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The Impossible Avant-garde of Vladan Radovanović*

Nemogoča avantgarda Vladana Radovanovića**

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IZVLEČEK

Izraz *nesuđena avangarda* (»nesojena avantgarda«) je skoval Milorad Belančić, da bi z njim opisal edinstveno umetniško usodo Vladana Radovanovića. Čeprav je bil Radovanović edini resnično avantgardni srbski skladatelj v Jugoslaviji po drugi svetovni vojni, je bilo njegovo delo prezrto in potisnjeno na rob. V članku obravnavam okoliščine, zaradi katerih je bila Radovanovićeva avantgarda desetletja neprepoznana, nepomembna in nevidna.

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ABSTRACT

The term *nesuđena avangarda* ("undestined avant-garde") was coined by Milorad Belančić to describe Vladan Radovanović's unique artistic destiny. Although Radovanović was the only truly avant-garde Serbian composer in the post-World War II Yugoslavia, his output was overlooked and sidelined. In this article I discuss the circumstances that rendered Radovanović's avant-garde unrecognised, irrelevant and invisible for many decades.

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Introduction

Vladan Radovanović (born in Belgrade in 1932) is the most erudite Serbian composer and multimedia artist of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Blessed with an encyclopaedic knowledge, extraordinary memory and eloquence, he is the sole Serbian composer who, as asserted by Jim Samson, "committed himself to a remarkably radical position right from the start".[1] Radovanović's vast and diversified output poses numerous challenges. His prolific career has spanned almost seven decades, during which he has worked in the realms of instrumental, vocal-instrumental and electro-acoustic music, metamusic, visual and tactile arts, artifugal projects, literature, recordings and drawings of his dreams, polymedial and vocovisual projects, as well as art theory. The key features of Radovanović's art are: first of all, his self-proclaimed goal "to express himself by doing what no one else has done before",[2] thus embodying the avant-garde urge for innovation and originality; second, his autoreflexivity and a constant dialogue with himself, as exhibited both in his individual artistic and theoretical works and in their interrelations within his entire output; and finally, an incredible complexity and wealth of symbolism in his music, writings and multimedia works – seemingly abstract, yet embroidered with Radovanović's immense erudition and a quirky sense of verbal and visual humour.

The starting point for this article is the term *nesuđena avangarda* (literally translated as "undestined avant-garde", or "avant-garde that wasn't meant to be"), coined by Serbian philosopher Milorad Belančić (1943–2017) to describe Vladan Radovanović's unique artistic destiny.[3] My central argument is that avant-garde poetics such as Radovanović's are "impossible" in small peripheral cultures which experienced a belated and incomplete development of cultural institutions and the "world of art" in general. If Radovanović were born in a "big" European culture, it is almost certain that he would have been recognised as one of the great artistic innovators and luminaries of the twentieth century. Moreover, it is likely that many of his artistic projects, which had been left in the conceptual or draft stage, would have been brought to completion. As it were, in the post-war socialist Yugoslavia, a majority of Radovanović's avant-garde projects could not be performed or exhibited at the time when they were conceived, due to the lack of necessary technical means, or simply the ignorance of artistic arbiters in the country; and even when performed or showcased, his works were often misunderstood. Since his works were not publicly available or comprehensivelly discussed, until Mirjana Veselinović's landmark monograph published in 1991,[4] Radovanović's output was not promoted to an adequate place in the history of Serbian, Yugoslav or global post-WWII art. In Serbia, this situation has changed in recent years, with a surge of new publications (special journal issues, edited books, catalogues, dissertations etc.) dedicated to this doyen of Serbian avant-garde. But while his oeuvre has finally received

1 Jim Samson, *Music in the Balkans* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 488.
2 Ivana Janković [Medić], "Sintezijska umetnost Vladana Radovanovića," *Muzikologija/Musicology* 3 (2003): 157.
3 Milorad Belančić, "Jedan osobeni pluralizam," *Stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* (Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 2013), 192.
4 Mirjana Veselinović, *Umetnost i izvan nje: poetika i stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1991).

its due recognition in the homeland, Radovanović's avant-garde has remained largely unknown in the rest of the world; he is yet to be included in any major anthologies and encyclopedia of the twentieth century art.

What complicated Radovanović's earlier reception and inclusion in Serbian and Yugoslav art histories was the fact that he constantly pursued many different artistic disciplines (some of which he had invented himself), which made it impossible to pigeonhole him: critics were puzzled whether he was a composer who loved to paint, or a paintor who strived to write, or a writer immersed in conceptual art... The correct answer to this (rhetorical) question would be that he is – all of that, and even more – a true Renaissance man in a non-Renaissance time. Although he was trained as a composer, it is difficult to assert that music is his primary discipline, because it is only one of the artistic "streams" that emerge from his creative "core"; instead, Radovanović is an artistic polyphonist who "composes" using all arts as parts of his multimedia polyphonic textures. Thus the central position in his entire output is occupied by the so-called *synthesic art,* which encompasses both synchronous and successive conjoining and merger of all media or stylistic features into integral art.[5] Radovanović introduced this term not only to define and explain his unusual multifaceted activity (and thus facilitate his own pigeonholing), but also because he strived to create general models for the classification of multimedia works.

The list of Vladan Radovanović's breakthroughs and innovations in music and other arts that he has pursued since the early 1950s encompasses:

- notations and drawings of dreams (1953) – his *lifetime project;*[6]
- vocovisual syntheses of word, sound and image in two-dimensional space (1954);
- conceptual projects: stream of consciousness, visions, improvisations, projects of events that examine their own creation etc. (1954);
- synthetic projects: word-picture, word-gesture, polymedia (1955);
- (proto)-minimalist music (1956);
- working with the body as an object (1956);
- tactile art (tactisons, 1956-1958);
- vocovisual syntheses in three-dimensional space (since 1958);
- abstract-structuralist drawings (1958);
- hyperpolyphony (1959);
- music for tape and radiophonic works (1961);
- transparent pictures (1962);
- electronic music (1966),
- vocovisual syntheses of words, plastic, tactile and kinetic (1971);
- meta-art: the media explores itself: tape, paper, photography (1973);
- transmedia (1976)
- meta-musical projects, transmodalism (1979);
- computer music (1976).

