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EXPERIENCE OF THE "LOWER" SENSES – THE ARTIST'S MULTISENSORY AISTHESIS

Abstract: The ability to translate sensory experience into artistic language (the language of literature, art, theater, and film) offers room for consideration of how artists think. A teaching experiment – a student sensory walk – became a starting point for reflecting on the artistic view of multisensory experience. Students could express their observations in the form of an essay, but often they also wrote poetic, or prose forms close to literature, sometimes resembling a report. Such a multisensory "stroll" may refer not only to the sphere of everyday life, but also exist in art; hence we can talk about an architectural walk, a museum-gallery walk, a theatrical walk, or a literary walk. The term "walk" may also be used in science, as proven by G. Bataille or R. Shusterman. In the humanities, it is present in many disciplines, so examples from literature, theater, visual and performing arts will be discussed here. Of particular interest are artistic activities, which are an expression of the creative search for an appropriate language, form and discourse for rendering perception, especially of the so-called "lower" senses. The question arises as to how to express sensory experience in words and what theoretical categories, both generalizable and common at the level of scientific and critical discourse, should be used. Many authors make such attempts, and indeed, some of the descriptions created in literature affect our senses so strongly that we can almost feel the taste, smell or texture of the depicted things, phenomena, or people.

Keywords: multisensory experience, senses, aesthetics, walk, aesthetic experience, author, text

"If you set out on a journey let it be long.
 a wandering that seems to have no aim groping your way blindly
 so you learn the roughness of the earth not only with your eyes but by touch
 so you can confront the world with your whole skin".¹

The words of the poet Zbigniew Herbert serve as a motto for considering the role of sensory experience in the thinking and acting of creators of literature, as well as theater, visual and performing arts. In many of Herbert's poems, he particularly ennobles touch as the most important and reliable of the senses.

"and touch in its certainty comes
 to return to things their stillness
 over the ear's lie the eye's chaos
 there grows a dam of ten fingers
 a hard and faithless mistrust lays
 its fingers in the world's wound
 to divide thing from appearance
 O you most true you alone
 can give utterance to love
 you alone offer consolation
 we are both blind and deaf

- touch grows on the edge of truth".²

Here, touch takes over the function of sight and becomes the main tool for experiencing reality. The hand is our tool that we use to learn about and to perceive action, since perception of the world through sight only is no longer possible. Touch also plays an important role in the process of remembering and recalling memories. The poet, as it were, embodies the experience of touch in words, most fully conveying the dimension that Paul Rodaway calls tactile – he distinguishes three dimensions of experience through touch: tactile, kinesthetic and haptic, with tactile understood as the most intimate, assuming reciprocity and maneuverability of touch, feeling through hands and skin.³ In her analysis of *Chord of Light*, Anna Haratyk distinguishes two functions of touch present

¹ Z. Herbert, *Podróż*, [in:] *Elegia na odejście*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1993, p. 24; transl. John and Bogdana Carpenter.

² Z. Herbert, *Dotyk*, [in:] *Idem, Wiersze zebrane*, ed. By R. Krynicki, Wydawnictwo a5, Kraków 2008, pp. 84-85 (from *Hermes, pies i gwiazda*, 157); transl. Alissa Valles.

³ Cf. P. Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*, London Routledge 1994.

in Herbert's poems: it helps us to salvage the memory of the past and it is the primary sense of knowing the world.⁴ Herbert draws our attention to the sensory experience of matter in the essay *Why the Classics?* "The old poet's dream is for his work to become a concrete object like a stone or a tree, so that, being created in a language that is constantly changing, it will acquire a permanent existence. One way, it seems to me, is to throw it far beyond itself, to obliterate the ties that bind it to its creator. This is how I understand Flaubert's recommendation: »Artists should be everywhere present in their work and nowhere visible, just as God does not reveal himself«".⁵ And Piotr Augustyniak notes that in the poet's works, the cognitive way of human contact with the environment is best conveyed by the metaphor not of sight, but precisely of touch, which constitutes "a unique way of »seeing with the skin«".⁶ The senses in Herbert's work are strongly synesthetic. In *Phenomenology of Perception*.⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty challenges the assumptions of idealism and empiricism, emphasizing the processuality of cognition, in which no described object is ever a ready-made, definite and finite set of qualities present in consciousness or objectively in the world. Embodied cognition is a direct perception of the world, in which the body as a whole participates every time and there is a bodily integration of all the senses. In her article, Agnieszka Łazicka analyzes the metaphor of the seeing touch, comparing the work of Herbert and Merleau-Ponty based on the very foundations of their ontological-cognitive reflection, and then concludes that "Herbert's poetic worldview is born on the basis of the senses – essentially related to the bodily dimension of existence".⁸

Aisthesis as a transesthetic category

Aἴσθησις means aesthetic experience understood as a process: "Perception, experience (or, perhaps better, experiencing) does not, therefore, constitute some finite activity or a onetime unique act, but is always a potentially vague or infinite process, with which other powers, such as mental or affective

⁴ A. Haratyk, *Dotknąć światła... O dotyku w pierwszym tomie poetyckim Zbigniewa Herberta*, "Wielogłos". Pismo Wydziału Polonistyki UJ, 2018, No. 2 (36), p. 74.

⁵ Z. Herbert, *Dlaczego klasycy?*, [in:] *"Mistrz z Delft" i inne utwory odnalezione*, ed. By B. Toruńczyk, Zeszyty Literackie, Warszawa 2008, p. 147.

⁶ P. Augustyniak, „Wersety panteisty”. *Ontologiczne przesłanie Zbigniewa Herberta* [in:] *Pojęcia kielkujące z rzeczy. Filozoficzne inspiracje twórczości Zbigniewa Herberta*, ed. By J. M. Ruszar, Wydawnictwo Platan, Kraków 2010, p. 80.

⁷ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia percepcji*, transl. M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński, Fundacja Aletheia, Warszawa 2001.

