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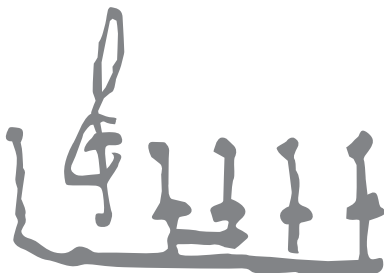
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AFTER CHOPIN: NOTES ON RECEPTION



MUSIC RECEPTION: GENERAL PREMISES

In recent decades, the reception of music (and of the arts in general) has become a new area of research – not just empirical, part of the describing and studying of the history of music or the arts, but also a theoretical and aesthetic problem, which sets reception up as a very important area in the theory and history of 16e, the fine arts and music. The theoretical foundations of reception are common to all the arts, in spite of the ontological differences between the work of music, art or literature. Therefore, the theory of reception is best considered in interdisciplinary terms. When studying the musical work and its structure, the musicologist is alone, whereas the reception of music allows one to incorporate into one's studies all the disciplines connected with the arts – indeed, all the humanities. Initially, reception studies in the field of music were confined to the analysis of musical criticism and of a work's stylistic influence. Today, the foundations are being laid for systematic study, under the influence, above all, of research into the reception of literary works.

The basis for the aesthetics of reception was elaborated by the 'Constance school' of Hans R. Jauss, Robert C. Holub and Wolfgang Iser.¹ It was constituted by virtually the whole of aesthetic thought in relation to twentieth-century literature and art. The most important thesis that emerged was that the work of art exists in active reception, with the contribution of a changing audience. Every work is implicated in a double dialectic relationship – through the chain of works preceding it and through the chain of receivers who apprehend it and impart

¹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception*, tr. C. Mailland (Paris, 1978); Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory. A critical introduction* (London, 1984); Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, 1978).

meaning to it. In this way, reception becomes part of the life of a work, of its duration in history.

The reception of music shares many elements with the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who places the creative artist and the interpreter on the same level.² Thus we can speak of two concretisations of meaning: the meaning of the creative artist's 'product', its effect or action, and the meaning determined by the addressee, the meaning read in the reception or interpretation of that product.

The new formulation gained by the aesthetics of reception has lent great significance and dignity to art – features currently often contested, particularly by the postmodernists. The artwork has a twofold existence in time: in the act of creation within the conditions of a particular moment, and in the (endless) process of the discovery of its meanings. The completeness of the work (without entering into the ontological aspects of the musical work, its not entirely definable character) is juxtaposed with its history. Hans-Heinrich Eggebrecht couches this in categorical terms, stating that only the action or influence of a work has a history, whereas the musical text remains the same.³

Whilst Hans R. Jauss elaborated the aesthetics of reception, Robert C. Holub developed its various elements to the level of a 'reception theory', encompassing both methodological and empirical aspects. Holub surveyed the theoretical elements that make up the contemporary theory and aesthetics of reception – elements which crystallised during the 1970s. These two scholars, precursors of contemporary reception theory, enumerated such currents as Russian formalism of the early twentieth century, combined with Parisian structuralism, Ingardenian phenomenology, Praguean structuralism, Gadamerian hermeneutics and sociological research into art and literature.

Whilst the problem of reception was addressed in the first current, combining formalism and structuralism, this current appears to have focussed solely on studying the work per se. Russian formalism

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda. Zarys hermeneutyki filozoficznej*, tr. B. Baran (Kraków, 1993), 195; Eng. tr. as *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. edn, tr. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York, 1989).

³ Hans-Heinrich Eggebrecht, 'Zur Wirkungsgeschichte der Musik Beethovens. Theorie der ästhetischen Identifikation', in Harry Goldschmidt, Karl-Heinz Köhler and Konrad Niemann (eds.), *Bericht über den Internationalen Beethoven-Kongress* (Berlin, 1977), 469.

possessed a radical strand (B. M. Eichenbach, R. Jakobson and others) and a moderate strand (B. W. Tomaszewski, W. M. Żyrmunski). The latter strand took account of the structure of poetry and also its substance: moral elements, the artistic functions of the elements of a work, and genres. In Jauss's opinion, the assertion of the artistic nature of poetry came to be seen as the result of perception, the art object being brought to life in reception. This means that all evaluation and reevaluation of a work is determined by reception and its different norms: aesthetic, cultural and social.

