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QUADRATI, CANTONI, CANTONATE:
TOPOGRAFIE POETICHE
DI AMELIA ROSSELLI

A cura di Chiara Carpita e Emmanuela Tandello

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SOMMARIO

EMMANUELA TANDELLO, <i>Introduzione. Quadrati, cantoni, cantonate: topografie poetiche di Amelia Rosselli</i>	9
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I. DIALOGHI

LAURA BARILE, <i>L'uso di Montale nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli</i>	15
GABRIELLA PALLI BARONI, <i>Fratellanza e destino: Amelia Rosselli e Pier Paolo Pasolini</i>	31
LUCIA RE, <i>Melina morde la mela: il linguaggio affamato di Amelia Rosselli</i>	43

II. SPAZI METRICI TRA MUSICA E POESIA

CHIARA CARPITA, «Spazi metrici» tra post-webernismo, etnomusicologia, Gestalttheorie ed astrattismo. Sulle fonti extra-letterarie del 'nuovo geometrismo' di Amelia Rosselli	61
ROBERTO GIGLIUCCI, <i>Lettere inedite di Amelia Rosselli a David Tudor (1960-1969)</i>	107
STEFANO GIOVANNUZZI, <i>La mente dattilografica</i>	113
JENNIFER SCAPPETTONE, «Cantonidisintegratidella/miavita»: Closure and Implosion of the Canto(n) in Amelia Rosselli, and the Dream (or Nightmare) of a Transnational Language	131

III. BILANCI

Repertorio bibliografico su Amelia Rosselli (2001-2008)

EMMANUELA TANDELLO, <i>Premessa</i>	157
ANN SNODGRASS, <i>Knowing Noise. The English Poems of Amelia Rosselli</i> (Gian Maria Annovi)	159
SILVIA DE MARCH, <i>Amelia Rosselli tra poesia e storia</i> (Laura Barile)	162
ALESSANDRO BALDACCI, <i>Amelia Rosselli</i> (Stefano Giovannuzzi)	163
TATIANA BISANTI, <i>L'opera plurilingue di Amelia Rosselli. Un "distorto, inesperto, espertissimo linguaggio"</i> (Viviana Ponta)	165
EMMANUELA TANDELLO, <i>La fanciulla e l'infinito</i> (Chiara Carpita)	167
FRANCESCO CARBOGNIN, <i>Le armoniose dissonanze. Spazio metrico e intertestualità nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli</i> (Emmanuela Tanello)	170
FLORINDA FUSCO, <i>Amelia Rosselli</i> (Gabriella Palli Baroni)	171

«CANTONIDISINTEGRATIDELLA / MIAVITA»:
CLOSURE AND IMPLOSION OF THE CANTO(N)
IN AMELIA ROSSELLI, AND THE DREAM
(OR NIGHTMARE)
OF A TRANSNATIONAL LANGUAGE

JENNIFER SCAPPETONE

This essay glosses the political conceptualism of Amelia Rosselli through the lens of her 'new geometrism', inflected by the open-field poetics of Charles Olson on the one hand, and by the dialectic between non-intentionality and constraint, freedom and imprisonment explored by practitioners of the New Music on the other. The phrase 'Disintegratedcantons' in an early riposte to the neoavanguardia links Rosselli's formal research with a political aspiration (or trauma): the dream (or nightmare) of a 'total' language, poised to host all possible rhythms, yet ultimately giving rise to the discomposing syntheses of transnational clashes. Atomic metaphors in Pasolini's reading of her first published Italian poems elicit the force of these clashes: Rosselli generates a post-Enlightenment poetics, exposing the violent unreason stemming from the programmatic disenchantment of history.

«'Tis this
I calculate: I must My Self set free, by
Strong Set High Prison Walls»
Blocks of Granite do lead me up to God
(From *Sleep: Poesie in inglese*)

I^N October 1963, the 33-year-old Amelia Rosselli attended a series of lectures and conversations in Palermo convened by the Gruppo 63, a cell of the Italian neo-avant-garde whose powerful cohort included the Novissimi members Nanni Balestrini, Eduardo Sanguineti, Alfredo Giuliani, Elio Pagliarani, and Antonio Porta as well as Luciano Anceschi, aesthetic philosopher and editor-in-chief of the journal «il verri», and Umberto Eco, author of the 1962 treatise *Opera aperta* ('*The Open Work*'). The conference was organized in conjunction with the *Settimana Internazionale di Nuova Musica* curated by Francesco Agnello, a festival of contemporary 'Neue Musik' informed by poststructuralist and Marxist theory, and it continued the Novissimi's search to revitalize language by critiquing traditional academic and literary culture as well as the logic of the consumer capitalism that had lately invaded Italy via the United States – at a superstructural level.¹ The year

¹ See Eco's 1971 critical eulogy, *The Death of the Gruppo 63*, now reprinted in UMBERTO ECO, *The Open Work*, introduction by David Robey, trans. Anna Cancogni, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 236-249. Eco's concept of the open work was itself inspired both by the theorization of space in architecture by Bruno Zevi, and by the new music coursing through Italy. See BRUNO ZEVI, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Torino, Einaudi, 1948. The work was translated as *Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture*, New York, Horizon, 1957. Eco first delivered his lecture *The Open Work* at the 12th International Philosophy Conference in Venice in 1958, shortly before John Cage performed *Sounds of Venice* on a RAI quiz show.

of this conference was to become part of the group's name, commemorating a series of tumultuous political and social events. It was the year of King's *I Have a Dream* speech in Washington, of Kennedy's assassination, and in Italy, of both Fellini's *8½* and the censoring of Pier Paolo Pasolini's Christological allegory of labor, *La ricotta*, for blasphemy.

Amelia Rosselli was both the embodiment of and the exception to the postwar panorama in Italy and beyond. She was in the womb when her mother, Marion Cave, an English Quaker Labour activist, was arrested for organizing the spectacular escape of her Italian Jewish father, Carlo Rosselli, an intellectual leader and hero of the Italian anti-Fascist Resistance, from the prison island of Lipari. Feminist and activist groups in England rallied for the release of Cave and her unborn child in 1929.¹ Born in Paris in 1930, Amelia spent the greater part of her first two decades in exile between France, England and the United States in a continual displacement triggered by the assassination of her father and uncle by French *cagouleurs* – probably upon direct order of Fascist Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano – when she was seven years old. She was brought up in three tongues, and educated in as many (and more) literary traditions; she began writing in each before settling primarily in Italian upon the untimely death of her companion Rocco Scotellaro. Yet Rosselli's poetry plies its way between discursive systems in a way distinct from both the delirious pastiches of her contemporaries in the neoavanguardia and the multilingual montages of their avowed predecessors Eliot and Pound. Her poetry stages the roiling of one linguistic system *within* another, more alarming than if it were to allow languages to cohabit without contaminating one another; it makes them *unheimlich*, unhome-ly, as the 'home' language of any given poem can become, in Rosselli's handling, a 'homicide' – a hostile fusion of domicile and homicide.² This idiom is radically inclusive – one is tempted to deploy the term 'catholic' – at the level of conception, yet 'barbarous' in practice («Vissuta in Italia, paese barbaro», she writes in a rare autobiographical line; 'Experienced in Italy, barbarous country').³

Despite being embraced as one of few women invited to the Gruppo 63 gatherings in Palermo and Reggio Emilia, Rosselli would characterize the tactics of the Novissimi as «superatissime» ('far overcome') – belatedly hearkening to modernist authors like Joyce and Pound whom she had read extensively in the original language years before.⁴ She would clarify in a later interview that she regarded

¹ See ISABELLE RICHEL, *Marion Cave Rosselli and the Transnational Women's Antifascist Networks*, «Journal of Women's History», 24, no. 3, 2012: pp. 117-129.

² «Homicide» appears in *Ashore's the great servility*, from *Sleep*: «A soldier wooden he / staked by the running homicide / flash-deep», AMELIA ROSSELLI, *L'opera poetica*, ed. Stefano Giovannuzzi et alii, Milano, Mondadori, 2012, p. 884. (This Meridiano edition of Rosselli's works is hereafter cited as *OP.*) For an introduction in English to *Metrical Spaces* and an extended discussion of the 'homicide' concept, see my introduction to *Locomotrix: Selected Poetry and Prose of Amelia Rosselli. A Bilingual Edition*, ed. Jennifer Scappettone, trans. Jennifer Scappettone, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012, pp. 1-47.

³ *OP.*, p. 45. All unattributed translations in this piece are my own.

