How Does Free Verse "Work"?

On the Syntax of the Avant Garde

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A Three-Part Model for Free Verse:

Polish criticism has traditionally applied a structuralist reading to the avant-garde poetry developed, for the most part, through the Kraków-based poetic programs of Przyboś and Peiper. Dorota Urbańska's canonical essay on versification in free verse evokes precisely this tradition[1]. I will note that Urbańska's classification of free verse is rooted in a strict dichotomy between verse with and without syntax, defined by line length determined by the author's arbitrary choice. As a text, free verse therefore conveys its poetics to the reader primarily through the act of reading quietly. Urbańska's dichotomy seems derivative of a totalising opposition between verse and prose, linked in spirit to the historical Avant Garde and its demonstration of the autonomy of poetic language. Urbańska's argument has provoked adamant pushback from Adam Dziadek (among others) in his text *Polish Versology — (contra)versy (Wersologia polska – kontr(o)wersje)*, in which he argues that structuralism confronts the problem of free verse, while Urbańska's typology offers no resolution on this matter:

> The difficulty of describing this kind of poetry is of course tied to its lack of regular metre. In the face of this lack, however, can we really say that this poetry is devoid of rhythm, and that rhythm is not conceivable within it?[2]

[1] D. Urbańska, *Wiersz wolny. Próba charakterystyki systemowej*, Warsaw 1995. The consensus among many scholars that free verse can be defined as a dichotomy does not fundamentally diverge from Urbańska's claims. Adam Kulawik designates a dichotomy between intonation and caesurae that he defines as "phonetics" (*Wersologia*, Kraków 1999); still earlier, Maria Dłuska wrote of the emotional clauses of text, referring also to prose and reading expression into caesurae in free verse (*Próba teorii wiersza polskiego*, Warsaw 1962). Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska's essay similarly supported a binary definition of free verse, referring mainly to the poetics of Przyboś. The prosaic feature of the poetic line resonated with the vocal interpretation of poetry, through the declaration of the critical meaning of some decisions at the expense of other, syntactic ones, while defining line length as the author's arbitrary decision (such as in *Wiersz awangardowy*, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 1965, issue 2). For further reading, see also the newest study *Wiersz wolny: geneza i ewolucja do 1939 roku*, edited by Lucylla Pszczołowska and Dorota Urbańska (…).

[2] A. Dziadek, *Wersologia polska – kontr(o)wersje*, [in:]: *Strukturalizm w Europie środkowej i wschodniej. Wizje i rewizje*, ed. W. Bolecki and D. Ulicka, Warsaw 2012, p. 382.

According to Dziadek, the system Urbańska proposes is not compatible with contemporary poetry because it is "mainly limited to the question of syntax" and therefore has little to contribute to the study of how meaning is generated in poetic texts". With the advent of free verse, regular metre disappears, to be sure. This does not, however, mean that rhythm dies with it as a crucial component of verse production: "In the end, [rhythm] is always present in the literary work, regardless of whether we are speaking of poetry or prose"[3]. I would not stand by Dziadek's strong position on the syntax of free verse, although I do understand his intention to draw the reader's focus to the anthropological, somatic and aesthetic meanings of rhythm, as discussed in texts such as Henri Meschonnic's *Anthropologie historique du langage*. Dziadek wraps up his observations with a question of profound importance, in my opinion: the disintegration of the border between poetry and prose has become the driving factor displacing traditional metre as the core component of verse production. The poets of the Avant Garde were focused, as we know, on a form of intonation tied closely to the rhythm of casual speech. The meaning internal to their sentences – as I hope to demonstrate further on – was also rooted in a form of syntax freed from the logical and semantic requirements that govern normative sentence structure in prose. This became a decisive aspect of the poetics of the avant-garde text. In his text *Free Verse as Graphic Text* (*Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny),* Witold Sadowski adopts a position similar to Dziadek's, although his writing precedes Dziadek's and relates somewhat differently to Urbańska's claims. According to Sadowski, we can simultaneously cast two organisational nets over poetry, effectively yielding a four-part model for free verse. Let us not, however, anticipate our argument.

Strictly binary models for a theory of free verse have been offered by several scholars pre-dating Urbańska, such as Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska and Janusz Sławiński, who were some of the first to comment on the syntax of avant-garde verse[4]. For these scholars, the critical component in the poetics of verse is the intensification of its significations beyond the level of metre. Sławińska and Sławiński's theories take into account the role of syntax in determining line length, but, unlike Urbańska's model, they do not prioritise it as a fundamental component of verse structure[5]. All models of verse structure that honor the strict dichotomy between verse and free verse fundamentally resemble one another. All of them relate to text as a literary product that is organised structurally. For now, we might describe this organisational model as "flat", two-dimensional, and particularly relevant for paper-based text. This becomes especially clear in Urbańska's model – as she herself openly concedes. In a sense, Witold Sadowski's contribution consists of his attempt to transcend this "flat" (not to mention linear) model for verse and its functions, along with the new understanding of syntactic figures he provokes. Sadowski seeks to loosen the tight cords of the corset set in place by this binary model. In his text, Sadowski ultimately takes structuralism as his reference point and argues that the binary model for free verse is not sustainable, mostly due to the need to reinterpret Urbańska's assessment of the graphic notation of verse. Even during the interwar period, criticism argued for the simultaneous application of two descriptive systems to verse to relate to its "incorporation of metre into

[3] Ibid, p. 383.

[4] Sawicki, Siatkowski

[5] Przyboś's poem thus seems to attain its full meaning and to find its structural basis only when it is read out loud – interpreted vocally by the artist: "This creates a tonal effect unusual for prose, tending to suspend the voice at surprising moments and overcoming worn-in tonal habits of spacing out syllables, which cleanses the work of its imprint of banality and automisation" (A. Okopień-Sławińska, p. 438).

free verse"[6]. Sadowski therefore introduces a three- or even four-part model for mapping out free verse. Looking beyond the "flat" and linear system appropriate for text printed on a page of paper, whose stylistic and poetic properties were the reference point for the structuralists, Sadowski turns (perpetually) toward the "flat" drawing:

> (…) the pronounced graphic division of text into perpendicular and level fragments, grouping verse not so much into stanzas as into blocks, was at the very least appropriate for poems dealing with architectural themes. (…) One might discern a shared sensibility among the poets of the '50s that suggests an attempt to model free verse after architectural cubist motifs[7].

The question I wish to contribute to the ongoing conversation on versification does not take the syntax of the avant-garde sentence as its sole point of departure. I am interested, rather, in the Polish Avant Garde's attempt to reckon with the flatness of the piece of paper and the sense of spatial and dynamic possibilities it implies for syntactic systems. The poets of the Avant Garde tried to interrogate this and framed their poetry under the banner of "construction". This notion can be developed as a rhetoric if the rhetorical and compositional premises of the work (or "action", as I'd like to call it) are used not as tools for describing stylistic aspects of the text, but as a system of creative cues linked to reception and understood in terms of *actio* – the implementation of artistic text. With these ideas in mind, we can view poetic text as a "notation" – the equivalent of written notes in music – while its "implementation" consists of a "mimetic" repetition of the author's creative gestures.