5 Cf. Janković, "Sintezijska umetnost Vladana Radovanovića," 142–43.

6 The number in the brackets indicates the year when Radovanović first started a certain artistic activity.

In order to at least partially bypass the fact that his works had been ignored by performers, curators and critics alike for the best part of the 1950s and 1960s, which led to them being excluded from the official "world of art" in Serbia and Yugoslavia, Radovanović took up the task of writing about his art himself, but also about various problems of contemporary art; in doing so, he produced an immense theoretical output consisting of monographs, articles, edited books and catalogues, which has followed his every artistic step, thus acquiring the status of autopoetics. Striving for a great terminological precision and an exact labelling of his often very unusual projects, Radovanović introduced many new terms and offered new definitions of already existing ones.[7]

In this article I argue that three main factors contributed to the "impossibility" of Radovanović's avant-garde. First of all, his truly innovative oeuvre was at complete odds with the surrounding social and cultural environment in a country that did not yet possess institutional or discursive tools necessary to acknowledge and validate his poetics – I have dubbed this "the unrecognised avant-garde". The second reason is that his avant-garde output was "too abstract" and could not express the desired socialist ideological values; for this tendency I have coined the term "the invisible avant-garde". Finally, having spent his entire career in a country that was on the "wrong" side of the centre-periphery divide in the post-World War II Europe, Radovanović could not make his mark in a way that the composers and other artists who lived and worked in the great European centres did – I have dubbed this "the irrelevant avant-garde".

The unrecognised avant-garde

My first hypothesis is that, in order for a certain artwork (or entire artistic oeuvre) to be identified as avant-garde, it must belong to an organised avant-garde formation, or initiate a new "school" or "-ism"; furthermore, it must be publicly visible, promoted as something groundbreaking, and accompanied by an appropriate critical discourse. In the case of Vladan Radovanović, this miraculous loner of Yugoslav art, it did not happen. It had to do, first and foremost, with the fact that only a negligible percentage of his opus was published, exhibited, performed or reproduced at the time when it was created. In spite of his fantastic erudition, Radovanović was never offered a teaching position at the Belgrade Faculty of Music, and only found institutional support at the Radio Belgrade, where he founded the Electronic Studio of Radio Belgrade 3 in 1972. The museums of contemporary art rarely included Radovanović's works in their exhibitions because, as a painter, he was an autodidact and hence dismissed as a dilletante. Moreover, as observed by Milorad Belančić:

> *In Vladan Radovanović's oeuvre one finds some entirely unexpected, never-beforeseen artistic innovation, not only in local, but in wider, European and global coordinates (visions, voco-visual, tactile art, minimalist music, metamusic etc.) In the 1950s their originality must have been so surprising, that they could not be*

7 Cf. Katarina Tomašević, "Prolegomena za raspravu o teorijskom diskursu o muzici Vladana Radovanovića – povodom knjige *Muzika i elektroakustička muzika*," *Treći program* 155–156 (2012): 230–231; 237.

understood, therefore they were not taken seriously. These works were 'untimely', 'un-contemporary' in Nietzchean sense, because they presented such an unforeseen broadening of an artistic field. His avant-garde appeared too early, both in the local and global artistic scenes. Yet, this undestined avant-garde (or: undestined signpost) played a truly liberating role, although it was completely confusing and incomprehensible for the conventional understanding of art.[8]

In other words, this avant-garde was so *ahead* of its time and place, that it could not immediately anticipate, or precede any artistic movement or school, thus remaining isolated, "infertile", without direct successors, only to be retroactively recognised as a forerunner of many artistic movements that appeared much later. Art historian Đorđe Kadijević has suggested that Radovanović did not even attempt to attract artistic "offspring": "His unique works seem unrepeatable. To put it simply, Radovanović does not allow himself to 'resemble' anyone else, but he has also done everything in his power to prevent anyone else from starting to resemble him (...) Radovanović does not only wish to be the first one [to do something], but also the only one."[9] Furthermore, Kadijević asserts that Radovanović was never interested in drawing attention to himself by a typically avant-garde outrageous posturing: "If the originality of someone's avant-garde is confirmed by arbitrary voluntarism, transgression, incidents, provocations, excess behaviour and a tendency to scandalise, then Radovanović really does not belong in such company."[10]

It is even more striking that an oeuvre such as Radovanović's emerged in the conservative environment of the post-WWII Serbia. The generation of Serbian composers educated in Prague in the late 1920s and early 1930s, mostly in the class of Alois Hába (commonly referred to as "The Prague Group"),[11] failed to establish an avant-garde musical scene upon their return to Belgrade in the mid-1930s, due to the general underdevelopment of Serbian musical life and its institutions. As observed by Melita Milin, "The negation of tradition, which is one of [avant-garde's] main positions, [...] was too radical for a young musical culture which had been trying to establish its own tradition during the last century with a lot of enthusiasm and effort".[12] The most outspoken member of the Prague Group, Vojislav Vučković, initially advocated for an equation of radical avant-garde music with the radical political left. However, a few years before his tragic death in 1942, Vučković realised that the maxim "left in music – left in politics" could not be applied adequately in Serbia of that time; thus, he started promoting the ideology of socialist realism, "imported" from the USSR. After the war had ended, the doctrine of socialist realism became – albeit only for a brief period of time – the official cultural norm in the newly established Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (later Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). Although Yugoslav artists escaped the harsh

8 Belančić, "Jedan osobeni pluralizam," 192.

9 Đorđe Kadijević, "O originalnosti," *Koraci* 3-4 (2006): 11.

10 Ibid, 12.

11 This group consisted of composers Ljubica Marić (1909–2003), Stanojlo Rajičić (1910–2000), Vojislav Vučković (1910–1942), Dragutin Čolić (1907–1987) et al.

12 Melita Milin, *Tradicionalno i novo u srpskoj muzici posle Drugog svetskog rata (1945–1965)* (Beograd: Muzikološki institut SANU, 1998), 84.

denunciations that their peers in the countries of the Eastern Bloc were subjected to, the composers were still expected to write accessible, tonal music, loosely based upon "national" musical premises. The late 1940s and early 1950s saw the emergence of the first generation of composers educated at the Belgrade Music Academy (nowadays Faculty of Music), which had only been established in 1937. Its professors were fearful of dilettantism and insisted that students should master traditional forms of European classical music. Radovanović himself used the term *academic classicism* in his writings to describe the rigid canon that the young composers were subjected to.

