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‘Between East and West’: Socialist Modernism as the Official Paradigm of Serbian Art Music in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss the notion of ‘socialist modernism’ and argue for its introduction into Serbian music history and musicology as an appropriate label for a vast number of works composed in the seventh and eighth decades of the 20th Century. The term is borrowed from Serbian art theory, where it was introduced by Ješa Denegri, who defined ‘socialist modernism’ as a further development of the notion of ‘socialist aestheticism’, which was the first sign of distancing from the ‘socialist realism’ as the dominant aesthetic position in the years immediately after the end of the WWII. While both terms have been widely used to discuss the visual arts and architecture (e. g. Miško Šuvaković), they have not been applied to the study of Serbian and Yugoslav music history. It is my goal to analyse the main facets of ‘socialist modernism’ and to compare this notion to other prominent terms, which are commonly used to describe the art music production of the majority of Serbian composers in the given period, notably to ‘moderated modernism’ and ‘neoclassicism.’

Denegri used the notion of ‘socialist modernism’ to point to the specific position of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ‘between East and West’ during the Cold War. He defined it as a “unique formation that emerged at the crossroads of the features of Eastern and Western cultural models.” Similar tendencies can also be observed in Serbian art music since the late 1950s, with an increasing desire to ‘catch up’ with the dominant currents of European musical (high) modernism.

As a paradigmatic example of this stylistic approach in art music of the 1960s and 1970s, I discuss the poetics of Aleksandar Obradović (1927–2001), one of the most prominent Yugoslav (Serbian) composers of the period, whose artistic profile vividly illustrates the currents of political developments and changes in Yugoslav art in the second half of the 20th Century.

KEYWORDS

Socialist modernism
SFRY
Neoclassicism
Moderated modernism
Serbian musicology
Ješa Denegri
Miško Šuvaković
Aleksandar Obradović

Introduction

The notion of the ‘socialist modernism’ in Serbian art history roughly encompasses the same timeframe as the duration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963–1992), of which Serbia was a part.¹ At the same time, this period in Serbian *art music* – considered as an institutionally affirmed theory and practice – has been discussed in most varied ways, marked by the use of numerous, often inconsistent and sometimes contradictory, terminological determinants.

‘Yugoslav artistic space’ should be understood, according to Ješa Denegri, as the “geographic area and political environment in which the polycentric and decentralized, yet at the same time unified and shared, art life of the second Yugoslavia (1945–1991) emerged” (Denegri, 2003: 172). Miško Šuvaković elaborates on Denegri’s views and stresses the fact that Yugoslavia was a multinational and multiconfessional federation, whose member states (republics) still maintained separate cultural identities, not having been forced to give up on their individualities in favour of a supposed ‘unitary’ concept of ‘Yugoslav art’. Nevertheless, the artistic scenes of these republics were closely connected and interlaced (Šuvaković, 2017). Having this in mind, I argue that the art music scene in Serbia *within* SFR Yugoslavia – during the period of nearly three decades – was largely dominated by the aesthetics of ‘socialist modernism’. However, this theoretical construct, widely used to discuss visual arts and architecture, with notable elaborations in recent publications by Serbian aesthetician Miško Šuvaković, has not yet been applied to the study of Serbian and Yugoslav music history.² Even the musicologists who wrote several chapters in the capital collective volume *Istorija umetnosti u Srbiji XX vek. Drugi tom – Realizmi i modernizmi oko hladnog rata* [History of Art in Serbia. Vol. 2 – Realisms and Modernisms around the Cold War] did not address

¹ After the end of the World War II, the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed on 29 November 1945. In 1963, amid pervasive liberal constitutional reforms, the name Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was introduced (usually abbreviated as SFRY or SFR Yugoslavia). It was a federation (governed by the League of Communists of Yugoslavia – KPJ) made up of six socialist republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. The city of Belgrade (Beograd) – the capital of Serbia – was also the federation capital. SFR Yugoslavia was considered dissolved on 27 April 1992.

² An early version of this article was written as a seminar paper for the course ‘Applied Aesthetics,’ in the class of Prof. Miško Šuvaković, within the frames of the Doctoral Academic Studies of Musicology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, academic year of 2015/2016. In preparation for this publication, I have revised and extended considerably the ideas presented in that paper.

this issue at all.³ It is therefore my goal to analyse the main facets of socialist modernism and to propose its application in the realm of Yugoslav and Serbian art music, as an appropriate label for a vast number of works composed in the seventh and eighth decades of the 20th Century. To this end, the notion of ‘socialist modernism’ is here compared to other terms, which are commonly used in Serbian musicology to describe art music production of the large majority of Serbian composers in the given period, notably to the notions of ‘moderated modernism’ and ‘neoclassicism,’ in order to better understand their points of intersection and their differences. As a paradigmatic example of this stylistic approach in art music of the 1960s and 1970s, I discuss the poetics of Aleksandar Obradović (1927–2001),⁴ one of the most prominent Yugoslav (Serbian) composers of the period, whose artistic profile vividly illustrates the currents of political developments and changes in Yugoslav art in the second half of the 20th Century.

Socialist Realism, Moderated Modernism and Neoclassicism

In Serbian musicology, a transition from *socialist realism*⁵ (which marked the years immediately after the WWII) into *moderated modernism*⁶ is oftentimes discussed,

³ For instance, even though Jelena Novak’s contribution to the volume is entitled “Subverzivni socijalistički modernizmi u muzici. Figura kompozitorke” [“Subversive socialist modernisms in music. The figure of a female composer”] (Novak, 2012: 781–786), she does not actually use the syntagma anywhere in the article, and, consequently, she does not attempt to define it either.

