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LISTENING TO PARIS: CHOPIN BETWEEN THE *SOIRÉES INTIMES* AND THE MODERN SOUNDSCAPE

Leon Botstein, in a double issue of *The Musical Quarterly* entitled 'Music as Heard', pointed out the crucial importance of studies on the history of listening. He confirmed that the nineteenth century was a watershed of key qualitative and quantitative changes in civilisation which affected music.¹ Studies on changes in the soundscape, the result of developments in modern life, and on ways of listening in Paris during the first half of the nineteenth century lead to reflection not only on the sources of our modernity, but also on changes in aesthetic and cognitive categories, more simply known as sensitivities.²

Luigi Russolo stated in *L'arte dei rumori* in 1913 that the birth of noise in the nineteenth century changed sensitivity forever. The use of machines, that element of the industrial revolution which had the greatest impact on the soundscape, further stratified society, this time in terms of aural comfort. The audio phenomena, as broadly understood, resulting from social divisions had crystallised much earlier, but pointing to the first decades of the nineteenth century as indicative of the key directions of the changes taking place allows us to outline the simultaneous refinement and degradation of aural sensitivity, which constitutes a problem for contemporary aural ecology.

¹ See Leon Botstein, 'Toward a History of Listening', *The Musical Quarterly*, 1998/3, p. 430.

² See Richard Leppert, 'The Social Discipline of Listening', in Hans Erich Bödeker, Patrice Veit and Michael Werner (eds), *Le concert et son public. Mutations de la vie musicale en Europe de 1780 à 1914 (France, Allemagne, Angleterre)* (Paris, 2002), p. 483; R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, 1993), p. 103.

1.

When Chopin arrived in Paris, in 1831, ‘the capital of the nineteenth century’, as Paris was later referred to by Walter Benjamin, was undergoing a number of important changes. Louis-Philippe, the ‘Citizen King’, had just acceded to the throne of France. At the same time, prefect Claude-Philibert Barthelot, Comte de Rambuteau, was beginning his radical conversion of Paris, to be finalised in the new urban order of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann. The July Monarchy saw an increase in the social and economic power of the new bourgeoisie (e.g. the Rothschilds), which paved the way for new customs, and after the devastating cholera epidemic of 1832, prefect Rambuteau, by means of his multi-dimensional urban and social engineering, and in accordance with the will of the Citizen King, undertook to give Paris ‘water, air and shade’.³ However, the urban and social changes in Paris during the first half of the nineteenth century involved not only replacing the complicated grid of the medieval city with the simple lines of the contemporary capital and harmonising the social and economic functions of the districts, but also a gradual departure from traditional models of behaviour, emphasising urban, entrepreneurial, ‘voracious mobility’, to borrow a term from Richard Sennett’s study *The Fall of Public Man*.⁴ Hanna Arendt sees this break as a symptom of the new *vita activa*, as opposed to the *vita contemplativa*, which was decaying during the nineteenth century.⁵ The growing number of aural stimuli, including new aural phenomena, are ordered and managed, but at the same time their heterogeneity increases, and changes in the way of life increase the pace at which they are heard. The city begins to appear to residents moving through it as a palimpsest, where organisation on a mass scale, labour productivity and discourse on order emerge as fundamental criteria,⁶ and the authorities exercise increasing control

³ *Mémoires du comte de Rambuteau publiés par son petit-fils* (Paris, 1905), p. 368.

⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 155.

⁵ See Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge MA, 1999), p. 53.

⁶ e.g. Anaïs Bazin, *L'Époque sans nom. Esquisses de Paris 1830–1833* (Paris, 1833), vol. i, pp. 44–45; cf. Alain Corbin, *Le miasme et la jonquille. L'odorat et l'imaginaire social XVIIIe–XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2008).

over citizens' behaviour, even in the ludic, and thereby the political, realm (subversion and discipline).⁷

These phenomena not only had a decisive impact on the soundscape; they also initiated changes in aural sensitivity and led to the formation of a different way of listening.⁸ Leaving aside considerations of attempts to eliminate noise from the public sphere made during the first decades of the nineteenth century (from changes in urban solutions such as surfacing technologies to legal regulations, e.g. customs⁹), this text focuses on two attitudes towards the contemporary soundscape: that of cooperating with the phenomena of that soundscape, and that of cutting off what is perceived as the aural encumbrance of modernity. The second approach,



⁷ See Corbin, 'Invitation à une histoire du silence: «Sedebit solitarius et tacebit» (prophète Jérémie) («Le solitaire s'assiera et se taira»)', in Brigitte Maillard (ed.), *Foi, fidélité, amitié en Europe à la période moderne. Mélanges* (Tours, 1996). In this text, there is no exhaustive discussion of the fascinating aspect of the relation between aural sensitivity and objection to authority, which Chopin saw and heard during a visit by General Ramorino, and also in 1848. Also beyond the scope of this text is the issue of Chopin's political declarations and how his work was received in that context (Berlioz, writing of the mazurkas, which 'have something in them of the customs of the elegant world for which they seem to have been created', emphasises a 'contempt for common surroundings'. Hector Berlioz, *Journal des débats*, 27 October 1849, quoted in Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *L'univers musical de Chopin* (Paris, 2000), pp. 120–121. To outline just the first of these problems, it can be stated that the people of Paris on one hand disrupt the soundscape (subversion of power) and on the other submit to the authority which is to become or is an expression of the interests of the masses (subjection to discipline). The second model leads directly to submission to those in charge and thereby, paradoxically, to the soundscape being conducted (a dampening of individuality). During the 1848 revolution, Lamartine apparently envied Liszt his public acclaim (Sennett, *The Fall*, p. 236), and, as Sennett observes, the politician becomes 'a believable, moving public performer, a personality of authority who could impose on his working-class audience that discipline of silence which the bourgeois audience normally imposed on itself in the domain of Art' (ibid., p. 224). Always, however, 'danger from below and danger from the vocal crowd become united' (ibid., p. 299), and the spontaneous, loud expression of reactions and desires results from a lack of polish, which is one of the main regulators of customs and class order; 'public silence among workers was thought by the bourgeoisie to be a sign that, if not content, the urban worker was at least submissive' (ibid., p. 214).

⁸ This text is a continuation of research conducted in two articles: Maciej Janicki, 'Dziewiętnastowieczna fonosfera jako kontekst twórczości Chopina' [The nineteenth-century phonosphere as a context for the art of Chopin], in Maciej Gołąb (ed.), *Chopin w kulturze polskiej* [Chopin in Polish culture] (Wrocław, 2009); 'Polityka i grające tabakierki. Chopin a fonosystem' [Politics and musical snuffboxes. Chopin and the phonosystem], in Sebastian Bernat (ed.), *Dźwięk w krajobrazie jako przedmiot badań interdyscyplinarnych* [Sound in the landscape as a subject of interdisciplinary research], Prace Komisji Krajobrazu Kulturowego PTG, 11 (Lublin, 2008).

⁹ On surfacing technologies, see e.g. Charles Gourlier, *Des voies publiques et des habitations particulières à Paris. Essai sur les améliorations qui y ont été successivement apportées ainsi qu'aux habitations des classes pauvres et ouvrières* (Paris, 1852).

in the case of the art of Chopin, is to choose *intimacy* (a term borrowed from the *soirée intime* and the increasingly common idea of intimacy¹⁰) against *modernity*. It would be an oversimplification to describe this as mere escapism,¹¹ but it is not wrong to perceive in its traits an adherence to tradition and to certain elitist forms with class associations.

When Chopin wrote, just after arriving in Paris, that ‘there’s more shouting, uproar, rattling and mud than you can possibly imagine. One gets lost in this swarm, and it is convenient inasmuch as no one asks how anyone lives’,¹² he indicated, in addition to his surprise at the nineteenth-century din, the right to silence in public places, describing modern mute observation, the ‘passive spectacle’.¹³ One cannot help but think of the *flâneur*, but one who not only looks, but listens – the *flâneur* who chooses not the intimacy of the salon but the spectacle of the street. He is difficult to define, because he seems to hide his personality, to remain neutral, blasé, an uninvolved observer, as later masterfully described by George Simmel and Walter Benjamin.¹⁴ One description of the problem of noise in Paris and people’s strained nerves is the short, satirical work *Première facétie*, from 1840,¹⁵ while an outstanding description of the sounds of the Parisian

¹⁰ Louis-Philippe presented himself as a model of ‘intimité familiale’, and during his reign the home foyer (a solely private sphere) stands in counterpoint to the salon (a public and private sphere). See Monique Eleb-Vidal and Anne Debarre-Blanchard, ‘Architecture domestique et mentalité. Les traités et les pratiques XVIème–XIXème siècle’, *In Extension: recherches à l’École d’Architecture Paris-Villemin*, 1984/2, pp. 147–149; cf. Sennett, *The Fall*, published in France as *Les tyrannies de l’intimité* (1979). In cities, however, the phenomenon should be dated to the second half of the eighteenth century, in connection with the search for ‘aural comfort’. See Jean-Pierre Gutton, *Bruits et sons dans notre histoire* (Paris, 2000), pp. 84–94.

¹¹ Cf. Berlioz’s perception, published in 1842, which may be related to the surplus of inferior artistic works produced in the *pianopolis*: ‘Chopin always stands at the side, you don’t see him in the theatres or at concerts. You could say he’s afraid of music and musicians’; Berlioz, *Journal des débats*, 13 April 1842, after Eigeldinger, *L’univers*, p. 114.

¹² Fryderyk Chopin to Norbert A. Kumelski, Paris, 18 November 1831; *Chopin’s Polish Letters*, tr. David Frick (Warsaw, 2016), p. 243.

¹³ Sennett, *The Fall*, p. 126.

¹⁴ Cf. the earlier, exhaustive description of a *flâneur* from Chopin’s time in Bazin, *L’Époque sans nom*, vol. ii: pp. 301–322, and the brilliant *physiology* of the scene in which the *flâneur* appears in Honoré de Balzac, ‘Histoire et physiologie des Boulevards de Paris’, in George Sand et al., *Le Diable à Paris. Paris et les Parisiens. Mœurs et coutumes, caractères et portraits des habitants de Paris, tableau complet de leur vie privée, publique, politique, artistique, littéraire, industrielle, etc., etc. Vues, monuments, édifices publics et particuliers, lieux célèbres et principaux aspects de Paris* (Paris, 1845), vol. ii, pp. 90–103.

