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ANXIETIES OVER TECHNOLOGY IN YUGOSLAV INTERWAR MUSIC CRITICISM: STANISLAV VINAVER IN DIALOGUE WITH WALTER BENJAMIN

Abstract: The text sheds light on a previously little known piece written in 1935 by the Jewish-Serbian poet and literary and music critic Stanislav Vinaver, from the perspective of the much more famous 'artwork essay' by Walter Benjamin, likewise from 1935, as well as some of Vinaver's many writings on music. The purpose is to offer an interpretation of Vinaver's views on the mechanical reproduction of music, seemingly close to Benjamin's views on technological reproducibility in the visual arts and its effects but ultimately drawing very different conclusions. The reasons for this may be found in Vinaver's passionate advocacy of modernism in Yugoslav literature and music alike and a sort of nostalgic, metaphysical reverence for music, reminiscent of its apotheosis in early German Romanticism.
Keywords: Stanislav Vinaver, Walter Benjamin, aura, mechanical reproduction of art, aesthetic autonomy, early German Romantics, communism, fascism.

In autumn 1935, working in exile in Paris, Walter Benjamin began sketching his famous essay on *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*. By the end of the year, the first version of the essay was complete.

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However, as early as February 1936, there was already a second, extended and largely rewritten, version. Later that year, the essay was finally published, albeit in Pierre Klossowski's French translation, in Adorno and Horkheimer's, who were by then likewise exiled, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. In this version, the only one to see publication in Benjamin's lifetime, the first thesis as well as all references to Marxism, communism, and fascism were suppressed.[1]

In the essay, Benjamin famously argues that the advent of technological reproducibility had changed not only the production and reproduction of art, but also its perception, status, and function in Western society. More specifically, Benjamin argued that technological reproduction deprives artworks of their 'aura' – that mystical quality of traditional works of art, such as paintings, statues, and the like, stemming from their uniqueness, originality, authenticity and aesthetic autonomy. However, technologically (re)produced artworks such as reproductions of paintings and statues, graphic art, photographs, and films have no originals, but only exist in thousands or even millions of copies, none of which are any more original, unique, or authentic than any other. Since those are some of the defining elements of the 'aura' of traditional, 'auratic' art, which have now grown all but meaningless, which is why in Benjamin's view art is losing its aura in the age of its technological reproducibility. As is well known, Benjamin welcomed this loss, because in his view it freed art from aesthetic autonomy and confinement to ritual, whether religious (e.g. organized worship) or secular (e.g. bourgeois concert-going), so that it might assume openly political, progressive, liberatory, and anti-fascist functions. This politicization of art, Benjamin famously concluded, was communism's answer to the fascist aestheticisation of politics.

That same year, only a few months earlier, in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Stanislav Vinaver (Serbian Cyrillic: Станислав Винавер), a Jewish-Serbian poet, intellectual, and literary and music critic, wrote a short article titled *Mechanical Music* (*Mehanička muzika*) and published in *Zvuk* (*Sound*), a Belgrade-based music periodical. In his piece, Vinaver, like Benjamin, addressed the advent of mechanical reproduction, but in the domain of music, one of Vinaver's main interests. Thus in his text, 'mechanical music' denotes the mechanical reproduction of music *qua* recorded sound, in other words, the mechanical reproduction of sound recordings of musical performances, chiefly by means of gramophone and radio. Unlike Benjamin, however, Vina-

[1] Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism*, London, Pluto Press, 2000, 130.

ver was alarmed by the advent of art's technological reproducibility, fearing that the contemporary proliferation of 'mechanical music' by means of radio and the recording industry jeopardized not only traditional music, but no less than humanity itself, its organic life as we know it, threatening to replace it with a 'mechanical' surrogate. Vinaver dismissed much of the supposedly new music of the 1930s as merely (mechanical) reproduction and lamented what he called 'natural' music and instruments. Crucially, what he lamented comes remarkably close to Benjamin's 'aura', although Vinaver, writing several months before Benjamin, did not use the same term.