⁸ A. Łazicka, *Dotyk, który „widzi”*. *Próba postawienia problemu*, „Białostockie Studia Literaturoznawcze” 2018, No. 12, p. 104.

ones, necessarily cooperate".⁹ Agnieszka Bandura believes that both sensuality and rationality have their place in aesthetics. Analyzing the complexity of experience, she emphasized its "multisensory" nature – in experience, sensory impressions and what the individual senses do are both penetrated and overlapped (synesthesia is a particularly interesting example of this situation). Every perception, every experience of any object, constitutes a certain whole, irreducible to a set of separate sensory qualities. In other words, individual sensory impressions influence each other, generally causing a given perception to arise precisely from this trial of strength of the individual senses and in the course of their cooperation".¹⁰ *Aisthesis* is thus understood as a superior human activity based on sensuality. It functions at the interface of traditional powers: cognition, experience and feeling (intellect, reason and feeling). Bandura argues that *aisthesis* gives unity to experience, cognition and consciousness and is the only constant element in "fragmented" reality.

For centuries, the senses have been divided into so-called higher (theoretical) senses – sight and hearing, and lower (practical) senses – taste, smell and touch. This statement seems obvious, but the experiment carried out (student sensory walk) shows that we are still stuck in this traditional division. There have been disputes over the essence of beauty and the importance of the different senses in the philosophical and aesthetic fields for centuries. Sight has been the privileged sense, allowing intellectual perception of the world. "Visual aesthetics is a story spun by colors and shapes that 'bind', or 'arrest' our sight, which our eye makes contact with and which it stays at for a longer period of time".¹¹ The ancient Greeks believed that only the ears could hear harmony and the eyes could perceive symmetry. The senses of touch, taste and smell were not only called inferior, but also dark and cannibalistic, emotional, related to the survival instinct, carnality, materiality of being, to human nature – more animal, carnal, and less civilized. Today, even hearing, although counted among the "higher" senses, loses out to sight in the dominant pictorial culture. Aristotle, on the other hand, emphasized the privileged place of sight over the other senses, while recognizing the vital role of touch in the ability to survive.¹²

⁹ A. Bandura, *Αἰσθησις. Zmysłowość i racjonalność w estetyce tradycyjnej i współczesnej*. Universitas, Kraków 2013, p. 16.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹¹ M. Podgórski, *Ucieczka od wizualności i jej społeczne konsekwencje. Fenomen estetyki haptycznej*, Poznań 2011, <https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/handle/10593/1437> [accessed: 07.05.2022], p. 18.

¹² Aristotle, *O duszy*, transl. P. Siwek, [in:] Idem, *Dzieła wszystkie*, Vol. 3, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1992, pp. 33-146.

The eighteenth-century *Methaphysica* by Aleksander Baumgarten¹³ is considered to be the first text in which the lower senses are treated as more privileged. Johann Gottfried Herder argues that the sense of sight provides most of the ideas concerning only the surface of things and, paraphrasing Descartes' famous thought "I think, therefore I am", says "I feel! I am!" ("Ich fühle mich! Ich bin!").¹⁴ In *Estetyka pięciu zmysłów* [*Aesthetics of the Five Senses*], citing the words of the aesthetician Karl Aschenbrenner¹⁵, who maintained the traditional division of the senses and their participation in the "true" aesthetic experience provided by sight and hearing, Maria Gołaszewska writes: "These also include the sensations of the 'lower' senses: smells, tactile sensations, taste sensations, somatic and kinetic sensations, which, depending on their nature, make it easier, possible, or much more difficult for us to focus on what is in the foreground of our perception or intellectual concentration".¹⁶ It was not until the 20th century, thanks in part to a growing interest of artists, that aesthetic theories emphasizing the participation of all human sensuality in the aesthetic experience and thus challenging stereotypes surrounding the sense of touch were developed.¹⁷ One such theory is pragmatic aesthetics – pioneered by John Dewey and now developed by the American philosopher Richard Shusterman. From a pragmatic perspective, the following discussion of tactile categories aims not only to capture the functioning of this sense in art, but also to enrich the processes of creation and impact of art itself. R. Shusterman notes that "philosophers preferred to reflect on the mind, finding the problem of bodily consciousness too troublesome",¹⁸ and proposes a new field of knowledge –

¹³ A. G. Baumgarten, *Metafizyka*, translated from Latin and edited by J. Surzyn, Biblioteka Europejska Series, Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, Kęty 2012. Cf. also: P. Kozak, *Wychować Boga. Estetyka antropologiczna Alexandra Gottlieba Baumgartena na tle myśli niemieckiej pierwszej połowy XVIII wieku*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2013.

¹⁴ Cf. K. Tkaczyk, *Johann Gottfried Herder. Sensualistyczny bunt wobec klasycznej estetyki*, [in:] *W kulturze dotyku? Dotyk i jego reprezentacje w tekstach kultury*, ed. A. Łebkowska, Ł. Wróblewski, P. Badysiak, Wydawnictwo Nomos, Kraków 2016, p. 20.

¹⁵ K. Aschenbrenner, *Jak możliwa jest sztuka?*, transl. M. Gołaszewska, [in:] *Eseje o pięknie. Problemy estetyki i teorii sztuki*, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, PWN, Warszawa-Kraków 1988 and in: *Eidos sztuki*, ed. M. Gołaszewska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 1988.

¹⁶ M. Gołaszewska, *Estetyka pięciu zmysłów*, PWN, Warszawa-Kraków 1997, p. 117.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that in non-European cultures the issue is different: the aesthetic experience is framed as involving the entirety of a person's bodily existence. An example is the Japanese tea ceremony, in which haptic aspects (such as the sensation of the texture of a vessel filled with a tea infusion) are important in addition to visual and taste qualities.

¹⁸ R. Shusterman, *Świadomość ciała. Dociekania z zakresu somaestetyki*, transl. W. Małecki, S. Stankiewicz, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Kraków 2008, p. 13; the author's own translation.

