

Marija Masnikosa

DUAL by Vladimir Tošić

Abstract: *Dual* by Vladimir Tošić (1992) is one of the first postminimalist compositions by this author. Based on a strictly conceived, complex repetitive process, the composition takes a step outside the space of radical minimalism solely owing to the specific ‘tridimensional’ physiognomy of the repetitive models treated therein. These models simulate the most common textural organization of tonal music (“melody + accompaniment”), so the composition itself belongs to the domain of postmodern simulative art.

Key words: postminimalism, integral minimalism, strict precomposed repetitiveness, minimalist and postminimalist texture, simulacrum, late modernism, postmodernism, simulative art.

Vladimir Tošić, author of the first integral-minimalist composition in our country,¹ is the only Serbian composer whose postminimalist output was preceded by an engaged practice of radical, modernistic minimalism. In this regard, the minimalist output of this author is significant for Serbian music insofar as it is the only line of continuity linking the practices of modernistic and postmodern minimalism.²

Postmodern minimalism has suffused Tošić’s output almost imperceptibly. Following a series of “integral minimalist” works, created in the late 1970s and during the 1980s, the composer continued to “construct and project, rather than compose in the typical sense of the word”³ in the 1990s; however, these “new” minimalist works changed their “physiognomy” – they lost the desirable modernistic indistinguishability, typical of radical minimalism, and gained the communicativeness of postmodern “new simplicity”.

Dual is one of Tošić’s first postmodern compositions. His conceptualistic tendency to work with a single idea of a work, expressing it through different artistic media,⁴ was transformed during the 1980s and 1990s into a need to realize a purely musical, compositional-technical idea in various manners, in separate versions for different performing ensembles. Thus, *Dual* exists in 14 versions: for flute (violin) and double bass; for flute, bassoon (bass clarinet), piano and percussion; for flute and piano; for chamber ensemble (flute, oboe, violin, viola, violoncello, marimba, vibraphone and percussion); for symphonic

¹ The work in question is *Fuzija (Fusion)* for 12 instruments, from 1978.

² Although postminimalism in American music originated from the evolution of the poetics and compositional technique of radical minimalism, in our country these two movements were not connected by a line of continuity. Postminimalism in Serbian music appeared as a creative response to the practice of American postminimalism and mostly to the influence of the practice of integral minimalism of Belgrade composers from the OPUS 4 group. For more details about this subject, see: Marija Masnikosa, M.A., *Postminimalizam u srpskoj muzici za gudački orkestar u poslednje dve decenije XX veka*, doctoral thesis, 2006, manuscript.

³ The quotation is by Tošić himself. Cf. Miodrag Lazarov Pashu: Vladimir Tošić, *Moment* no. 19, Beograd, 1990, 49.

⁴ Besides compositions, Tošić has also realized numerous musical graphics, musical objects, installations, stage works and video projections, all of which represent his unique modality of audio-visual synesthesia.

orchestra; for saxophone, clarinet, piano and percussion; for string orchestra; for string quartet; for string trio (violin, viola and violoncello); for wind quintet; for solo piano; for two pianos; for two guitars, and for flute, marimba and vibraphone.

The precomposedness of the process that constitutes this work, as a compositional-technical **idea**, does not essentially depend on the performing ensemble for which it is intended, so that each of its versions is representative of and relevant to its understanding and interpretation.⁵ Although *Dual* is one of the first compositions in which Tošić deviates from the “rigid” modernistic concept of his integral minimalism,⁶ the principle of process precomposition has not been abandoned in this work. It has merely been modified to meet the demands of a new historical moment.

The composition incorporates many important features of radical modernistic minimalism: it is built on a reduced tone phonemic basis (on the tones of Tošić’s harmonic mode,⁷ established in the author’s integral-minimalist output) that undergoes strict repetitiveness in which only the smallest gradual changes are allowed. The organization of the piece is processual, which, according to the composer, means “that shape is created using the selected procedure, from which everything else proceeds, without sudden changes and clashes of different materials”⁸. The composition is segmented, consisting of several shorter, differently conceived repetitive processes, concatenated without any sharp contrasts. The sections are homogenous and their flow is the result of symmetrically precomposed procedures that, as a rule, return to their “starting point” at the end of a section.