The purpose of this essay is to shed some, so to speak, archaeological light on Vinaver's piece, from the perspective of Benjamin's more famous essay and some of Vinaver's own many writings on music, in order to offer an interpretation of Vinaver's views on the mechanical reproduction of music, initially so close to Benjamin's views on technological reproducibility in the visual arts but ultimately drawing very different conclusions. Given the close historical and conceptual proximity of Benjamin's and Vinaver's respective texts, as well as their markedly different geographical, cultural, and political contexts – one written in Paris, the other in the relative obscurity of interwar Belgrade – it is interesting to compare the two texts and their authors' diametrically opposed stances regarding the emergence and rapid technological development of mechanical reproductions in the arts. As I argue below, the reasons for Vinaver's alarm over mechanical reproduction in music, so different from Benjamin's optimistic view, may be found in the former's persistent advocacy of modernism in Yugoslav literature and music alike, complete with its classic bourgeois ideological trappings of aesthetic autonomy and even a special, metaphysical reverence for music, reminiscent of its apotheosis in early German Romanticism, most notably by E. T. A. Hoffmann, Schelling, and Schopenhauer – but quite foreign to Benjamin. To illustrate my argument, the remainder of the essay proceeds first with a brief discussion of Benjamin's article, followed by a more detailed discussion of Vinaver's piece, and then an explanation of the interpretation sketched above, based on Vinaver's *Mechanical Music* and other related writings.

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Although largely obscure in Benjamin's lifetime and for some time afterwards, Benjamin's 'artwork essay' has been a classic read in arts and media studies, Marxism, and a number of other disciplines since the 1970s, so there is no need to rehash it here in much detail. "In principle", Benjamin begins, "a work

of art has always been reproducible", but then adds: "But the technological reproduction of artworks is something new".[2] This is because for the first time in history, technological reproduction enables artworks to be reproduced on an industrial scale, making it difficult to differentiate between originals and their technically accomplished, almost indistinguishable copies. Artworks are thereby copied from their original time and place, their own "spatiotemporal nexus", as Peter Fenves puts it,[3] which forms part of their aura, and pasted, albeit as copies, to the receiver (or consumer) wherever and whenever s/he desires to experience them. In other words, to experience a classical painting, statue, or piece of music before the advent of technological reproduction, one would have to go to its original location, a gallery, museum, church, archaeological locality, or concert hall, and enjoy there and then, as if on a sort of pilgrimage, the 'aura' emanating from the artwork, its uniqueness, originality, authenticity, and original location.

For example, an 'auratic' work of art such as Michelangelo's *David* may exist in only one place and time and emanate its aura from there, whereas its technologically reproduced copies may be simultaneously enjoyed at any number of places, but without the original's 'aura', because only the original may have it, by virtue of its uniqueness and authenticity. In Benjamin's own words: "what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura. […] *By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence*" [emphasis in the original].[4] This new development is even more pronounced with the arts of photography and film, still relatively new at the time, which are entirely predicated on mechanical reproduction: a photograph or a film may simultaneously exist in millions of copies and be viewed by millions of people across the world and it would make little sense to call any of those copies 'the original' copy or print. In Benjamin's words: "From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic'print makes no sense".[5] That is why in Benjamin's view technological reproduction abrogates

[2] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility", in: *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2008, 20.

[3] Peter Fenves, "Is There an Answer to the Aestheticizing of Politics?", in: Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Art,* London, Continuum, 2005, 64.

[4] Walter Benjamin, op. cit., 22.

[5] Ibid., 25.

the very notions of authenticity, uniqueness, and originality and, along with them, the 'aura' of traditional art predicated on them. In Arne Melberg's formulation, reproduction "is no longer secondary in relation to an original and the unique originality of the work of art has simply ceased to exist".[6]

Benjamin welcomes this new development because in his view, depriving artworks of their 'aura' frees them from their original ritual functions, for instance in facilitating organized worship, whether of God, in a church, or of Art, in a museum. For, as long as artworks are saturated by their mystical 'aura', stemming from their uniqueness, authenticity, and originality, they remain impervious to all other meanings and interpretations, including political. In Benjamin's words: "[I]t is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function. In other words: *the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual*".[7] Benjamin welcomes art's divorce from ritual because it makes room for investing art with another function – that of progressive politics. Again in Benjamin's words:

> [F]or the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual. […] *as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on another practice: politics.*[8]

And along with traditional art's aura and subservience to ritual there also goes its aesthetic autonomy or rather, in Benjamin's view, the semblance thereof – the bourgeois 19th-century idea that all true art obeys only its own laws and purposes, serving no extraneous function but simply existing for itself. In Benjamin's words: "Insofar as the age of technological reproducibility separated art from its basis in cult, all semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever".[9] In this "definitive renunciation of aesthetic autonomy", Benjamin thus rejects another defining element of 'auratic' art.[10]

Benjamin's renunciation of aesthetic autonomy and other elements of 'auratic' art was motivated by his imperative to politicize art in a bid to coun-

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[6] Arne Melberg, "The Work of Art in the Age of Ontological Speculation: Walter Benjamin Revisited", in: *Walter Benjamin and Art*, op. cit., 95.

