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THE POST-AVANT-GARDE LANGUAGE IN THE CHAMBER REPERTOIRE OF THE *ARS POETICA* ENSEMBLE: DIRECTIONS OF ASSIMILATION

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Abstract

Chamber music genres in the 20th and 21st centuries have undergone a comprehensive process of reconceptualization. For the musical art in the Republic of Moldova, as well as in the international musical sphere, the 20th and 21st centuries represented an innovative period marked by numerous experiments and challenges. In a context where the environment, society, and science were in a continuous process of modernization, updating musical language became not only inevitable but essential to reflect the complexity of the contemporary era. The field of chamber music proved to be an ideal space for new explorations, offering composers a favorable environment for redefining sonic material. In this context, the Ars Poetica ensemble, established alongside the launch of the International Festival Days of New Music in Chișinău, made an essential contribution to promoting and valuing contemporary chamber music from the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: *Ars Poetica, avant-garde techniques, chamber music, contemporary language*

Introduction

The activities carried out by the Ars Poetica ensemble over more than three decades constitute a significant benchmark for the development and valuation of contemporary chamber creation in the Republic of Moldova. The ensemble's varied repertoire reflects the compositional orientations specific to contemporary music and highlights the process of assimilating post-avant-garde language into Bessarabian chamber creation. Local composers aim to expand the expressive possibilities of musical discourse, engaging in a continuous process of refinement aligned with the evolution of international contemporary music. In this context, the ensemble's repertoire highlights the use of a wide range of

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compositional techniques and procedures specific to post-avant-garde language, such as aleatoricism, sonorism, rhythmic and timbral techniques, pointillism, heterophony, etc.

1. Techniques for Integrating Post-Avant-Garde Language into the Chamber Repertoire of the Ars Poetica Ensemble

Timbral techniques are the first to which composers turn in search of new sonorities. We note a great variety of extended techniques in the repertoire of the Ars Poetica ensemble, ranging from the performance mark "sur mecanism" in Vlad Burlea's work *Existence* No. 2, which involves producing sounds by striking the body of the instrument, or "col legno" indicating the use of the wood of the bow in string instrument groups (found in works such as 8 Pieces by Igor Iachimciuc or Aspirations et tendencies by Anastasia Lazarenco), to more specific performance indications such as:

- "**tongue attack without sound**" in *Pentaculus minus* by Ghenadie Ciobanu, which involves executing the tongue attack motion without producing a tone—a technique used particularly in wind instruments.
- "**dietro al ponticello**" *in Sound Study* No. 5 by Gh. Ciobanu, which indicates bowing between the bridge and the tailpiece (rather than between the fingerboard and the bridge), producing a harsh, at times metallic sonic effect that gives the music an unusual, spectral color.
- "**glissando** si preme con le dita della mano sinistra l'arco dal ponticello sul tasto" in *Duo* for Violin and Vibraphone by Vladimir Beleaev, which directs a glissando created by pressing the string with the fingers of the left hand while continuously moving them from the bridge area (ponticello) toward the fingerboard (tasto) or vice versa, contributing to a fluid transition between pitches and a progressive alteration of timbre.

Within the category of timbral techniques, we also encounter a multitude of **tone clusters**, noted under various forms in the scores of local composers. Relevant examples include *Concerto for Ars Poetica* by Dmitrii Chițenco; *Sound Study* No. 3 by Gh. Ciobanu; *Duo* for Violin and Vibraphone by Vl. Beleaev; *Existence* No. 1 by Vl. Burlea, among others.

Rhythmic techniques, such as polyrhythm and polymeter, become essential elements of contemporary composition. They integrate organically into the language of avant-garde works, highlighting the decisive role of rhythm and metro-rhythmic mobility in configuring new sonorities. At the same time, they help emphasize form and allow for a freer treatment of musical material, while simultaneously offering a means of valuing and reinterpreting the folkloric substratum of the works. The work Incantation for tenor saxophone (or bass clarinet) and piano, composed by Snejana Pîslari, stands out as an example of an original approach to polymeter. The alternation of various time signatures—4/4, 3/4, 5/4, 11/8, 7/8, and 6/4—complemented by tempo indications (molto accelerando, poco più mosso, ritenuto, syncopations, and various

embellishments) amplifies the improvisational character of the piece, clearly bringing it closer to the genre of an instrumental fantasy.



