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# “Spaces of Silence” and “Secret Music of the Word”: Verbo-Musical Minimalism in the Poetry of Gennady Aygi and Elizaveta Mnatsakanova

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**Abstract:** Two major poets of the Russian Neo-Avant-Garde—Gennady Aygi and Elizaveta Mnatsakanova—created textual works that transgressed the limits of language and the borders between the arts. Each pursued their own method of the visualization and musicalization of verbal matter, yet both share a particular musical sensibility, which guarantees the integrity of the linguistic structure of their verse, despite the fragmentation and logical incoherence of its elements. The atonal (serial) musical tradition has a special significance for these experimental poetics of minimalism. Mnatsakanova, herself a musicologist, who was friends with Dmitri Shostakovich, not only used the techniques of contemporary music composition in her visual and sound poetry, but also collaborated with electronic musicians in her recorded poetry performances. Aygi experimented with language, not only crossing the boundaries between music and poetry, but also between sound and silence. For him, music was a way of expressing pre-verbal subjectivity and reproducing signs of meaning that are hidden from ordinary perception. In his poems, Aygi brought together Chuvash folk music with experimental techniques of minimalism, correlating his own work with such Soviet unofficial composers as Andrey Volkonsky and Sofia Gubaidulina. This paper will address the issues of transmutation between verbal, visual, and sound art in poetic minimalism of the Soviet-era underground.

**Keywords:** Aygi; Mnatsakanova; poetry; Neo-Avant-Garde; minimalism; musicality; silence; language



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## 1. Introduction

The destruction of utopian ideals characteristic of the early 20th century entailed a change in axiology and philosophy in the culture of the second half of the century. Theodor Adorno’s now classic idea, to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, based on the traumatic experience of war and genocide, explains the existential nature of the fundamental difference between the art of the first and second halves of the last century. In this regard, the poetic experience of the German-speaking poet, a native of the Eastern European city of Chernivtsi, Paul Celan, who had a huge impact on European literature, is indicative of the work of many Russophone poets and intellectuals of the second half of the twentieth century.

Finding themselves in a paradoxical situation of the simultaneous impossibility of speaking and keeping silent, poets were looking for new ways to articulate post-traumatic experience and self-identification. This predetermined the specifics of the transfer of the achievements of Avant-Garde art into the culture of the second half of the 20th century, in view of the complex existential experience. The appeal to the Avant-Garde tradition in various poetic practices was associated with the poets’ strive for comprehending their own linguistic experience and subjectivity status. At the same time, the cardinal difference in the aesthetic programs of the early Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde is the post-Utopian

nature of the latter, a critical reassessment of the universalist projects of the early Avant-Garde aimed at creating a new language and transforming reality, the individual, and society with the power of words.

Nowadays, critics conceptualize the Avant-Garde of the second half of the century in terms of the 'third wave', 'Neo-Avant-Garde', and 'Neo-Futurism' and the like, when individual poetic practices that are not bound by common manifesto or theoretical statements are united under the general name of Neo-Avant-Garde. From Neo-Avant-Garde, we understand the general characteristic of the work of individual poets from the second half of the twentieth century, associated with the development and rethinking of the aesthetics and linguistic experiments of the early Avant-Garde. One of the main features of Neo-Avant-Garde poetry, which will interest us in this article, is going beyond the boundaries of the text, balancing on the edge of sign and object, the textual and the physical, and the verbal and the extra-verbal (visual, musical, or performative). Our focus will be on the forms of multimediality characteristic of the Russophone poetic Neo-Avant-Garde, namely on the interaction of literary and musical codes in the space of an experimental text.

The transition from Avant-Garde to Neo-Avant-Garde in the conditions of the Soviet era, full of tragedies and catastrophes, was not a continuous process. As Irina Sandomirskaya showed in her illuminating study of violence and the blockade of the word under Stalinism, the pressure of totalitarian language accounted, among other things, for Oberiuty's<sup>1</sup> withdrawals into silence, apophaticism, and alogism. Paralyzed by power and violence, the word "seems to lose its corporeality, turning into 'babble', into secret writing, into OBERIU's transcendental alchemy" (Sandomirskaya 2013, p. 9). A formerly active, energetic word falls into a state when "the patient, not the agent of speech, takes the place of the subject of speech—a 'victim' of language [...] when the word no longer carries a meaning" (Sandomirskaya 2013, p. 9). As Sandomirskaya suggests, all of Konstantin Vaginov's<sup>2</sup> novels were an example of that, with their parody taking the form of dialogue. It appears that Alexander Vvedensky's poetry was one of the last convulsions of the agony of the poetic word in the era of political terror—the era when poetic utterance beyond the rational logos lost any chance of survival. The space for such poetry was eventually confined to the dimensions of Daniil Kharm's little locked suitcase, holding the manuscripts of his fellow Chinari, which Yakov Druskin managed to preserve during the Leningrad blockade, the War, and the persecutions that followed. Druskin himself had no choice but to withdraw into the apophatic asceticism of his diaries, where he commented on Vvedensky's poems. The decomposition of logical connections in the language of poetry was forcibly halted, giving way to the radioactive decomposition of the atom at Soviet test sites.

The dissolution of language in a deformed speech environment, as a result of catastrophic processes in history and society, continued in the post-war period, in languages other than Russian, which were allowed no forms of utterance beyond the logos of Soviet poetic discourse. Allegorically, this era of poetic timelessness and fatigue, when 'big words' turn into 'screams' without finding a new language, is conveyed in a blockade-time poem by Oberiuty's successor, Gennady Gor, "The creek sick of speech/Told water it took no side./The water sick of silence/At once began again to shriek" (Gor 2016, p. 29). After World War II, the work of Romanian–German poet Paul Celan became a successor to the poetic language of Andrey Bely, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Osip Mandelstam. His concept of 'language mesh' (*Sprachgitter*), which implies that language could be a means of poetic communication during the prison regime of ideological violence, urged poetry to turn to the 'dumb', 'silent', and 'untold' zones of discourse about language. Against Martin Heidegger's *Gerede* and Walter Benjamin's *Geschwätz* of the masses, as they figure in the context of authoritarian language with Babel-like power, Celan opposes *lallen*, or inner 'muttering'.

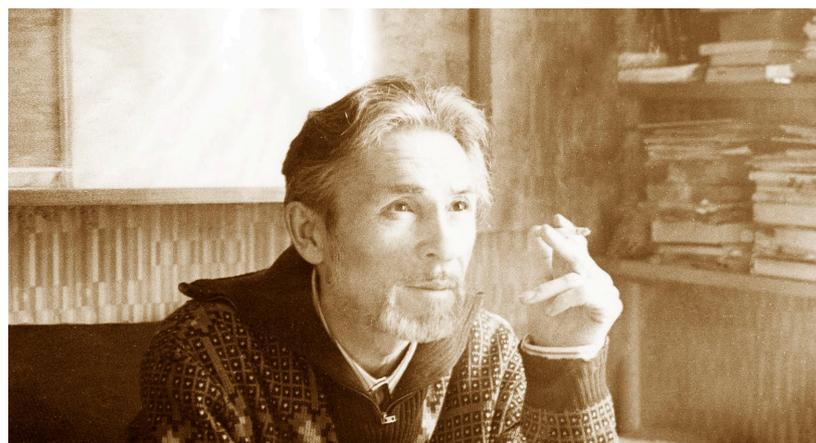
In his poem "Tübingen, January", Celan (2012) appeals to the glossolalia of the ancient prophets, as follows: "Came, if there/came a man,/came a man to the world, today, with the patriarchs'/light-beard: he could,/if he spoke of this/time, he/could/only babble

and babble,/ever- ever-/moremore". In the German original, *nur lallen und lallen* literally resonates with the ancient Greek glossas lalein ('speaking in tongues'). At the end of the poem, the meaningless word Pallaksch is repeated twice—a reference to Friedrich Hölderlin's glossolalia produced in a fit of poetic delirium, used here to convey the 'beyond-logos' experience repressed by authoritarian language. The multilingualism and 'idle talk' of people is once again surmounted by the poet's dislalia, as in another verse by Celan<sup>3</sup>, as follows: "Eroded by/the beamwind of your speech/the gaudy chatter of the pseudo-/experienced—the hundred-/tongued perjury-/poem, the noem". The splitting of words into fragmented morphemes, the fragmentation of lexemes, the atomization of prepositions, conjunctions, and particles are all characteristic of Celan's poetry—all these techniques inaugurate a new poetic turn in the deformation of an ossified and 'disenchanted' language.

Largely inspired by Celan, the idea of the decomposition of the word is resuscitated in Russian Neo-Avant-Garde poetry by Gennady Aygi (Figures 1 and 2)<sup>4</sup> (1934–2006) and Elizaveta Mnatsakanova (Figure 3) (1922–2019)<sup>5</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Gennady Aygi in his house in Denisova Gorka Village.



