

SHIMMER

by

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Daniel Lau, 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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ABSTRACT

Shimmer is a collection of poems that explores the unfixed nature of self-construction through the complications of intersectionality. Throughout the text, the speaker, possessing multiple positions that share the locus of the singular unified body, navigates existing power structures in various publics in which bodies and cultures are read and deemed legible or illegible to situated hegemonic social structures. Through confessional and lyric strategies, the speaker reflects on the rituals that reify culturally informed social contracts within diverse publics.

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Sum Illusive

I can seek my eyes in your opalescence

-- dull rainbow reflections --

bright buttons that reveal nothing.

when you pet me

there is silence

when you shift me

my eyes open and close

and in this action, you want to see mirrors or kaleidoscopes,

the tumbling of gems clicking and shifting

as your hand moves.

So many colors you made dazzle.

SECTION ONE: Dazzle

Playtime Suite

Now it is time to make the house.

Seek the fundamentals: outside and inside.

Gather your kith, your notions, your sundry.

Place the pig in the heart bowl. He is driving.

Stack the melamine to the left. Place the fridge

on the other side of the line. It is safe now

to play banquet. You can eat the grapes

and after, you can leave. Put on your shoes.

socks first. Leave the cord. I need to know

where everything goes.

An Ecology

crystallized. The array suspended
by string within this hollowness
this rattling, this clinking rolling
over each other like waves against
my perimeter. How awesome it is

to echo and know my sounds,
the sounds wholly my own like
hewing amethyst purposeful
to the space it occupies. My red,
my ribbons, swimming about the geode

of experience. My fugue chimes
fire back and forth. Sometimes
consonance gets the best of me.
I, folding, eggs in a batter of someone
else's mess. Untangle it. All these

stones in silent proximity waiting
to ring out as a bell's song, a chorus
in a moving room no one wants to here.
A body constructed by a world
that simply wants to reclaim its parts.

Figure Study

See here in Fig. 1 there is a boy.

He is gathering leaves and dry branches. He is afraid of the apocalypse.

He considers his brief time on the earth and though he has not experienced anything that should cause legitimate concerns, he understand the precarious situation life places a body.

Fig. 2

Note his observation. Slight scowl. Tendril hand on the chrome shopping cart's broken plastic hand grips. There is a crisis. There is a lack. There is no more meat in the freezer and there is no desirable meat here, now, within the space allocated for provisions.

He notes discomfort in his mother. He registers her voice say

baby, go to the courtesy counter and get a rain check.

Fig. 3

There are not enough Flintstone vitamins to get him through the 4th grade.

Fig. 4

He is in summer and is propped by the garage door. The white wash layers giving way, cracking to reveal its greying plywood. The scales of paint remind him of science: erosion, canyons, protection within the lacuna. He considers these things and how beautiful it is to find the empty space in something.

Fig. 5

His body is inside the green trash bin settled on its side in the middle of the grass. Legs out and exposed to the elements. It has rained. He has noted that it is time to take cover, that environments often shift and one must adapt or sojourn. He breathes in the autonomy of plastic and wet jeans and remembers the meat.

Palo Santo

Density -- the smoke -- thickens

The air. Inject a moment of forest fire
Into your everyday.

Consider it a cleansing. The wide pupils shift
in the white expanse, in the dark room

And noticed how quiet the beings are

So settled in their places. The black
too black but for the glow of a cell phone.

I imagine the color mauve:
the idea of a softening, of night's batted interior.

The muezzin-like drone of the Frigidaire.
Nothing is what it seems.

False trajectories are traced in the air
everyday and considered beautiful.

Put your fingers to the line, its smudged edges
unraveling, the plume

of smoke trailing from the twin
canisters of a blue jet, an apparition,

breaking away from itself

always dissipating into the moment,

a space it cannot claim, a failure to condense,
a perception

of indiscernible contour. And now,

what do I do with all my lines.

Etude

Today I slip into my father's
shirt. This red, this second skin
such a fit against my shoulders,

such wear between the seams.
I gather myself to greet him
in the mirror, my face draped over

his, his stubble creeping through
the sheet laid over my bones
like a tent or the boney figure

chairs make during renovation.
I'm under construction. The painter's
tape has been laid across the edges

of my wainscoting, my molding
growing gilt by the day as the trees
throw confetti on my birthday morning.

