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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1950397> since 2024-01-04T16:00:01Z

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Amelia Rosselli and the anguish of breathing: style or pathological speech?

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IL PARLATO IN AMBITO MEDICO: ANALISI LINGUISTICA, APPLICAZIONI TECNOLOGICHE E STRUMENTI CLINICI
15-17 febbraio 2023, Università del Salento, Lecce

Introduction

The subject of our analysis are 8 poetry readings by Amelia Rosselli (1930-1996), one of the best-known poets in our literary tradition, a polyglot and musicologist, who conveyed great attention to the sound substance of the poetic text. Her clinical vicissitudes - testified in her 1977 writing, *Storia di una malattia* - are reflected in the indexes of the oral data (Caputo, 2004; Giovannuzzi, 2012; Venturini & De March, 2010; Paris, 2020). Significant milestones in the history of her pathology:

- 1954: first electroshock and insulin shocks to treat what initially appeared to be a nervous breakdown or sleep disorder.
- 1954: first clinical diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, psychoanalytic therapy with several periods of clinical hospitalization.
- 1969: Parkinson's disease diagnosis, 'damage of the extrapyramidal system', treatment with anti-spastic drugs until death
- 1996: suicide.

Several doubts surround the true nature of her illness, including the hypothesis of a cover-up of her paranoid schizophrenia with Parkinson's disease: the antispasmodic drugs prescribed could be explained as a treatment for the potential damaging effects left by the electroshocks on her muscular system. The analysis of her readings offers us interesting information about the nature of her speech and the possible prosodic reflections of a pathological substratum.



Fig. 1. Amelia Rosselli. Photo by Dino Ignani

Data

- 8 recordings from 1985 (3) to 1990 (Impromptu), last by Rosselli.
- 10 recordings (Rosselli + 9 contemporary poets, 5 M, 4 F) of *Pietre tese nel bosco*.

Premise

- First approach in Colonna (2021), VIP-*Voices of Italian Poets* methodology: characteristic traits, lengthening of contours and experimental use of the voice in relation to the text ("experimental" voices in the history of 20th century Italian poetry reading), influences of experimentalism in music, fragmentation through silence and noise emphasis by microprosody and peculiar use of pauses.
- Studies on silence in pathology (cfr. Dovetto, 2013 and Nodari & Calamai, 2021) → particular style;
- Studies on silence: annotation protocols in use in the CLIPS project (cf. Savy, 2006; Savy, 2007) and studies conducted at LFSAG (cf. Romano, 2008; De Iacovo et al., 2020) → distinction between long and short pauses.

Method

Global Rosselli's style:

- Annotation on PRAAT in 4 levels (Colonna, 2022), data extraction;
- VIP-Radar (VIP-R) (Colonna, 2022): 20 General-VIP-Radar indexes (Tab.1, Fig. 2).

Investigation on Pauses:

1. classification, extraction and study of pauses in Rosselli's readings (8);
2. comparison of pauses in 10 readings.

Main classification (reduced) (+ very long pauses <pll>; inspiration <insp>:

- a) pauses with laryngealization (<?pbb> <pbb?> <?pbb?>);
- b) short pauses (<pb>);
- c) long pauses (<pl>).



Conclusion and discussion

- Original prosodic style (VIP-R) of Amelia Rosselli.
- Our pausal annotation system can be reliable. Group of glottal stops and <pb> (and <insp>) with minimal variation and high level in Rosselli. High variation, with further options of classification.
- Comparison: similar values for <pb>; lower levels for <?pb?> and <pl> (further studies: check of Speech Rate); minor variation.

Finally, Amelia Rosselli: a peculiar style or pathology?

