

---

---

## NEW WORKS

---

---

Article received on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017  
Article accepted on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017  
UDC: 785.7

*Vesna Mikić\**

University of Arts in Belgrade  
Faculty of Music, Department of Musicology

### **TRAVELLING THROUGH THE BOXES OF SOUND 1 & 2: SRĐAN HOFMAN'S WORLD BEYOND THE MIRROR<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The idea behind this paper is to present two of the most recent works by Srđan Hofman (1944), which he regards as a diptych; the first of them won the 2015 Mokranjac Award. With its interpretation based on the central position that manipulating with composed sound objects occupies in Hofman's work, the text offers a discussion of the positioning of these works in Hofman's oeuvre so far.

**Key words:** Srđan Hofman, sound, object, Serbian contemporary music, Mokranjac Award

One might imagine that, when at the end of the première of *Kroz kutije zvuka* (Through the Boxes of Sound) for violin, clarinet, and piano, that unexpected sound (from the speakers) "appeared" and then "disappeared" in the space, most of the auditorium (whether present in the tiny hall of Radio Belgrade's Studio 6, or in front of their TV screens or radio sets) could scarcely imagine (primarily due to the peculiar status and history of contemporary music and its institu-

---

\* Author contact information: mikic@eunet.rs

<sup>1</sup> This research was carried out as part of the scientific project of the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Music in Belgrade *Identiteti srpske muzike u svetskom kulturnom kontekstu* [Identities of Serbian Music in the World Cultural Context], supported by Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

tions) that the function of that “disappearance” of sound was actually that of a cinematic *cliff-hanger*. Using one of his customary deceptions, Srđan Hofman actually announces another sequel in the adventures of the superhero he made and “set free”, which to me, from today’s and, finally, my own quite personal perspective (not only of a passionate TV watcher, but also a relatively well-informed interpreter of Hofman’s work), seems as if it had to happen precisely the way it did, not in any other way, perhaps even as if it were something quite “natural”? In other words, if (perhaps) that night in autumn 2015 no one else thought of wondering: “And what happened next?”, Srđan Hofman certainly did. Thus in 2016, while the jury of our country’s most prestigious contemporary music award were already deliberating, Srđan Hofman had already finished working on the “sequel” to the work that won him (at that moment still unbeknownst to him) a Mokranjac Award. I admit that, as a musicologist, I enjoy this kind of paradoxes, because, while making the work even more amusing, they also always unequivocally re-position and “return” it to (everyday) life. Also, the fact that I actually find it hard to accept these works’ “individual”, isolated concert lives, although they are certainly possible and, from a practical point of view, quite feasible/conceivable, opens a whole new “world” of their potential musical conceptualizations and contextualizations. But, since I am unable to derive a discourse on either one of these two pieces without invoking the context of their author’s oeuvre, I must say that this, too, as well as all the other circumstances mentioned (or not) above, I perceive as quite expected, when it comes to Srđan Hofman. That said, I must still allow for the possibility that I may be the only one to experience this “problem”, having to admit that all my attempts, already spanning decades, to “pin down” Srđan Hofman, to “tame” that sound, to figure out “the game”, sometimes seem like “mission impossible”, because the moment it seems like I am close to the “solution”, the composer raises “the stakes” and the game continues...

Of course, the title of this text results from the latest “round” in the game, the most recent instalment of (Hofman’s) story. The title “combines” verbal states, (proper) nouns, and adverbs that are entirely part of Hofman’s oeuvre or “derive” from it, suggesting certain peculiarities of *Through the Boxes of Sound 1 & 2* that I want to highlight on this occasion. Thus “travelling” at once alludes to another Hofman piece that won the Mokranjac Award, *Gledajući u Ogledala Aniša Kapura* (Looking at the *Mirrors* of Anish Kapoor)<sup>2</sup> and the fact that this

