

Summary of the Thesis

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Thesis title: Bodies to Listening. Somatoaesthetic of the Musical Events

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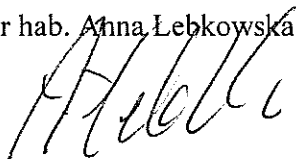
The main goal of this dissertation is to understand the somatic relations involved between the listening body and the "body to listening" during a musical event. The assumed hypothesis is based on the conviction that the somatic tensions between the listener and the musician undergo dynamic transformations and result from the properties of particular social formations and politically organized body regimes. Therefore, the thesis proposed in this dissertation is as follows: music is not only the art of the aesthetic organization of sounds in time, it is also a set of geopolitically entangled practices of somatic and sensory stimulation of the listening subject. As a consequence, every musical phenomenon bears the mark of political action, and musical corporeality should be treated as a sensitive barometer of the socio-cultural discourse of the present times. In my research, I present selected music projects from the years 1980 – 2020. These are the decades in which the bodily aspects of music were strongly problematized, and the criticism of neoliberal ideas, including identity policies, was particularly severe. I narrow down my research to three somatic areas: racial, queer, and transgender. Thus, I prove that artists whose bodies are carriers of historical persecution can deconstruct the current forms of social marginalization and systemic violence and therefore shape new forms of communities organized within the framework of musical events. I argue that the potential of contemporary music lies in critical acts of disagreement with various forms of exclusion. To prove my ideas I present my research in three main parts, which are divided into six chapters.

In the first part, "Music of Late-Capitalism", I presented the most important objectives and features of the cultural theory of music. I tried to outline the socio-economic context, essential for understanding the properties of the most current phenomena of late-capitalistic music. The first chapter ("Musical and Social Structures") is written as a form of a critical recapitulation of Theodor Adorno's and Jacques Attali's socio-musical theories. The theoreticians' proposals become the starting point for further considerations on the relationship between the capitalist system and the aesthetic organization of sounds in the era of postmodern culture. I try to show how the constitutive properties of the economic system, i.e. social inequalities, identity politics, and neoliberal ideology, find their reflection on the cultural map of late-capitalism and are audible in the present soundscape. I planned the next chapter ("The Musical Landscape of Late-Capitalism"), as a space for interpretations of some interesting examples of musical interventions into capitalistic contradictions of the social order. It is also a place where I present an outline of the history of the romance between the Polish music market and the neoliberal ideology after the fall of communism. In the summary of the first part, I point out that capitalism does not recognize any externalities to the system and exudes a depressive sense given by the lack of an alternative, which Mark Fisher called capitalist realism. However, by resigning from Fisher's pessimistic vision, I want to prove that despite systemically supported adversities, there are still possible gestures that bind the global community around specific affects and emotions. Those acts may contribute to the revaluation and repair social environment. In this way, contemporary music not only effectively dethrones the alienating concept of subjectless listening, but also engages the listener and the artist in a somatic bond that can easily take the form of non-heroic resistance.

The second part – “Somatoesthetics of Musical Events” – presents the most important concepts concerning the hermeneutics of the body and political entanglement of musical phenomena. Here, I wanted to scrutinize selected moments in the technological and aesthetic evolution of sound structures. In chapter four (“Time, Space and Sound”) I present different ideas of musical time and space, which - thanks to the invention of the phonograph and television - became even more complex and therefore enabled postmodern aesthetic experiments. To better illustrate the effects of technological changes, I chose audiovisual projects by the British band The Beatles, which (thanks to conscious choices and audiovisual recording techniques) prefigured postmodernity. My goal is to present how the progressive technological mediatization of the body led to a situation in which a new space of critical and interventional artistic practice between the voice and the body was introduced. In the next chapter (“Virtual and Somatic Aspects of Contemporary Musical Events”) I present my own understanding of a musical event, which I treat as an intense spatiotemporal area where the relationship between the listening subject and the perceived artist takes place. At this point, I also introduced the additional “body to listening” concept, which can be understood both as a real body - perceivable in the concert space - and as a mediated object available to experience via media platforms. In order to operationalize both concepts more precisely, I used Jacques Rancière's aesthetic theory. His ideas were my main methodological inspiration but I decided to significantly supplement them with other aesthetical and philosophical propositions gathered around the vast idea of corporeality. Somatoaesthetics, as I define the set of hermeneutic methods on corporeality based on Rancière's theory, has served me as an effective way of interpretation, especially useful to analyze all kinds of somatic strategies used within musical events, and allowing me to better understand the complex relationships between the listening subject and the “body to listening”.

In the third and final part – “The Archival Body and Corporeal Utopias” – I present different dimensions of the 21st century musical corporeality. To create a selection of the most exemplary somatic phenomena, I was guided by several self-imposed criteria: (1) world music market recognition of chosen artist; (2) musician's attribution to the category of the Other (e.g. non-white, non-male, non-heteronormative, etc.); (3) the interventional and critical nature of artist's work or its significant entanglement in the neoliberal ideology. I narrowed my research to artists popular in the United States of America from 1980 to 2020. In this part I presented how the present music appears as a dialectical machinery, the products of which - although undoubtedly entangled in capitalism – constantly destabilize this system. In chapters five (“The Archival Body”) and six (“The Corporeal Utopias”) I interpret artists who, in my opinion, represent non-normative forms of corporeality and effectively intervene in systems of racist, homophobic and transphobic oppression. The artists I have selected systematically show distortions, exclusions, inequalities, unconscious fears and irrationality inscribed in the contemporary capitalist system.

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