A Rhetorical Understanding of Free Verse as a Work of Structure-Building

The rhetorical tradition associates the recorded poetic text (as a text to be recited for an audience) with music and dance (by way of rhythm). It classifies the arts by the criteria of mimetic signs referencing the senses. Poetry is thus linked to the sense of sound, painting to sight, cooking to taste, and perfume design to scent (in so far as this work serves mimetic purposes), while touch, finally, is linked to the visual arts, architecture, and once again, dance. In order to understand this particular aspect of rhetoric that, in my opinion, must be suspended in the case of poetic syntax (being a particularly directive and compositional notation), we ought to take into account one aspect that was neglected by classical rhetoric – namely, movement. Movement connects poetry with dance, as the performance of prescribed steps. Movement develops its own vision of collective reality and forms a system of points that orient us in space (its map is generated in the brain when we first develop our motor skills). In this way, it might respond to our need for rhetorical and syntactic systems that capture the creative experience as we understand it. We might also describe this as the experience of creative practice: it is simultaneously cognitive and experienced as craft (that which is learned; a set of skills that identifies the artist and seasoned audience members alike as experts). In poetic practices, this process might unfold through a system of "orienting" creative guidelines leading to the reconstruction of a collectively conceived experience of the world. Bearing in mind these compositional cues for the implementation and reception of the "structure" of free verse, we can treat poetic "notation" accordingly as a kind of internal simulation of movement.

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[6] W. Sadowski, *Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny*, Kraków 2004, p. 201.
[7] Ibid, p. 203.

The Avant Garde's projects of "constructing" the world always appear in the context of a utopia of "transforming" reality. This fact, which we might see as a form of "politicisation" through text, makes avant-garde verse even more compatible with the concepts proper to rhetoric. Because of its interventions in and divergences from traditions of reception, avant-garde verse has always offered a set of creative/reconstructive cues directed at the reader who, in the case of the historical avant gardes, is assigned the role of student or apprentice in the workshop of the poet-craftsman. In my writing, the word "cue" remains incredibly important in that it directs our attention towards the "directive" forces of rhetoric, which– as a field so firmly linked with communicative tools understood performatively and with the prerogative to persuade and educate one's audience, using new words to produce a "shared" world – is considerably better suited to the study of avant-garde poetry than classical stylistics. Rhetoric persuasively addresses a whole host of theoretical dilemmas, fundamentally disabling any approach to the interventional nature of avant-garde literature that is totalising or single-minded[8]. In modern approaches to poetry, the standard is to take the whole arsenal of rhetorical figures (treated merely as stylistic figures) only under certain conditions, and often divorced from their contexts. According to the vision of stylistics that currently presides over all poetry textbooks in circulation, figures associated with elocution and tropes are marked as significant, while other rhetorical figures and premises fall by the wayside. Following the basic criterion for the work of art (according to which the devices of invention and direction remain concealed, while aspects of memory and speech are suppressed entirely), when faced with the whole spectrum of possibilities availed to us by rhetorical devices and tropes based on linking words, it is clear that readers limit their focus to the semantic dimension of the text and its multiplicity of meaning. This multiplicity of meaning is then articulated according to linguistic conventions and the dictionary's offerings (according to which language is understood as a collection of lexemes). Tropes play a leading role in stylistics, becoming more significant than complex figures such as syntactic and conceptual devices that are rarely mentioned. One might say that it is precisely due to the limitations on the meaning of text, culled from the statement's connection with the signifying whole and allowing us to link the composition more directly with its sphere of *dispositio*, that we can freely subordinate elements of "creative direction" to the sphere of elocution. In the poetry textbooks most heavily circulated in high schools (by Kulawik, Korwin-Piotrowska and Handke), figures of speech (or of syntax) are only explored superficially. Emphasis falls only on aspects of syntax distinct for

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[8] In his introduction to the anthology of translations published in "Pamiętnik Literacki," *Retoryka*, Marek Skwara draws attention to the basic distillations of traditional rhetorical figures (tropes, figures of thought, and conceptual figures) essential to modern and contemporary thinking on rhetoric against their traditional scope (*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* – associated with memory, memorisation and the mnemotechnics of recitation and *pronuntiatio* – as an actual enactment of the text: *actio*, through speech. One might say that this mode of operation is only relevant for figures related to *elocutio*, and is visible (as Skwara has critically noted) not only in the various attempts to adapt rhetoric to newer approaches to cultural and historical texts (such as de Man's or Derrida's, or from another angle, Hayden White's) – but in textbooks of stylistics and versification that deal with the syntax of the colloquial, spoken sentence without attending to the significant "suprasegmental" implications rightfully associated with its rhetorical meaning. Skwara claims that attempts to apply rhetorical tools to the contemporary humanities always fail to do this legacy justice. This state of things, he argues, is the result of the decline in rhetoric's authority. He evokes the positions of scholars such as Todorov, who argue that rhetoric lost its meaning during the romantic period, when the essential dichotomy between the natural and the artificial was dissolved. Chaim Perelman has said of this crisis: "If rhetorical figures are divorced from rhetoric (the art of persuasion), then they cease to be rhetorical figures, and become instead adornments that merely describe a manner of speaking." (from *Retoryka* [*Tematy teoretycznoliterackie*, from the translation archives of "Pamiętnik Literacki"]), ed. M. Skwara, Gdańsk 2008, p. 18).

their rhythmic, repetitive and recurring qualities, producing correlations and parallelisms. This is due to the poetic line's dominance as a unit of rhythm or meaning, treated as the sole component of verse structure. In this way, the range of activity available to figures of speech is limited to their syntactical "link" to the verse. Free verse, however, should not only liberate rhythm, but syntax as well. Because rhetorical and syntactic aspects of complex figures of speech are generally overlooked, we end up evoking them only cursorily, with impromptu references to diplosis, zeugma (and its derivative syllepsis), anastrophe, hyperbaton, chiasmus, prolepsis, paralepsis and metalepsis as a kind of erudite exception. The same applies to figures of thought, such as aposiopesis and *correctio*. The analysis and interpretation of poetry tends to decode meaning (of metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches) by treating these devices as grand semantic figures, or as tropes pointing back to linguistic meaning. The very process of reading thus leads to the "lexical" fossilisation of the poem's meaning, thereby allowing us to explicate the poetic ambiguity of surprising word combinations. The text delimited twice-over signifies nothing through its own sheer construction (since the composition in turn points back toward the author's constructive decisions) – nothing, that is, but the fact that it is indeed a poem. This anti-rhetorical hermeneutic effect excellently demonstrates how the matter of avant-garde syntax is addressed in Janusz Sławiński's most acclaimed essay on the Kraków Avant Garde[9]. In *Concepts of Avant-Garde Language (Koncepcja języka awangardy)*, Sławiński lists the effects of polysemy produced through syntactic manipulation. He brings special emphasis to paronomasiae and neologisms created by reviving the ambiguous meanings of morphemes. Sławiński brings great insight to the displacement of word formation to the level of syntax in euphonic sentence sequences, and to the false homonymity produced by grouping together words with similar sounds but disparate meanings, or the operation of filling familiar syntactic templates with surprising verbal material. He is less concerned with the much-discussed "blossoming sentence" (he treats Peiper's sentence structure — so distinct from Przyboś's elliptical one — as "periphrastic", which is to say, deeply embedded in anecdotal contexts and potentially yielding undesired polysemic effects). Sławiński only references zeugmas as an aside, and he leaves out sylleptic constructions entirely. He designates all forms of ellipsis and contraction as the syntactic figures most commonly used by the Avant Garde. He sees these figures as tools that allowed Przyboś to depart from Peiper's tenets for the "evolving" avant-garde quasi-prosaic poem. In this sense, anacolutha, for instance, are not read as creative syntactic errors, but as errors that generate a multitude of meanings. This "appellative" tendency, subordinated to the understanding of language as a collection of lexemes, paints a portrait of the poem as a finished set of shimmering associations congealed, as it were, into one piece to project a static image of reality.