⁴ Aleksandar Obradović was born at Lake Bled (Kingdom of Yugoslavia; today Republic of Slovenia) in 1927. He graduated in composition from the Academy of Music (today the Faculty of Music) in Belgrade in 1952, where he studied in the class of Prof. Mihovil Logar. He spent the 1959–1960 academic year in London, taking advanced training under Lennox Berkeley, and the 1966–1967 academic year in the USA where he worked at Columbia University Electronic Music Center. He taught at the *Stanković* School of Music in Belgrade (1953–1954), then he became an Assistant and, in 1961, the Assistant Professor at the Academy of Music in Belgrade, Department of Music Theory. He then taught Orchestration from 1964 (held the position of Associate Professor from 1969) and he subsequently taught composition (he was elected Full Professor in 1975). He was Rector of the University of Arts (1979–1983) and General Secretary of the Union of Yugoslav Composers (1962–1966), music writer and critic, etc.

Obradović’s musical output is quite extensive, with over 200 compositions, many of which are large-scale symphonic and vocal-symphonic works (including eight symphonies). His works were performed in 33 foreign countries and he received the highest recognitions in ex-Yugoslavia (7th July Prize, October Prize of the City of Belgrade). Cf. Marinković, 1997: 5.

⁵ According to Miško Šuvaković, the notion of socialist realism is to be understood as the normative artistic doctrine and stylistic formation based on the representation of the *optimal projection* (project, vision, utopia) of the new socialist society, which had originated in the 1920-ies in the USSR and which became in the years after the WWII the dominant art in the “real-socialist” countries (including Yugoslavia). Cf. Šuvaković, 1999: 321. Serbian musicologist Melita Milin observes that “[...] for many theoreticians the very notion of realism in literature and fine

notably pointing to the fact that this change did not take place abruptly, immediately after the resolution of the Cominform⁷ in 1948, which caused the severance of relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Serbian musicologists also identify a period of 'extended effect' of the postulates of socialist realism – and the duration of this period is quite difficult to determine precisely.⁸ The stylistical framework immediately after the abandonment of the socialist-realist aesthetics is usually referred to in Serbian musicology as 'neoclassical' and/or 'moderately modernist,' and is sometimes equated with the notion of 'socialist aestheticism,' which also originated from visual arts theory, which I will discuss later on.

An interesting definition of the 'socialist realism' (or 'sorealism') in Serbian music is given by Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, who describes it as a "simplified type of musical neoclassicism" (Veselinović-Hofman, 2007: 108). According to this author, neoclassicism, as the most vital artistic current in the stylistic pluralism of Serbian music in the second half of the 20th Century – characterized by the aesthetic orientation towards the restoration of earlier styles on different levels as well as by its ability to

arts has been challenging due to the different modalities of existence of aesthetic and real objects, while this problem becomes even more complex when trying to define the derivative notion of socialist realism. In music, this set of questions is even more problematic due to the particularities of musical expressivity." Cf. Milin, 1998: 16. On the topic of socialist realism and music in SFRY see also: Milin, 2004: 39–43.

⁶ Ivana Medić wrote the first comprehensive study of the notion of "moderated modernism" in Serbian art music after WWII (Medić, 2007: 279–294). As observed by I. Medić, "the 'moderate' part of this term can be expressed in two ways in English: as an adjective (moderate) or participle (moderated). In both cases, the denoted meaning is essentially the same – something opposed to radical, extreme, provocative, and troublesome. However, the adjective suggests that moderateness is in the very nature of the phenomenon, while the participle puts an emphasis on human agency"), hence her preference for the second option (cf. Medić, 2007: 280), which is also my choice in this paper.

⁷ On 28 June 1948 the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) adopted the prepared text of a resolution in which Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform by the other member states, citing "nationalist elements" that had "managed in the course of the past five or six months to reach a dominant position in the leadership" of the KPJ. Retrieved from http://www.znaci.net/00001/138_76.pdf (last access 18 November 2017).

⁸ According to Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, the borderline of the dominance of the "sorealism" idea in Serbian music can be drawn roughly around 1951, although up until 1954 the artistic creation in Serbia was subjected to various means of ideological-political control. However, "... since the beginning of the sixth decade, the events in the field of Serbian art were largely focusing on the arguments against this ideological input and echo." Cf. Veselinović-Hofman, 2007: 108–9. On the other hand, Melita Milin thinks that the "[u]pper limit of this period (...) remains undetermined (1945–...) (...) having in mind that the ideas of socialist realism remained 'in the air' for another ten years or so, although less and less prominent, until they disappeared completely at the end of the 1950s." Cf. Milin, 1998: 3.