**Figure 2.** Gennady Aygi.

Aygi's free verse speaks to inaudible "spaces of silence" ("However, muteness is a tribute—and for myself—silence",<sup>6</sup> from an early 1956 poem), mystical "singing without words", "places of no-thought", "empty stages", "long pauses", and "tranquility of a vowel". In Aygi's poetry, voices are orchestrated using multiple punctuation marks, or rather—marks of the 'cessation' of thought and speech (as, for instance, in his poem "Island

of Daisies in a Clearing”). Alogism finds new spaces of expression, as follows: “I notice one thing: something shaky-logical, previously unfamiliar, becomes quite ‘logical’ in this work, as if I am learning to speak some new language” (Ayki 2001, p. 157). Aygi’s silent poetry is a poetry “speaking in a different way” (Ayki 2001, p. 158), “with that essential Word in which the silence of the pre-Word is concealed” (Ayki 2001, p. 159). Glossolalia is present here both in its pure form, through the heritage of Chuvash shamanism<sup>7</sup>, and transformed as an interlingual transparency, as a ‘hum of language’, resonating in various national idioms. Thus, it transcends not only the uniformity of the ‘Babelian confusion’ of languages in favor of a unique translanguing speech, but also the linguistic limitations of verse systems<sup>8</sup>.



**Figure 3.** Elizaveta Mnatsakanova.

Ayki and Mnatsakanova<sup>9</sup> share a particular musical sensibility, which guarantees the integrity of the linguistic structure of their verse, despite the fragmentation and logical incoherence of its elements. The legacy of Anton Webern and the atonal musical tradition has a special significance for this kind of Avant-Garde poetry. This was already the case for the Chinari. Yakov Druskin noted the affinity of Alexander Vvedensky’s poetics of nonsense with dodecaphonic musical techniques. Just as atonal music violates the principle of gravitation of sound pitch and sounds become significant by themselves in their position within a series, in poetry of the absurd, the principle of semantic connection is violated and words undergo desemantization. Each line of Vvedensky’s verse contains a main idea plus a ‘drawback word’ that displaces the logical structure of the poetic utterance.

Elizaveta Mnatsakanova’s poetic speech moves along similar lines. The musical intoning characteristic of her poetry introduces a new community of sound, meaning, voice, and phenomenon into the language. As Anna Glazova (2003) insightfully notes, “in this division, in this primordial caesura, poetry finds its beginning. Poetry inflicts wounds on itself in the search for the true essence of language, in overcoming the boundaries of individuality, achieving a new community, a new fusion”. In what follows, we will consider the linguistic poetics of two leading figures of the literary underground of the Soviet era—Mnatsakanova and Aygi—through the prism of their immanent musicality.

## **2. Elizaveta Mnatsakanova: “Secret Music of the Word” as Withdrawal into the Linguistic Underground**

Back in the 19th century, the French symbolist poet Paul Verlaine outlined the priorities of modern poetry as the desire *for music that is above all*, or, to more literally interpret his metaphor *de la musique avant toute chose*, for music that stands *ahead* of all things, and which, accordingly, leaves behind everything else, namely literature. The problem that we will

address in this article is located, as it were, in a no-man's-land—not belonging, strictly speaking, either to philology or to musicology, or even to the philosophy of music, but located in between these domains in the as-yet-underdetermined area of *musical verbality*, or *verbal musicality*. Elizaveta Mnatsakanova's work belongs to this area, a zone of dynamic transition from music to words, from musical existence to linguistic existence, and from musical thinking to poetic thinking. Thus, we will not be talking about the return of word to music, but about a new verbal–musical unity, where both word and music retain their independence, adopting some features from each other, opening up to each other, and, thereby, resonating in each other with new meanings. We could classify this problem as what Roman Jakobson (1959) defined as *transmutation*, that is, translation from the language of music to the language of poetry. In this essay, then, we will discuss the issue of “verbal music” as “the other music” and of poetry as “the music's Other”<sup>10</sup>.

Most critics and literary scholars classify Mnatsakanova's poetry as experimental literature and the Neo-Avant-Garde. Here, we do not undertake to discuss her position in the canon of modern Russian poetry. We will be interested in one particular subject, namely Mnatsakanova's orientation towards the musical compositionality of poetic works.

Musical techniques in the poetry of Mnatsakanova have already become the subject of scholarly analysis. Gerald Janecek (2003) highlights the most noticeable feature of Mnatsakanova's poetics—the use of musical forms in versification and paronomasia as the main poetic device<sup>11</sup>. The scholar compares the development of the musical theme of her long poem “Requiem” to the work of a composer pursuing the main theme, developing each of its motives separately. The poet herself points out in her self-commentary that the composition of the parts of “Requiem” (subtitled “Autumn in the infirmary of the innocent sisters”) more or less follows the composition of the Catholic requiem and connects the distribution of the text by voices at the end of the poem with polyphony and the musical form of fugue.

Janecek also raises the question of simultaneity, how to read this work, following the musical principle of the simultaneous sound of several melodic voices or lines? On the one hand, this seems technically impossible; on the other, such reading is akin to musical structuring in modern composer practices, when disparate musical fragments are performed in aleatory order (cf., for example, with Pierre Boulez' method of ‘structural interpretation’). At the same time, the visual appears to support the sound—the reader reconstructs a kind of ‘musical–visual poetic structure’ after the author.

In another study, Janecek (2006a) discusses the process of the birth of a verbal text from music, noting that the music of the word, its phonic potential, plays, in this process, as big a role as the phonic potential of the musical material—sound, tone, and sounding matter as such, especially in the work of a professional musician and musicologist like Mnatsakanova<sup>12</sup>. The poet herself admitted “reading scores for a symphony orchestra completely restructures thinking, makes it stereoscopic, phonic, three-dimensional, multilinear” (Mnatsakanova 2003). And this is the key to the architectonics of her poetic texts.

Yet, Mnatsakanova's technique is different from the so-called ‘sound poetry’, Janecek rightly notes. In particular, the fact that the poetic structure here uses polyphonic technique and contrapuntal forms, shaping its own specific system—a textual–semantic polyphony. However, the main problem, according to the scholar, is the *possibility* to read the text polyphonically. He believes that brevity and variation of text segments help to overcome the difficulties of such reading. The author herself likens the reader of her text to the conductor of an orchestra: “After all, when the conductor looks at the page of the score, he/she reads it not from top to bottom and not from bottom to top, but reads it, embraces it with his vision as a whole, as well as each line simultaneously and in a connected sound with other lines” (Idem). Janecek also comes to the conclusion that the polyphonic musical form of *passacaglia* performed by Mnatsakanova turns out to be surprisingly convenient for poetry.

Vadim Rudnev (1992) makes an attempt to define the unique musicality of Mnatsakanova's poetry from the perspective of the theory of verse. “The musical principle”, he

echoes Janecek, “in the poetry of Mnatsakanova, a professional musician and musicologist, is deeply structure-forming; it determines the metrical, intonational and compositional organization of individual poems and the entire book as a whole”. The combination of prosodically organized linguistic units, constantly repeated and varied, fully satisfy the definition of “motif” in music, according to the critic. The lines in such poetry are not entirely poetic lines, but rather motif configurations, “How to determine the genre of Mnatsakanova’s poems? A lamentation, a prayer, a praise?” asks Rudnev. Not entirely trusting musical analogies, the poet admits that the roots of such a construction lie not only in musical language, but also in sacred language (spells, prayers, and litanies), which are characterized by a weakening of ordinary syntagmatic connections and paradigmatic variation of the same formula<sup>13</sup>.

Mnatsakanova’s linguistic poetics is associated with the tradition of ‘language composing’<sup>14</sup>, which seeks to reveal the hidden ‘verbal music’ of poetic language. Such composing naturally modifies the tradition of reading this kind of poetry. It should be reading–hearing and reading–listening. A characteristic feature of this poetry is the absolute fusion of poetic matter, borrowing its quality from musical matter. This is a fusion that breaks down differently with each act of reading. The following question arises here: does the printed text still determine the reading order? With the traditional approach, obviously yes. Literary and linguistic analysis of the text assumes that any element of the text is significant precisely in the position in which it is fixed in the printed text. But, if we approach the text as a verbal–musical unity, in which the signs are arbitrarily distributed in the printed space (as in the scores of modern Avant-Garde music), then it turns out that the discreteness of linguistic signs in a poetic text of this nature is only an inevitable fixation of one of the possible sequence orders of linguistic units. Real reading (including the author’s reading) will always be variable. And this variability, as it seems, is the main principle of Mnatsakanova’s poetics, which she draws from music<sup>15</sup>.

These principles are quite consistent with Mnatsakanova’s own practice of both writing and reciting her texts. Thus, the three currently existing editions of the poem “Requiem: Autumn in the infirmary of the innocent sisters” are, at the same time, independent works and variations of the same text. Moreover, the author considers the piece’s self-translation into German not as a translation, but as a “variant in another language” (Mnatsakanova 2003, p. 258). Upon careful reading of the different versions, it turns out that the variations affected only the combinatorics of the parts and particles of the poem itself. The same applies to the way she recites her work, whereby individual phrases, words, and parts of words are not intoned at all in the traditional manner of poetic reading. The author skillfully reproduces with her voice the subtlest overtones and changes in tone in the implementation of the ‘motifs’ and ‘themes’ of the “Requiem”, which is heard in the audio recording of the poem’s reciting, published on CD in 2007 to the electronic soundtrack of the Austrian composer Wolfgang Musil.

