

Music closer to the body. The problem of musical perception

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As Zygmunt Bauman notes, from the perspective of postmodern culture, the body turns out to be the only permanent point for people in their never-ending process of self-creation, search for their own identity¹. To a large extent the problem of the relevancy of the body can be referred to the experience of art. In contemporary reflection on art, as well as in art itself, we can see a clear tendency to become interested in the body, to restore the links that were broken because of the forms of reception of art present in European culture from the times of the Enlightenment, when the first museums and concert halls were established. A repressive model of art reception, a model consolidated by the institutional artistic culture, especially in the 19th century, also determined the dominant forms of thinking about art and its reception in the tradition of philosophy of art and aesthetics. A contemporary representative of neopragmatist aesthetics, Richard Shusterman, writes critically about this:

philosophical aesthetic has put the experience of art on a path of disembodied spiritualisation, where full-blooded and widely shared appreciative enjoyment is refined away into anaemic and distanced connoisseurship by the few².

Maurice Merleau-Ponty may well be one of the major 20th century philosophers who has contributed to the revaluation of the issue of corporeality in cultural tradition. What he finds in corporeality is, first of all, this basic existential quality that determines the action of perception. He argues that the body, in the sensual experiencing of things, in gestures, movements, physiological reactions, estab-

¹ See Z. Bauman, "Socjologiczna teoria postmoderny", [in:] *Postmodernizm w perspektywie filozoficzno-kulturoznawczej*, ed. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Warsaw 1991.

² R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2000, p. 53.

lishes our relations with our milieu even before understanding, it establishes the limits of our perceptual world and thus builds our reality – the world for us: “It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body I perceive ‘things’”³.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception may be a point of reference in reflections on musical experience. The idea of corporeality as an aspect of perception creates new opportunities for analysing musical reception; it proves to be a point of reference for various traditions of thinking about music and arts.

The senses and the body in an analysis of musical perception

Starting from the basics of musical experience, that is perception of sound, we have to point to an aspect that is not always recognised, namely that the sense of sound refers to various experiences of the body: it is a multi-sensory experience, a feeling and reaction of the body. As a sensual experience, perception of sound is just seemingly associated exclusively with auditory perception. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “the senses intercommunicate, opening on to the structure of the thing”⁴. Each perception involves all senses, even if one of them dominates.

The psychology of music studies the phenomenon of synaesthesia, examining the equivalence of auditory and visual sensations, which takes place both with regard to individual sounds and such related qualities as timbre, pitch, volume, and with regard to higher-level sound structures, for example harmonic, melodic or tonal phenomena⁵. Multi-sensory experience of the substantiality of music leaves a clear mark also in the sphere of linguistic expressions associated with descriptions of music, both in scientific (musicological) analyses and in colloquial language. Musical qualities are described conceptually in the context of visual sensations (line, space, colour) and tactile sensations (density, weight, texture, temperature). This refers both to the elementary perception of sound and to the entire musical structure – this musical tissue in which the analytical language discovers qualities like, for example, density, weight, hardness, colour, luminosity etc. In this linguistic game with the musical object we can find a presentiment of corporeality of this experience, corporeality that falls outside discursive knowledge.

The tangibility, massiveness of music revealed in perception is a sensation drawing on the experiences of the body for, in accordance with Merleau-Ponty’s line of thinking, perception is always an act of communication with an embodied subject, with a “body subject”; it is a process of finding through the body a direct

³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge 2002, p. 216.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

⁵ See Z. Lissa, *Wstęp do muzykologii*, Kraków 1974.

path of communication with the object, a process of mutual adjustment, in which both the object and the subject discover their substantiality, their “consistency”⁶. Music can be tangibly felt as acoustic waves, vibrations (which is sometimes consciously used in some musical genres, for example *house* or *techno*). As John Dewey wrote: “Sounds come from outside the body, but sound itself is near, intimate; it is an excitation of the body; we feel the clash of vibrations throughout our whole body. [...] It is sounds that make us jump”⁷.