[7] Walter Benjamin, op. cit., 24.

[8] Ibid., 24–25.

[9] Ibid., 28.

[10] Peter Fenves, op. cit., 67.

ter what he rightly saw as fascism's aestheticisation of politics, emptying the political sphere of all genuine debate and replacing it with elaborate aestheticised rituals, such as parades, mass rallies, and the like, for instance, those organized by Gabriele D'Annunzio in Fiume/Rijeka in 1920–24 or those filmed by Leni Riefenstahl in Nuremberg in 1933; in Uwe Steiner's apt formulation, "the tendency of Fascist states not to give the masses their rightful due but merely to give expression to them".[11] Here is how Benjamin put it: "The masses have a *right* to change property relations; fascism seeks to give them *expression* in keeping these relations unchanged. *The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticising of political life*".[12] Benjamin's real and, as time soon showed, justified fear was that this aestheticising of politics could only result in war: "*All efforts to aestheticise politics culminate in one point. That one point is war.* War, and only war, makes it possible to set a goal for mass movements on the grandest scale while preserving traditional property relations".[13] "*Such is the aestheticising of politics, as practiced by fascism*", Benjamin writes and famously concludes: "*Communism replies by politicizing art*",[14] filling the void left by the loss of its aura – its uniqueness, originality, authenticity, and aesthetic autonomy – effected by its mass industrial, technological reproduction.

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In the 'artwork essay' and his work in general, Benjamin focuses on the visual arts of painting, sculpture, and, especially, photography and film, saying little about music. Indeed, various Benjamin scholars have noted that "music was not close to Benjamin's interests", that he offered "few direct and sustained engagements with music",[15] which has left a "largely unexplored territory of Benjamin's relevance for aural phenomena and musical culture".[16] By contrast, Stanislav Vinaver was "a great admirer of music and an excellent connois-

[11] Uwe Steiner, *Walter Benjamin: An Introduction to his Work and Thought*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 125.

[12] Walter Benjamin, op. cit., 41.

[13] Idem.

[14] Ibid., 42.

[15] Rajeev S. Patke, "Benjamin on Art and Reproducibility: The Case of Music", in: *Walter Benjamin and Art,* op. cit., 187 and 194.

[16] Rolf Goebel, "Introduction", in: *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin,* Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2009, 19.

seur".[17] In his own words, Vinaver "adored music", because in it he "found the ultimate meaning of life", "the ultimate sensory frontier".[18] According to Serbian literary critic and theorist Gojko Tešić, for Vinaver music was "the most substantive, essential, cosmic, metaphysical – that essence to which he aspired in everything; the ideal to which, in art, he subjected everything".[19] Vinaver was fascinated by music as "the ultimate truth of all truths".[20] Accordingly, he devoted much of his work to music criticism, both of musical performances and contemporary tendencies and developments in the poetics of music, in Yugoslavia and abroad. In Miško Šuvaković's assessment, in his essays written between 1922 and 1935, Vinaver "performed the theoretical transition from a cultivated and educated listener and music aficionado *qua* critic to a critic and aesthetician of modern music".[21]

In that context, his piece on *Mechanical Music* occupies a prominent place, commanding "special significance at the moment of its publication – one might say that it was programmatically intoned".[22] The text ostensibly begins as a review of an "interesting and naïve work on the influence of music" penned by an English musician called Cyrill (*sic!*) Scott. This was probably *Music: Its Secret Influence throughout the Ages*, written by Cyril Scott, a late Romantic British composer, and published in London in 1933. Vinaver begins his essay as a Hegelian-Marxist critical review of Scott's book, but already on the first page this morphs into a wider discussion of what he calls 'mechanical music'. In fact, the text is Vinaver's reaction against some new instruments that were emerging at the time, most notably the Theremin, the beginnings of electronic music, and the growth of the radio and gramophone record as the main carriers of mechanically reproduced music at the time. Vinaver begins his reaction by noting the 'deluge' of mechanical music:

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[17] Katarina Tomašević, *Na raskršću Istoka i Zapada: o dijalogu tradicionalnog i modernog u srpskoj muzici (1918–1941),* Belgrade – Novi Sad, Muzikološki institut SANU – Matica srpska, 2009, 176.