¹⁵ J. C. Maldan, *Première facétie. Les Embarras de Paris. Quel horrible fracas! Quel tumulte! Quels cris!* (Paris, 1840).

street in the spirit of modern *flâneurism* is provided by *Études physiologiques sur les grandes métropoles de l'Europe occidentale*, by an author using the pen name Gaëtan Niépovié, wherein we read:

'The cries of the pedlars, the daily news bulletins, the whipcracks of the speeding coachman, the sounds of the coach driver's bugle, the neighing of the heavy wagon-horses, the "to the station! to the station!" of the dandy in the tilbury, the sour notes of the blind clarinettist, the yapping of another blind man's barrel-organ, the bitter harmony of an old Savoyard, the rumble of thousands of wheels of all sorts of vehicles [...]; and all this without pause. In a word, anthills of people, swarms of businessmen like ants, as indefatigable as bees, marching off to look for the myrrh and honey known as money, or coming back, nimble and ready, loaded with as much of the precious booty as they are able to peck; and in Paris, they can peck a lot'.¹⁶

While on certain streets (e.g. Saint-Martin, Saint-Denis) 'the most disorderly, the maddest rush of traffic' dominates,¹⁷ on some boulevards (e.g. the quiet, elegant des Italiens, but not the noisy du Temple of the common people¹⁸)

'the knot of activity loosens up; there is a relaxation; the movement here is more rhythmic, more regular, people's physiognomy more mobile, more serene, their gestures here are not so vehement, so abrupt; in short, there is a visible moderation of thought in the to-and-fro of the boulevards'.¹⁹

The author's most interesting observations, however, concern new ways of perceiving sounds. As Jonathan Crary notes,

'Vision, in a wide range of locations, is refigured as dynamic, temporal, and composite [...] the demise of the punctual or anchored classical observer begins in the early nineteenth century, increasingly displaced by the unstable attentive subject'.²⁰

This type of perception is represented by Niépovié,²¹ who also describes trying to catch hold of fragments of conversation heard while

¹⁶ Gaëtan Niépovié (pen name of Karol Frankowski), *Études physiologiques sur les grandes métropoles de l'Europe occidentale. Paris* (Paris, 1840), pp. 108–109.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁸ See Auguste Luchet, *Paris. Esquisses dédiées au peuple parisien et à M.J.-A. Dulaure, membre de la Société des Antiques de Paris* (Paris, 1830), pp. 11–12, 66–73, 149–157.

¹⁹ Niépovié, *Études physiologiques*, p. 114.

²⁰ Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 148.

²¹ See Niépovié, *Études physiologiques*, p. 108.

flâneuring. What seems most interesting, however, is not the words heard, but his descriptions of what is lost: ‘Interjections, bursts of speech which only offend the ear’, ‘a reply broken by the murmur of other voices’, ‘The rest dead in the distance’, ‘Gone’, ‘Incomplete’, ‘The end of the sentence drowned in the tumult’, ‘A conversation which petered out at the corner of rue Montorgueil, then continued farther on with vigorous gesturing’, ‘The end of a lively discussion, which judging from the gestures was full of fire for the pair, of which one was an official, the other a bourgeois’, ‘A speculative plan drowned in the noise’, ‘The end of the sentence unintelligible’, ‘The rest of the advice, the point, was deafened by the unbearable caterwauling, running from one end of the boulevard to the other, of that line of petty vendors which you must have seen in the MIRROR OF FRENCH INDUSTRY’.²² The aesthetic of this passage, a type of chance observation, brings to mind contemporary ways of reacting to reality in its discontinuity and heterogeneity. The phenomena other than motion which render it impossible to compose a coherent image (‘tumult’, ‘murmur’, ‘noise’, ‘merchandise’, verbs such as ‘petered out’, ‘dead’, and especially ‘drowned’ and ‘deafened by’) show how complex the modern aural reality is, where hearing *en passant* takes on a double meaning. Focusing on a selected phenomenon no longer constitutes attachment (a coherent narrative). What dominates is accidental framing, which has little to do with composition. The musical, literary or visual miniature, incompleteness, internal heterogeneity and frequent discontinuity in musical improvisations seem to be the consequence of a similar manner of listening, and of changes in perceptions of narration and form.

Against such aural heterogeneity, it is little surprise that Chopin’s continual search for apartments attests not only his need for comfortable, clean accommodation appropriate to his status as a modern composer, but also his need to ensure himself of aural comfort, increasingly difficult to find in Paris. The *cornet à piston*, which Chopin says in a letter he must avoid at all costs,²³ is described in the Larousse *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* as an instrument whose sound is ‘vulgar, sometimes trivial, often viscous’,²⁴ and it is presented

²² Ibid., pp. 223–231.

²³ Fryderyk Chopin to Julian Fontana, Paris, 4 October 1839, *Chopin’s Polish Letters*, p. 319.

²⁴ ‘la sonorité vulgaire et parfois triviale, souvent pâteuse’.

ironically as the bane of residents powerless against the amateurs who play it,²⁵ while in the book by Niépovié, the *cor de chasse* is described simply as ‘infernally pandemonium! that enormous conspiracy against people’s organs of hearing! It’s a conversation shouting from street to street, from house to house, from one floor to the next’.²⁶ A similar acoustic burden, also described by Chopin as a threat to quietude, is a ‘miss’ who adds to her dowry of skills, in the parlance of the day, by ‘strumming’ on the piano the works of the biggest musical vulgarisers.²⁷ In *Physiologie du musicien*, Albert Cler portrays the phenomenon of the *Madame fait de la musique*,²⁸ as well as singing romantic songs, scraping away on the violin or playing the hurdy-gurdy. Chopin writes ironically, but nevertheless touches on the seriousness of the problem. He argues that the mechanical nature of the hurdy-gurdy makes it a permanent encumbrance, as opposed to transient noises such as the rumble of accelerating vehicles,²⁹ the cries of water bearers or the barking of dogs, while the melody it plays is unfortunately taken up by ‘blind clarinetists, street singers, boys, and thousands upon thousands of malevolent voices’.³⁰ Not to mention other street artists (including with full percussion kits imitating battles³¹) or the *cris de Paris* of the pedlars, which were in fact disappearing in the period of the July Monarchy.³²

The aural sensitivities of Parisians, irritated by the increasing number of stimuli, were exposed to the performance of music on a mass scale, reminiscent of today’s ubiquitous loudspeakers. Their mechanical precursor, the most disastrous means of performing music in terms of

²⁵ Albert Cler, *Physiologie du musicien* (1841; Paris, 1996), pp. 33–34.

²⁶ Niépovié, *Études physiologiques*, pp. 220–221.

²⁷ Fryderyk Chopin to Julian Fontana, Paris, 1 October 1839, *Chopin’s Polish Letters*, pp. 315–317; on the ‘dowry’, see Charlotte Nalle Eyermaier, ‘The composition of femininity: the significance of the “woman at the piano” motif in nineteenth-century French culture from Daumier to Renoir’, doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1997; on the ‘musical vulgarisers’, see Danièle Pistone, *Le piano dans la littérature française. Des origines jusqu’en 1900* (Paris, 1975), pp. 314–315.

²⁸ Cler, *Physiologie*, pp. 62–63. Cf. ‘Oh! The piano, that dear piano, / Which will never refrain! / Oh! That piano hammering up above / And hammering my brain’, Jules Laforgue, *Des fleurs de bonne volonté*, XII, quoted in Pistone, *Le piano*, p. 338.

²⁹ See Christoph Studeny, *L’invention de la vitesse. France, XVIIIe–XXe siècle* (Paris, 1995), pp. 93, 108.

³⁰ ‘les aveugles sur leur clarinette, par les chanteurs de rue, par les gamins, par des milliers de milliers de voix malfaisantes’, Cler, *Physiologie*, pp. 35, 122–126.

³¹ Henri d’Almèras, *La vie parisienne sous le Règne de Louis-Philippe* (Paris, n.d.), pp. 27–28.

³² See Victor Fournel, *Les cris de Paris*, repr. (Paris, 2003), pp. 68–70.



dampening sensitivity, was the hurdy-gurdy, against which some inhabitants attempted to do battle, sometimes at great financial cost,³³ and which Léon Escudier described as ‘a sort of toothless barrel-organ whose sour, strident notes wear the nerves out’.³⁴ Its mechanical sound, combined with the heightened noise of the growing number of vehicles, was more and more frequently inseparable from apartment life. It is such Parisians who ‘turn their backs’ on the street in an attempt to escape the noise, or the legal regulations on such aural phenomena as the Paris carnival,³⁵ the rides in the Tivoli Gardens, the numerous little theatres with their acrobats along the Champs-Élysées,³⁶ cabarets, taverns and cafés, sometimes with highly experimental instrumental ensembles,³⁷ innumerable, of which colourful descriptions seem to recall the aural landscape of the past, now lost forever. One of a small number of works where the soundscape of Chopin’s Paris is described with all its flaws is Jean-Georges Kastner’s humorous *Les voix de Paris*.³⁸ Among the instruments/sounds described, we find, alongside the banging and rattling, ‘a multitude of noises. Shops opening up, the milkman’s horn, the blacksmith beating his anvil, the coppersmith working copper, etc., etc.’ and the text begins with the lament of a disgruntled resident woken by the sounds of piano preludes, a romance, a flute, a violin, a *cornet à piston* and other symptoms of the big-city soundscape of the time.

It can be assumed that, in the period during which he lived on Place d’Orléans, Chopin was not bothered by the sounds coming from the busy boulevards. He cut himself off from these by having windows facing the inner courtyard, a new type of building construction known as ‘islands’, which acted as acoustic screens/modulators, and whose

³³ Cler, *Physiologie*, pp. 122–126.

³⁴ Léon Escudier, *Mes souvenirs. Les virtuoses* (Paris, 1868), pp. 315–316.

³⁵ See Edouard-Ferdinand de La Bonninière de Beaumont-Vassy, *Les Salons de Paris et la société parisienne sous Louis-Philippe Ier* (Paris, 1866), pp. 163–175.

³⁶ e.g. Franz Grillparzer, *Journal de mon voyage en France (1836). Suivi de journal de [F] Hebbel. Mes voyages en France 1843–44, 1860, 1862* (Paris, 1942), pp. 104–109.

³⁷ e.g. Alexandre Privat d’Anglemont, *La Closerie de Lilas* (Paris, 1848), quoted in d’Almérés, *La vie parisienne*, pp. 106–107.

