

1.

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 also a little like "the city upon a hill."

2.

Poets are real: poets make poetry, or its algorithms, and think of themselves, and represent themselves, as poets.

In defining the limits of the *res poetica*, take Wallace Stevens's claim that "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 face different sets of what Bishnupriya Ghosh calls "local struggles" within shifting sets of conditions, and have different responses to them.

The production, dissemination, and reception of poetry are part of a projection from the space of such struggles into another space, the *res*

poetica, a model state.
FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF
CONTENT, and can thereby be open to
various forms of evaluation, which can result
in reason, violence, or other responses.

4.

Poets cannot help producing poetry.
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, in that sense, can be an open secret, “a way
of imparting knowledge such that it cannot
be claimed and acted on.”
The *res poetica* can be a compact to transmit and
maintain knowledge in the face of tacit or
explicit threat, through an articulation, or a
non-articulation.

5.

Shrikant Verma’s [*Magadh*](#)—which Vivek Narayanan
characterizes 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”—can be read as an open
secret.
Narayanan says Verma’s “ambiguous invocations of
half-mythical South Asian cities bring Borges

and Cavafy automatically to mind, but there is also a canny and even bitter political outrage... that sets him apart," and that makes me think of Mandelstam, and of Robert Duncan's *Passages*.
"Bizarrely," Narayanan writes, "Verma was a senior Congress Party functionary under Indira Gandhi in the late 70s and early 80s—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.

Shrikant Verma's "Corpses in Kashi,"
translated by Rahul Soni:

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.

Poetic invocations of particular cities, localities, and inheritances elaborate a space as much *of them*, seeking representationality, as *beyond them*, seeking a space with idealized or perfectible conditions.

When realized as a particular instantiation of the *res poetica*, the relation that is formed transposes localized histories and sets of perceptions and inheritances into a model state, a space that is momentary, fragile, temporally continuous or discontinuous, but materially real.

It is the *res poetica*, rather than a poem or poetry, that brings together:

- the conditions under which the poem was written
- the poem itself in its medium of dissemination (paper, pdf, jpeg, aiff, phonemes, etc.)
- the poem among its predecessors
- the conditions in which the poem is received
- the poem's author function and author

When people argue about the meanings of poems,
what is at stake is not poetry, but a particular
realization or set of instantiations of the *res
poetica*, i.e. a negotiation of meanings, and an
acceptance or a rejection of meanings, within
a relation or set of relations.

7.

Qualitatively, the *res poetica* 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.”

It’s just differently realized, and enforced.

8.

David Kyuman Kim, following Judith Butler and
Emmanuel Levinas, constructs the
problematic of “melancholic freedom”:
“Human freedom—which is to say, freedom of
movement, speech, and thought—emerges
through the application of critical thinking
and reasoning that continues to render
distinctions from the past, authority, and
tradition.
“The drive for agency—to enact it, claim it, and to
live it—is evident across cultures, races,
sexualities, genders, and classes.
“In acknowledging agency as a central feature of
human freedom, emancipation, and
liberation, the work of agency becomes
apparent in distinctive forms of self-
determination, such as political action,
cultural expressions and symbolism, and

moral reasoning.

“At the core of contemporary quests for agency lie dimensions of the religious and spiritual life, the heart of which is to transcend circumstances and conditions of constraint and limitation of varying kinds.

“[T]he work of fulfilling individual and collective projects of freedom,” Kim says, “requires the ability to see possibility where there is foreclosure, to discern opportunities for care and regard for the self when choices appear to be diminishing, and to sustain hope in the face of despair.

“Modernity finds its pitch and strength in the clasping hands of discontent and freedom.”

9.

Despite Auden’s epithet and Spicer’s uncharacterizable lament (“Poetry makes nothing happen” and “No/ one listens to poetry”), the *res poetica* is phenomenologically 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.

Melancholic freedom shares characteristics with the *res poetica*, but is not a problematic specific to poetry.

Like sex, political action and religion, poetry, and the self-determination it affords, is not the province of the individual.

The *res poetica* is the result of a discontinuous yet collective effort to realize human agency through poetry.

8.

Sianne Ngai writes that “[o]ne ordinarily thinks of the ‘face-to-face encounter’ as achieved through a process of drawing closer.