assimilate elements of any musical tradition – has experienced a certain deviation in Serbian music immediately after the WWII: “We could almost say that this deviation came into being by means of ‘socializing’ and politising the aforementioned aesthetical characteristics of neoclassicism, by limiting them to the demand for simplification of all parameters of a musical work, both extramusical and musical, actually to the superficial and wrong projection of a presupposition of intelligibility and accessibility of music” (Veselinović-Hofman, 2007: 109). Nevertheless, it should be said that neoclassicism as a musical current, whose main protagonists in the interwar period were Igor Stravinsky and ‘Les Six,’ never really existed in Serbian art music before WWII. Thus, the appearance of ‘neoclassicism’ *within* the frames of ‘sorealism’ could be observed as the first manifestation of this artistic current in Serbian music. However, this has not been the case: on the contrary, neoclassicism has usually been observed by Serbian musicologists (including M. Veselinović-Hofman) as a radical *novelty* in Serbian art music *of the 1950s, i. e. after socialist realism* – as the stylistical credo of the young generation of composers who stepped on the music scene in the mid 1950s (see, for instance, Mikić, 2009: 135, 120). In this context, Dragana Stojanović-Novičić rightfully observes that in Serbia (and more generally in former Yugoslavia) “the term ‘socialism’ was connected to various aspects of people’s lives, including music, for a very long time. Just as we have observed the occurrence of the hysteresis of neoclassicism, we must take note of the hysteresis of the soc-realistic artistic concept which was also linked to neoclassicism up to a certain point” (Stojanović-Novičić, 1999: 53-54). She sums up that the socialist-realistic concept actually implied “a highly simplified variant of neoclassicism, maximally stripped and receptive, comprehensive. It was often linked to a certain national music idiom” (Stojanović-Novičić, 1999, 54).

On the other hand, the notion of ‘moderated modernism’ is also quite problematic as the ‘stylistic’ determinant of the Serbian art music from the 1950s onwards. I. Medić rightfully observes that this notion is an oxymoron because ‘modernism,’ by definition, should not be ‘moderate’ (Cf. Medić, 2007: 280). The author lists a number of terms which are used as synonyms with ‘moderated modernism’ to a certain extent, and which range from descriptive to diminishing.⁹

⁹ These are: moderate mainstream, moderately contemporary language (or procedures), ostensibly moderate idiom, moderateness and accurateness, socialist aestheticism, academic

Up until this point, there have not been any attempts to more precisely define the relationship between ‘moderated modernism’ and ‘neoclassicism’ in Serbian music after WWII. In the writings of different authors, these terms are sometimes also used as synonyms, with various degrees of overlapping. For instance, Melita Milin divides the entire art music in Serbia between 1945 and 1965 into four categories, based on the type of acceptance of musical novelties:

- 1a. ‘objectivist’ neoclassicism, inspired by the neoclassicism of Igor Stravinsky (typical example: Dušan Radić – *Spisak*, 1954);
- 1b. neoexpressionism, inspired both by the expressionism of the ‘Second Viennese School’ and Igor Stravinsky’s folkloric expressionism (typical example: Aleksandar Obradović – *Symphony No. 2*, 1964);
2. ‘archaised’ modal language (typical example: Ljubica Marić – *Pesme prostora*, 1956);
3. acceptance of avant-garde compositional procedures: elements of 12-tone music, clusters, aleatory, ‘tape music,’ etc. (typical example: Aleksandar Obradović – *Epitaph H*, 1965) (Milin, 1998: 85 and further).¹⁰

Milin’s classification is determined by the fact that she places only the first two ‘stylistical’ approaches (1a and 1b) under the umbrella of ‘moderated modernism’ (Milin, 1998: 88). On the other hand, I. Medić believes that “the entire bulk of works” that Milin analyzes should be labeled moderately modernistic (Medić, 2007: 286.)¹¹ She

classicism (or modernism), tempered modernism, middle-of-the-road, humanistic tradition, tonal music with false notes, conservative-modern music, officially approved modernism, normal state of art, well-adjusted art, politically correct composers, etc. Cf. Medić, 2007: 281–282.

¹⁰ The author gives a similar classification in her article “Etapo modernizma u srpskoj muzici” (Миљин, 2006: 103), where she identifies four stages of Serbian musical modernism, the third and the fourth of which encompass the period after WWII. The third stage (1951–1970) encompasses neoclassicism, neoexpressionism and “poetic archaisation,” and the fourth (1956–1980) the opuses of the composers who have assimilated the elements of European avant-garde compositional procedures with the main purpose to approach the actual currents of contemporary European music.

¹¹ However, both Medić and Milin think that the creative output of the composer and multimedia artist Vladan Radovanović (b. 1932) represents the only notable exception and a “special case,” as a completely autochthonous artistic presence in the context of Serbian post-WWII music.

regards moderated modernism as “a very useful construct for analyzing, on the one hand, political ideologies and their influence on arts, and on the other, artistic ideologies and their reciprocal impact upon societies” (Medić, 2007: 293) – therefore, regardless of the individual ‘palettes’ of musical expression. Furthermore, I. Medić claims that even the ‘local-type avant-garde’¹² (which developed in Serbian music in the 1960s under the influence of Polish avant-garde composers and György Ligeti) should also be observed as an expression of moderated modernism. She supports this statement with evidence of compositional-technical and ideological nature (Medić, 2015; see also Medić, 2004: 77, 81). She follows in the footsteps of György Peteri, who defines the gradual, cautious introduction of the elements of Western-European musical avant-garde in the countries previously under Soviet influence as ‘defensive integrationism’. This tendency is characterized by deliberate efforts to import and ‘domesticate’ Western economic and cultural knowledge (Medić, 2007: 287).