In this case we can speak of experiencing the massiveness of music felt as an action of some special acoustic energy capable of moving the physical space and, at the same time, as vibrations, which, going through the subject perceiving them, allow him to experience his own corporeality. Thus perception of music becomes a way to experience your own body. Is this description of the problem of perception also a description of the experience of music as an art? In his book about experiencing art Dewey concludes that in contacts with music it is impossible to separate aesthetic emotions from purely physiological excitation, caused by an acoustic stimulus. Perhaps our cultural traditions, taking into account the artistic context of art, are too unequivocal and consistent in separating the aesthetic sphere.

Aesthetic perception

In his article “Art and nature”, Mikel Dufrenne tries to demonstrate the universality of art’s message not in its cultural durability (in the sphere of meanings and values), but on the level of, as he puts it, “prehistoric” and “presocial” experience⁸, which is contained in an act of direct encounter with a work of art. As the above-mentioned scholar indicates, such an encounter always takes place initially in physical communion: in the contact between the matter of a work with the corporeality of a subject perceiving it. “A work first speaks to our body – by means of a language, to which only it is able to respond”⁹. For Dufrenne this “first” does not mean only the chronological order, but also meaning. The moment of physical closeness to a work is not just a situation in which perception begins, but already contains the initial aesthetic fulfilment (aesthetic, if we bear in mind the etymological understanding of the term, referring to a purely sensual act of perception). In an act of aesthetic perception, the perceiving subject is, in a way, forced to acknowledge his own corporeal presence vis-à-vis the physical presence of a work of art. Dufrenne calls this “submissiveness”, “belonging to the object”

⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁷ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, Perigee Books 2009, pp. 246-247.

⁸ See M. Dufrenne, “Art and nature”, Polish translation by I. Wojnar, [in:] *Antologia współczesnej estetyki francuskiej*, ed. I. Wojnar, Warsaw 1980.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 458.

the presence of which organises the sensual field of the perceiver, “involves the whole body”¹⁰.

This special aspect of perceptual involvement, which Dufrenne finds in the physical bond with the object of aesthetic perception, is conducive to the deepening of the work-perceiver relation, because it brings to the act of perception a non-rational factor of “impression” produced by the work: a unique moment of aesthetic experience, difficult to verbalise, absent from an analytical approach to art, in which the essence of the work is manifested in an intuitive capturing of its uniqueness in relation to other works, in which “the message of the work can be captured in itself, without thinking”. This, “impression”, argues Dufrenne, is an act rooted in physical communion with reality, in “material imagination” of the embodied subject, which “permeates the intimacy of things”, enables us to penetrate – even beyond the threshold of consciousness – the deep structure of the work’s cultural content¹¹. Yet the physical presence of the perceiver, his or her involvement, activate the work itself, make the object of aesthetic observation cease to be a lifeless element of space, but, as Dufrenne writes, “acquires a soul”: it “moves”, “takes on a new brilliance”, “tenses up”, “spreads”. The aesthetic object in the process of perception “proposes a way, direction, stops [...]. What we are to see is greater than our field of vision, while marginal vision is taken up by our whole body”¹².

Thus, the essence of perception cannot be reduced to a passive act of registering or experiencing qualities that are present, found, observed; it is just as much an “excitation” of the object done by the perceiver by his or her existence – active, searching, trying, “wandering”, as it were, around the object. It is an act of experiencing the object, experiencing which in its essence is grounded in the corporeality of the perceiver. Such an approach leads Dufrenne to extracting the existential meaning of the act of perception of a work of art (accepting a definition of existence that refers it to embodied presence – and as such close to M. Merleau-Ponty’s thought):

The object becomes alive thanks to what Biswanger calls the existential dimensions of the body. Dimensions which are vital, not cultural, which, perhaps, establish thus some elements that are constant in aesthetic experience: this presence, naked and vulnerable in a way, this presence we

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 455.