“But in disgust the opposite trajectory makes this ethically important moment happen.

“Pulling away from the object in revulsion, you’re suddenly in front of the other, who, unlike the others, is attuned to you, who stands in the space you’ve prepared for him through that act of withdrawal.

“Paradoxically, in the economy of disgust, it is by means of an originary exclusion that the textual encounter is made intersubjective.”

Disgust can be a form of melancholic freedom.

8.

Poetry is capable of sustaining any form of ironic communication.

Poetry can act as a medium for re-representations of commonplace derogatory stereotypes as an ironic comment on networked populism without activating the stereotypes themselves—i.e. poetry can attempt to recapitulate and reiterate stereotypes without the poem’s author function seeming to be a node for drawing pleasure or discharge from the stereotypes themselves, in an effort to drain the stereotypes of charge, even if the node draws pleasure in disgust, as in sculpting vomit.

A mode of communication is like S&M: without permission, without mutuality, it becomes violence.

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 to those lines, and the *res
poetica*, running like a current through that
moment, was damaged and reduced.

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.

“[W]hatever the conditions of their legal
origination,” Benhabib continues,
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.”

That form of cosmopolitanism, which seeks to
transcend the state via natural rights, is a
branch of “rights-based” ethics.

10.

Addressing a conference on “The Charter of Cities of Refuge” and “The International Agency for Cities of Refuge,” Jacques Derrida, elaborating an idea of cosmopolitanism, finds that they 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 the global imagination of the cosmopolitan, who, by contrast, relishes non-national nomadism and celebrates 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.”

Ghosh uses cosmopolitanism and “cosmopolitics” to depict the situation of the “contemporary (post *Midnight’s Children*) South Asian novel,” which finds itself, and its authors, “irrevocably enmeshed in a larger public culture, imbricated in the uneven battles over producing a localized modernity.”

The cosmopolitical novel limns “the capacities of the literary to translate local struggles” and attempts, or can be read as attempting, “a cosmopolitan literary activism within... political limits” that are represented in the works themselves.

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.

For some, a global cosmopolitanist dominant, American Standard English, is the only language available.

One way in which speakers of a closed perceived cosmopolitanist dominant can respond to vernaculars to which they does not have meaningful access—i.e. access only to vernacular FORMS, ALWAYS AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT, but not to the conventional meaning structures associated with them—is an ironic infantile appropriationism.

De Man says that irony is “permanent parabasis [or interruption] of the allegory of tropes.”

An ironic infantile appropriationism ignores or professes ignorance of the conventional meaning structures attached to specific FORMS, ALWAYS AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT, and layers on lowest common denominator meanings, often of a sexual nature.

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 both forms of, among other things, simulating accessibility and discursive mastery.

The failure of a vernacular to fully signify across different kinds of divides—i.e., that language, and its attendant assumptions, expectations, forms and conventional meaning structures don’t “translate” without effort—can be exaggerated and read as part of the failure of the tools of global capital to fulfill its implicit promise of total access in a real, meaningful way to any and all cultural contexts.

The author function of a work can be made to absorb or incorporate the ironies of that reading, which also produce (and this is what makes it lyric) a kind of pathos, which can be beautiful.

10.

Maharashtra, the state in India where Mumbai is located, was created in 1956, four years after Nissim Ezekiel's first book, *A Time to Change* was published in 1952.

Arun Kolatkar, born in 1932, published his first book in English in 1976, but was by then a well-known poet writing in Marathi.

His first collection written in English, *Jejuri*, 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. *Sarpa Satra*, a retelling, in English and in very modern terms, of a tiny piece of the *Mahabharata* was published that same year.

Kolatkar's work in Marathi amounts to more than fifteen volumes.

Kolatkar's "Pi-dog," from *Kala Ghoda Poems*, which is set in the Kala Ghoda section of Mumbai, ends when it becomes time to "surrender the city/ to its so-called masters" and resists any attempts to reduce its specificities to perspectives that accrue, like rights, to any one individual.

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

10.

Poetry has its own particular modes of reception, rather than a fixed and identifiable set formal characteristics.

Reception, in Auerbach's sense, 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.”

