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Reception of Music as a Cultural Process

Introductory remarks

Reception of music as a cultural process should be understood as a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that cannot be described in a simple, one-dimension way. A few dozen years of a scientific research on the essence of the issue encompass aesthetics, psychology and sociology of music. It is often the case that the research trespasses the boundaries of these fields which intertwine anyway.

While enumerating factors that differentiate perception of music the researchers usually start with quoting two phases of listeners' behaviour. The first phase is a direct, natural, as it were, perception of an acoustic phenomenon, the second is an interpretation of perceived music internalized according to certain social canons.¹ Music being – according to sociologists – an asemantic phenomenon becomes in the context of history and culture a peculiar cultural meaning thanks to which it may be understood more profoundly, more adequately and in line with the intension of its composer.

Existence of 'effective communication'² within music depends on many socially-conditioned factors and the internal nature of a specific individual. Since it is impossible to separate complementary psychological and socially-generated factors of an individual one may say that these two groups determine quality of perception, help to differentiate its level from 'a naturalistic one' to an adequate one and serve the purpose of classification of music's listeners. Results of numerous researches usually bring forth various typologies of listeners – typologies that provide interesting data about music audience, its understanding and assessment of 'the art of sounds'.

¹ See Tomasz Misiak, *Muzyka a semiotyczne kryterium kultury* [Music and a semiotic criterion of culture], *Muzyka* 2 (1996), 83.

² See Tomasz Goban-Klas, *Świadomość kulturalna społeczeństwa polskiego* [Cultural consciousness of Polish society] (Kraków, 1985), 5.

Typologies of music listeners Perspectives: psychological and aesthetical ones

The mode of formulating typologies of reception attitudes depends, needless to say, on methodologies of the fields of science enumerated above. Typologies based on psychology analyse mainly this aspect of 'the art of sounds' that is derived from an individual's personality, from his/her inborn predispositions and limitations, whereas the aesthetic perspective of the research on music reception takes into account an axiological aspect of this experience, rather in line with the formula of Maria Gołaszewska according to which a listener of art is someone 'who is not indifferent to art, who feels a need of it due to its value and strives for realisation of his/her interests'.³

The authors of the most interesting typologies of music listeners based on psychology were: Richard Müller-Freienfels⁴ (listing sensualists, motorists, fantasts, emotionalists and mentalists), Henri Delacroix⁵ (listing the following types: imaginative – egocentric, imaginative – allocentric, formalistic, associative), Charles Samuel Myers⁶ (listing the following types: intrasubjective, associative, objective, 'characterising'), Janina Koblewska-Wróblowa⁷ (quoting the following categories of listeners: polysensorists, imagists, interpreters, formal analysts and aversionists) and Otto Ortmann (listing sensorists, perceptionists, imagists).

Analytic network applied to music listeners according to psychological requirements usually classified them into those who, while listening to music, focus on various aspects of it e.g. acoustic, sound, movement and program virtues; who analyse music in purely rational and intellectual man-

³ Maria Gołaszewska, *Odbiorca sztuki jako krytyk* [Art-consumer as a critic] (Kraków, 1967), 29.

⁴ Richard Müller-Freienfels, *Psychologie der Musik* (Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1936), 119-120, after Tomasz Misiak, *Muzyka jako wspólnota. Kulturowe wzory odbioru muzyki w europejskiej kulturze muzycznej XX wieku* [Music as a community. Cultural patterns of music reception in European musical culture of 20th century] (Warsaw, 1990), 87.

⁵ Henri Delacroix, *Psychologie de l'art* (Paris, 1927), after Tomasz Misiak, *Muzyka jako wspólnota...*, 87.

⁶ Charles Samuel Myers, 'Individual Differences in Listening to Music', in *The effects of Music*, ed. Max Schoen (New York, 1927), see also Tomasz Misiak, *Muzyka jako wspólnota...*, 88.

