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TOWARDS THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

Abstract: For several decades, aesthetic debates concerning music have largely taken place within analytic philosophy. Since a surge of interest in authenticity, these debates have increasingly focused on issues of musical performance. This is unsurprising because actual performances individualize the ways specific musical works appear, thus providing the primary source of aesthetic experiences. Moreover, the study of broadly understood experience has been an important focus of phenomenology, making it natural to expand analytic reflection by including the phenomenological tradition. In this article, I discuss methodological considerations that open the way for research on musical performance within phenomenological aesthetics while simultaneously supplementing analytic philosophy of music. By examining a passage from Fryderyk Chopin's *Piano Sonata* in B Minor, No. 3, Op. 58, as performed by Maurizio Pollini and Rafał Blechacz, I demonstrate both the practical application and the effectiveness of this proposed research methodology.

Keywords: aesthetic experience, musical performance, phenomenology, philosophy of music

Introduction

In charting a research trajectory for musical performance in the paradigm of phenomenological aesthetics, two initial questions emerge: (1) Have such strictly phenomenological studies already begun? and (2) Can we find phenomenological takes on musical performance within the analytic philosophy of music? Regarding the first question, the answer is readily apparent: yes,

of course. One need only consider the work of Mikel Dufrenne[1], Roman Ingarden[2], Vladimir Jankélévitch[3], Günter Figal[4], or Arnold Berleant[5]. Even Edmund Husserl's early reflections on the consciousness of internal time – where the perception of melody serves as an emblematic example – can be viewed as a prototype of a phenomenology of music, although that was not Husserl's aim in his lectures on time[6]. These analyses unearthed numerous questions and difficulties associated with performing a musical work and its aesthetic reception. The ontological, epistemological and axiological issues that have emerged could constitute a systematic and detailed research program. However, within phenomenological aesthetics, one may be under the impression that these questions have not been sufficiently developed or subjected to the kind of critical discussions that, by contrast, are actively advanced within analytic philosophy of music.

Turning to the second question – whether analytic philosophy of music contains a phenomenological approach to musical performance – it is indeed not difficult to point to works focused on authenticity precisely in the context of performing a musical work. Lively debates on that subject, which have continued since the 1980s, yielded Peter Kivy's notable *Authenticities*[7], as well as many critical polemics by Stephen Davies[8], Jerrold Levinson[9], David Davies[10], Julian Dodd[11] and Andrew Kania[12]. Much like phenomenological research,

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1 M. Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, transl. E. S. Casey, A. A. Anderson, W. Domingo, L. Jacobson, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973, pp. 3-54.

2 R. Ingarden, *The Work of Music and the Problem of Its Identity*, transl. A. Czerniawski, Macmillan Press, London 1986.

3 V. Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, transl. C. Abbate, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 2003.

4 G. Figal, *Aesthetics as Phenomenology: The Appearance of Things*, transl. J. Veith, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2015.

5 A. Berleant, *A Phenomenology of Musical Performance*, in: idem, *Re-Thinking Aesthetics*, Routledge, New York 2016, pp. 169-176.

6 E. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time(1893-1917) (Husserliana: Edmund Husserl, collected works, 4)*, transl. J. B. Brough, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht1991.

7 P. Kivy, *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1995.

8 S. Davies, *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, pp. 206-253.

9 J. Levinson, *Music, Art, and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, pp. 393-408.

10 D. Davies, *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, MA2011.

11 J. Dodd, *Being True to Works of Music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020.

12 A. Kania, *Philosophy of Western Music: A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge, London 2020, pp. 157-200.

these analyses highlight, from multiple perspectives, the dependency of aesthetic experience on shifting historical and cultural contexts and also illuminate, so to speak, the elusive quality of the aesthetic experience, which so adeptly defies descriptive capture[13]. We should also mention Bruce Ellis Benson's *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*[14], which, though it grows out of phenomenological roots (chiefly Husserl, Heidegger, Ingarden, and Gadamer), maintains an ongoing conversation with analytic philosophy of music. More detailed treatments of musical performance may be found in the work of John Rink[15] and Nicholas Cook[16], which, in my view, successfully combine both analytic and phenomenological approaches. Hence, we find quite a lot of research on musical performance within analytic philosophy of music, though the problem remains, metaphorically speaking, that its conceptual net is too coarse to seize and scrutinize the actual aesthetic experience. Of course, it is still open to discussion whether phenomenology can handle the description of aesthetic experience more effectively and, if so, what such a faithful description ought to look like[17].

It is likewise worth considering the specific character of phenomenological aesthetics as compared to analytic aesthetics. Let us first note three common features that connect phenomenology with analytic philosophy. First, both employ a linguistic form of description that is heuristic and hermeneutic in nature. Although that might sound obvious, it is not necessarily so, since music can also be analyzed by a range of empirical methods and research tools, as happens, for example, in music psychology or neuroaesthetics. Second, both phenomenological and analytic philosophy of music are grounded in individual aesthetic experiences and strive for a comprehensive explanation of them. While this, too, may appear trivial, it is crucial to emphasize that, lacking such experiential support, no aesthetic analysis would carry much meaning. Indeed, every analysis in this domain stems from personal aesthetic experiences, and each aesthetician brings a unique sensitivity and insight that necessarily affect the shape of the research. As for the third shared feature, it can be stated succinctly: both phenomenological and analytic philosophies of music avoid dogmatic resolutions and do not issue final claims.

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13 R. Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997, pp. 438-456.

14 B. E. Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003.

15 J. Rink, *Music in Profile: Twelve Performance Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2024, pp. 38-62.

16 N. Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, pp. 56-134, 176-209.

17 See Section 4 of this article.

Let us now briefly address the main methodological difference between phenomenological and analytic philosophy of music. One can get the impression that phenomenology complicates aesthetic experience so much that drawing constructive conclusions about a particular musical work proves difficult. Roman Ingarden, for instance, frequently cites Chopin's *Piano Sonata* in B Minor, No. 3, Op. 58 in his studies, yet from these analyses we learn little about what properties characterize the experience of the specific aesthetic object – namely, the phenomenological correlate of an individual performance of that work. Put plainly, Ingarden's analyses show that aesthetic experience depends on the formation of the musical piece, the variable properties of its performance and the changeable perception of listeners. Consequently, we likely never hear Chopin's *Piano Sonata* in B Minor, No. 3, Op. 58 in exactly the same way, making it impossible for us to determine which individual aesthetic experience of the *Sonata* any given analysis might address. Meanwhile, analytic philosophy of music, broadly speaking – though there are exceptions – tends to assume that our aesthetic experience of a particular piece is available to us without basic doubt. In discussions of a performance's authenticity, for example, one need only posit certain conditions or scenarios for realizing the work and the resulting experience is presumed to be clear. Yet this situation becomes paradoxical in both phenomenological and analytic inquiries: one either remains at too general a level, failing to engage with any concrete aes -thetic experience, or one presupposes the transparency of aesthetic experiences. As a result, we lack many detailed investigations of the specific perceptual material – i.e., the individual performance of a musical work – that might, through deeper analysis and discussion, bring to light the actual aesthetic content disclosed in experience. Let us note only in passing that such detailed research would also demand a kind of introspective dissection of one's own subjective aesthetic experiences, entailing some disclosure of one's inner self and sensibility. However, I am convinced that this personal dimension of individual analyses does not conflict with the scientific paradigm but aligns with the nature of the subject under study.

In the following sections, I will present a phenomenological approach to researching musical performance that simultaneously draws on the insights of analytic philosophy of music, for ignoring the latter would be nothing short of careless. My point of reference here will be Western classical tradition, focusing on performances by Maurizio Pollini and Rafał Blechacz of a passage from Fryderyk Chopin's *Piano Sonata* in B Minor, No. 3, Op. 58 as a case study. With suitable modifications, however, this model could likewise serve as a launching point for phenomenological research in other musical genres.

1 Prolegomena to the Phenomenology of Performing and the Performance of a Musical Work

Keeping in mind the distinction between performing and the performance of a musical work – analogous to the difference between speaking and what is spoken – let us first consider how phenomenology encompasses both aspects. To begin, note that the manner in which certain words are spoken can not only convey varying degrees of expressiveness but can also, through those expressive differences, shift their meaning. This is perhaps most evident in the actor's craft and likewise applies to musical performance. It is also self-evident – at least linguistically – that a performance is the result of performing; yet this causal link is not transparent and calls for elucidation by connecting the artistic and aesthetic dimensions or, to borrow Greek terms, by relating *energeia* (action) to *ergon* (the product of that action).

Taken at face value, performing a musical work appears to be nothing more than the physical actions of the performer aimed at playing a given piece. However, if we stopped there, we would be left with purely empirical investigations that can amass precise data on sound volume, exact duration of tones, intricate aspects of sonority, and so forth – everything acoustic or measurable by advanced recording technology, which sound engineers perhaps know best. Thanks to leading-edge neuroscientific research, we might someday – even if not yet – discover every biological, chemical and physical process taking place in the performer's nervous system while performing a musical work. Yet no matter how much data we accumulate, translating them into meaningful aesthetic information remains problematic, for these raw data by themselves lack any explicit purpose and, bluntly put, mean nothing – or, more cautiously stated, matter about as much as static or noise next to the richness of aesthetic experience. Only personal experience with primal phenomenological data, and their interpretation as oriented toward the aesthetic aim they serve, constitutes information of genuine interest to aesthetics.

The performer, in undertaking a musical work, seeks to realize a particular aesthetic goal, that is, to create a specific intentional aesthetic object. The listener, however, does not know this intentional aesthetic aim; they hear only the finished product, or the outcome of performing. Even slight shifts in how the piece is undertaken (changes in dynamics, tempo, articulation or sonority) modify the performance's aesthetic content[18], and this mysterious link between

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18 Let us note that interpretive authenticity – broadly discussed by Julian Dodd and understood as revealing the deep level of a musical work's content, i.e., its musical meaning – constitutes a more fundamental value than score compliance authenticity and performer's personal authenticity. For Dodd states: "interpretive authenticity is not merely a final value

'performing' and 'the performance' is a knot that must be untangled by analyzing the aesthetic senses – which, hypothetically, we posit – derived from phenomenological data, that is, from the performer's artistic presentation of the work. A phenomenological analysis of performing a piece thus focuses on the qualities of the artistic process, yet does not by itself determine the aesthetic reception of the performance[19]. A phenomenological examination of artistic qualities, in which a preliminary reduction (*epoché*) of the aesthetic sphere paradoxically operates – more clearly as we shall see later – to facilitate aesthetic givenness, aims to clear the path for as unprejudiced and as adequate a reception of the musical performance as possible. Analyzing a work's performance also serves the purpose that, in cases of divergent aesthetic perceptions (which cannot be ruled out a priori), one may reliably appeal to the foundation that ultimately consists in the particular way certain sounds are played. In this sense, the phenomenological approach objectifies what is given, and in turn this becomes the source of legitimate subjective aesthetic experiences. In short, the phenomenology of performing a musical work is a stage of analyzing artistic qualities that are potentially oriented toward aesthetic qualities.

To illustrate what we have just discussed, let us use an example. The performances of the opening measures of Chopin's *Piano Sonata* No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58 by Arthur Rubinstein[20],Martha Argerich[21], Maurizio Pollini[22] and Rafał Blechacz[23] differ from one another in terms of articulation, agogics, dynamics, as well as sonority (despite all being performed on modern pianos). The analysis of these four parameters of sound production presents four different ways in

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18 in performance; it alone is a constitutive value, a norm deriving directly from the practice's telos." J. Dodd, *Being True*..., p. 45. Let us supplement this sentence with another significant statement by Dodd: "I regard interpretive authenticity as the most fundamental performance value within our practice of work performance. Interpretive authenticity in performance is, after all, precisely that way of being faithful to a work that consists in playing it with understanding. "Ibid., p. 142.

19 This stage of phenomenological analysis, consisting in attentive listening to perceptual material, is close to the theory of concatenationism presented by Jerrold Levinson; idem, *Music in the Moment*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY1997, p. 9. It is also worth noting the connection between Levinson's theory and the titular expression "music in the moment" and Husserl's concept of primal impression (*Urimpression*): "The «source-point» with which the «production» of the enduring object begins is a primal impression." E. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology*..., p. 30. Or elsewhere: "The primal impression is something absolutely unmodified, the primal source of all further consciousness and being. Primal impression has as its content that which the word «now» signifies, insofar as it is taken in the strictest sense." Ibid., p. 70.

20 1961, catalog number RCA Red Seal – SB-2151.

21 1986, catalog number Deutsche Grammophon – 419 055-1.

22 1986, catalog number Deutsche Grammophon – 415 346-1.

23 2023, catalog number Deutsche Grammophon – 00289 486 3438.

which the musical work manifests itself, as apprehended in intentional acts of consciousness. The primary aim of analyzing the artistic qualities of individual performances is to grasp, through various intentional acts of consciousness, the constitutive features of the object, and thereby to be able to direct oneself toward the same object in repeatable acts. The recognition of artistic qualities in a performance does not yet determine, as we noted earlier, its aesthetic content, but rather defines, so to speak, the material potential of the artistic object being received.

After recognizing the artistic qualities and their potential orientations in a musical performance, attention must then be given to explicating possible aesthetic responses or resonances of listeners to the perceived qualities. The phenomenology of musical performance as an investigation of the appearance of the intentional aesthetic object thus aims at analyzing strictly aesthetic qualities. After establishing what is going on in the performance (and in reality, partly even during this establishment, since in phenomenological investigation the performing cannot be absolutely separated from the performance), there follows a stage of explicating the aesthetic content or, in other words, the meaning, or meanings respectively, of the intentional object. Let us recall Edmund Husserl's important statement: "*The primitive mode of the giving of something-itself is perception (Wahrnehmung)*"[24]. Let us add that the German term Wahrnehmung used by Husserl is not limited solely to mere perceptual sensation or empirical perception (*bloße Perzeption, empirische Wahrnehmung*), but refers to phenomenological perception (*phänomenologische Wahrnehmung*)[25]. It is also significant that *Wahrnehmung* (perception) is connected with the noun *Wahrheit* (truth), whose alethic meaning was so clearly brought forth by Martin Heidegger[26]. We will therefore assert that aesthetic appearance simultaneously means the reception of truth, which is setting itself in the performance of a musical work[27], and uncovering this aesthetic truth is the main task of the phenomenology of musical performance.

