AUTO/AURA

by

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Michael Wanzenried, and they evaluated his presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by Martin Corless-Smith, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved for the Graduate College by John R. Pelton, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College.
DEDICATION

Over the course of this project, I was supported by many people. Nothing here was the result of individual action. If anything, what I am able to claim as my own is really the product of many collaborations. I am lucky to have such good people in my life. And while they’ve been thanked effusively in person, I want to leave a written testimony to those that helped make this possible. In no order than who comes to mind first, a thousand heartfelt thanks to Dr. Lucille Harris, Dr. Andrew Riddle, Kevin Ferney, Dr. Martin Corless-Smith, Kate Walker, Dr. Clyde Moneyhun, Melissa Keith, all of my colleagues at the Boise State Writing Center, Chris Butts, Brendan Finney, Jenny Gropp, Amy Vecchione, Deana Brown, the Collaboration Room at the Albertsons Library, Zeke Hudson, my parents who’ve always been confused by what it is that I’ve been doing the last few years, the Calancas, Pat Muri, Cass Hopkins, Ushka, and Mowgli.

Thank you.
ABSTRACT

I will make the poems of materials, for I think they are to be the most spiritual poems,
And I will make the poems of my body and of mortality

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, section 6

*Auto/Aura* attempts to follow through on Whitman’s project by literally using materials from the world to create a situation that challenges the traditional reader-poet relationship. The poems here diverge from the page into a three-dimensional setting to continue in a largely personal and arbitrary lineage (as all poet-historical lineages tend to be according to Jerome Rothenberg) of 19th and 20th century poetic practices that viewed the visual component of the poem as just as an important component of the poem as the content itself. From Mallarme’s “Un Coup de Des…” to Ezra Pound through the Brazilian Concrete Poets and into contemporary video poetics (among many others), the use of white space, indentation, shifts in typography, nonsensical sounds, images, and scrambled syntax have been seen as invaluable elements in communicating reality as a complex palimpsest of events, ideas, people, and sensations.

Shifting the conventional location of the poem (away from the page or computer screen) functions much like the white space between lines and stanzas does in many poems. It destabilizes the relation between different points on the page and challenges the reader to make (or intuit) certain connections. And while the space between those points may only consist of a ¼” stripe of empty page, the reader might discover that they’ve
jumped from ancient Rome into a kind of present moment, and a new narrator has
replaced another. This kind of juxtaposition has allowed poets to manipulate multiple
perspectives, effectively enabling the poem to draw from and speak through (almost
simultaneously) any number of subjects.

One effect that this kind of practice has had, where a poem does not necessarily
have a purpose to announce, is that the poem (and poet) has been able to push back
against the reader’s expectations, allowing for a more complicated version of reality to
emerge than some thought possible through traditional poetics. In many ways, a
significant cross-section of 20th century poetry (often referred to as avant-garde or
experimental) has seemed interested in implicating the reader in the construction of the
poem’s meaning. This, in addition to the loss of faith in a universal aesthetic, has led to a
poetic practice that has been exploring how human experience is an intersection of
various—personal, social, historical—trajectories.

In many ways, the goal of Auto/Aura hopes to continue that tradition of
integrating the reader into the world of the poem. Thematically, the poems here concern
themselves with how aspects of power, violence, history, and identity resonate and cycle
through time. As I have tried to present these poems, the reader has to relinquish some of
their physical control over the text in order to become more fully engaged with what is
before them. In asking the reader to sit and track the visuals of “Call and Response”,
listen carefully for parts of “It Begins Here” to become audible, and maneuver their body
through “Fields”, I hope to interfere with the traditional poem-reader dichotomy in order
to call attention to how arbitrary and manufactured such identities are in the present
world. By calling into question one identity (and set of relationships) that is often taken
for granted, these poems hope to show how mutable all our identities are as the result of complicated, overlapping, and unstable interactions distributed across time, space, and matter.
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CALL & RESPONSE

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The lack of light, to some,
meant it was time to sleep.
But she trimmed the wick and
watched the flame for signs
of rain, foul weather,
or my husband’s return.
After the fact,

someone quoted me

*Hurry, girls, hurry, work
while your fleece is still warm.*

What control they had

No one can disappear

just

less dirty
I didn’t realize
I was unconscious. But
while I was, the revenge
I wanted stopped and, stripped
to his socks, leapt out the
window

as my father watched.
The suicide was sprawled on the bloody floor.