Mnatsakanova wrote her magnum opus, “Requiem”, while staying at a “hospital for the poor”, which she calls an “infirmary of the innocent sisters”. The poem is an “oratorio”, a *laboratory* of the word, where “voices come to life in sounds and letters”. According to her later self-comments, “Requiem” is “a new model and a new word altogether”. In this poetry, words decompose like bodies in an infirmary over the course of a disease. Particles of words scattered across the page of the score are like disembodied senses, however, integrated through musical laws of composition. A poetic space of ‘pain’ is created when speech turns into rambling, while also striving to heal using the forces of a new graphic and phonic order, as follows:

Брат Септимус	едва ли	Brother Septimus
едва ли е два	бо два ли	only on ly
либо два	бо три ли	or two ly
ли два	бо много	or two
ли	там бы	or
бо два ли	ло	two or
	бо три ли	three or
бо много там бы	либо много там	many were the
	бы	re
ло	ло либо бы	invisible
невидимых	ло	brothers
(Mnatsakanova 2003)		(tr. by Gerald Janecek, unpublished) <sup>16</sup>

Paul Celan’s ‘babble’ and Andrey Bely’s ‘dark glossolalia’ here acquire the force of a kind of medical conspiracy that magically transforms the verbal flow, as follows:

Бродит смерть в беде братбродбраток	brother after brother after fording will rove
Ходит снег тябрябродитбред	roving ford
бродитбродбро	inbritherforoctober upto kneesfording
По колено дитбраток	in woe brotherfordbrotheroc
В дожде тябрябродитбратзабродомбрат	toberrovesraving rovesfordford
Бродит брат	ingbrotheroc
забратомбратзабратомбратбро	toberrovesbrotherafterfordingbrother
(Ibidem)	afterbrotherbrotherafterbrotherr
	oves
	(tr. by Gerald Janecek, unpublished)

Mnatsakanova’s “Requiem”, just like her earlier poem “Little Requiem” from the book *Arcadia*, as well as Gennady Aygi’s “Presentiment of a Requiem” and Anna Akhmatova’s classic “Requiem”, is also a liturgy for the primordial word, the ever-nascent word, the word through a child’s perspective, which has not yet been dismembered into meanings. An example of such a word is *звонкойволга* from a children’s song, which, together with the homophonic phrase *и волк ягненка уволок* from Ivan Krylov’s fable, becomes the main leitmotif of Mnatsakanova’s book *Metamorphosen* (Netzkowa (Mnatsakanjan) 1988)<sup>17</sup>.

Despite the seemingly static nature of the text on the printed page, Mnatsakanova’s poetry demonstrates a freedom of language that is made possible by its musical elements. In her own words, this is a “freed music”, which “encompasses everything and keeps in its depths an entire immeasurable ocean of performance” (Mnatsakanova 2006, p. 151). However, her sound poetry cannot be categorized as a kind of zaum. Pure sound poetry is most often limited to the sonorous aspects of poetic language, bearing only a formal resemblance to music. Mnatsakanova’s poetry employs the principles of musical composition; musical techniques structure the sounding stream to a much greater extent than in pure sonoric verse. Unlike pure zaum, this kind of poetry does not obscure or eliminate meaning—it enters into a free play of meanings. ‘Free’, however, does not mean ‘whatever the reader wants’. The semantic frame of the text, fixed in its verbal score, sets a certain mood (what composers call *Stimmung*)—a topic or several topics that develop through free association as the process of reading or listening unfolds. Mnatsakanova’s major poem “Requiem”, for example, employs key musical motifs such as ‘death’, ‘doom’, ‘brotherhood’, ‘sisterhood’, ‘septenary’, ‘light’, ‘resurrection’, etc.

Unlike traditional verse poetry, Mnatsakanova’s texts are fluid and processual. In music, form is always procedural, as the prominent music theorist Boris Asaf’ev (1930) showed. The properties of musical form—the unity of the different and the “otherness of what was previously”, the fluidity of the musical elements, the variability of the sound flow, and the interconnectedness of the elements of the whole—are fully manifested in her poetic works. The verbal and musical form here is not just a flow, but a process; not just

movement, but advancement (*processus*), i.e., change of states. A word (part of a word or even a separate letter) repeated two or three times or more is not a tautology, but a musical repetition that unravels the semantic potential of the word.

The function of multiple spaces in Mnatsakanova's word music is to generate meaning. In ordinary written speech, space serves as a simple delimiter of linguistic signs. In traditional poetry, it acts as a rhythmic and semantic element. By liberating the possibilities of spaces, the verbal music in Mnatsakanova's texts brings them to the forefront of poetic expression. Spaces become as significant as alphabetic characters. Often the space here is part of the word itself, its inaudible shadow, or "absent structure" (to use Umberto Eco's term (see [Eco 2002](#))). A space sounds no less sonorous than a spoken word. It not only takes shape in verbal music, but also serves as an active carrier of hidden meaning, and its appearance in one position or another is as non-random as it is variable (Figure 4):



**Figure 4.** From *Das Buch Sabeth* (Mnatsakanova 2018, p. 127).

To recall Stéphane Mallarmé, the discoverer of spaces in a poetic text, a "throw of the dice" (see [Mallarmé 1914](#)) always produces a concrete and immutable result, but the act of throwing itself is fraught with unpredictable and undetermined randomness.

The spaces and suspension points that so delicately and diversely break up the continuous flow of words in Mnatsakanova's poetry are nothing more than the implementation of the principle of a musical pause. Silence is hidden in the musical pause. The significance of pauses in music was specifically actualized in music and musicology of the twentieth century, when the key role of the pause and the variety of its functions became clear. Starting with Mallarmé, silence in poetry began to be conceptualized as a certain manifestation of the word. Poetic creativity became the revelation of silence. It is not surprising that Mnatsakanova, as a musician and as a poet, attaches such importance to silence in her work. Velimir Khlebnikov's idea of silence is also important to her—"silence that speaks louder than words. It contains many more words than the thickest novel. It sounds in the soul with quiet, unceasing music. . . ." (Mnatsakanova 2006, p. 136).

Despite the fact that Mnatsakanova herself denied the influence of any techniques of Avant-Garde musical composition on her work, we cannot help but note the affinity of her techniques to the post-war musical Avant-Garde. First of all, minimalism should be mentioned—a technique based on the repetition of musical phrases with minimal variations

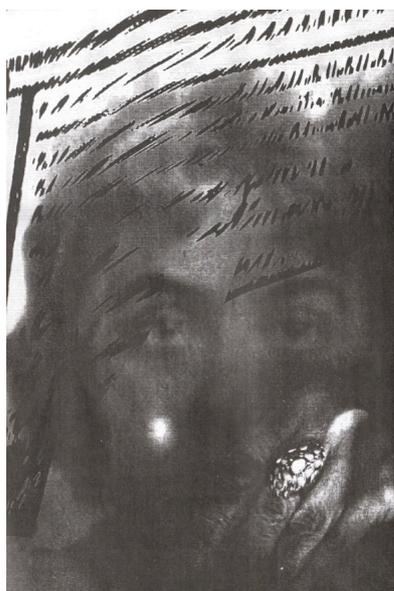
over a long period of time. In part, Mnatsakanova’s poetic techniques are reminiscent of the method of serialism<sup>18</sup>. Considering her experience of working with contemporary electronic musician Wolfgang Musil, who wrote the soundtrack for “Requiem”, there is reason to assume the influence of ambient music, at least on the oral performance of the work by the poet herself.

Another distinctive feature of Mnatsakanova’s ‘verbal music’ is the musical composition of her printed books. She designs and composes the book as if it were a piece of music. The order of the texts and their arrangement on the page obey a single and continuous architectonic principle. The whole book becomes, as it were, sounding, achieving the musical principle of universal harmony, in her own words: “and the whole, its composition and structure, and the smallest parts of it, are perfect and complete harmony. We cannot know how this or that part of the whole comes into being, or with what effort the entire structure is erected. But both the whole and its smallest parts are the embodiment of harmony, its implementation” (Mnatsakanova 2006, p. 148). The score of poetic texts is clearly visible in her poetic cycle “Das Hohelied”, where the right column contains quasi-musical explanations imitating the tempo of the melody in music (“frantically”, “boundlessly”, “sinlessly”, “unrestrained”, etc.); they are laid out here as a separate dimension of the literary text (Figure 5).