In Roman Ingarden's theory, the focus switches to the conscious act, and in relation to music especially to the concept of the intentionality of the work's existence. The intentional relationship is the relationship of the subject of consciousness to the object of consciousness; it is a relationship of the constituting of meaning according to Husserl. In respect to the musical work, as Ingarden opines, we have 'a relatively constant schema' (the score) and 'a multitude of forms of the work' (in various interpretations).⁴ The huge role of individual perceptions and intersubjective reception results from the infinite number of acts of bringing the work to life. 'The process of supposedly historical changes to the musical work is actually no more than the continual process of discovering and concretising different new forms of the work', writes Ingarden; in other words, the creative 'replication' of its schema.

For the Prague structuralists Jan Mukarovsky and Felix Vodički, art is a dynamic signifying system, and every work is a referential structure. The artwork cannot be independent of history, and it is determined by diachronic series. The forging of the semiotic perspective in the 'Prague school' allowed scholarship, on one hand, to preclude psychologising theories focussed on the artist or on individual perception and, on the other, to reject the idea that art is a direct reflection of social reality. Mukarovsky respects the social dimension of art and the historical aspect of artistic norms, but not as a reflection of reality in the work. The work is an autonomous structure, but at the same time also a communicating sign, or *signifiant*, in respect to the *signifié*. And Mukarovsky places the accent on reception: 'Of fundamental importance for understanding the

⁴ Roman Ingarden, 'Zagadnienie tożsamości dzieła muzycznego w czasie historycznym' [The identity of the musical work in historical time], in *Studia z estetyki* [Studies on aesthetics], ii (Warszawa, 1958), 295.

essential artistic intention of the work is the attitude of the receiver, not the artist'. For the Prague school, reception becomes 'the permanent concretisation of the meaning of the work'.⁵

From there it is just one step to Gadamer's metacritical orientation, to hermeneutics understood as the history of the work's action – its 'Wirkungsgeschichte', primarily involving understanding. He explains understanding not in relation to particular disciplines, but in general as the essence of man's being in the world. He introduces – *à la* Husserl – the notion of the 'horizon'.

Hence we have the 'hermeneutic horizon', which encompasses both the historical horizon and also the individual, personal, horizon, and even the 'horizon of the question of meaning', the 'horizon of expectation'. As for the sociologising trends in research, they embrace the conditions and documentation of reception, such as the sociology of taste, the genesis of fame, and studies on the reception of the work of certain writers.⁶

In Holub's opinion, the 'received horizon' is a requirement that is difficult to fulfil, since it supposes an ideal interpreter and a highly competent receiver with complete knowledge. Jauss, however, sees in the chain of interpretation also a role for the 'broad public' – for the ordinary receiver who favours genres that help to determine the fate of 'good' and 'bad' art, who participates in the establishing and decline of paradigms, who is a witness. Zofia Lissa called the historical horizon simply 'historical awareness', which in music presupposes 'a familiarity with the various codes of musical information which have formed as this art has developed and the ability to interpret those codes correctly'. The 'information fields' to which Lissa refers are mobile; thus Chopin, for example, finds a different place in the musical awareness of a Pole or of a German. It is also important that the works of the past are continually being inscribed in new contexts, in a constantly changing present.⁷

⁵ See H.R. Jauss, *Pour une esthétique*, 148.

⁶ Quoted in R.C. Holub, *Reception Theory*, 45–46. Many aspects of the functioning of literature in society have been addressed in Janusz Sławiński (ed.) *Problemy socjologii literatury* [Aspects of literary sociology] (Wrocław, 1971), including Roman Zimand's article 'Pułapki socjologii literatury' [The traps of literary sociology].

⁷ Zofia Lissa, 'Świadomość historyczna w muzyce i jej rola we współczesnej kulturze muzycznej' [Historical awareness in music and its role in contemporary musical culture], in *Nowe szkice z estetyki muzycznej* [New sketches on musical aesthetics] (Kraków, 1975), 93 and 98.

The second horizon is the ‘horizon of expectation’, as a central problem in the theory of reception. This may be compared to the experiences of the first receivers, but it should also have an intersubjective character. Hermeneuts speak of the merging of these two horizons. The actual horizon, which encompasses expectation, is not born without a past, but it can overcome that past; it is not suspended in a void, but is marked by the stamp of our knowledge, experiences and habits, on which the history of reception exerts a powerful influence. Reception becomes an ‘active appropriation’ of the work, modifying its meaning and value in different generations up to the present time, and we stand face to face with a work of the past as receivers with our own horizons. Jauss differentiates between three kinds of aesthetic activity: production (poiésis), perception (aisthésis, as receptive aesthetic experience) and reception (catharsis). What does this catharsis signify? Well, it signifies aesthetic identification, the discovery of one’s freedom of aesthetic judgment, and so cathartic pleasure. But is this supposed to represent a phenomenological stance or a postmodernist relishing of one’s own experience?