"somaesthetics", to include the "critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensoryaesthetic appreciation (aisthesis) and creative self-fashioning".¹⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, a forerunner of humanistic geography, distinguishes between close senses – those that allow direct response to certain emotional and physical stimuli, and distant senses – those that maintain distance. Proximity is thus linked to materiality, and distance to visuality. Only being at a certain place can one fully experience it, and tactility, according to Tuan, is crucial here.²⁰

In *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts*, Arnold Berleant draws our attention to the expansion of aesthetics, emphasizing the superior role of experience. He points out the key issue of modern aesthetics "rooted in experience that constitutes the realm of aesthetic theory" because when it is missing, many aesthetic issues become "empty spider webs of logic" devoid of content.²¹ Indeterminacy becomes the key word for the field of interest of aesthetics: "we are going beyond the widened and enriched range of objects now regarded as art to things and situations that cannot be easily circumscribed and catalogued. (...) Artists have revised and reshaped portions of the earth's surface (Christo, Smithson), and we have stepped outside the manyfaceted gem of the art object into our environment and have discovered its aesthetic character".²² Post-Kantian aesthetics changes not only the very notion of the artwork/art object, but also the position of the viewer, who "works together with the creator, sometimes even becomes the creator, and everything interacts with the aesthetic context of which both are components".²³ In his other work, *Sensibility and Sense. The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*, Berleant recognizes perceptual experience as normative, and thus aesthetics, making it the focal point, becomes a fundamental discipline (in a provisional and heuristic sense).²⁴

Aesthetics draws on tools developed by the anthropology of the senses and focuses on various aspects of sensuality and its role in cultural participation and cultural cognition. The 1980s saw the publication of Alain Corbin's

¹⁹ R. Shusterman, *Estetyka pragmatyczna. Żywe piękno i refleksja nad sztuką*, ed. A. Chmielewski, transl. A. Chmielewski et al., Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1998, p. 138.

²⁰ Y.-F. Tuan, *Przestrzeń i miejsce*, transl. A. Morawińska, Foreword by K. Wojciechowski, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1987, p. 79.

²¹ A. Berleant, *Prze-myśleć estetykę. Niepokorne eseje o estetyce i sztuce*, transl. M. Korusiewicz, T. Markiewka, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Kraków 2007, p. 3.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁴ A. Berleant, *Wrażliwość i zmysły. Estetyczna przemiana świata człowieka*, transl. S. Stankiewicz, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Kraków 2011, p. 99.

study of the overwhelming influence of smell on the shape of the French social imagination, *Le Miasme et la Jonquille: l'odorat et l'imaginaire social, XVIIème et XIXème siècles*. Cultural analysis conducted through the prism of sensory cognition is becoming the main research method at the CONSERT (Concordia Sensoria Research Team) laboratory at Concordia University in Montreal. The group is headed by David Howes, who places the "sensory turn" (*le virage sensoriel*) against the background of the "material turn" (*le virage matériel*), which brought the interest in material objects into the framework of cultural history.²⁵ The methodological assumptions of the anthropology of the senses formulated by Howes and his colleagues are: "Sensory perception – in addition to having a physical dimension – is also a cultural act: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell are not only means for comprehending physical phenomena, but also channels for the transmission of cultural values".²⁶ The senses are no longer treated as transparent, but as the basis of experience. The anthropology of the senses allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study and comparative analysis of different cultures. The relationship between man and culture began to be seen as an interdependence of bodily stimuli and experiences, involving and shaping the use of the individual senses.

Haptic art is an interesting phenomenon that changes the mode of perception to a multisensory one – it assumes touch as the basis of perception, which is different from the perception of traditional artifacts and artworks. Aneta Rostkowska, a contemporary art scholar and curator, defines haptic art as: "works of art whose main mode of experience is the sense of touch," while distinguishing them from "works of art whose one of the main themes is the sense of touch." A haptic work of art falls into the former category, that is, as one that shows itself fully only through tactile contact, and "the reception of a work of art bypassing this sense will result in an incomplete presence in the viewer's experience".²⁷ From the object side, a work of this type is mainly characterized by properties that can only be directly experienced through the sense of touch, such as: softness/hardness, greater or lesser cohesiveness, thermal properties such as warmth/cold, wetness/dryness, stiffness/flexibility, tension/looseness, slipperiness/resistance, fragility/strength, lightness/heaviness (if it

²⁵ Cf. J.H. Budzik, *Kultura jako przestrzeń sensorium*, <http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=132&artykul=2870> [accessed: 07.05.2022]

²⁶ Quoted after: M. Herzfeld, *Antropologia: praktykowanie teorii w kulturze i społeczeństwie*, transl. M. M. Piechaczek, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2004, p. 332 (originally printed in: C. Classen, *Foundations for an anthropology of the senses*, „International Social Sciences Journal” 1997, No. 153).

²⁷ A. Rostkowska, *Haptyczne dzieło sztuki*, [in]: *Materia sztuki*, ed. M. Ostrowicki, Universitas, Kraków 2010, pp. 298, 300.

is the artist who is the source of touch – which may be the case, for example, in performance – specific types of touch can be added to this list: stroking, pushing, embracing, slapping, etc.). "In it, the sense of touch is not treated purely instrumentally, that is, as a means of getting to the property of a different, nontouching type, but as an essential means of reaching the content of the work".²⁸

On the other hand, Marta Smolińska, a scholar and art historian, in her recently published book *Haptyczność poszerzona. Zmysł dotyku w sztuce polskiej drugiej połowy XX i początku XXI wieku* [*Hapticity Expanded. The Sense of Touch in Polish Art of the Second Half of the Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries*],²⁹ understands hapticity very broadly: "I am, therefore, more interested, in a sense, in the opposite question: what happens to perception when – instead of artificially separating sensory experiences – one looks at them holistically with the participation of hearing, taste and smell, as well as balance and kinesthetic senses. What kind of multisensory, extended and somaesthetic definition of hapticity would then have to be proposed to describe the multifaceted nature of these sensations, encompassing the entire body?".³⁰ Smolińska argues that hapticity becomes a modality of sight, but also of hearing, taste and smell, as well as the sense of balance and the kinesthetic sense (proprioception). She points to the "multisensory, somaesthetic and synesthetic dimensions of hapticity".³¹ As a source of inspiration, she cites a text by Wojciech Bałus³² who identified touching with the eye as the essence of haptics within the classical science of art.