In contrast to that, Vesna Mikić equates ‘neoclassicism’ and ‘moderate modernism’: she believes that the “understanding of neoclassicism as moderate modernism is necessary in the case of Serbian music because of the specificities of the ‘local’ circumstances which represented a framework for the constitution of artistic and musical practices in Serbia after WWII” (Mikić, 2009: 128).¹³ Keeping in mind the opinion generally accepted in Serbian musicology, that neoclassicism *was indeed* an entirely new artistic current in Serbian post-WWII music, it is certainly not wrong to consider it a *modernist* tendency in the local context. The ‘restorational’ nature of neoclassicism justifies the claim of its *moderate(d)ness* as well, because it disturbs the supposedly ‘straightforward’ development of the artistic discipline, which would point to *high* modernism (Šuvaković, 1999: 195). However, Western music histories show that neoclassicism is a very complex stylistical tendency, and can thus be understood in many different ways; the same goes for its ‘local’ occurrences. Therefore, I conclude that the ‘moderated modernism’ ‘in Serbian music’ from the 1950s onwards can only

¹² This term was elaborated in: Veselinović, 1983.

¹³ V. Mikić reaffirms this attitude noting that the representatives of the younger generation of Serbian post-WWII composers promoted their resentment towards socialist realism in various forms of moderate modernism: “Serbian modernism of the 1950s did not negate its connections to the tradition and the past, it was internationally coloured and it possessed in itself the potential to be academized, which indeed happened near the end of the sixth decade, thus forming a solid base for the avant-garde breakthroughs of the Serbian art in the 1960s.” Mikić, 2009: 109.

equated to neoclassicism if the latter term is used in its 'broadest possible sense', as the most general determinant which encompasses all possible types of neo-isms, which do not (yet) display characteristics of postmodern musical thinking.

Social Aestheticism

V. Mikić introduces another interesting terminological parallel or congruence into Serbian musicology:

If we assume that the moderated modernism/socialist aestheticism possesses certain features of modernisms, but devoid of elevated expressiveness and subjectivity of the radical/avant-garde varieties of modernism, Ristić's [Second] Symphony could be observed, in its neoclassical design, as a modernist product of Serbian music (Mikić 2009: 121).

Mikić thus equates 'moderated modernism' and neoclassicism with 'socialist aestheticism' of the 1950s, a notion which was introduced into Serbian art theory by the literary theoretician Sveta Lukić in 1963. This author locates the occurrence of this particular type of aestheticism in Yugoslav art between 1950 and 1955; its "initial character was shaped by the struggle against the official Stalinist socialist realism and dogma of any kind. (...) With its occurrence in our environment, a direct and immanent opposition to socialist realism takes place for the first time in the world" (Lukić, 1963: 17). Keeping in mind that neoclassicism, with its advocating for the "aesthetic character and treatment of art" (Lukić 1963: 17) had exactly the same function of breaking with the so-called dogma in the context of Serbian art music of the 1950s, I believe that it is indeed possible to consider these notions as congruent, at least in this particular decade. Discussing the transformations of Serbian fine arts in the post-WWII period, Miško Šuvaković accentuates the gradual transformation of 'socialist realism' into moderated modernist art, which he also calls 'socialist aestheticism' (Šuvaković, 2008).

Although the stylistical foundations of this tendency in fine arts are not the same as in the case of Serbian art music (because these disciplines followed different developmental paths in the interwar period), it would not be wrong to say that their results 'were' similar, and that they both reflected the 'spirit of the times.' For instance, Šuvaković discusses the creative output of the visual artist Lazar Vozarević (1925–

1968) and observes the similarities between his poetic attitudes and the creative approaches of the poet Vasko Popa (1922–1991) and the composer Ljubica Marić (1909–2003) (Šuvaković, 2008). There were other Serbian composers of the time who could be observed in the same context, notably Dušan Radić, who based a significant part of his vocal-instrumental opus on the lyrics of Vasko Popa.

According to M. Šuvaković, the process of aesthetical distancing of Yugoslav art from Marxism as the dominant, hegemonic, and controlling discourse was gradual in the decades after WWII, and was carried out in several stages (Šuvaković, 2017). He points out the important change in social circumstances at the moment of solidification of the artistic practice of socialist aestheticism:

(...) socialist aestheticism occurs at the moment of establishment of the postrevolutionary period in the socialist revolutionary society, and when bureaucrats and technocrats replace the revolutionaries at the important – but not leading – functions in the society, which means that the socialist aestheticism is an expression of interests and tastes of the new governing class whose task is not only to change the world, but also to enjoy living in it (Šuvaković, 2008).

Socialist Modernism

According to Lazar Trifunović, aestheticism had everything it took to blend into the projection of the partially liberalized socialist society (Šuvaković, 2008). As a further consequence, the art historian Ješa Denegri introduces the notion of “socialist modernism:” he points out the specific position of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ‘between East and West’ during the Cold War, which is why he argues that socialist modernism “emerged as such *only in Yugoslavia* [my italics, J.J.B], thus constituting a unique formation resulting from the cross-breeding of the properties of the Eastern and Western art model” (Denegri, 2003: 173).

M. Šuvaković defines socialist modernism in aesthetics as the “procedure of renewal of the humanistic aesthetic-philosophical modernism in real socialism, with all its lateral or excess divergences, contradictions and revisions” (Šuvaković, 2017). He considers the notion of ‘socialist modernism’ to be paradoxical because it calls attention to the fact that within real socialism, at a certain point of its existence, a potentiality occurs for

its development 'as Western modernism'; in other words, as modernism which in Yugoslavia gets its internal autonomy and external function. 'Internal autonomy' means that the areas of various social practices gradually allowed for the possibility of immanent development of aesthetic, philosophical, scientific, or artistic practices without the necessity for their direct valorisation by the League of Communists. 'External function' implied declarative acceptance and reference to the 'revolutionary' *traditions* and social values proclaimed by the League of Communists as the criteria of belonging to or being faithful to set idealities or *brands* of the selfregulating socialist society (Šuvaković, 2017).