Example No. 1 – Snejana Pîslari, Incantation, measures 5–7

Another work from the catalog of composer S. Pîslari joining this approach is *Two Wings of One Soul* for B-flat clarinet and piano.

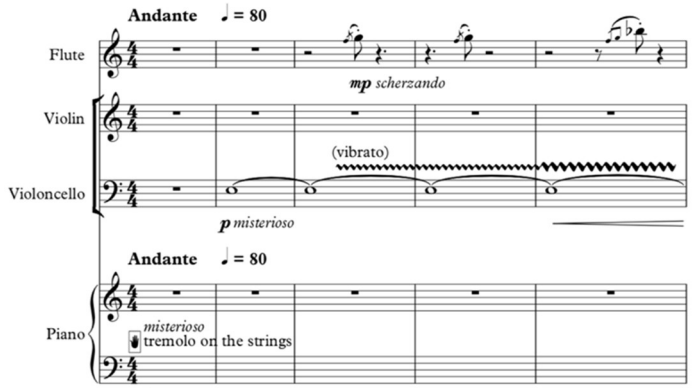
Metric and rhythmic freedom often appears in works addressing themes of the cosmic spectrum or sacredness. Relevant examples in this regard are *Pentaculus minus*, the *Sound Studies*, and *Morning Shadows* by Gh. Ciobanu. Regarding techniques for organizing harmonic language, polytonality, **polymodalit**y, and polychords are among the frequently utilized procedures in works performed by the Ars Poetica ensemble. These methods of structuring melodic and harmonic material recur constantly across the works analyzed over three decades, whether in fragments, distinct sections, or entire compositions. Inseparable from avant-garde music, they integrate organically into contemporary musical language.

One of the broadly used compositional techniques in many analyzed works is **aleatoricism**, an improvisational technique involving a degree of performer engagement in the compositional act. We distinguish two types of aleatoricism:Determinate or Controlled Aleatoricism: The composer provides the macro-structure of the work in the score, while the performer improvises at the micro-structural level.

Among the compositions utilizing controlled aleatoric elements, we mention: Concerto for Ars Poetica and *Kyrie* by D. Chițenco; *From the Songs and Dances of the Melancholic Moon No. 3* and part II of *Sound Study No. 3: White Silence* by Gh. Ciobanu; *Existence No. 1: Shadows and Moon Horn from Telluric Rites and Dances* by Vl. Burlea. Aleatoricism is realized through the freedom of improvising sonic passages or rhythm, the continuous repetition of musical fragments over timed seconds indicated by the composer, etc. Indeterminate or Uncontrolled Aleatoricism: The composer proposes a general sketch of the composition, granting the performer greater freedom during execution. This type of aleatoricism

appears partially in works such as: *Concerto for Ars Poetica* by D. Chiţenco; In Ion's *Garden* by I. Iachimciuc; *Sufferings and Astromusic I* by O. Palymski. In these compositions, the performer is sometimes given the opportunity to decide on the duration of the piece. Elements of conventional notation appearing in certain structural sections allow complete freedom of interpretation regarding pitch, rhythm, and musical form. Only dynamic shades and specific performance procedures are predetermined by the composer.

Another encountered procedure is **pointillism**, a musical composition technique from the second half of the 20th century in which individual tones prevail over melodic motifs or chords, being treated as the primary carriers of musical expression and ideas. Pointillist technique is used by Vl. Beleaev in *In Memoriam and Farewell*; by A. Lazarenco in *Flashes*; and by I. Iachimciuc in In *Ion's Garden*, among others. A true realization of pointillist technique occurs in the first movement (Andante) of the composition Flashes for flute, violin, cello, and piano, written by young composer A. Lazarenco. The musical material of this piece is presented in short-duration tones isolated by rests, initially stated in the flute part against a noisy sonic background created by a sustained pedal effect in the cello and a tremolo on the piano strings.