Not only literature and art, but every area of cultural practice of social life is subject to specific criteria of aesthetic reception, the scope of which includes intellectual reflection, actions, but also emotions and passions. Hapticity thus becomes a figure of multisensory experience – in both the creative act of the artist, who brings the work / event / process into existence, and in the perceptual act of the viewer.

Independent / alternative theater artists, who often perform in the open air, creating projects that correspond to sitespecific and environmental theater trends, have been proposing this kind of experience both in their artistic

²⁸ Ibid., p. 300.

²⁹ M. Smolińska, *Wprowadzenie*, [in:] *Eadem, Haptyczność poszerzona. Zmysł dotyku w sztuce polskiej drugiej połowy XX i początku XXI wieku*, Universitas, Kraków 2020, pp. 9-28.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

³¹ Ibid., p. 13.

³² W. Bałus, *Dotykanie wzrokiem. O pojęciu haptyczności w klasycznej nauce o sztuce*, „Konteksty: Polska Sztuka Ludowa” 2019, No. 4, p. 202. Bałus derived Alois Riegel's views from the texts of Adolf Hildebrand and Robert Vischer, who wrote about the „symbolic” or metaphorical treatment of touch and activating it within the framework of the so-called „active looping”, using remembered tactile impressions.

practice and programming plans for years. Shortening the distance with the audience, inviting them to cocreate, and entering into multisensory contact are deliberate creative strategies (there were attempts to create multisensory perception through the computer screen during performances via Zoom at the time of the coronavirus pandemic³³). Multisensory experience also appears in institutional theaters, although the box stage is a considerable handicap. Among the artists who have managed to overcome this limitation we can mention Juliusz Osterwa, who is referred to by Wanda Świątkowska in her text *Przeciw hegemonii wzroku. Teatr wielozmysłowy na przykładzie projektu Juliusza Osterwy* [*Against the Hegemony of Sight. Multisensory Theater. The Case of Juliusz Osterwa's Project*]. Świątkowska shows the theater and Osterwa's project in the light of Juhani Pallasmaa's concept of the architecture of the senses. This prominent Finnish professor of architecture derives his scientific thought from the sensory experience of architecture and general reflection on the human person, attempting to create a holistic approach to the problem of the relationship between the human person and the human environment, considering the role that the human body and senses play in this process. He writes, for example: "The architectural experience brings the body into almost intimate contact with the world".³⁴ "A work of architecture is not experienced as a collection of isolated visual images, but in its full bodily, material and spiritual presence",³⁵ "The special joy of travel is the opportunity to become acquainted with the geography and microcosm of tastes and smells. Each city has its own set".³⁶ According to Świątkowska, both architecture and theater have historically been dominated by ocularcentrism, hence the juxtaposition. Świątkowska sees Osterwa as an artist who, as early as in the 1920s, put forward an original proposal to activate the so-called lower senses, ones most neglected in theater: touch, taste and smell. She reveals concepts preserved in Osterwa's *Raptularz kijowski* [*Kiev Journal*], in which there are hints on strategies for stimulating all the senses of a theatrical audience (e.g., "It is easy to spray a smell in a theatre: the smell of pine – (forest), the smell of flowers (roses) – (garden), the smell of perfume – (boudoir), the smell of cigars – (office)"; cf. pp. 172-173 of *Raptularz kijowski*).³⁷

³³ Cf. Teatr Usta Usta Republika, *Ambasada 2.0*, <http://www.ustausta.pl/ambasada-2/>; 777 online <http://www.ustausta.pl/777-online/>.

³⁴ J. Pallasmaa, *Oczy skóry. Architektura i zmysły*, transl. M. Choptiany, Fundacja Instytut Architektury, Kraków 2012, p. 72; the author's own translation.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54; the author's own translation.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67; the author's own translation.

³⁷ W. Świątkowska, *Przeciw hegemonii wzroku. Teatr wielozmysłowy na przykładzie projektu Juliusza Osterwy*, [in:] *Estetyczne impresje. Powtórzenia - powroty - perspektywy*, ed. M. Błaszczak, P. Dobrowolski, I. Górską, E. Szuklarek, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2022, pp. 175-195.

Agata Kiedrowicz, a curator and design critic, artist working interdisciplinarily at the intersection of the humanities, art and design, emphasizes the following in her performative lecture entitled *Community of the Senses*: "Being in the world means touching. We touch the world, and the world constantly touches us. Theater, like the realm of design and visual arts, is a perfect field for sensory activity. The senses build our history, memory, emotionality. Through them it becomes possible to transcend the dominant order, to reach the depths of humanity and experience".³⁸

The phenomena described here are strongly manifested in the so-called affective turn. Ryszard Nycz defines a "culture of emotion" as one seen through the prism of its emotional dimension, owing its specificity to its involvement in emotional relations that shape the dominant forms of art and literature. He draws our attention to institutional strategies for organizing and managing a "society of experience" or "society of emotion".³⁹ And he understands "emotions in culture" as "a spectrum of emotional articulations of arousal and reaction - of the nature of passions, emotions, feelings, moods... - manifested in various media, types, genres of culture, and especially in art and literature".⁴⁰ Works that appeal to the sense of touch seem to fit firmly into this definition, as they not only appeal to the intellectual and aesthetic competence of the audience, but also touch on their structures of feeling - on both the sensory and precisely the affective level.

