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Panel #1: Poetic Composition: Tools and Materials

Panelists: Erica Hunt, Jennifer Scappettone, Brent Edwards, Charles Bernstein

A starting point: assume abundant materials, the everyday, everywhere you look, even when you are not looking but listening, as you sleep, under the bed, every where. Assume: "mind is shapely," tool driven mammals, no legs, two legs, three legs and no legs again, the facts of the matter and their spin, inevitable transformation. What do you begin to make of it, as a poet, a reader and writer? One approach suggests an "ontological pluralism", the many worlds that co-exist side by side, in relation to the brutal facts, "the material character of the signifier," a pluralism that limns the imaginary and the utopian, claimable through artistic diligence. Your thoughts?

Poetics of Enormity

It seems the trouble is enormity.

Trouble, like form, is "ambient," can't get remote.

Trouble, like attention, is dopamine-sprayed.

While the "page" is now in everybody's faces, glassy &
still obedient to a more or less face-sized frame
more or less the size of our provincialism

and the tool of it too.

The quote on quote page promiscuous & pointing ever away from itself thus
colonizing as never before—in the roving

pocket provincialism of borderlessness:

Transocean going for the record broke
by the well called Tiber—over six miles

vertical, though, this Rome,
into the lower Tertiary, 24 to 65 million years old:
“BP’s second material discovery in the emerging lower tertiary play”—

ocean: the deep frontier:
Eye-in-the-Mer Apollowing it,
that 2/3 of the planet left unexplored...

now subject to half the world’s stockpile of dispersants
to “kee[p] the water from the shore.”
Scalapino’s portent, riposte: “How can that be alone: [like water in water]?”¹

Not structures alone but space itself as speculation,
“spreading” in slightness like the base of the faux-golden bowl,
courtesy now of bygosh.com:

“and, though not of signal depth, justified...by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone
of its surface.”²

What can poets in the Re-Gilded Age draw from Henry James’s emblem, this gilded cracked non-
object wrought of words?

Miming a flat goblet of matter mined on the cheap, mind onscreen, narrative’s abstraction and
spreading actuality,

a null-shape, a tone, waxing unspecific. Stein on James: “You see he made it sort of like an
atmosphere.”³ Volume simulacral:

“It might have been...diminished... by half its original height.”⁴

¹ from *The Animal is in the World Like Water in Water*, with Kiki Smith (New York: Granary, 2010).

² Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*.

³ Gertrude Stein, “Henry James,” in *Writings, 1932-1946*.

⁴ Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*.

Source-chalice, feminized urn of proportions ungiven: of enormity. Material classed by the intimations of “as” only:

“As formed of solid gold it was impressive; it seemed indeed to warn off the prudent...”⁵

This gilded crystal vessel as fiat value unhinged from “nature’s money,” worrying signor Pound, “say also of a lost time,”⁶ dissolving, vaporizing, last century’s paradox, Koons balloon-dog that weighs overmuch on the roof and is as costly.⁷

What can those in the gildwashing age draw off?

A poetics of ambient material

disintegration, counter-speculation.

“Objects and places...disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to give out... to the participant at once so interested and so detached as to be moved to a report of the matter”—

Henry James, *The American Scene*

A poetics moved to a report of the *matter* disposed for human use, addressed to it, thus on the move, a surface perforation, interface:⁸

“the sea that opens and that unites. You were its servants, indeed you also subdued it; there remains of it a taste of solitude, of regret, in your body.”

—Edouard Glissant, *Poetic Intention*

⁵ Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*.

⁶ Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*.

⁷ Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog (Yellow)*, high chromium stainless steel with transparent color coating, 1994-2000. See also Williams Jennings Bryan’s “Cross of Gold” speech.

⁸ See Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006). Christine Wertheim writes a fascinating application of Ranciere to Kenneth Goldsmith in *Open Letter*: “The Unboring Boring and the New Dream of Stone, or, if literature does politics as literature, what kind of gender politics does the new poetics of the boring enact?”

A taste of regret:

: a junk-shot

: Corexit

: a top-kill

: Sea-Brat #4

: shore hourglasses of plastic bags for hire

If there's something slapdash & rampant outside the text...

an ethics of immersion, of "delusional space,"⁹ a structure-mired critique...

committed to the broken codes...and a locus of accountability...

instate these exceptions to the post-slogans:

"truth to immaterials"

So the digital's immaterial, while Suzhou workers riot or are hospitalized by the neurotoxin in your gardenburgers

that can damage the peripheral nervous system & cause paralysis;

but it dries more quickly and reduces streaks on iPhone screens.

"site-speculativity"

So the troublesome sites aren't only pasted over, plasticked, "capped,"

but replaced, transmuted into rhetoric, a searchable Superfundament.

It's rhetoric that off-gasses.

"OF the vaporization and the centralization of the ego-polis. All lies in that."

Of the unwitting commission of bodies to the vaporization of certain matter-cracks and leaks.

A spill "of national significance," nation in fumes: deterritorialized, yes. A becoming-major of that.

⁹ See Lisa Robertson, *Philly Talks* 17 (2000), with Steve McCaffery.

Wafting ambiance for those “[f]ugitives...bound for the deleterious...”¹⁰

consummation of Cage’s “Lecture on the Weather”:

“I dedicate this work to the U.S.A. that it may become just another part of the world,
no more, no less.”