Since the late 1950s, Yugoslav composers and critics started to have regular contacts with the West, and it was chiefly after the Biennial of Contemporary Music was founded in Zagreb in 1961 that the composers were encouraged to assimilate at least some of the latest avant-garde techniques (for example aleatorics, micropolyphony and, to a lesser extent, serialism); however, by that time, Radovanović had already made far more advanced breakthroughs. Thanks to the Biennale in Zagreb, Croatian and Slovenian composers were in a closer contact with the European avant-garde; Radovanović was probably the only Serbian composer advanced enough to actually 'fit the bill'. However, not a single Serbian composer ever had a concert dedicated to his or her works at the Biennale, unlike some Croatian and Slovenian avant-garde composers such as Milko Kelemen (1924–2918), Ivo Malec (1925–), Vinko Globokar (1934–), Dubravko Detoni (1937–) and others. Thus, Radovanović was sidelined in Zagreb due to being an outsider, while in Belgrade he was mostly ignored because he was at odds with the moderately modernist (and, later, moderately postmodernist) environment. Being an introspective, auto-reflexive and introverted man, Radovanović did not aggresively campaign for his works to become publicly visible; thus, the first and only Belgrade concert dedicated solely to his music was organised as a celebration of his 80th birthday, in 2012!

When it comes to his output in visual arts, in the mid-1950s, frustrated by his isolation and desperate to find kindred spirits, Radovanović joined the artistic group *Mediala*, formed by painters Miro Glavurtić (1932–), Leonid Šejka (1932–1970) and Olja Ivanjicki (1931–2009). These artists aimed for the new art built on the basis of the merger of tradition (middle ages, Byzantium, renaissance and classicism) with contemporary techniques. Members of Mediala wanted to use all past experiences and all artistic breakthroughs from the past that would enable them to answer ontological questions. Radovanović joined this group of esoteric traditionalists because he thought that they shared his interest in multimedia artistic syntheses (hence the name Mediala). However, this collaboration did not work out, as the majority of Mediala members were only interested in painting; and in its striving for the archaic, metaphysical and mystical, as well as free interpretations and reinventions of past styles, Mediala was actually analogous to the neo-mystical (neo-medieval) stream of moderated modernism in music, which Radovanović despised. Thus, he left Mediala as soon as he realised that its artistic mission was incompatible with his own. Miro Glavurtić himself and the art historian Irina Subotić have recalled Mediala's very first exhibition in June 1958, where Radovanović exhibited his *ideograms*, a model of his polymedia project *Tactisone – Movement – Sound*, as well as his tactile art, aptly named *Pipazoni* (literally translated as "touchings" or "touching zones"). Glavurtić and Subotić testify that during the exhibition *Pipazoni* were the talk of

the day, yet they provoked nothing but confusion, ridicule and mockery. Both critics and audiences were baffled, but unwilling to engage with this new, challenging art, and after the exhibition, the entire Mediala group was given a derogatory nickname "Pipazoni"![13]

The fact that Radovanović's artistic breakthroughs were mostly ignored in Serbia of that time is confirmed by Slobodan Pavićević, who testified that in 1980 he was one of only three authors from central Serbia (out of total 70 authors from the entire Yugoslavia) who was included in Radovanović's exhibition "Verbo-voco-visual in Yugoslavia 1950–1980."[14] Another testimony, by Đorđe Savić, is even more illustrative: "I saw Vladan Radovanović's great retrospective exhibition in the National Museum three times – completely alone, in an empty gallery, filled with magnificent art. It was great that I was not disturbed by anybody; yet, it was crushing to realise that other people needed to see this exhibition, one of those that must not be missed – and yet, they missed it."[15] Art historian Borka Božović lists the following reasons for this neglect of Radovanović's work:

> *... lack of information, indifference, ignorance, fascination with foreign artists and with the latest fads, misunderstanding (...) In isolation he created his own world and built a sophisticated art system. (...) There were no critics that could explain, observe, promulgate or support Radovanović's experiments, innovations, ideas, drawings, objects, photographic works, video works. Even when some institutions for new art practice were formed, Radovanović was rarely invited to present his work...*[16]

Thus Božović is rightfully fascinated with the fact that, even in such an environment, Radovanović retained his incredibly strong urge to express himself and a persevering will to continue with his research and work up to this day.

The invisible avant-garde

An interesting definition on socialist realism in Serbian post-WWII music is given by Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, who described it as a "simplified type of musical neoclassicism"[17] and aptly asserted that neoclassicism, with its ability to assimilate elements of any musical tradition, underwent a deviation in Serbian music immediately after WWII: "We could almost say that this deviation came into being by means of 'socializing' and politicizing 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

13 Cf. Žarko Rošulj, "Ideogrami Vladana Radovanovića – Za um(et)nikov osamdeseti rođendan," *Stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* (Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 2013), 160–177.

14 Slobodan Pavićević, "Sintezijska umetnost Vladana Radovanovića," *Koraci* 3–4 (2006): 5.

15 Đorđe Savić, "Ka metafizici Vladana Radovanovića: pogled sa balkona na zakrivljenje u ništa," *Koraci* 3–4 (2006): 22.

16 Borka Božović, "Recepcija stvaralaštva Vladana Radovanovića," *Koraci* 4–6 (2014): 126–27.

17 Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, "Muzika u drugoj polovini XX veka," *Istorija srpske muzike – Srpska muzika i evropsko nasleđe* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2007), 108.

of a presupposition of intelligibility and accessibility of music."[18] The dogma of socialist realism was abandoned as soon as Yugoslavia parted ways with the USSR and Eastern Bloc in 1948, after which this simplified neoclassicism easily transformed into slightly more advanced, yet by no means daring *socialist modernism*[19] or *moderated modernism.*[20] The official idelogical stance was the determination to open up towards Europe and "modernize" Yugoslav cultural life, but not at the cost of destroying the existing institutions of musical and cultural life, and without calling for the radical denial of tradition.[21] Hence a prevailing opinion among Serbian music professionals in the early 1950s was that composers should seek novelty, but without discarding traditional artistic means and their communicativeness; also, that gradual and continuous introduction of new techniques was more desirable than an abrupt break with the past.[22]

Unlike the majority of his peers, young Vladan Radovanović flatly rejected academic classicism and moderated modernism; he refused to combine traditional and contemporary techniques with (pseudo)national tradition and dismissed all (neo)conservativism. As a cosmopolitan and somewhat esoteric artist, Radovanović could never adopt predictable, superficial mimesis that was routinely employed to create musical works that embodied the ideologies of socialist modernism, moderated modernism or defensive integrationism. When asked to provide a label for his own musical style, Radovanović offered a syntagm *cosmic–sacral polyphony*.[23] Ever since the beginning of his professional career, Radovanović strived to merge the oneiric and real worlds, to penetrate the realms for which humans do not have suitable receptors, to discover the unique core of all creation, either by contemplating the vastness of space or by immersing himself into the depths of his own being. Even when they contain text, his musical works are abstract and esoteric; moreover, Radovanović invested a great deal of time and effort in raising and solving internal, meta-musical problems of the discipline. In his choral or vocal-instrumental or radiophonic works, the verbal layer is chosen for its sound qualities rather than "meaning". Moreover, he often works at the meta-level of discourse, where musical language "deconstructs" itself right before the listeners. Serbian moderately modernistic art music scene in the 1950s, 1960s and even 1970s had absolutely no use of Radovanović's nonconformist, "cosmic–sacral" works, which is why they were marginalised and rarely performed.

