

THE PERCEPTION OF ORGAN MUSIC

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Abstract: analysis and detailed understanding of the artwork receiving process, both by the creator (performer, improviser, composer) and by the receiver.

INTRODUCTION

My considerations to date in terms of the aesthetics of organ music concerned mainly the perspective of the musician, who – when being fluent in his field of art – can be called an artist¹. In this article I will focus on the second but no less important subject of the aesthetic situation, i.e. the recipient. It is the recipient who is the addressee of a work of art created during the creative process and received in the perception process². It is in the process of perception – i.e. receiving, learning about the work, experiencing its value, understanding it, accepting or rejecting it – that the aesthetic object and the personality of the recipient are shaped³.

Organ music and its recipients constitute a unique category of music. If we mean an organ recital, then this uniqueness will be slightly smaller; however, if we mean liturgical organ music, then the issue of perception of this music takes on new contexts, becoming unique and requiring special, separate analysis. Using a certain metaphor, there are three “universities” of music performance where a musician will learn how to play well: a church, a pub and a circus. Why? Because – in addition to the formal elements of the musical work – the creator-performer in these three circumstances must specifically take into account the context of the music being performed and the issue of the recipient’s perception. Let us remember that the flourishing of independent music concerts (instrumental recitals in particular) is the domain of the 19th century; previously, music mainly played a functional (liturgical, entertaining) role⁴.

MOTIVES OF CONTACT WITH ART

At the beginning one should ask why man (as a recipient) wants to commune with art? Undoubtedly, the answers will be different, often impossible to clearly define, because it is not always possible to reach the real motives and assessments of the recipient; the barrier may be the inability of the recipient to describe the phenomenon of his perception, the inability to isolate the phenomenon in his own consciousness, or simply the transience of the matter of art and music in particular.

Among the catalogue of motives for which the recipient wants to commune with art, we can mention: 1) expectation of entertainment, filling free time, detachment from everyday life; 2) seeking strong excitement, shocking experiences; 3) seeking peaceful joy, relief and, if possible, satisfaction of

¹ Szostak, Michał (2020). Creativity and artistry in organ music. *The Organ* 391: 24-31.

² Gołaszewska, Maria (1986). *Kim jest artysta?* Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.

³ Gołaszewska, Maria. (1984). *Zarys estetyki*. Warszawa: PWN

⁴ Tatarkiewicz, Władysław (2015). *Historia estetyki*. Warszawa: PWN.

desires; 4) seeking understanding of the world and life, finding solutions to bothering problems; 5) treating art as a mirror in which he can review himself, his intimate matters, to find affirmation of life attitudes, and inspiration for dreams; 6) the need to experience beauty. Of course, most often the recipient's motivation is a synthesis of several of the above-mentioned elements, mixed in different proportions depending on its permanent characteristics (education, aesthetic sensitivity, aesthetic taste, imagination, predisposition, aesthetic preferences, experience, intelligence) and momentary phenomena (mood, circumstances).

When analysing the motives of the recipients, we must also remember that the attitude of readiness and openness of the recipient to a work of art (aesthetic attitude) may meet the fulfilment of expectations or their failure, disappointment. This issue also depends on the level of these expectations of the recipient: if the expectations are low, then it will not be difficult to satisfy them, if they are excessive – then even an objectively outstanding work of art may not live up to the subjective impressions. This is the first moment when the recipients are divided into two groups, which – in the further process of perception – will follow different paths. The recipient, whose expectations are met, manifests interest in the work, enters the work and analyses it, contemplates it, receives it – most often in concentration, reluctant to attempt to disrupt this process. The recipient, whose expectations are not met, loses interest in the work, needs additional effort to focus attention on the work, his thoughts diverge from the work; after some time, he either finds contact with the work or loses it irretrievably, which may have further consequences in the form of discouraging the recipient to a given artist, performer or the entire field of art.

The above-mentioned motives of the recipient's contact with art constitute a kind of introduction to the issue of "conditions of aesthetic reception". These conditions can be divided into objective (external to the recipient) and subjective (internal). The sheer number of factors that determine these conditions of aesthetic reception gives a picture of the complexity of the whole perception process and makes the creator of the artistic work aware of how delicate matter he is dealing with. The problems sketched so far allow us to move on to the issue of types of recipients.