---

<sup>2</sup> Srđan Hofman won his first Mokranjac Award for *Gledajući u Ogledala Aniša Kapura* for two amplified harps and LogicPro sound processors. For more, see Mikić, V., “From (Listening to) *Moving Mirrors* to (Listening Through/In) *Mirrors in Motion* – Srđan Hofman: *Looking at the Mirrors of Anish Kapoor* for Two Amplified Harps and Logic Pro Software”, *International Journal of Music New Sound*, 2011, 37, 63–74.

time, sound is “travelling” *through* boxes/spaces as well as *through* (not only musical) time, which actually means that it navigates and sails somewhere, into another “world”. And that world, which until now (referring to Hofman’s earlier pieces) I perceived as only a possible parallel, sometimes fairytale world, is now turning out to be the “real” world of Hofman’s superhero, a world he conquered, made, and “slipped out” of to “swing” by home?<sup>3</sup> And that is revealed to us only in the “sequel”, only afterwards... It turns out that that afterwards, beyond (happily ever after?), that Deleuzean actuality of Hofman’s space-time, of Hofman’s world, is really more “real” than the “real” itself. For, even if one could erstwhile “separate” the world of reality from that of fiction/fairytale, that is no longer the case. Precisely because there is no “confusion” anymore, there are no “riddles” or “signs”<sup>4</sup> or, at least, because they are differently functionalized, Hofman’s hero now really is a superhero. But, lest there be confusion, this does not involve any kind of (neo)Platonist procedure that might have sound/music as the superhero, somehow “invited” into the composer’s world. On the contrary, one might say that here, too, there is the same, reversible (mirror) logic at work. For, only on the basis of the ensuing piece may we interpret the “origin” of our hero and set out on a journey around his world. And the “sonic” link between the two works, two boxes/worlds/events, the cliff-hanger – the sound with which the first piece ends and the second begins – is the crucial effect of Hofman’s “comedy of errors”, change of positions, play of the senses, something that, in my view, forms an important aspect of his poetics, that which I began by calling his audio/visual “deception” (Ex. 1). Namely, we “see” the “origin” (source: the speaker) of this concrete sound having listened to its genesis (*Through the Boxes of Sound 1*) and before listening to its transformations (*Through the Boxes of Sound 2*). Of course, regarding these pieces we may follow this “reverse” logic or, more precisely, logic of “reversing” on a number of levels: as mentioned above, on the level of macro-form, as well as that of micro-form, the treatment of the perform-

---

<sup>3</sup> I remember, probably wrongly, that one of Hofman’s favourite books is *Sophie’s World* (1991) by Jostein Gaarder and since I had already written a “fairytale” about Srđan Hofman (presenting in this journal his piece *Mirror* (cf. Vesna Mikić, “Who am I – I am? Reflections on/of Self in Srđan Hofman’s *Ogledalo* (Mirror) for Trio (Mezzo-soprano, Violoncello and Piano) and Chamber Ensemble (2012)”, *International Journal of Music New Sound*, 2013, 42, 103–113, describing a world that is not only “physically” behind the mirror, but is also something more than, above, and beyond the mirror, seemed like a convenient and fitting “double” pun.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, I am alluding to the titles of the following pieces by Hofman: *Rebus 1* and *2* for electronics (*Puzzle 1*, *Puzzle 2*, 1988–89) and *Znakovi* for flute, cello, and live electronics (*Signs*, 1994). For more on postmodern signifying practices in Srđan Hofman’s work, see Mirjana Veselinović Hofman, *Fragments o muzičkoj postmoderni*, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 1997, 87–132.

ing ensembles (relations between instruments), and the like. Finally, it is as if the composer's previous musical/sonic objects had become objects of sound/music, both by means of naming (boxes/sources of sounds) and in concrete realization. Namely, it is important to emphasize that there is no "changing" roles or confusion in terms of the fact that Hofman's pieces always include "composed" sound, which is, although (here) partly conceived in the sphere of "extended" media, always a constituent (even when it is the key constituent) of the musical material as well as the composer's musical flow, the emerging world of the musical work. It is therefore necessary to give further consideration to the place that Hofman's latest "diptych" occupies in the context his oeuvre thus far.