Thus, as can be seen, contemporary humanities, especially aesthetics, strongly challenge previous divisions, emphasizing multisensory reception of literature, art, theater and performance activities. Artists no longer propose works, but experiences - literary, visual, theatrical, cinematic, and performative ones - that strongly engage and transcend the definitions of what was previously the responsibility of the audience. The heterogeneity, multilevel, polyphonic nature of the artistic message poses increasingly complex challenges for the audience. More and more often a work of art cannot only be seen or heard, but also touched, tasted, and smelled. Interesting sensations appear especially on the tactile level - roughness and coarseness or, in opposition to them, smoothness. Artists often refer to the phenomenon of synesthesia in their work,

³⁸ A. Kiedrowicz, *Wspólnota zmysłów* / performative lecture, 18.05.2016 [online], <http://bliscyniezajomi.pl/idea-i-program-7/> [accessed: 10.04.2021]. A. Kiedrowicz also curated the exhibition *To czuć! Projektowanie dla zmysłów* [*It feels! Designing for the Senses*], 23.03.2017, R+ Gallery in Szczecin, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/galeriarplus/photos/> [accessed: 10.04.2021].

³⁹ R. Nycz, *Wstęp. Humanistyka wczoraj i dziś (w wielkim skrócie i nie bez uproszczeń)*, [in:] *Kultura afektu - afekty w kulturze. Humanistyka po zwrocie afektywnym*, ed. R. Nycz, A. Łebkowska and A. Dauksza, Nowa Humanistyka Series, Vol. XIX, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Warszawa 2015, p. 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

which consists in associating impressions from different senses with one another, such as sounds with colors, smells with tastes, etc. This phenomenon is common in both colloquial language (e.g., "rough voice", "warm color", "sweet smell") and literary language (e.g., Charles Baudelaire's and Arthur Rimbaud's poetry, Miron Białoszewski's works).⁴¹ In the reception of haptic art or expositions, performances and spectacles focused on multisensory activity, a peculiar dramaturgy is set in motion – planned by the creator, inscribed by him or her in the work, but "set in motion" only by the audience treated as coparticipants or even cocreators.

Sensory walk

"I lock the door and put the cold keys in my leather bag. I walk downstairs, smelling the scent of probably a dozen dinners from the apartments next door. Boiled potatoes come to the fore. It's stifling. The floor below I smell fried fish. I push open the first door, push open the second [door] and walk out. Green, fresh. As I walk through the housing estate on Norwida Street, it smells of mowed grass, I can hear children from a nearby school just having a break on the playground. I pass the estate, I see the brick of the hospital, I feel the unpleasant smell again. It always smells like this when I'm standing at a pedestrian crossing, because there's a sewer manhole next to it. I push the pedestrian call button. I walk across the pedestrian crossing, the smell of fumes, cars are passing, I can cross. I cross, and then I stand at the pedestrian crossing again, I wait for a streetcar to pass, it's green and yellow, the exhaust fumes can still be smelled. The light changes to green, I cross the street. I walk down Libelta Street, turn right. I feel the uneven surface under my feet, I am walking on cobblestones. It's quiet, there are no people, only houses. I walk into the park. Again, I hear children, but it is a moderate noise, there are only a few of them, and their voices are coming from the playground on my left. I walk uphill, and the farther I go, the more I hear the city. The greenery of the vegetation has a calming effect. I leave the park, cross the street, and again hear the noise of people and streetcars more clearly. I pass the opera house; I feel light dew [coming] from the side of the fountain. I touch my sweatshirt, it is slippery, made of orthalion. I check which pocket I have my phone in. I continue walking, stop on Fredry Street, touch the metal handle of the city bookcase. I flip through a few books, they smell a bit rotten, like old books, I feel the thick paper under my hands. None of them interest me, so I touch the handle again, close the bookcase, and continue walking. Walking along the sidewalk,

⁴¹ <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/synestezja;3982085.html> [accessed: 25.04.2021].

I pass several establishments from which smells are coming: fried meat (kebab) and toasts. Near Okraślak [a modernist building in the center of Poznań] the noise intensifies again, I pass people queuing for ice cream, going in and out of McDonald's. I'm at Freedom Square, I go across the fountain, feel the drops of water on my body again – cold, but pleasant. A group of people have gathered around the fountain, some man is riding a board and has loud music on. I look around again, crossing the street; the sound of cars driving on cobblestones is different from that caused by driving on a traditional road. I turn left, walking ahead. I climb a few steps, put my hand in my purse, and feel cold keys, and a wooden key ring with an indentation (it's navy blue, shaped like a shoe) in my hands. I search for a pack of cigarettes – partially foiled, so I touch the slippery foil and a lighter (plastic on the outside). I take out what I touched. The lighter is yellow, I pull out a cigarette and light it. I put the pack and lighter in the bag again. I inhale, smell the cigarettes. When I finish smoking, I put out the cigarette and throw it away. I enter the museum; I don't touch the door as it opens by itself. I walk up to the ticket office, lean against the counter, and ask for a ticket for the Hans Arp exhibition. The lady tells me the amount, I open my purse, looking for my wallet. I open my wallet, leaf through my cards, looking for my ID card, open the change compartment, feel the money under my fingers: its shape and texture. I take out 7 PLN, hand over the ticket, and show the ID card. The lady thanks me and invites me to the right. I head towards the cloakroom, remove my bag, take out my phone, notebook (blue, leather, nice) and pen, ask for a "ticket". I put it in the notebook, tie it with a rubber band. I move on. There are no definite smells in the museum, the smell is typical of a museum, but it's hard to pin it down in any way. I enter the exhibition, put the notebook in my other hand, and with my right hand I reach for an information leaflet. I look at the various sculptures, some of which can be touched. I pass the first part of the exhibition, turn right. I see three pink plush sculptures that can be touched, sat on, etc. I don't feel like it".⁴²

The above quote is an excerpt from a student essay. Every year, students of Polish Studies and Film Studies and Media Culture programs at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań go on a *Sensory Walk*, then describe it and share their impressions in class. As part of the *Aesthetics of Space* course, students have a workshop assignment called *Sensory Walk in City Space*. In the description of the workshop, students can read: "Take a walk along a chosen route (to the university, a store, etc.) lasting about 1 hour and activate all your senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Describe your feelings and the route filtered through the five senses. Write about this walk in the form of an essay

⁴² Transcript of a sensory walk by one of the students, a participant in the *Aesthetics of Space* class, academic year 2017/2018.