Her face, in a wave of sunlight,

seemed to care where the knife had fallen.
Now that day has dawned

again

Must I pick myself up
and carry it on for
inspection

again

of my own disgrace.

What do you hear in the smoke
and crackle
of a burning body?

Voices or

the turning of a page.
She was carried away and everyone got what they wanted.
This morning when I woke
the light pressed down, firmly,
on my lip

to get at the darkness
    horrible things inside

I was no longer
allowed to keep.
February had just begun
    I shouldn’t have been thinking
        about what to do when
            her coat came off.

We knew what was there
underneath

No particular faith
    in laws or birthrights

or fences.
Alive, dead

there’s usually a market
for a body

But not mine

Whose value into death
was mostly symbolic.

*Meum Et Tuum*

That chiseled marble slab

*Mine And Thine*

As though I could read it.
We have
the heat of many hands
    shoving us
onto the scale

to see what we are worth.

Opening

the doors to the slaughterhouse,
    will take more than canons

to untie
    the bow
Knife goes in; guts come out.
One blanket

Threaded bare

Invisible lines stretched
between pins

Night sky constellations

Embers, fevers, my life

Out of reach to stay alive
When I did what I did
part of me was freed.

The rest was eaten,

    eyes open,

family style.
Wherever belief
was taken from

from books, from very old books,
or something else made
to suffer,

there’s no way
to discriminate hand from handle

only master from mistress
  fathers from mothers
  brothers sisters
  lovers children
  you and you.
With hammers
(or however it’s done)
to our heads
it always sounds the same.

Echoes of the soon-to-be
missing
Didn’t you know
a ravenous wolf
dressed is the same as
undressed inside or out

Is tearing
you?
I tried to be useful.

But what else
   can a woman or sheep
   or a man

become but an engine
   that keeps warm

their father’s histories.
It’s a matter of time
and sunlight

End of green

The blue of the sky through
the faded yellow of my shirt

Across a burnt field
and sturdy paved roads.
I walked around
looking for a sprig of pine.
I carried water to
all the graves I could.
I sat by the spring
and watched you eat grass
for a hundred days
and no shepherd came.

Hundreds more
and still just a sheep for
company.

I always imagined
something else to talk to.

Forgive me,
I’ve only been myself.
Who knows what else gets cut
when shears move forward

a center hollowed out,

around animal bone,

a breath circles, whistles.
Repetitions, patterns

of sand
of earth

of clouds
of hair

of thread
of grass
of tears

desire a chance
to clothe the invisible.

I can barely think what
color to make my blood.
Face to face

This and this

Had we always been so simple before being
domesticated.
Breasts, beds, brutes, and bodies someone dumped in the street. Memories manufactured at best.

Worst.

Made to look natural.
Our husbands had always been
Our masters had always overseen
Our military had guaranteed
Our victories were just dedications

To the wives and mothers and widows
who stayed at home with their yarns
mending socks.
Who would believe me?
The winds don’t blow one way
all the time.

And going to the mountains
or leaving to see
something new

No reason

or permission.
No one cares if I know what happened.

No,

starving. Tired of talk.

Same names
Same designs

In the ossuary
the bone box.
There are pictures that
show her building a loom,
fucking a slave of hers.
Another, a mosaic,
over a toilet, she’s
dressed like a farmer’s wife.

If you look, there’s always more.

Right here,

jamming her veil
under a rock.
Always, dreams

a ewe asking
  if I want to suckle,
    here, like one of her own.