Using *Through the Boxes of Sound 1 & 2* as a point of departure, one could describe various trajectories or make various "tours" through the world of Hofman's oeuvre. Using the titles as our "guide", we would certainly visit all those works that are in any way "inspired" by (sound) items/objects (of sound): for instance, the cycle *Hexagons, Moving Mirrors, It's Coming!, Musical Toys, Looking at Mirrors by Anish Kapoor, Mirror...*<sup>5</sup> "Guided" by genre/medium, one could also make two excursions: one, in the traditional world without the electronic medium, including (again) *Hexagons, Movable Mirrors, Musical Toys*, and *Mirror*, as well as *Hadedas* and *Makamba – Ritual*;<sup>6</sup> and the other, in a world supported or constituted by electronics, including works ranging from *Déjà vu*, via *Puzzle 1* and *2, Samples, Signs*, with a longer stopover at *Duel*, and another visit to Hofman's Anish Kapoor.<sup>7</sup> Along either one of those two journeys, we would certainly notice, having set out from "boxes of sound", that one might also travel along the line connecting music (as sound = musical object) and sound (as music = sound object) and back, if we chose as our "guide" precisely the compositional procedures that are associated with them, that is, that produce them (the most complex procedure is certainly that of distributing sound in space, followed by various kinds of manipulation/transposition, transformation, varied repetition of smaller tonal-rhythmic/musical/sound "objects", which are edited/combined/ composed into larger formal wholes). Besides enabling the composer to produce extremely clever and effective "reflections" of

---

<sup>5</sup> *Hexagons – Monodrama* for cello (1975); *Hexagons – Pastorale* for violin (1975); *Hexagons – A Farce* for violin, cello, and piano (1976), *Hexagons – Ritual: Musical Scenes* for six groups of girls, Orff instruments and conductor (1978); *Movable Mirrors* for two pianos – four players (1979), *It's Coming – Sound Objects* for 11 strings (1981); *Musical Toys* for amplified cello and double bass (2008).

<sup>6</sup> *Makamba – Ritual* for woman's choir and chamber ensemble (1997), *Hadedas – A Statement and Three Developments* for cello and piano (2004).

<sup>7</sup> *Déjà vu* for saxophone (clarinet) and tape (1985), *Samples* for flute, clarinet, AKAI 1000 HD sampler and Apple Macintosh computer (1991).

media, both within traditional media and between two distinct media worlds in the context of individual works, they may also truly serve as tools for various explorations of Srđan Hofman's entire oeuvre so far.

With further fine tuning and calibrating, one might also produce a narrative/search/journey based on the concept of "diptych",<sup>8</sup> discussing it both on the "basic" level of "characters" in Hofman's musical materials, a genuine Hofmanesque kind of "singing" and "dancing",<sup>9</sup> often accomplished by the aforementioned procedures of transforming (the character of) sound objects, as well as in more general, conceptual terms. Namely, even though only *Puzzles*, electronic music pieces from 1989, in addition to *Through the Boxes of Sound 1 & 2*, feature a numbered "sequel", the change in performing ensemble, media situation, "viewpoint" (which may actually justify my point about the "reflection" of media in terms of Hofman's entire oeuvre), which we find in *Through the Boxes of Sound 1 & 2* as an effect of implementing the concept of "diptych", although "unnamed" and "unnumbered", has been part of Hofman's poetics for a long time, if not always. Thus one might speak of mutual "reflection" not only regarding pieces such as *Duel* for piano and live electronics,<sup>10</sup> which also exist in "unplugged" versions (e.g. for two pianos and percussion), but also regarding pieces that bear "similar" titles even though their direct sources of inspiration, concepts, and media realizations are different, such as *Looking at Mirrors by Anish Kapoor* and *Mirror*, or pieces such as the early *Hexagons*, "gathered" in a cycle comprising relatively independent units. In this particular case, however, Hofman produced a single recording and score, dating it to a single year, 2015, and numbering the pages "continuously".<sup>11</sup> The two works "reflect" each other not only in terms of their almost equal durations (around nine minutes), the relative "similarity" of their basic sound objects and types of their treatment, but equally, each work and especially the "sequel"/second work may in fact be viewed as an entirely independent piece, not only in terms of their identical media situation (assuming one can at all speak of "identical" electronic sounds