Jauss also writes about the social functions of reception, since one cannot confine oneself to the flawed circle that sends one from an aesthetic experience of the work to one’s own experience and back again. One must be open to the experiences of others. The body of Jauss’s work forms a kind of macrocosm of reception aesthetics – an idealised aesthetics, one must add, based on knowledge, unalloyed experience and a moral stance, and so an aesthetics embracing an ‘elite’ of receivers. Iser, in turn, focuses on the microcosm of reception aesthetics, that is, the process of understanding the work as we become acquainted with it.⁸ This was conceived not as a synthesis of the work’s meaning woven together from different strands, but as an interactive process between the work and the recipient during actual reception. The reception aesthetics of the ‘Constance school’ reinforces, or perhaps restores, respect for the history of art, literature and music. The work is never separated from the history of its reception. The historical horizon is a very important factor – perhaps the most important – in our understanding of the work. Jauss emphasises that in the historical objectivism of the nineteenth century, facts were assumed to be independent of the observing subject, and

⁸ W. Iser, *The Act of Reading*; quoted in R.C. Holub, 83.

art history was the positivist chronicle of works and their artists. Contemporary reception theory and aesthetics, meanwhile, establishes a link between culture and history. History is the *reenactment* of the past in the present, in the mind of the historian. Reception theory also breaks with the former notion of interpretation, in which critical thinking adhered to the text⁹ and was not free thinking, the fusion of different horizons leading to a profound, creative understanding of the work.

Reception aesthetics has been criticised, above all by Marxist scholars, for a lack of sociological grounding, and by some structuralists, as well as by postmodernists, who deny the possibility of an intersubjective relationship between text and interpretation. They negate the existence of a common historical horizon. For them, all that counts is the work and its individual reception or vision.

In musicology, the term ‘reception’ has acquired two meanings: the adoption of features of another composer’s work and social reception reflected in music criticism. It appears in lexical sources quite rarely. In *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, reception is defined as ‘The impact of artworks as reflected in the responses of audience, critic and artist’ and as ‘part of the work’s modern meaning’.¹⁰ The *Brockhaus - Riemann Musik Lexikon* similarly distinguishes two levels of reception: the level of the art of music itself and the level of its social action.¹¹ However, although Eggebrecht distinguishes many aspects of reception history, from the point of view of composition, value, function, perception, application, critical and interpretative reflection and the fine arts, when considering the historical-compositional category he writes only of the performance of works, and not of their effect on other composers.¹² In a broader understanding, reception is divided into the sphere of influence on art and the sphere of individual and intersubjective or social reception, the two spheres influencing one another.

The sphere of art encompasses above all music. We are dealing here with the history of the musical art, with a work’s influence on other composers. Mieczysław Tomaszewski calls this sphere of reception **resonance**, and it will be discussed separately.

⁹ R.C. Holub, 127, 156,

¹⁰ *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Michael Randel (London, 1986), 682.

¹¹ *Brockhaus-Riemann Musik Lexikon* (Wiesbaden, 1989), ii, 390.

¹² H.-H. Eggebrecht, *Zur Geschichte der Beethoven Rezeption* (Mainz, 1972).

In the sphere of art, the reception of music is not restricted to influence on other composers, since music also influences literature and the fine arts. Since the nineteenth century, the figure and music of Chopin has inspired poetic interpretations (Kornel Ujejski, Cyprian K. Norwid), stage plays (Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz) and many *vies romancées* biographies. In painting, drawing and sculpture, the figures of composers, including Chopin, have inspired many outstanding works, although it must be said that beyond occasional articles and albums of portraits and sculptures, interest in this subject among representatives of other disciplines linked to art and literature, even in respect to Chopin, is rather meagre.¹³

The other sphere of the reception of music is its effect on people, on the world of ideas and experiences, and indirectly also on attitudes and behaviour. In this sphere, the following are distinguished:

1. The **perception** of music; that is, the individual experiencing (sensing) of music, studied by psychological, experimental and other methods. In psychological terms, perception signifies the reception of reality on the sensory level – a largely subconscious phenomenon ('subception'). All perception of the reality that surrounds us should be supported by actions of the mind. Leibniz called this process **aperception**, a term recalled in the first half of the nineteenth century by Johann F. Herbart in his pedagogic writings. But in Poland, music psychology and music sociology have not been greatly developed, beyond the analysis of musical skills and occasional public questionnaires, for example during Chopin piano competitions. In the area of music teaching, research has been carried out into the perception of music among children and youngsters, but the scrapping of mandatory musical education has essentially thwarted these efforts. There has also been limited research