[18] Gojko Tešić, "O *Muzičkom krasnopisu,* ukratko", in: Stanislav Vinaver, *Muzički krasnopis: eseji i kritike o muzici,* Belgrade, Službeni glasnik, 2015, 685.

[19] Idem.

[20] Ibid., 686.

[21] Miško Šuvaković, "Estetika muzike XX veka", in: Mirjana Veselinović Hofman *et al., Istorija srpske muzike: srpska muzika i evropsko muzičko nasleđe*, Belgrade, Zavod za udžbenike, 2007, 740.

[22] Gojko Tešić, op. cit., 695.

> Millions upon millions listen to the radio and turn gramophone records. This is a torrent of mechanical music, and a torrent of music in general, the likes of which humankind cannot recall. This is literally a deluge of music, flooding the whole world, similar to the watery deluge of Noah's day. […] This deluge is perhaps even more important. We are swimming, day and night, carried by waves of music.[23]

However, this seemingly neutral description of the proliferation of easily available music soon turns less neutral, when Vinaver expresses his fear of oversaturation with (mechanical) music:

> The external music surrounding us, which we now produce and under which we live, lashed around by its passions and poisoned by its poisons, exceeds us, in many instances, to the sphere of inaudibility. So many times have I felt exhausted to the point of dying at the thought that behind all those windows and doors, cracks and under who knows what other lids covering the boiling pots of relations, there is overflowing mechanical music.[24]

Due to the mechanical reproduction of music embodied in the radio and gramophone record, there is simply too much music, Vinaver argues, more than the human ear and mind can process. This mechanically (re)produced music is simply threatening to overwhelm us.

In the next paragraph, Vinaver mourns what he perceives as the deafening of old, 'natural' music and instruments by the ostensibly new, 'mechanical' music of his day:

> Indeed, perhaps it would be an infinite sort of refreshment from this insane and acute fatality of mechanical tones coming at us and gnashing from all sides, from all those radios – a wonderful refreshment, if we could hear symphonies of falling dew, of flowers opening, of leaves absorbing the sun, of dancing particles of dust, of clouds soaring above us, and who knows what other kinds of secret organic states. For now, there is no such sonic dew and we find ourselves in the deadly sphere of our fully determined music, made for us, created by us, gnashed, cut out, carved, and tailored for us, understood and grasped by us. We are perishing in its ocean.[25]

Soon, however, it becomes clear that what Vinaver is really mourning is Benjamin's loss of aura in the domain of traditional, 'auratic' music, even if he does

[23] Stanislav Vinaver, "Mehanička muzika", *Zvuk,* Vol. 3, 2, 1935, 45–6.

[24] Stanislav Vinaver, op. cit., 46.

[25] Idem.

not use Benjamin's term: "Instruments, which we inherited already from the primitive peoples and which we crafted over thousands of years of religious and magical raptures, are like individuals, from whom only their individual truth may be extracted".[26] This is perhaps the closest that Vinaver comes to Benjamin, only, so to speak, from the other side: while Benjamin welcomes the loss of 'aura' in technologically, mechanically (re)produced art, the obsolescence of 'auratic' art in the 20th century, Vinaver is appalled by it, by the loss of a tradition "crafted over thousands of years of *religious* and *magical* raptures". In my view, this tradition, with its 'religious' and 'magical' overtones, is none other than the 'auratic' tradition that Benjamin dismisses in his essay.

Vinaver then continues in a similar vein, but now veering dangerously close to the metaphysical:

> Have we truly exhausted the old instruments and instruments in general? And isn't there, even if they only produce sound and nothing else, nevertheless another secret in them, for music? How may we and can we at all so easily break off from individuality, abandon beings endowed with life, tear off from life itself, which is nonetheless a secret? Those are perhaps the problems inherent in this musical scourge.[27]

There is much in that short paragraph that remains secret, mysterious, metaphysically hidden: the secret that traditional instruments allegedly impart to music and the old trope, dating back to at least the 18th century, of handmade instruments, especially violins, being endowed with a life of their own and therefore treated as individuals. Finally, life itself, as the greatest secret of all, appears to be under threat from this new scourge of mechanical music:

> And what will happen when we abandon our old friends, our old symbols […] – when we smash our violins and bassoons, oboes and harps, drums, violas, and violoncellos and dump them into antique museums? What will happen when we commit this treachery, […] when one abandons one's best friend for an immediate benefit, and even life itself for a mechanical equivalent of life?[28]

As those final lines suggest, even life itself, or, at any rate, organic life is under threat due to the loss of aura, in danger of being replaced by a mechanized, machine surrogate of life, carried by the waves of an ocean of dehumanising technology.