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24 E. Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, transl. D. Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1969, p. 158.

25 E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte nach dem Nachlass. Erster Teil: 1905-1920, Husserliana XIII*, ed. I. Kern, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1973, pp. 144-150; E. Husserl, *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907, Collected Works 7*, transl. R. Rojcewicz, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1997, pp. 39-42.

26 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson, Blackwell, Oxford 2001, pp. 257-269.

27 Regarding "the setting-of-truth-into-the-work", or "the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of beings", also understood as bringing the work-character of the work into motion and happening (*in Gang- und ins Geschehen-Bringen des Werkseins*) see M. Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in: idem, *Off the Beaten Track*, transl. and eds. J. Young, K. Haynes, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, pp. 16-33, 44-49.

Let us return to the example of four different performances of the opening measures of Chopin's *Piano Sonata* in B minor No. 3 Op. 58. Each of the cited performances possesses a different aesthetic characterization, which we could describe – here still at a very general level, and thus only approximate – using emotively charged adjectives. Arthur Rubinstein's performance is restrained and nostalgic, Martha Argerich's performance is dignified and affective, Maurizio Pollini's performance is great and majestic, Rafał Blechacz's performance is impetuous and unsettling. A detailed development of this descriptive characterization will follow in the fourth section of the article, but let us note here already that in such descriptions of aesthetic qualities, besides differences, there may also occur similarities, because words are so imprecise that they may correspond not to one, but to several performances. Let us note additionally that the use of a given term also depends on the person who uses it, thus a performance that is 'unsettling' for me might not be such – for linguistic rather than necessarily aesthetic reasons – for someone else. It might even seem that specifying the meaning of nearsynonymous words, which in colloquial language often function as synonyms, is impossible. Therefore, someone might pose a troublesome question: how many terms would one need to use to individualize the aesthetic experience and do it justice in describing even four performances of just a few measures of a musical work? Unfortunately, we do not know the exact answer to this question because – as we will discuss later – every description of aesthetic experience is inherently performative. Let us note, moreover, that although the differences between artistic qualities in the mentioned performances are directly, straightforwardly graspable in perception, finding the appropriate term characterizing a given aesthetic experience does not come so easily. We will return to this serious problem of 'faithful' description of aesthetic experience shortly, but before that, let us look at the issue of relativity and subjectivity of aesthetic experience.

2 Objectivization as Overcoming Subjectivity and Relativity

Aesthetics has always grappled with the problems of subjectivity and relativity of experience. Indeed, it would be difficult to maintain that an identical repetition of aesthetic experience is possible. Even more absurd would be the belief that all recipients of art possess the same degree of aesthetic sensitivity, enabling them to receive a work of art in exactly the same way. However, I consider it inappropriate to draw from this the conclusion that, given the a priori lack of universality and unanimity of aesthetic judgments, discussions about art are meaningless. For although an identical repetition of aesthetic experience seems impossible, it is not so capricious as to possess a completely different

character each time[28]. Secondly, although each of us possesses different aesthetic sensitivity, this does not negate the possibility of conducting discussions about aesthetic experience and, consequently, the possibility of further developing one's sensitivity, combined with the way of understanding the work of art. It is natural that a performer's way of understanding a given work evolves as they gain new aesthetic experiences, and changes as a result of long-term, years-long reflection on the interpretation of the work. A similar process can – and in my opinion, should – occur in the case of sensitive and openminded, i.e., non-dogmatic listeners.

Let us therefore consider what objectivization means in aesthetics, how we objectify aesthetic experiences, and what is the scope of this objectifying. Intentionality as an act-based directing of attention toward a certain object determines the sphere and manner of the phenomenon's appearance. In the sphere of intentionality, we perceptually apprehend (*auffassen*) the phenomenon as a correlate of the intended physical object and thematize what we perceive. All perception is thus a thematizing of what is perceived, and along with perception comes the striving to understand what is given in perception[29]. This thematization serves the function of objectivating or objectifying, which constitutes the cognitive activity of the lowest level and for this reason can be called, as Husserl did, an act of judgment[30].For the act of judgment does not merely mean predicative judgment, but in a broader sense is a prepredicative and objectifying turning-toward the perceived existent as an aesthetic phenomenon appearing in the subject's experience. The scope of objectivization of aesthetic experience encompasses all data apprehended in perception, and as such, they constitute the reference point for aesthetic analyses. It is thereby clear that exhausting all possible meanings of a given aesthetic phenomenon is not possible in a singular perceptual apprehension, which is why it requires a multi-perspectival analysis of a hermeneutic character. This multiperspectivity as an open research project allows for new ways of aesthetic experiencing of phenomenological data, insofar as they find justification in the same material foundation that is a specific artistic performance of a musical work, or – to put it somewhat differently – insofar as they are grounded in the same source perceptual material.