¹¹ A confirmation of this is provided by Susanne Langer (*Philosophy in a New Key*, Harvard University Press 1990, pp. 243-245). Referring to the problem of meaning in music, she argues that a huge role in the construction of semiotic imagination of the perceiver is his or her bodily experience relating to the perception of music, thanks to which he or she is perfectly able to distinguish, for instance, some qualities of sound important to the semiotic message of a work (for instance, “sweet” or “strident”). According to Langer, the imagination of the listener is shaped by a transient play of associations occurring “below the threshold of consciousness”, linked, among others, to bodily perception of the world, which she describes as “organic experience”, “vital impulse”, “bodily rhythm”. Ultimately, this transient play of associations turns out, according to Langer, to be an intuitive insight into the message of the work, a “flash of understanding”.

¹² M. Dufrenne, *op. cit.*, pp. 454-455.

are proposing to the work is neither dull nor subjective, it is the presence of the “human nature”, i.e. human body¹³.

This statement can be treated as the ultimate point of Dufrenne’s reflections on aesthetic perception. His efforts ultimately aim at establishing a possibility of “direct” contact with a work of art, this means one that would not be determined culturally or at least would not challenge the absolute nature of the cultural determinant of aesthetic perception. What seems crucial is that he specifies here the bodily aspect of perception, linking it to the notion of “existence” and treating it as a constant and indispensable element of artistic experience.

Referring directly to the question of the perception of music, Dufrenne considers the possibility of overcoming “learned perception” in favour of “naive perception” – one that, for example, breaks with the idea of the continuity of musical progression, settles for contemplation of the sonic moment, gives in to the surprise brought by a fragment, an individual moment, a sound. Dufrenne claims that such a model of perception is proposed especially by contemporary music, the avant-garde of the second half of the 20th century – music that requires directness of listening, breaks with all aesthetic or artistic preparation, opposes the principle of repetition, development or continuity of the musical process, music that, by producing new sounds, shocks and hurts, but at the same time liberates us from common artistic conventions and perception models, allows us ultimately to refer the musical experience to our own body, to the physiological boundary of sensation.

Sensing. Towards the boundary of musical experience

According to Merleau-Ponty, owing to the bodily determination, perception is not only an operation of consciousness, an act of intellectual cognition, but a total experience, involving the subject as a whole – it is not just perception of the object, but “belonging”, “adhesion to things”¹⁴. This phenomenon is described by the category of “sensing”¹⁵. Drawing on this notion – taken, as he himself notes, from the Romantic tradition – Merleau-Ponty points to the complexity, ambiguity of the experience of reception and, at the same time, to its mysterious nature¹⁶. Sensing points to an often disregarded aspect of perception, namely the experience of sensually felt proximity of an object, which is not only the experience of its physical tangibility but a sense of mutual bond. Sensing is an intentional touch of the substantiality of the object, recognition of its inner, vital energy, an experience of a special kind of vitality. When sensing an object, we reach what is

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 455-456.

¹⁴ See J. Migasiński, *M. Merleau-Ponty*, Warsaw 1995.

¹⁵ “Le sentir”

¹⁶ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology...*

underneath the surface of sensual impressions; we discover its spatial “capacity”, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, this special quality going beyond the “visible data”. He defines it poetically as “opening to the tissue, to the structure of Being”¹⁷.