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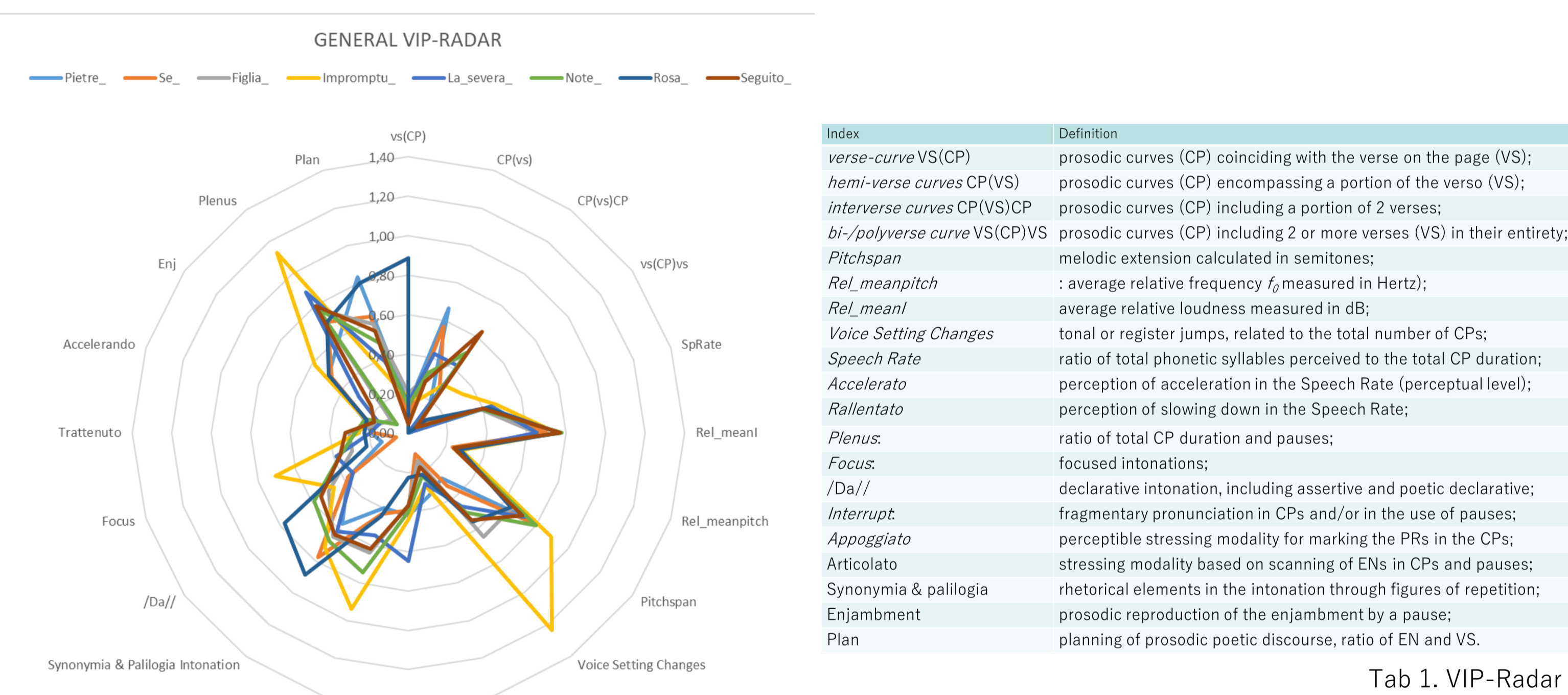


Fig. 2. General VIP-Radar

Index	Definition
verso-curve VS(CP)	prosodic curves (CP) coinciding with the verse on the page (VS);
hemi-verse curves CP(VS)	prosodic curves (CP) encompassing a portion of the verse (VS);
interverse curves CP(VS)CP	prosodic curves (CP) including a portion of 2 verses;
bi-/polyverse curve VS(CP)VS	prosodic curves (CP) including 2 or more verses (VS) in their entirety;
Pitchspan	melodic extension calculated in semitones;
Rel_meanpitch	: average relative frequency f_0 measured in Hertz;
Rel_meanl	: average relative loudness measured in dB;
Voice Setting Changes	tonal or register jumps, related to the total number of CPs;
Speech Rate	ratio of total phonetic syllables perceived to the total CP duration;
Accelerato	perception of acceleration in the Speech Rate (perceptual level);
Rallentato	perception of slowing down in the Speech Rate;
Plenus	ratio of total CP duration and pauses;
Focus	focused intonations;
/Da/	declarative intonation, including assertive and poetic declarative;
Interrupt	fragmentary pronunciation in CPs and/or in the use of pauses;
Appoggiato	perceptible stressing modality for marking the PRs in the CPs;
Articolato	stressing modality based on scanning of ENs in CPs and pauses;
Synonymia & palliologia	rhetorical elements in the intonation through figures of repetition;
Enjambment	prosodic reproduction of the enjambment by a pause;
Plan	planning of prosodic poetic discourse, ratio of EN and VS.

Tab 1. VIP-Radar

Results

Global Rosselli's style (Fig. 2)

- Wide variation between readings (see *Impromptu*);
- Convergence in acoustic, stylistic, organizational choices;
- Wide *Pitchspan*; presence of *Interrupt*, high *Voices Setting Changes*;
- Heterogeneous *Plenus* and *Enjambment* index → lengthenings.