разбиты	черепом	надвое	разбитым	
тобой	улыбаюсь	тобой	безоружна	<i>безбрежно</i>
улыбаюсь	тобой	уменьшаюсь		<i>суженый</i>
				<i>безудержно</i>
				<i>безудержны</i>
тебе	уменьшаюсь	тебе	исчезаю	<i>безутешная</i>
				<i>безутешны мы</i>

**Figure 5.** From *Das Hohelied* (Mnatsakanova 2006, p. 64).

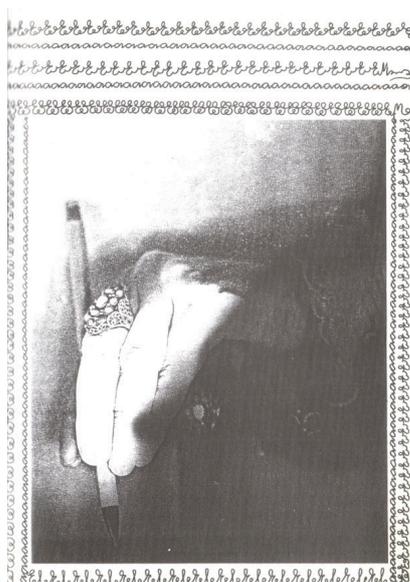
In her prose essays, too, the text is sparse with typographical notations and highlighting, as in the final essay from the book *ARCADIA* (Figures 6 and 7).



**Figure 6.** Picture from Elisaveta Mnatsakanova’s book “Arcadia” (Mnatsakanova 2006).

In an essay dedicated to Anton Chekhov, Mnatsakanova reiterates the idea of the “music of words”, or “music of speech”. A phrase from the writer’s classic play “Seagull”—“men and lions, eagles and partridges”—becomes a leitmotif, a “musical sequence” giving

the essay a kind of melodic unity. “The secret music of the word”, according to Mnatsakanova, is the actual subject matter of Chekhov’s literary language, “What kind of music is this, what is it about? . . . LISTENING to the text, catching and identifying the melody, that deep line that controls the mechanisms of speech movement” (Mnatsakanova 2006, p. 161). The melody of a language is deemed its most important characteristic. In the spirit of Mallarmé, that seer of verbal music and verbal magic, she continues, as follows: “So much the tighter are words bound with other music—not only phonic, audible, but also a secret one, hidden behind the text, behind all visible performance, behind the visible appearance of life” (Mnatsakanova 2006, pp. 167–68). Music, almost a *doppelgänger* of language, forms a new unity—*verbomusic*<sup>19</sup>. Musical intonation brings a new unity of sound and meaning and of voice and phenomenon into language and into the realm of the decomposed Logos.



**Figure 7.** Picture from Elisaveta Mnatsakanova’s book “Arcadia” (Mnatsakanova 2006).

Mnatsakanova’s emigration to Vienna in 1975 was not totally accidental. Germanophone culture was always privileged in her life, starting from the music of the Viennese classics (especially Strauss and Mozart), continuing with translations into Russian or Austrian and German poets (among them Trakl, Rilke, Novalis, Hölderlin, Celan, and others) and ending with her friendship with poets and composers (Artman, Rühm, Musil, and Cizek). In the first years of living in Austria, she already published artistically designed books in German, made self-translations of her poems, and exhibited her own books in two languages in well-known art galleries such as the Albertina.

In a book written in Russian, but with the German title *Beim Tode zugast*, Mnatsakanova applies translingual techniques such as quotations from European poets. A poem from the book quotes the German poet Johannes Bobrowski’s *Im Strom*, which combines love lyric and biblical allusions. The phrase *Als ich dich liebte* echoes Russian phonetics and semantics, involving the mechanism of interlingual paronymy: *liebte*—либо, люблю, люби; *dich*—тех (Figure 8).

As is often the case in Mnatsakanova’s verse, the poem is built like a song set to a particular tune or motif. In this case, the motif of love is performed using the elementary building blocks of two languages—deictic shifters, conjunctions, and interjections. In another poem from this cycle, the Latin word *incognito* is embedded (in a slightly modified version, as *inkognito*) into the motif of Nikolai Gogol’s ‘beautiful, unknown distance’ (*прекрасное далёко*), breaking down into forms that do not exist in Russian (*инко, тоин, and токог*), then into semantically significant word forms *когда* and *гнить*, referencing the key theme of death for the poetic cycle (Figure 9). Processes of this kind persist in the poet’s

later work, with a growing tendency towards interlingual polyphony and musicalization of the verse.

*als ich dich liebte*  
 ах либо ты либо я  
     либо *liebte*  
         много  
 не доллюбили *liebte*  
     *liebte*    либо  
 любят не так  
 ли не    там    ли  
     *liebte*  
 бо  
     *dich liebte*  
         *dich*  
         не тех  
             *dich*    *dich*  
                 *dich*  
         люби    *liebte*  
         мьх    *dich*

Figure 8. Elizaveta Mnatsakanova. From *Beim Tode zugast* (Mnatsakanova 1982, p. 36).

в прекрасном таком  
 в прекрасном моем  
     *inkognito*  
     *inkognitus*  
     *inko ignotus*  
 инко  
 ньи  
 тонн  
 ко  
 ньи  
 токог  
 ни  
 токог  
     да бы подольше подальше бы да  
         свами отвас вмоем  
             прекрасном  
                 таком  
                     далеком  
                         *inkognito*  
 дад да когда да да ког  
     дада  
     лекода  
         леком бы таком и  
         нко  
         гни  
             то ин  
         ко  
         гнит  
         о  
 о мне бы гнить подольше бы  
     свамисвами отвас от вас  
         гноил и  
 в прекрасном далеком  
                     от вас  
  
 INKOGNITUS

Figure 9. Elizaveta Mnatsakanova. From *Beim Tode zugast* (Mnatsakanova 1982, p. 56).

In the first verse of Mnatsakanova's book *Das Buch Sabeth*, we see the Latin forms of the Catholic chorale reverberate in the Russian text. Interlingual paronymy is spread throughout the text in verbal consonances (*laudate*—*когда-то*; *вмарте*—*aparte*; *crimosa*—*грозы*) and in phono-semantic complexes (*lau*—*лау*—*оул*; *март*—*mart*—*мерт*). Some word forms begin to echo in other languages as well ('part'—'apart'—'aparte'—'à part'), further increasing the translingual tension in the text (Figure 10).

*part*  
*apart*  
*á part*  
*aparte*  
 о когда-то  
 о когда-то                      о когда-то  
 повстречались лаудамус лаудате  
 лаудате                      лаудате  
 над  
 про  
 улком  
 гулко                      узком  
 узком                      узким  
*la*  
*udate*                      *crimosa*  
 грозы  
 марта *la*и в марте  
*date*

Figure 10. Elizaveta Mnatsakanova. From *Das Buch Sabeth* (Mnatsakanova 1982, p. 82).

Unfolding into a sound series resembling atonal music, languages sound with new meanings in Mnatsakanova's 'verbal music', as syllables recombine from bilingual lexemes (*viscina* from *oblivisci* + *тайна*; *тайно* from *тайна* + *noli*) (Figure 11). The author's musical thinking allows the reader to listen to the poetic text across the phonetics of different languages and perceive rhythmic patterns in the minimal units of words.

плетение	<i>noli</i>	явление	<i>noli</i>
тайных нитей	<i>obli</i>	тайное	<i>oblivisci</i>
жизни	<i>visci</i>	подспудной	<i>no li</i>
жизни	<i>noli</i>	о цезарь	<i>li</i>
тайное	<i>obli</i>	тайнотай	<i>obli</i>
веление	<i>viscina</i>	тайно	<i>visci</i>

Figure 11. Elizaveta Mnatsakanova. From *Das Buch Sabeth* (Mnatsakanova 1982, p. 88).

In Mnatsakanova's cycle *Metamorphosen*, the juxtaposition of the Russian and German texts and the interspersing of German phrases into the Russian text creates a counter-punctuation of the verse and polyphonization in two languages. The cycle includes, among other songs, Martin Luther's hymns known from Bach's chorales. The book-length poem *Metamorphosen* is based on a sound motif from a children's song and unfolds as a musical composition modeled on Bach's suites. Verses often resemble meditations on a phrase or quotation from someone's poetic or musical work. Intertextual links with arias, romances, lyric poems, liturgies, and prayers permeate the poems. But the intertext is sonically re-orchestrated here. In *Das Buch Sabeth*, discussed earlier, the counterpoint appears more complicated, whereby, along with Slavic wedding and funeral songs in Russian, the author inscribes German prayers across the text (Mnatsakanova 2018, p. 179). In the poem "funeral kolo dance", three-syllable Russian verbs form a counterpoint with three-syllable German negative adjectives (Mnatsakanova 2018, p. 182) in a stereophonic playback of the song-text.

The switch between languages naturally complements the polyphonic structure of verbal and musical unity in the graphic space of the page. Interlingual shifts are designed to provide access to other semiotic dimensions of the verse, both visual and audial at once. Most often, it is musical themes, leitmotifs, and reminiscences that motivate the switch between idioms across the barriers between languages. Mnatsakanova's texts are constantly "transmuting" (to use Roman Jakobson's linguistic term (Jakobson 1959, p. 233)) into consistently different sonic and graphic forms, into different versions of the same text, and into tautological constructions of minimalist music<sup>20</sup>.