(about 2-3 pages)".⁴³ The course covers topics showing the meaning of space and proposing, in addition to its description, an in-depth analysis and interpretation of its experience. A variety of spaces are presented and discussed: literary, theatrical and "non-theatrical" spaces, museum and gallery, architectural, green (parks, squares, gardens) and urban (though sometimes rural) spaces, painting, photography, sculpture, etc.

In total, more than 40 transcripts of *Sensory Walks* were produced between 2017 and 2022. The sensory walk becomes a starting point for considerations centered on a critique of reality dominated by the so-called "higher" senses. The urban "stroll" turns into a multisensory experience, but above all it activates the so-called "lower" senses that we often forget about. A multisensory aesthetic walk planned in this way can be understood as a cultural practice and critique. A simple student exercise of walking a selected route shows how firmly we are stuck in an ocularcentric, highly scopic culture. After conducting and recording the walks, students read the essays out to the rest of the group in class and shared their observations. Most of them were surprised to find out that they had never before experienced such conscious contact with the external environment and their own senses and feelings as during this walk.

An attempt to describe verbally and create photo documentation of the places experienced (sic!) by the students would mean reducing these walks to a visual-auditory aspect only. After all, we do not hear the sounds of the street, do not feel smells from the bakery or a trash can, do not touch the handle of a streetcar warmed by the hand of a stranger, do not taste coffee bought on the way in a nearby café. The sensory walk is not only a multisensory aesthetic, anthropological or cultural studies experiment, but also a literary one. It allows one to reflect on the possibilities of language and thinking of the artistwriter who tries to put their sensory experiences into words. Such a multisensory "stroll" may concern not only everyday life, but also art, hence we can talk about an architectural walk, a museum/gallery walk, a theatrical walk, a literary walk, or a scientific walk (as George Bataille⁴⁴ or Richard Shusterman⁴⁵ argued).

⁴² Transcript of a sensory walk by one of the students, a participant in the *Aesthetics of Space* class, academic years 2017/2018.

⁴³ *Aesthetics of Space* is an academic course taught by me from 2017 to 2022. Materials for the *Aesthetics of Space* course taught at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Author of the course concept and syllabus, and instructor: Monika Błaszczak, author's archive and <https://maius89.maius.amu.edu.pl/~moodleifp/course/view.php?id=265> [accessed 22.01.2022].

⁴⁴ G. Bataille, *Wielki palec u nogi*, essay written in 1970, reprinted with commentary by Roland Barthes *Wychodzenie z tekstu*, with a foreword by Jean-Pierre Cometti. Cf. T. Swoboda, *Historie oka. Bataille, Leiris, Artaud, Blanchot, słowo / obraz terytoria*, Gdańsk 2010.

⁴⁵ R. Shusterman, *Estetyka pragmatyczna. Żywe piękno i refleksja nad sztuką*, op. cit.

This raises the question of how artists, creators, and "ordinary" viewers of reality think. Students were expected to express their observations in the form of essays, but these often also took on poetic or prose forms close to literature, and sometimes resembled purely technical reports. Some students focused more on the environment, others on their inner feelings. Some described the experience chronologically, with topographical details, mapping the entire walk; others used a division of the senses in their descriptions. It is clear from their accounts that "multisensory perception of the world not only reveals the sensory multidimensionality of landscape, but also opens a space for topographical experience, which is born and opened on the road, during the hike. In this dimension, sight does not play a dominant role – it is auxiliary, allows one to assess the situation, but it is not able to reflect the entire sensory quality of the landscape: the polyphony of sounds, smells and tastes... As a multisensory topographical experience, it becomes the medium through which we experience the world and organize it".⁴⁶ The perception of landscape that students experience during a multisensory journey "is never limited to sight, but also includes somatic, kinesthetic and tactile sensitivities that are linked to sight and hearing".⁴⁷ Such an attitude implies critical participation in shaping reality through cocreation and activity of the senses – a model of a multisensory activecreative subject emerges.

As a rule, in the analyzed transcripts there is information about the buildings passed on the way – their names and sometimes architectural styles (e.g., Okrągłak, the National Museum, Collegium Maius), names and topography of the districts (e.g., Jeżyce, Wilda, Rataje), streets (e.g., Fredry, Norwida, Libelta), and means of communication (streetcars, buses, commuter trains). Visual impressions turn out to be dominant. Auditory impressions are often dampened by headphones, through which music flows. There are sounds of birds, streetcars, cars, conversations, ringing phones, barking dogs or containers being emptied by garbage trucks. In the haptic (tactile) realm, the most common sensations are the coolness of a doorknob, the stickiness of a handrail, the hardness or softness of objects, the unevenness of a street or sidewalk surface, the roughness or smoothness of clothes, the coolness or warmth of water from a fountain, or the wetness of rain on the skin. Students are least likely to register impressions with their senses of taste and smell. It is true that in some transcripts there are more elaborate descriptions in this regard, but usually these are brief mentions, or these senses are omitted altogether. If they

⁴⁶ B. Frydryczak, *Zmysły w krajobrazie*, „Estetyka i Krytyka” 2016, No. 3 (42), p. 15.