³⁸ Jean-Georges Kastner, *Les voix de Paris: essai d’une histoire littéraire et musicale des cris populaires de la capitale depuis le moyen âge jusqu’à nos jours. Précédé de considérations sur l’origine et le caractère du cri en général et suivi de Les cri de Paris. Grande Symphonie humoristique vocale et instrumentale* (Paris, 1857).

interior furnishings absorbed sound.³⁹ From 1839 to 1846, excluding 1840, Chopin's life went according to the Parisian daily rigour of the 'mill', the 'grind' of lessons and salon visits (according to Murray Schafer, an unpolluted, urban-industrial, modern 'lo-fi soundscape'⁴⁰) and the freedom of summers in Nohant (according to Schafer, a natural, almost Arcadian 'hi-fi soundscape'⁴¹). Chopin found it difficult to compose during the winter months in Paris, but thanks to his stays in Nohant, where he did not give lessons or extend himself during evenings in the salon, he had time for creativity. The rhythm of the aural landscapes from 1841–46, with breaks in May and October or November, is regular, and each of them is an appropriate environment for a different type of activity. The soundscape of Nohant was distinguished, we would say today, by being eco-friendly, particularly when compared with Paris. The two can be described by opposing concepts: open/free, unhampered, and closed/limited (separated), muffled. In Paris, the self-organisation of the soundscape involved a game of separating oneself from negatively perceived elements of the external soundscape. In Nohant, by contrast, the soundscape was full, acoustically free; it did not require self-isolation. The likelihood of an element of the soundscape being perceived in a negative way was reduced, which made it easier to dispense with the discipline of attending to others (being forced to direct perceptions beyond oneself) and with the rules of playing oneself (being forced to direct perceptions upon oneself), as noted in the *Manuel de l'homme de bon ton*.⁴² The conditions of the soundscape (how it is conditioned) permitted greater freedom of behaviour. An open window did not necessitate paying attention to other people, and did not lead to irritation of others. Chopin could compose in a favourable aural context, though it must be remembered that that type of holiday was available to only a select social group,⁴³ which consciously formed its 'aural identity'.

³⁹ See François Loyer, *Paris XIXe siècle. L'immeuble et la rue* (Paris, 1987), pp. 125–127, 167; Olivier Balajé, *L'espace sonore de la ville au XIXe siècle* (Lyon, 2003), pp. 152, 235, 244–245, 251–252.

⁴⁰ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 1993.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See *Manuel de l'homme de bon ton, ou cérémonial de la bonne société, suivi d'un choix de jolis jeux de société et de rondes à danser* (Paris, 1830), pp. 109–110.

⁴³ See d'Alméras, *La vie parisienne*, p. 46.

2.

From models of conduct to aesthetic choices, we can find determinants forming ‘aural identity’ (an aural image composed of ‘the stylisation of aural behaviours’),⁴⁴ which becomes a tool of social distinction, to use the phrase of Pierre Bourdieu.⁴⁵ The intonation of one’s voice during a conversation and the music one listens to proclaim one’s membership of a specific social class or some other group, while aesthetic choices previously referred to have a common denominator within a unit or group. ‘Differences in perceptions of the aural environment’ become ‘a function of social belonging’.⁴⁶

In composing in particular musical genres and performing in selected salons, Chopin joined in with the ‘system of fashion’, to use Roland Barthes’s term, and descriptions of the composer’s playing in categories of the aesthetic values of the aristocracy and the artistic strategy he chose (gradually reducing the number of his public concerts, being inaccessible to a wider public, having intimate contact with his listeners – perpetuated by critics⁴⁷) place him in opposition to the rivalry of the modern aural landscape, as taken up, for example, by Berlioz and Musard. It is worth remembering, however, when reading the Parisian reviews, that interpretations of Chopin’s music in the context of ‘aristocratic’ categories of aesthetics and mores naturally created the aesthetic, classical image of the composer-pianist, but ‘Chopin belonged to the salons of the new elite and the upper middle class, for whom music was a cultural capital more important and conspicuously displayed than for the old elite’⁴⁸ (the salons in Saint-Germain which remained closed during the exile of Charles X⁴⁹), and the descriptions and reviews did not come from the aristocracy, but from certain middle class groups seeking their own distinctiveness and uniqueness, ambitious to advance in the social hierarchy, and in need

⁴⁴ Term borrowed from Balaÿ, *L’espace sonore*, pp. 55, 78, 83.

⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris, 1979).

⁴⁶ Balaÿ, *L’espace sonore*, p. 43.

⁴⁷ Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-century France. La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1838–40* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 146.

⁴⁸ Jolanta T. Pekacz, ‘Chopin and the Discourse on Salons’, in Artur Szklener, John Comber and Magdalena Chylińska (eds), *Chopin in Paris: the 1830s* (Warsaw, 2006).

⁴⁹ See *Mémoires des autres par la comtesse Dash* (Paris, 1896), vol. iv, pp. 134–135.

of prestige.⁵⁰ Though there is a note dated 30 December 1832 by Count Apponyi on a performance by Chopin at the Austrian embassy,⁵¹ which the composer also mentions in a letter of 1 October 1833 ('you have great talent at once if you're heard at the British or Austrian embassy'), the reference to music is only marginal in comparison with the count's notes on political and social issues.

An unusually important manifestation of class 'aural identity' was disciplined reaction. Emotional restraint was valued in aristocratic circles, and undue emotional exuberance and spontaneity were perceived as failings of the lower classes to be avoided. 'To sneer at people who showed their emotions at a play or concert became *de rigueur* by the mid-19th Century. Restraint of emotion in the theater became a way for middle-class audiences to mark the line between themselves and the working class',⁵² and the role of the *claque* and *dilettanti* compensated for the need to express emotions.⁵³ The increasing position of the attentive listener resulted not only from the growing status of music among the arts (which reached its apogee in the Romantic perception of music as absolute revelation), but also from the strengthening of the role of the new social classes on the historical stage (music/contemplative listening as a sign of prestige). At the Opera, the audience behaved freely only momentarily (the rigour of the new bourgeoisie⁵⁴); at the Théâtre-Italien the public concentrated almost solely on the arias (the demise of the *beau monde* is associated with the dominance of

⁵⁰ Pekacz, 'Chopin and the Discourse on Salons', pp. 313–314.

⁵¹ 'Rossini at the Piano, Tamburini, Rubini, Mlle Giulia Grisi singing, Kalkbrenner, Liszt, Chopin and Others for the Instrumental Music', Rudolf Apponyi, *Vingt-cinq ans à Paris* (Paris, 1913), vol. ii: 1831–34, p. 306.

⁵² Sennett, *The Fall*, p. 206; cf. James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris. A Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 190–192.

⁵³ 'The true public, the true public no longer applauds, it no longer bothers to applaud. It is afraid to dirty its gloves, or take them off, or to have its hands go red; it no longer cries out, but murmurs its bravos for fear of going hoarse. The claqueurs are a forced result of our habits of well-being and comfort; they scream, they stamp, they put on a great production, and leave to the spectators the tranquil pleasure of watching, listening and enjoying', Charles de Boigne, *Petits mémoires de l'Opéra* (Paris, 1857), p. 84; cf. Patrick Barbier, *À l'Opéra au temps de Rossini et de Balzac. Paris 1800–1850* (Paris, 1987), pp. 158–160, 250–252.

⁵⁴ Compare other bourgeois rules, e.g. concerning uniformity among residential furnishings, as opposed to free use of stylistically divergent décor by the aristocracy as described by Robert Musil in *The Man Without Qualities*.

bourgeois codes of behaviour⁵⁵) and allowed themselves at times to express their opinion,⁵⁶ but the audience at Chopin's favourite theatre remained more quiet than in the hall on rue Le Peletier.⁵⁷ Certainly, the most emotionally free behaviour, not meeting the standards of refinement, was to be found during performances at the Porte-Saint-Martin theatre, which played mainly unambitious melodramas similar to those at the Vaudevilles or Ambigu theatres, for example. It sometimes happened that the public reacted loudly or even shouted during a play, commenting on the action or the behaviour of other audience members, and in the intervals, especially for several months after the July Revolution, spontaneously singing the Marseillaise or the Parisienne.⁵⁸ Chopin, who saw Marie Dorval perform there in *Marie Jeanne, ou la femme du peuple*, wrote: 'The scene is delivered in remarkable fashion. Everyone bawls; all you can hear in the hall is the blowing of noses'.⁵⁹ Such a reaction to the repertoire on the part of a not overly refined public, perfectly captured in caricatures by Honoré Daumier (e.g. *La cinquième acte à la Gaîté*, 1848), shows how an overly spontaneous aural reaction assigns a member of the public to a certain social class. On the other hand, as noted by Sennett, 'The audience forcing a point is living a different kind of sign language than the audience applauding at the end of a play, or at most applauding at the end of a speech'.⁶⁰ We should bear in mind that, during the Viennese performance of the Variations, Op. 2, applause broke out at the end of each variation, to such a degree that Chopin could not hear the orchestral accompaniment.⁶¹

It is remarkable how many passages in handbooks of good manners from the first half of the nineteenth century are devoted to conduct related to discipline, and thereby to the radical reduction of the aural sphere and the maintenance of its decorum: from restricting

⁵⁵ William Weber, 'Did People Listen in the 18th Century?', *Early Music*, 25/4 (1997), p. 690.

⁵⁶ Barbier, *À l'Opéra*, pp. 149, 246–249; Cécile Sajaloli, 'Le Théâtre-Italien et la société parisienne, 1838–79', doctoral thesis, Université de Paris I, 1986–87, pp. 239–243.

⁵⁷ Sajaloli, 'Le Théâtre-Italien', pp. 226–228.

⁵⁸ Niépovié, *Études physiologiques*, pp. 453–454; Ernest Legouvé, *Soixante ans de souvenirs* (Paris, 1887), vol. ii, p. 127.

⁵⁹ Fryderyk Chopin to his family, Paris, 12–26 December 1845; *Chopin's Polish Letters*, p. 386.

⁶⁰ Sennett, *The Fall*, p. 87.