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[9] For Zwrotniczan, sentence formation – as Sławiński demonstrated in *Koncepcja języka poetyckiego awangardy* – was a fundamental unit of poetic activity. Only this act allows us to view meaning in terms of its function, thus allowing us to adapt words to one another, "so that the encounter between them becomes a linguistic »event« whose significance is not contingent on whatever takes place beyond the phrasal sequence" (J. Sławiński, *Koncepcja języka poetyckiego awangardy krakowskiej*, Kraków 1998, p. 91). The "action" or "event" Sławiński mentions, unfolding within the text, turns out to be the product of an associative gesture proper to metaphor, understood as a static figure (the approximation of two incongruent elements) rather than as the result of the production of information in a sentence read according to the topic-focus structure of free verse. I have written about this in the text *Życie słowa. Składnia zdania (post)awangardowego*, which appears in the volume *Przyboś dzisiaj*, ed. Zenon Ożog, Janusz Pasterski and Magdalena Rabizo-Birek (Rzeszów 2017).

Verse and Poem. A Three-Level Model for Free Verse

How did Witold Sadowski's three-part (if not four-part) model for free verse fundamentally alter stylistics' "lexical" tropes and premises for reading the poetic text? In Urbańska's conception of free verse, and according to Okopień-Sławińska's earlier notions, intonation remains unambiguously tied to the syntax of casual speech. Its enunciation can therefore be modulated according to line length or logical syntactic conjunctions that the lines might transgress. Regardless of whether we obey the line breaks or syntax while reading, we can view intonation as unambiguously contingent on the natural rhythm of the sentence. As Sadowski has noted, other kinds of rhythm appear regularly in free verse. So many poems incorporate a sense of regular meter, often by citing a specific tradition (the author of *Free Verse as a Graphic Text* (*Wiersz wolny jako tekst graficzny)* cites an example from Herbert). Bearing this in mind, we can locate yet another manifestation of the prosaic form within poetry, one that might even obey two verse systems simultaneously (verse regulated by both metre and intonation). Poems composed accordingly can generate their own poetic meaning simultaneously on two plains. In this way, in terms of metre, the poetic unit's break might fall in the very middle of an arbitrarily established line, or might correspond to syntax or intonation. We can read a verse of this sort in a number of ways – by following the intonation suggested by the text's segmentation, or the intonation of the sentence structure as it spills over line breaks, or according to the metre's rhythm. This last choice is the obvious one for many of Piotr Sommer's poems, since the poet often manipulates metric rhythm, oscillating between the rhythm of casual speech and metre, be it regular or tonal. Multiplying the poem's meaning by exploring its possible intonations brings about a whole new realm of reader-guided choices that can alter the meaning of the text. Placing emphasis on the poetic meaning of intonation "pushes" to the background the problem of syntax. Urbańska associates syntax with "flat" composition and the poem printed on one page. In this approach, we drift instead towards the moment of the "speech act" (*enuntiatio*) "scored", as it were, by the poetic text.

Can we consider this three- or four-part sketch of the poem to be spatial? Let us provisionally decide that the text read simultaneously by several tonal criteria does in fact transgress the borders of verse and veers toward the realm of poetic stylistics and rhetoric alike, which is to say, towards the voice. Free verse thus becomes contingent on speech, utterance, and the style of speaking, depending on how one chooses to read the text. The range of possible intonations allows us to finally treat the poem's "score" as a set of "cues" – a composition to be enacted, not only at the level of elocution. The reader can choose to treat verse as something linked, first and foremost, to regular rhythm, or instead to prioritise the contours of the sentence divided into lines, or perhaps to acknowledge both these criteria in equal measure. In his writing on versification, Adam Ważyk suggests that the binary model of verse — the legacy of structuralism that has informed conventions for reading free verse today— imposes entirely unnecessary constraints. Ważyk does not emphasise the syntax of everyday speech as a counterpoint to both prose and metric rhythm in versification, making his approach somewhat at odds with the poetics of the Kraków Avant Garde. For Ważyk, the tradition of Polish poetry prioritises rhythm to excess as a crucial component of verse composition, and we therefore might as well dismiss it entirely. Ważyk, who brought us *Amphion* (*Amfion*), gives more weight to the mnemonic techniques of poetry, or the means by which it is memorised. As he writes in *Essay on the Poem* (*Esej o wierszu)*:

> Poetry wants to either be memorised word for word, or read several times (…) The poet dreams that one reader might return again and again to his work. He does not crave a vast number of readers; he only wants loyal ones. The information he conveys should be frequently revisited if it cannot be remembered indefinitely. (…) Degradation of information runs parallel to the rise of entropy. The poem's structure, evoked in order to delay this process, is nonetheless vulnerable to it as well[10].

Ważyk does not pause to question why exactly poetry "wants to be memorised" – he does not identify rhetorical mnemonic functions or procedures used for memorising text. In his approach to versification, however, the traditional rhythms of Polish poetry (developed by Kochanowski, Trembecki, and Mickiewicz) serve the function of a broadly accepted standard, solidified and thus internalised through frequent repetition. Ważyk's "*vers libre*" does not make sense unless we are discussing a new form of free verse that disregards traditional metre. In this way, the poet of *"vers libre",* turning his focus to the colloquial, prose-like sentence as the essential unit for composing verse, integrates into his verbal structure various aspects of traditional verse as a kind of dalliance between free verse and the traditional system that has always been the point of departure for the Avant Garde's poetic model[11]. The three-part model of verse, constructing the poem by building tension between the various forces within versification (in free verse: metre, syntax, and arbitrary line length) seems rather intuitive for Ważyk, since he has alluded to "craft" in his essays on versification. Ważyk's system of versification seems to expand beyond the space of line in traditional free verse. In Ważyk's system, the stylistic methods that determine the poetics of free verse, having been confined by structuralism to the flat page and the lexical mode of language, can once again approach the act of speech. This *actio* is tied to the moment of *pronuntiatio* and *memoria*. Rhythm and repetition restored from regular versification become just as compelling as the mnemonic function of the poetic gesture – no longer necessary in print culture, but retaining the true intimacy of the reader who comes to intimately know a literary text by relying on former knowledge.

On the other hand, not all the principles of verse composition can be renewed and revitalised simply when activated in poetry that engages its reader rhetorically. Syntactic devices, as I will attempt to demonstrate here, introduce yet another aspect to our model of verse, which is to say, another system of syntactic incisions into the work, based on figures of speech, or the potential for syntactic error in poetry. The devices typical for avant-garde syntax enable the "construction" of verse mentioned above. I understand syntax not so much as a fossilised set of figures of speech as mere "decoration". By activating the constructive potential of syntax, rendering it contingent on verse and relating to it as one more defining element of poetic units of meaning (thus breaking up verse into sentences of poetic prose), we liberate the syntactic units of individual lines from their constrictive obligation to co-create the poem's order. Once again, we can now understand this order as a set of cues provoking us to make choices. In free verse, sentences remain liberated only when we house them within a normative, logical and semantic order, for only then can they cease to function as syntactic standards working against the arbitrary line breaks of free verse. In this way, syntactic breaks within the line yield (even more) pauses and conjunctions. We can thus construct poetic meaning through the potential latent in these linkages. These syntactic and constructive gestures might recall the process of a build-

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[10]p. 24

[11]A. Ważyk, *O wierszu wolnym*, in: *Amfion. Rozważania nad wierszem polskim*, Warsaw 1983.

ing a house, brick by brick. The space of the poem is, of course, an imagined space; however, if we treat its internal order as a set of creative, compositional cues addressed to the reader, then the poem does become a building – a creative task to be performed. As Ważyk has argued, free verse remains somewhat free in reality, and somewhat constrained, while in this case, syntactic operations are dispersed between the syntax of proper speech and grammatical error.

