

SHANE NEILSON

Particulate Matter

The ashes to ashes of a village,
immolated huts and burnt-out husks
of automobiles. Overcast cloudcover fed
by black plumes, wet mist of rain lapping at
smouldering wounds. In the market square,
an old man at half-mast
looks for his son.

Gathered there are the corpses of young men
he watched born, breast-fed, grow to
assume their fathers' stalls.

Arranged in rows, their bodies crushed by tank-tread.
A few shots outside the gruesome perimeter—
trying to flee.

The puréed victim goo,
the reddened flesh paste of men
squeezed out of their tubes.

He sees the drenched clothes of those he knew
and loved, their wardrobes newly-pressed and
torn, bony shears having shred the denims and polyesters
at pressure points.

He kneels, feeling the organic soak seep through
his leggings. Head declined in the scoliotic search
for his boy, he picks up a piece of metal
that might have been a ring,
imagining its finger, a hand he once shook
in the mock seriousness of an adult
striking a bargain with a child.