I stand silent in front of him as he
appraises me, in the same way
he says I love you, the same way
he says you're wrong.

Glamor

When was the last time you lined
your eyes with kajal and shined wide open?

Mawkish or venerable; the keepsake
of stibnite smears on the pillow of who
you became the night before

-- who you continue to collect each time
you build yourself with black
and ambergris. With silk
and a stretched gaze.

Bituminous anchor, reveal me
by blotting it all out.

A Litany

Jackfruit Lychee Wood Ear Milkfish

Durian Dragon's Eye Phoenix

Banyan Tree Rice Joss Sticks Five Spice

Hungry Ghost Lai-See Folded Crane

Steamed Cakes Swollen Tongues Lemongrass

Char-Sui Suzie too Altar Smoke

Musk Ox Bamboo Pork Stews

Cleaver Tiger Mango Flesh Paper Son

Boat Tea Jasmine Delta. There.

Now write.

Reader as Fugue

Only through forcing
can we understand sound,
moving through constriction,
can we attempt to study the fluid:
air, the loose collection,
molecules folding over each other
like sand or gumballs
running past the thin membrane
grass provides. The repurposing
is a music like the way children play
in fall leaves, their lines fashioning
an aria, a symphony in C,
how they cleave through a field
to the foot of a maple just to rip
the wings from the samara
clean off -- to peeled apart
what's present and find
in their hands a new thing.
to see the process as creative,
the infinite restructuring,
the method of finding
and refinding the violence

of a thud pealed into a machine
And, so, they smack the shell
of a decaying log
in order to find a drum,
knowing: to make something beautiful
You must cleave it
or beat it into shape.

SECTION TWO: Fracture: Refraction

Turn the object.

So, I show them my right side.

Present the other side of the object.

So, I perform an about-face.

It seems that the object's movement is efficient.

I stare forward.

Place the object in the seat in front of me.

So, I sit down.

Now, tell me what qualifications you have for the position?

An Examination

After Lisa Robertson

Here, we explore the interior
seemingly to attempt to grace
every seam of the vinyl.
Navigating this geography,
we consider the light. Its yellow.
The aperture of the windshield
enough to produce an image--
flip two bodies upside down
into Wilshire boulevard,
content in their making
nothing. The space echoes
into every vehicle where
a million hands explore the law
of conservation. All matter moves
in the liquid of reality. Even liquid.
Watch as objects part from their origin
to master another terrain. Proximity
is not an index of want. Proximity
is not an index of happiness
and reflecting on the two figures
turned shadows,

the negatives of humans revisiting

Zeno's paradox, Zeno's asymptote

inviting the dare, the thought:

If one claims an object, does it remain

a possession after one releases its hold?

Reorient. Perhaps claim it all.

Object Permanence

Yesterday you fucked a cliff off the PCH. Or it's what I thought when I heard a section of it fell into the Pacific. Loose rocks; light white moths; a hunger like sand gnats slowly working their way up the leg. And now all I can remember is two things: the moment you told me you didn't realize I was beautiful, your shut eyes when you entered and reentered me. A moan found itself in a man and shook itself until it fell from his throat. A man found himself inside of his hunger so he ate his way out. An origin story, a fable. Nothing to take away.

It's as if to say if you scream in a cave you can feel all of the negative shake like jello in this pocket of earth like a body of water as if to say the liquid air behaves like the ocean as if to say the air in all its negativity is pockmarked with animals clinging to where they cling and swimming to and fro in this diaphanous body as if the body, a collection of many living and dead things, hold fast to its bodiness by remaining in this darkness, this damp, all enclosure intact as if the location available to the world is indeed its mouth where it breathes and release and breathes and releases and invites strangers to perceive its unfettered mystery as if to say there was any mystery to begin with, so when a child screams into its mouth and hears herself double in return it's as if the nature of humans compels them to scream into the bodies of others to make them feel large. Do you think of me when you hear echoes?

False Step

Every moment
I see myself, the shadows
of my movement change
trajectory in the ether. The lines
flying away from the lines
my body makes. Tattered, ghost,
dream of me in strips
of fading light, I create
the abomination. A mouth flung open
in thought though the neat meat
knits a comfortable seam. All eyes,
yellow in feigned repose. All hands
folded in prayer. Dream of me.
no longer can I contain
the multitudes. The kinesthetic self
ragged in motion while the body lies
still in its pine bed, the covers
unturned, the corners tucked.
All the moments that have occurred
 within me
and all the moments that have not
running wild.