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18 Ibid,. 109.

19 Ješa Denegri coined the term *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". Ješa Denegri, *Pedesete – teme srpske umetnosti* (Novi Sad: Svetovi, 1995), 12–13; 17–18.

20 On various implications of moderated modernism in Serbian post-WWII music and musicology, see: Ivana Medić, "The Ideology of Moderated Modernism in Serbian Music and Musicology," *Muzikologija/Musicology* 7 (2007): 279–94; Ivana Medić, "In the Orbit of Shostakovich: Vasilije Mokranjac's Symphonies," *Music and Society in Eastern Europe* 8 (2013): 1–22; Ivana Medić, "Simfonijsko stvaralaštvo Rudolfa Bručija između socijalističkog estetizma i umerenog modernizma," in *Život i delo Rudolfa Bručija: kompozitor u procepu između estetika i ideologija,* eds. Bogdan Đaković, Nenad Ostojić and Nemanja Sovtić (Novi Sad: Matica srpska/Akademija umetnosti, 2018), 125–45; Jelena Janković-Beguš, "Between East and West: Socialist Modernism as the Official Paradigm of Serbian art music in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," *Musicologist – International Journal of Music Studies*, 1, no. 1 (2017): 141–163.

21 György Peteri has labelled this position *defensive integrationism*. Cf. György Peteri, "Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in Hungary in 1960s," *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2004): 119–20.

22 The word "new" here has a relative meaning, since in the post-war Serbia even neoclassicism could be perceived as new, because that style had barely existed in the local pre-war musical scene.

23 Katarina Tomašević, "Inovativan i autentičan stvaralac: Vladan Radovanović," *Muzikologija/Musicology* 23 (2017): 300.

As to Radovanović's works in the domains of visual arts, literature and multimedia, in spite of their immense complexity, they are never hermetic and cerebral, but magically attractive, fascinating, even beautiful. Their sublime "artness" is precisely what makes them so enchanting; and while, outwardly, they appear more mimetic than his musical pieces, they never engage with the socialist "optimal projection", but instead depict an imaginary, hidden, invisible, surreal world. Since Yugoslav critics lacked the discoursive tools to analyse and discuss his art, Radovanović undertook the task to analyse and discuss it himself. In 1957 he began to sketch his theoretical position, which he would constantly adapt and modify throughout his career. In the beginning he separated his numerous activites from one another – e.g. drawings of dreams, vocovisual art, performance art, polymedia; gradually, he discovered and affirmed the "unity in diversity" of his multifaceted art and established the theory and practice of *synthesic art.* Although Radovanović's systematisations are inevitably personally biased, his very need to establish the discoursive environment simultaneously with his artistic work separates him from almost all of his Serbian contemporaries and makes him practically the only exponent of genuinely avant-garde art in the post-World War II socialist Serbia. And while, with hindsight, his theory of synthesic art seemingly shares several traits with postmodernism, mostly with respect to the affirmation of pluralism, it is clearly separated from postmodernism by Radovanović's continuous insistence on originality, innovation, individual authorship, as well as the rejection of incoherence and his striving for the artworks, even the most complex ones, to emerge from a single core.

The irrelevant avant-garde

As remarked by Melita Milin, the question of who gets included in histories of music is always a political one.[24] With respect to Radovanović, my third argument is that, in order for someone's original creative invention to be recognised as such in a broad (global) framework, that work must be created in a "big", "central" culture. Those poetics that emerge in small, peripheral cultures have very slight chances of entering museums, art histories or encyclopedia worldwide, not only because of the obvious detrimental factors such as the lack of promotion and agency and the language barrier. Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman observes that countries such as Serbia (or, previously, Yugoslavia), which have built their professional cultures under the influence of a (Western) "centre" or "centres" will forever be marginalised, due to the ever-present imbalance of power: "the (sub)conscious of that centre contains some psychological reminder of its professional-historical value, which always justified the centre's conviction that such an advantage gained it the natural right to the status of an arbitrator – in spite of the fact that the periphery was often musically more creative and innovative than the centre".[25] This is confirmed by Jim Samson's observation:

24 Melita Milin, "General Histories of Music and the Place of the European Periphery," *Muzikologija/Musicology* 1 (2001): 142–45.

25 Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman, "Music at the Periphery Under Conditions of Degraded Hierarchy Between the Centre and the Margins in the Space of the Internet," in *Identities: The World of Music in Relation to Itself,* eds. Tilman Seebass, Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman and Tijana Popović-Mladenović (Belgrade: Faculty of Music, 2012), 25.

> *Composers of an older generation such as Xenakis and Ligeti would probably not have made the mark they did on the new music had they remained in Greece and Hungary respectively. There was a rather clear sense of centre and periphery in the 1960s, and for these composers the charismatic centres of new music in Europe and North America proved to be the gateways to international acclaim. (...) Arriving at the centres did not guarantee visibility, of course; they were nothing if not competitive arenas. But avoiding the centres all but guaranteed invisibility.*[26]

An illustrative example of such treatment of peripheral cultures is provided by Italian composer and musicologist Luca Cossettini who, in his essay on Radovanović's electroacoustic works, remarked:

> *Very little is known in Italy of the musical production of Vladan Radovanović, as goes for almost all the rest of Serbian and former Yugoslav artistic music of the twentieth century. Former Yugoslav composers are exceptions in the Italian books on history of music. The only composers cited are the ones who worked in the big West European centres (e.g. Ivo Malec). Italian publications about electronic music are focused on a canonical view of music creation that implies a West-Eurocentric idea of culture, thus ignoring those realities that do not fit the schemas that German, French and – to a lesser extent – Italian composers and musicologists had developed in the last fifty years.*[27]

Cossetini argues that the main reason for this occurence is the language barrier, which in the past had made access to primary and secondary sources on Serbian and former Yugoslav music very difficult. But although nowadays this issue has largely been bypassed thanks to the internet and Google Translate, this does not solve the problem of the still prevailing imbalance of power between the 'centre' and the 'periphery', between the rich and the poor, the large and the small.