TYPES OF THE RECEIVER

Aesthetics researchers have developed many recipient classifications based on different criteria. One of such classifications is the Edward Bullough typology, which distinguishes the personalities of the recipients depending on their attitudes⁵: 1) recipient with a physiological attitude (describing the elements of the work as calming, exciting, depressing); 2) a recipient with an associative attitude (preference for specific works due to their emotional experiences); 3) objectifying recipient (focused on the object, not on their own experiences); 4) recipient with mixed associative attitude (combines personal associations with the properties of objects); 5) recipient assigning qualities analogous to character traits.

However, one should pay attention to the typology based on the achievements of empirically oriented aesthetics, which takes into account the previously indicated objective conditions for aesthetic reception by the recipient. In this way we obtain the following types of recipients: 1) direct recipient (low level of knowledge about art and aesthetic categories, predominance of natural attitudes, non-reflectiveness); 2) secondary recipient (average level of knowledge about art and aesthetic categories, contact with art results from fashion, custom or belief); 3) critical recipient (high level of knowledge about art and aesthetic categories, significant aesthetic sensitivity, making critical judgments about a work); 4) art lover and connoisseur (genuine interest in art, combined aesthetic experiences with knowledge of art and aesthetic categories); 5) theoretician and art critic (professional recipient).

⁵ Bullough, Edward (1957). *Aesthetics*. London: Bowes & Bowes.

Of course, each typology relates to a certain point at which the recipient is examined and categorized. The time and change of individual parameters and conditions of aesthetic reception can affect the movement of recipients – usually upwards – among the types of recipients described. This is the role an organist (e.g. liturgical, municipal) can work permanently in a given institution. Permanent influence on the recipient, which is available to the organist of a given place, enables him to educate, develop and transform the recipient into an ever higher type. Good understanding of the motives of communing with art and the dominant types of recipients is the basis for adapting works of art to the level of perception of a given community and a key determinant of recipient satisfaction with the creator.

At this point it is worth saying a few words about the border that the creator should not cross: I mean the border between art and kitsch. Trying to please the recipient's tastes that are too low can lead the artist to the border of good taste and the border of real art, beyond which he may fall into the abyss of kitsch. Never mind if the creator does it consciously and intentionally; worse if it is the result of chance or lack of knowledge in this area. Due to the fact that the subject of kitsch is very extensive, I will limit myself only to distinguishing the attitude of the recipient that interests us today, who expects easy, pleasant and undemanding music. Based on the theory of aesthetic situation, the problem as kitsch receiver experience can be presented by showing its opposition to aesthetic (art receiving) experience. Kitsch consumer wants to interfere with kitsch artefact by feeling egalitarianism of mass scale (he likes to talk with his surroundings sharing his emotions with); he chooses items to consider from his desires avoiding his own thought, consciousness and will keeping his attention on external, fleeting and sentimental experiences preferably in the community of people in the same situation. Kitsch is easily understood by the consumer, it requires no great intellectual effort. It also aims at universal rather than individual emotions, playing on the most common denominator⁶. Kitsch, unlike art, doesn't accept the nature of things in the light of their critical or revelatory attributes, but to the extent which they cover and protect, relieve and console⁷. The main distinction between art and kitsch is the truth: art is based on the truth basically and kitsch is based on the prettiness only. Creator needs to keep the truth as the most important factor in creating the work of art⁸.

TYPES OF THE RECIPIENT'S ATTITUDES TO ART

Audience attitudes can be divided into conscious and unconscious. Conscious types of attitudes of recipients result from intentional human involvement; Due to the fact that each person sees the world a little differently, he selects the analysed works and their properties and adapts their attitude to them. Unaware types of recipients' attitudes are automatic, reflexive; they result directly from human personality or are caused by external events (often by surprise); they are often caused by pressure from events or objects in the human environment⁹.

Based on the above distinction, the following types of recipients' attitudes towards art are distinguished: personality attitudes (personal characteristics of a person predominate, e.g. innate pessimism, optimism), periodic attitudes (resulting from periodic changes in human personality, or objective factors depending on the profession practiced, fulfilling social role or special events in life, e.g. the period of education at the university), program attitude (occupied deliberately due to the desire

⁶ Samier, Eugenie (2008). On the Kitschification of Educational Administration: An Aesthetic Critique of Theory and Practice in the Field, *International Studies in Educational Administration* 36(3): 3-18.