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28 J. Dodd, *Being True*..., pp. 129-135.

29 To avoid oversimplifying the issue of perception, let us add Husserl's important observation that retentional and protentional moments are also joined to the source primal impression; E. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology*..., pp. 21-38, 84-89.

30 E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment. Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, ed. L. Landgrebe, transl. J. S. Churchill, K. Ameriks, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973, p. 60.

Complete overcoming of subjectivity and relativity of experience in favor of objectivity and absoluteness is impossible in art. I would say, however, that this is fortunately so, because otherwise art, instead of developing and creating new forms, would begin to ossify and wither. Getting to know a work of art through taking different perspectives – which is particularly facilitated by the situation of different performances of the same musical work – provides an opportunity to expand one's aesthetic horizon by apprehending different adumbrations (*Abschattungen*) of the phenomenon, each of which has something of its own to offer. When a work of art sees the light of day, it becomes intersubjectively accessible, and perhaps what in exact sciences is often taken as a flaw and obstacle should in aesthetic investigations be considered an advantage, since thanks to the properties of subjectivity and relativity, aesthetic experience can be developed and refined. Phenomenological aesthetics as a rigorous science in the Husserlian sense (*strenge Wissenschaft*) and simultaneously as an a priori impossibletocomplete project of overcoming subjectivity and relativity should, however, be capable of descriptively revealing the content of the phenomenon. Therefore, we will now move on to key methodological issues connected with the description of the experience of musical performance.

3 Phenomenological Description of the Experience of Musical Performance

In establishing the framework of phenomenological analysis of musical performance, let us first recall Edmund Husserl's postulate from *Logical Investigations*: "we must go back to the things themselves"[31]. This postulate could be complemented by the formulation 'we must go back to the experiences themselves', which in turn refers to the so-called principle of all principles. This fundamental principle of Husserl states, "*that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily* (so to speak, in its «personal» actuality) *offered to us in «intuition» is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being*, but also *only within the limits in which it is presented there*"[32]. Within these frameworks lay Mikel Dufrenne's research methodology, where phenomenological reduction (*epoché*) encompassed the physical reality of the artwork, thus the intentional perception of the aesthetic object did not refer to the painting as canvas, music as sounds, or the dancer as a biological organism[33]. Importantly, in Husserl's principle of all principles, the way of

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31 E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 1, ed. D. Moran, transl. J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London 2001, p. 168.

32 E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book – General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology, Collected Works 2*, transl. F. Kersten, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1983, p. 44.

33 M. Dufrenne, *Intentionnalité et Esthétique*, "Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger" 1954, no. 144, pp. 77-78.

understanding the limits of appearance plays a particularly significant role. In a hasty assessment, it might seem that these limits narrow the scope of the phenomenon's (artwork's) appearance exclusively to purely aesthetic qualities, excluding, for example, Ingarden's metaphysical qualities[34]. However, I believe that artificially setting limits to the possible appearance of phenomenon conflicts with the postulated – though in reality utopian – idea of phenomenology being free from presuppositions, thus the question of limits actually concerns the originarity (*Originarität*) and legitimacy of the ways aesthetic qualities appear, even when they possess extra-aesthetic resonance in the form of metaphysical or religious qualities, an example of which is the category of saturated phenomena, extensively characterized by Jean-Luc Marion[35].

The core and main task of phenomenological analysis is to track down all adumbrations (*Abschattungen*) of the appearing intentional aesthetic object and capture it in description. However, the description itself, as we indicated earlier, is inherently performative and as such is characterized by the fact that, as an individual and objectifying perspective, it addresses a wider group of people who will subsequently evaluate the truthfulness or fidelity of this description according to their own subjective aesthetic experiences. Thus, every description of subjective, individual aesthetic experience is put to the test of intersubjective communicability and is subject to further evaluations, additions, or corrections. The performative character of description is also evident in that it mediates between the appearing object and its experience. Speaking metaphorically in musical terminology, the performance of a musical work is like the tonic, and its experience is the dominant, and the better this tension is captured in description, the greater the chance that this individual aesthetic experience will be faithfully communicated. However, what type of description is capable of capturing this correlation between the object and its aesthetic experience?

