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## Statement for Rethinking Poetics

Once the performance is over and people walk away, my hope is that a process of reflection gets triggered in their perplexed psyches. If the performance is effective (I didn't say good, but effective), this process can last for several weeks, even months. The questions and dilemmas embodied in the images and rituals I present can continue to haunt the spectator's dreams, memories, and conversations. The objective is not to "like" or to "understand" performance art, but to create a sediment in the audience's psyche.

—Guillermo Gómez-Peña

This comment by Gómez-Peña embodies for me, more or less, where I'm at these days in terms of thinking about performance [including these three days in June of 2010]. Though simple sounding enough, Gómez-Peña's thought-line contains some rather expansive notions about performance in general, but also, I think, notions that have significant import for poetic activity, specifically.

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"Once the performance is over..."

The meaning of this clause seems quite obvious at first, so self-evident, but to me, it is neither of those. Performances, if not anything else, eventually *do* arrive at a state of being "over". That's the inalterable reality of any performance—there's a little "death" involved each time. And how few poets (and their critical elucidators) these days perform writing in the "live" mode in which the writing *itself* (at *any* point along the way) displays a sense of its own approach toward a state of being "over." Thirty minutes might go by, and yet the number of references, allusions, citations, that get pinned up as on a clothesline that's hard-posted into a forever-land bedrock of poetic preeminence, leaves one batty, batty-focused (this critique might also extend to much current so-called "experimental" writing). This forever-ness-trance-in-the-making is what most people on the street-street still understand as being poetry-poetry.

But, "over", also suggests a crossing "*over*"—but to where? Answer: *no one really knows!* In performance, on the plane of the social-psychic, whatever ratio we each are to some amassed whole of humanity / higher ape-dome *we don't know* (being "finite"—bio-matter—in process). And yet! We have dreams of acting on that very ratio—as unto some whole, both as performers and as spectators (often confusing the two—hopefully). Thus, we "liberate" art by way of this whacked out reaching towards "wholeness", and thus, we "oppress" art too, by relieving it of its pretensions of eternity. Such strong dreams we have! Such insomnia we're prone to!

"Once the performance is over...*and people walk away*"

people walk away...though a compulsion to camp out forever at St. Peter's CyberTronic Fuckspot, knapsack in hand, living through reading after reading (thus dying, steadily),

still, people bail, scoot, move on. *And*, people always walk away to somewhere, to material-social locations. But these historically active locations are not the same as those “crossings over”; that is, the lingering oscillatory flow of performative “overs” haunt those other locations (locations that are mediated by class, race, gender, and sexual relations) into acting—well, even weirder. So, already we’re dealing with a kind of double-life of poetic ritual, a birth-death cycle of performance that renders generic “social being” as suspect. This aesthetic of “sending” what is “already sent” (and its corollary “un-sending” of what is “not-yet-sent”) is not only patently absurd, and quite disorienting, *but*—it has the transformative capability of swallowing back lost remnants of the apparent world into poetic activity itself. In this cauldron, we punk around naked. I mean, “real world” content detection is not a gliding movement from individual brain to world-already-there, but an antagonistic dance between a re-imagined self as unto a de-imagined world. There, in that *de*-imagined world, we might measure “traces” of larger historic forces as a new kind of “location” (not necessarily per se “where we live” – the “local”, the “national” the “global”, etc). But, we can describe “location” (momentarily at least, through filtering of national image-*in-nations*, *imagination*s)) *as a place*. And people walk away from there too. For sure. But the point of art (from this proposed “ethical” perspective) is not to have people *look* away, *think* away, so soon.

Again, Gómez-Peña:

Once the performance is over and people walk away, my hope is that a process of reflection gets triggered in their perplexed psyches. If the performance is effective (I didn’t say good, but effective), this process can last for several weeks, even months”

So, not sure if my brief gloss on Gómez-Peña’s comment constitutes the outlines of an aesthetic-political ethics per se, but I do mean to critically speak to the still dominant (and I would say, oppressive) post-modern aesthetic that over-privileges the now-now (presentism) as the end-all crucible of poetic production & reception. You know, gauges gauging gauges, always-in-the-light Calvinist Grace, Capital’s Bogey Bot.

So instead, I want posit (and not defend to the death, o wolves) what I’ll call *Material Trans-Locative Chronicity* as a framework from which to more openly to discuss the material-death of performances, along with their weird after-lives

Carla Harryman’s recent poetic diptych, a vocal-performative bestriding of the movies *Eva* and *La Notte*, subtly eviscerates some of the hidden ideological dream-work of post-war Continental Capitalism by adjoining her (Harryman’s) most recent multiple critical viewing memory of the films. That is, there’s deeply layered in-between time or place that gets constructed between viewer (Harryman), image-sound projections (the two films), and viewer-projector (us, the audience). The “present” fades out into the background, and what comes forwards (and not by declaration of Harryman’s intent) are strings of failed “nows”. *Eva* and *La Notte* are two films deeply concerned with the anxiety of no-past/no-future, and as films, are quite serious in tone; but once the affectual scaffolding of their intended social-time is brought into high focus, a strange new hilarity asserts itself. It isn’t snark, and certainly not irony either.

William Howe's "Symphony for Prepared Shoes", a synthesis of live writing, dance, visual poetics, sound poetics, ephemeral practice, sculpture, installation, print making, and improvisational collaboration, starts by Howe designing individual vocabularies for each player (actually, Howe designs each pair of shoes himself where the shoes' soles act as word stamps (right shoe whole words / left shoe, letters and letter-forms). The players walk or crawl or prance on a huge sheet of paper while they recite out loud words that they and the other players are leaving behind, toning off of what they're hearing at the moment. Howe explains "the writing/movement is to one extent or another covered with language and becomes a kind of residue text that bears a certain kind of relationship to the acoustic piece, but does not represent it temporally (it more closely resembles the entire time frame of the acoustic piece holistically rather than a linear, time dependant textual path). The objects that come out of the process of the piece are sculptural and 2D visual in nature, however, the space that the performance takes place in during the performance and directly afterwards until the writing movement surface is taken up is radically transformed and becomes a kind of installation of the residue of a collaborative live writing project."

Suzanne Stein's "A Hole in Space" repurposes poetry readings that are (as by the calendar) far apart in "time". And yet, each performance does not (and in fact, can not depend on a "now" as "now". Live events of readings, the physical spaces of the Poetry Project and Canessa Park, with real, live humans, which are long gone, are layered upon each other and compressed and re-deployed. Stein literally performs previous audience members' um's and ooh's and ah's during subsequent performances. For example, she says that because she did not like the "quite cold" atmosphere of CCA but rather enjoyed the warmth of seeing the audience, as at the Poetry Project, and that by having that "nearer" experience, that acknowledging the "presence" of the audience, becomes a problem in itself, like where is where, and when is when, and so how, "affect". Stein also states that she wanted to "top" the space and to submit to the audience—two dueling considerations, it would seem, or a multi-zoned, hierarchically ranging experience. There again, perhaps *A Material Trans-Locative Sense Chronicity* might shed light on much art as revolutionary ghost-work, escaping Cultural Capitalist Capture Zones, as opposed to having to mimic the architecture-speak of "project."