According to the same author, 'socialist modernism' is postulated as the *condition for the existence of modern art in a socialist society*. He argues that it is highly unlikely that new cultural or artistic processes (from the early 1960s onwards) would have been put in motion if the general shift in political course had not occurred; nor would they have transfigured so quickly and thoroughly, in just a few years, the situation on the artistic scene in Yugoslavia and, accordingly, caused the shift of the entire artistic climate. Nevertheless, Šuvaković agrees with Denegri, who claims that this change was not carried out only due to political reasons and interests: actually, "the defining role in the process was played by the artistic production itself," who took the opportunity to fill in the 'Yugoslav artistic space' with different contents and expressive languages (Šuvaković, 2017).

Šuvaković concludes that this complex political, social, cultural, and artistic process led to a new type of artistic work, different from 'socialist realism', but also different from the 'high' modernism of the interwar period. This 'socialist modernism' can be summed up as the "discovery and development of the autonomy of art in the society conditioned by the centralized government and its cultural policy" (Šuvaković, 2017).

Denegri observes that in the process of establishing this specifically Yugoslav stylistic formation, a key role was played by the Yugoslav cultural and political institutions, which provided logistic support, organised the exhibitions of foreign art in Yugoslavia after 1950, and served as mediators when Yugoslav art was exhibited on the international artistic scene (Denegri, 2003: 173). Similar tendencies can also be observed in Serbian art music since the late 1950s, with an increasing desire to "catch

up” with the dominant currents of European musical modernism.¹⁴ One of the examples of state support for new music was the establishment of the ‘Biennial of Contemporary Music’ in Zagreb (the capital of Croatia) in 1961, as an expression of the desire to position Yugoslavia as an important centre on the map of the (Western-)European post-war music scene, though this goal was never fully realized. Subsequently, ‘Yugoslav artistic space’ and its particular formation of ‘socialist modernism’ were never fully integrated into the corpus of Western modernism(s) in the second half of the 20th Century.

Aleksandar Obradović and the Socialist Modernism in Music

Aleksandar Obradović’s opus encompasses the entire second half of the 20th Century; however, the key elements of his poetics were already established during the 1950s and further developed in the seventh decade of the 20th Century. Generally speaking, his compositional style brings together characteristics of ‘traditional’¹⁵ musical language with certain up-to-date elements of the dominant currents in European art music of the time. He has remained faithful to these artistic postulates until the very end of his creative journey, and he has readily confirmed this in one of his last interviews (a few years before his passing):

(...) novelties in art cannot exist by themselves, create themselves. The root is always in some former events. In a climax of former styles or trends, there is a germ from which a new branch will grow, like a new path (Marinković, 1997: 14).

His highly original mixture of ‘old’ and ‘new’ is often labelled in Serbian musicology as some sort of ‘neoclassicism,’ highlighting the traditionalist aspects of his musical style such as architectonics of the pieces (sonata form), broadly tonal language, traditional thematic work, etc. Obradović’s ‘traditionalist’ approach is probably the reason why in the recent decades he has been pushed to the margin of the musicological science in

¹⁴ Interestingly, the serialist avant-garde of the ‘Darmstadt circle’ – which at the time was already losing its initial feeling of radical novelty – did not find a ‘fertile ground’ in Serbian music (unlike in Croatian or Slovenian). As I mentioned earlier, the non-serial compositional techniques of the Polish composers such as Witold Lutoslawski, Krzysztof Penderecki and others had a much stronger reception among Serbian composers, notably in the generation born in the fourth decade of the 20th century.

¹⁵ I place the adjective ‘traditional’ under quotation marks because, as I am going to show, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact tradition on which Obradović leans upon.

Serbia which has been preoccupied with the achievements of the musical avant-garde and post avant-garde / postmodern music in the second half of the 20th Century.¹⁶ The only sizeable musicological study devoted to the Aleksandar Obradović's symphonism—the most important facet of his creative work – was written as early as 1979 by Zorana Radić, as a graduation paper at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade.¹⁷ This study bears the characteristics of the positivist, analytically oriented Yugoslav musicology of the time, wherein very little attention is devoted to the contextualisation of the composer's oeuvre.¹⁸ More recently, Serbian musicologist Dragana Stojanović-Novičić dedicated a significant part of her PhD dissertation to Obradović as well, placing him in a wider context of Serbian symphonic music, which she analysed from a particular perspective, at the intersection of the avant-garde and the postmodern tendencies in music of the 1960s and the 1970s. She also observed Obradović and other composers of symphonic music in the context of the most important festivals in Yugoslavia dedicated exclusively to contemporary music creation: the Music Biennale Zagreb (MBZ) and the Platform of Yugoslav Musical Work in Opatija (Stojanović-Novičić, 1999). Today also, it is necessary to re-consider Aleksandar Obradović's opus in the context of social and cultural circumstances in the FPRY and then in the SFRY in order to determine more precisely his artistic achievements and the place he should occupy in the histories of Yugoslav/Serbian music. This is all the more important because Obradović shares the unfortunate destiny of many Serbian composers of his generation, whose notable compositions (symphonies, concertos, vocal-instrumental works), while often

¹⁶ Here in particular I refer to the studies by Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman such as Veselinović 1983; Veselinović-Hofman, 1997; Veselinović-Hofman, 2002: 18–32, etc. The study by Melita Milin (Milin, 1998) represents an important exception because the author observes Serbian art music composed up to the breakthrough of the “second wave” of Serbian music avant-garde in the 1960s.