Due to this neglect of peripheral cultures, many of Radovanović's artistic enterprises which, had they been created in big centres such as Paris and New York would have certainly entered the anthologies of contemporary art, were simply not registered (or registered too belatedly to make any impact). For example, Radovanović's *Pričinjavanja (Visions)* from 1955 and other projects which work with an idea as a material substance, accentuating the mental images and the non-literal use of language – predate the conceptual artworks by the likes of Henry Flynt (1940–) or Joseph Kosuth (1945–). Since the *Visions* are performed by the author himself, that work can also be said to represent an early (proto)form of performance art. *Making One's Body* (1957) was created ten years before the official manifestos of physical art in Europe and America (by Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Gina Pane). Radovanović's unclassifiable projects from 1956–1957 predate Fluxus and post-Duchampian neo-Dada (e.g. the work of artists such as Joseph Beuys, Wolf Vostell, George Brecht or Ben Vaultier); etc.

26 Samson, *Music in the Balkans*, 567–68.

27 Luca Cossettini, "Beyond the mix. On Vladan Radovanović's mixed electronic music," *Stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* (Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 2013), 39.

In the domain of music, as soon as he graduated in 1956, Radovanović wrote *Six Two-Part Chorales*, very simple, proto-minimalist works, characterised by radical reductionism in terms of duration, rhythmical organisation and tempo, without specific instrumentation. While Radovanović's *Chorales* certainly bear resemblance to the first proto-minimalist works such as *Octet for Brass* (1957) by LaMonte Young (1935–), at that time Radovanović knew nothing about these new tendencies. The actual minimalism in Serbia only happened two decades later, in the 1970s, so one can hardly speak of a direct influence of Radovanović's *Chorales*.[28] If we recall the aforementioned Belančić's statement about a novelty which was so innovative at the moment of its creation that it could not produce direct successors, it is clear that such a novelty can only retroactively be identified as an anticipation of a certain artistic movement or school. Radovanović's motivation for the decision to pursue a radically reductionist style at the very beginning of his professional career were threefold:[29] first of all, he wanted to liberate himself from the petrified academic style that was forced upon composition students at the Belgrade Music Academy, to pyrify himself from all conventions and to reach the essence of music. His second reason was the already mentioned artistic credo "to do what nobody else had done before", and yet remain within the realm of music. The final reason was that *Chorales* were created in the mentalistic project *Visions (Pričinjavanja)*, an example of *artifugal* art; this is Radovanović's term for "the departure from what was once considered art"[30] – an art that springs from somewhere among the previously recognised media and genres. Thus *Visions* and the complementary *Chorales* anticipated phenomena that would become crucial for Radovanović's entire output: the polyphony of media, metalanguage, and *a degree of mentality* that his poetics would share with the much later conceptual art.[31]

Another Radovanović's innovation is what Melita Milin has called *meta-musical projects*.[32] These projects explore music as such; their means of expression are primarily visual, verbal and theatrical. Radovanović has created many metamusical projects known as *Transmodalisms*, which represent phases of creation of a musical work, its progression through various modalities, from an idea to its transcription and sound realisation to the listener's experience of the work. They often contain witty verbal description of the performing process as an indispensable part in the trans(cription) modality.

Due to the fact that "big" cultures had long overlooked and ignored artistic oeuvres from the small, peripheral ones, many of Radovanović's creative and theoretical pursuits that were novel not only in local, but also in international coordinates, were neither registered nor included in the anthologies of contemporary art. Even when Radovanović arrived at some novel concepts or techniques simultaneously with artists from other

28 Cf. Dragana Stojanović-Novičić, "Stvorenost u svedenosti – *Šest dvoglasnih korala* Vladana Radovanovića," *Treći program* 155–156 (2013): 221.

29 From my conversation with Vladan Radovanović in Belgrade, 8 February 2014.

30 Konstantin Stefanović, "Istraživanje medijskog postupka u sintezijskoj umetnosti Vladana Radovanovića," *Treći program* 155–156 (2012): 286.

31 From my conversation with Vladan Radovanović in Belgrade, 8 February 2014.

32 Melita Milin, "Meta-muzika i muzika Vladana Radovanovića," *Vladan Radovanović – Sintezijska umetnost. Jednomedijsko i višemedijsko stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* (Kragujevac: Narodni muzej, 2006), 126–37.

parts of the globe, we cannot speak of an influence, because information on new artistic practices only reached Yugoslavia selectively and belatedly. Being isolated from the academia and, during the first decades of his career deprived of financial support, Radovanović could not attend festivals and seminars on avant-garde music, where he could have promoted his ideas, compared his discoveries with others and received feedback. Instead, he was relegated to working in solitude, and only finding out much later that something had also been done before by someone at another part of the world – or even, that someone did something after him, but was credited with being the first one. However, what is surprising is the unpreparedness of Serbian musicologists and art critics to believe in Radovanović's claims that he arrived at many of his artistic discoveries, which are similar or analogous to similar things happening simultaneously in the wider world, entirely independently. Radovanović was often forced to counteract the critics' claims that he had been influenced, for example, by György Ligeti (1923–2006) and the Polish composers when he conceived his concept of *hyperpolyphony*. In a recent interview Radovanović provided a detailed chronology of events and specified when exactly he became acquainted with works by the likes of Henryk Górecki (1933–2010), Witold Lutosławski (1913–1994) and Ligeti.[33] The analysis of Radovanović's hyperpolyphonic works confirms that his technique is indeed quite different from, say, Ligeti's micropolyphony. Namely, Radovanović has early exhibited a preference for something that could be labelled as serialism, but very different from serialism of the Darmstadt school. His works from the late 1950s reveal Radovanović's desire to control all parametres of a work and a "great density of personal decisions", as stated by the composer himself.[34] The next step was the introduction of his concept of *hyperpolyphony* where one finds multiple parts in the same or similar orchestral colour (e.g. 59 parts in his electroacoustic work *Sferoon*); however, these parts preserve clear interval relations. These are not Ligetian clusters, or glissandos, or canons, just an incredibly dense polyphony[35] (similar to what Alfred Schnittke would do in his symphonies a few decades later).[36]

