

Written for "The Work of Leslie Scalapino" symposium, presented at the Poetry Project, November 11, 2006

L.S. and the Anti-Production Room

"The relation to terror is people, not death."

-Leslie Scalapino

Some refer to it as *The Production Room*, others *The Blue Lit Stage*. Some simply call it *Cinema Station*. Americans try to make it sound cute –

Gitmo. Some kind of side-paneled hatchback from the 80s? Furry space creature that squeaks in a high voice and delivers us from danger? Something domestic even, familiar.

Pain – typically inflicted after "the one being held" is asked a series of riddles. The voice of the torturer an exercise in an obsessive self-conscious display of agency, one that oscillates dizzyingly between the interrogatory, the declarative, and imperative modes, or conflates all three into one, the emphatic exclamatory. So language itself becomes meaningless, except as an expression of the torturer's fantasy inhabitation of every relational perspective. For "the held" it becomes impossible to utter anything that will register outside of this total logic. A no-brainer! Right? Tell me.

Question:

What assists the conversion of absolute pain into the fiction of absolute power?

In Leslie Scalapino's book *Dahlia's Iris*, social reproduction does not occur "out there" as much as "in here". Grace Abe is a detective who's inhabited by a dead Marine, investigating the murder or suicide of a number of paperless hispanic boys ("repetition does not signify relation") beneath the skyscrapers downtown. This is the world. Her body inside registers, social ripple. From part one, indigo at night:

She had a dim 'memory,' always in the present only, of the Marine's activities but these were separate from her own actions (she did not do his actions or any resemblance of his at the time the Marine was in her, or before he was in her). And these were not dreams of something she *wanted* to do either. She had no impulse to do his actions hunting killing people (though she had no specific information about his life either) regardless of her job as a police detective. He was entirely separate troubled. Running, she would find herself weeping, but as him.

Excruciating physical pain finally dazes so the person is still in their flesh. One's still, while the flesh feels as if it is existing in the outside separated. The flesh does not seem to *be* that one, yet is theirs only and enhanced delirious.

In a sense, the person, sieve, imprint can only avoid replicating the killers by experiencing the social trauma inwardly, that which the killer cannot do. Which is to feel it—the social trauma—becoming part of the fabric of the self, sieve, imprint thus depriving it of the willed abstraction from which it draws its power. The detainee has *no choice*. But for others, “the free,” this is counter-intuitive. To injest, instead of reject. One can only reject principles or ideas, not social being—we exist in and of it. We are of it. So to reject is a delusion, a kind of psychic armor.

To wear armor implicitly condones violence. The armored one (who is monad, not-sieve, windowless, blank) removes herself, is in-violate, cannot be touched, can only ever be referred to. Thus, the armored one grants herself immunity from vulnerability, essentially moves outside her body as it exists socially (ie. of and from violence). Like this: since her body is no longer physical / vulnerable, it becomes conceptual. A conceptual body has no physicality, only a voice. And he who is voice with no body evokes terror, is power itself. Does power have a body?

Infinitely reiterating the illusion of the naturalness of its authority, Voice displays the supposed ease of its agency. Voice parties. Voice snaps photos. Voice gabs incessantly, is blustery and “creative.” But oftentimes Voice, behind its disingenuous joy, is bent on disciplining those who dare to stop smiling.

Safety as terror. Terror, then, a kind of safety – for some.

Not efficient to be armorless.

Definitely not fun.

Certainly isn’t safe.

The armorless get blasted, blown up, shot in the abdomen, targeted by police in plainclothes behind a barricade a barricade a barricade of buses, Oaxaca.

Palestine: who ran with a child in broad daylight for cover at the side of the road
screaming don’t - - - shoot - - -

In *Dahlia’s Iris*, Scalapino continually returns to the question of what interiority (she, we, aware it’s alarm-rigged) could mean in a context such as this. It is not the opposite of the social, but that which blooms from what it might warp toward, some-whereplace burgeoning here. In this way “the outer event is ‘subjectivity.’”

However, simultaneously, the “interior” is “perceiver not separate from the perceived...that which... ‘observing itself’ disrupts its own formation.” The outer event

is subjectivity. Scalapino tries; can the interior event in observing itself disrupt its own formation? Does a discourse hope.

