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Arranging Chaos

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Captured by the color, while straining my ears, I may have taken the picture to escape from car sounds, from electric noises (though there is no escape). The thing called a photograph surely has the essence of silence.

I strain my ears for shape. I strain my ears for color.

ARRANGING CHAOS

I made an altar. Though that is what I say, it's an extremely simple thing; I don't know if it's appropriate to call it an "altar." I wonder if I should call it an "alcove" arranged in my own style. I went to the woods and gathered a handful of plants resembling dead trees; then I arranged them in the corner of my room with hospital white walls—I think I'll just say that I threw them in the corner and left them standing around my transistor radio.

While back in Japan for about ten days last September, I visited the Kunisaki Peninsula, where mystics hovered and hermit priests popped up behind every mountain and at the bottom of every valley. I bought a mask of a woman, of the type used during festivals there. Actually, I was planning to give it to Professor Paul Engle, my trusted mentor, who collects masks from around the world. I'm not sure, but I suppose after writers from around the world go back home, looking at a mask may be a way of remembering the mug of a certain, faraway writer. Once I sent Mr. Engle, a seventy-two-year-old poet, a mask of an arctic fox I had found in Tsuruoka of Yamagata Prefecture. But temporarily, I hung a mask of a woman on one of my white walls.

Within a short time (well, about two months), the corner with the dead trees, illuminated with a five-dollar lamp bought at a place called K-Mart, began to throw delicate shadows across the wall; and then, that mask of a woman became a permanent fixture there.

On the small desk I use as an alcove (I believe they call it a coffee table), beside the dead trees and radio, is a small Indian doll, a painted Mexican clay serpent, and a potted rubber plant—all sitting on a Japanese scarf, a table cloth. Oh, and to the lower right of the mask is the yellow cap of this year's World Series champs, the Pittsburgh Pirates of 1979.

The radio is always set on WJZZ (Detroit's FM jazz station). Once I counted the FM stations in Detroit and found twenty-six.

This is a peculiar thing. Before going out, I always make a point of turning on the radio; when I come home, the living essence of my alcove seems to be dancing in space. It might only be my imagination. (And I've yet to tape those full-color pinups in my alcove.) When I get a good photograph of my alcove, I'll send it along. (You must be laughing. . . . I'm trying hard to show signs of an interior existence; as when you make something in your house, even if it's crude, it becomes yours and then you don't want to even take a step into the exterior.) I take one step, two steps out. I start my car and hear the same WJZZ jazz. Did you see the movie, of about a year ago, I guess, *The Deer Hunter*? Please look at the photograph. A young man in the neighborhood has arranged the carcass of a deer othe back of his car. I'm sending the nostalgic odor of blood.

LAKESIDE

Thank you for your letter.

At last, winter is reality. The tens of hundreds of lakes dotting suburban Detroit have frozen. The ice must be over a yard thick. I've forgotten what the average thickness is supposed to be, and even if I brush away the powdery snow and peer into the sheet of ice, which looks like cracked quartz (I think they often sell it in souvenir shops), I am unable to measure how thick it is. So let's just say it's "over a yard thick."

In small trucks, or are they vans, young people (at least I presume young) go "skating." They go straight ahead, then slam on the brakes, taking a slide. . . . Well, since roads are often icy around here, I suppose that is good practice. The ice groans with the weight of a car and sends the sound of "varoom" into the air. When I hear that noise, I remember vaguely something about Lake Suwa, of Japan's Shinshu District. (Is noise my destiny?)

How about the mysterious Lake Mashuko, which never freezes? I look in the dictionary: ". . . circumference 24 kilometers, depth 208 meters; a volcanic crater lake noted as one of the world's clearest lakes. . . ." I wonder if it's just too large and clean to freeze? In my dreams I see hairy grandfathers sliding on their bellies. Shwoosh. And here, at the Great Lakes . . . I read in the newspaper (*The Detroit News* —15 cents) Lake Erie has frozen.