The aforementioned Ligeti, or Iannis Xenakis (both of them previously singled out by Jim Samson) may actually serve as the poster boys for all composers "from the periphery" who would not have made a significant impact on the European avant-garde music had they not emigrated westward and been endorsed by the Western avant-garde luminaries. Without the institutional and financial support that they received in West Germany or France, where they also had the opportunities to promote their compositional techniques and to have them instantly theoretically ellaborated and disseminated, they would have probably shared the destiny of countless internationally obscure Hungarian, Romanian, Greek, or Yugoslav composers. As remarked by Melita Milin: "Nowadays we can only assume what could have happened if Radovanović had had the opportunity to participate in international festivals of avant-garde music and showcase his original

33 Tomašević, "Inovativan i autentičan stvaralac," 294–96.

34 Ibid., 296–97.

35 Cf. Ivana Neimarević, "Radiofonska dela Vladana Radovanovića," *Treći program* 155–156 (2012): 248.

36 Cf. Ivana Medić, *From Polystylism to Meta-Pluralism: Essays on Late Soviet Symphonic Music* (Belgrade: Institute of Musicology SASA, 2017): chapters on Schnittke's Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3, pp. 43–66; 149–185; Ivana Medić, "'Crucifixus etiam pro nobis': representations of the cross in Alfred Schnittke's Symphony No. 2, 'St. Florian'," in *Schnittke Studies*, ed. Gavin Dixon (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016): 3–29.

ideas. Instead, he shared the destiny of his colleagues from Eastern Europe who only received belated and incomplete information about these events."[37]

In the domain of visual arts, Vladan Radovanović was, as pointed out by Đorđe Savić, the first artist who photographed a photography of the photographic paper and exhibited it (in 1977).[38] Aside from the already mentioned innovations such as proto-minimalism, hyperpolyphony and proto-conceptual "mentalist" projects, which certainly belonged to the anthologies of European post-World War II avant-garde, several other domains of Radovanović's output were novel in Yugoslavia. For example, already in 1956 Radovanović completed his *Inventions*, one of the first electroacoustic works in the country; in 1976 he wrote *Computoria*, the first computer music piece in Yugoslavia; in the early 1970s he initiated the foundation of the technologically advanced Electronic Studio within Radio Belgrade 3; furthermore, he is one of the pioneers of the radiophonic art in Yugoslavia and the recipient of numerous awards for his radiophonic works.[39] As explained by Cossettini, "From the technological point of view, Radio Beograd Electronic Studio began as a third-generation studio, which is to say that it used a digital-analogue technology, when at the time all the other older European studios only had analogical equipment. The vision of Vladan Radovanović – to give to the composers a 'state of the art' technology – made the Beograd Studio one of the most advanced studios in Europe, opening this way a field of new opportunities for musical creation."[40]

Finally, Radovanović's theory and practice of synthesic art also belongs among his original inventions, although it is reliant upon the ancient tradition of syncretism.[41] This is in line with Radovanović's understanding of artistic innovation which does not presume creation *ex nihilo*, but only new breakthroughs on the basis of something that has already been there: or, as Belančić put it, "creation is repetition governed by difference."[42] Since there is no absolute innovation, "every innovation is a merger of the old and the new (...) The new predominandly reveals itself as the extension of the artistic field."[43] He has also observed that "every innovation loses its actuality in time, in other words it gets old. Still, it retains its essence *in its own time*. The key reason for its ageing is the very process of decoding that makes any innovation legible."[44] In spite of this, Radovanović has rejected postmodernist dismissal of progress and its relativist "anything goes" ideology. He has said: "To create is to bring something new into the world. Since the absolute creation of something out of nothing is unachievable, we can only strive towards it. Thus, for me innovation is the governing norm."[45]

Instead of a definitive conclusion, which would probably turn into a lament on the decades-long irrelevance, invisibility and a lack of recognition of Radovanović's total

37 Melita Milin, "Vokalnoinstrumentalna muzika Vladana Radovanovića," *Stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* (Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 2013), 14.

38 Savić, "Ka metafizici Vladana Radovanovića: pogled sa balkona na zakrivljenje u ništa," 26.

39 Cf. Biljana Srećković, "Oživljavanje trećeg sveta: elektroakustička muzika Vladana Radnovanovića," *Stvaralaštvo Vladana Radovanovića* (Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti, 2013), 23; Cossettini, "Beyond the Mix: On Vladan Radovanović's mixed electroacoustic music," 35–37; Neimarević, "Radiofonska dela Vladana Radovanovića," 245–247.

40 Cossettini, "Beyond the Mix: On Vladan Radovanović's mixed electroacoustic music," 35.

41 Cf. Janković, "Sintezijska umetnost Vladana Radovanovića," 141–146; 155–161.

42 Belančić, "Jedan osobeni pluralizam," 194.

43 Ibid., 196.

44 Belančić, "Jedan osobeni pluralizam," 195.

45 Vladan Radovanović, *Samopredstavljanje umetnika* (Niš: Studentski kulturni centar – Naissus Records, 1990), 5.

oeuvre both in the Yugoslav and international contexts, I will instead express my hope that someday soon, preferably while Radovanović is still alive (he is 87 years old now), he will be (re)discovered and (re)appraised globally as one of the most original artistic visionaries of the twentieth century. In fact, now might be the right time for this: as remarked by Belančić, "the inner subtlety, multifacetedness and variety of Vladan's opus only became *contemporary* in the present day, much too belatedly. This late timeliness of the early 'non-timeliness' of Radovanović's endeavours shines a peculiar genealogical and heuristic light on the important question of the philosophy of art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries."[46]

