

OUT OF PLACE

I always knew that there was something wrong with me.

it got very bad in Jr. High school.
when I walked into a room
all the students would begin talking
at once

it got noisy
and I would stand and stare at them
and the sound would heighten
until the teacher would bang on the
desk:

"ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! THAT'S ENOUGH
OF THAT!"

I had no idea of what excited them
and when I sat down at my desk
heads would continue to turn and
look at me.

these occurrences were continuous
and I never did anything untoward or
unusual
so I knew that there was just something
wrong with me.

the teachers, too, acted strangely:
"WHAT ARE YOU DOING MR. CHINASKI?"
and I wouldn't be doing anything.
"YOU WILL PLEASE REMAIN AFTER CLASS!"

it was usually the female teachers
who did this
and I liked all my female teachers
even though I felt sorry for them
but they never explained to me
what I had done
and I never asked.

on the school grounds it was odd
also:

boys I didn't know would walk up
to me

ask, "how you doing?"
and I would answer,
"get away from me...."

what it meant.

I never knew.

I had no plans, few desires and
no impulses toward anything
but I sensed that there was something

wrong with me
that I was a freak

and it felt neither good nor
bad,
I accepted the situation and
waited.

ON BEING 20 ...

my mother knocked on my roominghouse door
and came in
looked in the dresser drawer:
"Henry, you don't have any clean
stockings...
do you change your underwear?"

"Mom, I don't want you poking around
here...."

"I hear that there is a woman of the
streets who comes to your room late at
night and she drinks with you, she lives
right down the hall...."

"she's all right...."

"Henry, you can get a terrible
disease...."

"yeah...."

"I talked with your landlady, she's a
nice lady, she says you must read a lot
of books in bed because as you sleep at
night the books fall to the floor all
night, they can hear it all over the
house, heavy books, one at midnight,
another at one a.m., another at 2 a.m.,
another at four...."

after she left I took the library books
back

returned to the roominghouse and
put the dirty stockings and the dirty
underwear and the dirty shirts into
the paper suitcase
got public transportation downtown
boarded the Trailways bus to
New Orleans
figuring to land with ten dollars
and let them do with me
what they would.