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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

Mapping the Self: Ad Infinitum

THESIS

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in English

by

Brendan Bense

Committee:

Associate Professor Monica Youn

Associate Professor Natalie Shapero

Professor Emerita Amy Gerstler

2024

DEDICATION

To

my friends, teachers, and instructors

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Mapping the Self: Ad Infinitum

by

Brendan Bense

Master of Fine Arts in English

University of California, Irvine, 2024

Associate Professor Monica Youn, Chair

This thesis is an interrogation of repetition, spirituality, the self, and grief through the lens of religiosity and family. It offers a dive into the transformative power of change via fragmentation and the paradoxical nature of repetition. This thesis is an interrogation of repetition, spirituality, the self, and grief through the lens of religiosity and family. It offers a dive into the transformative power of change via fragmentation and the paradoxical nature of repetition. This thesis is an interrogation of repetition, spirituality, the self, and grief through the lens of religiosity and family. It offers a dive into the transformative power of change via fragmentation and the paradoxical nature of repetition.

Chapter 1:

Isn't it all the same

My grandmother tells me
in a voice like crystals

You are a beautiful soul
when I spill the sugar

on her favorite black carpet.
How do you know?

She shakes the rug but a few
sugar specks remain.
They look like the stars

she says, gesturing first
to the ground, then to me

like everything was contained
between us two.

Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all
Isn't it

Broken Radios

I hear a voice at night that tells me
our hearts are not our own
to give away. I would pray to God

but he is a tapestry hung on the wall
one day and a seventy-something
at the bus stop the next, so every
answer is a different voice.

This one writes messages in my head
that blossom like a nervous
hunger and rile the blood caught

under my skin. And my blood
has a voice too; it calls
the world a broken radio.

even when we die it is not enough. In heaven we wonder aloud together
in song like symphony, like gospel, if we are happy here with no journey left.

When you are a forest and teem over the earth
even your smallest flower will shine,
and then you will have the world to give away.

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even your smallest flower will shine,
and then you will have the world to give away.

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When you are a forest and teem over the earth
even your smallest flower will shine,
and then you will have the world to give away.

Wander the shoreline
your smallest flower will shine
your smallest flower will shine
your smallest flower will shine
your smallest flower will shine
your smallest flower will shine

Give the world away
 give it away
 give it away
 give it away
 give it away
 give it away

who are we to refuse these things?
the anxious genes of our families
never again. The present takes the shape
like old nightmares. And our children
look over their shoulders

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who are we to refuse these things?
never again. The present takes the shape
like old nightmares. And our children
look over their shoulders

I fear for our children
the anxious genes of our families
and their families, and god, and the gods

and their families, and god, and the gods

“When a storm comes, Jesus will hold the roof!”
There is a makeshift church down a farm
road with a collection box at the door.

Campfires settle our desire

“When a storm comes,
Jesus will hold the roof!”

My grandmother tells me
in a voice like crystals

Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all the same

I fear for our children
the anxious genes of our families

When you are a forest and teem over the earth
even your smallest flower will shine,
and then you will have the world to give away.

How do we wear ourselves?

Isn't it all the same

“When a storm comes, Jesus will hold the roof!”

give it away, give it away, give it away, give it away

Wander the shoreline

Why was it never a question until now
Isn't it all the same
My grandmother tells me
in a voice like crystals

Give the world away
Give the world away
Give the world away

Dancing under our skin
Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same
When you are a forest and teem over the earth
even your smallest flower will shine,
and then you will have the world to give away.

How do we wear ourselves?
“When a storm comes,
Jesus will hold the roof!”

the world a broken radio

“When a storm comes,
Jesus will hold the roof!”

“When a storm comes,
Jesus will hold the roof!”

“When a storm comes,
Jesus will hold the roof!”

“When a storm comes,
Jesus will hold the roof!”

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“When a storm comes,
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“When a storm comes,
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“When a storm comes,
Jesus will hold the roof!”

Dancing under our skin

Chapter 2:

Give the world away
I fear for our children
the anxious genes of our families

I hear a voice at night that tells me
You are a beautiful soul

Isn't it all the same

Wander the shoreline
Wander the shoreline
Wander the shoreline

When you are a forest and teem over the earth
Dance under the skin

You are the earth like crystals
I am the earth

When you are a forest and teem over the earth
Wander the shoreline

Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all the same

“When a storm comes, Jesus will hold the roof!”

look over your shoulder

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same

I do not fool myself

Isn't it all the same

Give the world away

I hear a voice at night that tells me

Isn't it all the same
Isn't it all

I fear for our children
the anxious genes of our families

When you are a forest and teem over the earth
even your smallest flower will shine,
and then you will have the world to give away.

My grandmother
Fears for our children
the anxious genes of our families

When you are a forest

Isn't it all the same

Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the
same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all
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Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the
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the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it
all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same Isn't it all the same I do not fool myself

I hear a voice at night that tells me
voice like crystals

isn't it all the same?

Everything contained between us two
Isn't it all the same

voice like crystals
voice like crystals
voice like crystals
voice like crystals
voice like crystals
voice like crystals
voice like crystals
voice like crystals
voice like crystals
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Isn't it all the same?