OUTLINE OF POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) Figuring “science” in the broadest sense—that is, as scientia, or “knowledge”—what kinds of knowledge might poetry produce that are different from, adjacent to, or even opposed to those made available by science in its more colloquial sense?
   a) What is the social use of such knowledge, and does it have a use-value?
   b) Can it or should it be commodified, or can/should it resist commodification altogether? [Do all types of poetry do this, or do certain poetries generate different knowledges or use-values? Are different poetics differently commodifiable?]

2) How can or should poetry trouble the lionization of science as an apex of "reason"? Can we love the epistemological systems of science enough to see their weaknesses, lacks, and the dangers an uncritical relationship to the scientific method makes possible?

3) We use the term “experiment” or “experimental” to describe a certain kind of poetry—namely, a poetry whose product, end, or aim is not yet determined, one that remains questionable or that stages questions (formal or otherwise) which have yet to be answered. How does this sense of aesthetic experimentation square with the term’s more scientific valence, i.e., to perform an “experiment”?

4) Given that “experiment” shares an etymological root with “experience,” is there something in the process of creating or of interacting with a text that is akin to the scientific process of experimentation? Can poetry model an “experience” of language that produces genuinely scientific knowledge?

5) Which writers, outside of the panel, do we see pushing poetry and form through engagement with science or scientific concepts? What do they have to offer this discussion?

6) The scientific world makes claims toward "objective" truth (exterior) while most relegate poetry to the realm of the "subjective" (interior). Do the panelists find these terms useful when examining poetry written with the scientific process in mind? What is the relationship/tension for each writer between the persona(l) and the scientific?

7) "If we view scientific writing as a genre, how are poems written alongside science engaging in a hybridization of those forms? Is a new form created by the "scientific" poem?"
8) What are the panelists' scientific obsessions? What makes that specialized topic such a rich source for your poetry?
Poems

**Term Break** ([http://nzpoetsonline.homestead.com/SW30.html](http://nzpoetsonline.homestead.com/SW30.html))

By Sue Wootton (Editor of Corpus.NZ, an online journal about medicine and the humanities)

Condom near the see-saw in the morning rain: frail
as an angel's pericardium flayed from an angel's heart, fallen
from last night's sky. Dropped.

There's a boy waking late today and stretching: raw
where he didn't expect it, and a girl, elsewhere, solitaire,
owing to herself: bereft.

**Consequences of the Laws of Thermodynamics** (Bashir, Samiya. *Field Theories*. Nightboat 2016).
BY **SAMiya BASHIR**

When Albert Murray said
the second law adds up to
the blues that in other words
ain't nothing nothing he meant it

not quite the way my pops says
nomads don't show emotions
but more how my grandmother
warned that men like women

with soft hands blood red
nails like how Mingus meant
truth if you had time for it
facts if you got no time that

years pass. Zero
one two three and
the man you used

to flirt with you can
no longer flirt with
thank goodness.

He's now a man
you can't wear
your jaw out on
about weather
news or work

a perfect
strawberry

buried
beneath

a peck.

**Double Slit**
By Rushi Vyas

On the tongue’s gnarled bark
floating over basement concrete, light
scatters grey through the transom above
my dead Bapu. Stiff as sugarcane,
stand. Golden beams carry dust
to his noose-ejected tongue. Light
molds rigored tissue into tumor,
frames my metastatic tremble: no.

Think of light: my body approaching—
now wave; his hanging—now particle.
When I reach for his pulse,
I collapse. Behind the door’s double slit,
the suspended body dies when seen.
Perhaps, if I look away—

No.
Two days earlier, in sunlight, in the car, 
Bapu closer to my throat
than his mind. One moment, shaking,
cursing his goddamn son. The next,
still apology, open palm
caressing his bachu’s flat head.
The visible spectrum flutters in rearview,

no.

Blink: phantasm; flicker: shadow; quiver:
basement furnace burning behind the neck, fire
thieving his body to warm our home. I offer prasad
to the murti of his mangled tongue, pour milk
past hungry mouths into the gutter. Across the globe,
monks leap from mountains to return
as rain. The prayer’s scaffold falls.