From 1975 onwards, Elizaveta Mnatsakanova was writing within a foreign linguistic and cultural environment, thereby making Russian a kind of foreign language for herself. It is characteristic that one of her earliest poems, "Dedication" (1966), prophesies an exit from the Russian environment so that she can become more than just a 'Russian poet'. This exit from one culture and entry into another makes her a translingual—and transmedial—poet, whose work languages sound like musical voices in a polyphonic composition.

### 3. Gennady Aygi: "Spaces of Silence" or Minimalism as Apophaticism

Gennady Aygi's commitment, much like Mnatsakanova's, to the synthesis of arts as a way of breaking through the boundaries of words and signs manifested itself in his intention to merge musical and verbal codes. Aygi introduces musical genres in the titles of his texts, as follows: four "Requiems" dedicated to Boris Pasternak<sup>21</sup>, "Mozart: 'Cassation I'" (1977), "Epilogue: Lullaby-Suvalkiya" (1984), "A little Song for Friends" (1982), "Another Little song for myself" (1982), "Two Little Songs for You and Me" (1986–1987), etc. Musicality becomes a way to access a universal proto-language, to a pre-verbal expression of man's worldview, as with the motif of crying in the texts "Field-fog" (1971), "Weeping-and-I" (1974), "Message in Terza Rima" (1963), "With Singing: Towards an Ending" (1983), and "Dedicated to Singing" (1963). In "Veronica's Book" (1984/1997), dedicated to the poet's baby daughter, the desire to recreate the childish primitive language of intonation and sound rhythm comes to the fore, see the titles of the following poems: "Prologue: Chant—Fatherhoodland", "In the Fourth Month: Attempts at Singing", "Song from the Days of Your Forefathers (Variation on the Theme of a Chuvash Folk-Song)", "Little Tatar Song", "Chuvash Song for a Girl Your Age", "Little Song for You—About your Father", etc.

In Aygi's experimental work with language in between the musical and the poetic, the goal of overcoming the classical canons of the musical system played an important role. He repeatedly correlated his own poetic creativity with the musical experiments of fellow composers with whom he was in close contact, such as Sofia Gubaidulina (Figure 12)<sup>22</sup> and Andrey Volkonsky<sup>23</sup> (Kulle 1998, p. 15) (Figure 13), as well as his son, musician and composer, Alexei Aigui (Figures 14 and 15). Sergey Prokofiev's "Sarcasms" reveal to Aygi the secret of Georgy Obolduev's "rare musicality" (Aygi 2001, p. 180).

He also refers to the music of classical composers (Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, and Mozart), which allows him to emphasize his own "punctuation poetics" (Aygi 2001, p. 162): "'Schubert' as 'mother'"! (from "Willows (in memory of music)", 1981); "the light of Mozart" (from "Suddenly a flickering of a holiday/Suddenly—a flashing holiday", 1963); "whitens—from the depths—intensifying something dear: /its own—and ours: something!—/its-own-not-human-Mozart. . .—/oh more than playing!" (from "Forest—just beyond the fence", 1970), etc.

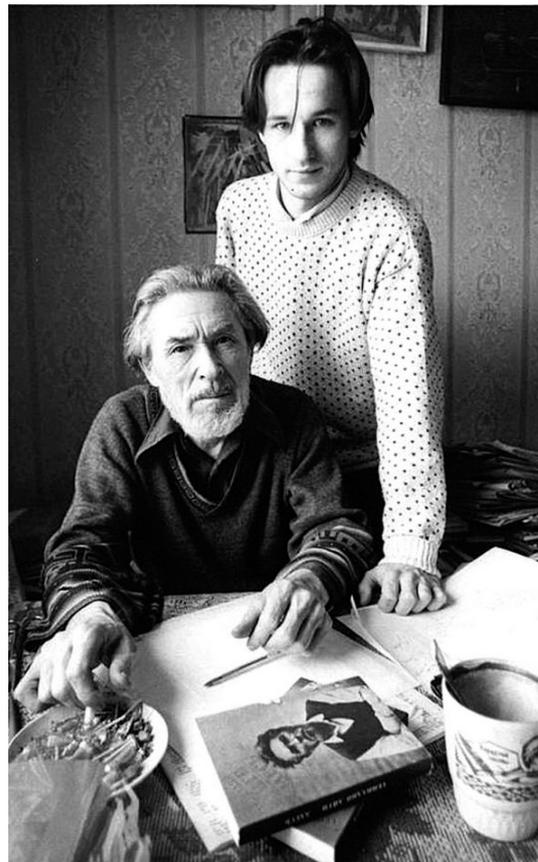


Figure 12. Composer Sofia Gubaidulina and Gennady Aygi.



Кира Георгиевна Волконская, Геннадий Айги, Игорь Блажков, Марина Кедрова, Лариса Бондаренко и Валентин Сильвестров в квартире К. Г. Волконской. 31 января 1977 года

**Figure 13.** Kira Volkonskaja (composer Andrei Volkonsky's mother), Gennady Aygi, composer Valentin Sylvestrov, etc. (Aygi 2022, p. XVI).



**Figure 14.** Gennady Aygi with his son, musician, Alexei Aygi.



Figure 15. “2–Aigi–2” Project: Gennady Aygi, Alexei Aigui, and “4’33” Band.

Atner Khuzangaj highlights musicality as one of the key components of Aygi’s poetics, as follows: “The ‘integrity’ of the author’s poems (their unity), so that in the body of the poem one thing would pass into another, as if without signs of this ‘transition’, comes from the music of symbolism, when the weight of individual words is eaten up by the euphony of the whole thing” (Khuzangaj 2006, p. 118). Aygi turns to music not even as a way of expressing pre-verbal subjectivity, but as a reproduction of the signs of the existence surrounding the poet, signs of a hidden but assumed meaning. Stephanie Sandler observes that the role of music and sound, which are as significant for Aygi’s poetics as visibility, is often underestimated (Sandler 2016, p. 62)<sup>24</sup>.

The strive to capture silence in the text gives rise to an original poetic search for the expression of the multidimensionality of the world-as-silence, the polyphonic nature of creativity as a ‘conversation’ with the world. Attempts to embody silence in Aygi’s early work were expressed in the alternation of various aesthetic codes within the same text, in the construction of a musical, visual, and poetic phrase. His will to express a pause in the text is both a continuation of the traditions of the early Avant-Garde (Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, and Bozhidar) and a transfer of Avant-Garde ideas, achieved through their reflection and discovery of new meanings, going beyond verblativity to musicality, through silence—to a dialogue with being<sup>25</sup>.

The variation of different forms of expression of silence in the texts creates a rhythm<sup>26</sup>, which Aygi perceives as the alternation and relationship of “high and low tides”; “irregular milestones hidden in the blood”; and as the “World-Noise”, “the ‘wave oscillation’ in each rhythmic ‘cell’ must be transmitted throughout the poem, according to large or small rhythmic periods” (Aygi 2001, p. 17). If meter is conceptualized by Aygi as a limiting category, then the rhythm in his poetry, based on musical forms, is expressed in a variety of “rhythmic patterns” (Sandler 2016, p. 64).

From the musical category, rhythm becomes a constant, a law that organizes all existence, including the field, the forest, the sleep, the whiteness, and the silence. In the poetic rhythm Aygi sees a rhythm of existence, which becomes one of the basic principles of his aesthetics.

The embodiment of silence in the word is achieved by various means, among which are text reduction, minimalization of expressive means, and multimediality. Gerald Janecek discusses the origins of minimalism in the poet’s work, as follows: “All of Aygi’s work was created under the sign of minimalism <...> He shows how it is possible (and better) to make poetry from elementary things. In the minimalism of poetic means, deep respect for the verbal material and the method of its transmission is necessary” (Janecek 2006b, p. 141). The source of this understanding for Aygi was the philosophical and aesthetic theories and musical experiences of the early Avant-Garde, as well as the legacy of the New Viennese School, among the composers of which Anton Webern had the greatest influence on the poet<sup>27</sup>. Aygi’s work reveals such basic principles of musical minimalism as the concep-

tualization of primary sound elements, including the simplest combinations of sounds, individual sounds, and various ways of expressing silence (graphic and paragrapheme elements). As the music critic Piotr Pospelov (1992) notes, “rejecting the discursive-logical principles of European culture, minimalism did not strive for deconstruction, but for the purification of musical thinking, for the creation of works free from humanistic abstractions, in which there would be nothing but the very primary elements of music sounds”.

Highlighting the rhythmic capabilities of the phoneme, which organizes the internal movement of the text, is a characteristic technique of Aygi’s poetry. The breaking down of a word into individual elements, the conceptualization of these elements, and their transformation into independent segments is visible in such poems as “Morning in Childhood” (1961), in which each vowel is the center of a poetic phrase and linguistic world creation (“a, it rocked, a”; “and lily was there, was like a second syllable” (Aygi 1997, p. 47)); “Tranquility of a Vowel” (1969), consisting of a single *a* sound; “Next to the Forest” (1984), organized as a scale of resonating vowels (*a, o*); “Phloxes—after Everything” (1982), filled with the sounding of the vowel *a* as a chanting sound-cry (“a Wha-iteness? . . .”; “a Whiteness. . .”), where supra-linguistic meaning is concentrated in the minimal unit of language and time is compressed at the deictic point *hic et nunc*.

