

I.

A *relation* is a real thing, i.e. has a physio-neuronal
instantiation between minds and in brains,
traceable through Positron Emission Tomography.
The *res poetica* is a relation realized through poetry.
It's a space akin to what George Oppen
had in mind when he, following Shelley,
called poets "the legislators of the unacknowledged world."
It's not like "a city upon a hill" (which "cannot be hidden").

2.

Poets are real: poets make poetry, or its algorithms;
they think of themselves, and represent themselves,
as poets.
In defining the limits of the *res poetica*,
take Wallace Stevens' claim "We live in the mind"
in equal measure with Elaine Scarry's demonstrations
of the ways mind can be reduced, with violence,
to body.

3.

Poets come out of
what Bishnupriya Ghosh calls "local struggles"
which cannot be represented from a single perspective.
The production, dissemination, and reception of poetry
partially project the space of such struggles
into another space, the *res poetica*,
a model state.
FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION
OF CONTENT, and is thus open to evaluation.

4.

Anne-Lise François, following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, calls an *open secret*
"[a] gesture of self-canceling revelation [that] permits a release
from the ethical imperative to act upon knowledge"
in environments of threat.
An open secret is

“an essentially preventative or conservative mode of communication
that reveals to insiders what it simultaneously hides from outsiders,
or, more specifically, protects them from what it is in their power to ignore.”

Poetry can be an open secret,

“a way of imparting knowledge
such that it cannot be claimed and acted on.”

As an open secret, poetry “makes nothing happen.”

“No

one listens to poetry.”

It can be used as cover.

It can also transmit and maintain knowledge
in the face of tacit or explicit threat,
through articulation or non-articulation.

This function, of open secret, is called *the res poetica*.

5.

Vivek Narayanan characterizes Shrikant Verma’s *Magadh* as

“one of the most highly regarded books of Hindi poetry from the 1980s”
and “among the best books of poetry I have ever read.”

Magadh contains

“ambiguous invocations of half-mythical South Asian cities”
that remind Narayanan of Borges and Cavafy, but
“there is also a canny and even bitter political outrage”
that makes Verma’s book unique and beautiful.

It makes me think of Mandelstam, and of Robert Duncan’s *Passages*.

Narayanan reads *Magadh*

as an open secret:

“Bizarrely, Verma was a senior Congress Party functionary
under Indira Gandhi in the late 70s and early 80s”
(which entails complicities now seen in Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*).

“It’s hard, for me at least, to resist reading *Magadh*
as his way of speaking about some aspects of that close-up experience
in the only way he could.”

6.

Rahul Soni’s translation of Shrikant Verma’s

“Corpses in Kashi”

Have you seen Kashi?

Where corpses come and go
by the same road

And what of corpses?
Corpses will come
Corpses will go

Ask then, whose corpse is this?
Is it Rohitashva? No, no
all corpses cannot be Rohitashva

His corpse, you will recognize
from a distance
and if not from a distance

then from up close
and if not from up close
then it cannot be Rohitashva

And even if it is,
what difference
does it make?

Friends, you have seen Kashi
where corpses come and go
by the same road

and this is all you did –
made way and asked,
Whose corpse is this?

Whoever it was
whoever it was not
what difference did it make?

7.

It is the *res poetica*, rather than a poem or poetry, that brings together
the conditions under which the poem was written

the poem in its medium of dissemination
the poem among other poems
the conditions in which the poem is received
the poem's author function and author
It's the state induced by *explication du texte*
It's a model state, momentary, fragile,
temporally continuous or discontinuous,
but materially real.
It is not different in kind
from the nationalisms Benedict Anderson describes in *Imagined Communities*,
from the "new Tipi way" Warren L. D'Azevedo describes in *Straight With the Medicine*
or from constructs such as "The United States" or "India"
(which Narendra Modi describes as having a "natural relationship").
It's just differently realized, and enforced.

9.

Despite Auden's epithet and Spicer's uncharacterizable lament,
the *res poetica* is a state discernable
as what Mina Loy called "the level of cool plains,"
a kind of transcendence that David Kyuman Kim identifies as religious,
but that can also be (like Loy's) sexual, political, or otherwise determinate
in trajectory, if not in instantiation.
Like sex, political action and religion, poetry, and the self-determination
it affords, is not the province of the individual.
It's projects local struggles into shared space.

8.

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,
"[t]he nebulous core shared by all cosmopolitan views
is the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, do
(or at least can) belong to a single community,
and that this community should be cultivated."
Seyla Benhabib contends that
"since the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948,
we have entered a new phase in the evolution of global civil society,
which is characterized by a transition
from international to cosmopolitan forms of justice."
Benhabib continues

“[W]hatever the conditions of their legal origination,”
cosmopolitan forms of justice “accrue
to individuals as moral and legal persons in a worldwide civil society...
their peculiarity is that they endow individuals
rather than states and their agents with certain rights and claims.”
Cosmopolitanism seeks to transcend the state via ideas of natural rights.

10.

Addressing a conference on “The Charter of Cities of Refuge”
and a body called “The International Agency for Cities of Refuge,”
Jacques Derrida, elaborating an idea of cosmopolitanism,
finds that the conference-goers have defined for themselves
the task of “bring[ing] about the proclamation and institution of numerous,
and, above all, autonomous, ‘cities of refuge’, each as independent from the other
and from the state as possible, but, nevertheless, allied to each other
according to forms of solidarity yet to be invented.”

Bishnupriya Ghosh critiques Arjun Appadurai’s opposition
of “ethnic collectivists who lack... global imagination”
to cosmopolitans who, by contrast,
“relish non-national nomadism and celebrate migrancy, hybridity, and mobility.”