In each of these processes, which retain their radically modernistic strictness, the repetitive model is a stable category whose physiognomy changes, though its integrity during the composition remains intact. From the output of Tošić’s modernistic minimalism, *Dual* has also retained the characteristic minimalist treatment with a reduced tone phonemic basis, as well as the absence of traditional tonal logic.

The composition begins with a melody-theme (in parallel octaves), built on 8 tones of Tošić’s harmonic mode and introduced in a specific order (*c, g, fis, e, d, b, a, h*), which further in the music flow serves as a set tone row to be treated in the mode of variations (in the case of the first repetitive section, this tone row is designed as a series). The ensuing repetitive sections of the composition are built by introducing all of the tones of the set row into a repetitive process, regardless of whether or not they are introduced in the set order.

The repetitive process is the most complex in the first section. This is a double process, which was not characteristic for Tošić’s integral-minimalist works.⁹ It develops in two completely precomposed and phasally asynchronous procedures of (gradual) construction and deconstruction of different repetitive

⁵ This text is concerned with the version for the string orchestra.

⁶ In fact, Tošić has not yet entirely forsaken the idea of precomposed minimalism.

⁷ These are 8 odd tones of the harmonic series which Tošić used to create his harmonic mode in his phase of integral minimalism.

⁸ Cf. Vladimir Tošić, *OPUS 4. Dokumenti*, SKC, Beograd, 2001, 54.

⁹ Double repetitive processes did not gain ground in Tošić’s integral minimalism. They were characteristic of the integral-minimalist works of Miroslav Miša Savić. More on the integral minimalism of the composers from the OPUS 4 group in: Marija Masnikosa, *Muzički minimalizam*, Clio, Beograd, 1998.

models.¹⁰ One of them develops in the part of the first violin, while the other is entrusted to the parts of the other strings. Both “lines” of the process use the same (set) tone row, but the profiles of their repetitive models are different. The profile of the repetitive model exposed in the part of the first violin is that of traditional, melodic thematism, while the repetitive model in the part of the other strings exposes the set “series” by separating the adjoining tones by rests and by aptly simulating the rhythmic articulation, which is characteristic of harmonic accompaniment in tonal music. What is also different is the processes of construction and deconstruction of these models.¹¹

The other repetitive sections of the composition are simpler and are built with greater license.

The second and third sections of the composition are designed as unique repetitive processes, based on layered rhythmic (in the second section) or rhythmic-harmonic (in the third section) repetitive models, while the melodic dimension of the music flow (in both sections) is developed with a certain degree of license.¹² Both repetitive sections contain a “melody of long tones”, which is the syntagmatic basis of both – in the second repetitive section the melody moves in the double bass part, while in the third it is in the part of the first violin.¹³

Thus, the first three repetitive sections of the composition have a typical postminimalist texture in which the “melody” and its repetitive “accompaniment” are shaped in different ways. Postminimalist texture implies a functional differentiation of the layers, where one of them necessarily plays the main role, serving as the actorial category of the music flow (e.g. “melody”), while the other layers are repetitive or drone. In the first section that is the pseudo-actorial melodic line,¹⁴ while in the second and fourth it is the nonthematically organized melodic line that creates the syntagmatic plane of all the sections. What is paradoxical, however, is the postminimalist texture in this composition as the result of a strict postmodernist repetitive procedure!

The fourth and fifth sections of the composition, unlike the preceding ones, are based on nonhierarchically organized layered repetitiveness and have a characteristic minimalist texture in which there is no functional layer differentiation.