⁴⁷ Eadem, *Krajobraz. Od estetyki the picturesquedo doświadczenia topograficznego*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, Poznań 2013, p. 236.

are referred to, the following are described: the taste of coffee, water, cigarettes, chewing gum; the smell of exhaust fumes, food, garbage, sewage, human sweat, freshly cut grass, flowers, or cigarettes. Many sensations occur simultaneously, such as the smell and taste of coffee, and the touch of the cup from which it is drunk. Walks and transcripts from the pandemic period were slightly different. Here, the spaces of one's apartments, rooms, balconies, parks, or other green areas appear as scenery; there is even an online walk or a walk while in Portugal, recreated from memory as reminiscence. Tactile, gustatory, and olfactory sensations are described from the perspective of a protective mask, which in those days was mandatory to wear everywhere outside the home. There are also terms for nonobvious metaphorical sensations, usually not used to describe sensory impressions. In one transcript, the author writes: "The architecture of the Collegium Maius smells of science."

In addition to the complexity of the experience itself, students struggled to find the right language to describe their sensory experiences. How can sensory experience be expressed in words and what general and common theoretical categories should be used at the level of scientific and critical discourse? How can we express in words only what we experience with our senses? Many authors make such attempts, and indeed some descriptions created in literature affect our senses so strongly that we can almost feel the taste, smell or texture of the people, things, or phenomena depicted. Thus, literary authors prove that it is possible to convey an intense smell or taste with words alone,⁴⁸ and to experiment with the material form of a work (works of the so-called liberature are a notable example here).⁴⁹ In the *Posłowie* [Afterword] to the collective book entitled *Spektakle zmysłów* [Spectacles of the Senses], Monika Kostażuk-Romanowska draws our attention precisely to the problem of translating sensory experience into artistic language (literature, art, theater, film): "in the texts presented in this collection, the problem of the participation of sensuality in the creation of artistic (and not only artistic) illusion, in the construction of the possible or impossible effect of truth also recurs several times. The sensual dimension of an artifact provides a guarantee of its credibility, but at the same time this credibility turns out to be extremely fragile and deceptive. Many times, it is the sensual material that "lies" to us, becoming a tool of creation that reveals its "incompleteness." Paradoxically, this "imperfection" of the sensual matter of art (can smell and taste be rendered in film?) reinforces its

⁴⁸ Cf., for example, A. Warnke, *Z polotem. Zapach w polskiej literaturze*, 30.04.2018, Culture.pl, <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/z-polotem-zapach-w-polskiej-literaturze> [accessed: 07.05.2022].

⁴⁹ Cf. Z. Fajfer, *Liberatura, czyli literatura totalna. Teksty zebrane z lat 1999-2009*, ed. K. Bazar-nik, Foreword by W. Kalaga, Korporacja Ha!art, Kraków 2010.

symbolic function. After all, the imagined sensuality, which does not reach the state of literal materialization, affects the senses, and, opening to extrasensory perception, makes the abstract space of meanings and values concrete".⁵⁰

In recent years, much has been said and acted upon at the level of preschool education in the field of children's sensorium. Sensory integration diagnoses are carried out and special classes are conducted with children who show disorders in this area, but we are forgotten and cut off from touch, taste and smell at later stages of education and future professional work. It is also worth noting, referring to the knowledge of biology, that we do not have as high sensitivity of the so-called lower senses as other species. Humans have not developed magnetic, vibratory, or electrical senses, for example. Yet scholars list a number of additional senses in humans, including proprioception, nociception, thermoception, sense of balance, chemoreceptors or magneto-reception. Another interesting phenomenon is that some people experience so-called synesthesia – a state in which the impressions of one sense (e.g., sight) also evoke impressions characteristic of other senses.⁵¹

Even though the sensory turn and the affective (emotional) turn developed some time ago (in the 1980s and 1990s), and became constituted in the thought of scholars, our real, everyday sensations, feelings, and emotions related to the perception of the world still oscillate around the "higher senses". The term "higher senses" has been put in quotation marks deliberately, as it seems too anachronistic and unjustified today. However, is this really the case? The main trends in art, theater, performance, and literature focus on the reception of a work of art using primarily sight and hearing. Taste, smell and touch usually act as auxiliary senses to these two main ones, if they are considered at all. Creators/artists identified in the work, as well as scholars, place the "lower senses" or those less recognized ones (such as proprioception or thermoception) at their center, but this is still not the dominant view.

The sensual pleasure of creation

In his theoreticalliterary essay, adopting the perspective of a scholar and literary artist at the same time, Roland Barthes wrote that "reading is a gesture

⁵⁰ M. Kostaszuk-Romanowska, *Postłowie*, [in:] *Spektakle zmysłów*, ed. A. Wieczorkiewicz, M. Kostaszuk-Romanowska, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2010, p. 361.

⁵¹ More on this topic can be found in cf. M. Koton-Czarnecka, *Zmysły zwierząt są niesamowite. Jak postrzegają świat?*, „National Geographic Polska”, 25.02.2020, <https://www.national-geographic.pl/arttykul/zmyslowa-ostrosoc> [accessed: 08.03.2020]; *Człowiek posiada więcej niż 5 zmysłów*, 16.06.2016, <https://joemonster.org/art/36446> [accessed: 03.08.2020] and A. Mączyńska-Frydryszek, M. Jaskólska-Klaus, T. Maruszewski, *Psychofizjologia widzenia*, ed. R. Bartel, Wydawnictwo ASP, Poznań 2002.