⁴ See *Scienza e Istinto*, an interview with Elio Pecora, in *È vostra la vita che ho perso. Conversazioni e interviste, 1964-1995*, eds Monica Venturini, Silvia De March, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2010, p. 21, and *Il dolore in una stanza*, on p. 65 of the same volume. On the problematic gender dynamics at play in this movement, see LUCIA RE, *Language, Gender, and Sexuality in the Neoavanguardia*, in *Neoavanguardia: Italian Experimental Literature and Arts in the 1960s*, eds. Mario Moroni, Luca Somigli, Paolo Chirumbolo, Toronto and Buffalo (NY), University of Toronto Press («Toronto Italian Studies»), 2010, pp. 171-211.

each 'linguistic order' as a distinct 'discipline of the mind', adding that '[t]he multilingual work that has been fashionable from Pound forward does not in fact interest me'.¹ More than polylingual, we might describe Rosselli's language in practice as 'minor', staging microdisplacements of so-called national languages, and imploding the boundaries of Italian from within – though it is 'total' in conception, as we shall see.²

Rosselli sent to Pier Paolo Pasolini, yet never published, a polemical report on the conference of the Gruppo 63 that she authored under the pseudonym 'Xenaxis' – presumably to echo the exiled Greek avant-garde composer and architect Iannis Xenakis, who had been sentenced *in absentia* to death, then imprisoned as a former member of the National Liberation Front's armed resistance against Axis powers. Rosselli's essay casts a skeptical eye on the aims of the conference, with its implicit division of experimental style and content-based realism: for a refugee, after all, multilingualism is not a stylistic choice but an embattled reality, part of the content of everyday living; the refugee is always *xenos* – guest, enemy, stranger.³ Though Rosselli pushed language to more extreme degrees of experimentation than Pasolini did, she shared Pasolini's contention that language is never a matter of form alone. Rosselli's 'poetry of research' is also a search for a new semantics. Impatience with the antagonism of form and content sheds light on her response to a 1977 interview question soliciting her formula for writing: 'Post-neorealist or, better, post-realist'.⁴ With its rigorous historicism, Rosselli's 'post-neorealist' poetry represents a unique contribution to the emerging development of conceptualist art across the disciplines in the late 1950s and '60s.

Using the notes she had taken at the now mythical founding conference, Rosselli also composed *Palermo '63*, a series of lyrics polemical and parodic by turns that were eventually published in «il verri» (1970) with the subtitle *Otto poesie-collage scritte durante la prima riunione del Gruppo '63* ('Eight poem-collages written during the first meeting of the Gruppo '63'), and later in *Primi scritti* ('First Writings' [1980]), in which the subtitle is revised to read *poesie-collage ironicamente dedicate al Gruppo '63*. All of the poems' titles are directed toward particular members of the movement – except one *A me stessa* ('To myself'), and one titled simply *Chiesa* ('Church'), which is addressed ardently to 'Jesusinthelimbs'. The invocation of Christ in the third stanza of *Chiesa* leads to a tactic unique within the series – the sudden elimination of the spaces between words:

...Inventa parole e
perdoni io t'amo Gesùnellemembra.
Rovinainfinitasimuove
romanzochiarificatoreunisce
Jesùnellemembratotali
Combinalarimanuovaiopregoilluminare

¹ *La poesia oggi non ha ruolo, è un piacere privato*, an interview with Gabriella Sica, in *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, cit., p. 15.

² I make an argument for Rosselli's poetic as part of a 'minor' literature in the introduction to *Locomotrix*, especially on pp. 41–42. I build on the argument of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

³ See AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Lettere a Pasolini, 1962–1969*, ed. Stefano Giovannuzzi («Quaderni Del Tempo», Genova, San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2008, p. 78).

⁴ *La poesia oggi non ha ruolo, è un piacere privato*, cit., p. 14.

iquattromondi
 Preghieradisperatarimuove
 passionedisperataangoscia
 Infernoimmobilesintetizza
 Cantonidisintegratidella
 miavita.
 ...Invent words and
 pardon I love you Jesusinthelimbs.
 Infiniteruinisstirred
 Romanceclarifierunites
 Jesusinthetotallimbs
 Arrangethenewrhymelpraytoilluminate
 thefourworlds
 Prayerdesperateremoves
 Passiondesperateanguish
 Immobileinfernosynthesize
 Disintegratedcantonsof
 mylife.¹

Rosselli's representation of prayer amidst a group of polemics against men of the avant-garde is anomalous on several counts, and it is not surprising that despite the recent explosion of interest in her work, little analysis of this poem has appeared.² Not least surprising is the mingling of stylistic novelty with the expression, or trope, of eroticized religious candor – a tactic also abundant in the neologistic and anachronistic interpolations of the mock-Metaphysical English sequence *October Elizabethans* (1956, also collected in *Primi scritti*), and indeed throughout her oeuvre, particularly in *Variazioni belliche* ('Bellicose Variations'; composed 1959-1961, published 1964) and *Sleep: Poesie in inglese* (composed 1953-1966, published in translations by Antonio Porta and Emanuela Tandello in 1989 and 1992 respectively). *Chiesa* occupies (but not without imploding from within) the conceit of an address to Jesus, rendering this figure a complicit agent of 'the new rhyme', or of verse itself – of poesis.³

That the outmoded stances of ravished mystical poetry and prayer appear without spaces distinguishing words in *Chiesa* creates a link, however indirect, to the 'motsfondus' ('fusedwords') of Futurism;⁴ the other poems in the series, in fact,

¹ *OP*, p. 666.

² An exception appears in Chiara Carpità's thorough commentary on *Primi scritti* as a whole in the Meridiano edition, which devotes several sentences to *Chiesa*, reading it as a parodic invocation of the experiments of the Gruppo 63. See *OP*, p. 1413.

³ Rosaria Lo Russo offers a compelling argument for the way that Rosselli's «glorious and violent mystical-erotic inspiration» occupies the tradition of feminine mystic «oral writing» – particularly the trope of the mystic marriage to Christ – in order to «seduce the Father-God into a "parity" of communication». This argument stresses the way that phonic dissolution of the poems in *La libellula*, *Variazioni belliche* and *Serie ospedaliera* enacts a parodic de- and resemanticization of the paternalistic Canon. See *I Santi Padri e la Figlia dal cuore devastato*, in *La furia dei venti contrari. Variazioni Amelia Rosselli – con testi inediti e dispersi dell'autrice*, ed. Andrea Cortellessa, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2007, esp. pp. 69-74.

⁴ For «fusedwords in freedom», see, for example, FILIPPO TOMMASO MARINETTI, *Selected Poems and Related Prose*, with an essay by Paolo Valesio, trans. Elizabeth R. Napier, Barbara R. Studholme, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 244.

mimic a futurist or neo-futurist «destruction of syntax», their fragmentary and highly paratactic constructions distinguished only by periods, hyphens, dashes, and plus and minus signs, with only the very rare comma.¹ However, the word fusion particular to *Chiesa* can also be read as an anachronism nodding to ancient manuscripts that lack spaces between words: a tradition of *scriptio continua*. Confusing antiquated with experimental poetic trappings takes the nod backward in time to *stilnovismo* embedded in the name *Novissimi* ('Utterly New') to a more drastic extent – just as, when performing with David Tudor and Merce Cunningham at the Teatro Sistina in 1960, Rosselli's less minimalist aleatory impulses reputedly led her to break into a Gregorian chant (to John Cage's distaste).² *A me stessa* explicitly embraces anachronism as it declares, «Morirò nel vecchio stile preoccupandomi ancora per l'avvenire»³ ('I will die in the old style still worrying about the future'). In a workshop on metrics, Rosselli refers to *scriptio continua* as a sign of the association between visual and sonic registers in archaic writing forms, pointing out that spaces between written words are an invention: 'At one time sound was so close to the graphic text that one wrote absolutely without spaces between one word and the other'. She adds that the interruptions of punctuation in modern discourse are 'psychological'.⁴ As a score, the fused syllables of *Chiesa* evoke the lived collective space of a church through the chanting that takes place within, evening out the whims of individual expression and linking the printed poem to the continuum of thought in oral utterance. Yet this continuum of letters and accompanying paratactic syntax paradoxically permit an atmosphere of fracture to dominate the poem. At the beginning of the section of 'fused' words, 'Infiniterruin' stirs while «romanzochiarificatoreunisce» – a line that trips up reading, as it could be read either as 'romanzo-chiarificato-reunisce' ('clarified novel reunites') or 'romanzo-chiarificatore-unisce' ('clarifier Romance unites'). ('I have emphasized the latter option in translating, due to the otherwise perplexing presence of «rima» (rhyme, or more generally, verse), stressing the linguistic rather than generic implications of «romanzo» to invoke the unifying 'family' of Romance languages.) The verses «Preghieradisperatarimuove / passionedisperataangoscia» introduce syntactical disturbances; that «angoscia» may be read as noun or verb makes the relation between the two lines difficult to parse. The designation «Jesùnellemembratotali» begs the further question: whose members, whose limbs? Without the psychological scoring of punctuation, it becomes difficult to imagine the poem's syllables yoked to the fits and starts of any integrated speaker, or these 'limbs' belonging to any one individual body, regardless of the avowed presence of an I. The limbs are identified as 'total' – distinguishing them from the property of an isolated speaker, and creating a potential paradox, given that 'membra' are necessarily but appendages of a whole.

The Christ presence that renders these conceptually dismembered limbs entire is entreated to forge a new rhyme that will also syncretize traditions, or 'cantons'

¹ FILIPPO TOMMASO MARINETTI, *Distruzione della sintassi. Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà*, in *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria, Milano, Mondadori, 1983, pp. 65-80; translated in IDEM, *Selected Poems and Related Prose*, cit., pp. 143-151.

² See *Partitura in versi*, an interview with Francesca Borrelli, in *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, cit., p. 145.

³ *OP*, p. 667.

⁴ *Laboratorio di poesia*, dir. Elio Pagliarani, in *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, cit., p. 237.

both jurisdictional and mystical. In the infinitive, the speaker invokes this poetry's illumination of 'thefourworlds' – recalling of course the «croce quadriforme» ('quadriform cross'), with its dual axes pointing in four directions.¹ However, we might well read these 'worlds' as the France, England, United States, and Italy of Rosselli's life – or as the four heavenly realms of Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Action laid out in the Kabbalah. The poem ultimately estranges prayer a step further, calling on Hell to synthesize the collapsed cantons of the speaker's experience: 'Immobileinfernosynthesize[s] / Disintegratedcantonsof / mylife'.² The literally '[d]isintegratedcantons' of this poem, building blocks subject to '«[i]nfiniteruin', mark as disintegral the cultural and linguistic subdivisions of nations in the speaker's life – as well as the four corners that, once imposed on language and sound, form cantos, or songs. While the etymological link between the two terms remains uncertain, «[c]antoni» harbors a distinct echo of «[c]anzoni», one that Rosselli elsewhere taps in serial variations: the first poem of *Variazioni* (1960-1961) in *Variazioni belliche* introduces a play between «la canzonetta / del bar vicino» ('the little song / of the nearby bar'), «etmisfero cangiante» ('changeable hetmisphere'), «canzoni» ('songs'), and «cantonate» ('street corners'), while introducing a skepticism more bitter about the indifference of Christ:

[...] se dalle lacrime che sgorgavano
diramavo missili e pedate inconscie agli amici che mal
tenevano le loro parti di soldati amorosi, se dalle finezze
del mio spirito nascevano battaglie e contraddizioni, –
allora moriva in me la noia, scombinava l'allegria il mio
malanno insoddisfatto; continuava l'aria fine e le canzoni
attorno attorno svolgevano attività febbrili, cantonate
disperse, ultime lacrime di cristo che non si muoveva per
si picciol cosa, piccola parte della notte nella mia prigionia.³

[...] if from the tears that were disgorging
I issued missiles and unconscious kicks to the friends that
poorly kept up their parts of amorous soldiers, if from the finenesses
of my spirit battles and contradictions were being born,
well then boredom was dying in me, my dissatisfied ailment
was wreaking havoc on happiness; the fine aria continued and the songs
around and around unwound febrile activities, dispersed
cantons, last tears of christ who did not move for
such a tiny thing, tiniest part in the night of my imprisonment.

'Cantons' in the modern and in the obsolete senses are linked, and indeed Rosselli's musicological studies throughout the 1950s were a result of the disintegrated tonal system, based on the need to erect new musical systems to 'save art from incommunicability due to the lack of a common and shareable language'.⁴ Prayer

¹ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Il Cristo trainava*, in *OP*, p. 117.

² Alessandro Baldacci writes of Rosselli's answer to the «santi padri» («holy fathers») in *La libellula* taking the form of a «preghiera spaesata, con i modi di un "incanto vuoto"» («displaced prayer, with the means of an "empty enchantment"»). See ALESSANDRO BALDACCIO, *Amelia Rosselli*, Roma, Laterza, 2007 (1st edition), p. 53. For an attempt to wed Rosselli's aesthetics to those of the Gruppo 63, see ANTONIO LORETO, *I santi padri di Amelia Rosselli*, Milano, Arcipelago edizioni, 2014.

³ *OP*, p. 41.
⁴ See VALENTINA PELEGGI, *Amelia Rosselli. Musica in poesia*, «Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli», xxx, no. 107, 2010, p. 68.

as song or enchantment based on what she will later call 'Christemblems'¹ is represented in *Variazioni* (1960-61) as forging a dubious sense of integrity; its imperatives are accompanied by critical revelations such as «Retta combinavo / preghiere assurde e tutto il mondo crollava» ('Upright I composed / absurd prayers and the whole world crumbled'), in a poem whose closure is explosion: «Contro della spia / notturna non è chiaro perché cada la bomba» ('The cons of [Against of] the nocturnal / spy isn't clear so that the bomb falls').² In her final dialectical movement away from 'Jesus in the limbs', the displaced speaker of *Chiesa* recalls the Hell that synthesized the Italian vernacular – the Inferno of Dante, its magisterial architecture of cantos rationalizing the ethical and intellectual sphere of a poet in exile – to synthesize these cantons again. But Rosselli's own efforts of linguistic and architectonic synthesis will rupture and recombine from within, rather than consolidating, the Italian 'national' language; they will stage the ecstatic and violent disintegration of cantons.

Grappling with Amelia Rosselli's poetics of «Cantonidisintegrati» requires grappling with phantom instances of polyglottism more discomposing than those of the storied experiments of the avant-garde, in texts in which cultural idioms improperly acquired and/or deployed are estranged from themselves. The shapes of these texts – which eschew the free-verse line in favor of determining spatial constraints – accommodate language that acts as *xenos*, both guest and host: language whose characteristics and aspirations invoke the term '*xenoglossia*' (from the Greek for 'foreign speaking', 'babbling'), or the intelligible use of a language one has not learned formally or does not know. The canonical narrative of the xenoglossic phenomenon in Western literature appears in the story of Pentecost, wherein the Holy Spirit is said to have bestowed upon the apostles the sudden ability to speak in languages previously alien to them, effectively remedying the confusion of tongues meted out as divine punishment for construction of the Tower of Babel. Such tales of miraculous translation evince a yearning for the promise of correspondence between languages, and thereby of erased cultural difference, in moments when literary and scriptural translation between Latin and a range of vernaculars was on the rise. Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, which argues (through the medium of Latin) for an illustrious vernacular in a context of vast linguistic confusion, is an early example of a search for the origins of distinct common idioms in an Adamic tongue. During the early twentieth century, the unruly copresence of previously remote languages spurred by increased mobility, mass communication, and urbanization became a material component of modernist poetries, wherein the fracturing and contamination of the dominant by foreign, subaltern, ancient, or imaginary tongues located meaning in an elsewhere beyond the conventions of any single language. The explosion of traditional poetic stanzas enabled these experiments through the 'destruction' of syntax and of linear, hieratic logic, permitting ambient noise to infiltrate a polyphonic lyricism.

But what we might call Rosselli's xenoglossic strategies must be read *vis-à-vis* a sociopolitical context alienated by political trauma from the revolutions of the historical and neo-avant-garde, from the capital of a nation and nucleus of

¹ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Dialogo con i poeti*, in *OP*, p. 265.

² *OP*, p. 143.

a personal-political tragedy where the anarchic liberties of modernist *mots-en-liberté* ultimately proved subject to autarky. For notwithstanding F. T. Marinetti's cosmopolitan origins and multilingual, transoceanic output, the Futurists upheld Mussolini's call to 'defend' the Italian language through expulsion of foreign contaminants;¹ even the radical cosmopolitanism of Ezra Pound's 'translations' and ideogrammatic montages inspired by written Chinese strived to cohere in the synthesis of Fascism. After World War II, Eugene Jolas, publisher of the seminal modernist journal «transition» and of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, reconceived of «Atlantica» as a crucible language that «might bridge the continents and neutralize the curse of Babel», not through invention, like Esperanto, but through a synthesis of tongues such as was occurring in the New World.² Renegade linguists such as Frederick Bodmer, whose 1944 work *The Loom of Language* was part of Rosselli's personal library, proposed that «the constructive task of devising or of adopting an *auxiliary* medium to *supplement* existing national languages is [...] one of the foremost needs of our time», a prerequisite to keeping the world's peace.³ Transgressing the confines of totalitarianism and enacting the barbarism of writing lyric after the war, Rosselli too reformulated modernist tactics in a subversive and semi-utopian key, inventing a 'closed' but immersive form in which to capture a nonmastered, deterritorialized idiom.⁴ In these 'cubic' forms and collapsed cantons, syntax is not so much 'destroyed' as dislocated or floating. It lodges us in the uncomfortable space between sanctioned linguistic systems.