---

<sup>8</sup> "The work *Kroz kutije zvuka I* (as well as the diptych, of which it constitutes the first part) rests on a few rather simple motives, which, in their unpredictable, seemingly asynchronous unfolding, occasionally 'drop' into boxes formed by different, discretely evoked musical stereotypes. Furthermore, the piece also ends with sound 'trapped' inside a real box – a speaker", Srđan Hofman, Comment, cf. [http://composers.rs/en/?page\\_id=2251](http://composers.rs/en/?page_id=2251), acc. on March 12, 2017, 21:25.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, I am alluding to the "models" of Josip Slavenski.

<sup>10</sup> *Duel* for piano and live electronics (1996).

<sup>11</sup> However, Hofman numbered the piece in the programme notes published on the 24<sup>th</sup> Composers' Forum webpage, while the programme of the Forum has it without numeration. Cf. [http://composers.rs/en/?page\\_id=2251](http://composers.rs/en/?page_id=2251), acc. on 12. 3. 2016, 21:20.

separated by 20 years), the “sequel” of *Duel* from the mid 1990s. And since one could also interpret some other pieces by Hofman<sup>12</sup> using the same logic of mirroring/duelling, it turns out that a “longer” stopover at *Duel* on either of the two tours described above would be more than justified. Regarding *Through the Boxes of Sound 2*, there is no longer duelling in terms of “conflict”, if there ever was, but only a continual, irreversible, and inevitable process of “reconciliation” through observation/searching/travelling, whereby Hofman’s world comes into being and is recognized.

That the piece was conceptualized, almost from the very beginning, as a “diptych” is suggested, as mentioned above, not only by its “sound” coming from a box/speaker, but also by the way the composer obtains it. For, Hofman complements the media format “prescribed” by the commission – a chamber trio (violin, clarinet, piano) – with instruments/objects/sources of sound<sup>13</sup> that are not very frequent in his work or are, rather, usually “hidden” and “mysterious”, which seem finally to “present” to us the process of composing sound, perhaps even “translating” certain aspects of object-oriented procedures of computer-aided composition into a traditional “musical” language. Thus the work’s already exciting soundscape shaped by combinations of “traditional” articulation techniques is not only lent additional “colour” by a rainstick, chimes, feet thumping on the floor, tapping a small pot and wooden box, but equally, their “impulses” and “signals” turn out to be colouristic-rhythmic constituents of the work’s ultimate sound image and thus also its ensuing “fate”. The logic of “mirroring” and duelling *qua* mutual gazing/observing is implemented here in terms of links, alternations, and varied repetitions of sections that differ in character, similar to those quasi-aleatoric and “rather” rhythmic sections from *Duel*, as well as extremely attractive tranquil oases of two-part “counterpoint” involving melodic instruments (score mark E to four bars before score mark G; Ex. 2), where Hofman, by means of articulation procedures, plays with media “swapping” places, approximating an electronic/synthesized sound.

Also, the main sound object is presented in the work’s opening three bars (Ex. 3), which also suggest (in the piano part) the potentials of their further, het-

---

<sup>12</sup> I have discussed the “key” role of *Duel* on multiple occasions, both in texts whose “titles” treat a given aspect of the work’s constitutive problematic, such as “Duel as an Answer”, *International Magazine for Music New Sound*, 1996, 8, 39; “Does *Duel* Really Exist?”, in *Exclusivity and Coexistence*, eds. Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman and Miško Šuvaković, Belgrade, FMU, 1997, 154; “A Sample of Equal’s *Duel* – Srđan Hofman: *Music Toys* for Violoncello and Double Bass”, *International Magazine for Music New Sound*, 33, I/2009, 46, as well as in all of my texts cited thus far, although perhaps to a lesser extent (see notes 3 and 4).