No.

I can only pray his tongue is tumor
before my gaze. It is just a dead organ
strung by electric cable to the ceiling.
In the grey light, there is no mantra,
but the wave function collapse—
the signifier claiming the body it calls.
HISTORY (N.)

John James

*I didn’t make these verses because I wanted to rival that fellow, or his poems, in artistry—I knew that wouldn’t be easy—but to test what certain dreams of mine might be saying and to acquit myself of any impiety, just in case they might be repeatedly commanding me to make this music.—Plato, Phaedo*

Viewed from space, the Chilean volcano blooms.

I cannot see it. It’s a problem of scale. History—the branch of knowledge dealing with past events; a continuous, systematic narrative of; aggregate deeds; acts, ideas, events that will shape the course of the future; immediate but significant happenings; finished, done with—“he’s history.”

...  

Calbuco: men shoveling ash from the street. Third time in a week. And counting.

*Infinite antithesis. Eleven miles of ash in the air. What to call it—just “ash.” They flee to Ensenada.*
The power of motives does not proceed directly from the will—
a changed form of knowledge. Wind pushing
clouds toward Argentina. Knowledge is merely involved.

Ash falls, it is falling, it has fallen. Will fall. Already flights
cancelled in Buenos Aires. I want to call it snow—
what settles on the luma trees, their fruit black, purplish black,
soot-speckled, hermaphrodite—if this book is unintelligible

and hard on the ears—the oblong ovals of its leaves.

Amos, fragrant. Family name Myrtus. The wood is extremely hard.

Ash falling on the concrete, falling on cars, ash
on the windshields, windows, yards. They have lost
all sense of direction. They might as well be deep
in a forest or down in a well. They do not comprehend
the fundamental principles. They have nothing in their heads.

The dream kept
urging me on to do
what I was doing—
to make music—
since philosophy,
in my view, is
the greatest music.

* * *

*History*—from the Greek *historia*, learning or knowing by inquiry.

*Historein* (v.) to ask. *The asking is not idle.* From the French *histoire*, story.

*Histor* (Gk.) one who sees. *It is just a matter of what we are looking for.*
TROPHIC CASCADE

Camille T. Dungy

After the reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone and, as anticipated, their culling of deer, trees grew beyond the deer stunt of the midcentury. In their up reach, songbirds nested, who scattered seed for underbrush, and in that cover warrened snowshoe hare. Weasel and water shrew returned, also vole, and so came soon hawk and falcon, bald eagle, kestrel, and with them hawk shadow, falcon shadow. Eagle shade and kestrel shade haunted newly berried runnels where deer no longer rummaged, cautious as they were, now, of being surprised by wolves. Berries brought bear, while undergrowth and willows, growing now right down to the river, brought beavers, who dam. Muskrats came to the dams, and tadpoles. Came, too, the night song of the fathers of tadpoles. With water striders, the dark gray American dipper bobbed in fresh pools of the river, and fish stayed, and the bear, who fished, also culled deer fawns and to their kill scraps came vulture and coyote, long gone in the region until now, and their scat scattered seed, and more trees, brush, and berries grew up along the river that had run straight and so flooded but thus dammed, compelled to meander, is less prone to overrun. Don’t you tell me this is not the same as my story. All this life born from one hungry animal, this whole, new landscape, the course of the river changed, I know this. I reintroduced myself to myself, this time a mother. After which, nothing was ever the same.
Nomi Stone, Fieldworkers of the Sublime

https://poets.org/poem/fieldworkers-sublime

In a dream, two lovers’ thighs scythe around each others’ centers.
Spring again!

A scientist grafts eyes
onto the tails of blind tadpoles.
It works. The proof

is the tadpoles can now follow
rotating optical patterns. Nervous systems
rebooted, they swim

into the fluorescent light.
Once the laboratories begin hatching
bombs, the pond scum and lilies,

their slick, hairlike roots,
are left naked in buckets. The room
of the world shakes. If you see me

from there, there
where I have lost you, here
is a picture of my body, bright with data.