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[26] Ibid., 47.

[27] Stanislav Vinaver, op. cit., 47–8.

[28] Ibid., 48.

That ocean, as Vinaver argues, is nothing but the mechanical reproduction of music, proliferating already existing music to a humanly unbearable degree. In his own words: "And that 'ocean' is, however, nothing new, because it is just a repetition, registration, and multiplication of previously existing music".[29] In his view, all of this 'mechanical' music is mere reproduction, not production or genuine creation, in terms of creating something new, but merely the reproduction of already existing music, multiplying it to an unbearable degree:

> It is strange that such technical development in fact and only in a giant proportion simply multiplies and magnifies something that already exists and that we already, in reality, lived through. Now, when this painful and sadistic music is perhaps already dead to a higher meaning, because it has yielded complete and consummate patterns, only now, thanks to technology, it is becoming noticeable and perceivable to all; it floats over the universe and looks like a great conqueror.[30]

Appalled by this 'sadistic' conqueror, Vinaver seeks refuge in old instruments, endowed, as he tells us, with life and individuality. Accordingly, he concludes: "And then even an ordinary violin, in a seedy road tavern, seems to me like an old, idyllic, narrow trail, leading to our salvation. *Apage, Sathanas*".[31]

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Thus Benjamin and Vinaver, writing only a few months apart, one in his Parisian exile, the other in the provincial obscurity of interwar Belgrade, both address the contemporary proliferation of technological reproducibility in the domain of art, that is, in Vinaver's case, music, but with opposite conclusions: while Benjamin welcomes it as enabling art to assume a political function, Vinaver is alarmed by the prospect of traditional, 'auratic' music going obsolete and taking no less than our organic life with it, replacing it with a dehumanized, mechanical copy. Above, I tried to explain in some detail why Benjamin welcomed the advent of the technological reproducibility of art and its perceived consequences, with reference to his political agenda. Now I must try to explain Vinaver's motives in his hostile reaction to the same phenomenon in the sphere of music. One of those motives may be Vinaver's staunch adherence to modernism in music and literature, both in Europe-

[29] Ibid., 46.

[30] Ibid., 47.

[31] Stanislav Vinaver, op. cit., 48.

an culture and, especially, in that of interwar Yugoslavia and Serbia. According to the Serbian literary critic and theorist Gojko Tešić, Vinaver was "the most pronounced champion of modernism in Serbian art and culture",[32] with all that modernism entailed: its radical pursuit of the new, of new poetics, of new and original literary and compositional solutions, its valorisation of originality and creativity, of authorship, genius, and authenticity – in Benjamin's understanding, all the necessary ingredients of 'auratic' art.

Vinaver's modernist orientation is easily appreciated not only in his poetry and positive critical pronouncements on modernism itself, but also in his critical diatribes against all sorts of nationalism and neoclassicism in music and literature, whether Serbian or European, and their representatives, such as Bogdan Popović, Miloje Milojević, and Stevan Hristić. For instance, in an article titled *The Future of Music* (*Budućnost muzike*) and published in the Belgrade-based journal *Comoedia* in 1924, he argues in the following terms for the genuinely new, the new new:

> But the true, genuine, new new is the kind of new that belongs to an altogether new. That would have to be a significantly different music, a significantly different world feeling. […] And then the future of music would be huge, infinite. Whereas all that sniffing around old fields in order to eke out another grain or two that were left uncollected, outside the barn: that would be a nice and charming job for antiquaries, for all lovers of the definitely old, for musicologists. But certainly not for genuine explorers or creators.[33]

One finds a similar position in his review of the Seventh International Festival of Contemporary Music published five years later in the Belgrade magazine *Vreme*, in 1929. There he rails against the 'artisans' and 'craftsmen' of modernism, the epigones (in his judgement) of Schönberg and Stravinsky:

> That craft feels strong. It feels secure. It is confident. But it does not disarm anyone. But it is somewhat austere and barren, dry and dead. And the big question is how much one can mould modernism at all. Schönberg and Stravinsky's modernism consisted of a continual search and vibration. These authors had to have before their eyes, before their entire spiritual being, the entire musical past as well, against which they rebelled and with which they sometimes found common ground. Those protests and revolts, that eternal anticipation gave birth to creations of genius, such as *Petrushka* and *Pierrot lunaire*. There always had to be, I would say, a hindrance and an obstacle that had to be overcome. Now there are

[32] Gojko Tešić, op. cit., 689.