¹⁷ This graduation paper was published several years later, but without any changes in the main text, as: Radić, 1987. Her analysis encompassed Obradović's symphonies Nos. 1–6 (the last of them was composed in 1976–77), as well as several other large scale orchestral and vocal-instrumental pieces which were composed until that moment. The only addendum of the later date is the list of Obradović's compositions which was probably made by the composer himself in 1993.

¹⁸ Another notable examples of this sort of writing on Obradović's music can be found for instance in the study in French language by Louis-Mark Suter (Suter, 1989); on in Olivera Stambolić's more recent article (Stambolić, 2005: 178–188).

performed at the time of their creation and still (relatively) highly regarded in Serbian music history, today rarely reach the concert stage.¹⁹

Aleksandar Obradović stepped onto the Yugoslav music scene as a member of the first generation of composers who graduated from the Music Academy (today: the Faculty of Music) in Belgrade after WWII: he began his studies in 1945, at the time when the 'socialist' doctrine was in full force in the 'second Yugoslavia' (then: FPRY). The insight into the circumstances of the composer's growth and artistic maturity, as well as into his opinions on 'socialist realism' in music (clearly expressed in the aforementioned interview, from a half-a-century's distance), suggest – somewhat unexpectedly – that this 'reactionary' artistic trend did not have a direct or determining influence on his formative years as a composer:

In my opinion, for many who nowadays speak of some 'dictated standards' in art, it is a fabricated thesis. If, from the present-day point of view, one assesses the period forty or fifty years in the past, then the same criteria could be used when speaking of the present-day dictated standards based on religious [Orthodox] grounds, and the trend which could even be criticized more sharply. People used to write out of their own desire, just as they do now because they want to write. A trend need not necessarily be regarded as a dictated standard. A trend can designate a fashion or a sincere desire to follow a path. (...) Therefore, everyone composed to his liking (Marinković, 1997: 12–13).²⁰

Of course, other Yugoslav/Serbian composers might have had varying opinions on this subject matter, and it is disputable whether or not Obradović's statement should be taken for granted. Either way, he stressed the importance of commissions, which were well paid, and thus represented a very welcome impetus for compositional creation, admitting that "[a]fter the liberation there was a trend of writing mass songs. It was a

¹⁹ As a noteworthy exception one should mention the world premiere of Aleksandar Obradović's Piano Concerto No. 3 *Pro libertate* in 2011, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the composer's passing, twelve years after the piece was completed (1999). This premiere took place at the Belgrade Music Festival (BEMUS), the most important art music festival in Serbia, and it drew unanimously positive reviews. See: Cvetković, 2013: 99–109.

²⁰ Obradović expressed the same opinion in an earlier interview at Radio Belgrade 2nd Programme (in February 1993), which was subsequently printed in: Jevtić, 2011, notably pp. 231–232.

mass need. Since there was a need, there were commissions,” and concluding that “[n]obody wrote against his own wish” (Marinković, 1997: 13).

Nevertheless, Obradović admitted that it is “[c]ertain that the environment and conditions influence our lives. There is no doubt that they do” (Marinković, 1997: 14). It is highly likely that Obradović’s life-long attitudes towards the content, role, and place of music in Yugoslav (and Serbian) context were shaped by the direct influence of his composition professor, Mihovil Logar (1902–1998), a Belgrade-based Slovenian composer, who had been one of the more conservative members of the so-called ‘Prague Group’²¹ in the interwar period. Namely, even at the time when his fellow students in Prague were reaching for the most avant-garde music techniques of the time (dodecaphony, microtonal composition), Logar was unwilling to fully abandon traditional formal structures and tonalities of the Western music. Even at the time when elements of European avant-garde were gradually introduced into Yugoslav/Serbian art music in mid 1960s, Logar’s aesthetic position remained unchanged.²² Logar’s views are mirrored in Aleksandar Obradović’s work, which is characterized by the merging and overlapping of traditional and contemporary compositional techniques, as well as by the evolution of the music language without radical breaks with the past.²³

It is also important to ‘bring into the equation’ the circumstances of Obradović’s bourgeois upbringing, which conditioned his musical taste from an early age. He was born into a respected family and received first instructions in music from his Hungarian mother, who was a competent pianist. Afterwards, he nurtured his talent independently,

²¹ The title “Prague Group” refers to Serbian composers who studied in Prague in the interwar period, where they were introduced to the music of the “Second Viennese School” (because Prague was under German cultural influence), and also with microtonal and athematic music of Alois Hába. The members of this informal group belonged to different generations, but Mihovil Logar is usually observed together with the members of the so-called “younger generation,” together with Dragutin Čolić (1907–1987), Milan Ristić, Ljubica Marić, Vojislav Vučković (1910–1942) and Stanojlo Rajičić (1910–2000), due to the fact that they all studied in Prague at the same time (Bergamo, 1980).

²² Highly illustrative in that respect is his short essay “Paradoks kratkog spoja između publike i savremenog kompozitora,” in which he claims that “lack of content” in contemporary music has caused interruption of communication between contemporary composers and their audience (Logar, 1968: 157–158).

