The Something More of "Almost Nothing"

Miron Białoszewski's Kairotic Everyday

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In an episode from Miron Białoszewski's *Hums, Lumps, Threads* (1976) entitled "Going Out," the narrator is filled with wonder during an evening walk through a city:

> I go home along Próżna Street. On one side, there are still three houses connected by a strange system of gates and courtyards. On the other side the houses are bigger. Two of them old. The Secession building in particular concerns me. Five floors. With a tiny courtyard, and balconies hung skyward from the corners. When it gets a bit warmer, this is where they snore. And how. Even the walls bounce around. Afterwards I stand at the bottom of the courtyard, spellbound, and look up. I listen. I checked today. The windows were unopened. From inside I could hear nothing but breathing. Lu. told me recently, because I'd reminded him of something from his walks along the street. And that they didn't have a punch line. He:
>
> yes – he says to me – I love it best when almost nothing is happening . . .[1]

Nothing in particular happens during the walk, but the incident occupies a particularly meaningful place in the narrator's ritualistic revisitation of the city. "The snoring courtyard" exemplifies Białoszewski's approach to the representation of the everyday.[2] This episode, like so many in the "small narrations," borders on the trivial in the near absence of eventfulness. However, this non-eventfulness—the snoring of Próżna's inhabitants—is exactly what enchants the narrator. The signification of the emphatic closing line of the episode, which privileges the "almost nothing," goes beyond this particular episode; Białoszewski creates an everyday that overflows with its own surplus, that does not cease being the everyday but at the same time becomes "something more."[3]

This "something more" challenges the commonsense understanding of what is meant by the everyday, and it may well be the secret of Białoszewski's popularity as a writer. In this commonsense understanding, the everyday lacks events amid the endless repetition of mundane tasks and activities. When events do happen, they are bracketed as "holidays," which, often nostalgically, are contrasted with the everyday's inertia. The everyday's open-ended, transparent flow—its repeatability—is never considered worthy of a story since it is never seen for the first time.

Indeed, the everyday has been theorized as that which resists signification and defies the possibility of eventfulness. It has been viewed as intrinsically deficient, always in need of being filled, never sufficient unto itself. Thus, for Maurice Blanchot, the everyday's essential trait is its imperceptibility; it is a

stagnant and tedious realm with only the *potential* to be a site of signification. Within the discourse of existentialism, for example, the everyday is a repetitive, "instrumental" realm that prevents access to the authenticity of the subject (of the Heideggerian *Dasein*, for instance). In Marxist and post-Marxist discourses (broadly understood), such theorists as Michel de Certeau and Michael Bernstein, who exalt the everyday, view it either as the inherently oppositional sphere of praxis or, like Michel Foucault, as a sphere of total control emanating from the power structure. Certeau and Henri Lefebvre juxtapose the everyday with a repressive public life and view it as a realm that has been commodified and manipulated by the structures of capitalism, but that has at the same time the inherent potential of becoming the realm of authenticity, if it can be revolutionized and transformed (i.e., freed from the all-pervasive system of control). These views of the everyday draw on such binary oppositions as everyday versus non-everyday, authentic versus inauthentic, and oppressive versus free. All such binaries grow out of the belief that the everyday must be transformed in order to retrieve a hidden existential or political potential.

In Białoszewski's writing, the everyday is neither the oppositional nor the inert, but an all-encompassing sphere meaningful in itself, beyond which there is nothing. Białoszewski creates this everyday via many intertwined aesthetic strategies (e.g., the reenactment of orality, the avoidance of "high" style, and careful thematic choices). One of the most important of Białoszewski's strategies is his idiosyncratic treatment of temporality, which can be better understood through a distinction between the juxtaposition of two types of temporality, *chronos* and *kairos*, and Blanchot's view of the everyday's imperceptibility.