The syntactic theory of avant-garde poetry has implications closely bound to the spirit of rhetoric. In order for any syntactic theory of avant-garde free verse to be at all possible, however, we must first state the thesis that there is no such thing as a poem without syntax. The very premise of the poem without syntax insists on using line breaks as the primary component of verse composition. There are, however, syntactic maneuvers that diverge from normative syntax. These semantically marked figures become an element of the text's poetics, although they might play this role in prose and poetry alike. Prose poetry might, in fact, operate on this very basis. In a formulation not unlike the three- or four-part model of poetry, we will view rhythm and metre as devices of verse composition, and view syntax and intonation in terms of arbitrary line length. If a poem works by virtue of its entire syntactic structure, then the reader should bear in mind line length alongside the components identified here. Line length is distinct from sentence length or the poem's length as a whole, which, in our reading, is understood as a rhetorical interval.

Advantages of the Rhetorical Theory of Poetry

Heinrich Lausberg's classic work, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study,* is particularly helpful for demonstrating the hermeneutic potential of carrying over an expanded toolkit from rhetorics to poetry is. Polish rhetoric textbooks (Ziomek's *Retoryka opisowa*, Korolko's *Zarys podstaw retoryki*) deal directly with the art of public speaking, while Lausberg refers instead to cases where the priorities of speech and literature converge, overlap or intersect. In this area, I am mostly interested in the confluences associated with the manipulation of "compound words" (and to a lesser degree individual tropes). Rhetoric has traditionally been applied to literary works. Most relevant for the Avant Garde would be any emphasis on the practical and dynamic character of rhetoric. Later on in this essay, I refer specifically to devices that use "compound words" thought of as "ornamentation", rather than correct grammar or clarity of speech (*ornatus* – alongside *literaria* and *claritas*). Rhetoric – as the art of composing complex phrasal systems, and as a practice that relies on the activation of techniques in speech – transcends (though not always) the dichotomy seen as non-negotiable in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: the dichotomy between *poiesis* and *praxis*[12]. It does this by placing emphasis on the

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[12]Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is often evoked by philosophers for its emphasis on the distinction between Greek *poiesis* (creation) and *praxis* (action, also described as experience). This distinction is based on the action's objective. *Poiesis* thus refers to all forms of creation whose objectives can be located within the act itself, but refer to what is outside of it, while in the case of *praxis*, the objective is written into the action itself, or, to be more precise, the action's successful execution. Both, however, reside within "practical philosophy", placing virtue on equal grounds with the "consistent disposition" of man (a form of "valor", according to Aristotle). Aristotle says: "All Art deals with bringing some thing into existence; and to pursue an art means to study how to bring into existence a thing which may either exist or not, and the efficient cause of which lies in the maker and not in the thing made; for Art does not deal with things that exist or come into existence of necessity, or according to nature, since these have their efficient cause in themselves. But as doing and making are distinct, it follows that Art, being concerned with making, is not concerned with doing." (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, Cambridge 1926, Book 6, Section 1). From the rhetorical perspective (my perspective), one might add that in today's cultural approach to literature, representing "creation" as something that has no real source (such as in other works or in memory, even, of material – *vide* the tradition of versification), is hard to justify. This issue becomes irrelevant if we treat poetry as a system of cues designed for the reader to then "implement".

execution, repetition and implementation of a set of rules for producing a desired effect. It thus places the consumer of art in the role of the expert: the consumer plays her assigned role to produce an effect that is in fact "practical" (the practice of art) as defined by the work of art (*poiesis*). The product, however, is not always an "object", such as a shoe created according to the rules of the shoemaker's art. Art (*techne*, *ars*) according to the definition we might take, for now, from Lausberg's acclaimed handbook (which aggregates and organises citations from all significant authorities on rhetoric) is understood in the "active" context of rhetoric as "an ordered process that strives for perfection"[13]. This process – as Lausberg explains– can appear rather natural and can resemble a natural course of events (such as the branching out of a tree). It can occur either accidentally, or as the product of a deliberate process (*techne/arte*). Artistic production (*epuos*, *opus*) that does not correspond to nature (*fisis*) cannot come into being without a complicit party, such as an individual's natural disposition to engage in activity. If this individual lacks experience (*apeiria*), then art is passed over to fate (*tiche*) – in other words, the work of art develops on the basis of *fisis* through *apeiria* and *tiche*. Each repetition of a known but poorly understood form of activity builds up to "experience" (*empeiria*). In experience (*empeiria*), fate (*tiche*) directs us according to our knowledge. In this way, each repetition that describes and confirms experience is in fact already an imitation (*mimesis*). For practical purposes, rhetoric perceives creative acts as inseparable from the work's reader/viewer. These acts thus consist of reproducing or emulating templates. In rhetoric, imitation (the replication of templates) is always associated with science, and as such remains the *mimesis* of artistic practice. In the context of avant-garde poetry (which exceeds this definition by its very nature), poetics (an art distinct from rhetoric) can bring to poetry more than *memoria* and *pronuntiatio*. Poetics can introduce *inventio* and *dispositio*: the ability to create that which does not yet exist and to expose the creative process in the form a compositional record, so that it can be put into practice. Creative cues now visible, for example, in the "syntactic" record of the creative process, can be described precisely as the "construction/building" of the avant-garde poem. The rhetorical approach to the communication process must be applied in those cases where the poem and its execution are understood as actions, and not as an artistic object or found artifact.

According to the tenets imported from rhetoric into poetry, the avant-garde work is a work that develops the conditions for its own operation – as revealed in the "notations" as a form of *dispositio*, which I interpret as the reader's creative cues. With the help of these "cues", the poem is a composition "to be rehearsed". I associate these "notations" with creative acts of syntax: composing intervals longer than the poetic line and enabling us to trace the author's constructive strategies throughout the space of the work as a whole. The creative, craftsman's experience is encoded into the avant-garde work and is then repeated by the reader, becoming visible only in the composition/disposition of cues. If we view the elements of *dispostio* on the level of *elocutio*, then the work imitates/records the actions that led to its creation. These might be the actions of the author himself, or of some other master of the craft. By putting them into practice (bringing the element of practice to the level of elocution), imitating and rehearsing given templates, the poem and its author make available the artistic experience gained throughout their course of artistic actions. The avant-garde poem thus "performs" experience, using techniques catered to that experience. As Lausberg suggests in his *Handbook of Literary*

[13] H. Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*, trans. Matthew Bliss, Boston 1998, p.1.