From “Note on Secret-Life Writing”, a kind of preface to *Dahlia’s Iris*:

“The alien pod-flowers in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* consume a self by duplicating it (its appearance): physiological is conceptual. Interiority thus destroyed by being its duplication is socially uniform: is a reflection of a U.S. ‘view’ that interiority itself is entity / as uniformity.”

This view on the creative-destruction of the individual self, of interiority as the uniformity (of a bygone liberal humanist era) is surely not what anti-enlightenment discourse had “hoped?” to (negatively) figure. Does a discourse hope. For rather than rendering the humanist rhetoric of a brutal colonizing nation state obsolete, “The U.S. [is now just] occupied by ‘itself’”. The U.S. is occupied by itself. As interiority is, has become uniformity.

So, the interior not disrupting its own formation as the subjectivity of the outer event.

From Part III, The Spine’s Dream:

...If one is not in one’s motions (drops out of these, separates)—by not attending, these motions don’t even occur (in one)—one has the sense of not living at that instant or at all.

...There’s no board meeting to replace her later.

The outer event now. Then, what is it?

In his brief article entitled “Terror and Form” published in Art Forum, David Joselit suggests that the form of terror epitomized by Al Queda’s “stunning instance of Situationist detournement” that caused “an icon of American mobility [the airplane] to perform its own negation” is more like twentieth century art than conventional warfare in its logic of appropriation and subversive recoding. Yet he also writes of another kind of terror – that of the terror of form, of the pure abstraction that is the law, our own socio-economic system. He writes, “ The genius of American terror is that this “juridical form” is sold to us as entertainment...we choose between the law as drama (police patrolling the cities, doctors probing our bodies), as comedy (the middle-class family in sitcoms is disrupted only to be reaffirmed), or as video verité “documentary” (codes of gender and social behavior in ‘Reality TV’).”

In short, “We’ve learned to love our terror.”

Though writing about the paintings of Thomas Eggerer, Joselit suggests the outlines of an eery relationship between art and the seduction of pure form. “The gestural brushstroke collides with architectural renderings to create impossible spaces redolent of apocalypse.”

What is the gestural brushstroke, and what the architectural rendering, of writing that must interiorize the outside?

I mean it really. What is the gestural brushstroke, and what is the architectural rendering, of the interior event of trying to fashion a temporary home.

It is in such a space in *Dahlias Iris* where Latin American boys lacking papers dive like kites out of skyscrapers, or disappear in a life-long flurry of work at the slave camp.

Grace had changed. Four years earlier a meeting of occurrences had precipitated, or suddenly there was a man who had been a marine dead who was in her. She would be running out, it would be him running. But she would never leave her body or her own mind when he was there. He'd been special forces, an assassin when he was alive; she hadn't known him but she would feel the presence of his activities, 'ghosts of actions she had done' which were apparently his, or hers. Though she hadn't acted (when he had killed someone, before entering her).

First addicted to Ibogaine, a drug used by Indian hunters, causing illness of vomiting followed by elation and an utter lucidity in hunting, she'd spiraled with the marine being there erratically. Then addicted to a Peruvian drug derived from frogs, the secretion applied to burn marks on one's chest or arms. Chloe, Andrew, Jasper Frank were aware of her use of drugs. They were not aware of the marine who might suddenly begin and be there in her. She didn't tell them. Andrew murmured Don't Grace, finding her in her underslip burning her chest.

Terror as safety. Safety, terror.

The “debacle” causes some, even those who consider themselves to be fundamentally against armor, to argue for the benefits of armor in fighting armor.

Others simply feel kinda “armory”.

Make armor amour. Not war.

The voice – simulacral but recognizable – demanded is packaged “my project?” – and becomes a source in the attempt at self-extension; they used to call this an imperialist buffer, and it used to refer to geographical space. Who knows power doesn't work like that? now?

So long as one is speaking/spinning/“making opinion”/working the room, the self extends out beyond the boundaries of the body and the body’s morbidity can be hidden behind an emperor’s cloak. It is armor.

(Hand over hand, foot over foot, rung by rung up the laddered spine, towards the low rumble of the larynx, the (drone of the) sky).

My “did this to me.” On the Blue Lit Stage.