

PROJECT PAPERS

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ARIZONA

The road struck straight to the horizon.
I kept feeling that I ought to be feeling something.
From the opposite horizon
the road struck straight back to me.

Should that landscape have impressed me?
I looked around.
It was itself—nothing more than scenery.

Was I one aspect of what I saw
or did I stand apart?
The scenery is still silent.

I have come to see that my private ego
is of no consequence.
Words keep butting in on my pilgrimage
to the center of silence.

OAHU

Fading,
no more clearly visible
than when fading,
receding...

a rainbow is, and is not,
over the city.
As far as the far wall of the world
sugar cane is bending to the wind.

Why does my heart ache?
Because words are superfluous
or because I have none to offer?

Still barely visible, the rainbow, fading,
becomes at this moment
a memory.

THE HOLE

The hole says,
"Take a look, if you dare."
And I reply,
"What for? You're empty."
"Yeah, but you can see through
to the other side.
Maybe you'd like what you'd see."
As I squirm around in front of the hole
someone tries to elbow me aside.
"Hurry up," he says.
"Take a peek and get outta the way!
You're holding things up!"
At that the hole cracks up laughing,
choking, its spit flying.

EVENING

When I got home in the evening
Dad was dead on the doorstep.
'Strange things happen,' I thought,
stepped over him and went inside to find
Mom dead in the kitchen.
The gas range was still burning.
I turned it off and tasted the stew.
'Well, if things keep going like this
my older brother must be dead, too.'
Sure enough, he was dead in the tub.
The kid next door made believe he was crying.
The noodle vendor's bike brakes were screeching.
It was an ordinary evening,
promising no relief tomorrow.

-- translated by William I. Elliott and Kazuo Kawamura.

"The Hole" and "Evening" are from Nonsense Poems (Yoshinashi Uta). Tokyo: Shichosha, 1985); first appearance of these poems in translation. "Oahu" and "Arizona" are from With Silence My Companion (Tabi). Tokyo: Kyuryudo, 1968). With Silence...was published by the Prescott Street Press, 1975.