Ghosh cites the critiques of Revathi Krishnaswamy and Aihwa Ong,
who find such formulations of cosmopolitanism reflect
the experience of “transnational elites” who
“fetishize their marginality as migrants,
while synchronizing the global flows that underpin the new world order.”

12.

Sheldon Pollock writes against
“what often seems to be the single desperate choice we are offered:
between, on the one hand, a national vernacularity
dressed in the frayed period costume of violent revanchism and bent
on preserving difference at all costs and, on the other,
a clear-cutting, strip-mining multinational cosmopolitanism that is bent,
at all costs, on eliminating it.”

Pollock wants to
“conceive of the practice of cosmopolitanism as literary communication
that travels far, indeed, without obstruction from any boundaries at all,
and, more important, that thinks of itself as unbounded, unobstructed, unlocated —
writing of the great Way, rather than the small Place.”

At the same time, Pollock wants to
“think about cosmopolitanism and vernacularism

as action rather than idea,
as something people do rather than something they declare,
as practice rather than proposition (least of all, philosophical proposition),”
and also as a *choice*, one which in turn “enables us to see
that some people in the past have been able to be cosmopolitan or vernacular
without directly professing either, perhaps while finding it impossible
rationally to justify either.”

At the time of its dominance, Latin
was a cosmopolitanist idiom, and English,
Spanish, German and Italian were vernaculars.

At the time of its dominance, Sanskrit
was a cosmopolitanist idiom, and Tamil,
Kannada, Javanese, and Marathi
were vernaculars.

13.

Monolingual speakers of English
can access re-representations of vernacular FORMS
but often not the chains of meaning associated with them.

A response to lack of access to all of the conventional meanings
of, for example, Tamil film musicals,
is to use the tools at hand to appropriate the forms of the
vernacular into a kind of super-ordinate neo-
cosmopolitanist idiom, via, for example, heightened
cuts, homophonics, or pasted voice-overs, which are
forms of, among other things, simulating
accessibility and discursive mastery.

The failure of global capital to fulfill its implicit promise
of total access is not quite ironized in the work.

The failure of a vernacular to signify across
kinds of divides — i.e., that language, and its attendant
assumptions, expectations, forms and conventional
meaning structures doesn’t “translate” —
seems to be the languages’ problem.

The author function of a work can
incorporate the ironies of that reading, which
produce (and this is what makes it lyric) a kind of
pathos, which can be beautiful, but without permission
can read like appropriation and attempted dominance.

10.

Poetry has its own particular modes of reception,

rather than a fixed and identifiable set formal characteristics.
Reception, as defined by Auerbach, is a “subjectivistic-
perspectivalistic procedure,” one that, under certain
conditions, “creat[es] a foreground and a background,
resulting in the present lying open to the depths of the past”
(which sounds sexist, but doesn’t have to be).
The production, dissemination, and reception of poetry, is,
even in negation, an act of affirmation,
one that creates a relation, the *res poetica*.

8.

A mode of communication is like S&M:
without permission, without mutuality,
it becomes violence.
Poetry is capable of sustaining any form of ironic communication.
Poetry can attempt to recapitulate and reiterate stereotypes
without the poem’s author function seeming to be a node
for drawing pleasure in discharge from the stereotypes themselves.
Or, in an ironic effort to drain the stereotypes of charge,
the node may draw pleasure in disgust,
as a sign of self-implication, a white flag.
Pleasure in disgust, and pleasure generally, can freak people out.
The *res poetica* requires constant renegotiation of forms of permission.
Deriving pleasure from disgust and deriving pleasure from re-iterating stereotypes
can, during discontinuous communicative acts, look like the same thing.
I once published a poem that contained the lines
The Asian woman sat eating Tam crackers.
I laughed.
This stuff is endless.
When I first read the poem at Halcyon in Brooklyn in 2000,
a member of the audience had a visible visceral reaction,
and the *res poetica*, running like a current through that moment,
was damaged and reduced.
Later, a man I once met, also Jewish, made a watermelon joke at an awards ceremony.
Another altered and read a document related to a murder.
Confusion about permission is racism.

10.

Maharashtra was created in 1956,
four years after Nissim Ezekiel’s first book, *A Time to Change*,
was published, without translation, in English.

Arun Kolatkar published more than 15 books in Marathi.

He published *Jejuri*, written in English, in 1976.

The book is a serial panorama of a sacred Hindu site in Maharashtra, incorporating numerous ironies that play the site's actual physical state off its accepted spiritual significance.

Kolatkar's second book written in English, *Kala Ghoda Poems*, was published in 2004, a year after his death.

His third, *Sarpa Satra*, a retelling of a tiny piece of the *Mahabharata*, was published that same year.

Kolatkar's writing in English may have been an open secret, with regard to forms of Maharashtrian and Hindu nationalism.

Kolatkar's "Pi-dog," from *Kala Ghoda Poems*, set in the Kala Ghoda section of Mumbai, ends when day breaks, and, as in many cities in India, the dogs, who have ruled small sections of the night roads, "surrender the city to its so-called masters."

II.

I couldn't organize with a bloc I thought was mine because it wanted to be violent.

Its members have a lot of justifications for violence.

Anne Boyer's daughter recently said that the choices are basically shut-in or revolutionary.

I've become a shut-in out of fear.

The Res Poetica a work in progress.

Meena Alexander suggested Sheldon Pollock's work after reading a draft of a thesis prospectus that contained pieces of this work.

If the Pollock quotations could be dropped or substituted for, this work would be composed using only internet resources, and without utilizing any pay-window enabled sites. O. Mandel (1961) and Wendy Steiner (1981) have used the term *res poetica*, which may need to be replaced.

"Metaphysical blippety-blips
while sucking candor lozenge?"

— "The Cosmopolitans"

Sianne Ngai and Brian Kim Stefans