<sup>13</sup> Especially in his electronic music pieces, where he uses object-oriented sampling programmes.

erogeneous transformations, including its peculiar “reflection” (right before score mark B, to the beginning of the “rhythmical” section marked by a change in time signature to 9/16, Ex. 4). The seeming domination of the rhythmic and repetitive (read: pianistic/keyboard) over the melodic aspect is formally prepared by a logical distribution of material. At first, in rhythmicized/rhythmic “fragments” of the main sound object, then in more extended sections, such as the one starting at score mark C, or its more aggressive and longer variant that, beginning four bars before score mark G, “hammers” the rhythmical pulse into the listener, which one may recognize, despite a more “delicate” soundscape in the ensuing section (achieved by means of character transformations of materials presented thus far), as the “impulse” or “trigger” of the ending/beginning of the work.

This seeming domination, “stemming” from an ostensible duel, is an effect of a paradox engendered by the “unpredictability” of the world that Hofman takes here as his starting point: the more “worldly”, the more “everyday” it is, in the biopolitical context/world of art/world of music it is as if it turned more unreal. And, most probably – vice versa? But in order to problematize such a “turn”, Hofman must also, as though in a manifesto, “reject” the notion of duel *qua* conflict and, “raising the stakes”, bet everything on his superhero and his world. Hofman finds a practical solution for realizing such a plan in technological advance, which now enables (unlike in *Duel*) a single performer to play both the piano and MIDI keyboard, with much more ease and facility. Furthermore, as an old master of electronic sound, artlessly, elegantly, and ingenuously, Hofman deals with the physical limitations of this procedure by “adding” recorded material (audio file). Also, this transcendence of a physical/bodily barrier allows Hofman to construct quite peculiar sonic situations, where one cannot (and should not) perceive the boundaries between electronic and “traditional” keyboard sound (for instance, in the piano-audio section at score mark F, one cannot identify the “sound source” of its peculiar synthesizer/harpsichord timbre). The basis of the material involves transformed rhythmic-chordal (timbral) variants/transformations of the sound object (for instance, the descending series of chords in the piano part at score mark C are a variant of the “reflection” at score mark B in *Through the Boxes of Sound 1*). Here, however, those “oases” of melodic “singing” or dramatically “pointed” situations (like those generated in the former work’s metrically or rhythmically repetitively structured sections) are considerably less frequent, almost nonexistent. It is as though everything about this world were a “play”, whether with pets or electronic gadgets – in fact, there is not much difference between them anyway.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> It is as if, in a hypothetical Hofman *Star Wars*, the main character was R2D2 and not Luke Skywalker.

Perhaps the most compelling indicator of this “change” of position, the final attainment of the ideal of equality, is the “ragtime” episode resulting from a transformation of the preceding material; it is posited almost like a Coda, right before the very ending of the piece (score mark H, ex. 5). Hofman has never been averse to making this kind of (nostalgic?) references to the “primary” world, e.g. in *Musica concertante*.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, in *Duel* he quotes an old tune from Vojvodina. However, although used as the basis of a lyrical episode, it is placed right at the centre of the piece, in the solo piano part, before the piano and electronics’ “duel” continues.<sup>16</sup> Here, by contrast, we have a “dancing”, humorous episode almost at the very end, in a symbiosis of electronic and piano sound, whereby the concept of duel *qua* conflict and struggle for domination is finally transformed. Of course, that does not mean that the game is over and that it will not continue. For, in Srđan Hofman’s case, from this moment on, every return/departure into “silence” potentially is and always will be a cliff-hanger announcing new adventures of his superhero: (new) sound.