⁷ Janina Koblewska-Wróblowa, 'Typy przeżyć muzycznych' [Types of musical experiences], *Materiały pomocnicze dla nauczycieli szkół i ognisk artystycznych* [Subsidiary materials for teachers of schools and art centres] 23 (1958), 28–72.

ner (e.g. analysing development of a particular piece of music in its vertical and horizontal form) without internal involvement; finally who expect music to provide them with emotions, ecstasy and even stimuli for their personal sensual thrills. Moreover, psychological research proved that there are listeners who receive music through a synthesis of an auditory reaction with other sensations (visual, motor and olfactory ones) but also those with impartial or hostile attitude towards 'the art of sound'.

The distinguishing feature quoted by Ortmann – 'ability of a listener to perceive more and more complex structural elements of a piece of music'⁸ allows us to notice that children perceive music as 'raw' tones or chords and react to them spontaneously. Professionals and gifted laymen in a conscious process of music perception carry out an analysis and synthesis of particular elements of a given piece of music, and after an appropriate theoretical preparation they are even able to understand abstract music concepts such as tonality or polyphony. It is worth noticing that in the latter concept the mode of perception depends on certain cultural factors, such as 'learning', 'knowledge of a code' or 'knowledge of the rules of syntax'. The role of experience and a musical training equally vital in reception of music as inborn psychological predispositions was also emphasised by Leonard B. Meyer.⁹

Perception of a musical work of art from the point of view of aesthetics was a subject of interest of Roman Ingarden¹⁰ (who distinguished two modes of perception: epistemological one – aiming at acquisition of an objective knowledge and aesthetical one – aiming at solely aesthetic experience), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel¹¹ (his classification included experts who listen in a cognitive, analytical way and dabblers – listening in a purely emotional way), Eduard Hanslick¹² (experts and laymen exhibiting 'musical' and 'pathological' attitude respectively) and Władysław Tatarkiewicz¹³ (divided aesthetic experience into purely aesthetic, literary and poetic ones).

⁸ Otto Ortmann, 'Types of Listeners: Genetic Considerations', in *The Effects of Music*, ed. Max Schoen (New York, 1927), 119–120; see also Tomasz Misiak, *Muzyka jako wspólnota...*, 93.

⁹ Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago, 1956).

¹⁰ Roman Ingarden, 'O zagadnieniu percepcji dzieła muzycznego' [About problems of perception of the musical work], in Roman Ingarden, *Przeżycie, dzieło, wartość* [Experience, work, value] (Kraków, 1966).

¹¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wykłady o estetyce* [Lectures about aesthetics], vol. 3 (Warsaw, 1964), 256–259.

¹² Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (Leipzig, 1854).

¹³ Władysław Tatarkiewicz, 'Skupienie i marzenie' [Concentration and dream], in Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *O filozofii i sztuce (w setną rocznicę urodzin)* [About philosophy and art (on the centenary of birthday)] (Warsaw, 1986), 167–175.

Maria Gołaszewska has a special place in creation of reception typologies. She claimed that on the ground of aesthetics one cannot divide receivers of art according to sociological criteria such as e.g. education or profession. Instead she suggested four factors:

1. frequency of a contact with art,
2. theoretical background and knowledge of a receiver,
3. psychological features of a receiver (inborn and acquired ones) and
4. level of passivity and activity of a receiver while being exposed to works of art.

Her division of art receivers was as follows:

1. 'naive' receivers – with a little theoretical preparation in the field of art, rarely exposed to art, treating art as entertainment, cannot evaluate it properly – passing so called apparent judgements conveying their personal and emotional reaction to art;

2. 'non-authentic' receivers – derivative ones, their relatively frequent contacts with art stem from certain theoretical assumptions and convictions of a receiver's environment on the importance of art in life, extensive knowledge of such receivers accepts judgements of experts uncritically;

3. critical receivers – with an extensive but non-systematic and incomplete knowledge of art, they have frequent contacts with art and pass independent and critical judgements;

4. art lovers – their frequent contacts with art stem from direct need of artistic experience, therefore they are consciously planned and directed, their extensive knowledge usually concerns one domain of art which interests a receiver the most.