²³ The proximity and interconnection of their aesthetic and social views – at least until the end of the 1950s – is illustrated by their collaborative (co-authored) report about the contemporary music scene in Serbia which they presented at the Conference of the League of Yugoslav Composers in Bled (Slovenia), 26–28 December 1956. Published as Logar & Obradović, 1957: 13–14.

listening to the operatic works in the repertoire of the Belgrade Opera at the time of German occupation (mostly Italian and German late romantic operas) (Marinković, 1997: 9). Mihovil Logar was actually his only 'real' music teacher who became Obradović's professor of piano and music theory at the School of Music in Belgrade²⁴ in autumn 1943, thus introducing the young autodidact into the world of 'academic' musical training (Marinković, 1997: 9–10; Jevtić, 2011: 228–231).

Obradović did not have the chance to graduate from the School of Music: after several extremely difficult years spent under German occupation, during which two of his close family members were shot to death, towards the end of the war he joined the partisans as a volunteer, against the wishes of his parents (he was only 17 years old). He was demobilized after several months and continued his grammar school education. An accidental meeting with Logar in summer 1945 contributed to his 'return' to the studies of music: after liberation Logar was appointed professor of composition at the Music Academy in Belgrade and he invited his former student to apply for the entrance exams for composition, because additional enrollment was being organized for the students who fought in the War (Marinković, 1997: 10–12). Obradović passed the test, and was subsequently admitted to Logar's composition class.

It is beyond doubt that the events of WWII influenced Obradović's sincere adherence to the communist ideology and its artistic ideals. However, his compositions reveal a picture, which is not so onesided. First of all, it should be repeated that 'neoclassicism' (for instance, an imitation of Sergei Prokofiev's style) was widely accepted as a useful didactic tool in the studies of composition at the Music Academy, which was advanced by professors of all generations, including former avantgardists. Furthermore, the opinions expressed by certain Serbian musicologists that "artisanal, academic neoclassicism (...) was the 'speciality' of Aleksandar Obradović" (Mikić, 2007: 209) do seem to neglect the fact that he was actually one of the first Serbian composers to introduce aleatory, electronic music and *musique concrete*, micropolyphony, and other prominent traits of avant-garde music after WWII into his works.²⁵ 'Academism' in

²⁴ Today this school bears the name of its founder, the composer Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac.

²⁵ Obradović even wrote the first handbook of electronic music and electronic music instruments in Serbian language, as the addendum to his book *Uvod u orkestraciju* [An Introduction to Orchestration]. Published as Obradović, 1978.

Serbian music of the time should be understood as an expression of *anti-diletantism*,²⁶ the desire to master the 'artisanal' aspects of the great traditions of Western European music. At the time, a number of important Serbian composers saw this as an indispensable stage in the evolution of 'young' Serbian music culture on its journey towards full contemporaneity (*as* Western music culture!), a clear sign of the aforementioned tendency towards the *autonomy of arts* as an important trait of 'socialist modernism.'

The adoption of the elements of most recent avant-garde styles of the time (notably in the 1960s) can also be observed as the further affirmation of the autonomy of arts, which was, as already mentioned, desired by the artists, but also supported by the federal state. The other pole of 'socialist modernism,' as observed by M. Šuvaković, namely, the reference to the revolutionary traditions and (Eastern) communism, can also be seen in the music by Aleksandar Obradović, thus making him a paradigmatic representative of this stylistical formation in Serbian art music of the 1960s and 1970s (and even in later decades). Many among Obradović's notable works, such as his symphonies, clearly reflect the ideal projection of the artistic and political position of Yugoslavia, between 'East' and 'West.'

Perhaps the most striking – and the most notorious – example is Obradović's Symphony No. 4 (1972), a two-movement cycle which mimics the same macro-formal outline of his early Symphony No. 1 (1952). Both symphonies share the same 'programmatic' content with their references to WWII and the People's Liberation War (Radić, 1984: 5, 7). However, while Symphony No. 1 remains firmly rooted in the 'neoclassical' (neoromantic, neoexpressionist) musical language, Symphony No. 4 is much more interesting for its highly individualised use of heterogeneous stylistical devices. It was premiered in the year of its completion (1972) by the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, to largely positive reviews, although certain critics expressed doubts regarding the overall aesthetic result of the Symphony given considerable stylistical differences between its two movements (for instance Josif, 1972: 14).

²⁶According to Vlastimir Peričić, the fact that the Music Academy in Belgrade was only a decade old (founded in 1937) created some sort of "fear of diletantism" among the first generation of professors after the end of WWII which is why they insisted that their students should master traditional forms and musical language of the past (Western) styles. Cf. Medić, 2007: 283; see also Medić, 2004: 79.

