

AUTO/AURA

by

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DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

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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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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 Mallarmé'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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FIELDS

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.

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 unrepeatable

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