¹⁰ This procedure of Tošić ties in with the procedure “patented” by Reich in his composition *Drumming*, who called it *rhythmic/harmonic construction/reduction*.

¹¹ The strings linearly increase the number of tones in the model, while in the part of the first violin the model “wins” new tones, leaving out a few “old” ones as far as bars 43–45, when the repetitive model reaches its full *legato* form. The processes of model deconstruction differ, too: each tone disappearing from the repetitive model entrusted to the orchestra is replaced by tone *c*, while in the part of the first violin the progressive “disappearance” of the tones-events is executed by extending the duration of the last surviving tone in the model.

¹² In the second repetitive section, the four-bar “collective” rhythmic model is stated in different melodic transpositions, containing an ever different drone (taken from the set row), while the melodic component of this model contains a scale upbeat (incorporating all the tones of Tošić’s harmonic mode, which are exposed in such a way as to always start from a different scale note) and its other section in which the set tones are combined freely. In the third repetitive section, in addition to the rhythmic, the model also contains its harmonic component: the arpeggiation of tertian chords (built from the tones of the set row, which, however, do not form tonal functional connections when in succession. Paradoxically, the “collective” rhythmic pattern of these repetitive models forms a pull tape!)

¹³ The melodic line that represents the syntagmatic basis of the sections appears as one of the “products” of repetitiveness of the chosen functionally differentiated repetitive models.

¹⁴ The total melodic line is generated using the repetitive procedure, and so it loses its true syntagmatic projection.

If we bear in mind that there is no clear intertextuality in this composition that would be a firm signifier of its postmodern status, it turns out that the postminimalist (i.e. postmodernist) dimension of this work is realized only through the hierarchical organization of the texture, which was unimaginable in modernistic minimalism. The postminimalist texture of *Dual*, which results from a carefully conceived “tridimensional” structure of the chosen repetitive models, is in fact the simulacrum of the most typical texture of tonal music (which consists of “melody” and “accompaniment”).¹⁵ As such, postminimalist texture itself becomes a sign because in creating an illusion of the traditional hierarchy of musical layers, it refers to the broadest sample of tonal music despite the absence of traditional tonal functionality and regardless of repetitiveness!

The foray Tošić made in these compositions is not significant, compared to his integral-minimalist output. Not abandoning his creative *credo*, which did not essentially change over time, owing to the “compromise” made in the domain of articulation of music material, Tošić has succeeded in preserving the system. In these works his repetitive models ended up losing their nonhierarchical organization and contextual neutrality for the sake of their approximation to traditional patterns, which was Tošić’s only concession to time. And the effect of this small change is great.

What Tošić produces with a layered organization of the repetitive model (and at the same time of the music flow) is multiplicity and a pseudo-functional difference of the surfaces that in a typically postmodernist manner simulate the “depth” of tonal premodern music tradition. The simulation procedure is identified by the appearance of “structural dissonance” in the relation system (precomposed repetitiveness) ↔ repetitive model (traditionally structured music material), regardless of the fact that the repetitive models used in *Dual* are, in fact, “empty signifiers”, literally freed from the historical ballast of their signifieds.

Of course, there is no real music reference and the referential plane of the work itself is placed into the space of allusions – simulated homologies: the theme-series stated at the beginning of the composition refers to the tonal line-theme which could be a subject of variation of sorts; the melodic dimension of the repetitive model in the first and second repetitive sections hints at the traditionally formulated motive; the melody of long tones (in the second and third repetitive sections) “reminds” one of a slow, drifting melody from some ambiental (tonal) music.

As a composition whose floating and open referential plane actually produces the “illusion of reference”, *Dual* unmistakably belongs to the field of simulative art. This is literally the case “of replacing the real with its simulacra, that is, of the operation of aversion from any real process by its operative counterpart, with a metastable, programmatic, infallible signifying machine that offers all the simulacra of the real (...)”.¹⁶

¹⁵ Even when the repetitive model has no melodic dimension, it is established on the syntagmatic axis of the section (in the second and third repetitive sections) as a long, floating melody with “harmonic” repetitive accompaniment.