Chronos, as Frank Kermode understands it, is a passing or waiting time, whereas kairos is "the season": a point in time "filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end."[4] Chronos is what we usually associate with the experience of the everyday; it is just a succession, an empty duration during which nothing happens. Kairos represents a point of concentrated time, of transtemporal significance, in which (usually a posteriori) the pattern of meaningfulness becomes immanent. "The divine plot," as Kermode says, "is the pattern of kairoi in relation to the End."[5]

Kermode sees the seeds of this distinction between types of time in the theology of the New Testament: in "the coming of God's time (kairos), the fulfilling of the time (kairos—Mark 1:15), the signs of the times (Matt. 16:2–3) as against passing time, chronos."[6] By introducing the distinction between chronos (time) and kairos (the fulfillment of time), Christian theology established anchoring points in history by which the past (that of the Hebrew Bible, for instance) was validated and the future always already imbued with teleological meaning.

In opposition to Kermode's binary view of time, Blanchot perceives the everyday as a chronos that leaves no room for a "holiday" (that which would cancel and suppress the ordinary). Time for Blanchot is a pure chronos whose

nature is quantitative and successive; it neither awaits, nor permits splendid moments.[7] The everyday is not what is inserted between the non-everyday but what is, in a sense, cancelled and unapproachable by language and representation. Thus, he claims, "the everyday designates for us the region of speech where the determinations true or false, yes or no, do not apply—it being always before what affirms it and yet incessantly reconstituting itself beyond all that negates it."[8]

The Blanchotian view of the "escaping" everyday, and the theological distinction between kairos and chronos provide reference points for exploring Białoszewski's construction of the everyday. This everyday possesses kairotic qualities, but these qualities do not belong to a distinct realm of significance that transcends temporality. Rather, the kairos of Białoszewski's everyday emerges from the very amorphous substance of chronos. Not belonging to an order outside of chronos, Białoszewski's kairos seems to involve the radical experience of temporality through everyday events (or, perhaps one should say, nonevents). In other words, even though Białoszewski does not distinguish between two distinct orders of time, not all moments of time are experienced in the same way.

Białoszewski's everyday involves a chronos whose flow becomes visible in its own kairotic moments. Thus, the kairotic moment can be identified with the moment when chronos discloses itself in the repeatability of everyday events. The pattern of this disclosure resembles the Heideggerian understanding of aletheia, "truth," which refers to the "unconcealment" of being unmediated by concepts or propositions (in its Greek etymology, *aletheia* is formed by joining the word *letho*, "to conceal," with *a*, a prefix that negates this concealment). Similarly, in Białoszewski's writing, kairos and chronos do not belong to mutually exclusive orders of time; kairos does not exist outside of chromos, but rather constitutes its disclosure, its "non-hiding." We might say, then, that Białoszewski's kairos is the *aletheia* of the chronos. Moreover, just as for Heidegger such a disclosure happens not in everyday praxis, but in art, so does the everyday become a work of art in Białoszewski's writing. Clearly, on a metalevel, Białoszewski's writing imposes an aesthetic form and, thus, visibility and transmittability on the sphere of human life whose repetitiveness and boundlessness are both particularly challenging for representation, and resistant to abstract thought and analytical propositions. Thematically, too, Białoszewski performs his claim that "reality is an artist" with the caveat that in his ontology there is no reality other than the everyday.[9] In the episode from Próżna Street, for instance, all of reality participates in an act of artistic creation. To the snoring of the Próżna inhabitants, the walls of the house respond by "bouncing around" (literally: "so that the walls are playing," in the idiomatic Polish expression *aż mury grają*). With the walls orchestrating the snoring of people, the whole of reality performs for the enchanted narrator.