Glossing the imperatives of *Chiesa* demands comprehension of what it means to be a poet of disintegrated cantons: one who never possessed a mother tongue, but instead referred to herself as a 'child of the Second World War' – simultaneously dismissing the label of cosmopolitanism, with its implications of entitlement, for the term refugee. This tortuous upbringing comes through poignantly in Rosselli's language – whether composing in the French, English, or Italian linguistic 'cantons' of her life. She embraced Italy for reasons of affection, paternal and otherwise, and chose to compose the majority of her poetry in a defamiliarizing Italian that traffics in the grammars, lexical associations, and sound systems of dialects living and dead, English, and French: dis- and re-integrating canto(n)s. In this piece, I will account for the critical capacity of Rosselli's xenoglossic poetic

¹ ADELMO CICOGNA, *Autarchia della lingua (Contributo ideale e pratico alla santa battaglia e prontuario delle parole straniere da sostituire con le corrispondenti italiane esistenti)*, with a preface by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Roma, Edizione dell'Autore, Brossura, 1940.

² EUGENE JOLAS, *Man from Babel*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 272-273. For more on Jolas and multilingual poetics before and after the world wars, see MARJORIE PERLOFF, *Logocinéma of the Frontiersman: Eugene Jolas's Multilingual Poetics and Its Legacies*, in EADEM, *Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy*, Tuscaloosa (AL), University of Alabama Press, 2004, pp. 82-101.

³ The University of Viterbo houses Rosselli's copy, the 1955 printing of FREDERICK BODMER, LANCELOT THOMAS HOGGEN, *The Loom of Language*, London, George Allen, 1944. Citation is from the 1985 Norton paperback edition, p. 3.

⁴ «The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today», THEODOR W. ADORNO, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, in IDEM, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1981, p. 34. The original 1955 text reads: «Kulturrkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frisst auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben».

in relation to the utopian formalism of the postwar avant-gardes, comparing her imposition of cantons, or constraining angles, on verse to generate a capacious 'metrical space' to the conceptualist frames of the day – and glossing the singular expression of political disenchantment that results.

In introducing Rosselli's poetry to the Italian literary public in 1963, Pier Paolo Pasolini confronted the problematic of limits triggered by her upcoming debut volume *Variazioni belliche* through deployment of an astonishing metaphor: that of the mushroom cloud. «[I]l revival avanguardistico [...] ha trovato in questa specie di apolide dalle grandi tradizioni famigliari di Cosmopolis, un terreno dove esplodere con la funesta e meravigliosa fecondità dei funghi atomici nell'atto in cui divengono forme, ecc., ecc.» ('[T]he avant-gardist revival [...] has found in this sort of stateless person from the great familial traditions of Cosmopolis, a terrain in which to explode with the fatal and marvelous fecundity of mushroom clouds in the act of their becoming forms, etc., etc.'). he wrote, before affirming, 'I will not go beyond the limits of the flyleaf' («Oltre i limiti del risguardo non vado») – admitting that his analysis will be truncated somewhat arbitrarily by the dictates of space, without attempting a comprehensive account of this emerging body of work.¹ The agent of Pasolini's anxious metaphor is difficult to locate: is the explosiveness Rosselli's, or that of the pointedly Anglicized «revival» of the neo-avant-garde, «così tetro presso gli eterni apprendisti di Milano e Torino» ('so tetric amidst the eternal apprentices of Milan and Turin'), which occupies the 'stateless' poet's 'terrain'? The question is left unresolved; ultimately, this inaugural analysis of Rosselli's work by her mentor of sorts ascribes an agency to the poetry that surpasses that of its author. *A Note on Amelia Rosselli* opens by comparing Rosselli's linguistically inventive idiom to «una emulsione che prende forma per suo conto, imposseduta, come si ha l'impressione che succeda per gli esperimenti di laboratorio più terribili, tumori, scoppi atomici»² ('an emulsion that takes form of its own accord, nonmastered, as one imagines coming about through the most terrible laboratory experiments, tumors, atomic blasts'). Pasolini's recourse to the term «imposseduta» ('nonmastered', or even 'impossessed') in this passage suggests that one is obliged to exceed the limits of the vocabulary to characterize the way that Rosselli's language evades control – even the control of its author.

Rosselli's poetry cultivates an explosive relation to limits – not only in linguistic and aesthetic senses, but in geopolitical and sociohistorical terms as well; and Pasolini distinguishes her explosive experimentalism from that of formalists by describing it as consciously conducted out in the open, in what he paradoxically calls «un laboratorio pubblico» ('a public laboratory') – as if the most classified and arcane procedures were being tested amidst the social tumult that they address. Pasolini calls the resultant verse «una lussureggiante oasi fiorita con la stupefacente e casuale violenza del dato di fatto» ('a luxuriant, verdant oasis with the stupefying and random violence of the fait accompli') – but he traces its origins to 'The Myth of Irrationality', in capital letters. In a 1963 letter to her brother

¹ PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *Notizia su Amelia Rosselli*, «Il menabò», 6, 1963, pp. 66-69, quoted here in one of several reprints, in AMELIA ROSSELLI, *La libellula*, Milano, Studio Editoriale, 1996, p. 105. My translation of the full essay appears in «Locomotrix», p. 283.

² Ivi, p. 103.

John, Rosselli takes issue with this terminology, describing her poems as «quite and unexpectedly rational»; she resolves, «I'll have to publish the essay on metrics separately, so as to clear the mystery».¹ While it is appropriate to speak of the *fait accompli* in commenting on this collection of poems, Pasolini ultimately obscures the nature of the determination in play – as Rosselli's determinism is anything but «casuale» ('random').

Rosselli may have provoked the atomic metaphor by characterizing one strain of linguistic invention in *Variazioni belliche* as that of «forme miste – fuse – e pseudoarcaiche»² ('mixed – fused – and pseudoarchaic forms'). However, Pasolini's ultimate inscription of her linguistic fusions/fissions under the sign of irrationality and the uncontainability of the atomic blast disavows Rosselli's researched development of an explicitly 'closed' poetic – whose etiology was outlined in *Spazi metrici* ('Metrical Spaces') upon Pasolini's very suggestion the year prior. This poetic tractate, eventually published as a postface to *Variazioni belliche* – and which has continued to inspire and mystify readers – describes her strategy for composing, from roughly 1958 forward, within a 'cube-form' wherein a spontaneously dictated regularity of line length, in spatial and durational terms, would permit the reception of myriad rhythms while neutralizing the energies roiling in each stanza.³ Rosselli's literal deployment of the word «metrica» ('metrics') reunites the term's applications in poetic meter and measurement: indeed, the typescript for her second book, *Serie ospedaliera* ('Hospital Series'), housed at the University of Pavia's Fondo Rosselli, contains penciled-in measurements for the poems' first and longest lines. She composed at the typewriter to make use of the monospaced Courier font, which enabled the production of lucid lines subtly to signal the metrical rule that lay behind their composition; in another literal deployment of language, which borrows from English, *Spazi metrici* uses the term «rigo» ('line') as well as the traditional «verso» ('line of verse') in describing her process.⁴ Rosselli's development of a measured «metrica sistematica chiusa»⁵ ('systematic closed metric') for the twentieth century was designed to resist the instinctual, romantic – in a word, 'irrational' – fits and starts of free verse, which

¹ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Letter to John Rosselli*, in Fondo Rosselli, Centro di ricerca della tradizione manoscritta di autori moderni e contemporanei, University of Pavia, 25 October 1963. This archive will hereafter be referred to as the Fondo Rosselli at the University of Pavia. Original text is in English.

² This quote hails from AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Glossarietto esplicativo*, in EADEM, *Una scrittura plurale: saggi e interventi critici*, ed. Francesca Caputo, Novara, Interlinea, 2004, p. 69. Rosselli's glossary for Pasolini refers to individual incidences of words that are 'fused'; see AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Lettere a Pasolini, 1962-1969*, ed. Stefano Giovannuzzi, Genova, San Marco dei Giustiniani, 2008, p. 21; p. 25; p. 28; p. 30; p. 32; p. 33; p. 34; p. 36.

³ *Spazi metrici*, first published as an appendix to *Variazioni belliche*, was reprinted most recently in the Meridiano edition of her collected works: see *OP*, pp. 181-189. Among the crucial analyses of *Spazi metrici* are CHIARA CARPITA, *La metrica tridimensionale di Amelia Rosselli*, «Soglie. Rivista quadrimestrale di poesia e critica letteraria», 2, August 2004; PAOLO CAIROLI, *Spazio metrico e serialismo musicale. L'azione dell'avanguardia postweberniana sulle concezioni poetiche di Amelia Rosselli*, «Trasparenze», eds. Giorgio Devoto, Emmanuela Tandello, 17-19, 2003, triple issue devoted to Amelia Rosselli, pp. 289-300; *La poetica*, in the *Introduction* to TATIANA BISANTI, *L'opera plurilingue di Amelia Rosselli. Un distorto, inesperto, espertissimo linguaggio*, Pisa, ETS, 2007, pp. 28-55; FRANCESCO CARBOGNIN, *Le armoniose dissonanze: "Spazio metrico" e intertestualità nella poesia di Amelia Rosselli*, Bologna, Gedit, 2008 (1st edition), pp. 15-44.