¹⁶ Cf. Žan Bodrijar, *Simulakrumi i simulacija*, Novi Sad, Svetovi, 6.

Stepping into the field of simulationism as an authentic field of postmodern music, *Dual*, paradoxically, establishes a continuity with its modernist “predecessors” in Tošić’s output. By means of rigid precomposition (as a feature common to integral minimalism and the production of “pure” simulacra), a mimicry of the author’s modernist *modus menti*, or rather, its mutation in the postmodern epoch has been carried out in this composition. As such, *Dual* occupies the “zero” level of postmodern minimalism in a field which is governed by a strong interference of late modernism and postmodernism.

The paradox of its status in the history of newer Serbian music lies in the fact that this piece, which represents a paradigm of the zero move from integral modernistic minimalism, was created in the late 1990s, when the postminimalist practice of Belgrade composers was already on the wane.

Is that not yet more proof that during the 1990s we were living in an “amalgam of different epochs”, in one of those “asynchronous present tenses” in which a palimpsest of different, residual and emerging phenomena was being carried out before the eyes of the cultural public?

Vladimir Tošić: *Dual* – repetitive model from the first repetitive section of the composition

Translated by Dušan Zabrdac

Summary

DUAL BY VLADIMIR TOŠIĆ

Vladimir Tošić composed the very first piece of integral minimalism in Serbia. He is the only Serbian composer whose postminimalist output was preceded by personally realized radical, modernistic minimalism. Therefore, his output could be understood as a line of continuity that connects the practices of modernistic and postmodernistic minimalism in Serbian music.

Although the *Dual* is one of the first pieces in which Tošić steps aside from the “rude” modernistic concept of his integral minimalism, in it he still holds on to the precomposition principle. More precisely, the principle is only modified to adjust to the demands of the new historical moment.

The *Dual* consists of many important features of radical modernistic minimalism - it has been built upon a reduced tone phonemic basis that undergoes strict repetitiveness in which only the smallest gradual changes are allowed.

The piece begins with a melody-theme (in parallel octaves) built on 8 tones of Tošić's harmonic mode and introduced in a specific order (*c, g, fis, e d, b, a, h*). The five repetitive segments follow in which the given tone row is treated in the mode of variation.

Thanks to the specifically shaped, three-dimensional repetitive models, the first three repetitive levels of the piece have a typical postminimalistic texture in which the “melody” and its repetitive “accompaniment” are shaped in different ways. Contrary to the preceding ones, the fourth and fifth sections are based on nonhierarchical organized layered repetitiveness and have a characteristic minimalist texture in which there is no functional layer differentiation.

This piece has no explicit intertextuality that would be a firm signifier of its postmodern status. Hence, its postminimalistic, i.e. postmodernistic dimension, is realized only through its hierarchical organization of the texture which was unimaginable in the modernistic minimalism. The postminimalistic texture of the *Dual*, which comes from a carefully conceived “three-dimensional” structure of the chosen repetitive models is in fact the simulacra of the most typical texture of tonal music (“melody”+ “accompaniment”).

What Tošić produces with a laminar organization of the repetitive model (and in the meantime also of the music flow) is multiplicity and a pseudo functional difference of the surfaces that in a typical postmodernistic way simulate the “depth” of the tonal premodern musical tradition.

Of course, there is no real music reference and a referential level of the piece moves in to the allusion space – of simulated homologies. This piece actually produces a “referential illusion”, thus undoubtedly being a simulation art piece.

By the means of rigid pre-composition (as the mutual feature of integral minimalism and the production of “pure” simulacra) in the *Dual*, we have a mimicry of the author's modernistic *modus menti*, its mutation in the postmodern age. As such, the *Dual* occupies the “zero” level of postmodern minimalism in a field which is governed by a strong interference of late modernism and postmodernism.