Rhetoric, viewing the matter from a rhetorical angle rather than the stylistic one referenced above: "Every *ars* can be taught (...) and learned (...) by the communication of the rules (...) of the *ars* in question (...) If the pupil possesses the natural predisposition (...) and practices the knowledge learned through practical application (...) *techne* (thus, an element of *poiesis* –J.O.) again flows into *empeiria* (an element of *praxis* – J.O.), only now the *empeiria* is rationally enlightened by the *techne*".[14] Rhetoric's ability to serve the purposes of art and the individual's needs by way of the repetition of deliberate rules is extremely relevant for the interventional and radical tendencies of the Avant Garde. In his essay *A Rhetoric of Motives,* Kenneth Burke demonstrates that rhetoric should prompt us to undertake the actions it describes (Aristotle, Cicero) and to generate new positions (Quintilian)[15]. Tying the art of persuasion to ethical positions allows us to apply the terminology of rhetoric to poetic composition. In this case, we must view expressive devices in terms of their ability to communicate and to arouse specific emotional states without necessarily achieving pragmatic ends. And yet, it was Quintilian who promoted rhetoric in the first place and brought it to the very heart of the education system by demonstrating that an excellent speaker makes an excellent citizen. When we speak of the performativity of rhetoric, therefore, we do not come up against the same theoretical problems tied to theories of performativity in literature or poetry. In the case of rhetoric, the recorded text is an exemplary and masterful application of a set of rules whose implementation leads to their illumination, evocation (elocution is here understood as an *actio* as well: as execution), and to the formation of new (creative) positions through the internalisation of these rules, now infused with personal experience. Of course, creating these positions can be understood on a number of levels: in avant-garde poetry, the teacher of these guidelines might be a deranged experimental teacher, or a naive teacher à la Rancière, simply applying his knowledge of the rules as an informed reader. One thing remains indisputable: avant-garde poetry is agentive poetry, performative in the sense that it always strives to teach us something, thus provoking us to engage in a form of creative imitation, understood literally. To read the avant-garde poem properly, we must not understand it so much as we emulate and perform it.

As a final comment on the usefulness of applying a rhetorical approach to avant-garde poetry: in Lausberg's classification of *artes*, emphasis is placed on either the execution of the action, or the subject who performs that action (*artifex*, *actor*)[16]. Any action has three degrees of concreteness that determine whether a work of art is classified as poietic, practical or theoretical. The poietic arts, as we know, are based on the ability to make something that "might be, or might not be" (a boot, a poem, critique). And yet, both poems and works of music (or even critique, for that matter) are generated according to the rules of poetry and music (understood as theory) rendering them as "events" (for they are not objects), when they are made according to the appropriate practical art. On the other hand, the practical (performative) arts are also rooted in action, and must (or perhaps can) conceive the existence of the "poietic" *opus*. This renders the timeless, poietic work as a present and transitive one, for example, in the case of a play performed on a stage. In the end, Lausberg notes that film and music manage to

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[14]Ibid, p. 3.

[15]K. Burke, *ARhetoric of Motives*, Berkeley 1969, p. 49.

[16]H. Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric...*, p. 5.

narrow the gap between the practical and poietic arts[17]. Due to the changing creative philosophies of the twentieth century, the situation of avant-garde poetry is rather similar since, as we know, it often referenced film. The process-oriented, dynamic poem's content becomes the equivalent of the film, although this does not preclude treating the avant-garde text just as we might treat the recording printed on the celluloid film strip, existing only to anticipate the moment when the film will be projected. In this way, the avant-garde poem becomes something like the documentation of artistic activity, or rather, a detailed script for an action. This is a radical revision of traditional notions of the poem. The deleuzian figure of the "movement image" does a good job of illuminating this notion of the modern poem. Deleuze used this figure mainly in reference to cinema, but it echoes throughout his philosophical reflections on literature. Deleuze writes:

> The writer's specific materials are words and syntax, the created syntax that ascends irresistibly into his work and passes into sensation. Memory, which summons forth only old perceptions, is obviously not enough to get away from lived perceptions; neither is an involuntary memory that adds reminiscence as the present's preserving factor. Memory plays a small part in art (even and especially in Proust). It is true that every work of art is a *monument,* but here the monument is not something commemorating a past, it is a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves and that provide the event with the compound that celebrates it. The monument's action is not memory but fabulation. We write not with childhood memories but through blocs of childhood that are the becoming-child of the present. Music is full of them. It is not memory that is needed but a complex material that is found not in memory but in words and sounds [...][18].

The avant-garde poem will never be a finished poem, although it does become a consolidated text. It produces meaning precisely by disrupting syntactic order – and this is why we must understand it as active and processual. For it retains these syntactic orders so that we might be able to realize them in our own free manner, in accordance with art.

Syntax of the Avant-Garde Poem

In his study, Sławiński takes into account several theses regarding the syntax of avant-garde phrasing (metaphorical and periphrastic). In Sławiński's opinion (bearing Peiper in mind), syntax becomes, first and foremost, a device for putting meaning into dynamic play. This principle, however, is particularly relevant in the case of Peiper's "blossoming sentence", whose components build out the poem, becoming "addenda" to the poem itself and filling out its original concept with further commentary[19]. To do such a poem justice, we must implement a style of reading that doesn't dwell on the periphrastic nature of Peiper's pseudonyms, but

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[17]Ibid, p. 6-7.

[18]G. Deleuze, P. Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York 1994, p. 167-8.

[19]Sławiński goes on to write: "Its elaboration consists of the constant reclaiming of bygone phases, thus amounting to transience incrementally disrupted by its opposite, hindered in turn by the sameness of repeated elements. The beginning and end of a sentence are not only moments that mark its trajectory. They are points that define the limits of its system: between them (...) lies a whole range of variations" (Sławiński, *Koncepcja języka poetyckiego awangardy*, p.127-28).

moves on to reconstruct how and why the poem was initially composed through frequent repetition and layering, and how exactly its "dynamic instability of meaning" unfolds. To do so, we would have to approach the entire avant-garde poem as a rhetorical interval or as a constellation of several such intervals, as I have proposed. *Periodos* refers to the "cyclical course" of a statement, running towards an unspecified endpoint (unlike, say, perpetual speech (*oratio perpetua*)). At the beginning of the rhetorical interval, dispersed, inchoate elements appear, becoming mutually coherent only at the end. The first part of the rhetorical interval builds suspense (rhetoric defines this as *protasis*), while the second subdues this suspense into *apodosis*. Failure to resolve the interval's setup is treated as an error (*vitium*). In the absence of a verbal articulation of the apodictic idea, we find ourselves dealing with an *elliptikon schema*. A detractive gesture produces an end for the interval that can be defined as *anantapodosis*. If the contrast to the apodictic idea is less obvious, as might be the case if a necessary conjunction is missing, then *apodosis* merely diverges from expectations, and this is called *anakoloutos*. Each rhetorical interval therefore has a circular structure, often composed of several "circular systems". These interrelated systems most often appear as antithesis.

From a rhetorical perspective, elocution consists of three distinct figures[20]: through incorporation (*per adiectationem*, perhaps through the repetition of words, synonyms, or words that sound similar, which is to say, through a form of tautology; or through accumulation, such as enumeration, *epitheton* or *polisyndeton*), divergence (*per detractionem*, which includes all forms of ellipses, zeugmas and syllepses, as well as asyndetons), by means of ordering (*per ordinem*, such as anastrophe, hyperbaton or some forms of isocolon, meaning, the conformation of rhetorical elements, their quantitative comparison, or syntactic ordering). It is therefore important to note that tropes, as well as figures of speech and thought, do not represent discrete worlds. So many devices can be identified with a number of the terms above, depending on their mode of operation in syntax, or the function they are assigned by the surrounding words. In the end, all these conceptual figures can be understood as broad figures by which the listener shapes her interpretation of the discourse as a whole (for convenience, we might call them suprasegmental). They can also be treated as syntactic figures, or even tropes. In this way, allegory and synecdoche are simultaneously tropes (and are treaded accordingly in stylistics), and compositional figures. As conceptual figures, *praeteritio* (sometimes called paralepsis) and *reticentia* (also called aposiopesis) can be interpreted as the counterparts of irony. *Praeteritio* consists of the rhetorical gesture of evading certain issues, while *reticentia* consists of staying silent. Semantically speaking, these figures might be perceived as forms of detraction. Within syntax, however, they are often simply ellipses. If we turn to semantic figures of thought, *correctio* operates in the same, suprasegmental way in that it consists of the need to correct a thought by repeating a piece of the syntactic relationship.

