

Merrill Cole

THE EXAM

a bacterial attentiveness
close, secret, malign

"the big picture" pulls apart
this microscope
is a crutch

beige interns circle slowly
no one mutters "home"

a pox on life
pressed against the glass

this window
gives view to "garden pinks"
imitation does not please

you want a mirror
to enframe
the image you swallowed

THE SEQUIN SAID IT

If the music sequins
All its quotation marks would
Sustain a subject he tells or
He tells you to
Would he hear it mark
This takes him as if he wishes
Mark to take him

Move left I tell you no move left

This other one the real boy or
Who he would
Hear a ghost story what
He said stains a subject
Wish telling mark of music
If it takes him who quotes
Would you hear this

The sequin said it all no said it

Tells the ghost the real
Move this other wish I
The subject to hear it would
Leave if he ghosts
It sustaining mark
Move you quote
Music all left

ZERO'S HOLD

But now, what I pursued
has lost itself in the causes of relief, flowers,
backgrounds, gilded furniture, drifting forward,
your incision's relinquishment. So silvered
is memory's eclipse — the numbers
hammer exposure for closing face,
body, and flinch — that
one wishes for hours struck like gold, edges
aglow like well-earned bruises. How might we
play this again, all unsmiling,
improvised? Unable to tailor audition
where yet another actor's violence
sounds ironic? "Slap." "Slap." "Slap."
No more compelling than a clock's
tick, ventriloquist tocks, and
I've been coached for something else —