Katherine Larson, Love at Thirty-Two Degrees

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/48159/love-at-thirty-two-degrees

I

Today I dissected a squid,
the late acacia tossing its pollen
across the black of the lab bench.
In a few months the maples
will be bleeding. That was the thing:
there was no blood
only textures of gills creased like satin,
suction cups as planets in rows. Be careful
not to cut your finger, he says. But I’m thinking
of fingertips on my lover’s neck
last June. Amazing, hearts.
This brachial heart. After class,
I stole one from the formaldehyde
& watched it bloom in my bathroom sink
between cubes of ice.

II

Last night I threw my lab coat in the fire
& drove all night through the Arizona desert
with a thermos full of silver tequila.

It was the last of what we bought
on our way back from Guadalajara—
desert wind in the mouth, your mother’s
beat-up Honda, agaves
twisting up from the soil
like the limbs of cephalopods.

Outside of Tucson, saguaros so lovely
considering the cold, & the fact that you
weren’t there to warm me.
Suddenly drunk I was shouting that I wanted to see the stars
as my ancestors used to see them—
to see the godawful blue as Aurvandil’s frostbitten toe.

III

Then, there is the astronomer’s wife
ascending stairs to her bed.

The astronomer gazes out,
one eye at a time,
to a sky that expands
even as it falls apart

like a paper boat dissolving in bilge.
Furious, fuming stars.

When his migraine builds &
lodges its dark anchor behind

the eyes, he fastens the wooden buttons
of his jacket, & walks

outside with a flashlight
to keep company with the barn owl

who stares back at him with eyes
that are no greater or less than

a spiral galaxy.
The snow outside

is white & quiet
as a woman’s slip

against cracked floorboards.
So he walks to the house

inflamed by moonlight, & slips
into the bed with his wife

her hair & arms all
in disarray

like fish confused by waves.

IV

Science—

beyond pheromones, hormones, aesthetics of bone,
every time I make love for love’s sake alone,
I betray you.
After a head trauma, distance
is one measurement of injury: across small breaks,
the nerves regrow.

Spanning large gaps requires silk grafts:
spider threads
ensheathed in nerve cells, new suspension bridges

between the word flood and the rush
of rising sea water. This science reveals the body
sees the silk as kindred,

absorbs it, so there is no ensuing infection.
It is easy to imagine the brain
as a meshwork of silk rope bridges,

perhaps easier as a city or a field of grass.
A lone apricot tree, its orange fruits flaming up
like ideas—

[After a head trauma, distance]

by Rosalie Moffett
[Up early for the long drive home, I become]

by Rosalie Moffett

Up early for the long drive home, I become
aware of the orb-weavers’ webs
built between parallel power lines—

    they gleam in the streetlamp, beaded
with what looks like their own tiny orb-lights, solar systems
    strung around the flickering white.

All those moths roving dumbly towards the ersatz
moon, their navigation
gummed up with the modern world, and the spiders,

    feasting, clinging between
the spiral-bound wires, the electricity—and me,
    pre-coffee, dumbstruck in the brown-dark.

Human voltage is everything. It’s our hurt, travelling
to the brain, it’s our heart, in fear
quickening its pace. This electricity, lineless,

    jumps cell to cell—
each cell, like a castle, flings up its portcullis, potassium
gets out, sodium gets in,

and this mix creates a charge that blasts ajar
the next door, chain reaction
that takes the spark where it needs to go.

    I need to understand this, standing
under the webs between the wires, because I can see her
    better if I can see into her:

electricity gone berserk, wrong turns
    tugging her body
into its spasms, rickety system flashing

    with pain and information. I’m prone
to think of it among the still shapes of early morning,
    the spiders in their jeweled

territories, the power lines taking electricity to the TVs,
    the toasters and coffee makers, everything
about to wake up.