The first movement of the symphony is entitled *Buktinje (Torches)* and it is composed in the sonata form, whereas the first subject is based on the freely used 12-tone row and the second subject is quasi-folkloric (Stambolić, 2005: 186). This movement is 'programmatically' seen as a reminiscence of WWII (Radić, 1984: 7). The second movement is entitled *Odjeci (Echos)* and its formal scheme is 'variations with a theme' (Radić, 1984: 7), with the principal theme taken from the mass song *Družo Tito, ljubičice bela* (Comrad Tito, you white violet) – a eulogy to the life-long president of the 'Second Yugoslavia' and leader of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, Marshal Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980). This very simple tonal melody is transformed from the very beginning of the movement in such ways that it is barely recognisable (or completely unrecognisable!) thanks to the use of the micropolyphony, clusters, aleatory, and chromatism.²⁷ The theme is further 'masked' with the clever use of orchestration and chordal mixtures, as well as with the introduction of another important thematic motive *b-e-b-a* (B flat – E – B flat – A),²⁸ and the quotations of both themes of the first movement. The main theme is practically 'hidden' from the immediate sight, but its elements are nevertheless present throughout the movement (notably its march-like rhythm), and it is fully quoted for the first time in the seventh variation (of twelve). There are other characteristic elements of motivic work, such as 'blending together' the main theme of the second movement with the first theme of the first movement (compare Radić, 1987: 69), both of which, apparently, symbolize Tito, the leader of the Yugoslav people both in the war times and in peace. The last variation is particularly interesting because it 'sums up' everything that has been said up to that point – all thematic materials of the movement – and it culminates with the 60-voice canonic imitation of the mass-song theme. Metaphorically speaking, the 'music *for* the masses' has been transformed into 'music *of* the masses'! The composer's message expressed with this music-technical device can be interpreted as the confirmation of his own conviction that the chosen 'way into the future' is the right one for Yugoslavia – the one, which can lead the country into the light of progress (expressed with the elements of avant-garde musical language!) but based on the morals and values of the people's revolution, led by Tito (i. e. communism of the Eastern bloc).

²⁷ For detailed analysis of this movement and the Symphony as a whole, see Radić, 1987: 49–72.

²⁸ The symbolism of this motive is unknown – it could be a purely "musical" device, or it could have another meaning for the composer.

This piece can thus be seen as an epitome of ‘socialist modernism’ in its musical and ideological content, situated between the poles of ‘East’ and ‘West.’ It is therefore not surprising, that this particular symphony was chosen to be performed by the Czech Philharmonic orchestra as part of the 6th Belgrade Music Festival – BEMUS, the oldest and the most important art music festival in Serbia,²⁹ in 1974. As observed by Dejan Despić, the faithful chronicler of this music festival,

A rare event, the playing of a Yugoslav composer’s work by a world-ranked top-class orchestra, occurred on the first of these evenings when the Czechs played Yugoslav Aleksandar Obradović’s *Fourth* Symphony, obviously to the composer’s great satisfaction! (Despić, 2001: 29).

Even more illustrative is the opinion of the conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, Václav Neumann, about the piece:

Obradović’s work is very charming and interesting. If I did not like it, we would not have performed it. Your [Yugoslav] music reflects some sort of purity, it is reflective of the ideology, it is somehow – democratic. (Hristović-Samardžiski, 1974: 6).

It can thus be said that the ‘ideology’ of Obradović’s Symphony No. 4 was not observed even at the time of its creation as rigidly ‘communist’ (despite its programmatic content!) largely because its musical language revealed the tendency for the *autonomy of art*. This symphony, as well as Obradović’s other notable works, reflects a careful consideration of *musical* problems and the composer offers highly personal solutions to the ‘needs’ of Yugoslav art, thus revealing himself as both a *modernist* (in his longing for the autonomous development of his discipline, in the particular *Yugoslav-Serbian* context and circumstances) and as a *socialist* (in the core values he propagates with his programmatic pieces).

²⁹ Belgrade Music Festival – BEMUS was founded in 1969 as the central festive event marking the 25th anniversary of the Liberation of the City of Belgrade (Janković, 2006: 46). Obradović’s Symphony was performed on the first of two concerts of the Czech Philharmonic orchestra, on 11 October 1974 at the Kolarac Hall in Belgrade (BEMUS, 2017).

Conclusion

In my opinion, the selected example from the opus of Aleksandar Obradović, among many other possible illustrations, clearly demonstrates that there is sufficient evidence which confirm the hypothesis of this paper – that the stylistical formation of ‘socialist modernism’ was equally represented in Yugoslav/Serbian music as in the visual arts and architecture of the same period. Therefore, the introduction of this notion into Serbian and wider musicological discourse would be very welcome, perhaps even necessary, when analysing the music composed in Yugoslavia (and Serbia as its part) in the 1960s onwards, until the dissolution of the country. It could be used to describe in the most general and comprehensive way the diverse opuses of a number of Serbian/Yugoslav composers belonging to (or around) Obradović’s generation who predominantly composed large scale symphonic and vocal-instrumental works, such as Rudolf Bruči [Brucci] (1917–2002), Dušan Kostić (1925–2005), Petar Ozgijan [Osglian] (1932–1979), Slobodan Atanacković (b. 1937), etc. Even though their individual poetics are different, they all demonstrate the tendency, quoted earlier, towards the ‘internal autonomy and external function’ (Šuvaković, 2017) of their music which is both *modernist* (in its musical ‘language’) and *socialist* (in its ‘ethical’ dimension, which contradicts the presupposed modernistic autonomy of arts).

In light of the analysis presented in this paper, another possible term for the same opus of works could be ‘Yugoslav neoclassicism.’ However, it would probably be better just to apply such a term to the music of the 1950s – in other words, to equate it with the notion of ‘socialist aestheticism’ – since the following decades did bring a wider aesthetic plurality of compositional approaches and gradual distancing from the principles of neoclassicism in the works of certain Serbian composers (and in certain Yugoslav republics this evolution was even more farreaching). On the other hand, having in mind that the syntagma ‘socialist modernism’ has already been accepted in art theory and history of Yugoslav architecture of the 1960s and later on, there is no reason why the parallel events in Yugoslav/Serbian music of the time would not be discussed in the same way, given the similarities of ideological starting points and of the resulting artistic productions.

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