To further explore Białoszewski's treatment of kairotic moments as chronotic, it might be useful to look at his representation of death, traditionally

understood as a radical kairotic moment or, as Lefebvre calls it, "the distinctly non-everyday."[10] In Białoszewski's writing, death appears as *to już*, a phrase he uses both in his "small narrations" and in his earlier poetry.[11] Although colloquially *to już* can be translated as "it's over," or "this is it," its literal meaning is closer to "it was" or, to convey its sense of completed action more precisely, "it already was." Interestingly, this literal meaning points to a larger issue in Białoszewski's treatment of temporality, namely, his insistent return to changes that go unnoticed because they happen in—or rather between—infinitesimal units of time. This fascination with the microtemporal reduces the traditionally privileged status of death to an always already belated recognition of its occurrence. Thus, in one of the small narrations, Lusia describes with the words *to już* her a posteriori recognition that her sister Baśka, the narrator's close friend, has died:

> Lusia rushed up and stood in my doorway.
> "It's over [*to już*], Miron."
> Basia died at four, a little after four. Lusia, together with Mira, her other sister, rushed immediately to the hospital because they'd been sleeping in their coats by the telephone. Baśka was sitting up, her head swaying. Lusia started to cry. Baśka said to her.
> "Dummy."
> She pointed to the tiny radio borrowed from her tiny neighbor
> "Remember the radio . . ."
> Then she lost consciousness. Lusia ran to fetch a priest.
> "Don't tell mother he didn't make it."
> Mira held Baśka's hand.
> At one point I couldn't tell if it was her pulse or just mine. And imagine—me, who's so frightened of the dead.[12]

Baśka's death is granted no visibility. Rather than constituting a kairotic rupture in the chronotic everyday, it is always already embedded in the fabric of chronos. Although Lusia and Mira witness Baśka's death, it actually goes unnoticed, its precise moment unrecorded: "at four, after four." Even Baśka's body does not signal a moment of clear passing from life, but almost in a symbolic act of transmitting life, her fading pulse merges with her sister's. Baśka never becomes the Other, and her place never becomes "the place where I am not."[13] On the contrary, when her pulse merges with Mira's, Baśka's place becomes the place "where I am," not because death renders itself a means for experiencing existential authenticity, but because the invisibility of the border between life and death is rendered as familiar. Mira's astonishment at the experience ("And imagine—me . . . ") only deepens the familiarity and ordinariness of death. The very manner in which Baśka's death is related brings it from the sphere of potential ontological inquiry to the sphere of an animated conversation between friends.

The narration of the death firmly embeds Baśka's last moments in the realm of the profane through her sense of mundane responsibilities (her concern for the borrowed radio), and Lusia's worry lest her mother discover that

the priest did not arrive in time to administer the last rites. Baśka's death is also domesticated because the narration is focalized by her sisters; there is no psychologizing, or pointing toward the otherness of death. It is as if positioning Baśka's death outside the everyday's open-ended flow, as a kairotic rupture, would have rendered it abstract, less individual.

In Białoszewski's world, the (potentially) eventful moments of rupture are short-circuited, the event of death always already incorporated into the open-ended flow of the quotidian, and distinguished from the quotidian only a posteriori. Thus, there is nothing "authentic" to be learned in moments of crisis (the very word *crisis* proves inadequate here). This lack of illumination does not signify that human life is inauthentic, however; rather, in Białoszewski's all-embracing quotidian, the category of authenticity proves useless as it presupposes a distinction between the inauthentic (traditionally associated with the quotidian and noneventful) and the authentic (the nonquotidian and eventful). Białoszewski's treatment of death shows that even the most extreme events do not anchor his everyday, as if the very idea of anchoring negated the open-ended flow of the everyday. The elusiveness of this flow is manifested by a repetitive belatedness, by an endless repetition of *to już*, to which even something as radical as death cannot grant the visibility of "now." On the contrary, if we adopt Blanchot's view that the essence of the everyday is its invisibility, then in Białoszewski's works death, being imperceptible, represents the quintessential everyday. In the absence of any "panoramic" vision, death becomes a vanishing point where change is infinitesimal, hardly palpable, and always already disappearing between one heartbeat and the next. And yet, between these beats, the status quo is irrevocably changed, and that which is invisible is not made visible, but made part of the everyday. Death's presence is as subtle as life's, but it is a presence that is present *in* life, not as the boundary of life.