## References

- Hofman, Srđjan, *Through the Boxes of Sound 1 & 2*, Comment; [http://composers.rs/en/?page\\_id=2251](http://composers.rs/en/?page_id=2251)
- Mikić, Vesna, *Muzika u tehno-kulturi* (Music in Technoculture), Belgrade, Univerzitet umetnosti, 2004.
- Mikić, Vesna, “Duel as an Answer?”, *International Magazine for Music New Sound*, 1996, 8, 39.
- Mikić, Vesna, “Does Duel Really Exist?”, in *Exclusivity and Coexistence*, eds. Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman and Miško Šuvaković, Belgrade, FMU, 1997, 154.
- Mikić, Vesna, “A Sample of Equal’s *Duel* – Srđan Hofman: *Music Toys* for Violoncello and Double Bass”, *International Magazine for Music New Sound*, 33, I/2009, 46.
- Mikić, Vesna, “From (Listening to) *Moving Mirrors* to (Listening Through/In) *Mirrors in Motion* – Srđan Hofman: *Looking at the Mirrors of Anish Kapoor* for Two Amplified Harps and Logic Pro Software”, *New Sound*, 2011, 37, 63–74.
- Mikić, Vesna, “Who am I – I am? Reflections on/of Self in Srđan Hofman’s *Ogledalo* (Mirror) for Trio (Mezzo-soprano, Violoncello and Piano) and Chamber Ensemble (2012)”, *New Sound*, 2013, 42, 103–113.
- Veselinović Hofman, Mirjana, *Fragmenti o muzičkoj postmoderni* (Fragments on Musical Postmodern) Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 1997.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Musica concertante* for Piano, 13 Strings, and Electronics (1993) features a “nostalgic”, mandolin-like music box sound. For more about this work, see: Veselinović-Hofman, M. *Fragments...*, op. cit., 123–132.

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed analysis, see “Duel kao odgovor”, op. cit.; see also Mikić, V., *Muzika u tehno-kulturi*, Belgrade, Univerzitet umetnosti, 2004.



**Ex. 1 - Through the Boxes of Sounds 1 & 2 - end & beginning**

Pno.

(8va)

*pp* *ppp*

*ppp* *pppp*

*una corda*

Start audio file

MIDI Keyboard

Audio Track

Timeline

START 0.8 0.16 0.28

*ppp* *p* *ppp*

$\text{♩} = 60$

Srđan Hofman

**Ex. 2**

Cl. in Bb

Vln.

Pno.

Rainstick

*p* *pp*

arco sul pont., maffling

Con sord.

*pp* *pp*

pizz. ord.

*p* *p*

$\text{♩} = 56$

Ex. 2 (continued)

Musical score for Ex. 2 (continued) featuring Cl. in B $\flat$ , Vln., and Pno. The Cl. in B $\flat$  part is marked *ppp* and includes the instruction "Cl.". The Vln. part is marked *ppp* and includes the instruction "sul ponticello". The Pno. part features complex chordal textures with a  $\ast$  symbol below the first system.

Ex. 3

Musical score for Ex. 3 featuring Clarinet in B $\flat$ , Violin, and Piano. The Clarinet in B $\flat$  part is marked *ff* and includes the tempo marking  $\text{♩} = 96$  and *rit.*. The Violin part is marked *ff* and includes the tempo marking  $\text{♩} = 96$ . The Piano part is marked *ff* and includes the tempo marking  $\text{♩} = 96$ . The score concludes with a section marked *a temp* and *pp* for the Clarinet in B $\flat$  and Violin, and *p* for the Piano. A  $\ast$  symbol is located below the Piano part at the end of the score.

Ex. 4

The musical score for Ex. 4 is arranged in three systems. The first system includes parts for Clarinet in Bb, Violin, and Piano. The Clarinet part begins with a melodic line marked *a tempo* and *rit.*, with a tempo of 56. The Violin part features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The Piano part consists of a rhythmic accompaniment of chords, also marked *a tempo* and *rit.*, with a tempo of 56. The second system shows the Clarinet and Violin parts with rests, while the Piano part continues with a complex rhythmic pattern, including a triplet of eighth notes and a *8va* marking. The third system continues the Piano part with various dynamics (*mp*, *pp*, *p*) and includes a *Ped.* marking. A box labeled 'B' is placed above the first measure of the second system.

Ex. 5

158  $\text{H}$   $\text{♩} = 90$

Pno

Audio

Audio

Timeline 7.11

163  $\text{I}$

Pno

Audio

Audio

Timeline 7.14 7.19

pitch shifts (+10 c and -10 c)

172

Pno

Audio

Timeline 7.26

178

Pno

Timeline 7.35