¹³ One may single out the following studies: Xavier Deryng, 'La réception de Chopin dans les arts plastiques, les interprétations de Boleslas Biegas', in Danièle Pistone (ed.), *Sur les traces de Frédéric Chopin* (Paris, 1984), 169–182; Czesław Sielużycki, 'Prace chopinowskie rzeźbiarza Jean-Baptiste-Auguste Clésingera [The Chopin works of the sculptor Auguste Clésinger]', *Rocznik Chopinowski*, 16 (1984), 119–151; Władysław Stróżewski, 'Chopin i Norwid', *Rocznik Chopinowski*, 19 (1989), 49–60; Eng. tr. as 'Chopin and Norwid', *Chopin Studies*, 3 (1990), 53–65; Cyprian Norwid, *O Szopenie - Sur Chopin*, 'Wstęp – Préface' Jan Ekier, 'Posłowie – Postface' Krzysztof Jeżewski (Łódź, 1999); Agnieszka Morawińska (ed.), *Romantyzm. Malarstwo w czasach Fryderyka Chopina* [Romanticism. Art during the times of Fryderyk Chopin], exhibition catalogue (Warszawa, 1999).

allowing us to define the ‘semantic fields’ or fields of influence of particular genres, works and styles of music, of composers in various social milieux. Some achievements have been noted in music therapy, as a way of applying the art of music in psychiatric healing.

2. **Social reception**, intersubjective reception, the culturally-determined reception of music by specific milieux or elites, their reactions to live performances, recordings and other forms of contact with music. This is expressed in music criticism, in aesthetic, philosophical and worldview reflection, and in different interpretations.

Zofia Lissa, who distinctly separated the perception and reception of music, understood the latter as the way in which a work becomes part of the musical awareness of a certain social group at a specific time and in a particular cultural context and how it occupies a specific place in the general awareness of opinion-forming artistic milieux or among ordinary listeners. For Lissa, music reception is above all a category that changes over time, dependent upon historical and social conditions.¹⁴ Without perception, one cannot speak of reception, but perception is also conditioned by reception as the ‘reception culture’ particular to the milieu in which an individual is socially active.

It should be reiterated, after Ricoeur, that there is no one single theory of interpretation. There are only separate hermeneutic theories. Meaning, however, is open to different possible readings.¹⁵ The reception of art involves what Eggebrecht calls the ‘kernel of reception’, as opposed – one should add – to the essence of the work. Yet at the same time it also involves understanding that meaning becomes established only over the course of reception history. For Eggebrecht, it is somehow independent of history. He adds that only falsely-understood historicism treats every documented interpretation as testimony to the understanding of a work, and stupidity occurs in the interpretations of both performers and celebrated scholars.¹⁶ Krummacher, meanwhile, writes that we are part of a chain of reception, but that no one believes

¹⁴ Z. Lissa, ‘Recepcja muzyczna jako współczynnik historii muzyki’ [Music reception as an element of music history], *Muzyka*, 1971/3, 5–22.

¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka. Rozprawy o metodzie. Wybór tekstów* [Existence and hermeneutics. A treatise of method. Choice of texts], choice and ed. Stanisław Cichowicz (Warszawa, 1985), 107, 324.

¹⁶ H.-H. Eggebrecht, ‘Zur Wirkungsgeschichte’, 471, 474.

anymore in the timeless value of aesthetic norms, and therefore – one might say – of the musical work. All that exists are ‘transhistorical aesthetics’ or historical categories. The avant-garde rocked the notion of the musical work and the conviction that modern-era European music was based on the laws of nature. So how are we to determine the actual value of a work?¹⁷

Besides the reception of trained, competent scholars, there exists the reception of a broader audience. There are also cultural and social differences in reception. Although these do not belong to the ‘kernel’ of reception, even if they deform or trivialise the way in which a work is received they may still be the object of study, for example on the part of cultural sociologists. The merging of the historical and individual horizons demanded by reception aestheticians and theorists is not easy to accomplish. According to Gadamer, even if we see clearly the difference between the individual psyche and the historical horizon, it is still difficult to span the divide between psychology, which is essentially ‘narrow’, and historical hermeneutics.¹⁸ This must be achieved by philosophy, but that is a threshold which only a few can cross.