Figures

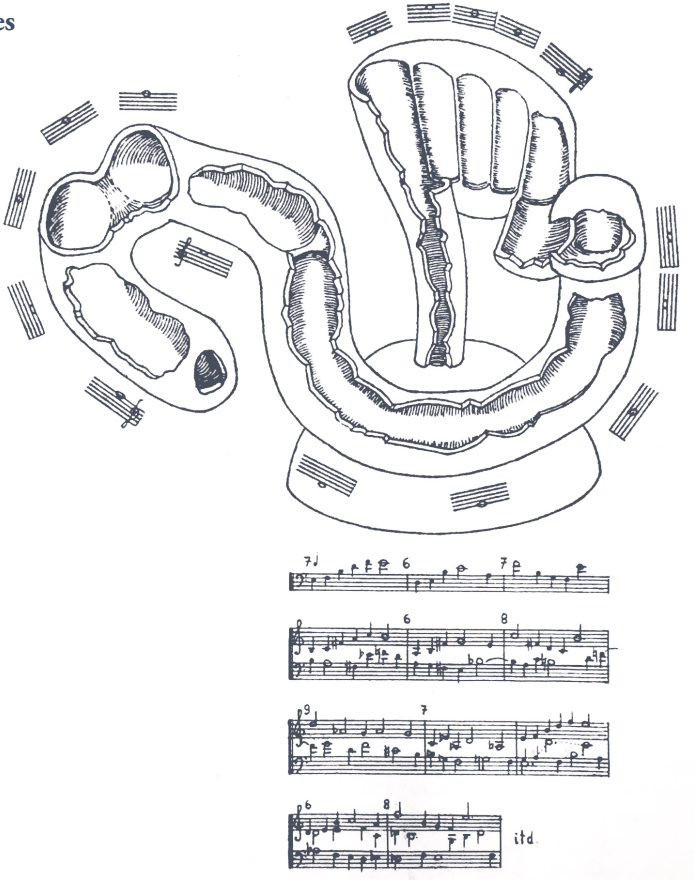

Figure 1: Tactison—Movement—Sound (Polym 1), 1957, ballpoint-pen, verbal text and score Reproduced from the catalogue for the exhibition Vladan Radovanović — Synthesic Art, *Kragujevac, 2006.*

46 Belančić, "Jedan osobeni pluralizam," 192.

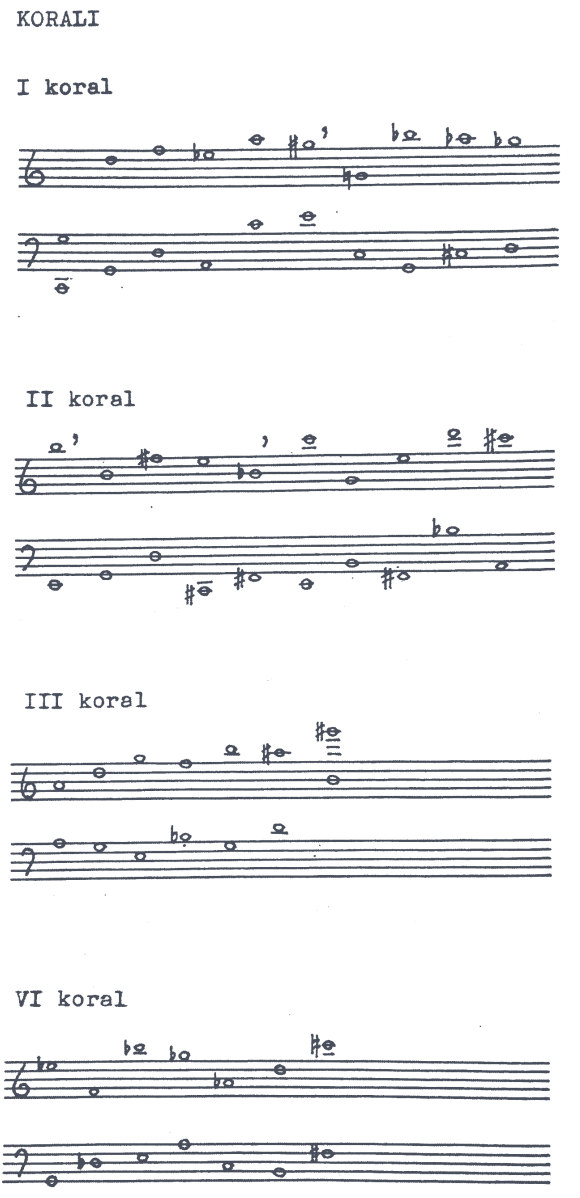

Figure 2: Six Two-Part Chorales, 1956, excerpt from the score
Reproduced from the catalogue for the exhibition Vladan Radovanović – Synthesic Art, *Kragujevac, 2006.*

Figure 3: Pustolina (The Desert)*, 1956–1962, collaged words*
Published as a book: Pustolina*, Belgrade, Nolit, 1968, p. 96.*