The most prominent devices of avant-garde syntax, determining entirely distinct creative strategies, are various forms of periphrasis and ellipsis. The former, as a stylistic device that expands our means for describing a given fact or phenomenon, is a figure of speech that functions by repetition (tautology) as well as accumulation enriched with modifications or corrections.

[20]Here I am following Jerzy Ziomek's classification, which is a somewhat simplified and abridged form of the classification Lausberg offered (J. Ziomek, *Retoryka opisowa*, Wrocław 1990, pp. 203-205)

Detractive figures constitute another creative strategy usually associated with ellipses: in this case, a trajectory is developed for the poem using mainly zeugmas, although these can also include modifications and corrections. The detractive syntax of the avant-garde sentence was most typical for Przyboś and Brzękowski, and to a certain degree, its legacy can be seen in the work of Karpowicz, Miłobędzka, and in the "avant-garde" poems of younger poets such as Marcin Sendecki. Syntax partially tied to cutting and detracting as ordering mechanisms, while partially employing additive and repetitive devices and meaningful (constructive, rather than lexical) tautologies mainly emerged out of Peiper's blossoming sentence as a prototype. This structure seems to have been influential in the long run, if we look at Wirpsza's poetry. We can also find traces of it in the contemporary poetry of Krzysztof Siwczyk. If I am evoking three major innovators of the historical Avant Garde who surface frequently in literary studies (Peiper, Przyboś and Brzękowski), I am not doing so in order to classify their individual outputs by trope within some kind of hierarchical schema. Miłobędzka, orienting herself towards the constructivist premises of avant-garde syntax and constructing her own sentences by way of detraction, often references syntactic figures we might associate with Peiper's legacy. However, if she manipulates syntactic devices introduced by Przyboś or taken up later by Karpowicz, this does not mean that her poetics have evolved directly out of Przyboś's project. Avant-garde syntax simply lives within the poetic tradition, right alongside the traditional metre of the Enlightenment or Romantic poets. So it is, perhaps, in similar memorisation experiments, and its constructive implications can be used as a form of *techne,* regardless of how similar the work of two poets may be. In this sense, Wirpsza does in fact continue the trope of Peiper's syntactic model (the additive-tautological line). Meanwhile, in an entirely distinct poetic context, we see similar exercises in the work of Piotr Sommer, who might be described as post-avant-garde only in the most narrow sense. Sommer's poetic syntax thus absorbs into itself a number of gestures that recall the syntactic devices of the modern American poets he himself translated. In brief: the revolution in Polish poetry launched by the poetics of the Kraków Avant Garde, whose legacy has had a major impact on all interpretations of the system (or lack thereof) of free verse in Poland, was effectively a revolution in the syntactic structure of the sentence.

To wrap up, I would like to demonstrate a few possible manifestations of the additive-tautological tradition, in which the sentence that constitutes the verse is constantly developing and operating within the space of a rhetorical interval (or several such intervals), simultaneously building structures of meaning that appear spatially. Let us first consider Tadeusz Peiper's well-known poem *Chorale of Workers* (*Chorał robotników*), from the collection *A.* The author has cited this volume as a "poem-obsession" and the source of his blossoming syntax in *Nowe usta.* I would recall that Peiper tends to describe this syntax in terms of motion:

> (...) the projection of visions occurs at full speed. Under the influence of those that came before, new visions undergo instantaneous degradation, fragmentation, displacement and removal. All this occurs on invaded territory as new, incoming visions gallop at the invader's same fast clip. At this point, we must take note that this movement is not derived from the description of movement (...) We are not dealing with movement in the world, but with movement between words[21].

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[21]T. Peiper, *Tędy. Nowe usta*, with commentary by S. Jaworski, Kraków 1972, p. 301.

And the poem itself:

Shadow
black bird,
black bird of our sighs
suckles at the golden udder, suckles the sun,
black bird.   (1)

Aaa, we wa -nt it we wa -nt it.
To have!
To have!
The golden udder we wa -nt to have

Ours! your song,
ours! your golden song,
ours, of the black, your golden song,
your song sculpts us the world,
our world
world.   (2)

Let's see. Shall we see? We steal with our eyes!
We steal, we steal, we steal
with our eyes.
Smoke has a knife.
the knife of our sighs,
the knife, it slices the sun into coins and coins it hands out.
Smoke has a knife and slices.   (3)

(Cień
czarny ptak,
Czarny ptak naszych westchnień
ssie złote wymię, ssie słońce,
czarny ptak.   (1)

Aaa, my chce my je mieć.
Mieć!
Mieć!
Złote wymię chce my mieć.

Nam twój śpiew,
nam złoty twój śpiew,
nam czarnym złoty twój śpiew,
twój śpiew rzeźbi nam świat,
nam świat
świat.   (2)

Patrzymy. Patrzymy? Kradniemy oczyma!
Kradniemy, kradniemy, kradniemy
oczyma.
Dym ma nóż,
ma nóż dym naszych westchnień,
ma nóż, kraje słońce na grosze i grosze rozdaje.
Dym ma nóż i kraje.   (3))[22]

If we read Peiper's poem verse by verse, it comes across as a declaration ordered by anaphorae and epiphorae, understood as stylistic syntactic figures. The rule governing repetition is thus "immobilised" and assigned the role of marking poetic correlations according to the rules of traditional verse analysis. If we understand repetition in these terms, this will only reinforce our dependence on line breaks in the absence of metric norms. Reading syntactic figures according to the rhetorical conceptual apparatus does not rule out this insight, but incorporates it as a device for organising and beginning to expand a rhetorical model for the poetics of the full sentence. If we are to treat the poem in its entirety as a set of rhetorical intervals, then we must first acknowledge that we are dealing with a text that consists of several (three) moments linked together transitions that might be described as interjections– an element proper to ongoing speech (*oratio perpetua*) and therefore not subject to the circular law of the period. Whereas in poetry we speak of verses, in rhetoric (the art of speech), we speak of cola (and their constituent commas). In Peiper's sentence structure, syntax is suspended in the tension of the drawn-out, nearly scanned sentence – or perhaps multiple sentences that cannot be spoken without violating the rules of grammar – thus yielding a colon-comma division that lends itself more easily to analysis. Aside from its verse structure, this poem has one more division internal to the verse. The three intervals that make up Peiper's *Chorale of Workers* are based on four consecutive declarations that are extremely metaphorical and develop their meaning in tandem (the latter pair will elaborate on one theme in two variations): "black bird of our sighs suckles at the golden udder"; "ours, of the black, your golden song, your song sculpts us the world"; "Smoke has a knife. the knife of our sighs,"; "The knife, it slices the sun into coins". In Peiper's poem, these statements halt in the middle of their course, and only then develop further. These halting maneuvers (each interval might be represented as a hand reaching out for something and then pulling back in the face of something else) unfold on two levels simultaneously: that of the verse, and of the sentence. The rhythmic order that I here call the poem's scan, which is to say, the rhythmic tendency towards the poetic scan (and in certain places this comes across rather vividly) becomes yet another aspect to consider. Rhythm can be read somewhat similarly, in terms of its particular "trimming of sentences": "Cień//czar/**ny**/ptak//czar/**ny**/ptak/na/**szych**/westch/**nień**"[23] ("Shadow//black bird//black bird of our sighs")" (here, double slashes mark the verse's endpoints, while boldface indicates stressed syllables, although the syllable "*ny*" can also be stressed). How do sentences operate within these three rhetorical intervals? In this case, we must understand "interval" in rather simple terms, as an individual, built-out sentence. Rhetoric supports this definition of an interval. The distinction between the rhetorical interval and the poetic line, defined by Lausberg as an amorphous *oratio perpetua*, remains its "circularity", As I have already mentioned, the interval is organised thus: incomplete thoughts are introduced at the beginning and then need to be assimilated. When the initial, tension-building idea (*protasis*) is not resolved, this results in a form