⁷ Gregotti, Vittorio (1969), *Kitsch and Architecture*, in G. Dorfles (ed.), *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, New York: Universe Books: 255-276.

⁸ Banach, Andrzej (1968), *O kiczu*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

⁹ Gołaszewska, Maria (1967). *Odbiorca sztuki jako krytyk*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

to accomplish specific tasks or goals), situational attitude (when the situation is so unusual, strong and unexpected that it evokes the recipient breaking his habits and typical attitudes), stereotypical attitude (imitating external manifestations of attitudes).

TYPES OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

As in the case of the typology of artwork recipients, also in the case of aesthetic experiences there are many classifications. It should be borne in mind, however, that these typologies are a theoretical artificiality, because the phenomenon of aesthetic experience is extremely indefinite and difficult to diagnose¹⁰.

The first of the possible classifications is the division of aesthetic experiences by the way in which the aesthetic value is given: 1) the aesthetic value is fully conscious; 2) the aesthetic value is experienced in a vague form. As part of this classification, we can conclude (somewhat complicating the topic) that aesthetic experiences can take place on a pre-reflective, reflective and secondary non-reflective plane. Aesthetic experience can take place before the recipient begins to make an intellectual analysis of the work, during and after the analysis, when knowledge does not weigh directly. Against this background, there are opposing scientific positions that refer to the knowledge (and intellect) factor in aesthetic experience: the first position speaks of the total independence of the aesthetic experience from knowledge-reason, the second position speaks of the important role of knowledge-reason in the process of aesthetic experience. The paradox is that recipients with rich knowledge in the arts claim that the aesthetic experience is completely independent of knowledge-reason, while recipients with insignificant knowledge in the field of art claim the important role of knowledge-reason in the process of aesthetic experience.

Another typology of aesthetic experiences can be distinguished on the basis of the manifestations of mental life involved in the aesthetic experience; such manifestations of mental life can be: imagination, the ability to isolate formal entities, intellect, the ability to symbolize, the ability to experience pleasure with a specific sense.

The third possible typology of aesthetic experiences can be built on the opposition attitude of “focus” (contemplation of the work, its form and content – going deeper) and the attitude of “dream” (inspiration with the work, catalyst for the imagination – transposing its value into the sphere of dreams and ideas of the recipient).

A kind of synthesis of the typologies presented earlier is the division of aesthetic experiences taking into account three basic issues: aesthetic value, recipient properties and the structure of experience as a mental process aimed at experiencing beauty. Using a combination of the above issues, aesthetic experiences can be divided into: 1) irrational, 2) expressive, 3) habitual, 4) understanding, 5) professional.

Irrational aesthetic experience

It is emotional (with somatic symptoms: acceleration of heart rate, respiratory arrest, coldness, chills, tears), and affective. These types of experiences are usually short-lived, although they are sometimes excited by the highest values (tragedy, sublimity, spontaneity) realized in the work in a perfect way. Most often they result from the recipient's personality traits, e.g. ease of movement. These experiences are also called “aesthetic fascination”; their structure is simple and culminates in a short-lived state of rapture. The object (work of art) and its value are the dominant here.

¹⁰ Gołaszewska, Maria (1970). Świadomość piękna. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Expressive aesthetic experience

In this experience, the production of an aesthetic object occurs according to the nature of the recipient. It is the recipient and expression of his nature that is the dominant here. The structure of the work is not the most important, and even often unrecognized, because the recipient is absorbed in their own experiences and creates an aesthetic object not counting on the work itself. Often these experiences are called dilettante, amorphous experiences that are characteristic of children or so-called direct recipient¹¹.

Habitual aesthetic experience

They relate to receiving an artwork in a programmed way, learned on the basis of another work of a given composer or of a given type. They occur in all types of recipients, including those who are capable of authentic and deep experiences. The aesthetic value in this type of experience is more presumed than given and it results from external evaluations or evaluations by critics. The nature of this type of experience is usually superficial.