Musicality is already present in Aygi’s earliest texts, including his two texts “Untitled” (1964) and “On Reading the Poem ‘Untitled’ Aloud” (1965) are organized according to the principle of polyphony and polycode, which captures the process of creating an artistic text and a new stage of its birth through interpretation. These texts manifest the Avant-Garde nature of experiment, aimed both at poetic self-determination and at the revival of synthetic art—the ancient ‘melos’ with its trinity of ‘words, harmony, and rhythm’.

The first “Untitled” poem is a composition of two red squares<sup>28</sup> and several lines of text, organized according to a hierarchical principle, whereby one line is in focus (“brighter than the heart of any single tree”) and the rest fade into the background, enclosed in brackets as a remark to the above (“Quiet places—holding up the highest strength/of song. It takes away hearing there, un-/to hold back. Places non-thoughts—if you understand/‘non’”) (Aygi 2011, p. 16). The connection between the first and second parts is the conjunction “and”, in the author’s characteristic manner, which is supplemented with a colon, as follows: “and:”. The key to Aygi’s text is the musical development of the verbal–visual theme. In a commentary written later, “On Reading the Poem ‘Untitled’ Aloud”, the poet deciphers the visual images of two red squares in the form of two musical themes. Each drawing includes a pause and a piece of music. The internal visual similarity of the red squares is developed by varying their sizes and placement on the surface of the sheet, whereby the first square is four times larger and is located to the left of the second. The musical arrangement of the visual code is based on the principle of internal unity, which initially lays the foundation for development. Both musical excerpts are performed *piano* (‘quietly’) and *poco adagio*<sup>29</sup> (‘a little slow, calmly’). *Adagio* in music has a deeper meaning than indicating only the tempo or speed of performance; it renders the nature of the music—concentration and deep thought.

The performance manner of the second musical passage, which follows after “a long pause” and the line “brighter than the heart of any single tree”, is set by the poet at the same tempo and character, which is emphasized in the commentary: “L’istesso tempo—the same tempo”. Two musical sketches are two variants of a single theme, which reflects the basic law of making a musical work. Polyphony and internal integrity are achieved both by their dialogical arrangement (one theme reveals another but is not likened to it) and by the arrangement of musical fragments in the context of a poetic text (each fragment is framed by pauses of different durations). The architectonics of the text are structured as follows: “The title is stated calmly and quietly”, in which the musical character of piano is immediately established, the first musical sentence is preceded by “a long pause” and ends with “a pause, not longer the first”, after the central poetic line “brighter than the heart of any single tree”, there is “a long pause”, turning into the second musical sentence and “another extended pause” (Aygi 2001, p. 17). Thus, one of the elements of Aygi’s poetic language

is the “pause”, semantically charged, rendering silence as an “ontological call” beyond the limits of the word. Natalia Fateeva calls such pauses “road signs” placed as “visual indicators of the semantic movement of the text,” emphasizing that such “punctuation poetics” has a “musical basis (musical notation)” and is designed for “reader performance” (Fateeva 2010, p. 309).

In an effort to ‘voice’ silence, Aygi creates hermetic texts that represent a multi-level code system limited by the form of verse tending to the minimum. The pause occupies an equal position in the musical text along with the melody, accompaniment, and sound. In *Veronica’s Book*, one of his most musical books, the leading melody is the melody of silence. For example, in the poem “Pause in my ‘Daughter’s Book’” the poet tries to grasp the boundaries of soundlessness and music. His minimalist work with text echoes the musical experiments of Anton Webern, who developed the atonalism of his teacher Arnold Schönberg. For Webern, the expressive possibilities of music were not reduced to “unbridled impulse and barely audible silence”, but were expressed “in a mysterious layer of endless withdrawal into questioning depths” (Adorno 1999, p. 192). The immersion “deep into questioning depths” is accompanied by Webern’s special reproduction of time, as follows: “The intensification of expressiveness went hand in hand with the limitation of temporal extensiveness” (Adorno 1999, p. 192). This perception of time is also characteristic of Aygi’s texts, which are embodied in minimalist forms, maximally saturated in imagery and minimally extended in space. ‘Limitations of temporal extensity’ are compensated for by the concentration of the expressive moment. According to the minimalist composer Steve Reich, in such music, “the sense of time as filled duration” disappears and ontological time is equated with psychological (cit. in: Pospelov 1992).

Webern’s conception, formulated at the origins of musical minimalism, was developed by John Cage, whose aesthetics are aimed at expressing silence through musical and non-musical means. Among Cage’s most famous compositions is the piece “4’33”, which lasts for 4 min and 33 s of silence. Silence in Cage’s work does not equate to a complete absence of sound. The composer draws listeners to the natural sounds of the environment in which “4’33” is performed, in combination and in contrast with which silence can “sound”. Aygi employs a similar technique in the “improvisation poem for the stage”, a poem titled “It is”, where the audience directly participates in the creation of the text, determining the ending of this text, whereby the improvisation poem sounds until “something” happens in the hall, stopping the performance (Aygi 2001, p. 76).

Repetition is no less significant for the musical composition of Aygi’s poetic texts. Repetitions organize his artistic system on several levels, as follows: repetition as parallelism, the prototype of poetry, establishing a connection between a natural phenomenon and a human, spiritual incident (Grübel 2006, p. 34); a repeating system of motifs and images (motifs of ‘silence’, ‘forests’, ‘fields’, ‘snow’, etc.). The system of repetitions in the text “Dawn: Roses in Bloom” (1969) acquires a musical and graphic arrangement, based on a combination of rational perception of Søren Kierkegaard’s phrase *le dieu a été* (French ‘there was a god’) from his book *Philosophical Fragments (Philosophiske Smuler)*—and a visual object, *a rose in bloom*. The text is structured centrifugally, whereby each poetic and semantic fragment has an invariant at the opposite pole of the text. If, for ease of interpretation, we divide the text into 10 parts, we obtain a system of intersecting, echoing invariants:

<the 1st fragment intersects with the 9th>

in the suffering-thicket  
and I am moving:

quietly...—as if  
in the suffering-thicket:

<the 2nd fragment intersects with the 8th>

and I am hearing long  
«le dieu a été»:

and non-human:  
«le dieu a été»

<the 3rd fragment intersects with the 7th>

kierkegaardian: like an echo! – oh it is dawning!.. and:	purifying! –
<the 4th fragment intersects with the 6th>	
not even scarlet: its spirit—of scarlet:	not even scarlet but of its spirit: <sup>30</sup>

The text begins with an introduction that precedes the development of the main musical and poetic themes. Slowness and preparation for action expresses self-determination, as well as the subject's fixation of his own spiritual state ("in the suffering-thicket/and I am moving"; "and I am hearing long") form an integral component of the creative process. Creativity, for him, is always the fruit of suffering and pain, in suffering, more often, the first word is born, which can be interpreted on several levels, whereby "le dieu a été" is, first of all, an intertextual reference to religious existentialism and to Kierkegaard's existential dialectics.

On the path of a person's acquisition of existence, Kierkegaard calls the following three stages: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. But Kierkegaard, in his irrational spiritual thinking, developed the ideas of Romantic aesthetics, the idea of overcoming the boundaries between life, philosophy, religion, and art, as well as the idea of the priority of music over other arts. In Kierkegaard's work *Either/Or (Enten—Eller)* (1840), the chapter "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic, or Musical-Erotic" is devoted to the study of sensuality in music. Kierkegaard (2004) distinguishes between two kinds of love in terms of priority of music over language, as follows: "Love from the soul is the continuation in time, sensual love a disappearance in time, but the medium which expresses this is precisely music. This is something music is excellently fitted to accomplish, since it is far more abstract than language and therefore does not express the particular but the general in all its generality, and yet it expresses the general, not in reflective abstraction, but in the concreteness of immediacy".

Musicality becomes a universal category for Aygi, organizing the external (compositional) and internal (linguistic) integrity of the text. The poem contains musical markers of the following manners of performance: length, strength, and tone (*long* as the musical *tenuto*, "quietly"—*piano*, "oh it is dawning!"—*crescendo*); musical instruments ("flute"); and a sound source marking repetition ("like an echo!"). Each phrase of the text, denoting a stage of human existence, has a transformed analogue, echoing the lines of the opposite part of the poem.