⁴ *OP*, p. 187.

⁵ AMBROGIO DOLCE, *Amelia Rosselli: poesia non necessariamente scientifica*, «Idea», XLIV, 1988, now qtd. in AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Una scrittura plurale*, cit., p. 329.

she considered «sgangherato, senza giustificazione storica, e soprattutto, esausto»¹ ('unhinged, without historical justification, and above all, exhausted'). The poetic chambers produced within a literally and conceptually 'squared' or 'cubic' form were designed to house the ideal of an objective, total language unrestricted by the whims of the individual subject.

Rosselli's accounts of her writing process suggest that she considered it a performance, as if typing were akin to playing an instrument.² Like many poets of her generation, Rosselli favored the typewriter because through this instrument she could work at high speed, without second-guessing an image: «scrivendo a macchina posso per un poco seguire un pensiero forse più veloce della luce» ('with the typewriter I can for a little while follow a thought perhaps faster than the speed of light').³ She described this process as 'thinking with eyes closed as if at the piano', as if attempting to produce antirhetorical receptacles of sound and perception – yet refused to call such thinking 'illogical'.⁴ Rosselli's process reveals the influence of Charles Olson's 1950 manifesto *Projective Verse*, which inaugurated the new, improvisational technique of open-field composition enabled by the typewriter and the «stance toward reality» that gave rise to it;⁵ Olson's essay, first published in «Poetry New York», was translated into Italian and published in «il verri» in 1961, where Rosselli would have seen it – though she soon had a copy of Donald Allen's seminal volume *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*, which presents Olson as a leading figure of the Black Mountain school and «Projective Verse» as «the dominant new double concept» of the era.⁶ Scholars of Rosselli have been quick to point out the affinities, but have done less to elucidate the differences between these writers. Olson aimed through projective verse to establish the laws of «the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings», and highlighted the typewriter's use in scoring reading: «It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had».⁷ Rosselli's analysis of her American male elder, however, constitutes a characteristically creative act of hermeneutic syncretism: it emphasizes the utility of Olson's «composition by field» for *displacing* the poetic subject, in line with the objectivist compositional parameters of post-Webernism, and the non-intentional writing practices of figures like John Cage (who taught at Black Mountain College during the summers of 1948, 1952, and 1953 until embarking on the European tour with David Tudor that would eventually bring him to Darmstadt). Rosselli locates in Olson's spatial focus a tactic for dodging tenden-

¹ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Introduzione a "Spazi Metrici"*, in EADEM, *Una scrittura plurale*, cit., p. 59.

² In describing the early series *Poesie '59*, for example, she notes that for some poems 'it was enough for me to play a prelude of Bach or Chopin to reinterpret it, almost immediately afterward, in poetic form'. See *Fatti estremi*, her 1987 interview with Giacinto Spagnoletti, in *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, cit., p. 84.

³ *OP*, p. 189.

⁴ *Incontro con Amelia Rosselli sulla metrica*, in *OP*, p. 1254.

⁵ *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*, ed. Donald Allen, London, Evergreen, 1960, p. 386. In Rosselli's personal copy at the Fondo Rosselli in Viterbo, marked «Rosselli '66» on the title page, this essay is heavily annotated.

⁶ Stefano Giovannuzzi makes note of the translation in his commentary on *Variazioni belliche* in *OP*, p. 1283; p. 1299. See *The New American Poetry*, cit., p. xiv.

⁷ Ivi, p. 386; p. 393.

cies of privatization and egotism abundant in the Anglo-American confessional school of poetry and in certain European exponents of *l'écriture féminine*.¹ This revisionist interest in Olson becomes clear in the script for a 1975 radio broadcast on American poets of the *élite*, in which she describes his «conception of metric spatiality» in her own terms:

[I]n un tentativo dell'abolizione dell'io del poeta egli proietta nella pagina lo spazio circostante, la totalità del caos; considerando la poesia come 'energia trasportata' e il verso come unità vettoriale nel campo della pagina.... Le metafore e immagini generano una sorta di reticolo animato; la poesia in sé stessa non è spazio di separazione dalla realtà, ma diviene la realtà stessa in cui il mondo 'si racconta' e 'si agisce.'

[I]n an attempt to abolish the I of the poet, he projects surrounding space, the totality of chaos, into the page – considering the poem as 'transported energy' and the line as a vectorial unity in the field of the page.... Metaphors and images generate a sort of animated grid; the poetry in itself is not a space of separation from reality, but itself becomes a reality in which the world 'narrates itself' and 'enacts itself.'²

Although projective verse opens the poem to contingencies beyond the poet's purview, the expressivist project and gestural liberation of Olson's open field – inflected by the rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism – could not be further from the constraining of the ego manifest in Rosselli's use of the enclosing square and cube. *Spazi Metrici* clarifies her aim to rein in the fits and starts of subjective judgment that are accommodated too «gentilmente» ('courteously') by free verse:³ enabled by the typewriter, which renders the page a grid of equivalently spaced characters, and approximated when taking notes in the city by writing on graph paper, the cube-form dictates line length and necessitates the total replenishment of space.

Reading *Spazi Metrici* thus makes clear that while the apparent spontaneity of Rosselli's compositional process at the typewriter seduces comparison with the surrealists and 'itinerant mystics' that Pasolini invokes in *Notizia su Amelia Rosselli*,⁴ the impromptu performance of writing exists within a dialectic: the 'new geometrism' of her mature poetic, with its tubular and squared forms, has more in common with the radically objective wing of modernist and postmodern art practices based on the meeting of constraint and non-intentionality than it does with irrationalism or the infinite possibilities of the open work. It casts the square or cubic frame to which she subjects letters, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences as an 'absolute time-space':

Le inquadravi in un tempo-spazio assoluto. I miei poetici non poterono più scappare dall'universalità dello spazio unico: le lunghezze e i tempi dei versi erano prestabiliti, la mia unità organizzativa era definibile, i miei ritmi si adattavano non ad un mio volere soltanto ma allo spazio già deciso, e questo spazio era del tutto ricoperto di esperienze, realtà, oggetti e sensazioni.

I framed them in an absolute time-space. My poetics could no longer escape the universality

¹ Rosselli rues this tendency of confessional writing in, for example, her 1979 interview with Mariella Bettarini. See *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, cit., pp. 32-33.

² The Olson discussion appears in *Poesia d'élite nell'America di oggi*, in *Una scrittura plurale*, cit., p. 160.

³ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Spazi Metrici*, in *OP*, p. 186.

⁴ See PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *Notizia su Amelia Rosselli*, cit., p. 103.

of the total space: the lengths and tempos of lines were pre-established, my organizational unity could be defined, my rhythms adapted themselves not to my will alone, but to the space that had already been determined, and this space was wholly covered by experiences, realities, objects, and sensations.¹

In an apparent paradox, the «realtà» ('reality') of the poem is to become more expansive through her geometric constraint, no longer «soggettivamente limitata» ('subjectively limited').² Rosselli thus declares to John in her letter on Pasolini's *Notizia*, «As to 'Mystery' & 'neurosis' & 'Mito dell'Irrazionale' – some type of objection – I would have spoken rather of the 'Mito del Razionale'!»³

Rosselli's inventive invocation of a grid underlying Olson's poetry calls to mind Rosalind Krauss's canonical 1979 argument that the emergence of the «antinatural» structure of the grid in modern and contemporary art announces modernism's «hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse»; Krauss argued further, «The barrier [the grid] has lowered between the arts of vision and those of language has been almost totally successful in walling the visual arts into a realm of exclusive visuality and defending them against the intrusion of speech».⁴ Krauss's argument, while describing well what Rosselli might name the 'Myth of the Rational', fails to account for the fertile relations between art and language expressed by the structuralist grids of language, systems, and information in the postwar moment – a task recently taken up by Eve Meltzer.⁵ Though poetic language cannot help but refer to speech and narrative, analyzing the conceptual implications of framing devices in Rosselli's poetic that denaturalize individual voicing can clarify the interdisciplinary modernist underpinnings of her poetic enterprise, and the way her work tussles with the assumptions of expressivist lyric.⁶

While a modernist fascination with pure geometry and structuralist fixation on the grid were clearly developing in the two and three-dimensional visual arts of her day, Rosselli's metrical strategy is most directly an outgrowth of her musical training. Rosselli's synthesis of spontaneity and measure, rationality and 'thinking with eyes closed' invites comparison above all with its points of contact in the calculated non-intentional practices of the musical and literary avant-garde. Her studies in dodecaphonic music with Luigi Dallapiccola and Guido Turchi in Rome were bolstered by her acceptance to the Darmstadt summer courses in new music from 1959-1961, where post-Webernism was being developed (though a psychic breakdown prevented her from participating in 1960); these courses exposed her to key debates and enabled her to enter into dialogue with the principal actors of the postwar avant-garde such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez,

¹ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Spazi Metrici*, in *OP*, p. 186.

² *Ibid.*

³ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Letter to John Rosselli*, Fondo Rosselli at the University of Pavia.

⁴ ROSALIND KRAUSS, *Grids*, «October», 9, Summer 1979, p. 50.

⁵ See EVE MELTZER, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013.

⁶ The modern definition of lyric, a notoriously contradictory and controversial task, is broached in a plurality of ways in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Virginia Jackson, Yopie Prins, Baltimore (MD), The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. In their overview, Prins and Jackson note that despite critical differences, lyric has come to signify the domain of personal expression in modern and contemporary scholarship. Rosselli needs, of course, to be seen as responding both to the European tradition of lyric and to the Anglo-American context in which she received her primary education.

and John Cage.¹ She also attended classes in contemporary electronic music with Luciano Berio at the Dartington College of Arts in 1962, and in the same period, worked at the RAI Phonology Studio founded by Berio and Bruno Maderna, the best equipped forum for electronic music production in its day, where she explored the harmonic series, concrete music, and, importantly for a poet, phoneme analysis. Rosselli's early musicological study of *La serie degli armonici* ('*The Harmonic Series*', appearing in «Civiltà delle macchine», 2, 1954), reflects her early search for 'an *a priori* or ideal form' to be found in a supposed organic state within the scales, rhythms, and harmonic solutions of folk songs existing outside of the tempered scale – «da trovarsi nel canto non 'educato'» ('to be found in non-'educated' song').² In an interview with Giuseppe Salviati, Rosselli identified this search for the untranscribed 'substructures' of popular music through meter as «strutturalista o post-strutturalista» ('structuralist or poststructuralist'), and such 'substructures' hold out the promise of what Peleggi calls 'the mirage of logic, of the perfect natural form translated into music'.³ Rosselli elsewhere asserted, «Che le mie ricerche in campo 'folk,' ossia etnomusicologico, abbiano influito nella ricerca d'un versificare più stretto, più severo, e di formulazioni geometriche, è ovvio» ('That my research in the field of 'folk,' or ethnomusicology, influenced the search for a stricter, more severe, and geometrically formulated versification is obvious').⁴

Rosselli's musicological research had been spurred by the desire «di trovare una sintesi della tradizione musicale razionale e scritta dell'Occidente, e quella orale e istintiva dell'Oriente» ('to find a synthesis of the rational written music of the West, and the oral instinctual music of the East').⁵ This musical quest alerts us to an additional urgency of her development of metrical spaces: pressing beyond an escape from the self, it extends to a search for a more capacious poetic, unfettered by the metrics of any given language.

Trasponendo la complessità ritmica della lingua parlata e pensata ma non scandita, tramite un numerosissimo variare di particelle timbriche e ritmiche entro un unico e limitato spazio tipico, la mia metrica se non regolare era almeno totale: tutti i ritmi possibili immaginabili riempivano minuziosamente il mio quadrato [...], la mia ritmica era musicale sino agli ultimi esperimenti del post-webernismo, la mia regolarità, quando esistente, era contrastata da un formicolio di ritmi traducibili non in piedi o in misure lunghe o corte, ma in durate microscopiche appena annotabili [...] a matita su carta grafica millesimale.

Transposing the rhythmic complexity of language spoken and thought but unscanned, through abundant variation of timbric and rhythmic particles within a whole and limited typical space, my meter was, if not regular, at least total: all possible imaginable rhythms

¹ In a 1992 interview, Rosselli relates a telling anecdote about her 1960 performance with Merce Cunningham and David Tudor, during which her less minimalist aleatory impulses led her to break into the anachronism of a Gregorian chant, until an audience member screamed «Amen!» – to Cage's distaste. See *Partitura in versi*, in *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, cit., p. 145.

² See *Paesaggio con figure*, in *È vostra la vita che ho perso*, cit., p. 284, AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Introduzione a Spazi Metrici*, in EADEM, *Una scrittura plurale*, cit., p. 59. *La serie degli armonici* is reprinted in EADEM, *Una scrittura plurale*, cit., pp. 45-58.

³ GIUSEPPE SALVIATI, *Nel linguaggio dinamico della realtà. Conversazione con Amelia Rosselli*, «Clandestino», 1997, n. 1, p. 12; VALENTINA PELEGGI, *Amelia Rosselli*, cit., p. 69.

⁴ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Introduzione a Spazi Metrici*, cit., p. 60.

⁵ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *La serie degli armonici*, in *Una scrittura plurale*, cit., pp. 48-51.

filled my square meticulously [...], my rhythmic were musical in the sense developed by the latest experiments of post-Webernism; my regularity, when it existed, came into contrast with a swarming of rhythms translatable not into feet or into long or short measures, but into microscopic durations that were only just annotatable [...] with pencil on graph paper in millimeter rule.¹

This metric is 'total' – it contains 'all possible imaginable rhythms' in a single, 'absolute' space.

In the essay *Documento*, which appeared in «La fiera letteraria» in July 1968 under the title *Alla ricerca dell'adolescenza* (the personalism of which spurred Rosselli's objections), she described the dialectic between the initial drafting of *La libellula* as a fluid «canto» ('song') in 1958 – spontaneous, but based in a decade of research into formulating metrical, philosophical, and 'historically 'necessary', inevitable' systems – and its extensive reworking to eliminate excesses four years later: «Credo che la non intenzionalità dello scritto, e la conseguente severità nel rivederlo e correggerlo, abbiano contribuito a renderlo un lavoro migliore degli altri miei, più calcolati e sofferti» ('I believe that the non-intentionality of the text, and the consequent severity in revising and correcting it, contributed in rendering it a work superior to my other, more calculated and suffered works').² The language of this statement resonates with the work of John Cage, who began working with non-intentional practices using the magic square and then the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*, in the early 1950s, having been introduced to the ancient divination text by Christian Wolff (whose father published the first complete English translation for Pantheon Books in 1950).³ Cage used the Chinese text to free sounds from his will as composer for practically the rest of his career in composition; his *Music of Changes*, one of the first fruits of this practice, was written for David Tudor, with whom Rosselli studied and had a relationship in the early 1960s. Rosselli was, for her part, introduced to the *I Ching* through her Jungian psychoanalyst Ernst Bernhard, whose *Psiche e Coscienza* series for Astrolabio brought out an Italian translation of the work with a preface by Carl Jung in 1950; she testifies to her use of the text in daily life, and the fact that the divination text consists of 64 hexagrams roughly resembling squares suggests some additional link to the importance of that form.⁴ Other prominent teachers at Darmstadt such as Boulez and Stockhausen were opposed to Cage's use of chance, and Rosselli's relationship to Cage would be as complicated and polemical as many of her relationships to the avant-garde; but in a letter to John of September 1961, she reports hearing «a really light & amusing piece by Cage (against whom I had many prejudices) for 'prepared' piano»; and in a bio accompanying *La serie degli armonici* to musicologists in Dubrovnik at the Fondo Rosselli in Pavia, we find Rosselli characterizing her 1961 studies with Tudor at Darmstadt as 'attempting

¹ *OP*, pp. 186-187.

² AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Una scrittura plurale*, cit., pp. 283-284.

³ See *Conversing with Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz, New York and London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 67-68. For an initial discussion of Rosselli's relation to Cage, see PAOLO CAIROLI, *Spazio metrico e serialismo musicale*, cit., pp. 295-298.

⁴ See ULDERICO PESCE, *La Donna Che Vola*, «Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli», 19, 1999, p. 44, and Chiara Carpita's analysis of the figure of the mandala and use of the *I Ching*, *Amelia Rosselli e il processo di individuazione. Alcuni inediti*, in *La furia dei venti contrari*, cit., pp. 136-51.

a deterministic approach to the non-deterministic puzzles and graph-suggestions of Mr. John Cage'.¹

Rosselli's self-characterization emphasizes a materialist species of determinism: one in which constraint enables the liberation of the isolated subject/idiom into a matrix of collective meaning. The constraint of the *forma-cubo* constitutes a means of «sprigionamento» – literally, a release from the imprisonment of personal experience in encountering the totality of space and time.² In a 1988 lesson on metrics, she notes that «è la materia sempre a dare questo sprigionamento dallo spazio dell'esperienza, l'incontro dello spazio-tempo con l'esperienza personale» ('it's the material to offer this release from the space of experience, the encounter of space-time with personal experience').³ In the space provoked by transcription of a reality filled with innumerable rhythms, Rosselli aspires not only to exceed the egotism of the individual voice, but that of a given language's rhythmic capacities, for writing into squares or conceptual 'cubes' permits the copresence of multiple metrics, which in turn disclose the embedded traces of foreign rhythmic substructures.⁴ She notes in *Metrical Spaces* that «la lingua in cui scrivo...è una sola, mentre la mia esperienza sonora logica e associative è certamente quella di tutti i popoli, e riflettibile in tutte le lingue» ('the language in which I write . . . is only one, while my sonic, logical, and associative experience is certainly that of many peoples, and reflectable in many languages').⁵ She elsewhere admits to the absurdly utopian character of her effort to «cercare le forme universali» ('seek universal forms'); an Italian passage in *Diario in tre lingue* (*Diary in Three Tongues*) confesses, «Ed io che mi dimetto ogni giorno dal consiglio municipale, 'mi domando se non sia possibile, in un assurdo sforzo, dimenticare quanto è intorno a me per rinchiudermi nelle alchimie di un linguaggio buono a ogni latitudine...'» ('And I who discharge myself/am dismissed every day from the city council, 'ask myself if it wouldn't be possible, in an absurd effort, to forget how much surrounds me to enclose myself in the alchemistries of a language good at every latitude...').⁶ The passage, with its ambiguous passive or reflexive voice and unattributed quotation, oscillates between the desire to be discharged from the authority of the state and the desire for alchemical enclosure in a more capacious language of citizenship.

Rosselli was not alone in seeking a 'total' language through a geometric ideal. In the experimentation with rectilinear geometrism spanning the visual, musical, and literary arts of the twentieth century – from the 'universal plastic means' of De Stijl through the postwar abstraction of Pietro Dorazio and Agnes Martin, the magic squares of post-Webernism, and the grids of conceptualism – we find

¹ The same text is read, in this issue, by Chiara Carpita, in "Spazi metrici" tra post-webernismo, etnomusicologia, Gestalttheorie e astrattismo. Sulle fonti extra-letterarie del "nuovo geometrismo" di Amelia Rosselli, p. 84.

² For more on metaphorical freedom and imprisonment as form and anti-form, see AMBRA ZORAT, *Intorno a libertà e prigionia: alcune riflessioni su Variazioni belliche di Amelia Rosselli*, «RiLUnE», no. 2, 2005, pp. 1-11.

³ *Incontro con Amelia Rosselli sulla metrica*, in *OP*, p. 1258.

⁴ Here I build upon the insights of Meredith Martin's *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-1930*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 2012, an innovative approach to the «military metrical complex» of nationalist poetics. Martin's argument highlights the way that prosody ensconced in the literary traditions of «national» languages tends to obscure the presence of metrics from other languages embedded within the dominant tongue.

⁵ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Spazi Metrici*, in *OP*, p. 184.

⁶ *OP*, p. 184; p. 625.

parallel aspirations to recover basic universal forms through abstraction.¹ It was in a 1965 'Debate on Dorazio' that Rosselli declared, «Io aspiro alla panmusica, alla musica di tutti, della terra e dell'universo, in cui non ci sia più una mano individuale che la regoli» ('I aspire to panmusic, to the music of everyone, of the earth and of the universe, in which there is no longer an individual hand that regulates').² Adriano Spatola, to whom Rosselli dedicates a poem in *Palermo '63*, summarizes this global, cross-media phenomenon with breathtaking range in *Verso la poesia totale*; written in the late 1960s and published in 1978, Spatola's book traces the response to a postwar situation in which «culture increasingly assumes the connotations of a phenomenon disconnected from strictly national spheres and endowed with laws valid almost everywhere», as well as an effort to «overcome personalistic impediments» in a 'total' poetry.³ But even these formulations begin to elicit an inherent tension between 'universal' language and the more discomfiting species of transnationalism that we find in Rosselli's verse.

As Paolo Cairoli and Valentina Peleggi have argued, Rosselli's work must be distinguished from the ahistorical species of utopian formalism found in the majority of Webern's followers. In the canonical reading by György Ligeti of Pierre Boulez's *Structure 1a* – written in 1958, the year before Rosselli enrolled in Ligeti's course on problems in Webern – Ligeti warns that the automatism of serialism should not tempt one to «regard the serial mode of working as a dialectic between freedom and mechanical compulsion». Instead, in serial work, «you build your own prison as you please, and once safely inside you are again free to do as you please»: «the vital thing is how far, and in what way, one can tug at one's chains».⁴ In his metaphorical treatment of imprisonment as a formal exercise, the composer insists on the freedom within constraint, opening up a space for play. But in the same period, other writers and composers who had had first-hand experience with resistance movements were grappling with imprisonment in more than formal terms. Antonio Gramsci's prison letters and notebooks were first published by Einaudi in the late 1940s and took Italy by storm. In the footsteps of the compositions *Canti di prigionia* ('Songs of Imprisonment' [1938-1941]) and *Il prigioniero* ('The Prisoner' [1944-1949]) by Rosselli's teacher Dallapiccola, composers Maderna and Vittorio Fellegara both chose to set excerpts from an anthology of letters from the Italian resistance almost as soon as it was published. It was in the period of Rosselli's most intense involvement with this scene, from 1958-1960, that the crucial debate between Stockhausen and Luigi Nono was unfolding at Darmstadt over the fragmentation of textual material charged by the recent devastation of war. The debate was triggered by Nono's 1956 composition *Il canto sospeso* ('The Song Suspended [or Interrupted]'), which drew on the texts of political prisoners sentenced to death.

Nono's use of prison letters from across Europe montaged and fractured the

¹ PIET MONDRIAN, *Neoplasticism in Painting*, in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2001, p. 426. See also CARPITA, "Spazi metrici", cit., p. 101.

² *Musica e pittura. Dibattito su Dorazio*, in AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Una scrittura plurale*, cit., p. 38.

³ ADRIANO SPATOLA, *Toward Total Poetry. With an Afterword by Guy Bennett*, trans. Brendan W. Hennessey, Guy Bennett, Los Angeles, Otis/Seismicity Editions, 2008, p. 19; p. 38.

⁴ GYÖRGY LIGETI, *Pierre Boulez: Decision and Automatism in Structure 1a.*, «Die Reihe», no. 4 («Young Composers»), 1960, p. 36; p. 53.

poets. Asked about the walls constantly appearing so as only to be undermined in her verse, Rosselli responded, 'I detained the explosions that gathered in me. If I alternate, I mean to demonstrate the duality of the demonstration'.¹ Fracture, arson, even urination and ejaculation versus ubiquitous walls: the revolt against persecution suffered by a person imprisoned before even entering the world persists in her poetry's paradoxical collusions of formal liberty and semantic incarceration. Revising poetic hermeticism, these metrical spaces host alarming semantic vagrancy – tropological shifts and paranomasia – within a prevailing environment of enclosure that alternates in its effect between suffocation and *ristoro*, or reprieve. This space is less hermetic than 'heterogeneous' in the sense Michel Foucault outlines in the essay *Of Other Spaces*: «The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us».²

While the cube-form is the matrix of 'an absolute time-space' containing the associative logic of all languages, Rosselli's dense aural texture encourages, accommodates, and naturalizes linguistic anomalies through repetition and assonance, while generating syntactical ambiguities. The resultant texts possess the ambient quality of a meditative chant, though they stray from the candid mysticism of *Chiesa* into an ironized sacrality of political utterance, articulated in an unhomely speech:

Ma in me coinvenivano montagne. Nella cella di tutte
le solitudini preparavano bistecche e insalate riccamente
condite. Nella cella delle pulchritudini attendevo
l'ordine di partire, insalata mista, per il tempo
che massacrava: ma nessun ordine attendeva fuori la
porta delle silenziose immagini. Il choc alla nuca
ruppe violento entro la porta – la scalata alla montagna
preparò la discesa precipitosa. Vietate al sole d'entrare,
vietata alla porta d'aprirsi vietata all'ira di soddisfarsi
fuori delle finestre dei poveri. Vietate alla noia
d'allontanarsi vietate. Nelle castelle di tutte le
bellezze moriva un vecchio sagace.

Condizionata ad una presa di potere che non era il
mio entravo in piazza e vedevo il sole bruciare, le
donne stagliare erbe su della piazza che ardeva di
malizia: la milizia.

Il sol fa mi do di tutte le tue battaglie.³

But in me mountains coinvened. In the cell of all
solitudes they prepared steaks and salads richly
seasoned. In the cell of pulchritudes I awaited
the order to depart, mixed salad, for time
which slaughtered: but no order awaited out the
portal of silent images. *Shock* to the nape
broke violent within the portal – the climb to the mountain

¹ *La poesia oggi non ha ruolo, è un piacere privato*, cit., p. 16.

² MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Of Other Spaces*, «Diacritics», 16.1, Spring 1986, p. 23.

³ *OP*, p. 69.

prepared the headlong descent. Prohibit the sun to enter,
 the portal prohibited to open the ire prohibited to satisfy itself
 outside the windows of the poor. Prohibit boredom
 to distance itself prohibit. In the castelles of all
 beauties an elderly sage was dying.

Conditioned to a power seizure that wasn't my
 own I entered the square and saw the sun burning, the
 women hacking grasses upon the square that blazed with
 malice: the militia.

The sol fa mi do of all of your battles.

Composed from a point where landscapes and tongues «co-invengono» or 'co-invene', her language charges the limits of the terms 'mother tongue' and 'fatherland' with its ruptures of propriety. We have alien systems informing word choice from just outside the portal, *fuori la porta* instead of *della porta*, breaking *entro la porta*, *within* the portal – subtle yet disquieting deviations from the norm. In the first glossary provided to Garzanti upon Pasolini's suggestion, Rosselli explains anomalous additions in her poems such as «contro del magazziniere» ('against of the store-keeper') as 'preferable' because of the poetic context, where each rhythmic or intensifying addition of a word is 'licit': she notes that such elements of the poem are unchangeable due to her metrical rule – because 'broken and incorrect language is born along with its squared form'.¹ Rosselli thereby requires a new species of reading, less insistent on the linear unfolding of narration and more akin to absorption within each strategically imprisoned environment/instance; as she states in the *Dibattito su Dorazio*, contemporary poems in squared form recall the rationalist painting of the day in their desire to «coprire l'intero spazio con una specie di geometrica confusione di colori, timbri vocalici, senza poi chiarire un senso centrale alla poesia, ma lasciando l'insieme parlare per sé» ('to cover the entire space of their *quadri* [squares, frames, pictures] with a geometric confusion of colors, vocalic timbres, without clarifying a central sense to the poem, but letting the ensemble speak for itself').² Rosselli also explains in her glossary that the gender of certain terms is inverted throughout the book for ironic or sonic effects: here, the norm for castles, *i castelli*, becomes *le castelle*. Yet we accept these deviations and their conceptual effects because the poem builds its own digressive logic through assonance – *nelle castelle* rhymes with *nella cella*, as *malizia* does with *milizia*, and narrative rhetoric gives way to the proliferation of staccato terms beginning with 'p' and what Rosselli would in her theoretical work call 'phonetic nodes': 'pre' and 'po'. Repetition produces a proliferation of cells, acts of waiting, prohibitions, and fires. The 16-line poem itself, as a shape and set of more or less regular lines, also resembles a ruptured cell.

We can imagine that by breaking «tutte le tue battaglie» – 'all your battles' – down into a constituent sol, fa, mi, do, Rosselli is liberating these sounds as noise, releasing them into new communicative and political possibilities. Her poetic error within constraint alienates the linguistic makeup of Rome from itself, so that readers of this canto find themselves outside the jurisdiction of any canton, or nation.

¹ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Lettere a Pasolini*, cit., p. 29.

² *Musica e pittura. Dibattito su Dorazio*, cit., p. 35.

Though Pasolini's *Notizia su Amelia Rosselli* notoriously, and misleadingly, characterizes Rosselli's linguistic errancies through the Freudian category of the unconscious *lapsus*, or slip, his nuclear metaphor at once accounts for the poems' consciously researched compositional method while describing their discomposing effect, literalizing the term 'experimentation' with a terrible historical inflection. Pasolini concedes that there is a dialectic at play in these stanzas, noting that in Rosselli's 'laboratory', the tumors and atomic blasts are 'dominated', but 'only scientifically' («solo scientificamente»), «Sicché il magma – la terribilità – è fissato in forme strofiche tanto più chiuse e assolute quanto più arbitrarie» ('So that the magma – the terribleness – is fixed in strophic forms that are the more closed and absolute the more arbitrary they are').¹ Pasolini's deployment of the mushroom cloud figure expresses something of a truth to the experience of reading Rosselli's poetry that evades every painstaking analysis of her demanding poetic tractate in isolation. For however cultivated and strategic her 'new geometrism' may be, however controlled the length of the *strophē* ('turning'), in reading, her lines vaunt anything but that coolness of composition we might associate with Cubism, Suprematism, De Stijl, or even their reverberation in postwar abstraction, concretism, and the anti-humanist turn in 1960s and '70s conceptualism. Rosselli's geometric compressions serve to host a mutation of 'organic' uses of language that bespeaks the anxiety of the atomic age.² Just as the mushroom-cloud metaphor represents the historical implosion of the rationalism of modernity into an uncontainable force defining an atomic aesthetic, Rosselli's cube-form occupies the verge of a painfully historicized postmodern poetic: her conception of metrical spaces represents the transition from a modernist aspiration to produce a 'total' poetic and 'panmusic' to a postmodern granular aesthetic. A sensibility we might call atomic makes itself felt through the morphing of words in her 'cantons' disaggregated into granular bits, so that in «Le tue acquerelle scomponavano la mia mente» ('Your acquerelles discomposed my mind'), for example, the «scomporre» ('discomposing') of the speaker's mind and of the light is echoed in the «scompiglio» ('mess') of spring, the «scostarsi» ('straying') from the train, the «accostarsi» ('veering') of the train, and even the «stornare» ('warding off') of swallows in the final stanza.³

The bellicosity of Pasolini's metaphor compels because it hails from beyond the immediate landscape of Fascism with which Rosselli's work would necessarily come to be associated, ostensibly chosen by the older poet to designate an alien phenomenon in a world become violently one – a figure with global reach, but deterritorialized from its origin and destination in a European context. The «scoppi atomici» resonate from beyond the strictly national tragedy of the Second World War, calling to mind the *fungo* ('mushroom') tower that appears in the opening sequence of Antonioni's 1962 *L'eclisse*: an apparition of violent alterity in the stark Fascist-modernist geometry of the EUR quarter of Rome, revealing the

¹ AMELIA ROSSELLI, *Lettere a Pasolini*, cit., p. 29.

² The atomic aesthetic is skillfully sketched and historicized, though in the context of the United States, in *Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940-1960*, eds. Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Kevin Stayton, New York, Brooklyn Museum of Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

³ *OP*, p. 222.

transnational violence of the near past when the curtain is drawn from the picture windows of the bourgeoisie.

The geographical alterity of the mushroom cloud, which immediately invokes the United States or Japan rather than the war-torn landscape of Fascist Italy, builds on the ambiguous nationality of «questa specie di apolide dalle grandi tradizioni famigliari di Cosmopolis», as Pasolini had characterized his object of criticism. Rosselli occupied an implosive cultural state – but rejected this characterization:

La definizione di cosmopolita risale a un saggio di Pasolini [...], ma io rifiuto per noi quest'appellativo: siamo figli della seconda guerra mondiale [...]. Cosmopolita è chi sceglie di esserlo. Noi non eravamo dei cosmopoliti: eravamo dei rifugiati.

The designation 'cosmopolitan' goes back to an essay by Pasolini [...], but I reject that epithet for us: we are children of the Second World War [...]. The cosmopolite is a person who chooses to be so. We were not cosmopolitans; we were refugees.¹

While the intellectuals of the twenty-first century have labored to distance cosmopolitanism from the privileged universal category that Rosselli rejects, bringing it into line with a minoritarian modernity bespeaking as much victimization as privilege, we need to honor her distinction, while attempting to account for the utopian – and dystopian – aspects of her poetic.² The dissonance between linguistic, sonic, and cognitive orders obliged to cohabit Rosselli's stanzas constitutes an extension of being a 'child of the Second World War' – with obvious implications for the under-theorized category of 'self-expression'. In *Ed hanno soffici manti quei ragazzi*, a later poem from *Documento*, we find Rosselli identifying with a feminized Pacific metaphor that happens to constitute the apex of conflict between the United States and Japan, undecidably placed between nation-states and between the roles of victim and aggressor:

Nella Pearl Harbor che sono io esprimersi
mai ebbe a miglior sorte altro che
vanagloriosa espulsione dei resti...³

In the Pearl Harbor that I am self-expression
never had a better fate than
vainglorious expulsion of remains...

Such stanzas, which never permit us to forget the human substance that remains in the wake of victory or defeat, reveal Rosselli's generative oasis to be the domain of post-Enlightenment poetics,⁴ wherein the violent unreason stemming from the programmatic disenchantment of history is disclosed. Rosselli routed the disillusionment, disorientation, and trauma experienced in the immediate aftermath of Fascism into poetic receptacles capable of hosting xenoglossic in-

¹ *Ma la logica è il cibo degli artisti*, an interview with Paola Zacometti, «Il Giornale di Napoli», 12 May 1990; reprinted in *La furia dei venti contrari*, cit., p. 221.

² See *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah, Bruce Robbins, Social Text Collective, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998; HOMI BHABHA et alii, *Cosmopolitanisms*, «Public Culture», 12, no. 3, 2000; ANTHONY APPIAH, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 2006.

³ *OP*, p. 390.

⁴ I have in mind the terms of Enlightenment established by the classic study by THEODOR W. ADORNO, MAX HORKHEIMER, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, New York, Continuum, 1999.

stances of ideological dislodging. Heedless of cultural propriety, these stanzas reflect the geographical and temporal paradoxes inherent in the institution of any national modernism – while eliciting that the nation is itself a fundamentally clamorous form.

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