I walk through your warm chambers to ask you nothing. Such life here and yet only a dull continuous thud. Inside, the red refuses its shimmer so shielded from light. There's nothing to repeal. There's nothing we can take back, change, make noise with, or smile for. All this rosy iron around me and all I can think about is how dense this silence feels. A buzz of room tone. Only gratitude that I am in a place now where I can hear my muffled echo. I can recognize myself.

Reader as Chevalier

There within the text,
the seam though fabric
fractured between thumb
and index finger. The cause:
indisputable. The reason:
a flair for the dramatic.

A tether, tropic
and mercurial,
releases the page.

Regard: cursory glances
within the panopticon,
it looks to me as though
I furnish elsewhere.

Read: how one
might consider
the body whole
if attentions
are misaligned.

Read: how spinnerets

refuse the simplicity

of producing one

singular thread.

Oh, my nun of speed,

conceal me.

Begin the process

of mending and make me

what you want.

A notification in my inbox signs off:

I MISS YOU

in so many ways do I consider
the semantics, the strategies
to say:

I remember your position

Who have you become?

You have crossed my mind once

and now, what of this occupation?

What am I to do to stomp
this presence at the threshold
of my mind? Send a missive,
the semaphore of signification
in which one quarters the calf
that pulled this number one
too many and thus the pasture
passed.

I MISS YOU

like all those heaping platitudes
peppering a wake's buffet
of hot dishes and cold salads.

I MISS YOU as if to say

YOU'VE ESCAPED ME

and in this way, you've missed.

Swipe Left

Here, on my sheet metal folding chair I think about my loneliness. I think about the pervasiveness of it. How it creeps into the rest of my limbs stemming from that tight heart pulling inward from the inside at the face. I try to console it with a scroll. First through messages my friends issue out into the world. Then through catalogs of strangers.

I think to myself what have I decided on entering this fray? Who will these strangers gather up of the me, my artifact, my image? How will my light please them?

I think that some of them are cute. I think that even a few hold promise. I think that I need to properly code what promise looks like in the context of an other. These others. All these others. Separate and the same in the same way we all could use jackets in the fall.

Funny little lapel. Swipe left. This one. This one is a gem. My mind changes tracks. I think of Amanda. I think of her dead. Maybe this gem is dead too. I think to check the Last Updated. The last Profile Viewed. Maybe this is all I'll glean. Is this enough? Could this be enough?

I sift through more stones. I think of all the monitors switched off on the other side of the circuit. I think of all those lovers who've left me with wriggling inside of their artifacts. Those sweet little slips of light holding their positions. Open profile. Photos. All. Scroll. The two of us. 51% Lifestyle. More Mathematical. File. Close Window.

When you order me to push it deeper, I imagine fracture, a tear. I conjure your travertine pools at stress; a fist conducting renovation. A high hiss slips through teeth, the corners of your mouth pulled flat like a buttonhole as you fold forward into a deeper bend and yet I am the only one frightened to stop.

Smile

Prime me bathe me ride my carriage toward an eclipse of an empire. There is nothing left but abandon.

Tear me into manageable parts. There. Better now. A scrapbook of something flat.

*

When I was blessed
with an inside crown
I learned to pull flesh
back, turn my bones
out to please you.
Show you my enjoyment,
my nature to please,
my pleasing nature,
my glisten of white
then flesh again.

*

You are there inside of his body moving slowly against his fine skin. You can see you ripple in him like a tent; a child prodding the taut section of an umbrella while it walks through the park.

Which movements are yours and which movements his when ideas and concepts share a body?

A Halloween ghost of white sheets. All covered. One in the same.

*

So when things part, it pleases you. When things stay parted, it is impossible. Duration is a factor. Pleasure is a fleeting thing. Any longer, discomfort occurs.

When he shook my hand, I knew he wanted to hurt me.

Nocturne: The Object's Ars Poetica

the eye black the nose the black
water the opaque whisper the
constant chatter of notice the
blend of favorable apparatus the
triangle of determination the
crevice
of folding the knowledge
of unbecoming the discussion
of youth the cold flavor of
morning the mentholated
cigarettes after tea the sustained
bite of a lisp the draconian
habits of dolls the tiny slippers
the painted faces the stamped
faces the flat dull eyes the absent
quiver the molotov words trickling
fire the kerosene amp with its stink
of issuance the bold night the
phosphorescent night blinding

SECTION THREE: After Aspasia

Courtesan, Rhetorician, Alien...