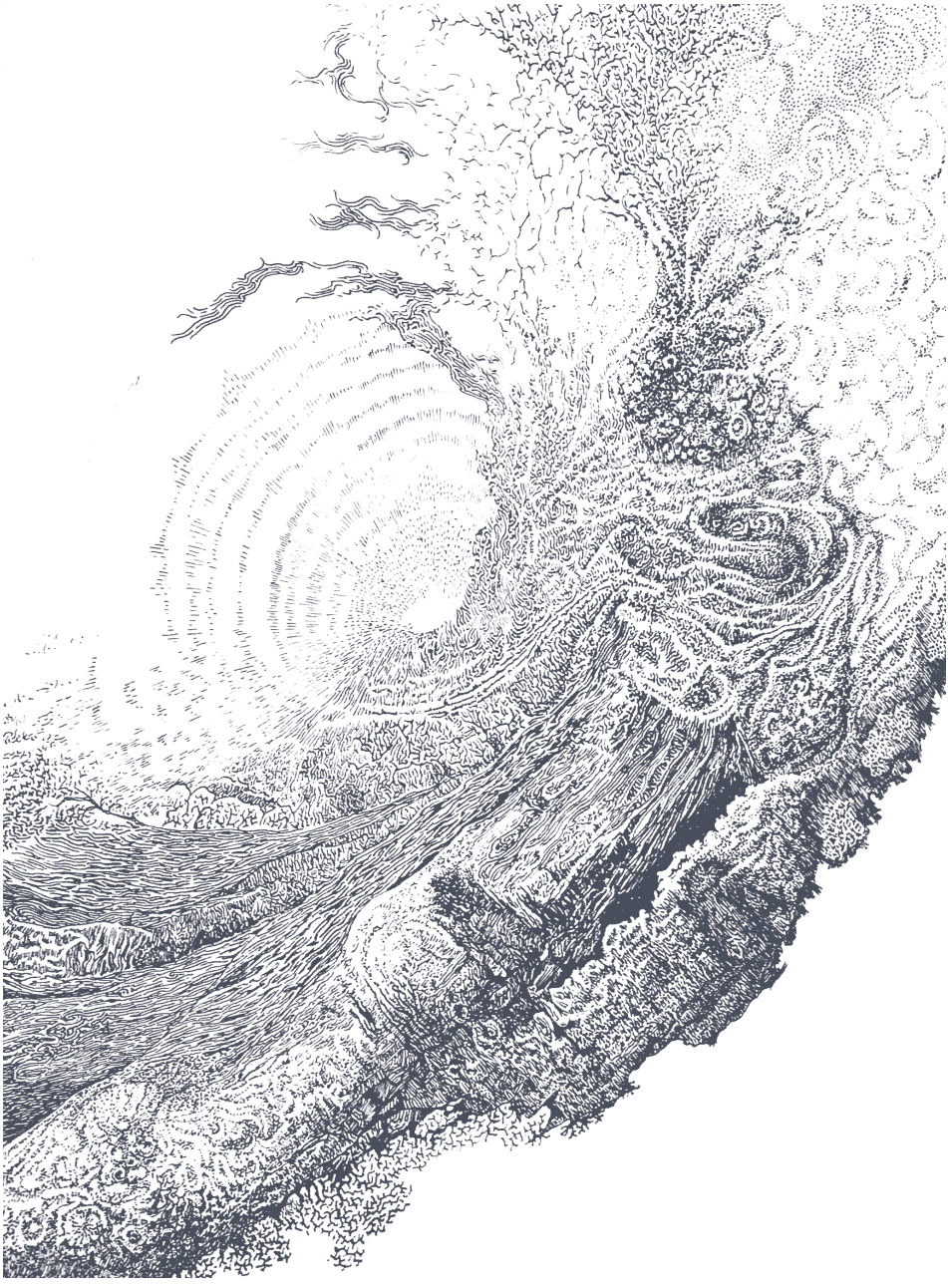

Figure 4: Heavenly Plants*, 1956, indian ink*
Reproduced from the catalogue for the exhibition Vladan Radovanović — Synthesic Art*, Kragujevac, 2006.*

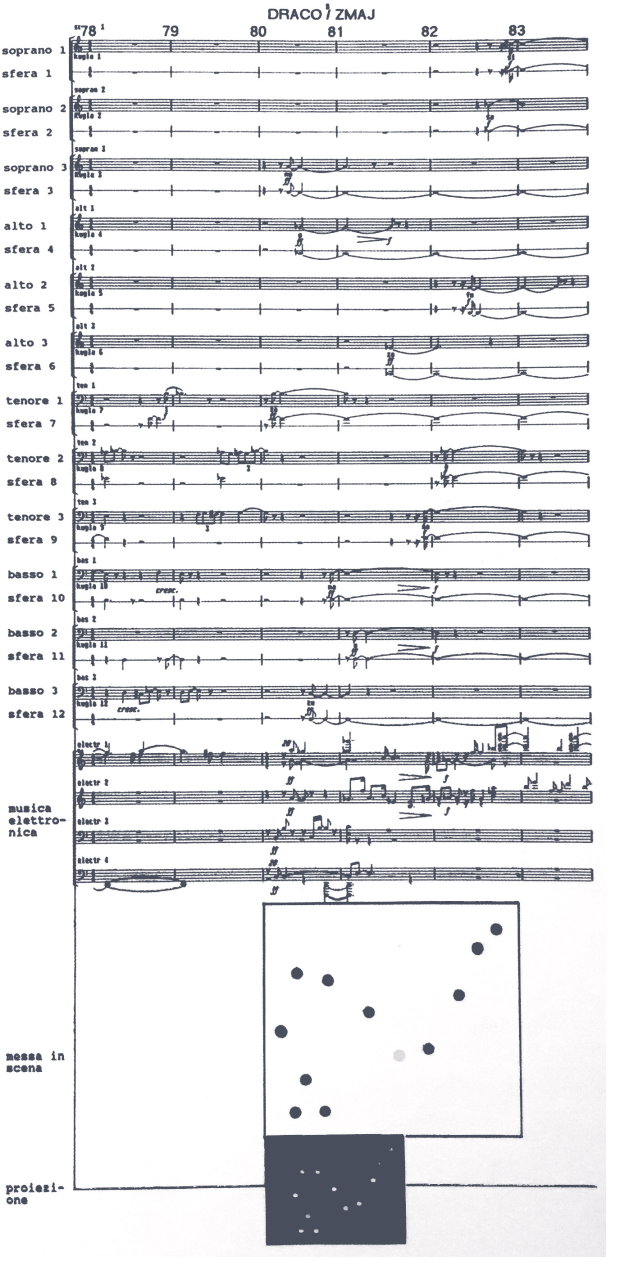

Figure 5: Sazvežđa (Constellations*), 1993–1997, excerpt from the score*
Published as: Sazvežđa*, special issue of the journal* Muzički talas (Musical Wave)*, No 3–6, 1997, p. 66 (constellation Draco).*

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POVZETEK

Vladan Radovanović (rojen v Beogradu leta 1932) je najbolj eruditski srbski avantgardni skladatelj in multimedijski umetnik dvajsetega in enaindvajsetega stoletja, ki je slovel po enciklopedičnem znanju, izrednem spominu in elokvenci. Izhodišče tega članka je izraz *nesuđena avangarda* (v dobesednem prevodu »nesojena avantgarda«), ki ga je skoval srbski filozof Milorad Belančić, da bi opisal edinstveno umetniško usodo Vladana Radovanovića. Moj osrednji argument je, da so avantgardne poetike, kakršna je bila Radovanovićeva, »nemogoče« v majhnih perifernih kulturah, ki so doživele zapoznel in nepopoln razvoj kulturnih institucij in »umetniškega sveta« nasploh.

V članku zagovarjam tezo, da so k »nemogočosti« Radovanovićeve avantgarde prispevali trije glavni dejavniki. Prvič, njegov resnično inovativen opus je bil v popolnem nasprotju z družbenim in kulturnim okoljem v državi, ki še ni posedovala potrebnih institucionalnih ali diskurzivnih orodij, da bi priznala in ovrednotila njegovo poetiko – to sem poimenovala »neprepoznana avantgarda«. Drugi razlog je, da je bilo njegovo avantgardno delo »preveč abstraktno« in ni moglo izraziti zaželenih socialističnih ideoloških vrednot; za to težnjo sem skovala izraz »nevidna avantgarda«. Nazadnje, glede na to, da je vse svoje poklicno življenje preživel v državi, ki je bila na »napačni« strani delitve center – periferija v povojni Evropi, Radovanović ni mogel pustiti pečata, kot so ga lahko skladatelji in drugi umetniki, ki so živeli in delovali v velikih evropskih središčih – to sem poimenovala »nepomembna avantgarda«.