of the body", "the pleasure of the text is the moment when my body moves in the wake of its own thoughts – because my body does not have the same thoughts as I do",⁵² and meaning is "the sense of what is sensually constructed".⁵³ Although the French scholar proclaims the "death of the author", he immediately admits that the author is needed when he reads. As a linguistic creation, the writer is stripped of all desires, except one: "the perverse delight of words".⁵⁴ Barthes addresses him or her directly: "The text you write must prove to me that it desires me. Such a proof exists: it is writing. Writing is just that: the science of the pleasures of language, its Kamasutra".⁵⁵ A text resembles a fabric in the process of its constant weaving, a texture in which the essentials are formed into weaves and the subject disintegrates, like a spider decomposing itself, in the constructive secretions of its own web. "(...) we can refer to text theory as hyphology (*hyphos* means fabric and a spider web)".⁵⁶ The metaphor used here can be extended to all artistic activities – not works, but precisely actions, processes, interweaving. Reading should be restored to its creative character and the discredited sensuality, corporeality and pleasure of reading should be rehabilitated. "The author who leaves his text and comes into our life has no unity; he is a mere plural of 'charms', the site of a few tenuous details, yet the source of vivid novelistic glimmerings, a discontinuous chant of amiabilities (...); he is not a (civil, moral) person, he is a body".⁵⁷

Aesthetic thinking is based on the perception of art as a model for describing reality, i.e., on its aesthetic perception and experience, which is combined with critical reflection, creating an entangled discourse.⁵⁸ The search for a space of encounter between the artist and viewer means entering "the dialectic of desire, the unpredictability of pleasure".⁵⁹ The sensory walk becomes

⁵² R. Barthes, *Przyjemność tekstu*, transl. A. Lewańska, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 1997, p. 22; the author's own translation.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 90; the author's own translation.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 39; the author's own translation.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 11; the author's own translation.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

⁵⁷ R. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, transl. R. Lis, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 1996, p. 10; translation of the original French version by Richard Miller.

⁵⁸ The concept of „entanglement” in theoretical thought is used by A. Krajewska, P. Czaplinski and K. Barad (in slightly different terms by each). Cf. A. Krajewska, *Splątanie literackie*, „Przestrzenie Teorii” 2012, No. 17 or *Teoria splątania*, „Przestrzenie Teorii” 2020, No. 34; K. Barad, *Posthumanistyczna performatywność: ku zrozumieniu, jak materia zaczyna mieć znaczenie*, transl. J. Bednarek, [in:] *Teorie wywrotowe. Antologia przekładów*, ed. A. Gajewska, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań 2013, pp. 323-358. K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press 2007; P. Czaplinski, *Sploty*, „TekstyDrugie”: Nowa Humanistyka, 2017, No. 1.

⁵⁹ R. Barthes, op. cit., p. 9; the author's own translation.

the starting point for considerations, the axis of which is a critique of reality dominated by the "higher" senses and an attempt to develop a language for describing multisensory aisthesis. A sensory landscape emerges from the descriptions, essays,⁶⁰ narrative maps,⁶¹ spaces of memory.⁶² Sensory, emotional, and mental experiences meet qualities and aesthetic sensations, which have both spatial and temporal dimensions. Sensory and affective relations become the basis of aesthetic experience, influence the language of description, and shape the dominant forms of art and literature. The artist creates in a clearance, gap and a weave at the same time – at the junction and intersection of multisensory sensations and experiences, and the language of art at the artist's disposal and that which the artist produces. Especially in the field of literature, this seems to be a difficult task. The inability to translate sensory experience into the language of concepts is very aptly described by Jolanta Brach Czaina: "The experience of touch translates poorly into words; it is troublesome to express. It is ad hoc and, as if it wanted to remain so, escapes substitute signs and secondary evocations. In any case, the conflict between touch and words is clear".⁶³

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⁶⁰ B. Frydryczak, *Krajobraz. Od estetyki the picturesque do doświadczenia topograficznego*, op. cit.

⁶¹ E. Rybicka, *Geo-poetyka. Przestrzeń i miejsce we współczesnych teoriach i praktykach literackich*, Universitas, Kraków 2014.

⁶² T. Pękała, *Czas miniony jako doświadczenie przestrzeni*, [in:] *Czas przestrzeni*, ed. K. Wilkoszewska, in collaboration with J. Petri, Universitas, Kraków 2008, p. 333.

⁶³ J. Brach-Czaina, *Błony umysłu*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 2003, p. 59.

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DOŚWIADCZENIE ZMYŚLÓW „NIŻSZYCH” – POLISENSORYCZNE AISTHESIS ARTYSTY (streszczenie)

Problem przekładalności doświadczenia zmysłowego na język artystyczny (literatury, sztuki, teatru, filmu) otwiera pole do rozważań, jak myślą artyści. Dydaktyczny eksperyment – studencki spacer zmysłowy stał się punktem wyjścia do refleksji na temat artystycznego spojrzenia na kwestię polisensoryczności. Studenci swoje spostrzeżenia mogli wyrazić w formie eseju, jednak często były to także formy poetyckie czy prozatorskie bliskie literaturze, czasem przypominały raport. Taka polisensoryczna „przechadzka” może dotyczyć nie tylko sfery codzienności, ale także przebiegać na polu sztuki, stąd można mówić o: spacerze architektonicznym, muzealno-galeryjnym, teatralnym, literackim, czy na polu naukowym (co udowadniają G. Bataille czy R. Shusterman). W naukach humanistycznych przebiega ona na polu wielu dyscyplin, dlatego przedmiotem namysłu są tu przykłady z zakresu literatury, teatru, sztuk wizualnych i performatywnych. Szczególnie ciekawe wydają się takie działania artystyczne, które są wyrazem twórczych poszukiwań odpowiedniego języka, formy, dyskursu na oddanie percepcji zwłaszcza tzw. zmysłów „niższych”. Powstaje pytanie, jak oddać w słowach doświadczenie zmysłowe i jakich

używać kategorii teoretycznych, uogólniających i wspólnych na poziomie dyskursu naukowego i krytycznego. Wielu twórców podejmuje takie próby i faktycznie niektóre powstałe w literaturze opisy tak mocno oddziałują na nasze zmysły, że czujemy niemalże smak, zapach czy fakturę przedstawionych rzeczy, zjawisk, ludzi.

Słowa kluczowe: polisensoryczność, zmysły, estetyka, spacer, doświadczenie estetyczne, autor, tekst

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