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Richard Berengarten Imagens 1
Susan Connolly The Sun-Artist
Amy Evans The Sea Quells
Alice Kavounas Thin Ice
Tin Ujević Twelve Poems (translated by Richard Berengarten)
Imagem 1

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For the first time in our history we are contemporaries of all humanity.

Octavio Paz

A little further
we shall see the almond trees in blossom
the marble glistening in the sun
the waves breaking

a little further,
let us rise up a little higher

George Seferis
A Little Further?

_Twelve propositions_

1. There are no temporal or spatial centres. Everywhere/everywhen is both centre and periphery. Octavio Paz answered Yeats’ complaint that “the centre cannot hold” (1919), with the assertion that “for the first time in our history, we are contemporaries of all humanity” (1950).

2. After Paz, it’s no longer enough to break down borders merely within and for any sub-group. All ethnicities belong any/everywhere. Poetry is universal. There is no civilization without poetry. Every tradition is an open, appreciable secret, belonging to whoever discovers and learns it.

3. Reading Paz this way moves (re-turns) us to the vatic and shamanic origins of poetry and to the Orphic responsibilities that Blake and Shelley were the last English poets to advocate with wholehearted spirit and sustained devotion. “All humanity” means not only the living, but the dead and the unborn.

4. A poet has responsibilities: social as well as subjective, communal as well as individual. Any emphasis on ‘spirituality’ in poetry, if it is not to caricature or betray itself, needs to involve critical commitment within, to and for both the past and future history of “all humanity”, and all nature.

5. Languages have gaps and holes and render reality imperfectly. To make a poem, a poet needs to travel through them into silence and to return through them from silence back into language: to test (tear) the boundaries between language and silence. This two-way movement between language
and silence means that every poetic journey is a Heracleitan return, not a one-way flight.

6. A term like ‘beyond’ confirms and embodies the spatio-temporal basis of reality, with all its binary distinctions, and is inconceivable without/outwith it. Can a shaman or seer, let alone a word-spinning poet, surpass such spatiotemporal constraints by moving, or at least peering, ‘further into’ any such ‘beyond’? The Lurianic Cabbalists studied this and answered: *Not through the last Veil, and no more than in sparks and glimpses.* Apparently the masters of the *Dao de jing* liberated themselves from binary distinctions only by neatly stepping in and through the gaps and holes of paradox. *Question:* What is the sound of one hand clapping? *Answer:* Poetry.

7. Poetry is a challenge to mortality and a criticism of Death. Crossing deaths, poems are spacetime-travellers: they encapsulate a non-self-defeating irony, the only defeat Death might admit, if Death had words.

8. Ancient laws of reciprocity, hospitality and magnanimity are necessary to the poetry of *this* time and *this* place too. Anything else or less is not good enough and will not serve adequately. A poet without such qualities can only be second-rate, however clever, skilled and cunning.

9. Poets who think of themselves literal-mindedly as belonging to *either* ‘central’ *or* conversely ‘peripheral’ positions are *both* likely to achieve little more than provincial nowherehood. Paz’s call demands wholehearted pluralism, eclecticism and multiculturalism. Here, the word *wholehearted* is not accidental. Who wants or needs a heartless (or headless) poetry?

10. A poetry informed by Paz’s perspectives is less likely to be parochial than one that isn’t. While poetry can’t support itself
without embodiment, awareness that the universal dwells in the particular and the particular in the universal *breeds* hospitality and magnanimity: poetry thrives on respect and affection for alterities.

11. Whenever the guest arrives, the host is reciprocally hosted. The particular interior that encompasses both guest and host is the anterior timespace that itself first gave welcome to the host. Poetry, being itself a gift, flourishes in that generous presence of arrivals, meetings and gift-givings.

12. We might learn our theory and practice from a Southern African word: Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes: the “word *Ubuntu* ... speaks about about the essence of being human: that my humanity is caught up in your humanity because we say a person is a person through other persons. I am a person because I belong. The same is true of you” (1998).