While Białoszewski passes over significant changes such as death with a deficiency of eventfulness and a nonclimactic tone, ordinary, even banal events generate an excess of eventfulness. Thus, in *Hums, Lumps, Threads* the sudden experience of a spring day elicits epiphanic exaltation. Sandwiched between the narrator's memory of his youthful days as a journalist in "Dispach from the Countryside" ("Wiejski reportaż") and an episode about a Swedish hotel in Warsaw in "Looks Like It's Not Just the Swedes' Fault" ("Podobno to nie tylko Szwedzi winni"), the episode "When Will We Say So Again?" ("Kiedy znów tak powiemy?") is written in the form of a diary entry. Its title does not signal the subject matter, and it carries no connection with the episodes preceding and following it.

> Sunday, March 31, 1974
>
> After that non-winter the world opened up gently, unhurriedly. Birds began to sing. The sun struck. So that we knew. We watched.
>
> And suddenly, today—the weather brought warmth to the shade, people came out . . . bit by bit; Sunday. I'm standing at the window: the trees burst forth here, and

> here, and my saved maple has budded, and my poplar has furry buds today. I lean out the window . . . and three willows are hanging green, all in leaves.
>
> So it's already happened. Just like that. And it's only March 31. Like in a dream. I can't believe it.
>
> —What a moment! what a moment!
>
> All is still before us—the dream is fulfilled.[14]

The episode is permeated by the elation, ecstasy, intensity, and mysteriousness that typify literary epiphanies. The ordinary world "opens up" to reveal—if only for a moment—its hidden potential in the miraculous force of spring. Although the narrator recognizes the moment as cyclical, and thus anticipated ("So that we knew. We watched"), he nonetheless configures it as kairotic. With his emotional exhilaration, the narrator imbues this cyclical transformation with the significance of an unexpected event overflowing with its own surplus.

What is striking, however, is that the narrator's amazement at this bursting vitality manifests itself in a language similar to that of the description of Baśka's death, as if both fall into the same category of temporality. While Baśka's death is marked as *to już* ("it already was"), spring's epiphany is "Więc już. Już! Stało się. Jest"—literally, "So it already was. Already! It happened. It is." It is as if the coming of spring, like that of death, has occurred between heartbeats. In his belated recognition of the change, the narrator can only repeat in amazement, "What a moment! What a moment."

As in the teleological view of kairos, the special position of the moment in the flow of time is viewed a posteriori in this exclamation, after the moment has passed. Białoszewski's kairoi, however, do not contribute to the future's meaningfulness, and thus they differ from the apocalyptic kairoi of Christian theology. The concluding sentence of the episode—"all is still before us, and the dream has been fulfilled"—presents the fulfillment of time in which the future still lies ahead unchanged, and not organized and prefigured by the kairotic "moment." Belatedness, epiphany, kairotic time, and the totality of future—in this one episode, contradictory conceptions of time emerge in a description of a topic that can so easily slip into a literary cliché.

The use of the same language to express infinitesimal units of time in the scene of Baśka's death and in the epiphanic moment of spring's arrival demonstrates that, regardless of their character, the specific moments of transformation—life into death, winter into spring—always pass unnoticed and unrecorded. However, only the spring day generates an epiphanic tone; the discreet scene of Baśka's death is marked neither by this intensity, nor even by the narrator's presence.[15] In a reversal of hierarchy, Baśka's scene is marked by a deficiency of eventfulness, whereas a spring day on which nothing remarkable happens overflows with it. In Białoszewski's writing, the known and the repeatable acquire the attributes of the revelatory, while the unique and extreme acquire those of the familiar. It is in the ordinary that Białoszewski's narrator exercises the emotionally engaged, exalted "I" that sees the pattern of time.

This springtime epiphany, however, is not just the literary translation of a cognitive event. That would reduce the scene to a rhetorical, and rather conventional, topos. Epiphanies punctuate Białoszewski's narrative based on a chronotic sequence ("one damn thing after another," to use Kermode's expression) that in itself possesses a kairotic value. Indeed, there is no extraordinary in the everyday. Its temporal structure is based on the repeatability of kairotic moments within ordinary experience. Interestingly, by specifying the date at the beginning of this passage, Białoszewski suggests his desire to indicate not only the repeatability of his kairos, but also its cyclical nature (which, per se, excludes an apocalyptic view of time). This cyclicality, however, only adds to the narrator's always fresh and always repeatable amazement. The response to the title of the episode—"When Will We Say So Again?"—could well be "Next spring."[16]

Through his treatment of temporality and linguistic patterns, Białoszewski creates an idiosyncratic model for the everyday that reverses our expectations regarding what it is and is not. On the one hand, he fuses ordinary and cyclical sensory experience (of, for instance, the arrival of spring) with the emotional intensity of epiphany; on the other, he frames unique situations (such as death) with mundane preoccupations and emotionally restrained tones. The language employed for both types of temporality performs the distinction between epiphany and everydayness, elation and restraint. The language used both by Baśka's sister and the narrator of the spring day experience conveys their surprise at this reversal (finding the kairotic in the cliché and the chronotic in the unique). These reversals notwithstanding, the change in the status quo always occurs in the infinitesimal, and is recognized only belatedly.

What is the critical value of this "decod[ing] of the world according to the everyday," to use Henri Lefebvre's words?[17] Perhaps the word *decoding* is somewhat misleading. Białoszewski, after all, decodes nothing. His everyday is an all-encompassing, fully exposed realm that conceals neither secrets nor deeper structures. No event, as *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* most radically attests, can change the everyday into the non-everyday for Białoszewski. In a parallel to his treatment of genres, in which he obliterates the temporal gap between the time of the event and the time of writing (and thus anything that would create distance between the narrator and the everyday), Białoszewski erases from his everyday anything that could create the impression of a "panoramic vision," which would deprive the everyday of its transparency and repeatability. The cumulative effect of its representation is not knowledge of it as a "Great Pleonasm";[18] it is an understanding of it in the Heideggerian sense of knowing what it means to stand in its presence, rather than grasping it as an object of knowledge. Such an understanding presupposes a subject far removed from a Cartesian ego, or a transcendental subject, and posits a subject characterized in terms of its situatedness, finitude, and temporality, briefly, by its "belonging" to the world (rather than being an agent in, or master over the world).

"Whatever its other aspects," writes Blanchot, "the everyday . . . allows no hold. It escapes. It belongs to insignificance; the insignificance being what is without truth, without reality, but also perhaps the site of all possible signification. The everyday escapes."[19] Białoszewski creates an everyday that is "the site of all possible signification" not only by making it visible (which every narrative does), but also by showing its invisibility in his treatment of time. This treatment performs the escape of the everyday. Such a representation of the everyday resists conceptualization, with the open-ended repetitions that constitute Białoszewski's small narrations producing no theory of the everyday.[20] The significance of the everyday in Białoszewski's post-*Memoir* writing manifests itself not in kairotic moments of meaning, but in the narrator's permanent state of alertness to the ever-present possibility that chronos will imperceptibly slip into kairos. This insistence on domesticating life into the all-embracing everyday points not only to the affirmation of life, but also to a refusal to face the traumatic as traumatic, as the radically non-everyday. The everyday, like spring, is permeated by *entelechia*—the force of life. To be astonished by the everyday requires a special type of attentiveness to the "almost nothing"—to the nonevents, the subtle presences, the barely perceptible voices.

"Almost nothing," in Białoszewski's writing, "is always something monotonously different."[21] The "almost" and the "is" are important because it is not that nothing is happening in the everyday, but that "almost nothing" happens and continues to happen. This "almost" is the foundation on which Białoszewski builds his everyday. Changes in the everyday happen, as in Baśka's death, in infinitesimal spaces between one heartbeat and another. In this sense, life itself is the everyday; as Lefebvre would say, "The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet—here lies the contradiction at the heart of everydayness—everything changes."[22] In this stationary movement, the everyday is never seen for the first time but is always already there.