The reception of the poem includes all the poems that have been realized before it, and the histories to which it otherwise “lies open” in Auerbach’s sense.

The production, dissemination, and reception of poetry, is, even in negation, an act of affirmation, one that creates a relation, the *res poetica*.

7.

In reviewing K. Silem Mohammad’s *Deer Head Nation*, Aaron Kunin details “[h]ow to create a community through poetry:

- “1) A poem can describe an existing social organization....
- “2) It can describe a society from an earlier historical.... period
- “3) It can invent one—for example, Martian teenagers, etc....
- “4) It can even invent the symbolic rituals through which societies define themselves....
- “5) a poem creates a community by incorporating multiple voices through quotation, allusion, and influence—intertextual rather than international relations....
- “6) a poem is an expression of a community of poets....
- “7) a poem is also part of a community—a collection of poems, or a sequence....
- “8) a poem establishes an artificial community among its readers....
- “Because the context of reading is a social one,” Kunin says at the end of his review, “poetry acquires its real significance in use.”

I think that poems are the media through which the *res poetica* is realized, that that is the significance Kunin is talking about, and actual neural transport of the communities to which he refers.

8.

From KSWnet.org, via Lemon Hound:

"Saturday, January 16, 2010

NEGOTIATING THE SOCIAL BOND OF POETICS

"Negotiating the Social Bond of Poetics: A series that returns to and departs from Jacques Lacan's theory of the Four Discourses in order to discuss the social bond of poetics.

"Negotiating the Social Bond of Poetics: Thematic Abstract

"The theme of this series returns to and departs from Jacques Lacan's theory of the Four Discourses in order to discuss the social bond of poetics. Lacan develops this theoretical frame in Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, and Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, and some of the selected fragments from Television. He proposes that there are four fundamental discourses, or structures of discourse, that produce different social bonds for the subject. These discourses consist of the master's discourse, the hysteric's discourse, the university discourse, and the analyst's discourse. While Lacan is concerned with the limitation of the master's discourse and the university discourse, he sees the potential of transformation in the analyst's discourse. Although he asserts that it is necessary to make an hysterization of discourse in the process of analysis—because this is the first step towards questioning the master's discourse—he asserts that this discourse must then be shifted to the analyst's discourse for Real change to occur. Seminar

XVII, which took place in 1969, follows the student and social revolt of May 68, a historical moment in which Lacan was immersed. He is critical of revolutions that appear to simply question the master and the university, and as a consequence only reproduce a new master, without shifting social bonds, as he cynically suggests that the Parisian students of 68 were in danger of doing. However, we do find moments in Lacan's seminars in which he suggests that a writer can hold a similar position as an analyst, and thus one would assume, also be able to shift these other discourses to enact some social change. Therefore, I am using this frame to ask questions, develop a dialogue, about poetics and social change. Can poetics operate like the analyst's discourse to create a different social bond through language? Do poets intervene in these other discourses or intersect with them in subversive ways that shift discourse and social bonds? Is Lacan's concept of the structure of the four discourses useful for us today, particularly as we head into financial cuts in the arts and academia that may limit interventions in hegemonic discourses? Or do we need to rethink what poetics and discourse are and reconsider how we engage with and disseminate them?- Nancy Gillespie"

11.

Pheng Cheah says that "cosmopolitanism and human rights are the two primary ways of figuring the global as the human"—and that as such, they partake of a faulty discourse of the human.

Cheah argues that the discourses that surround, protect, and legitimize current forms of globalization—the discourses of cosmopolitanism and human rights—fail to

take into account the facts on the ground, the actual ways in which people are not actually the bearers of dignity, freedom, sociability, culture, and political life.

That failure “indelibly compromises, circumscribes, and mars the face of global human solidarities and belongings staged by new cosmopolitanist and human rights discourses.

“[I]f social-scientific solutions to the problems of globalization have always already pre-comprehended an idea of humanity as the bearer of dignity, freedom, sociability, culture, or political life, and therefore as an ideal project that needs to be actualized, the task and challenge... in relation to globalization may be to question this pre-comprehension of the human and, somewhat perversely, even to give it up.”

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* by Sianne Ngai and Brian Kim Stefans