“no things but in ideas,”

stillborn. Except when it comes to paying,
except when it comes to launching them, obsolesced, to South Carolina and China,
“far more wonderful than if [they] were to dance of [their] own accord.”¹¹

Once hallowed p-dash structuralist tractates are the pernicious inverse of naturalist and realist
fictions, which at the acme of an epoch battering nature and body as mechanism sought to expose
immanent arcs of determinism: fates biopolitical manifest in the limbs of naïve young things—

tuneless Nana of the dung-heap,
Dreiser’s chorus girl-in-training—
into the lettered public sphere.

Double zeros pass the crisis of that realism. Now out of their reclusiveness
let these dance the catwalk of the dispersed, disorganized body.¹² Choral contour down the elliptical
gutter, leachate-swale

of incompletely intimate biology and biography
mapped more or less exactly upon the story of waste
in the United States, “our contrary quakes.”¹³

¹⁰ Edouard Glissant, *Poetic Intention*, trans. Nathalie Stephens (Calacoon, NY: Nightboat, 2010), 3.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*.

¹² The “disorganized body” is a concept that my collaborator on PARK, choreographer Kathy Westwater, has developed somatically. She gave a paper on this topic before a brief demonstration at the Belladonna ADFEMPO conference’s panel on ecopoetics. The panel, which I organized, was titled “Is Ground as to Figure as Ambience is to Body? Ec(h)opoetics of the Disfigured Landscape,” and held at the CUNY Graduate Center in September 2009.

Choros, from the root indicating *hedge, enclosure, hortus*—yard, garden, and garth of the polis’s threshing floor. In a landscape of concavities and convexities, the threshing-site was a rare platform, place to host both beating & rubbing the harvest for its seed, and dancing—the *seduction* of fertility—infrastructure of tragedy.

Hedge, enclosure, hortus. & yet classical drama—forum of the feminized ma-source, zone of the irrational, emoting, Dionysian, transitional citizen, cross-dressed, dithyrambic, apocryphally double-doored, is also a site of penetrability—of the expressive claims of beings with more fluid boundaries, “more open to affect and entry,” pumps of instability. “[C]atalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers, and sometimes helpers or saviors”¹⁴ for those being trained spectacularly in democracy.

Choros, a word the Spartans used to name their central civic and religious space. The chorus *is* public space: a choral crowd, spewn through the theater’s vomitorium at the end of a performance, are more perfectly interpellated into the citizenry.

Tragedy’s blocking of bodies, uncanny manifestation of shared language in an unprivate forum, opening improperly onto a sum of tongue’s vulnerabilities, camouflages, parasites—making a body of realism inextricable from the corporal experience in which it’s moored.

A chorus of enormity pumped vis-à-vis the infrastructure of disaster—welling up, out of the uncapped lots, weeping schoolwounds, fragrant sloughs—toward the newly sexed shores: dis/aster that hasn’t been mapped, only hyperlinked through the symptoms of shame and imperfectly

embellished cancers. Incompletely intimate:
one’s biology and biography mapping more or less exactly

¹³ Glissant, 34.

¹⁴ Froma Zeitlin, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996).

upon the story of waste in the United States.

To drill a poetic field that's choral, relational and participatory,
sucks in the junk and the data of trouble without disgorging a "view from everywhere,"
ambient citizenship that kicks, that has channels, thighs?

The dump is full / of gas. Days vaporize like pages onscreen. Page like methane,
A rough negative value, lethal anodyne, aloft.
Untuneful hissing out of sprawling goosenecks on the mound.

Brathwaite's "gnashlish"¹⁵

Mac Low's "snow annexation flyers the sky...tropical sweat...invading the Gulf stream...all over
credit union readiness"¹⁶

Scalapino on Valentine's Day, 2010: "their whole as bodies in the underground petroleum...holes
spurting here and there in the sky-turned-indigo as did the ocean, now petroleum."¹⁷

To make a start, out of enormity, and make it particulate, scattering the sum,
The poem a site for the restreaming of post-pastoral, post-Paterson fact in motion
as junk in the limbs.

Scalapino: "...to render the sense that 'the word' abuts sensory space that is of (in) the
world. That is, 'the word,' as spatial, *also* makes a sense of sensory space...and makes a sense
of the undoing of social tyranny...(public indistinguishable from private)."¹⁸

Archaeology of the Superfundament

To recapitulate, rescatter spatorhetorical ambiguity.

To pucker the realist page into myriad more sensuous channels.

¹⁵ From "Nights," in *Born to Slow Horses* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 2005).

¹⁶ Jackson Mac Low, *Forties*, 1990-1999.

¹⁷ "Buds eyelids," now printed in *The Dihedrons Gazelle-Dihedrals Zoom* (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Leslie Scalapino, "The Division Between Fact and Experience," *War and Peace*, vol. 4 (2009).

“There are no outdated thoughts which perish beside new energies that are uncontrolled, naïve, rudimentary.... History must be assumed *completely* (lived together) in order perhaps to move beyond it (like the sea) once more.” —Glissant, *Poetic Intention*

“The ‘old’ matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted...—believed in...yet for due testimony, for re-assertion of value, perforating as by some strange and fine, some latent and gathered force, a myriad more adequate channels.” —James, preface to *The Golden Bowl*

From one singular sensation, every little sap that demands pacifying
into and out of the vomitorium.

Not to make the invisible visible, but to bruise and multiply the channels of its invisibility.