Example nr. 2 a – Anastasia Lazarencu, Flashes, Movement I, ms. 1-5

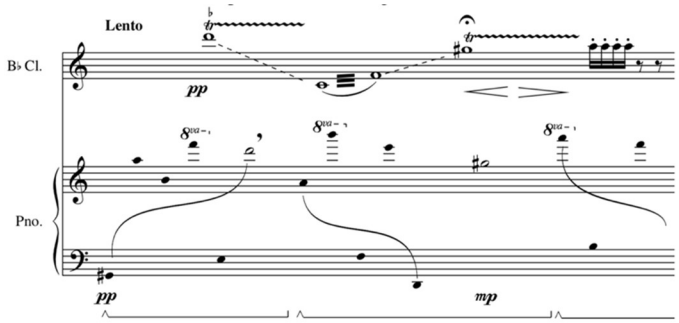
Subsequently, the pointillist technique is intensified, with musical material presented predominantly through wide leaps across various registers in all instruments, producing a colorful dispersion of timbral hues from shimmering sonic points. In the piano part, the composer introduces several durationless sonic points of approximate pitch, over which the performer improvises until reaching a point indicated by a horizontal arrow above or below the stave.



Example nr. 2 b – Anastasia Lazarencu, Flashes, Movement I, ms 15-18

The pointillist technique utilized in the very first section of the work fully justifies its title—Flashes—as the points through which the musical material is stated reflect and illustrate a succession of musical sparks.

Another example of pointillist technique can be found in the 5th section (*Ever Calling Ion*) from I. Iachimciuc's piece for B-flat clarinet and piano, titled *In Ion's Garden*. Through this technique, the composer reflects the searchings of the lyrical hero announced in the section's subtitle.



Example No. 3 – Igor Iachimciuc, In Ion's Garden, No. 5

Composer and conductor of the Ars Poetica ensemble, O. Palymski, employs pointillism in his oeuvre, successfully integrating the technique into works such as *Passacaglia, Perception*, as well as *Chamber Concertos* Nos. 5 and 6.

Passacaglia for instrumental ensemble was written in 1994 and presents a symbiosis between pointillist technique and polyphonic procedures. The theme of the passacaglia, played on the campanelli (glockenspiel), consists of 12 distinct pitches arranged according to pointillist technique, reminiscent of a row from Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone system. Following the conventions of the passacaglia genre, the theme is subsequently repeated ten times, gradually built upon by the instruments of the ensemble. The clarinet enters first, followed by oboe,

flute, bassoon, and trumpet, progressively joined by the string group, culminating in a tutti moment before ending abruptly on a general rest.



Example No. 4 – Oleg Palymski, Passacaglia, measures 1–18

Palymski's *Passacaglia* stands as an example of a work composed according to the model of traditional genres and forms, yet built from completely innovative musical material.

Another work signed by O. Palymski is *Perception*—a chamber symphony in three movements approaching the genre of a sinfonietta, composed in 1995. In the first movement, the composer integrates pointillism as a method for developing musical material. Starting from a complete, well-defined theme at the beginning, the composer fragments this theme and presents its elements through various rhythmic formulas, creating a typical pointillist texture.



Example No. 5 – Oleg Palymski, Perception, Movement I, measures 20–23

Elements of pointillism can also be found periodically in other sections of the piece, as well as in the works of other composers.

Heterophony is another composition technique relevant to the 20th century that originates in traditional music and stems from the oral character of folkloric genres. As researcher Alice Tacu notes, heterophony, which "appears in (...) art music in the first half of the 20th century, redimensions the archaic meaning of heterophony and creates a platform

for theoretical exploration within contemporary music. The theoretical >definition of heterophony in art music takes shape only in the 1960s, starting with Pierre Boulez and the cornerstone book of post-war serialism, <<Penser la musique aujourd'hui>>. In the Romanian space, heterophony takes shape in the studies of Clemansa Liliana Firca and Ştefan Niculescu, subsequently splitting into two existential branches: the conceptualization formulated by Tiberiu Olah and the theoretical foundation laid by Ştefan Niculescu, who epistemologically established heterophony"[2]. In the 20th century, heterophony transformed from a compositional technique into a mode of thinking.