With reference to the experience of music, “sensing” can be defined, after Merleau-Ponty, as an act of “coupling” – a process of physical coming together of humans and music, overcoming the spatial and, consequently, ontic distance. The bodily aspect of this experience can be contained in the characteristic desire to listen to music in conditions of maximum clarity as well as volume. Another form of “coupling” with music is multiple repetition of a recorded fragment, used sometimes in a way that borders on obsession, or persistent recollection of a remembered musical structure (for example, humming, beating the rhythm). The desire to come close to music in a situation of particularly deep involvement on the part of the listener transforms itself into a need felt by the body to “embrace” or “absorb” music, which may express an intention to “posses” it¹⁸. This directly involving aspect of sensing, defined as intentional “possession” of the object of perception, finds an interesting complement in Ingarden’s analysis of the aesthetic experience. When examining the phenomenon of aesthetic liking, which characterises the initial phase of experience, Roman Ingarden points to the moment of “desiring” – “visibly taking possession”¹⁹ of the aesthetic quality being revealed. Despite the fact that Ingarden’s analysis lacks direct references to the problem of the body, what is expressed in it points to undoubted bodily intention of the subject of aesthetic perception.

Involved perception, associated with repetition and excessive volume, may lead to a sense of distraction, stupefaction with music. This type of perceptual experience can be found in a situation described by Maria Gołaszewska as perception of a “fan” of music²⁰, as well as in many rituals, though also even in everyday listening to music. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology describes such an experience using the term “adhesion”²¹, a particularly intense contact between the subject and the object, in which boundaries are broken – the object is no longer opposite the subject but is an extension of the subject, of the subject’s subjectivity; just as a tool complements the hand: “My gaze pairs off with the colour and my hand with

¹⁷ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, Polish translation by S. Cichowicz *et al.*, Gdańsk 1996, p. 67.

¹⁸ To paraphrase Merleau-Ponty’s statement concerning visual experience, we could say that to listen is to possess from a distance (*ibidem*). “To possess music” would thus mean not only having it in one’s collection in the form of recordings; to possess – with regard to perception – would mean first of all to assimilate it, to have it by one’s side as internalised, recognised and remembered. Possession is, therefore, sensing music as captured, being constantly “nearby”. We could say that it is the ultimate form of “sensing” – if “sensing” denotes a sense of closeness, a physical bond even.

¹⁹ R. Ingarden, *Studia z estetyki*, Warsaw 1970, vol. 3, p. 98.

²⁰ See M. Gołaszewska, *Estetyka pięciu zmysłów*, Warsaw 1997.

²¹ This is also conveyed by the notion of “communion”, defined by Marek Maciejczak (*Świat według ciała w Fenomenologii percepcji M. Merleau-Ponty’ego*, Toruń 1995, p. 61) as a “sensual coupling of the object and the sensing body – the subject”.

hardness and softness, and in this transaction between the subject of sensation and the sensible it cannot be held that one acts while the other suffers the action or that one confers significance on the other”²².

Thus emerges an ontological, and not only functional, relation between the subject and object of perception. The secret of “sensing” is in the direct connection of perceptual experience with life, vitality of the subject. Vitality as the essence of sensing perception means that it is not about a mechanical recording of stimuli, but about full, complete involvement, which is not without affectiveness and motoricity. Vital engagement of the subject enables such a contact with the object that captures in it some existentially meaningful qualities: mood, sense of emotional “attraction” or “repulsion”, aesthetic but also ethical qualities present in the perceived object, which Merleau-Ponty refers to as “vital meaning” of the content of the object.

The concept of sensing, pointing to complete involvement of the subject in the act of perception and in its object, also contains the intention of total involvement of a human being in the reality given to him or her. This is how Merleau-Ponty expresses the idea of existential “being-in-the-world”, which can be described with regard to his philosophy as a relation between perceptual experience and engagement of a human being²³.

Manifestation of the body. Gesture and movement

The body constitutes a perceptual perspective not only in that it is a body receiving stimuli and a sensing body. An act of perception is complemented and developed in a bodily response, which is a manifestation of the subject’s expression and activity in a perceptual situation.

The body is for us something more than a tool or means: it is our expression in the world, a visible shape of our intentions. Even our emotional reflexes, most deeply hidden, most closely linked to the humoral system, influence how we perceive things²⁴.