Investigation on pausal distribution in Rosselli (Fig. 2, Tab.2)

- Many glottal stops (<?pbb?> (higher level) and <pb> alternating to <pl> (higher level) → higher variation

Variable	n	Mean	Variance	Std. deviation	Minimum	25% Quantile	Median	75% Quantile	Maximum
<?pb?>	44	0.213	0.041	0.202	0.062	0.090	0.120	0.233	0.952
<pb>	303	0.355	0.019	0.137	0.095	0.262	0.366	0.462	0.665
<pl>	97	1.004	0.255	0.505	0.477	0.680	0.824	1.131	3.047

Tab. 2. Descriptives of pauses in Rosselli

Comparative investigation on pausal distribution in 10 readings of a poem (Fig. 3, Tab. 3)

- <?pb?> and <pl> (lower level)

Variable	n	Mean	Variance	Std. deviation	Minimum	25% Quantile	Median	75% Quantile	Maximum
<?pb?>	9	0.129	0.002	0.040	0.102	0.106	0.112	0.126	0.224
<pb>	89	0.385	0.019	0.138	0.129	0.259	0.379	0.480	0.694
<pl>	63	0.862	0.077	0.277	0.386	0.680	0.846	0.979	2.006

Tab. 3. Descriptives of pauses in 10 poets' readings

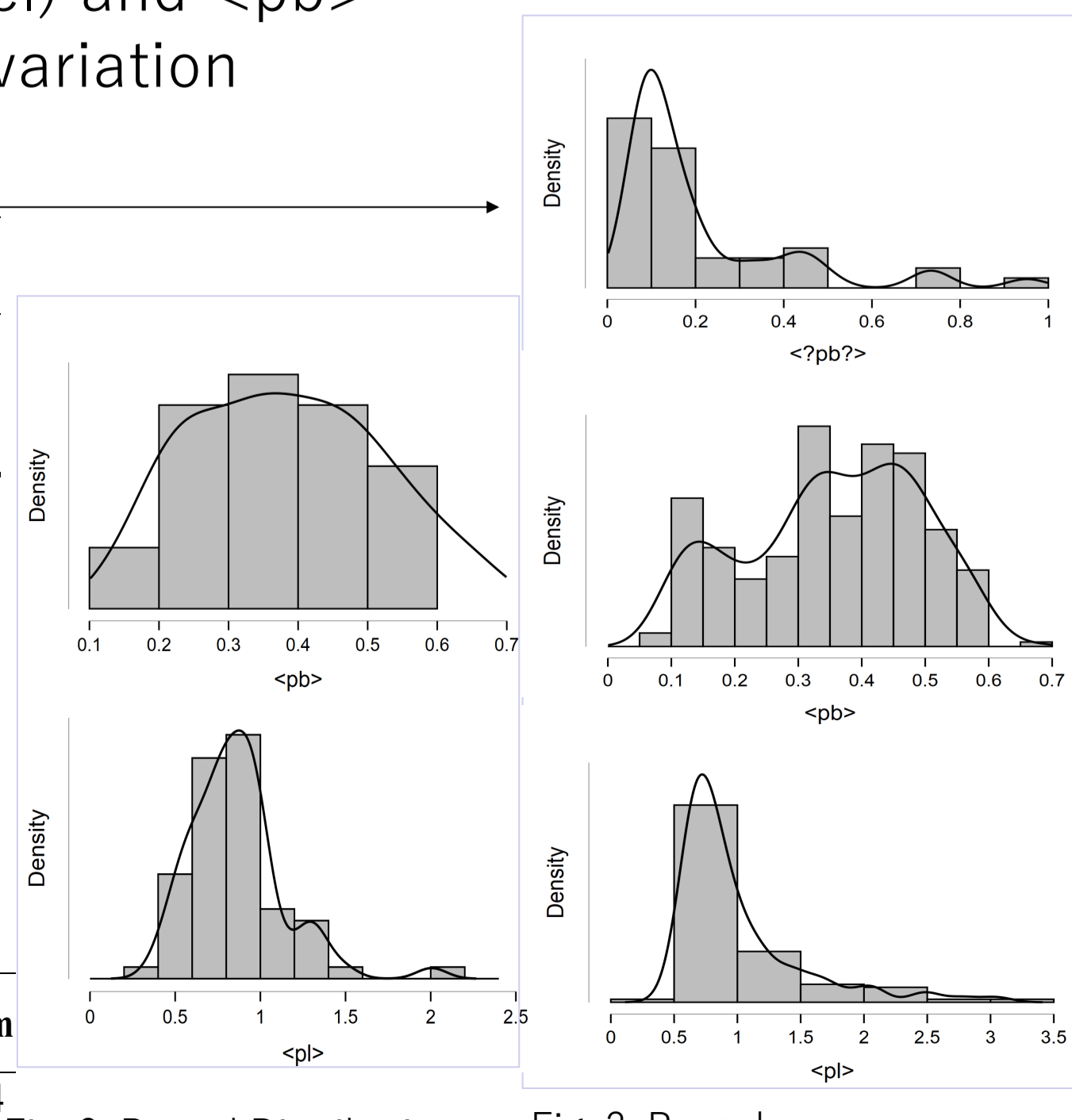


Fig. 3. Pausal Distributions in 10 poets' readings

Fig. 2. Pausal Distributions in Rosselli