Starting from the heterophonic treatment of melodic lines, this technique penetrates all layers of musical creation: texture, rhythm, etc. Examples of this are *Chamber Concertos* Nos. 5 and 6 signed by O. Palymski. *Chamber Concerto* No. 5, composed in 1992—the year of the inaugural edition of the International Festival Days of New Music—brought a new treatment of the chamber concerto genre to the local compositional canon. Following an introduction built on a sustained flute note, the theme of the first movement is stated, exhibiting a clear heterophonic character with polyphonic elements. The theme is presented simultaneously by violin I, viola, and cello, and is later taken up by violin II and subsequently the double bass. The exposition is executed in stretto, with the theme also appearing in inverted and augmented forms. The harpsichord, acting as accompaniment, plays a series of chords constructed from the pitches of the theme.



[2] Tacu A. „George Draga şi eterofonia în anii ’70.” În: *Revista Muzica* nr. 1, 2023 (pp. 41 – 58), 43.

Example No. 6 – Oleg Palymski, Chamber Concerto No. 5, Movement I, rehearsal mark 1

In addition to heterophonic techniques, this concerto involves improvisational elements from aleatoricism, metro-rhythmic freedom, and pointillist elements. Chamber Concerto No. 6, written three years later in 1995, follows the same blueprint but is treated with greater freedom.

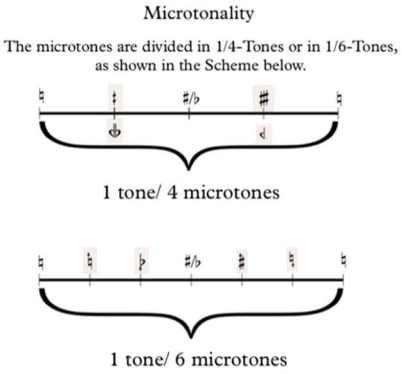
Composer Vl. Burlea applies heterophony in the fantasy *Once Upon a Time* for horn and piano, which carries the subtitle *Fantasy on a Folk Theme,* where the composer develops a folkloric quote—the hora fetelor (girls' hora). The author specifies the genre of the piece as a fantasy, which in his concept implies a free interpretation of the folk motif utilizing various improvisational techniques. Through the use of heterophony, the same folk-derived melodic line is presented simultaneously in slightly varied, ornamented, or rhythmically altered versions, producing a dense yet flexible sonic texture. This procedure helps highlight the folkloric layer underpinning the work and evokes the performance practice of traditional music. At the same time, syncopated rhythms, polyrhythmic overlaps, and improvisational passages amplify the expressiveness of the musical discourse and reinforce the piece's folk character.



Example No. 7 – Vlad Burlea, Once Upon a Time, measures 1–3

Heterophonic techniques reappear in sections of 8 Pieces for Flute, Clarinet, Violin, and Cello by I. Iachimciuc; in Pentaculus minus by Gh. Ciobanu; Astromusic I by O. Palymski; String Quartet No. 1 by C. Spătaru, among others.

Microtonality (microchromatics) is a specialized musical system of interval division centered on the microinterval—that is, an interval smaller than a semitone. Thus, microintervals include quarter-tones, third-tones, sixth-tones, etc. The microtonal system is used by composer Gh. Ciobanu in pieces No. 2 and No. 4 of From the Songs and Dances of the Melancholic Moon, as well as in part II of Sound Study No. 3: White Silence. Composer C. Spătaru provides an explanatory key for microtonal accidentals in the preface to his String Quartet No. 1.



Example No. 8 – Cristian Spătaru, String Quartet No. 1, preface

Another technique found in most of the analyzed works is **sonorism**, a modern compositional approach focusing on overall sound mass and the exploration of instrumental timbres and ambient soundscapes. The use of this technique creates complex sonic spaces where musical sound objects are most frequently perceived as undifferentiated by pitch. Composers introduce clusters, multiphonic chords, and microtonality into their works, generating novel sonic effects and unique timbral colors.

2. Conclusions

In conclusion, virtually every piece mentioned above incorporates elements from all the listed techniques to a greater or lesser degree, often with a stronger emphasis on one in particular. Thus, local contemporary creations can be viewed as anthologies of modern compositional techniques and procedures through which composers experiment and articulate their artistic searchings toward consolidating a distinct, original expressive style.

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