⁶¹ See Leppert, 'The Social Discipline of Listening', p. 472.

spontaneous reactions, for example, during concerts to general restraint in rhetoric and gesture.⁶² In this context of Chopin perceived in terms of

⁶² On concert etiquette, see Horace-Napoléon Raison, *Code civil, manuel complet de la politesse, du ton, des manières de la bonne compagnie, contenant des lois, règles, applications et exemples de l'art de se présenter et de se conduire dans le monde* (Paris, 1830), p. 52; also *Nouveau manuel complet de la bonne compagnie ou Guide de la politesse et de la bienséance destiné à tous les âges et à toutes les conditions* (Paris, 1863), p. 216. With regard to general good manners, one handbook recommends: 'Nothing is as tiring for serious people as the noise and agitation of a young man constantly in motion, speaking of everything without focusing on anything; rising abruptly to look at a picture, a vase, some flowers, then suddenly sitting down again just when you thought he was about to leave. Such turbulence is to be avoided' (*Manuel de l'homme de bon ton*, p. 21), and elsewhere, 'There are faults in good breeding which, if indulged in everywhere, would be revolting in their coarseness. For example, to pick the teeth, hum a tune, yawn aloud while stretching the arms, to stand by the fireplace with your back turned on the room, cutting your companions off from the heat, to stretch out in a chair or on a sofa, to drum with your fingers on a piece of furniture, to sigh, to pretend to have the shudders, to whisper in someone's ear, to pull papers out of your pocket and read them, to check the time on your watch – these are bad habits which may be forgiven occasionally in private society, but which must be eradicated when out in the world at large' (*ibid.*, p. 79). Confronting these tips with one of Chopin's letters, it is clear that Chopin did not approve of such behaviour concerning aural sensitivity: 'When I'm writing to you, I can't stand it when my bell goes into action, and in traipses something with great moustaches, large, overgrown, stout – he sits down to the piano, and not knowing himself what he is improvising, bangs, beats without any sense, hurls himself, crosses his hands, rattles for some five minutes on one key with one gigantic finger, which was destined somewhere out there in the Ukraine to wield a steward's whip and reins. Here you have a portrait of Sowiński, who has no other merit than a good figure and a good heart for himself. If I could ever represent charlatanism or stupidity in art, it would never be as perfect as I must now often hear, walking around my room and attempting to escape. My ears turn red – I would like to shove him out the door, but I have to restrain myself, even be affectionate with him [...]. But what most gets on my nerves is his collection of tavern tunes, senselessly arranged, accompanied as badly as can be, without the least knowledge of harmony or prosody, with country dance endings – which he calls a collection of Polish songs. You know how much I wanted to feel, and I did partially come to a feeling for, our national music – so just think how pleasant it is for me when from time to time he snatches here and there something of mine, the beauty of which often depends upon the accompaniment, and plays it in his tavern, schöne-Katriche-gagging-parish-organ taste, and you can't say anything, because he's incapable of understanding anything more than what he has snatched. It is Nowakowski turned inside out. And he chatters on! About everything, and especially about Warsaw, where he has never been'; Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, Paris, 25 December 1831, *Chopin's Polish Letters*, pp. 257–258. Compare Marcelina Czartoryska, who, asked to perform the Mazurka in D major, Op. 33 No. 2, played at first 'in a brash, forthright way, with no subtlety of nuance. It was only towards the end of the piece, at the theme's second appearance [bar 74 to the end], that she played it with a soft, caressing touch, utterly subtle and refined'. This student of Chopin related that 'Chopin had taught it to her that way: in this piece he wanted to present the contrast between the "tavern" and the "salon". That was why he wanted the same melody played so differently: at the beginning it was to evoke the popular atmosphere of the tavern, and, towards the end, the refinement of the salons'. Aleksander Michałowski, 'Jak grał Fryderyk Szopen?' [How did Fryderyk Chopin play?], *Muzyka*, 1932/7–9, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher as Seen by his Pupils*, tr. Naomi Shohet with Krystia Osostowicz and Roy



aural sensitivity (the poetics of pianist and composer) as a creative artist meeting the standards of aristocratic behaviour, 'For all the warmth of Chopin's temperament, his playing was always measured, chaste, *distinguished* [emphasis added]', as Karol Mikuli wrote.⁶³ Elsewhere, the author of a Viennese review refers directly to the category of moderation in rhetoric:

His touch, though clean and secure, has little of the brilliance of tone by which virtuosi proclaim themselves from the first bars; he accentuates only gently, like a person conversing in the company of cultured people, avoiding that rhetorical aplomb considered indispensable amongst virtuosos. He plays very calmly, without the fiery ardour which generally distinguishes artist from dilettante, and yet our discriminating and *sensitive* [emphasis added] audience at once recognized a true artist in this unknown young foreigner.⁶⁴

This type of musical bulletin is addressed only to a selected, refined audience: 'He had no need to seduce or amaze; he was more concerned with delicate sympathy than clamorous enthusiasm', as Liszt recalled.⁶⁵ A feature of nineteenth-century modernity, therefore, was not only the noise of the industrial revolution, but also a new type of public in need of 'clamorous enthusiasm'. New in both quantitative and qualitative terms, a public which must be bridled because it is not a select group of connoisseurs with plenty of free time, but people gathered often accidentally, pulled suddenly out of another, often apathetic, anesthetising or unpleasant aural environment, as Anton Schindler was aware of when writing about Chopin: 'Devoid of display, his playing is not for the crowd, which wants to be dazzled because it is itself blind'.⁶⁶

Apart from choices relating to behaviour, another important element forming 'aural identity' is the choice of repertoire. The aristocracy,

Howat, ed. Roy Howat (Cambridge, 1986), p. 75. See also Raison, *Code civil*, p. 204. Cf. *Manuel de l'homme de bon ton*, p. 21; *Nouveau manuel*, pp. 83–99.

⁶³ Karol Mikuli, 'Vorwort', in *Chopin's Pianoforte-Werke*, ed. Mikuli (Leipzig, 1880), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 276.

⁶⁴ Anonymous/Adolf Bäuerle (?), *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 20 August 1829, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 288.

⁶⁵ Franz Liszt, 'Concert de Chopin', *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 2 May 1841, quoted in Eigeldinger, *L'univers*, p. 258.

⁶⁶ Anton Schindler, *Beethoven in Paris* (Münster, 1842), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, pp. 292–293.

particularly the ancestral aristocracy, most often attended the Théâtre-Italien, where Italian opera predominated. The bourgeoisie, the new aristocracy of money and power (and diplomatic power), also went to the Théâtre-Italien, but especially to the Opera, where they delighted in spectacular productions of *grand opéra*.⁶⁷ The spectacular nature of the productions on rue Le Peletier, sometimes competing against the fashionable *spectacles militaires*,⁶⁸ confirmed the bourgeoisie's sense of its own worth, especially because of the stories of the fight for freedom presented in operas, which the bourgeoisie could now view with some distance.⁶⁹ Initially, Chopin was delighted by *grand opéra*, but his enthusiasm weakened over the years. He was always faithful, though, to the Italian repertoire, where he found an important point of reference for his own sensitivities. This is not surprising, since even the popular *Code parisien* warned: 'You should appreciate dramatic music, and not the blare of sounds which deafen; have a delicate ear, sensible to the charms of harmony; don't go to the Opera'.⁷⁰

For Chopin, Italian singers were a model for piano playing: Giuditta Pasta, for example. Lenz relates Chopin saying that the theme and second variation of the Nocturne in E major, Op. 9 No. 2 'were to be sung full-voiced, expressive but without any sentimentality. The style should be modelled upon Pasta and the great Italian school of singing, and the pathos should increase throughout the variations'.⁷¹ Chopin, then, shied away from melodramatic sentimentality and employed pathos with appropriate moderation. The problem of intonation is more clearly seen in metaphors used by Liszt in describing Chopin's assessment of Schubert: 'he would not listen to those [melodies of Schumann] in which the contours were too sharp for his ear, in which suffering lies naked, and we can almost feel the bones crack and crack under the rude embrace of sorrow. All savage wildness was repulsive to him'.⁷²

⁶⁷ See Beaumont-Vassy, *Les Salons de Paris*, p. 113.

⁶⁸ Jane Fair Fulcher, *Le Grand Opéra en France: un art politique 1820–1870* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 72–73.

⁶⁹ Enrico Fubini, *A History of Music Aesthetics*, tr. Michael Hatwell (Basingstoke, 1990), p. 310; It. orig. *L'estetica musicale dall'antichità al Settecento* (Turin, 1976) and *L'estetica musicale dal Settecento a oggi* (Turin, 1964).

⁷⁰ Charles Rousset, *Code parisien. Manuel complet du provincial et de l'étranger à Paris* (Paris, 1829), p. 156.

⁷¹ Wilhelm von Lenz, 'Übersichtliche Beurtheilung der Pianoforte-Kompositionen von Chopin', *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung*, 1872/36–38, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 77.

⁷² Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, tr. Martha Walker Cook (New York, 2005), p. 93.

With regard to imitating Italian bel canto on the piano, it is interesting that the imperfect mechanism of the instrument is characterised as ‘dry’, ‘disjointed’,⁷³ and especially ‘shrill and glaring’,⁷⁴ which brings to mind certain metaphors used by Chopin in lessons to reprimand students, in particular the ‘barking of dogs’ and ‘shooting pigeons’. During lessons,

every hard, rough or uneven note had to be played again and carefully corrected [...]. It was this arpeggio [the beginning of the A flat major Etude by Clementi from the second book of his *Préludes et Exercices*] which brought upon one unfortunate student this somewhat too sharp rebuke from the master, who springing up on [*sic*] his chair, exclaimed ‘What was that? Was that a dog barking?’⁷⁵

The aesthetic of Chopin, therefore, was in accordance with the norms of behaviour of an almost aristocratic profile of aesthetics and customs, and the fact that this image was perpetuated in reviews determined one of the main directions for the composer being received as an ‘aristocratic’ artist.

3.

we visited her [Lina Freppa] together in her apartment at the very end of Faubourg St.-Germain, where she lived with her mother in a *troisième-au-dessus de l’entresol*, far from the din and perpetual turmoil of the city. There we spoke about music, sang, played, then again conversed, played and sang. Chopin and Miss Freppa in turn tested their powers at the piano.⁷⁶

Heinrich Heine, as Enrico Fubini has pointed out,

while still playing a part in the Romantic dream, while still looking for a refuge in art from the hardships of a daily existence and introspectively seeking for a contact with the unique individuality of a piece of music [typical of assessments of Chopin’s art – M. J.], Heine sensed that a new era was on the point of taking

⁷³ *Le Pianiste*, 5 June 1835, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 292.

⁷⁴ August Kahlert, ‘Über Chopin’s Klavier-Kompositionen’, *Der Gesellschafter oder Blätter für Geist und Herz*, 1834/3, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 289.

⁷⁵ Jan Kleczyński, *O wykonywaniu dzieł Chopina. Odczytów dwie serie* [On performing the works of Chopin. Two series of readings] (Cracow, 1960), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 60.