of detraction designated as *anantopodosis*. In this sense, the sentence develops over the course of three intervals to a limit point defined as the syntactic climax, and is then dispersed and ultimately pulled back in. As a result, we must note that while *Chorale* does develop as a whole, its climax is left open at the end. Certain commas and their accompanying colons are only resolved through the sentence's syntactic layout: from basic links back to the subject group, the logical beginning of the sentence, which are then specified further by subsequent groups that define the subject and its object, after which we move on to the predicate group, which again brings more specificity to the information supplied by the text as a whole. This process can also be specific, multi-stepped and "fragmented". The entire middle stanza (the second interval) can thus be scanned as follows: *"Nam twój śpiew,// nam/czarnym złoty/ twój śpiew,// twój śpiew/ rzeźbi/ nam świat// nam świat//świat"*[24] (Ours! your song, // ours! your golden song,// ours, of the black, your golden song,// your song sculpts us the world,// our world// world). Here, the division of units is laid out according to the mounting tension and the subsequent denouement through resolution. In the second part of the sentence, however, these resolutions halt, and are instead are pulled back into one scanned word. If we read carefully and "in fragments", we see that new syntactic elements are at work, such as interjection (in the form of hyperbaton or a parenthetical clause, depending on which level of the composition we examine). This seems somewhat strange, especially when we scrutinise the predicate (the act of sculpting) in this light. We can begin to see how the trajectory of the sentence develops through repetition: anadiplosis is used as a form of *correctio* ("your golden song,/your song sculpts us the world"). Meanwhile, the sentence closes its circle through the gesture of close epanadiplosis ("Ours! your song... our world"). These are parentheticals, of course, because the developing sense of the statement functions as a kind of aside, extending the sentence to the limit of the second repetition ("us the world/ our world") in order to then finalise the developed sense of the detraction. Peiper's poem, *Chorale of Workers*, teems with hunger and longing. It throbs and reaches out – precisely by way of this gesture to expand and draw out the sentence structure by way of a rhetorical device we might call anantopodon. I have only managed here to point out one somewhat insignificant element of the game of syntax that we constantly bear in mind while interpreting *Chorale* as a whole. I have left out homonyms, the matter of chiasma (one of which nearly emerges in the third interval, creating its own form of climax), the question of homonymic rhymes, various phonic combinations, and paronomasia (which can also be understood in terms of the instrumentalisation of letters, or rhetorical repetition). When we analyse the internal divisions within Peiper's poem rhetorically, we lay bare the text's constructive cues (on the level of that composition's elocution). This, in turn, allows us to grasp yet another layer or dimension that expands our reading of poetic sentences – the layer of the "construction/implementation" of the text, contingent on its engagement of normative meanings syntax. This builds yet another form of tension that runs parallel to the line breaks, tearing through the syntax of normatively-read sentences. Rhetoric, which is also informed by the knowledge of syntax, allows us to examine poetic operations upon the sentence, now liberated from the conventions that the prose sentence must obey. We can then examine our own syntactic reconstruction within the space of the "complete" sentence that makes up the rhetorical interval: the poetic moment. In this sense, "active" syntax compels the reader to approach the poem unhindered by aesthetic or cognitive notions already harnessed to everyday communication norms. Instead, we are compelled to reconstruct the poem as a process in and of itself. The avant-garde poem thus becomes a poem "in motion", not unlike a silent film. This is in keeping with the political emphasis on its didactic and persuasive functions, tied to the art of speech as a performative act.

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[24]See above

Naturally, not all the syntactic triumphs of the Avant Garde are necessarily persuasive or di-
dactic. The strong prevalence of syntactic "actions" in contemporary Polish poetry extends the
legacy of the Avant Garde, but more often than not, it generally references rhetoric in terms
of free verse and its attempt to mobilise the rhythm and syntax of the colloquial, spoken
sentence within poetry. In this way, many of Piotr Sommer's poems offer a distant realisation
of additive-tautological poetic strategies. Let us look, for instance, at his poem *Yesterday* (*Wc-
zoraj)* from *Pastoral Song* (*Piosenka pasterska)*:

Fall in the small gardens around the houses –
aside from some jasmine all is still
clothed and the sparrows
jumping from one lilac

to the next – yield such a bare
moral, such a downfall? the passage
of leaves beyond the rusted fence
they shield us so well

from the eye of passerby, the neighbor
who once, long ago, worked in the passport bureau
and from the headlights of the car, that chases the leaves

like wind, so that faster and faster and
perhaps driven by this speed

you hasten your step

(Jesień na małych działkach wokół domów –
oprócz kilku jaśminów wciąż jeszcze
w ubraniu i wróbli
przeskakujących z jednego bzu

na drugi – dobywa z siebie taki goły
morał, taki upadek? przesłanie
liści za przerdzewiałym płotem
które tak ładnie chronią nas

przed okiem przechodnia i sąsiadki
co kiedyś kiedyś pracowała w biurze paszportowym
i przed światłami samochodu, które gonią liście

jak wiatr, tyle że szybciej szybciej i
chyba z powodu tego pędu
przyspieszasz kroku)[25]

[25]P. Sommer, *Po ciemku też*, Poznań 2013, p. 246.