The body’s reaction, from an elementary physiological reflex, through a motor gesture to the form of expression constituted by speech, is a response to a stimulus, it contains an intention to enter into dialogue with the object of perception; this strengthens the bond between the subject and the object, developed in the act of “sensing”: “the active body – insofar as it is capable of gesticulating, expressing itself and, finally, speak – turns anew to the world in order to establish a meaningful relation with it”²⁵.

²² M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology...*, p. 221.

²³ See J. Migasiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.

²⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, Polish translation by S. Cichowicz, Warszawa 1999, p. 28.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

Contemporary neopragmatist aesthetics in Richard Shusterman's writings bravely opposes the reduction of the impact of art to the sphere of artistic or aesthetic values, and the reduction of forms of experiencing it to purely spiritual contemplation. In this, Shusterman cites Dewey, who emphasised the experience of art as "a fully embodied enjoyment, engaging 'the whole creature in his unified vitality'"²⁶. Aesthetic neopragmatism not only restores the meaning of the bodily component in perceptual experience, but also recognises the legitimacy of such forms of art perception for which expressive bodily engagement (for instance, through dance) becomes the basic source of aesthetic satisfaction. In this perspective experience of art ceases to be a field reserved for experts and connoisseurs. On many occasions, for example in his analysis of the appreciation of "popular" music, Shusterman has been rather determined to advocate such a position:

Rock songs are typically enjoyed through moving, dancing and singing along with the music, often with such vigorous efforts that we break a sweat and eventually exhaust ourselves. [...] Clearly, on the somatic level, there is much more effortful activity in the appreciation of rock than in that of high-brow music, whose concerts compel us to sit in a motionless silence which often induces not mere torpid passivity but snoring sleep. [...] The much more energetic and kinaesthetic response evoked by rock exposes the fundamental passivity of the traditional aesthetic attitude of disinterested, distanced contemplation – a contemplative attitude that has its roots in the quest for theological and philosophical knowledge rather than pleasure, for individual enlightenment rather than communal interaction or social change²⁷.

In justifying this opinion, especially in the context of existential analysis of musical perception, we can point out that the view making a distinction between appreciation of "high-brow" music and rock music takes into account only an entrenched perceptual stereotype, dominating in a certain model of musical culture, but one that is by no means indisputable – as Pierre Joseph Proudhon argued, already in the 19th century, formulating the following statement: "Le concert est la mort de la musique"²⁸. It is not "high-brow music" that can induce passivity and torpor in the listeners, but some culturally determined forms of its appreciation.

Shusterman not only notices the significance of the corporeal aspect of the body's expression in the experience of appreciating music, but also points out that this expression is in some circumstances (for instance, with regard to some genres of popular music) an integral element of the act of perception, without which it is virtually impossible to properly recognise and sense music. An example here can be the funky style, the name of which "derives from an African word meaning 'positive sweat' and is expressive of an African aesthetic of vigorously active and communally impassioned engagement"²⁹, which finds its natural and necessary

²⁶ R. Shusterman, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

²⁸ P.J. Proudhon, quoted after F. Noske, "Forma formans", Polish translation by Z. Piotrowski, *Res Facta. Teksty o Muzyce Współczesnej* 1982, no. 9, p. 229.

²⁹ R. Shusterman, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

complement in lively dancing; as well as rap, which as protest music associated with the African-American subculture of big city ghettos refers to some characteristic rhythm of the body; “full appreciation of rap’s aesthetic dimensions would require not merely hearing it but dancing to it, feeling its rhythms in movement, as the genre emphatically means us to”³⁰. This suggests that bodily experience related to appreciation of music may define a mode of perception characteristic of some musical phenomena, that is corresponding to expressed cultural content, as well as refer to the natural situational context of reception, which, in the case of rap, was originally a dance party at home, club or park.