⁷⁶ Ferdinand Hiller, *Künstlerleben* (Cologne, 1880), quoted in Eigeldinger, *L’univers*, p. 104.

shape and radically changing the aesthetic attitudes that previous societies had formulated. The mass societies that were beginning to emerge required from the artist bigger and better musical effects, effects which would have to be different in kind. Heine could glimpse the nature of this new mass audience with its new requirements, requirements that would be such as Berlioz was meeting with his virtuoso orchestrations, and Liszt and Paganini with their solo virtuoso performances on the piano and the violin.⁷⁷

Within twenty years after 1830, a change takes place which eliminates the concept of music as ‘the intimacy of sensations so dear to the Romantics’, or at least shifts it elsewhere, assigning it another role. This occurs to the benefit of spectacular, social music, moving up in the hierarchy of importance.⁷⁸ Then we are witness to one of the key changes in aural sensitivity and ways of listening to music spanning from the concert hall to the salon. It highlights the opposition between the beginnings of mass culture and elitism, demarcating two directions of change. In the first, spectacular concerts in expanding concert halls, performed by ever larger and louder orchestras before huge audiences (e.g. Berlioz, Musard, Liszt); in the second, in the salons, *soirées intimes*,⁷⁹ where a small group of listeners gathers around a single instrument (e.g. Chopin, Hiller, Bertini, Heller, Zimmerman).

The first direction can be defined as a rivalry between music and the contemporary soundscape of the first decades of the nineteenth century. The paroxysms it reached can be seen in a lithograph caricature, *Concert in 1846*, where Hector Berlioz conducts an orchestra composed mainly of brass instruments (at least fifteen tubas and seven trombones), percussion (a kettle drum struck by a system of enormous hammers – suggesting both the durability of the drumskin and the volume of the sound – as well as a bass drum, already full of holes, and cymbals), cannons, and two double basses. In the foreground, below the conductor, we see a group of listeners. Some of them are stuffing their ears, some are so stunned that they are dropping out of their seats, or hiding under them (apparently,

⁷⁷ Fubini, *A History*, p. 313.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁷⁹ A term commonly used in the period. Marmontel, for example, writing about the pianist Döhler, recalls that he heard him at ‘public concerts and *soirées intimes*’; elsewhere, he writes about Gorla that he heard him ‘dans l’intimité et dans les concerts’; Antoine Marmontel, *Les pianistes célèbres. Silhouettes et médaillons* (Paris, 1878), pp. 248, 281–282.

Chopin ‘saved himself by putting his hands over his ears when he was forced to listen to it [the music of Berlioz]’⁸⁰). One listener has no chance of plugging his ears because he’s lifting up a lady who has fainted. At the right, there are two boxes with the inscriptions ‘Festgesetzte Preise’ and ‘Rettungs Kasten’. Concerts similar to that depicted in the caricature took place at the Cirque Olympique, the largest multi-functional space in Paris, and similar means were employed, not only at carnival time, by Franconi, Chicard and the then-famous Musard, using shots from pistols, muskets, cannons and breaking chairs, to the admiration not only of the sensation-hungry crowd, but even of the princes of Orléans and Nemours.⁸¹



Listeners could also be captivated in a spectacular way by a virtuoso, preferably with an extravagant personality, whose ‘performance became a matter of shocking the listener, of making him suddenly hear as he had never heard before, of taking over his musical senses’.⁸² In addition to aural stimuli, key in such a situation was the passive reception of visual stimuli. The virtuoso was an actor controlling the crowd, and his extraordinary gifts are attested by, for example, a caricature of Liszt playing the piano with several hands.⁸³ Those were the techniques ‘for making music right now absolutely real’,⁸⁴ while at the same time the artist ‘focused attention away from the text being played’.⁸⁵ The aesthetic stance of Chopin, who did not compose on the themes of fashionable operas of the time, was not suited to the sensitivities of listeners who expected the ‘commercial materialism’ of a Herz or Rosellen.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Solange Clésinger to Marcelina Czartoryska, quoted in Eigeldinger, *L'univers*, p. 20.

⁸¹ On Chicard, see Alain Faure, *Paris, Carême prenant. Du Carnaval à Paris au XIXe siècle, 1800–1914* (Paris, 1978), p. 52. On Musard, see Beaumont-Vassy, *Les salons de Paris*, p. 168, d’Almérás, *La vie parisienne*, p. 85, de Boigne, *Petits mémoires*, 1857, pp. 182–183, Escudier, *Mes souvenirs*, pp. 94–95.

⁸² Sennett, *The Fall*, p. 201.

⁸³ ‘First he throws his gloves to the attendant, then he sits down with a crash, takes a long, imposing look at his numerous listeners, fixing his gaze on each of his admirers, holding them petrified under its force, like a vulture mesmerising a flock of doves; finally, he places his hands on the keyboard and, while rolling out his thunder and hurling his bolts of lightning, he still has enough detachment to watch and listen to what is going on around him’; Paul Scudo, *Critique et littérature musicales* (Paris, 1856), vol. i, p. 17, quoted in Pistone, *Le piano*, p. 174.

⁸⁴ Sennett, *The Fall*, p. 200.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁸⁶ Ellis, *Music Criticism*, p. 146.

In the second direction, artists chose intimacy as a strategy for dealing with modernity. As his earlier biographers (Liszt, Barbedette) stress, Chopin improvised for a narrow group of listeners, in a dimly lit salon, and that choice can be seen as a flight from the din of the modern city, a conscious decision on the part of the composer to seek isolation in order to facilitate communication, an intimate meeting with a select audience and a carefully nuanced artistic message. As analyses of texts attesting interpretations of Chopin's music as possessing 'aristocratic' features have shown, Chopin is interpreted as a discreet artist, deliberately not disclosing all his intentions. Discretion, however, requires an appropriate soundscape (quiet, permitting listeners to sharpen their attention), an appropriate acoustic environment (of modest size, separated from outer rooms and having acoustic characteristics which permit listeners to grasp as many aural and semantic nuances as possible), and appropriate behaviour on the part of both the performers and the listeners (body discipline, remaining noiseless).

In 1843, Baron de Trémont wrote of Chopin:

the instrument undergoes a thousand transformations under his fingers through a *finesse* of touch, from what one can compare only to spider's webs up to effects of the most imposing strength; and yet Chopin is frail and unwell; also he cannot show his range in public; he needs intimacy, a small number of friends, to whom his accents seem to say: 'comme je vous aime, je m'épuise pour vous plaire'.⁸⁷

The dominant perception in early romanticism of music as a means (a language of sorts) of communicating feelings, or the absolute, assumes that the composer, the performer and the listener are bound by an intimate, extraordinary form of direct contact (compare the views of Hegel, Jean Paul, Heine, Schopenhauer, and Chopin himself, as expressed in *Sketches for a Method of Piano Playing*, where the composer emphasises song and speech as key points of reference for pianistic poetics⁸⁸). The role of the listener as a type of co-creator, and not a passive receiver of entertainment external to art, develops at that time, while a work is defined as a process, not a closed whole.⁸⁹ As Eigeldinger

⁸⁷ Baron de Trémont, 'Frédéric Chopin, Célèbre pianiste et compositeur', autograph script, 1843, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 287.

⁸⁸ Tr. in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, pp. 190–197.

⁸⁹ See Anne Leonard, 'Picturing Listening in the Late Nineteenth Century', *The Art Bulletin*, 89/2 (2007), p. 276.

writes, 'Chopin's aesthetic sense is still that of a man of the eighteenth century, an aristocratic pianist *da camera* for whom the atmosphere of the concert in the Romantic sense disturbs the listening conditions and the quintessence of the musical message'.⁹⁰ Astolphe de Custine wrote of a concert at the Salle Pleyel in 1841 that Chopin played 'not on the piano, but on the soul' of the listener,⁹¹ and after the last Paris concert in February 1848: 'the melancholy of your works penetrates the depths of the heart; the listener is alone with you, even in the crowd; it's no longer a piano, it's – the soul, and what a soul!'⁹² This is confirmed by Franz Liszt: 'he was more concerned with delicate sympathy than clamorous enthusiasm and, let's say it at once, those sympathies didn't let him down. From the first touch on the keyboard, a total understanding was reached between him and his listeners'.⁹³ Only in the salon or during a chamber concert, as opposed to a mass spectacle, is the 'naked heart' disclosed, called as such only in modernism.⁹⁴ Blaze de Bury wrote of an 1842 concert that Chopin 'needs a hall specially made up of responsive constitutions, of almost ethereal natures'.⁹⁵ which seems to be illustrated in a drawing by Wojciech Weiss from the end of the century in which a thicket of lines perhaps depicting Chopin's 'nerves' entwines the figure of the composer-pianist, rapt in creative passion, showing both Chopin's solitude and the impossibility of his pianism being conveyed in a mass spectacle. Słowacki wrote of the 'playing on all one's nerves' and the 'enervating music of Chopin', concluding: 'You feel with your nerves, not your heart' and asserting that some people 'after a Chopin concert lose part of their soul'.⁹⁶

One anonymous Scottish critic states in 1848: 'The performances of M. Chopin are of the most refined description; nothing can equal the

⁹⁰ Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 110 n. 73.

⁹¹ Astolphe de Custine to Fryderyk Chopin, Paris, 27 April 1841, *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* [Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin], ed. Bronisław Edward Sydow, 2 vols (Warsaw, 1955), vol. ii, p. 311.

⁹² Astolphe de Custine to Fryderyk Chopin, Paris, February 1848, *ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 297.

⁹³ Franz Liszt, 'Concert de Chopin', *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 2 May 1841, quoted in Eigeldinger, *L'univers*, p. 258.

⁹⁴ See emphasis on the listener as indicating the 'ascent of inwardness' described by Peter Gay in 'The Art of Listening', in *The Naked Heart* (New York, 1995), pp. 11–35.

⁹⁵ W. H. [Henri Blaze de Bury], *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 April 1842, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 287 n. 29.