Let us note that the specialized language used in music theory can describe the structure of a musical work with great precision but cannot satisfactorily express aesthetic experience. On the other hand, language characterized by emotive terms can indeed reveal subjective impressions but has great difficulty locating those moments that constitute the objective cause of these experiences. The ideal would therefore be to combine the advantages of these

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34 R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, transl. G. G. Grabowicz, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973, pp. 290-299.

35 J.-L. Marion, *Being Given:Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, transl. J. L. Kosky, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002, pp. 199-247; J.-L. Marion, *The Saturated Phenomenon*, transl. T. A. Carlson, in: idem, *The Visible and the Revealed*, transl. Ch. M. Gschwandtner, et. al., Fordham University Press, New York 2008, pp. 18-48.

two types of description through balanced use of technical terms that address the object and terms with emotive connotations that are meant to reflect the subject's experience. As a case study, we will analyze the first phrase of the aforementioned *Piano Sonata* in B minor, No. 3, Op. 58 by Fryderyk Chopin in two outstanding and only seemingly similar performances: those by Maurizio Pollini and Rafał Blechacz – winners of the *International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition* from 1960 and 2005[36].

Let us begin with the analysis of Maurizio Pollini's performance. Pollini's tempo is moderately fast, which corresponds to the marking *maestoso* with which Chopin qualified the *Allegro* tempo of the first movement of the *Piano Sonata* in B minor. The quarter-note pulse is relatively even, though not metronomically equal, as the last two chords in the first measure were subtly lengthened, and also the last chord of the first phrase (a musicologist would say at the end of its second member – the consequent), which is accompanied by an *arpeggio* (here the spreading of the chord in the low register), was gently displaced from the metronomic pulse. The dynamics of this performance are even, mainly in the range of *forte* (loud), but one can notice an emphasis on the first long note in the melody (half note F-sharp) and an increase in dynamics (*crescendo*) in moderate range in two ascending chord progressions (first in quarternote rhythm, then in eighth-note rhythm). Also noteworthy is the distinct (*forte*) treatment of the notes (mainly octave double-notes) in the lower register. The exclusive articulation of this performance is *legato*, thus connecting the notes (of course not taking into account the short eighth-note rest, which in the second measure serves as a breath between the antecedent and consequent of this first phrase).

Similarly, thus limiting ourselves to analyzing the artistic qualities of the performance of the first phrase of Chopin's *Piano Sonata* in B minor No. 3 Op. 58, let us listen to Rafał Blechacz's recording. The perceived tempo of his playing is fast, though we can note marginally that the metronomic difference between Blechacz's and Pollini's playing is not great. The agogics in this performance is very even, and Blechacz does not operate with subtle tempo changes as Pollini does. The dynamics, on the other hand, are clearly differentiated: he realizes the *forte* dynamics with decisiveness and begins the crescendo on the quarter-note chords, and then eighth-note chords, quietly (*piano*), achieving through this a very wide dynamic range. Unlike Pollini, Blechacz does not emphasize the octave double-notes in the low register and allows the melody in the

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36 Due to limited space, this analysis will not include the previously mentioned performances by Arthur Rubinstein and Martha Argerich. As a side note, however, let us record that Arthur Rubinstein was the honorary chairman of the *International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition* in 1960, and Martha Argerich was the winner of this Competition in 1965.

upper register to clearly dominate. In terms of articulation, *legato* predominates, with the exception of short (*staccato*) ascending eighth-note chords.

The analysis of sonority is perhaps the most difficult to conduct in this case, as both these performances – and let us recall that these are studio recordings – are of excellent quality with saturated and clear sound. It is also obvious that the tonal differences between two modern high-class Steinway pianos will be smaller than when comparing completely different pianos – as happens for example in the *International Chopin Competition on Period Instruments*, where a performer changes instruments even during a single competition stage, matching their tonal properties to the works being performed. Let us also note that sonority does not depend solely on the quality of the instrument, hall acoustics, and – in this case – the recording technique. The sonority of a performance also largely depends on how the performer makes use of the instrument's existing potential and acoustic conditions.

Despite these analytical difficulties, let us proceed to present the sonoristic aspect of both these performances. Comparing the recordings of Pollini and Blechacz, one might get the impression that Blechacz's performance takes place in a spacious hall with considerable reverberation, while simultaneously feeling as if one is in close proximity to the piano's sound. In Pollini's recording, on the other hand, one cannot hear such significant reverberation, and one can sense a distinct spatial separation from the instrument[37].

Comparing these two recordings, one might also get the impression that Pollini's sound seems to decay somewhat faster than Blechacz's. This is not an insignificant sonoristic property, because with longersustaining notes it is easier to play *cantabile* (in a singing style) – especially in long phrases maintained in slow tempo, which will only appear in later fragments of this *Sonata*. The sonority in Blechacz's recording seems intense but homogeneous, monochromatic, whereas in Pollini's it is more natural, i.e., closer to real acoustic conditions and also more varied.

After analyzing the artistic qualities of Pollini's and Blechacz's performances (i.e., agogics, dynamics, articulation and sonority), we will now move on to aesthetic analysis. Pollini's performance, as we mentioned earlier, gives an impression of greatness and majesty. This impression is primarily influenced by the moderately fast tempo of playing and strong dynamics, emphasizing a deep and mature tone. This majesty is simultaneously full of natural human gesture, which is emphasized by nuanced agogic changes. These agogic changes –

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37 Let us remember that we are talking about an impression here. In reality, the Herkules Saal in Munich, where Pollini recorded the *Sonata*, is more than twice as large (964 square meters) than the Teldex Studio in Berlin (455 square meters), where Blechacz recorded the *Sonata*.

which are, in my opinion, a particular feature of Pollini's performance – evoke an impression of dignity, refinement and elegance, as well as spontaneity and spiritual sensitivity. At the same time, it is a performance full of vigor, and the *legato* articulation (along with *forte* dynamics, moderately fast tempo and deep sound) reinforces the impression of vastness and greatness, not to mention some special wisdom or life maturity.

As for Blechacz's performance, we said earlier that it is impetuous and unsettling. Why exactly did we describe it this way and how could we refine this description? Let us note that the very choice of fast tempo, which imposes hastiness, evokes a mood of impetuousness. Additionally, this impetuousness is underlaid with anxiety because it is so unyielding, i.e., without the slightest agogic differences, as if it would not accept any word of opposition. This first phrase hurries forward from the very first note, though we do not really guess the reasons for this unsettling haste. The impetuousness and anxiety are intensified by clear dynamic changes, which, like deep breathing during increased physical effort, betray the gravity of the situation. This agogic uncompromisingness, so to speak, combined with the deep breathing of dynamics, reveals not only strength but also determination. Determination, understood here as decisiveness and self-confidence, is also revealed through the shortened articulation in eighthnote chords in *crescendo* dynamics, which in this manner of performance emphatically underscore the power of musical character[38].

Then, let us see that if, through a thought experiment, we tried to personify the character of this first phrase of Chopin's *Piano Sonata* in B minor No. 3 Op. 58 based on the performances of Pollini and Blechacz, we would obtain quite different figures – with different temperaments and different personality types. And although at first glance these might seem like similar performances, essentially realizing the same musical idea, closer analysis reveals significant artistic and aesthetic differences.

The above analysis should be supplemented with several final methodological remarks. Let us note that in this analysis we limited ourselves to phenomenological data, while the physical side of performance was bracketed, meaning we did not analyze what fingering Pollini and Blechacz used, nor at what moment and to what degree pedaling was applied. We occasionally referred to the score of Chopin's *Sonata*, but only to such an extent that with

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38 It is worth noting that both these stages of analysis use and join the features of two views in analytic philosophy of music, which are usually referred to as formalism and anti-formalism; P. Kivy, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY1990, pp. 30-145; P. Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 67-109; J. O. Young, *Critique of Pure Music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. 1-124.

minimal knowledge of musical notation one could, along with the recording, locate the places the analysis concerned[39]. With such a short fragment as we analyzed here, insight into the score does not seem necessary, but in a larger study it could prove helpful, and sometimes even essential. It should also be added that technical terms typical of detailed music studies were used sparingly in this analysis. It also seems that the use of technical terms in analyzing artistic aspects of performance is very helpful, while in analyzing aesthetic aspects one can (at least partially) abandon them in favor of a more 'literary' description – under the condition, however, that the connection between aesthetic and artistic analysis can be maintained[40]. One should also be aware of the serious risk that fantasizing in the 'literary' description of aesthetic aspects inevitably leads to empty words, because then the description moves away from primal phenomenological data. And one more methodological characteristic should be noted, namely that this type of analysis is relatively detailed, which constitutes both its advantage and disadvantage. The advantage is that this type of description has a chance to faithfully render the actual aesthetic experience; the disadvantage, in turn, is that an analysis of one performance of an entire work of the size of Chopin's Sonata would be extensive. Moreover, each performance of a specific musical work deserves an individual, separate analysis.