Understanding aesthetic experience

In this experience there is a balance of all factors that in other types of aesthetic experiences appear as dominant or exclusive. Knowledge, aesthetic sensitivity, upbringing, cultural habits, customs and external conditions as well as the belief that the work is intended to evoke aesthetic experiences come to the fore. Understanding the work manifests itself in the belief (resulting from familiarity with the structure of the work) that it is a valuable object. It is accompanied by the conviction that the work fulfils certain functions and readiness to submit to the work, i.e. submission to the beauty that the work accomplishes. We can say about the coexistence of authentic contact with aesthetic value with knowledge that facilitates this contact.

Professional aesthetic experience

Professional aesthetic experience concerns people dealing with art and professional perception: art critics, theoreticians, historians, and aestheticians. This kind of experience is metaesthetic, because the professional recipient (receiving the work professionally, not for his own pleasure) often analyses this experience and the whole work (as an individual, social fact – in the context of cultural conditions), being not only the right recipient of the work. A professional recipient is often an intermediary between the creator and the right recipient. Philosophers (aestheticians) distinguish here the issue of commitment to the work (“aesthetics from within”) and the issue of distance from the work “aesthetics from the outside”, i.e. avoiding aesthetic experiences other than professional¹². Professionals fully aware of the deformation that professionalization introduces into their aesthetic sensitivity, try to preserve the freshness of sensations to reach the real value of the work of art.

PERCEPTION OF ORGAN MUSIC

Given the above, let's look synthetically at the area of most interest to us, i.e. organ music. As mentioned at the beginning we will distinguish here strictly concert situation and liturgical situation. The very distinction just above suggests to us the directions in which the creator should pursue musical programming of the concert or liturgy.

¹¹ Geiger, Moritz (1928). *Zugänge zur Aesthetik*. Leipzig: Der Neue Geist Verlag.

¹² Piguet, Jean-Claude (1966). *Langage et art. Le langage II*. Neuchâtel.

Elements of the organ work itself – as in the case of any other musical piece – subject to perception are: dynamics, agogics, harmonics, themes (music and content). The sense of dynamics or agogics is relative: each recipient has their own scale of values for these variables; in addition, variable factors (mood, well-being) also determine the perception of these properties. Harmonics can also be perceived depending on the taste or product of the recipient – what for one goes beyond the possibilities of perception, is too complicated, incomprehensible, for the other recipient it will be fully acceptable and will arouse the unsatisfied.

The basic determinant of the concert is the fact that the recipients come to it consciously, with the intention of perceiving the music that was planned by the performer or organizers. We can assume that the number of random recipients is negligible, so the creator (improviser or performer-interpreter) can focus on constructing the program around specific topics, phenomena. Organ music during the liturgy is an important, but not the only, element of aesthetic (and spiritual) experience. The recipient of music planned around liturgical content analyses it as part of the whole group of impressions that reach it. Therefore, the creator should not forget about the complex context of this kind of aesthetic situation.

CONCLUSION

The general conclusion from these considerations is the fact that there is no perfect, coherent audience with the same possibilities of perception of a given artwork. The creator meets with recipients more or less similar to each other; therefore expecting in this context that all recipients will be equally “satisfied” with the artwork, is unreal¹³.

Can the creator forget about the recipient of the work during the creation process? Theoretically yes, if he has this artistic assumption and does it consciously; however, he must be prepared for criticism and misunderstanding. In the case of music that appears in a specific context (e.g. liturgical), the recipient should be the main subject of the creative process (for both the composer-improviser and the performer).

I hope that the analytical look at the complex problem of perception of artwork – and organ music especially – will draw the attention of us, active musicians, to the broad context of our activity and help to visualize and understand the mechanisms that are happening in the consciousness and subconscious of our recipients. After all, we create not to satisfy our own expectations or make our dreams come true, but first and foremost for recipients, and we should always keep their good in mind. I also trust that the recipient of the artistic work – after having familiarized himself with the theoretical structure of receiving process – will be able to understand organ music more deeply and – as far as possible – will be easier to take full advantage of the aesthetic values placed in our beloved organ music.

¹³ Gołaszewska, Maria (1984). *Estetyka rzeczywistości*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX.