can't
remember faces anymore.

Does no one ever lose the pair?
It's the same as the shoes in that you never
see both, except when they're strung
from the telephone wires.

I think the one glove is there to remind us
what we are and we aren't
to one another,

mirrors and opposites.
Which of us is the narrative
of that other?

Sometimes I believe you're a dose
of nether serum, something that cancels out
the very meaning in things.

It's like looking into the eye of a horse.
A perfect vacancy,

a perfect oculus, a kaleidoscope of black
reminding that life is never yours
exactly, that it always belonged to

not god, but some other totality.
Not fate.

More like accretion. No, dissipation,

a colorless, odorless,
tasteless substance.

To go to the horse diamond and look in that
animal's eye freaked me out, brother.
How it stood robot still

willing me to see more deeply,
hovering in the same
zero gravity as the bumble bees
swarming the porch.

The bees. Brother,
I knew when I saw the wasp fly directly into
the lock of the front door
that there were such intricate
malfunctions at work, such
crude misgivings
that the processes of remembering and
forgetting you would meld

the act of witnessing and wonder.

It was sister who found you,
sister who investigated your sleeping so late
and called out
to us to rush up the stairs.

So much time has passed. And hasn't.
I can't say with certainty that it ever
really happened.

We weigh almost nil and yet we sink.

What puzzles me most though is still how
the clouds
can for a brief duration hold such an amazing
mass of rain and nothing else

(besides distillates of mood, or ideas of grandeur)

and why the steeple tops look so much more
articulate
in rain, their sharpness
piercing the cloud cover,

why all the flowers spasm with uninhibited
sheen and glory against grey.

Once, in the coal banks, I found a mouse
in an empty beer bottle.

It was dead, of course. It reeked terribly
of death. I wondered
how it fit through the bottle's

aperture with no resistance on the bottle's
part.
It must have morphed itself pencil thin.

Who or what force negotiates
these transactions?

It must have exhausted its plumb body
in a multiday attempt to
extricate itself.

That's the only way I can imagine it.
It's still a curiosity
all this while later,
an icon of perplexity, virtuosic in self-defeat.

To find a hole in the dome of that shaft
and plunge straight down, brother, 400 feet,
that's what that's like.

Every summer we went to Black Lake
and every summer we slid the perch we caught
down the piping

that supported the dock.
I feel, not sorry, but obscenely lit with that now.

And having wasted so many birds for
practice, in a fashion,
to understand
the life of something was to take it.

To think one could capture a glimpse
of essence escaping its physical form in
that passing moment—
by paying close enough attention.

But you can't, brother.
You can't.

To have seen you pass from this zone
to where you are
would not help me to understand further.

We would sneak the 22° into the woods behind
the housing development,
one paved black road leading in.

When I sighted the woodcock on the road's
shoulder, I didn't figure to miss.

I never suspected the bullet would ricochet
off the macadam's edge and careen
toward 2nd St. and 3rd.

Or later, that a woman would ask us
if we had seen anyone with a bb gun,
as she just heard
something whiz past her head.

Grandfather at night in the snow, drunk,
his too-big pants around his knees.

The bat I snared between the garage door
slamming shut and its frame.

The stuffed wolf I have a picture of myself
sitting on in Canada.
It's as if there never was a future.

You can see it in our faces,

everyone waiting for an enthusiasm
to latch onto
among our tired dayscapes, glued

to the news, the dogs in chained orbits
around their coops, a nouveau grotesque,
as the sunlight slowly dismantles the houses
into unforeseen hardships and

the gypsy moths
milk the trees dead dry.

The runoff comes to rest
in a clump
of twigs and garbage
and broken furniture clogging the street's grate,

Science says we are moving
at an almost impossible velocity

in multiple directions, simultaneously.
Even direction, within a large enough
reference,
is arbitrary if not meaningless.

Sometimes I don't feel it. At all.
Sometimes I think time
is an illusion propagated by space
in which we were
and always will be here.

I know this is incorrect. But I feel it.

If time is a furtherance
it is toward never knowing.

We seek to grow beyond ourselves, brother.
Even for worse.
Is it the animal in us wanting out?
These days the animal in us, severe as it might be,
is hardly recognizable.

I often wonder if I remember things correctly.
I am convinced now that whatever force occupies
us ends up

the efflorescent pink bud
of a dogwood,
or the vapor in an owl's call.

It's the gun chest's mahogany scent that
reminds me of you,

the neo-electrical taste of a 16 penny nail,
the delivery trucks' insecticide
fumes of derelict idle.

Science and math can't explain it. How else
can these experiences be interpreted?

If feeling isn't the equivalent of knowing,
then what—
when I think of you and
all I can remember is trying to remember?

What are you
but a lunch-box-sized plaque in the grass now,
a period, a pinprick of ink

infinitesimal and dimensionless?

Less than.

I'd bet as hot as a star is
is as cold as you are.
I'd bet it all.

The blue jays, they call and call. The cherry
whiles in the idea of its shadow.

Is listening to the field there the same
from beneath,
like white if white could be heard?

Do you dream? Are you a dream—this one?

I cannot distinguish you from an exhaust
trail or exhaustion.

A window, you're
blacked out.
A stairway, you keep going.

And these exchanges? Letters
to a canceled address.

Brother, you shed us like a glacier
its stones.

If you were here,
I'd make you hold a rifle, the world magnified and
you at its scope—

I would show you the path to the river
under town.

We'd torch every abandoned vehicle
against its shore. We'd hurl rocks

in the water until
the water changed course.

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