[33] Stanislav Vinaver, "Budućnost muzike" (The Future of Music), in: *Muzički krasnopis,* op. cit., 25.

> no obstacles. Contemporary composers compose following the principles of Schönberg and Stravinsky – but with total freedom. And that freedom gives them neither joy nor does it make them convincing.[34]

In the same review, expressing his adherence not only to the modernist concepts of authorship and genius, but also, perhaps, to the valorisation of intuition in thought and artistic creation, an important ingredient in the philosophy and aesthetic of Henri Bergson, his former teacher at the Sorbonne and formative intellectual influence, Vinaver praises what he views as Schönberg's intuitive genius and dismisses serialism as no more than an intellectual play by a man of a genius:

> They [i.e. Schönberg's followers] have accepted a number of rules. Especially from Schönberg. This composer, for the sheer fun of it, founded a new domain of music comprising exactly twelve tones that are not related in any way. But that was only a caprice and whim of a man of genius, who in reality creates according to his own innate drive and derives the rules out of a desire for intellectual play. However, his pupils accepted this gospel without any reservations. Its offspring are arid and difficult.[35]

What this and the preceding quotations share is the typically modernist juxtaposition that Vinaver sets between a genius author and his barren epigones; between original, intuitive creation, authenticity, and the mystery of genuine art, on one side, and mere mechanical emulation on the other. To Vinaver it must have been clear where in that juxtaposition mechanical reproduction stood, with its incompatibility with the very notions of originality and authenticity.

The other possible reason behind Vinaver's hostility to 'mechanical music' may be his reverence of the old, early-Romantic view of music as the quintessential art, the only fully self-referential art, a view first promoted by the early German Romantics such as E. T. A. Hoffmann, F. W. J. Schelling, and Arthur Schopenhauer, and later taken up by such disparate figures as the German music theorist Eduard Hanslick, English essayist Walter Pater, and Vinaver's own modernist hero, Arnold Schönberg. According to this view, music is the only self-referential, and, as such, quintessential art because it, unlike the other arts, represents and refers only to itself, unable to represent topics or themes other than itself. For example, a painting or a statue,

[34] Stanislav Vinaver, "Moderna muzika posle pobede" (Modern Music after its Victory), in: *Muzički krasnopis,* op. cit., 168.

[35] Idem.

at least in the domain of figural, pre-abstract art, must represent someone or something, whether a person or a number of persons, a building, landscape, or cityscape. By contrast, a sonata, fugue, concerto, symphony, or any other genre of instrumental music (the only kind of 'pure' music, according to these thinkers) cannot represent anything but itself, certainly not concrete objects the way a piece of visual art or literature can. That is why for E. T. A. Hoffmann music was "the most romantic of the arts", for Schelling "the primal rhythm of nature", and for Schopenhauer over and above all the other arts.[36] That is also the source of Walter Pater's famous dictum that "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music",[37] that is, to music's self-referentiality and aesthetic autonomy that comes with it – representing and referring only to itself and not some extraneous contents, therefore existing only for itself and obeying only its own laws and not those of representing other objects or serving functions other than itself.

Similar views are readily found in Vinaver's writings as well. For instance, in a piece titled *Musica triumphans*, published in 1923 in the Yugoslav periodical *Misao*, Vinaver wrote the following lines: "Today, [culture] is so permeated by music that it is ripening into a musical fruit. Its thought is becoming musical, thrusting ever farther into the obscurity of sounds, ever farther from the clear conceptuality of visual representations".[38] Similarly, blending this early Romantic vision of music as mysterious and ineffable with another early Romantic view of music as a refuge from the mundane, empirical everyday world with, perhaps, his teacher Bergson's valuation of intuition and imagination in artistic creation, Vinaver wrote in another piece, two years later:

> [W]ithout imagination there is neither literature nor art, nor, in fact, a genuine cultural life […] Music, of all the arts, involves the highest degree of fantasy. One also conquers the imagination via music. That is perhaps one of the deep reasons why all the arts are inclined to the sources of music. It elevates the imagination and lends it wings, the wings with which we fly out of the ordinary. Carried by the wings of the imagination, we soar above the everyday […][39]

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[36] I have discussed this topic at length in Chapter I of my study *The Virtuoso as Subject: The Reception of Instrumental Virtuosity, c. 1815–c. 1850*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.