⁹⁶ Juliusz Słowacki to his mother, Paris, February 1845, *Korespondencja* 1955, vol. ii, pp. 126–127.

delicacy of his tone, or rival the lightness of his passages. They fall most deliciously on the ear accustomed to the “hammer and tongs” work of the modern school’.⁹⁷ Especially in terms of loudness and the previously mentioned lack of restraint in other means, the ‘modern school’ is often perceived in a very negative light, since it was admitted: ‘Mr Chopin [...] you reconcile me to the piano’.⁹⁸ Chopin does not wish ‘to give you nervous attacks and make you swoon. His inspiration is all of tender and naïve poetry; do not ask him for big gestures or diabolic variations; he wishes to speak to the heart, not to the eyes; he wishes to love you, not to devour you’.⁹⁹ The triumph of Chopin is not, to use a military metaphor, the ‘conquest’ of his listeners, but the emotionally intelligent seduction of them, achieved by effusing ‘charm’ and ‘enchantment’ in order to call forth those two characteristic descriptions of the reactions of his listeners. Chopin is said to have ironised to Liszt: ‘If you don’t conquer your public, you have to wear it out’.¹⁰⁰

Like the young girls practising on almost every floor of a Parisian tenement, so the torrent of musical virtuosity led to a backlash among people of refined expectations; Marmontel wrote of ‘sonorities eventually tiring and irritating to the delicate ear’. Against this he sets Chopin, who, ‘making constant use of the pedal, obtained ravishing harmonies, melodic whispers that charmed and astonished’.¹⁰¹ Chopin used the pedals ‘to obtain a soft and veiled sonority, but more often still he would use them separately for brilliant passages, for sustained harmonies, for deep bass notes, and for loud ringing chords. Or he would use the soft pedal alone for those light murmurings which seem to create a transparent vapour round the arabesques that embellish the melody and envelop it like fine lace’, adding that on Pleyel pianos ‘the dampers work with a precision very useful for chromatic and modulating passages’.¹⁰² Sound,

⁹⁷ Anonymous, ‘M. Chopin’s Soiree Musicale’, *Edinburgh Advertiser*, 6 October 1848, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 295.

⁹⁸ Baron de Trémont, ‘Frédéric Chopin’, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 286.

⁹⁹ Léon Escudier, *La France musicale*, 27 February 1842, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 394.

¹⁰⁰ Eigeldinger, *L’univers*, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ Marmontel, *Les Pianistes célèbres*, pp. 4–5, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 332.

¹⁰² Marmontel, *Histoire du piano et de ses origines* (Paris, 1885), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 58.

therefore, plays a key structural role, and its nuances cannot be grasped in a large hall, by a public whose threshold of sensitivity has been lowered. Of little surprise, therefore, is the opinion that, confronting spectacular orchestral effects (e.g. the ‘deafening sounds of the trumpet’, the ‘enticing song of the strings’) with the nobility of the piano, the ‘more sublime’ realm, Liszt writes: ‘Far from being ambitious of the uproar of the orchestra, Chopin was satisfied to see his thought integrally produced upon the ivory of the keyboard; succeeding in his aim of losing nothing in power, without pretending to orchestral effects, or to the brush of the scene-painter’.¹⁰³ A key element of Liszt’s description is the conclusion that Chopin’s

devotion to the Beautiful for its own sake [...] induced him not to yield to the general propensity to scatter each light spray of melody over a hundred orchestral desks, and enabled him to augment the resources of art, in teaching how they may be concentrated in a *more limited* space [emphasis added].¹⁰⁴

As early as 1829, on the subject of the concert in Vienna on 11 August, Chopin wrote:

The general opinion, however, is that I played too weakly, or rather, too delicately for the Germans, who are used to hearing their pianos hammered. I expect to see this charge in the daily paper, especially since the editor’s daughter wallops the instrument terribly. But it doesn’t matter, as it’s impossible not to have any flaws, and I prefer that sort to having them say that I play too forcefully.¹⁰⁵

But in 1835 we read: ‘we should add, however, that M. Chopin was not heard sufficiently and that many details of his part must have been lost to the listeners. M. Chopin’s otherwise perfect talent is so delicate, so full of imperceptible nuances which only a sensitive and trained ear can discern, that in our opinion it is not to his advantage to be heard together with someone else’,¹⁰⁶ and several years later it is emphasised that listening to Chopin tempts one to ‘go close to the instrument and put one’s ear to it’, while the pianist played his mazurkas ‘with the utmost degree of

¹⁰³ Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Fryderyk Chopin to his family, Vienna, 12 August 1829; *Chopin’s Polish Letters*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁶ *Le Pianiste*, 5 March 1835, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 128 n. 120.

softness, *piano* to the extreme, the hammers merely brushing the strings'.¹⁰⁷ Most interesting is a review by Blaze de Bury from 1842:

M. Chopin admits only an elite audience of initiates to his annual revelations; his exquisite, delicate, marvellous talent – but a fragile one which screens itself from analysis [...]; there is in M. Chopin's playing something *perlé*, rare, Aeolian, that simple mortals could not grasp. The day a microscope is invented for the ear, that day M. Chopin will become deified.¹⁰⁸

The poetics employed by Chopin required a sensitisation of hearing, a raising of the threshold of sensitivity to aural nuances, and changes in the context and perspective of sound perception.

In the context of this type of hypersensitivity, it is not surprising that the piano became an 'extension' of the pianist, fully controlled by his nerves, through which he felt and made himself felt. One can suppose that a key role was played in such a situation not only by touch itself, but also by feeling the vibrations of the instrument in the body: 'the whole man vibrated! The piano became so intensely animated that it gave one shivers. I repeat that the instrument which one heard Chopin playing never existed except beneath Chopin's fingers: he played as he composed'.¹⁰⁹ In the salon, the listeners surrounded the piano, often sitting so close to the instrument as to feel its vibrations transmitted through the floor and furnishings to their bodies,¹¹⁰ and the music fully enveloped or penetrated them.¹¹¹ The salon interior became a second resonator, a 'microscope for the ear', inside of which listening was an even more intense bodily activity, at the same time intimate, without any intermediacy. In such a situation, there is a radical reduction of the detachment so characteristic of the passive, modern spectacle. The listener does not rule over the image/sound, he is too close, too much 'inside' the sound, too closely connected physically,



¹⁰⁷ Berlioz, *Le Rénovateur*, 15 December 1833, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, pp. 71, 272.

¹⁰⁸ W. H. [Henri Blaze de Bury], *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 April 1842, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 287, n. 29.

¹⁰⁹ Georges Mathias, 'Préface', in Isidore Philipp, *Exercices quotidiens tirés des oeuvres de Chopin* (Paris, 1897), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 277.

¹¹⁰ See Josef Danhauser, *Liszt Improvising on the Piano*, 1840, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

¹¹¹ Compare later visual presentations of this phenomenon, e.g. *Misi at the Piano* by Édouard Vuillard (1899, private collection, repr. Leonard, 'Picturing Listening', p. 280, fig. 15).

resonating too much to remain indifferent. An intimate contact with the sound arises, and the work/pianist prevails over us all the more. As Marshall McLuhan wrote: ‘hearing – as opposed to cold, neutral vision – is sensitive, sensitised, “integrating”, and supports the perfect network of tribal blood relations and interdependencies’.¹¹² Though McLuhan’s statement refers to aurally-oriented oral cultures, it may be applied to re-orientation, as took place when music was heard in the salon. We can make a connection between the salon recitals and improvisations of artists in the nineteenth century, in certain respects, and what Sennett describes as the phenomenon of the intensification of ‘the patterns of crowd silence’ and of ‘the idea of a disembodied spectator’ and ‘the complete repression of audience response’, which ‘creates the logic of the interest in personality’.¹¹³ On the other hand, this would seem, in opposition to the passive, modern spectacle, to restore an authentic connection between artist and listener, to turn back towards the Schopenhauer ideal, where the listener becomes a co-creator of the work, a kind of psychological, creative ‘resonator’. The dazzling personality of the artist, which becomes of key importance in the art of the nineteenth century, is an artificial game in the large concert hall, but is authentically ‘stripped bare’ in the intimate salon. The concert hall is an arena, a passive spectacle, while the salon turns into a psychoanalyst’s couch, an (aural) microscope of personality.

In Leipzig, Henriette Voigt wrote in her diary beneath the date 13 September 1836:

The over-excitement of his fantastic manner is imparted to the keen-eared; it made me hold my breath. Wonderful is the ease with which his velvet fingers glide, I might almost say fly, over the keys,¹¹⁴

and in a review of a public concert by Chopin, Berlioz stressed:

Despite this, in large halls, before a crowd of people, many of these [‘a wealth of delicate, subtle thoughts’] go by unnoticed. [...] He [Chopin] avoids gatherings of noisy people assembled by chance, for he doesn’t feel any desire to

¹¹² Marshall McLuhan, *Selected Texts* (Poznań, 2001), quoted in Tomasz Misiak, *Estetyczne konteksty audiosfery* [Aesthetic contexts of the audiosphere] (Poznań, 2009), p. 76.

¹¹³ Sennett, *The Fall*, pp. 283, 285.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 269.

dominate them, to meet them head on. The *quiet and concentration* of a chosen audience are essential for him [emphasis added].¹¹⁵

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was noticed that attention, to which silence lends itself, conditions perceptions of music and alters sensitivity, which was not the norm in the eighteenth century. Contemplative, noiseless (incorporeal) listening, motionlessness on the part of the listener, closing the eyes, allowing one to be transported to an imaginary realm, focusing one's attention to an extreme requiring isolation from other aural phenomena – all of these elements play a key role in conditioning communication, and darkness is not only a scenic extra. In such a situation, the threshold of aural sensitivity is greatly enhanced, and the composer, aware of this context of musical perception, forms his musical structure in a different way. Suggestively portraying Chopin as hypersensitive, cutting himself off from reality, Liszt wrote:

he was in an empyrean of golden clouds and perfumes, his imagination, so full of exquisite beauty, seemed engaged in a monologue with God himself; and if upon the radiant prism in whose contemplation he forgot all else, the magic-lantern of the outer world would even cast its disturbing shadow, he felt deeply painted, as if in the midst of a sublime concert, a shrieking old woman should blend her shrill yet broken tones, her vulgar musical motive, with the divine thoughts of great masters.¹¹⁶

'When the eyes can see neither notes nor keys, when all disappears, only then does the hearing function with all its sensitivity; then you can really hear yourself, noticing every fault'.¹¹⁷ The act of performing music in a darkened salon corresponds in a way (or is *en miniature* a phenomenon evoked by similar needs) to putting out the lights in an auditorium (causing the musicians to disappear or dematerialise),¹¹⁸ the apogee of

¹¹⁵ Hector Berlioz, *Journal des débats*, 16 May 1841, quoted in Eigeldinger, *L'univers*, p. 261.

¹¹⁶ Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, p. 109. This text does not deal with an aspect which can be described as *towards silence*, possible to describe from the perspective of psychoanalysis. This affected Chopin's perceptions of sounds, but it mainly concerns solitude and illness, which are crucial in forming aural sensitivity.

¹¹⁷ Cecylia Działyńska, 'Jak grać Chopina?', *Kurier Poznański*, 1892/270, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 28.