Sociological perspective

Sociology suggests yet another attitude to the reception of art (and therefore music), different from psychological and aesthetic ones. Reception interpreted in sociological categories, as Antonina Kłoskowska explains 'aims not so much at grasping the whole range of psychologically possible reactions to a message (this should be the subject of a research on a psychology of reception), but rather establishing socially-specified types of a performance set by social categories and reception situations'.¹⁴

Sociological inquiries, transferring the emphasis on socially-objectified characteristics of a reception situation and differentiating a perception of aesthetic messages depending on a social character of receivers, lead to con-

¹⁴ Antonina Kłoskowska, *Socjologia kultury* [Sociology of culture] (Warsaw, 1981), 407.

struction of new typologies of music listeners. The authors of the most interesting ones were: Nicole Berthier, Agnes Losonczi and Theodor W. Adorno.

Typology of Berthier¹⁵ stemming from the standpoint of a traditional empirical sociology based on the following factors: form of a participation in a music culture, receivers' preferences and education (Berthier enquired only classical music lovers by a traditional questionnaire method, her respondents were listeners of radio programme called 'France-Musique' specialised in popularisation of classical music) distinguished the following types of listeners:

1. connoisseurs – frequent concert-goers, owners of impressive music collections, persons claiming that 'music is an indispensable part of their lives', they differ from musicologists only by lack of theoretical music background (this type is the least frequent);

2. traditional performers – performing in choirs, orchestras or at home, preferring classical music whose value had already been tested;

3. 'tourists of radio waves' – treating music as entertainment, listening mainly to the radio;

4. 'mass media products' – listeners interested in technical novelties, with liberal tastes, accepting messages in line with the rule of homogenisation implemented by the mass media.

Losonczi inclined towards complex, more phenomenological ways of description of musical attitudes tried by means of case-studies (one can see withdrawal from a quantity analysis for the sake of a quality analysis) to grasp musical interests of her respondents related to an outlook on life and biographical contexts and constructed multi-dimensional typology comprising needs of receivers on the one hand and profiles of their interests on the other.¹⁶

The typology based on the needs of listeners is as follows:

1. listeners looking for music as a source or a catalyst of their personal emotional experience – music is their life companion but also a way of escape from realities of life;

2. listeners trying to get to know a piece of music as a system, structure, stylistic whole – they look for an intellectual joy in solving 'a reception task';

3. listeners looking for a symbolic reflection of life problems, relations with actions, fighting, dramatic conflicts – music leads such listeners into the sphere of a real life truth;

¹⁵ Nicole Berthier, 'L'amateur de musique. Une approche sociologique', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 1/8 (1977); see also Tomasz Misiak, *Muzyka jako wspólnota...*, 96–97.

¹⁶ Agnes Losonczi, *Bedarf, Funktion, Wertwechsel in der Musik, Musiksoziologische Untersuchung des Musikleben in Ungarn nach 1945* (Budapest, 1960), vol. 3; see also Tomasz Misiak, *Muzyka jako wspólnota...*, 96–97.

4. listeners with miscellaneous needs, usually of the first and the third type or, alternatively, the second and the third one;

The typology presented by Losonczi based on profiles of interests is as follows:

1. spontaneous music lovers – intuitively aiming at the re-experiencing their first, incredible and positively shocking encounter with music. Usually these ‘musical neophytes’ wish to protect music from intellectual criticism and snobbism;

2. listeners biased against contemporary music – accept only classical music, they expect loftiness and harmony;

3. fashion followers – being acquainted with the latest trends in art is regarded by them as ‘a duty of a cultured person’, although these are quite often only appearances of understanding modern art;

4. listeners sensitive to emotional-and-intellectual perfection – open-minded and free of prejudices, elite of sensitive, aesthetically alert people aiming most of all at aesthetic experience (small group);

5. music experts – form a public opinion, promote new artistic trends.