Yet, in spite of never being seen for the first time, Białoszewski's everyday is far from a repetitive, stagnant realm that, as Blanchot puts it, opens itself into history only in moments of effervescence.[23] Białoszewski's everyday is constituted by side-gazing at and decentering the very events, things, and phenomena that literature tends to position centrally and endow with kairotic value. One aspect of this decentering tendency is the focus, without distinctions or hierarchies, on barely traceable signs of life, like the animated blob of marmalade in the volume *The Heart Attack* (*Zawał*, 1977), or the merging of Baśka's pulse with her sister's, or the sounds of snores coming through courtyard windows.

This consistent incorporation of everything into the narrative flow makes it familiar and domesticated without depriving it of the power to astonish. Instead of noticing moments in time—the *Augenblick* of presence and meaning—Białoszewski wants us to notice the interstices between moments and their all-encompassing flow. Both enchantment with the snoring on Próżna

Street and fear of falling bombs during the uprising are in these interstices and in this flow. To live in time means refusing to allow this flow to escape our attention. For a writer who spent a good portion of his career on minimal things, this is quite a maximalist postulate. "The aspects of things that are most important to us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes)," observed Wittgenstein. "And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful."[24]

Without central events amidst the proliferation of nonevents, Białoszewski's "life-writing" actualizes the everyday as the only realm of life. It is precisely the banality of the everyday that leads Białoszewski to affirm life everywhere. It is this astonishment permeating many of Białoszewski's narrations that often masks their unrealistic settings. How easily the reader passes over the narrator's claim that he could hear the breathing of the sleeping inhabitants of Próżna Street through their closed windows ("The windows were unopened. From inside I could hear nothing but breathing."). But the question of whether this is a realistic or unrealistic situation is irrelevant simply because, throughout several volumes of small narrations, Białoszewski's narrator has accustomed his reader to the extraordinary receptivity of his ear.[25] His receptive ear catches not only language, but also random sounds and the residual noises of life—like the snoring on Próżna Street—as a frequency of life. To Blanchot's claim "Nothing happens; this is the everyday,"[26] Białoszewski emphatically responds, "I love it best when *almost nothing* is happening."

Notes

A modified version of this paper, translated into Macedonian, was published by the Institute of Macedonian Literature, Skopje.

1. Białoszewski, "Wyjście," in *Szumy, zlepy, ciągi. Utwory zebrane* 5:179–80. All translations by Joanna Niżyńska and Philip Redko.

2. From the publication of *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising* in 1970 until his death in 1983, Białoszewski's writing focuses on describing the ordinary, the mundane, and the prosaic—the everyday life of undramatic times—usually from an autobiographical perspective. Michał Głowiński, in searching for a term that would accommodate the obliteration of genre distinctions in Białoszewski's prose of this period, introduced the phrase "małe narracje" (*Gry powieściowe*, 319), which later some critics (e.g., Stanisław Barańczak) extended to encompass Białoszewski's late poems and dramatic pieces. Thematically, these pieces revolve around such things as a passerby whom the narrator observes from his window, daily events in the life of the narrator, a hospital stay, and flashes of memories from his childhood and wartime youth.

These post-*Memoir* works also include travel diaries of the writer's trips to Egypt and the United States, as well as his boat trip along the coast of Europe. Those who look for exoticism in these diaries will be disappointed; for the narrator, an outing to Garwolin in the suburbs of Warsaw is as stimulating as a journey to the Big Apple. In this period, Białoszewski also wrote *transy i transiki* ("Trances and Little Trances"), meditative reveries arising from observing such everyday objects as the poplar tree in front of his window.

3. Cf. Michał Głowiński's striking description of Białoszewski's everyday: "But such is the paradox of Białoszewski—in his work this everyday doesn't stop being the everyday, but it simultaneously becomes something more. He plays out life in this everyday." "Niezwykłe zwykłe," 6; my translation.