¹¹⁸ The most interesting description of an improvisation under dim light is provided by Liszt in his first biography of Chopin, where he writes about a salon on the Chaussée d'Antin: 'His

which was achieved in the Wagnerian theatre in Bayreuth, leading to a concentration of attention and thereby to silence.¹¹⁹ The reduction of stimuli provided to the eyes, or the outright disorientation of vision, the shifting of focus from our predominant visual sense to the often marginal sense of hearing, has the effect that hearing, left on its own, becomes more acute.¹²⁰ Chopin's exceptional sensitivity to sound, which had also a psycho-physiological basis,¹²¹ particularly in moments of detachment from his surroundings while concentrated on playing, is described by Friederike Streicher: 'On one occasion when he was entirely absorbed in his playing, completely detached from the world, his servant entered softly and laid a letter on the music-desk. With a cry Chopin left off playing, his hair stood on end'.¹²²

In this audio-visual context, Chopin's playing, according to writers of the time, both caused transcendence (to ideal worlds) and provoked or made possible full empathy (communication with the artist), which is symptomatic of a wider, dominant tendency in the nineteenth century. Chopin is therefore represented as an ethereal being; he is made into a herald from ideal worlds, to which his music leads the way. The state described by Cray ('the state of being suspended, a looking or listening so rapt that it is an exemption from ordinary conditions, that

apartment, invaded by surprise, was only lighted by some wax candles, grouped round one of Pleyel's pianos, which he particularly liked for their slightly veiled, yet silvery sonorousness, and easy touch, permitting him to elicit tones which one might think proceeded from one of those harmonicas of which romantic Germany has preserved the monopoly, and which were so ingeniously constructed by its ancient masters, by the union of crystal and water. As the corners of the room were left in obscurity, all idea of limit was lost, so that there seemed no boundary save the darkness of space. Some tall piece of furniture, with its white cover, would reveal itself in the dim light; an indistinct form, raising itself like a spectre to listen to the sounds which had evoked it. The light concentrated round the piano and falling on the floor, glided on like a spreading wave until it mingled with the broken flashes from the fire, from which orange colored plumes rose and fell, like fitful gnomes, attracted there by mystic incantations in their own tongue'. (Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, pp. 51–52). In such a situation, even the minutest nuances of playing could make a powerful impression on both performer and listener. It is no surprise, then, that Liszt writes further on of 'the ebb and flow of tones, which sighed, moaned, murmured, broke and died'. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹¹⁹ Sennett, *The Fall*, p. 206.

¹²⁰ See Cray, *Suspensions*, p. 253.

¹²¹ Czesław Sielużycki, 'On the Health of Chopin. Truth, Suppositions, Legends', *Chopin Studies*, 6 (1999), pp. 99–156.

¹²² Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (London, [1902]), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 182.

it becomes a suspended temporality, a hovering out of time¹²³) can also be compared, for example, with a drawing by Cyprian Kamil Norwid of Thomas Tellefsen performing (1847, lost, previously in the collection of the Bibliothèque Polonaise, Paris), where all the listeners, including Chopin, are ‘absent’ (this wording well reflects the absence of vision, an oxymoronic sightless looking which Crary describes as a ‘state of suspension of normative perception’¹²⁴). Listeners contemplating the playing of Chopin find themselves in ecstasy (understood as standing outside oneself); they feel as if they have found themselves in another world,¹²⁵ detaching or escaping from the reality around them. In a drawing by Norwid from the first half of the nineteenth century, Chopin covers his eyes, like the woman in Ferdinand Khnopf’s painting *Listening to Schumann*, from the second half of the century.¹²⁶ This shows how the contemplative mode of listening to the music of Chopin preceded a phenomenon which became common only in the later decades of the century. As Wackenroder writes: ‘I shut my eyes to all the wars going on in the world and withdraw in silence into the realm of music, as I might into the realm of faith [...] where we forget the clamour of men and where we are no longer overcome with vertigo from the twittering of so many languages, with the confusion of alphabets and monstrous hieroglyphics’.¹²⁷

Analysing descriptions of Chopin’s playing, we notice an escapist return to exclusivity/containment, as it were, as opposed to the proper, modern realism of inclusivity/expansion. Chopin’s playing evokes a world normally inaccessible to the listener.¹²⁸ ‘The joys, the consolations, the soothing emotions which the creations of true art awaken in the weary, suffering, thirsty, or persevering and believing hearts to whom they are dedicated’,¹²⁹ ‘milder

¹²³ Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 10.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 133–134.

¹²⁵ Charles E. and Marie Hallé, *Life and Letters of Sir Charles Hallé Being an Autobiography (1819–1860) with Correspondence and Diaries* (London, 1896), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 271.

¹²⁶ Ferdinand Khnopf, *Listening to Schumann*, 1883, Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique.

¹²⁷ Wilhelm Henrich Wackenroder, ‘Die Wunder der Tonkunst’, in *Werke und Briefe* (Jena, 1910), pp. 164–165, quoted in Fubini, *A History*, p. 269.

¹²⁸ On the subject of evocation, see Leonard, ‘Picturing Listening’, p. 276.

¹²⁹ Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, p. 48

shores',¹³⁰ an 'aerial clime',¹³¹ 'the beloved homeland',¹³² 'sublime melody',¹³³ or the phrase of Chopin himself,¹³⁴ 'beautiful springtime, but under moonlight' – all present an ideal or idealised world which is either a distant Arcadian land or a past golden age where the pragmatism of time is suspended in an escape from the present. These descriptions are reminiscent of the total psycho-physical reaction to *Tannhäuser* recorded by Baudelaire in 1861.¹³⁵ Though they arise two decades earlier, they point to a similar subordination to the composer and his music. The reaction to the dream of an ideal realm is silence, speechlessness, evoked either by immersion in its (imaginary) beauty or by nostalgia evoked by its (real) inaccessibility. The reaction to the conclusion of an improvisation by Chopin is frequently silence, but not a sudden outburst of applause or other signs of a spontaneous expression of opinion appropriate to bravura recitals by pianists such as Liszt: 'When he finished playing a Nocturne one wished only to be quiet so that the enchantment should not be broken',¹³⁶ or elsewhere:



the last note drops like a pearl in a golden vase, and the audience, absorbed in its contemplation, hold back the applause for a few moments: they are listening still. It is like having watched the half-tints of an evening twilight dissolve harmoniously, and then staying motionless in the darkness, the eyes still fixed on the point in the horizon whence the light has just vanished.¹³⁷

In one description of an improvisation, the ideal world is confronted brutally with reality: Chopin 'sings and conveys our happiness, our current poverty, our longing for our mothers, and our longing for what is still ahead of us, our fear of the world, and our heavenly joy', but the listener is nevertheless awakened: 'I dream I'm at home, but then, from

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, p. 53.

¹³² Heinrich Heine, *De tout un peu* (Paris, 1888), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 284.

¹³³ George Sand, *Impressions et souvenirs* (Paris, 1873), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 283.

¹³⁴ *Chopin's Polish Letters*, p. 160.

¹³⁵ Charles Baudelaire, 'Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris', *Revue européenne*, 1 April 1861, repr. in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris, 1976), vol. ii, pp. 779–815; cf. Leonard, 'Picturing Listening', p. 269.

¹³⁶ Albert Déchelette, *Journal des Débats*, 28 December 1934, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 276.

¹³⁷ *Le Rénovateur*, 5 January 1835, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 67.

that illusion I awake; here's the shrill *cries* of the tradeswoman instead of the warbling of birds, the *noise* of wagons rather than the sigh of a river [emphasis added], and instead of dew – mud'.¹³⁸

Listeners did not attend to Chopin's improvisations only in a contemplative manner characterised by a quietening of reactions. Elisa Fournier recalls that 'we laughed our heads off' and that another part of an improvisation 'brought tears to our eyes'; later there was an episode 'which caused shudders', and then 'it filled the heart and pierced the breast, and in the surrounding quiet you could hear just sighs, barely contained, brought on by an emotion too deep to control', which shows that in his improvisations, as opposed to his nocturnes, Chopin 'broke the harmony of the tea table'.¹³⁹ Elisa Fournier does not describe precisely the reactions to the last part of the performance – an imitation of a mechanical instrument missing one sound – but we can assume that it also evoked contrasting, though presumably not so extreme, emotions.¹⁴⁰ An association between the stream of consciousness and the improvisations and letters of Chopin, then, would seem out of place.

¹³⁸ Aleksander Jełowicki, quoted in Adam Czartkowski and Zofia Jeżewska, *Fryderyk Chopin* [Fryderyk Chopin] (Warsaw, 2013), p. 289.

¹³⁹ Cf. Jeffrey Kallberg, 'The Harmony of the Tea Table: Gender and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne', in *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History and Musical Genre* (Harvard, 1998), pp. 30–61.

¹⁴⁰ 'I never heard such a talent in my life; it is miraculous in its simplicity, sweetness, goodness and sense of humour. In the last vein, he played for us a caricature of an opera by Bellini at which we laughed our heads off, there was so much shrewd observation and subtle mockery of the style of musical habits of Bellini. Later came a prayer of the Poles in their misfortune [*Largo* in E flat major?], which brought tears to our eyes, then an etude on the sound of a bell [*sur le bruit du tocsin*], which caused shudders, then a funeral march which was so heavy, sombre and painful that it filled the heart and pierced the breast, and in the surrounding quiet you could hear just sighs, barely contained, brought on by an emotion too deep to control. Then, casting off that painful inspiration and coming to himself after a moment's rest while Mme George [Sand] sang a few notes, he played some lovely melodies from a dance called the *bourrée*, well-known in the area, and of which the motifs, carefully chosen, form a valuable collection, full of beauty and simplicity. At the end, he rounded off that long, too-happy *séance* with a feat I could never have imagined. Using the piano, he imitated one of those musical pianos you can find in snuffboxes, pictures, etc., and so realistically that if we hadn't been in the same room we would never have believed that it was that grand piano sounding at the command of his fingers. All of the jewel-like finesse, the rapidity of the little steel keys setting the invisible cylinder into motion, was rendered with incomparable delicacy, and then suddenly there was an endless cadence, so faint that you could barely hear it, interrupted for a moment, as if by a damaged mechanism. He played one of those melodies – Tyrolean, I think, but with one note in the cylinder missing, and that note failed every time it was supposed to sound' [Elisa Fournier to her mother, 9–10 July 1846, quoted in Georges Lubin, *Georges Sand en Berry* (Paris, 1967), after Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin vu par ses élèves* (Boudry-Neuchâtel, 1988), pp. 368–369]. Cf: 'All the nuances, all the musician's