There are similar threads in reflections by Merleau-Ponty, who considers the phenomenon of expression in the act of perception, not just as its consequence and result. In Merleau-Ponty’s view, perceptual expression is an essential element of perceptual experience, established both in appreciative sensation and in the entire situation in which reception takes place. The perceiver’s expressive activity (for instance, in the form of movement) modifies and makes more specific the image of the perceived object; it directs the perceiver towards some qualities important from the point of view of expressive action taken (for instance, the metric and agogic factor of music recognised in dancing).

In his now classic book *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Leonard B. Meyer notes a link between musical progression and responses of the listener on the level of body movements. He concludes that changes in the various musical elements, especially rhythm, metre, dynamics and tempo, lead to analogous changes of motor responses. Meyer interprets motor responses of listeners as manifestations of their attitude of putting musical progression in order, an attitude in which the body, even before discursive understanding, explains the musical meaning:

motor responses are not, as a rule, made to separate, discrete sounds but to patterns and groupings of sounds. The more order and regularity the mind is able to impose upon the stimuli presented to it by the senses, the more likely it is that motor behaviour will arise. [...] Some listeners become aware of the tendencies of music partly in terms of their own bodily behaviour. Such listeners might be said to objectify music and [...] perceive it through their own motor responses³¹.

When it comes to an example of expressive response related to the perception of music, we can point to dance. Dance is a form of representation of a musical structure as well as a reference to music’s expressive progression in gestures and movements of the body. When dancing, the perceiver experiences music in a way different to the one when he or she is motionless; dancing movement of the body enables us to feel and emphasise some musical qualities, less evident in static perception, especially the metric factor as well as changes of tempo and structure of the form of a work. In particular, experiencing the musical metre is possible thanks to bodily expression: the conceptual understanding of the essence of metre

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 216.

³¹ L.B. Meyer, *Emotions and Meaning in Music*, University of Chicago Press 1961, p. 81.

in teaching music theory is usually preceded by the practice of time beating, that is expressing by a gesture of the hand the strong and weak rhythmic values within a bar. Thus, it is the body in natural expressive motion that “senses” the metre before intellectual recognition. In a similar way, without theoretical consciousness, the perceiver is able, in the order of the body, to assimilate and express, for example, the direction of the melodic line, fluctuations of the dynamics, some colour and articulation qualities (for instance, gentleness, smoothness).

On the other hand, expression as a specific action of the subject of perception contained in a gesture, movement and also a word, can be interpreted in existential analysis as the subject “going beyond” his or her own body³², going towards the object; thus expression is conducive to the deepening of the bond that determines the essence of the perceptual act as defined existentially. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception sees in expressive activity a special moment in which the perceiver transgresses his or her own subjectivity, turns towards the object not only to articulate expressive intentions included in the object, but also to articulate his or her own existential intentions, to perform an act of expressive provocation, as it were, with regard to the object of perception. Consequently, we should introduce into the analysis of musical perception the term “behaviour” defined with reference to Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy as an action of the subject that, being shaped under the influence of external stimuli and bodily responses, is a meaningful move, a “gesture” expressing some intention directed towards the world³³.

Music making as a gesture. Perceptual situation

Dance or gesture can be described as forms of visualisation of music, as projecting the musical progression – both assimilated, intuitively recognised, and felt, potential – into the visual space. This is also how we can understand the task of a conductor. The conductor leads a musical ensemble, but also “expresses” music itself – indicates its direction, sets its expressive potential – before the listeners, who, after all, are watching him or her. The conductor’s action has an expressive meaning; as a gesture or kind of dance³⁴ it creates a perceptual suggestion directed at the listeners of music, it determines their perception, and even is subject of aesthetic evaluation itself. Expressive meaning is also contained in the behaviour of musicians-performers. Their manual actions, associated with the process of performing a work, include some additional element, which is an articulation of supratonal expression, emotional gesture of the artist. This gesture, as in the case

³² See J. Migasiński, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³³ See *ibidem*, p. 28.