Two sources of inspiration for Aygi (the "scarlet color of the rosehip" and Kierkegaard's phrase), used in the format of not only verbal, but visual and musical codes, trigger a centripetal movement in the text, as follows:

as in the whole—is the pain component  
as the container for the world  
which is possible mentally:  
paints colorless but bright as it is cutting:  
in transformation—multiply unknown!—<sup>31</sup>

This phrase is not only a compositional, but also a musical, center, which is achieved by including terms of musical dynamics into the text, denoting shades of strength and volume of sound and setting the dynamics of the text itself, whereby the first part of the phrase begins with *crescendo* ("long, like an echo!—/oh it is dawning!"), reaches a climax, and is replaced by a gradual weakening to *diminuendo*, *piano* ("quietly"). However, the semantic center moves beyond the boundaries of the poetic text; compositionally, the effect of reflection is created—not of a literal repetition, but of the development of the theme, the inevitable transformation of all constituent elements. Repetitions, including signs of dynamic musical nuances, demonstrate the impossibility of identity, which corresponds to the principles of atonal music with its rejection of the symmetry of harmony, modulation,

meter, and form. The final part of the text also sounds like the end of a musical phrase, as follows:

over and over:

— —:

ah! two syllables last:

the flute would play:

a friend for you!)<sup>32</sup>

The phrase preceding the ending once again marks Aygi's focus on the infinity and variability of the text, which is also expressed by graphic means (— —:). The naming of the musical sounding ("ah! two syllables last:/the flute would play:/a friend for you!") is enclosed in brackets and expressed in the subjunctive form ("would play"), which denotes an attitude towards improvisation and an implicit appeal to the reader, creating the desire to read the poetic replica as a musical phrase—*prima vista*.

The flute, on the one hand, refers to the mythological flute of Pan ('syringa'), symbolizing the primordial musical principle, opposed to the harmonizing Apollonian music. On the other hand, the reference here is to "The Magic Flute" by Mozart (1791), whose work was a source of inspiration both for Kierkegaard (*Either/Or*, chapter "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic, or Musical-Erotic") and for Aygi ("Mozart: 'Cassation I'"). Kierkegaard found in Mozart's music the justification for his theory of sensuality at the stage of human aesthetic existence. Mozart's text is included in Aygi's poem as a source of inspiration, generating poetic reflection "in one breath," akin to "a rhythmic funnel that draws the voice into an unlimited space", which "is in the middle, in the center [...] of the verse" (Novikov 2001, p. 10). Aygi's text, organized according to the laws of a musical work, based on a system of repetitions and variations, can be correlated with the "repetitive method" of musical composition, "based on the organization of a static musical form by cycles of repetitions of short, functionally equal constructions (patterns)" (Pospelov 1992).

We can trace the transformation of the motif of silence in Aygi's early texts, as follows: "Silence (in the invisible glow...)" (1954–1956) (Aygi 2011, p. 11); "Silence" ("since I remember anything") (1955–1956); "Silence" ("As if...") (1960); "Outskirts: silence (In memory of the poet)" (1973); "You are my silence" (1974); "Singing and silence" (1982); "And: One-ravine. In memory of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński" ("oh silence/I have never been more shameless/with you silence") (1984); and "Leaf-Fall and Silence" (1984). Silence, which is the main attribute of the poet's artistic system and part of the artistic space in his early poems, in his later work is replaced by silence as a subjective, personal choice. Through the silence expressed in the poetic text, the ontological silence "sounding" in the poet's consciousness shines through.

The text "Poetry-as-Silence. Notes", from the later period of Aygi's work, represents a metalinguistic reflection of his own creativity and world culture as a whole; the text contains references to the works of Beethoven, Wagner, Dostoevsky, Nerval, Celan, Mayakovsky, and others. At the same time, "Poetry-as-Silence" marks a new stage in the work of Aygi—an approach to silence. Many texts of this period can be designated as a "musical score", which is associated with the inlay of the musical elements in them, the conceptualization of a pause, and the formation of the author's syntax. The minimalist poetic form characteristic of Aygi in "Poetry-as-Silence" is replaced by an extended text consisting of numerous microelements. Such experiments, characteristic of minimalism and other repetitive techniques, emerge as a way of reflecting the creative process, as vectors of the poet's movement towards expressing the ontology of silence in the word.

The prolonged form, connecting 54 minimalist fragments, relates to both classical and non-classical traditions. The poem "Poetry-as-Silence" can be interpreted as a symphony—one of the main genres in the work of composers that influenced Aygi, including Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Prokofiev. Mutually directed trends in music and poetry are indicative. In the work of Franz Liszt, a new genre synthetic form arose—the 'symphonic poem'—to which many composers later turned ("Don Juan", "Don Quixote" by Richard

Strauss; “Sadko” by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov; “In the Steppes of Central Asia” by Alexander Borodin, etc.). There was an increase in interest in the symphonic form in the poetry of the early twentieth century, with many poets using the genre designation “symphony” for poetic texts (“Symphonies” by Andrey Bely, “Angels” by Velimir Khlebnikov<sup>33</sup>, etc.).

The second episode of the first part of “Poetry-as-Silence” begins with a self-quotation from Aygi’s article dedicated to Paul Celan “For a Long Time: Into Whisperings and Rustlings”: “Whisperings, rustlings. As if wind were penetrating into a cold storeroom and flour scattering somewhere” (Aygi 2017). The phrase “And: rustling-and-murmuring. Rustle—of the origin—already—so distant. ‘Mine’, ‘my own self’” (Aygi 2003), as well as the deictic markers “mine” and “my own self” suggest an intertextual dialogue, “conversation at a distance” between Aygi and Celan. The poetics of the latter became a kind of answer to Theodor Adorno’s claim that it was “barbaric” to write poetry after Auschwitz. Worthy of note is Martin Heidegger’s influence on Celan’s poetics and its later metalinguistic reflection in Aygi’s thought. According to Heidegger’s classic statement, “Language is the house of being” (Heidegger 1976, p. 313), in which thinkers and poets live and provide the openness of being, preserving it in language. In Celan’s famous words, language survived the Holocaust, and the poet feels the word, on the one hand, as already said, constantly appealing to “someone else’s word”, and on the other, looking for a new language “after Auschwitz”. This understanding of language informs Celan’s original poetics, which Jacques Derrida (2005) termed a “poetics of testimony”, when a poem becomes a “poetic testimony”, that is, not through information or a speech act that generates knowledge, but by responsibly witnessing that it involves the poetic experience of language.

The significance of this understanding of language as poetic evidence determined the closeness and influence of Celan’s poetics on Aygi’s work. The search for sound and the discovery of space behind the sound (the motif of “whispers-and-rustles”), characteristic of Celan’s texts, become the object of Aygi’s reflection. For Celan, it is not a voice that sounds hopeless, but a late rustle. For Aygi, who is striving for ontology in silence, the rustle turns out to be the “beginning” of being and man, as follows: “40. Again—rustling-and-murmuring. It is—my brother < . . . >” (Aygi 2003).

Aygi’s poetics of testimony are manifested in the following phrase: Not to give way to nostalgia. For I also am not. . . how could I! Too much—from spaces interrupted—from “povers” long since abolished (Idem). Here, the negative particle is not a marker of the unspoken, but the inexpressibility as a property of poetic language. The italicization of the phrase “Not to give way to nostalgia is important”, as the motif of nostalgia for the inexpressible shimmers throughout the entire text, as follows: “8. Yes, one must not give way to nostalgia. But to mourn the dead is a duty” (Idem). Nostalgia, here, is an existential longing for ‘true being’ as a fact of poetic witnessing, and pain, which is a stimulus for creativity, and an eternal gap that does not allow the poet and his text to stop, to fall into anabiosis, either nostalgia or not. Aygi models the creative process as the inseparability of affirmation and negation, words and silence.

Traditionally, the second part of a symphony “unfolds in slow motion, written in the form of variations, rondo, or rondo sonata” (Mikheeva 1984, p. 213). Repetitive parts of Aygi’s “symphony”, subordinated to the principles of leitmotif choral singing, are organized as a rondo. The text refers to round dance as a folklore syncretic genre, as follows: “5. There was an epoch there—the Death of Choral Dances. Like something noiselessly gnawing—the silence of the forest. And it draws us. Into—dissolution” (Aygi 2003). The poem is permeated with images of eternity, out of time, and out of space. Such are the motif of Eternal Return, which is repeated in the text, and the motif of the wind carrying away dead time, as follows: “1. The former wind—dead. Deserted the lumber-rooms. The wind—dead scattering—of dead flour”. In the text, the poet addresses the names of the most significant authors, in whose work eternity was expressed through the prism of silence, as follows: “22. And here is Wagner. “In truth the greatness of the poet is revealed most of all when he is silent, so that the unuttered word can utter itself in the silence”; “24. Mighty silence—of Beethoven”; “32. Holderlin in his last poems: ‘I could say

much more'. It's better as it is. Silent places (as in ancient tragedy)"; "41. 'I am in your debt, skies of Baghdad' (yes—Mayakovsky). Soon after—will come the pistol shot. And these skies turn out to be a sketch: an immense panorama—of Silence".