Sommer's poem, not unlike Peiper's, has a "developing" syntax, whose rhetorical devices as constructive directives (compositional cues) coincide with several other layers of the composition that serve other interests. The sonnet (as a poetic subgenre) offers a clear template for the poem's internal breaks with its binary structure, its tone-based line structure, and meaningful enjambements associated with syntax as a form of versification. *Yesterday* is made up of two colons (two sentences that add up to one interval), organised according to a hierarchy of conceptual development. The thoughts proceed from that which is less discursively complex (referring bluntly to autumn), then become a metaphorical commentary on autumn, and ultimately lead to more conceptual content that allows us to convey a specific narrative. The poem's organisation, shaped by intonation and syntax, is thus a component of versification, flowing more smoothly as the rhetorical interval develops as a whole. This creates additional segments within individual lines. The first sentence, acting as our beginning (*protasis*), reaches a climax in the second stanza, marking its strong internal division with a question mark. This break takes the place of more traditional divisions between the expressive portion of the sonnet and its subsequent commentary. The denouement of the tension introduced at the poem's beginning (in the form of commas): "Fall in the small gardens around the houses –" articulated as "yield such a bare moral, such a downfall?", unfolds as the deceptive, superficial fulfillment of the rhetorical interval's expectations. The thought breaks off with the expression of doubt, which simultaneously makes room for new developments. The pauses interject additional subsections within the colon: the first one ending as the line does, yielding something like an exposed and thus emphatic pause, while the second bisects the first line of the second stanza, making it difficult to then trace the sense of the sentence as a whole. In keeping with Sommers' idiosyncratic style, lines and enjambements break up a long declaration. They seem to be pulled straight out of *oratio perpetua*: they are ongoing and do not necessarily lead to a defined endpoint. All other syntactic devices remain somewhat hidden. We can provisionally treat the second line as a continuation of the statement "about autumn": "aside from some jasmine all is still clothed". The entire development towards the sentence's climax is also broken off, or deceivingly extends towards its equivalent through two descriptions, by way of adverbials or an adverbial and modifier. The development of the initial commas suggests that the jasmine as well as autumn itself might both be "clothed". Introducing the equalising unit: "and the sparrows // jumping from one lilac// to the next", might go so far as to suggest that "Fall is still clothed", just like the jasmine and the sparrows. If we follow the logical course of the sentence, modeled as a form of hyperbaton, then "still clothed" is a unit that disrupts the correct word order of the statement as a whole, whose listed units ought to lie side by side. In this way, the motif we trace tapers away in the next stanza, when we come upon yet another pause that now marks the end of the parenthetical. Only now do we realise our own error. For it is not possible that the autumn and the jasmine and the sparrows (linked with autumn and by way of anacoluthon used colloquially, with "aside from" also meaning "and"), all simultaneously yield "such a bare moral" – thus, the very idea becomes pure comedy. The parenthetical is constructed, rather, via two parallel statements ("jasmine [...] is still clothed" and "sparrows jumping") in the form of adverbials acting as modifiers if we choose to link these modifiers to the autumn. We can also choose to perceive them as developed counterparts of the "bald moral", which appears significantly later and is equally linked to everything associated with "Fall." If "autumn" is not, in fact, "still clothed" – and thus it is "some jasmine [..] and the sparrows" that produce "such a bare moral, such a downfall?", then we are instead dealing with an interjection that is simultaneously an inversion. Here, Sommer constructs his poem as a kind of misleading intensification and dispersion of sense:

syntax is always ambiguous and amphibolic. That which enacts its own accumulation, supplementing the field of descriptions linked to the subject, turns out to be dependent on what is to come, as if the speaker has run ahead of his thought, and then seeks to return to the topic at hand. We can describe this figure of speech as a developed prolepsis: a push toward the culmination of the sentence understood as an event. At the end of the long, slow postponement of the climax in the form of syntactic anticipation or retardation, we have, at last, aporia. In the poem *Yesterday,* the meaning of the sentences, through specific "subdivisions" (be they logical or marked as line breaks, produced by pauses and enjambements on the one hand, and rhetorical and syntactic devices on the other) is somehow undermined. From line to line it softens, rather than accumulating and solidifying over the course of traditional intervals. We might say that from the very start, the syntactic gesture anticipates the image of leaves blowing about in the wind that appears in the climax. By this same token, the fragment underscored by repetition in the form of anadiplosis and *correctio* ("such a bare/ moral, such a downfall?") can be interpreted as the conceptual figures of aposiopesis or *dubitatio*. In compositional terms, the fragment can be read as the fulfillment of the interval's expectation of anticlimax at the expense of the reader's expectations (in lieu of additional commentary on that "Fall in the small gardens", we receive a question, or doubt, surfacing in the word "bare" and perhaps laced with disappointment). In the first two stanzas, through a special kind of anticlimax within the syntax, the developed parts of the sentences that constitute the colons and intervals by way of erroneous logic, two antithetical "lines" of one statement are spliced, only to be merged in the second part. We might say that they exchange meanings, or perhaps that meaning circulates between them, just like in a rhetorical interval. The second part should therefore yield the desired anticlimax. Unfortunately, it turns out that Sommer's sentences are somewhat "inflated", as it were. They project their pursuit of concrete sense (*apodosis)* by way of seemingly colloquial, but in fact rather devious logic. The expectations, however, are established only on the surface, as a kind of pretext (thus, as an anacoluthon). Syntactic order is subject to the principle of its own accumulation of sense, through its deceivingly logical specifications. These specifications inevitably lead not to explication, but to questions and to the scattering of sense. The subsequent interval in *Yesterday* is also an entire sentence. Its syntax is meticulously segmented through ambiguous enjambements. In its entirety, it might be described as an epanadiplosis that is then revised, crossing over into the suspension of a voice associated with aposiopesis. In this way, the second part repeats the syntactic and rhetorical premise of the first part, so much so that its circular nature becomes emphatic: "the passage/ of leaves beyond the rusted fence..." leads us to the headlights of a car "that chases the leaves/ like wind". The initial antithesis of two syntactic motifs culminates in paradox: the stressed repetition of the same meaning at both endpoints of the interval. Perhaps this is only true on a homonymic level (the leaves behind the fence, kindly shielding us from the neighbor's eye, are not necessarily the same leaves that flutter before the headlights). And yet, in terms of syntax, the sentence is internally contradictory and withholds latent meaning. This device, which borders on epanadiplosis, is a series of enumerations and therefore a figure of accumulation ("leaves" shield us "from the eye" of both "the neighbor" and "the headlights of the car"). We might treat this as a kind of polysyndeton: a sequence of addenda linked by the conjunction "and". Here, the syntax is simpler than in the first colon. And yet, due to the paradoxical nature of the "leaves" that appear once to "shield us so well/ from the eye of passersby, the neighbor", and once as those "hastened" by the headlights, the sentence is cobbled together by repeating the earlier antithesis in a rather abbreviated manner, in a state-

ment that is internally contradictory and runs counter to logic. The leaves simultaneously "shield us" and are "chased" by the headlights, thus failing to shield us at all. These leaves are simultaneously those that continue to thickly blanket the lane bordering the garden, and those that have already fallen. This leads us to the final denouement of the poem's climax, which again – by way of anacoluthon – fails to explain anything, and at first accelerates through regular, expressive repetitions ("so that faster and faster") and through conjunction (the use of verse to suspend the voice, as if right before the disclosure of a secret). These techniques lead us to a simple declaration that explains nothing and simply provides the next piece of the puzzle. Perhaps, in this way, the subject speaking in the poem is introduced: "and/ perhaps driven by this speed/ you hasten your step", for it is to this climax that the the mayhem of the "syntactic leaf" strives. *Wczoraj* – in spite of its use of past tense – reveals this moment of anxiety vividly, so that the syntactic devices appear as an extremely rich notation: as the memory of movement. If we adopt this approach, we must ultimately grapple with the insinuation that the speaker is simultaneously "inside", in the garden, on the side where the Fall is static and stable, and "chased" down the street, alongside the leaves, caught in the headlights of a car. In this way, the syntax of the text as a whole becomes a kind of reconciliation with a memory of steps that are slow at first, and then rushed for some unknown reason, a reason toward which we crane our necks, both carefully and clumsily.

KEYWORDS

performativity

the Avant Garde

blossoming syntax

Abstract:

The question I wish to pose through my remarks on versification is not limited to the syntax of the avant-garde sentence. It is rooted, rather, in an attempt to reckon with the flat nature of the sheet of paper, and the spatial and dynamic possibilities it implies. The artists of the Polish Avant Garde attempted to refine this, identifying their poems as "constructions". Rhetoric allows us to hone this possibility, if its premises for the composition of a work (which I prefer to define as an "action") are mobilised not only as tools for describing the stylistic aspects of a text, but as a system of creative cues that engage the reader. This process is understood as *actio* – the implementation of the artistic text. In this approach, the poetic text becomes a "notation", not unlike the sequence of notes documented in music, while its "implementation" consists of the "mimetic" repetition of the author's creative actions.

FIGURES OF SYNTAX

FREE VERSE

p o e t r y

r h e t o r i c

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

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