4. Kermode, 47.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 48. Kermode was influenced in his understanding of chronos and kairos by the theologians Oscar Cullman (*Christ and Time*) and John Marsh (*The Fullness of Time*). As Kermode emphasizes, neither Greek nor Hebrew carries the antithesis between chronos and kairos; Hebrew has no word for chronos, and thus does not provide the distinction between the plain duration of chronos, and the concentrated time of kairos (47–48). It is interesting to note, however, that although it was never juxtaposed with chronos, for the Greeks kairos was an important concept. It meant "opportunity" and was often used in rhetoric to designate the right moment of speech (see, for instance, Gorgias, who speaks of *kairou chronou techne* [the art of knowing the right time]; fr. B-13).

7. Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation*, 242. Thus, for Blanchot the everyday is radically atheist, and the Lord's Prayer "secretly impious: give us our daily bread, give us to live accordingly to the daily existence that leaves no place for a relation between Creator and creature." Ibid., 245.

8. Ibid., 242.

9. Kirchner, 215; my translation.

10. Lefebvre, "Everyday and Everydayness," 11.

11. The phrase *a to już* serves to convey the same pattern of temporality in the description of the death of Janek, another friend of the narrator, in the volume of poetry *Misdirected Sentiments* (*Mylne wzruszenia*, 1961). Its use as the title of the poem emphasizes the phrase's role:

> "this is it" ["and it already was"]
> I'm looking at Janek with the oxygen tube
> he's falling asleep
> what'll happen?
> I'm thinking
> when will it happen
> I arrive
> I'm looking with an oxygen tube

he's falling asleep
when will it happen
not yet not yet
I'm leaving for a moment
I'll come back soon
I'm asking over the phone
—how is Janek?
and it already was (*Utwory zebrane*, 1:309)

In the *Memoir*, the phrase appears while the narrator describes a "communion out of hunger" (i.e., a holy communion performed in extreme situations when no wafer can be provided). In the poem, *to już* has a function similar to that in Baśka's story; the same sense of belatedness (and invisibility) is conveyed in the *Memoir* vis-à-vis the sacred moment.

12. Białoszewski, *Utwory zebrane*, 9:11.
13. Certeau, 194.
14. Białoszewski, *Utwory zebrane*, 5:172–73.
15. By "discreet" I understand the quiet presence of the narrator within the narration as a voice relating the story without conveying emotional engagement.
16. As Adam Zagajewski points out in his review of *Hums, Lumps, Threads*, "W Warszawie jak na wsi" (In Warsaw as in the countryside), Białoszewski's narrator lives according to seasonal changes.
17. Lefebvre, "Everyday and Everydayness," 9.
18. As Lefebvre calls the everyday in Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation*, 240.
19. Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation*, 239.
20. The most straightforward form of these repetitions is the "doubling" in Białoszewski's post-*Memoir* writings, i.e., the same motifs and events are represented in prose, poetry, and drama.
21. This is what the narrator catches in the headlights of a bus travelling a country road in *Konstancin, Utwory zebrine*, 9:162.
22. Lefebvre, "Everyday and Everydayness," 10.
23. Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation*, 238.
24. Wittgenstein, par. 129.
25. Aural receptiveness minimizes the intervention into the world; in the post-*Memoir* works, Białoszewski's narrator tends to favor it over other forms of receptiveness. Although his overtly colloquial accounts of the daily conversations of and with his friends provide rich material for the exploration of Białoszewski's sense of sociology and theatricality of language, such episodes as Próżna Street highlight a different aspect of Białoszewski's auratic leitmotifs: namely, that listening to the "snoring courtyard" connotes no understanding. Many sounds represented in the small narrations present different levels of inarticulatibility and trigger different emotional responses (from enchantment to, in other episodes, horror). The snores of Próżna enchant the narrator,

but they are not meant as requests for mutual understanding between the narrator and the snorers. Neither are they meant as communication; rather they function as a pure expression that cannot be translated into any other form of expression, thus signifing the limit of symbolic substitution.

26. Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation*, 241.