³⁴ In *L'art et le geste* written in 1910, Jean D'Udine defines music as “a tonal projection of the forms of feeling, more directly reflected in the mimic ‘dance’ of the orchestral conductor” (quoted after S. Langer, *op. cit.*, p. 226).

of the conductor, is a form of interpretation of music, a message for the audience, which complements the situation of musical perception, but is also a living expression of emotions of the performer as a perceiver. In any case the very experience of performing as a bodily activity can be treated in terms of expression, not only creative, but in fact perceptual expression, which becomes a form of physical experience of music, release of emotional tension.

Therefore, music making is something more than just performing music; it is a way of expressing the performer's own perceptual emotions and, thus, simply a special form of perceiving music. The experience associated with the practice of music making even more strongly emphasises bodily engagement which builds the relation between a human being and music. It draws our attention to the active aspect of musical experience. Undoubtedly, music making in any circumstances, especially when it is based on improvisation, spontaneous playing, must take into account the unique bodily ability contained in manual skills, but also in the musicians' vital capabilities. This aspect is naturally included by the audience into the perceptual experience of music and prompts the perceiver's bodily engagement in the form of spontaneous responses of gesture, motion. The performers' expression co-creates the situational context of reception. As Leonard B. Meyer's analysis suggests, observation of performers' movements is a fixed element of the perceptual process and has a significant influence both on the perception of music and on the motor behaviour of the listener. Meyer refers to the opinion of Igor Stravinsky from his *Chronicle of My Life*: "The sight of the gestures and movements of the various parts of the body producing the music is fundamentally necessary if it is to be grasped in all its fullness"³⁵. Characteristically, bodily expression responses intensify especially in situations when music is appreciated in a group, sometimes becoming, as Gołaszewska describes it, their permanent, significant elements which influences the content of the aesthetic experience. Gołaszewska analyses this problem using the experiences of rock music "fans" as an example:

A fan-type aesthetic experience is entangled in non-aesthetic sensations and behaviour, so that in its real course it would be impossible to distinguish the purely aesthetic side. Usually, for example, music is heard collectively in the course of some kind of happening, where it is difficult to separate the performers from the audience: young people actively participate in such events; listening to music is, additionally, combined with dance or at least rhythmic body movements, shouting, clapping, even orgiastic cries and violent behaviour, consisting, for instance, in destroying various objects around. Perhaps what comes to the fore here is elementary, primeval [...] generalised *kalotropism* that is a blend of music, dance, word and strictly species-specific behaviour. Often, we are dealing here with an erotic and sexual component as well as admiration for the author or performer³⁶.

Gołaszewska's view, formulated from the perspective of aesthetic reflection, points to serious difficulties with distinguishing in this type of musical experience

³⁵ I. Stravinsky, quoted after L.B. Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

³⁶ M. Gołaszewska, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

a “purely aesthetic” sense, which in this case is contained in a more fundamental, archetypal existential experience (“kalotropism”), combining natural (inherent) aesthetic sensitivity of humans with a bodily expressive-vital need. She concludes her reflections by saying that the experience of musical reception stemming from the adoption of the attitude of a “fan” cannot be described in terms of categories of values hitherto accepted in aesthetics; it requires a new, special category described by her as “orgiasticity”, which draws on the Dionysian model of art and is rooted in the experience of the body. When it comes to such situations of musical perception, we can refer to Dufrenne, according to whom, “the aesthetic object encourages us to discover brotherhood of human corporealities in their brotherhood with the world”³⁷.

Composing – the body and the creative process

A musical analysis of compositions by the 17th century composer J.P. Sweelinck presented by the Dutch musicologist Frits R. Noske³⁸ is an attempt to describe a work from the perspective of the composer’s actions. The author argues that the form-creating process in musical composition is launched by movement, tonal search, which is the essence of primeval and common practice of music making: improvisation. The composer, claims Noske, at least with regard to the pre-19th century tradition, was primarily a practising musician; his work was a result of action, music making-searching and not *a priori* adoption of the pattern of a musical form. Thus composing should again be considered in terms of action – an open process and not closed, non-temporal act. Moreover, this action is not only intellectual but also – even primarily – manual. The so-called musical invention is given initially “in the fingers” of a virtuoso, who, improvising, seeks the right progression, develops the tonal matter and then records it in notation³⁹.