[37] Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione", http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/pater/renaissance/7.html, ac. 2 Nov. 2018, 12:37 p.m.

[38] Stanislav Vinaver, "Musica triumphans", in: *Muzički krasnopis*, op. cit., 36.

[39] Stanislav Vinaver, "Naše muzičke prilike" (Current Situation in Our Music), in: *Muzički krasnopis*, op. cit., 180.

This adherence to the early Romantic and modernist view of music may also be the reason why Vinaver, as noted above, regarded music as "the ultimate meaning of life" and "the last sensory frontier", "the most essential, cosmic, metaphysical" art, "the core" and "ideal to which he subjected everything regarding art", why he was fascinated by music as "the ultimate truth above all truths".

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That may also be the reason for his alarm at the proliferation of what he called 'mechanical music', that is, the (re)production of music by means of modern technologies, above all the radio and gramophone record. For, as Benjamin observed, technological reproduction robbed artworks of their 'aura', that mystique quality encompassing uniqueness, originality, authenticity, and autonomy. Vinaver, too, correctly saw that the mechanical reproduction of music threatened to rob music of its own equivalent of aura, inasmuch as it was incompatible with most of those qualities, mentioned above, that had defined music as an 'auratic' art since the late 18th and early 19th century. Benjamin, following his own progressive, communist, and anti-fascist political agenda, saw a valuable political, liberatory potential in art's loss of aura due to technological reproduction. By contrast, Vinaver, though certainly never a supporter of fascism but in 1935 still living in a country not yet ravaged by it, did not see such a positive potential in the mechanical reproduction of music, but, perhaps, only another sign of humanity's headlong march toward self-destruction in a total war, on the wings of an aestheticised technology and instrumental reason run amok, no longer serving humanity but turning against it.

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Summary

In Paris in late 1935, the exiled German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin completed the first version of his well-known 'artwork essay', *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*. In that essay, Benjamin famously welcomed the loss of 'aura' in art, the mystique, quasi-religious quality of unique, original, authentic, and aesthetically autonomous works of art, due to the advent of mass reproduction of artworks on an industrial scale, especially in the new arts of photography and cinema, rendering many of those quasi-religious qualities of 'auratic' art obsolete. Benjamin welcomed this in accordance with his leftist, anti-fascist political agenda, hoping that the loss of 'aura' would open art to politicization, communism's (or, at any rate, Benjamin's) response to fascism's aestheticisation of politics. That same year, 1935, in Belgrade, the capital of what was then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Serbian-Jewish poet, intellectual, and literary and music critic Stanislav Vinaver wrote an essay titled *Mehanička muzika* (*Mechanical Music*). In his essay, Vinaver focused on the advent of technical reproduction in and its effects on music, an art largely ignored by Benjamin. Unlike his more famous contemporary, Vinaver was alarmed by the new technologies of radio and the gramophone record and their perceived negative impact not only on traditional music, performed live on traditional, acoustic instruments, but on organic life in general, replacing it with a mechanical surrogate carried by the waves of a dehumanizing technology. Vinaver's views were probably shaped by his passionate championing of modernism in Serbian and Yugoslav literature and music alike, which is evident not only in *Mehanička muzika*, but also in his criticism in general. Two more important factors may have also been the influence of the French philosopher Henri

Bergson, Vinaver's one-time professor at the Sorbonne, and his valorisation of intuition in thought and artistic creativity, as well as Vinaver's somewhat nostalgic view of music as the only true and self-referential art, a view reminiscent of the re-conception of music in the early German Romantics such as E. T. A. Hoffmann, F. W. J. Schelling, and Arthur Schopenhauer, later taken up and elaborated by such disparate figures as the German music theorist Eduard Hanslick, English essayist Walter Pater, and Vinaver's own modernist hero Arnold Schönberg. Ironically, although Vinaver shared much of Benjamin's leftist politics, he did not see such a positive potential in the mechanical reproduction of music, but, perhaps, only another sign of humanity's headlong march toward self-destruction in a total war, on the wings of an aestheticised technology and instrumental reason run amok, no longer serving humanity but turning against it.