“Like Socrates, she is known to us only through the representations of others.” (Bizzell and Herzberg 59).

They want to make sure the beauty is inside me so they offer pearls to my mouth. One after the other, I begin to chew and feel their smooth preciousness offer a drag against my teeth's enamel. Gorgeous castaways invite the blood to play and when the mixture works itself into shellac, they make me swallow so they know my worth.

When galactic verve enters me, I can fold myself neatly into the chair at my bedside. It scrubs the bits that require pipe cleaners, Draino, thick-bottomed plungers. I see these dying stars inside me where the red turns black. The light fades and the tiny sparkles parade over the discus courts in my stomach's veranda. Nothing can part the spill of all the moonshine welling over. How interesting to know about the limitless meanderings of the inside. The myriad courtyards of dunnock song. This forever night so brilliant and concealed.

Facets impurity
the frozen smog trailing
through the crystalline dream
trapped and claimed for what
is time but a marker of reactions
and actions that change a substance
make me die a little each day
living in a place that kills me
with small pleasures
knowing that these I am
deigned to receive.

After Aspasia: A Friday

When they enter me it's always different. Sometimes pleasure. Sometimes a sinking in the gut. Sometimes ambivalence. I move these feelings to my mouth, roll them over my tongue and wonder what they'd taste like. Would I welcome them if I knew them as the sting of salt. Each grain to a wound so small it seems it wouldn't make a difference. The coarseness dragging about in empty kidney shaped pools. A luxury to return to. A sensation that reminds me I'm alive. Could I always continue curling my back into all this flavor?

Check the locks. Make sure the dead bolts on. Make sure no one saw you take the key from the mat. Turn the stove off. Turn the stove on to make sure you can turn it off; to make sure it stays off. Unplug the coffee machine. Unplug the toaster. Unplug the phone. Make sure they don't know we're at home. Keep the curtains drawn when you're on vacation. Keep the curtains drawn when you come home. No one needs to know you're alone.

After Aspasia: At Dusk

Past the first threshold is a solarium. Here you begin a transition. The sun wanes orange over your body and tints you. You become something else, something slow. You become more than your body. Your mass remains but your volume grows. You are your body and your clothes and your silhouette and your shadows that dance over your face. You are the absence the darkness creates; the asymmetry of the passing cloud, the idea of an eye your viewer creates as you turn to light a cigarette. The sun moves west and you are struck by all the pinks and oranges in the world and where these two meet it brings out your red and the red comes and the sky shows you its inside.

A wild color envelopes you and you are wild. The darkness comes, and you are a mystery.

When you believe,
the union compels you
to open it. Begin.
Unzip the skin
starting from your finger tip
of your right hand. Notice
the slow drip.
first the single spot
gathering in the whorl,
then expansion.
The spiral grows out
the fractures,
and fractals break of
one to two to four
to limitless divisions
spreading like a red net
toward the infinite
toward somewhere
beyond the body
traveling in a space
like an indefinable
lung, outward
and in all directions
and the mirror of the self
meets the surface
reflecting the idea of
division
as you rejoin
and the self disappears
and it is only you
and it is only you
and it is only you
inside the bright white
cloud and it is
only you until you
never existed.

You should go fucking kill yourselves.

After Aspasia: Nature

It has been said that my body
is a wild thing. And so I am indeed
untamed. Unfettered, unruly, pressed
into the form of something blooded:
lion, badger, goose. A strange hiss
escapes and they call it venom. A lip
curls and we name it anger. Feral,
this body, a house cat that has lost its way
yet still grooms what's ragged and natural.
Even with all my ribbons hanging
from my hair, I am a question.

Let me lap at the loose red trickle
of blood I made at the corner of
your mouth, the edge of your hole.
Where it doesn't bruise, it bleeds.
Because I love you, you must
become monstrous. Incorporate
the pieces. Blacken your veins
with poison and open your mouth
for the file. Take all the fearful parts
of night creatures and find them in me.