What is more, Losonczi made an attempt to identify mutual correlations between her typologies of listeners. Merging these two analytical dimensions brought her to the following conclusions (which were yet another typological specification):

1. spontaneous listeners are emotional ones, not contemplative or analytical;

2. listeners biased against contemporary music (intelligentsia with a stable background) are more emotionalists rather than analysts;

3. fashion-followers are not attached to any of the models, they are neither emotionalists, nor analysts not contemplation-oriented ones;

4. sensitive listeners are never analysts, they usually look for a cluster of music sensations;

5. experts are solely intellectuals, their approach towards music is analytical and objective.

Adorno¹⁷ classifies listeners according to relations between listeners (socialized individuals) and music itself. His classification is as follows:

1. experts – listen to the music in an adequate and conscious way, they are able to detect internal relations in a piece of music – it is a circle of educated professionals;

2. good listeners – not educated in terms of the rules of music language, but still able to see certain entreties and relations within pieces of music;

¹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 14 (Frankfurt am M., 1975), especially part: *Typen musikalischen Verhaltens*; see also Tomasz Misiak, *Muzyka jako wspólnota...*, 106–108.

3. educated consumers – regard music as ‘something one should be interested in’ (elements of snobbism), they cannot analyse music, but they do have a lot of secondary pieces of information about it, they adore virtuosity and contests, they condemn avant-garde;

4. emotional listeners – naive but sensitive, responding to music in a spontaneous way, easily manipulated by advertisement, music creates in them image associations;

5. listeners ‘full of prejudices’, resentimental ones – they appreciate only pieces of music that are full of order, discipline, they escape from the chaos of the contemporary culture in historicism;

6. jazz fans – showing aversion to classical-romantic music;

7. entertainment-oriented listeners – shaped by the mass media, treating music as the source of thrill and a form of getting away from problems of everyday life.

Also, Adorno draws one’s attention to the fact that ‘a good listener’ (dying out) was usually represented by patrons and music amateurs. ‘Educated consumers’ are most often subscribers of concerts and operas, festival goers and CD buyers.

Constructing psychological, aesthetical and sociological typologies of listeners prove various possibilities of approaches to the issue of reception of ‘the art of sounds’. Depending on a research perspective assumed by researchers various determiners of music reception are viewed as critical (ranging from an individual’s predisposition and his/her psychological features to his/her theoretical background, knowledge, frequency of a contact with works of art and various social determiners). Different results are obtained through usage of different analytical networks (e.g. sociology approach uses questionnaires or case studies) applied to different types of listeners’ groups (e.g. solely listeners of classical music – like in the case of Berthier, or listeners of all types of music – like in the case of Adorno).

Conclusion

Let us remark that in the process of art reception (and at the same time music reception) a considerable role is played by a listener’s knowledge and cultural competence (to be more precise, artistic competence).

‘Knowledge of art – writes Anna Matuchniak-Krasuska commenting on fine arts – is detectable both as an element of an aesthetic approach as well as a condition and a part of an aesthetic experience’.¹⁸ For ‘in the

¹⁸ Anna Matuchniak-Krasuska, ‘Wiedza o sztuce i kompetencja artystyczna jako warunki odbioru sztuki’ [Knowledge about art and artistic competence as conditions of art perception], *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 30/1 (1998), 191.

aesthetic approach as well as other approaches towards art one distinguishes cognitive, emotional and behavioural components'.¹⁹ [This statement can be paraphrased in relation to music]. The author claims that 'cultural competence is a theoretical concept describing man's capacities and his behaviour in the realm of symbolic culture as well as culture understood broadly in the anthropological sense'.²⁰ Such a definition justifies discussions on a competence observed in various scientific disciplines e.g. linguistics, sociology and aesthetics. It also allows for an interdisciplinary approach to the subject of the research.

Finally, it leads to an analysis of the cultural concept itself and further split into linguistic and artistic competence, or, to be more precise, strictly musical one. I shall deal with this issue on another occasion.

Translated by Michał Nolywajka

¹⁹ Ibid., 191.

²⁰ Ibid.