4 Conclusion

The distinction introduced at the beginning of the article between the phenomenology of performing a musical work and the phenomenology of musical performance could have stopped at distinguishing between analysis conducted from first-person and third-person perspectives. Such an approach to research methodology, although quite intuitive and tempting, would in my conviction trivialize the entire problematic, because in the phenomenological sphere (unlike in physical reality) one cannot establish a clear line of demarcation between performing and listening to a performance of a musical work. Both these aspects – i.e., performing and listening – are contained in musical performance. However, the artistic qualities and aesthetic qualities of musical performance are not identical with each other, which is why their closer examination can contribute to deepening the existing knowledge about music. The

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39 A comprehensive and authoritative online source of Chopin's scores is *Chopin Online*; https://chopinonline.ac.uk/.

40 A somewhat similar example of describing aesthetic experience – in reference to the first movement of Arnold Schoenberg's *Six Little Piano Pieces* Op. 19 – can be found in Andrzej Krawiec, *Merging Philosophical Traditions for a New Way to Research Music: On the Ekphrastic Description of Musical Experience*, "The British Journal of Aesthetics" 2024, vol. 64, no. 1, pp. 115-118, https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayad018.

model of phenomenological analysis of musical performance that I propose fits into a broader panorama of philosophy of music and aesthetics and does not mean establishing a separate field of research. Thus, the research model presented in this article can complement current aesthetic debates in the area of philosophy of music, taking place predominantly within the analytic tradition. John Rink also expressed a related intuition about expanding the analytic perspective with the phenomenological tradition, additionally noting that it would be propitious to shift the emphasis from composer-focused writings to the attitudes and actions of performers[41]. It would, of course, be helpful if performers also actively participated in conducted phenomenological research, since they too in their daily practice deal with the aesthetic dimension of musical works. The interdisciplinary bond of music–philosophy significantly calls for mutual understanding between philosophers and musicians, and the ground for this understanding can be nothing other than musical practice and philosophical literature – both analytic and phenomenological.

Returning thus to the question asked at the very beginning of this article, whether phenomenological research on musical performance has already begun, we can repeat with full conviction that yes, it has. However, it is only in its initial phase and requires development, refinement, and elaboration. The difficulties and challenges that multiply in this type of research should not discourage us from undertaking them, but rather be welcomed[42], because thanks to these new perspectives we have a chance not only to better understand music but also to experience it more deeply.

James O. Young recently noted that the concept of the aesthetic is highly problematic because it has an extremely broad scope of application in refer-ence to very different experiences and objects. This situation consequently eads to obscuring differences between individual aesthetic objects and experiences. The problems multiply all the more because aesthetic objects cannot be identified without knowing which experiences are aesthetic, and vice versa[43]. Analysis of aesthetic experience is certainly challenging, and we can in this context recall Edmund Husserl's famous statement about the time-constituting flow as absolute subjectivity: "In the actuality-experience we have the primal source-point and a continuity of moments of reverberation. For all of this, we lack names"[44]. In my conviction, going back to the experiences themselves and searching for appropriate names for them is an important and current task of

41 J. Rink, *Music in Profile*..., p. 37.
42 Ibid., p. 205.
43 J. O. Young, *The Myth of the Aesthetic*, "Erkenntnis" 2024, forthcoming,p. 16, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-024-00871-y.
44 E. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology*..., p. 79.

phenomenological aesthetics, within which lies the problematic of musical performance as an authentic source of aesthetic experiences.

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W KIERUNKU FENOMENOLOGII WYKONANIA MUZYCZNEGO (streszczenie)

Debaty estetyczne na temat muzyki od kilku dekad toczą się głównie na gruncie filozofii analitycznej, a począwszy od momentu wzmożonego zainteresowania kwestią autentyczności coraz częściej zwracają się one w kierunku problematyki wykonania muzycznego. Nie bez powodu zresztą, ponieważ to wykonania indywidualizują sposób jawienia się określonych dzieł muzycznych, stanowiąc tym samym prymarne źródło doświadczeń estetycznych. Analiza szeroko rozumianego doświadczenia była natomiast – i nadal jest – ważnym obszarem badań fenomenologii, stąd też potrzeba poszerzenia refleksji analitycznej o tradycję fenomenologiczną wydaje się naturalna. W tym artykule podejmuję zagadnienia metodologiczne, które torują drogę badaniom nad wykonaniem muzycznym w obrębie estetyki fenomenologicznej i jednocześnie stanowią uzupełnienie analitycznej filozofii muzyki. Na przykładzie analizy fragmentu Sonaty fortepianowej h-moll nr 3 op. 58 Fryderyka Chopina w wykonaniach Maurizia Polliniego oraz Rafała Blechacza pokazuję również praktyczne zastosowanie i efektywność proponowanej metodologii badawczej.

Słowa kluczowe: doświadczenie estetyczne, wykonanie muzyczne, fenomenologia, filozofia muzyki

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