After Aspasia: Bathing

Meager islands wading in steam. I turn the page of an essay
That folds me into a crane with a neck so thin what more
Could I be now but just that: an ornament. And through this
These men fill my hands up from the inside out, their red
Sand plumping up the skin and soon my feet become anchors
And my thighs deaden and I begin to take form like a plush
Toy. They replace my eyes with flat black buttons that foreclose
Your knowing and still they enter me again to fill my throat
Until words take shape and they make me sing.

Breakfast

The radio is playing. I place
 a vitamin in my mouth
 to pray. Here, commit this body

to saving itself. Fish oil. Magnesium.
 Iron. Each capsule, elemental in its design,
 In its representation. These chalky bits

of precious earth. This harvest.
 Hazelnut. Bear bile. Snake tincture.
 No Matter. Amen. And amen

And amen again against the limits
 of a miracle. Wall in the hymn
 so that it rings out Bupropion,

Fluoxetine, Citalopram, Sertraline,
 Mesembrine, Ishim, Fluvoxamine,
 Seraphim, Escitalopram, Ridwan.

Amen. Ameen. I mean hallelujah
 and hosannah; sword and plowshares
 For the holy fire moves. Excise, excise

and repair the charred remainder.
 My faith in the label's explication,
 such scripture leech into me.

Lay down these fits before the Eucharist
 and choke down these little gods
 that make me whole.

After Aspasia: in the Salon

Analysis: When the body moves, they chart my geography then move towards physics to learn the boundaries of potential. Calculate the velocity of departure from the wine to arrival at the beloved. Notice the shift. An object in motion, stays in motion unless it was never in motion at all. Now, they test its range, its sounds, taxonomize laughter to attempt correlations. They wonder if an alien can truly be pleased.

Confession

Bless me father for I have
skinned the cat. It was alive
and now it has been
reborn anew in the kingdom
of dirt. Like a white lamb,
it's stilled and pupaic
as they feed on his body
his congealed blood. Oh father,
you should see his transformation
his perpetual giving. The world
has changed into winged life.
The trees, now shine verdant
as if it received a fresh coat
of paint and has set to dry
in the open air. The ones below
spin in their sated ecstasy
as they grey and acknowledge
the thin skin dries to a dazzling
carapace like hundreds of bright
slick black eyes rolling in the dark.
Father, the beetles are real
and they know such things

as mercy.

After Aspasia: in the Marketplace

This body meanders the path

and passes the bolts of silk,

The pattern maker, sweets

Drizzled in honey, as coins exchanges

For coins and my arms grow heavy

And they see me as they seem themselves,

this shifting location of potential, an opaque

Case wrapped in cloth.

They hear me and I remain faceless.

They see me and they know nothing.

Here, I thumb this orange to know its flesh.

I cut it open to see its red.

I turn my eyes up from this whole thing

Split to give them my face.

Let them know that this body can smile.

Let them know it can tear into a steak.

Hunger is not in the teeth

the gnashing the flood of salted blood,

it's the passing of and passing through

a liminal sensation drives through and through

again as you coat the throat and it releases me

because we are wild now

Stupid Fucking Beauty

Add a few lines
against the shawl's knitting.
Safer to attend to details.
Safer to comprehend loss.
Analyze your risks
when you open
your mouth. See
that deviled line flair
when the tongue does
what it does. Even in the night
your shadow finds the luxury
of a caesura – the weight
of attending to yet absent from
The experience. So, I kiss you
and tell you all the things that
assault me when
I want, when
I consult possibility.
That fucking blender,
your fucking hand,
electric cars, permaculture,
each green fig

plumping on the branch
owning the potential
of sweetness,
daring the proliferation
of an idea. Fucking fruit.
Shitty little promises
concentric in their red bed.
Stupid books that tell me about
the many ways sadness
can permeate a core.
Even in the metaphor
when I imagine those
precious little radicles
struggle from casing
to root, I hate it
because of the margins
where I see them fail.
Stupid little life.
Stupid fucking beauty.
Now, what can I imagine
for tomorrow, but you.

Tell me how I feel when you're inside of me.

Turn me in your hand.

Does it please you?

Make me into your coin

and grate my edges against

paper : fiber
facsimile.

My face carbonized

upon the table.

Take it with you.

There is no integration
through

the castings of a body.

Open me and see the crepe

paper blood flood the room.

Revel in the beauty of
what's

kept from you, that inside

shimmer.

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