



Peter Hujar
Orgasmic Man, 1969
gelatin silver print, 28.5 x 19 cm

Portrait of a body unseen

Claudia Beck

Face to face with ecstasy
A portrait beyond the everyday
This man's face in rapture

Not Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*
Not the homoeroticism of Robert Mapplethorpe
More inwardly driven as in Julia Margaret Cameron's *Iago*

Hujar pictures a poem

The Sappho song rings true:
"Eros the melter of limbs (now again) stirs me
sweetbitter unmanageable creative who steals in"

Is this Eros up close?
Eyes squinched shut
Whose eyes see?
Mouth with an aaah, or not
Whose ears hear?
A hand, a touch, shudder unseen
A look of pain as pleasure moves to loss

Pleasure, unhold-on-able

Look again to Hujar's *Portraits of the Dead*
In catacombs of Palermo
Skulls, clothed skeletons glass-casketed
The realm of the dead made visible

Ecstasy and death—a pair—transformers and transporters
As a photograph is

1 Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 265.