Closer

  becoming faceless

Again

a ram asking if I’d heard
  how old men
    and their sons

  go to the mountain
    to kill his cousins.
I think it’s beautiful
how the sound of her name
    feels on

like wringing warm water
    from a bell

Soft on the tongue

A second skin
What to hold onto

Nothing worth naming

Even clothes made just for my body

Are worth more as a shroud
for a dead tree

More naked than what

My shoulder

Of how that idea

War stories starts
What we raise to your lips

Silence

Sacrificial

Weakness

The test of our mercy

Gone against

In thanks raises us
In the valley,
where the city had been,
I watched the herds trample
bones, just like theirs, deep,
forever deep in mud,
following a woman
armed with a rifle.
What follows survival?

I must have forgot
how busy
this place used to be.

Brick by brick,
the city
of rooms and

knives idle

fire for sale, have
been replaced

stranding me.
I needed one more strand
to finish the story

passed under and around
the wound that bled

    like a net
    or a vaulted ceiling

Over the unaligned
twisted together

Gods and men.

All tangled.
Elsewhere or now?
One place time another

Foundations for foundations

The buildings I’ve seen change
as much as the relations
they shelter

From anywhere but below
all things seem to have their own way
of going to sleep

of start

or stop.

Twined by the stick

starlight

knifepoint

skinfeel
The rain changed the sound of the trees.
The trees changed the color of the ground.
The ground changed the smell of my skin.
The stream washed away all the shit caught in my hair.

But the taste of blood

not changed.
Gold woven
All fucked up
Into fiber
A name not quite perfect

To be her

I have to pretend
IT BEGINS HERE

Who needs the eject button

The past firmly lodged in the present and playing

From another sequence of buttons

Memorized without looking

Navigate among worlds

Pause  resume  stop

Scroll  click  retrieve

Somewhere’s a simpler symbology
Maybe it’s not how much we can remember

Our transfer of ancestral bones into acceptable formats

The loss of fidelity between versions

Blurs the immediate horizon

Like becoming like

Boulders knocking into boulders

Echoes echoing

At home with this limited we
The first scraping shovel
Holes tear themselves open
Across the heel drawn line
The original the true the heroic the manifest the snake the empty well
Emigrant thoughts try to look east look back look away

I try to write home about those that remain

What was found and built with true scrap

Two generations or three maybe more
The somber grass complexion

Blood recognizable

Every look transits the sky

Gravity, diagrams, harvest, receipts
Wind pulled ocean air inland

Rain knocked all the blossoms to the ground

Stripped the magnolias stripped the cherries

Old love became visible from everywhere

Past clouds and unfurling leaves

Magnified in mirrors the sun held just so

One history blinds another

A story to salvage ourselves
Over rock surfaces and wooden skins

The air has the same temperature as the water

Vulnerable to spring floods

The loneliness of living somewhere first

Skin revealed in the patchiness of old plaid

My family’s family’s house dismantled

Carried across bridges and logs

Up to a creek that stopped their sunburst shoes
The front door installed in Lillian’s old bedroom

Right where she pressed her body into sleep

How everyone entered this world

Everyone had to pass through her first
In the remote light branches sway
A limb heavy with green buds
Pollen plumes and petunia petals stick to the window
Where did I put the camera this might be important

Like a weight of getting something right

Instructions read unread and re-read

Everything into millimeters
I wonder what has kept me close to home all day

Windmilling in the spring feeling upside down

Nosing close to the mildewed curtain

Bleach is a solution one cap then two

Water boils with electric efficiency

Fingers converge to feel the stove powering down

I had to toss back the sparks that jumped into my hands
A record of what children forced through the cracks

Costume jewelry from the table

A snowman’s hat, a wishbone, lengths of blonde and brown hair, green beans

Past the floorboards into the water

Past the water into the unlit soils

Where new lands and old lands settle fold for fold
Magic in the unrepeateable

A mother-father practice

Whispers through the wall into the belly

Every year there's a different Santa Claus
Each time the grass gives way

The limbs of a little girl

Find a place among skeletons

A place for prayers

Raw in what they could be made to say

Quick and white around the golden leaves

Somebody maybe nobody watching

Still