Eggebrecht presents a model of the ‘kernel’ of reception and a model for research in *Zur Geschichte der Beethoven’s Rezeption*, showing constant ‘concept fields’ (Begriffsfelder), richly documented in the Beethoven literature. These focus on experiences, intertwined with the composer’s biography, and on his ideas, the strength of his thinking. Eggebrecht reduces them to three conceptual sets – the need for suffering, volition and overcoming – and relates them to the unity formed by Beethoven’s life and work. His disquisition is formed in a similar way to sonata form, with an exposition, a development, in which he surveys the whole wealth of semantic categories hitherto applied to Beethoven, a reprise and a coda. The coda is constituted by questions relating to attempts at going beyond the existing categories: is it possible to do without them?¹⁹ In the face of the total relativism of reception, such an attempt at aesthetic identification, at penetrating the kernel of reception, is extremely important, and Eggebrecht adds that even spontaneous utterances on the subject of Beethoven’s music fall within the constant

¹⁷ F. Krummacher op. cit., s. 228-229 i 235.

¹⁸ H.-G. Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda*, 459.

¹⁹ H.-H. Eggebrecht, *Zur Geschichte*, 24 ff.

concept fields presented. Crucially, in Beethoven's case, this complex has become an integral part of his profile as a man and musician.

According to Eggebrecht, the differences in reception resulting from subjective taste, generational differences, changes in auditory experiences and historically shaped awareness belong to the 'shell of reception', and not to its 'kernel'. And most research concerns this layer of reception, although deeper meanings are occasionally reached through the shell. One may point here to the four profiles of Chopin drawn by Jim Samson in relation to different milieux and cultures: French critics, German publishers, Russian composers and British music lovers. In France, one finds in Chopin reception a topos of feminine softness, intimacy and refinement. In Germany, the activities of publishers in the areas of sheet music editing, correspondence, biography and analysis lead to Chopin being reevaluated as a Classic of the grand musical tradition. In Russia, Chopin is sanctified as a national and universal composer. And in Britain, he is a composer of the home and of every musical young lady.²⁰ However, changeable sets of meanings of this sort reveal a certain constancy to reception; for example, the national and European dimensions of Chopin's music, its intimacy and refinement, which belong to the idiom of the reception of his work.

As can be seen from the arguments set out above, the study of reception is not a purely musicological problem. It needs to be harnessed to studies of the theory and aesthetics of art, to acoustics, psychology and cultural anthropology – to all the human sciences, as was indicated at the beginning. That said, several remarks come to mind in particular:

1. The scope of reception is most probably too broad, and in the future it will separate into autonomous divisions. One such division is resonance.

2. Jauss's aesthetics, Holub's reception theory and Eggebrecht's approach to music reception are unlikely to represent the only, fixed model of research into reception. Social determinants, historical events and the tastes of an era cannot be directly translated into reception, since

²⁰ Jim Samson, 'Chopin Reception: Theory, History, Analysis', in *Musica Iagellonica*, 1 (1995), 91–112. For a list of Polish works documenting the problems of reception, see Irena Poniatowska, 'Recepcja muzyki jako problem estetyczny i teoretyczny' [The reception of music as an aesthetic and theoretical problem], in *Wokół recepcji i rezonansu muzyki. Szkice chopinowskie* [On the reception and resonance of music. Chopin sketches] (Warszawa, 2008).

everything must be filtered through awareness. Yet awareness is not free from the conditions of time and place. Will Beethoven's work forever remain the expression of suffering and the victory of the soul irrespective of cultural and historical determinants? Even if the answer is affirmative, then the reception 'kernel' prepared in this way is too general, detached from the vast wealth of documented interpretations which belong to the 'shell' but form a much wider *existing horizon*, stimulating new questions about the meaning of his music.

3. An understanding of the musical work as an intentional entity assumes that neither the written schema nor any of the possible renditions is 'ideal'. The work of music does not have such a point of 'ideal reference' that is the original work of art, for example. Moreover, we are speaking of the musical work solely within European culture up to the times of the most recent avant-garde, when it became possible to document it on tape and other media and to dispense with performances, and when the notion of the musical work in general became blurred; we also take no account of other cultures, based on oral tradition. And so if the musical work has undefined spheres and cannot be analysed in full, then reception, even that freed from all its *Wirkungsgeschichte*, also cannot be full, complete or ideal. Indeed, Jauss admits that reception aesthetics is not a self-sufficient discipline. It is continually expanding its boundaries and setting historians new questions, methodologically provoking them into restoring to aesthetic experience the function of communication which it appears to have lost.²¹

4. Staying with European music and Europocentric aesthetics, one exceptionally positive element of reception theory and aesthetics appears to be the fact that it confirms the role of the creation of intersubjective norms, and that art is not condemned to ineluctable degradation, be it by its serving ideology or by the blurring of the boundaries between art and not-art.

²¹ H.R. Jauss, *Pour une esthétique*, 18 and 156.