Some composers themselves point to the equivocal nature of their creative effort, noting its rootedness in the body. Igor Stravinsky writes:

So far as I am concerned, I cannot separate the spiritual effort from the psychological and physical effort. They confront me on the same level and do not present a hierarchy. [...] A composer improvises aimlessly the way an animal grubs about. Both of them go grubbing about because they yield to a compulsion to seek things out⁴⁰.

Stravinsky even claims that the physical pleasure of the composing process cannot be replaced by satisfaction with the finished work. Thus, a lot seems to be

³⁷ M. Dufrenne, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

³⁸ See F. Noske, *op. cit.*

³⁹ This way of composing concerns at least the 17th century keyboard music practice analysed by Noske. To confirm his views, we can also refer to characteristic names of genres typical of this music, names that include their manual principle, e.g. *toccata* (from *toccare* – touch) or *ricercar* (*ricercare* – seek).

⁴⁰ I. Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, Hamlin Press 2008, pp. 51-55.

pointing to the fact that the connection between humans and music, also in relation to composing, is based on some preintellectual, instinctive foundations. The phenomenon of the creative act turns out to be largely an experience determined by the activity of the body, a bodily search for a form of musical expression.

Capturing the moment of bodily engagement, present in and even determining the action of composing, means going beyond the way – traditionally dominant in artistic reflection – of approaching not only musical perception but also the artistic object itself: musical oeuvre. That is why Frits Noske's analysis can be regarded – referring to Gabriel Marcel's term⁴¹ – as work to “restore the bond” between music and humans. This bond was broken, when thinking about music became objective, when music was treated as a finished object, filled form (*forma formata*). In this process, the autonomy of music (its presentation as “musical work”) was achieved at the expense of cultural loss of understanding of some constant interconnections between the musical phenomenon and the human being, especially loss of awareness that music is permanently linked to human action, to active – bodily engaged – presence of human beings. This original, forgotten relation between the human beings and music is conveyed by a medieval definition describing music as *scientia bene modulandi*. As Noske concludes,

The medieval man did not regard music as product but as action. It was only in the time of the Renaissance that the word *musica* began to be used also to denote music recorded by notation. Later these two ways of understanding co-existed for a long time, but the modern meaning (*musica* as a product) gradually got the upper hand. In short, in the course of history the understanding of music as action transformed itself into understanding of music as object. The beginning of independent musical criticism and historical musicology [...] are in some way associated with this. Both disciplines are interested in completed pieces of music⁴².

Understanding music as action – music making as opposed to perceiving it as a piece, a product – ultimately confirms the perspective of perception analysis that emphasises the bodily context of musical experience. It allows us to notice the openness of the musical process, which presents itself as an expression of human existential activity, defined by Merleau-Ponty as a bodily form of reaching out to the world. As a reflection on the experience of the body, the problem of “music making” constitutes a complement and, at the same time, a return to the starting point of the analysis undertaken here.

⁴¹ “Concrete philosophy”, as Gabriel Marcel defines his philosophical programme, seeks to “restore the bond” with the world on the level of everyday reality. It is about rebuilding or, in fact, bringing back forgotten relations and interdependencies between man and the reality constituting his “existential orbit”. The categories of “sensing” – “experiencing”, which are key for this problem, as well as the significance he attributes to the body in this process, allow us to see close links between his ideas and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy (see G. Marcel, *Du refus à l'invocation*, Polish translation by S. Ławicki, Warsaw 1965; T. Terlecki, *Krytyka personalistyczna. Egzystencjalizm chrześcijański*, Warsaw 1987).

⁴² See F. Noske, *op. cit.* pp. 214-215.