The third part of Aygi's "symphony"—the scherzo—intensifies the perception of the modern state of the artistic language as "verbosity", which has a corrupting effect on reality. An increase in the number of "empty" words multiplies the number of referential connections and simulacra objects corresponding to them, as follows: "6. Today's verbosity. Things multiply—cataloguing of things expands. 'The epic of our times'. / And: when there is not that 'penny' that was counted there ('among simple folk')—'to your name'"; "16. There are more and more trivial things. And more and more—trivial words. / Chatter of things. Chatter of poetry".

The "finale" of the symphonic poem reassembles the main musical and poetic lines and suggests a rethinking of linguistic elements and artistic concepts that have undergone reflection, as follows: "50. Silence—is quietness with a 'content'—ours. / Is there 'another' silence? / 'Non-being does not exist, God would not have bothered with such nonsense', says Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky. / That concern a Silence that is 'not-ours'. 'Including' the quietness—with silence—of the departed. Everything—is. / And—we shall make no supposition—about something 'completely other'"; "53. ... And the notion emerges: 'Art—of Silence'"; "54. And—it seems that Silence itself, entering a pile of papers, Itself crosses out thoughts about Itself, striving—fusing with me—to become: Unique and ever more—Absolute".

The "Symphony" ends with the coming of the "Unique", "Absolute Silence". By connecting various semiotic codes through the inclusion of musical techniques of minimalism and repetitivism, Aygi seeks to express the ontology of silence in the text.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the late Soviet period, underground poets developed various techniques for escaping the dictates of Soviet ideology and discourse. The conceptualist poets criticized and conceptualized the Soviet language, whereas the Neo-Avant-Garde authors experimented with different forms of multimodality and multilingualism, rather than with Soviet clichés, thus pushing back the 'brackets' of the Soviet language and culture. For Elizaveta Mnatsakanova and Gennady Aygi, musicality became a way to evade the indoctrinating discourse and to carry out their own multimodal experiments, expanding the boundaries of the verbal text. On the one hand, Mnatsakanova and Aygi, each in their original fashion, build upon the experiments of the early Avant-Garde, restoring cultural ties lost during the period of Stalin's terror and performing an aesthetic transfer between the Avant-Garde of the beginning of the century and the Neo-Avant-Garde of the second half of the 20th century. On the other hand, the two poets locate their poetic practices in a new cultural context, interacting with the techniques of musical minimalism, creating new multimodal and polyphonic formats. In contrast to sound poetry, which is focused on revealing the sound potential of verbal units, Aygi and Mnatsakanova experimented with the sonic and visual planes of language inseparably from the semantics of words, drawing from music the repeating patterns and variations, pauses and silence in the texts as equal tools of meaning-making.

In times of crisis, as can be seen from examples from Russophone poetry of the last hundred years, poetic sensitivity to language as a medium of knowledge and perception of the world intensifies. From within a situation of totalitarian control over the language convention, the "linguistic underground" is activated, conducting uncensored work on the possibilities and impossibilities of language as such. This was both the case in the revolutionary era of the early Soviet time and in post-war underground poetry. It is also the case right now, in Russia and Russian emigration of the 2020s, when the Russian language is balancing on the brink of decay and half-decay in protesting poetic radicalism. The practices of exploring inter-semiotic (verbal-and-musical) spaces by Aygi and Mnatsakanova, discussed in this article, are aimed at moving away from poetic conventions towards the

linguistic underground, a kind of ‘language underneath language’. These practices are, once again, gaining acute relevance in the conditions of the new totalitarianism and political terror.

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## Notes

- 1 OBERIU stands for ‘Association for Real Art’, an Avant-Garde collective of writers and philosophers, founded in 1928. It ceased to exist in the early 1940s when most members were either imprisoned or executed.
- 2 A member of the OBERIU group of Avant-Garde writers.
- 3 <https://pierrejouris.com/blog/paul-celan/> (accessed on 5 November 2023).
- 4 For Aygi’s role in the Russian and Soviet Neo-Avant-Garde, see [Robel \(1993\)](#), [Valentine \(2015\)](#), and [Sokolova \(2019\)](#). The famous linguist Roman Jakobson called Aygi an “extraordinary poet of the contemporary Russian Avant-Garde” following in the footsteps of Khlebnikov’s linguistic creativity.
- 5 Despite her prominent role in the evolution of unofficial Soviet poetry, studies and translations of her work are still scarce. See the special segment of the issue of the Russian journal *NLO* dedicated to Mnatsakanova’s centenary (No. 5, 2022: [https://nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe\\_literaturnoe\\_obozrenie/177\\_nlo\\_5\\_2022/](https://nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe_literaturnoe_obozrenie/177_nlo_5_2022/), last accessed 27 February 2023). Among other things, Mnatsakanova translated some of Celan’s poems into Russian.
- 6 Translated by Sarah Valentine in her own article ([Valentine 2007](#)).
- 7 Aygi was of Chuvash origin and wrote poetry in both Russian and Chuvash.
- 8 Velimir Khlebnikov was, in many respects, the main inspiration for Aygi; on this topic, see [Weststeijn \(2016\)](#).
- 9 The two poets probably never met, but each expressed admiration for the other’s work, see [Aristov \(2022\)](#). Both had a profound passion for Khlebnikov’s poetic language.
- 10 We borrow the concept of “other music” from an insightful book on this topic by Alexander [Makhov \(2005\)](#).
- 11 See also [Janecek’s \(2000\)](#) more comprehensive study of the role of sound and visuality in modern Russian poetry.
- 12 Mnatsakanova graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in 1950. She was the author of books and articles about the work of Wolfgang Mozart, Johann Brahms, Gustav Mahler, Sergey Prokofiev, and German Galynin. She was friends with Dmitry Shostakovich and other Soviet official and unofficial composers.
- 13 Yuri [Orlitsky \(2022\)](#) specifically discusses Mnatsakanova’s appeals to musical culture, her use of musicological terminology and corresponding formal means, as well as elements of verse notation.
- 14 Cf. the works of Stéphane Mallarmé, Andrey Bely, or Velimir Khlebnikov.
- 15 This kind of variability in the distribution and intonation of verbal material suggests a similarity with the poetics of Orthodox prayer. As is known, historically, the distribution of a prayer text into separate word forms and its punctuation are highly arbitrary—the actual articulation of prayer formulas always varies and is individual for each reader.
- 16 I cordially thank Gerald Janecek for sharing his translation with me.
- 17 Elisabeth Netzkowa is the heteronym Mnatsakanova used within the Germanophone context. Her birth name was Mnatsakanjan; she was born in Baku to an Armenian family.
- 18 Especially its radical wing represented by Anton Webern and Pierre Boulez who emphasize the weight of pauses in musical speech.
- 19 Sergey Biryukov’s ([Biryukov 2005](#)) term (СЛОВОМУЗЫКА).
- 20 Stephanie Sandler suggests the ‘language sculpting’ metaphor: “Mnatsakanova’s poetry creates a sound environment in which the listener is caught in a seemingly endless present: sounds repeat and recombine, and words shift as speech acts from imprecations to affirmation, from plea to prediction. In that appeal to the imagination, Mnatsakanova asks readers to join her in an experience of the senses and of the mind’s capacity to bend language as if it were clay to be sculpted” ([Sandler 2008](#), p. 619).
- 21 The cycle “Ten Poems (in Memory of Boris Pasternak) 1957–1965” includes four different requiems, namely “Presentiment of a Requiem”, “To the Presentiment of a Requiem”, “Requiem Before Winter”, and “To the Requiem Before Winter”.
- 22 Aygi referred to Gubaidulina in his poem “Mozart: ‘Cassation I’” (1977), and Gubaidulina dedicated her work “Now always snow, cantata on poems by Gennady Aygi” (1993) to the poet.

- <sup>23</sup> The poet appreciated the performance of Volkonsky's "Mirror Suite" in 1962 (Ayki 2022, p. 386) and dedicated to him the following texts: "Overseas bird" (1962) and "The place: brasserie" (1965). He also stressed the significance of the pause in Volkonsky's composition "Immobile".
- <sup>24</sup> Tatjana Grauz's essay (Grauz 2018) provides more details on Aygi's musical connections.
- <sup>25</sup> On the meaning and ways of expressing silence in Aygi's work, see Postovalova (2016).
- <sup>26</sup> For more on Aygi's metrical and rhythmical techniques, see Orlitsky (2006).
- <sup>27</sup> On the influence of the early Avant-Garde and the New Viennese School on Aygi, see Lebedev (2007) and an interview with the poet Amursky (2006).
- <sup>28</sup> An allusion to Kazimir Malevich's "Red Square" and the second stage of Suprematism.
- <sup>29</sup> A possible reminiscence of Vladimir Mayakovsky's poem "The Violin—a Little Bit Nervous".
- <sup>30</sup> Translated by Olga Sokolova.
- <sup>31</sup> See note 30 above.
- <sup>32</sup> See note 30 above.
- <sup>33</sup> Larisa Gerver (2001, pp. 192–219) discusses the symphony as the "highest genre of musical literature" in case studies of "Symphonies" by Bely and the poem "Angels" by Khlebnikov.

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