Descriptions of Chopin's playing use primarily metaphors suggesting the limits of hearing, evoking delicate sounds (in terms of volume and spectrum), almost inaudible, sporadic, yet at the same time requiring heightened attention and sensitivity: 'a fly in flight striking [a key] with its wings' is not far from the 'technical proficiency' of Chopin which, according to Hiller, is reminiscent of the 'flight of a swallow'.¹⁴¹ Henriette Voigt writes of Chopin's 'velvet fingers' which 'fly over the keys'¹⁴² (the phrase 'doigts de velour' was also used by George Sand). In a review of a concert at the Salle Pleyel published on 27 February 1842, Escudier proposed a metaphor which especially affects auditory imagination:

Listening to all those sounds, all these nuances – which follow each other, intermingle, separate and reunite to arrive at the same goal, melody – one might well believe one is hearing small fairy voices sighing under silver bells, or a rain of pearls falling on crystal tables.¹⁴³

In another review of a concert on 14 December 1835, Berlioz wrote: 'the last note drops like a pearl in a golden vase, and the audience, absorbed in its contemplation, hold back the applause for a few moments: they are listening still'.¹⁴⁴ Drops of dew, pearls ('a rain of pearls falling on crystal tables'), a bell ('silver bells') – these comparisons evoke a lightness of sound reminiscent of early Romantic visions of ethereal

emotions, I could grasp, and I remember in the most exact way the motives and the feelings I had while listening to each piece. First he played a magnificent Prelude, then the *Berceuse* ['Wiosna' [Spring], Op. 74 No. 2? see Hippolyte Barbedette, *Chopin. Essai de critique musicale* (Paris, 1861), frontispiece and p. 58 n. 1], then a Mazurka, again the *Berceuse* – of which Mme Hoffman [Klementyna, née Tańska] said that the angels in Bethlehem must have sung like that. There followed a splendid Polonaise [Polonaise in A flat major, Op. 53], and finally, in my honour, an improvisation in which he evoked all of the sweet and sorrowful voices of the past. He sang the tears of the *dumkas*, and finished with the national anthem, 'Poland is not [yet] dead' ['Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła'] in a whole gamut of different forms and voices, from that of the warrior to those of children to angels. I could have written a whole book about this improvisation', Correspondence of Józef Bohdan Zaleski (Lviv, 1901–03), vol. i, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 283–284.

¹⁴¹ Ferdinand Hiller, *Briefe an eine Ungenannte*, Köln 1877, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 270; cf. Pistone, *Le piano*, pp. 473–474.

¹⁴² Henriette Voigt, diary, Leipzig, 13 September 1836, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 269.

¹⁴³ Léon Escudier, *La France musicale*, 27 February 1842, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, pp. 293–294.

¹⁴⁴ *Le Rénovateur*, 5 January 1835, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 67.

beings absorbed in the ephemeral activities proper to them, an illustration of the common tendency to describe the sound of the piano using metaphors relating to the sounds produced by water (from delicate drops to tempests).¹⁴⁵

In *Le Rénovateur* of 15 December 1833, Berlioz writes of a performance by Chopin as a ‘concert of sylphs or elves’ to which one must listen intently,¹⁴⁶ while Jean Paul wrote in a similar tone about music in general: ‘In truth, thine [musical] accents are echoes, gathered by angels from the joyous sounds of a second world to bring to our mute hearts, to our deserted night, the faded spring song of the soaring heavens’.¹⁴⁷ Such sublime delicacy is seen as something unachievable to the human hand, as a trait more proper to a phantom than a mere mortal. From which the expression ‘divine finger’, as well as the opinion, after noting Chopin’s delicacy, that ‘the whole man was nothing but breath, more of a spiritual than a bodily being, like his playing, pure harmony. The words he spoke – soft, transitory, murmuring – also recalled his art’.¹⁴⁸ This last sentence would confirm the accord between his physical features and personality (specifically, his way of speaking) and his attitude towards aesthetics and manners.

These metaphors lead us to an interpretation of Chopin as a feminine pianist. Women of the time wanted to appear ‘almost incorporeal, like angels or butterflies.’ In one biography of Chopin, it is stated that, in the evening, he was sometimes surrounded by ‘exquisite fairies at some magic fete’,¹⁴⁹ ‘a host of beings similar to playful sprites’ or ‘beautiful prophetesses from a magic land’, which conjures up an image of women as ethereal, almost incorporeal, beings. On the other hand, these metaphors, as Kallberg states, ‘helped forge a changing image of Chopin as an androgynous, hermaphroditic, effeminate, and/or pathological being’.¹⁵⁰ Such descriptions are, however, testimony to the aural sensitivity which is part of the image of femininity.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Pistone, *Le piano*, pp. 483–484.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 272.

¹⁴⁷ Jean Paul (Johann Paul Friedrich Richter), ‘Hesperus’, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Weimar, 1929), quoted in Fubini, *A History*, p. 301.

¹⁴⁸ Sophie Léo, *Erinnerungen aus Paris* (1817–1848) (Berlin, 1851), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin vu par ses élèves*, pp. 362–363.

¹⁴⁹ Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁰ Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, p. 70.

At the same time, however, it was written that ‘Chopin was the only political pianist. He incarnated Poland, he set Poland to music!’,¹⁵¹ where the figure of the composer is not interpreted solely in a context of Arcadian, aristocratic escapism or feminine attention to detail,¹⁵² but is placed on the side of an art of engagement, and thereby an aesthetic requiring a different threshold of sensitivity. In this case, interpretations focused not on Chopin the sentimental miniaturist (the private sphere of the fastidious – read feminine – *soirée intime*) but on Chopin the sublime bard (the public sphere of the epic – read masculine – narration of history).¹⁵³ Many, if not most, of the associations made in nineteenth-century texts on the works and performance of Chopin relate to the sounds of battle, armies, victories (the motif of a mythologising nostalgia for a glorious past and its imagined recurrence/restoration), calamities (the motif of an almost always heroic failure, often tinged with hope), or glory in defeat.¹⁵⁴

In forming a national discourse serving to construct national identity – as in academic painting, in which key historical episodes are employed as political argument – an important role was played by interpretations of the musical literature. Attempts were made to hear what was read from pictures. Historical narratives contained in (or added to) music served to gladden the heart during the period of the Partitions, as was the case in many works of Polish Romantic literature, although Słowacki asked: ‘Have you seen anyone, on the day after the great tenderness of Chopin’s music, becoming better, more beautiful, more merciful, turning into a hero?’¹⁵⁵ Chopin as heard in Paris is no longer (only) a feminine, salon composer, but a creator who uses the sounds of the piano to paint ‘fierce

¹⁵¹ Wilhelm von Lenz, *Die grossen Pianoforte-Virtuosen unserer Zeit aus persönlicher Bekanntschaft. Liszt – Chopin – Tausig – Henselt* (Berlin, 1872), quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, p. 71.

¹⁵² Cf. Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, pp. 38–40.

¹⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ ‘Sometimes [in mazurkas] we catch the manly sounds of the rattling of spurs, but it is generally the almost imperceptible rustling of crape and gauze under the light breath of the dancers, or the clinking of chains of gold and diamonds, that may be distinguished. Some of them seem to depict the defiant pleasure of the ball given on the eve of battle, tortured however by anxiety for, through the rhythm of the dance, we hear the sighs and despairing farewells of hearts forced to suppress their tears. Others reveal to us the discomfort and secret ennui of those guests at a fete, who find it in vain to expect that the gay sounds will muffle the sharp cries of anguished spirits’, Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, p. 41.

¹⁵⁵ Juliusz Słowacki to his mother, Paris, February 1845, *Korespondencja*, vol. ii, pp. 126–127.

exclamations’, ‘the repeated roar of artillery’, ‘the sounds from some dread battle waging in the distance’, as in the Polonaise in F sharp minor,¹⁵⁶ the ‘dull tramping’ illustrating a ‘detachment of the Polish nobility’ ‘rushing at the enemy’, and afterwards, ‘the clash of sabres, the sound of gunshots, and of bodies falling to the earth with a dull groan’.¹⁵⁷ National identity is forged through the addition of a programme to the music, but also through the discovery of a specifically national thread in the origin of the music,¹⁵⁸ which in Paris was received as something exotic.

We know that Chopin depicted historical subjects in music while still in Warsaw, introducing to them many varied elements, not shying away from expressive aesthetic means. It would seem that in this type of creative work he constructed a narration based on an external text, and, thanks to interpretations placing his music in the context of the great themes of history, as a figure he was transported from the intimate circle of private *soirées* (less valued genres) to the public sphere of political discourse (more valued genres). On the basis of his later improvisations, which nevertheless derived to a large degree from internal reflections, we can follow yet another aspect of the changes taking place in aural sensitivity. In 1844, Arthur Schopenhauer was one of the first to describe the instability of perception, attempting to grasp the essence of the stream of consciousness (using the phrase of William James, for the first time defining the term – ‘stream of thought’¹⁵⁹) playing out in time:

Sometimes external impressions of sense throng in on it [the intellect], disturbing and interrupting it, and forcing the strangest and oddest things on it at every moment; sometimes *one* idea draws in *another* by the bond of association, and is itself displaced by it; finally, even the intellect itself is not capable of sticking very long and continuously to *one* idea.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Liszt, *Life of Chopin*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁷ Józef Tretiak, *Słowo o Chopinie* [A word on Chopin] (Lviv, 1877), quoted in Ferdinand Hoesick, *Chopin: życie i twórczość* [Chopin: his life and art] (Kraków, 1967), vol. iv, pp. 191–192.

¹⁵⁸ ‘It was certainly here, among simple people, in seeking with his ear the essence of such idyllic music, that he was so taken by it, so saturated with it, that it sufficed for his whole life, as if a fairy wand had called forth from his soul an inexhaustible spring of the most alluring, delightful songs and melodies’, Marceł Antoni Szulc, *Fryderyk Chopin i utwory jego muzyczne: przyczynek do życiorysu i oceny kompozycji artysty* [Fryderyk Chopin and his musical works: a contribution to the biography and assessment of the artist’s compositions] (Kraków, 1986), p. 64.

¹⁵⁹ Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁰ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York, 1966), vol. ii, pp. 137–138, quoted in Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 55.



Schopenhauer also used the metaphor of the magic lantern, in which a series of images is shown, but none for too long.¹⁶¹ The heterogeneous improvisations of Chopin can be perceived in terms of changes in perception/attention as described by Schopenhauer (and mentioned by Bergson when analysing ‘temps intérieur’¹⁶²). Schumann compared the Preludes, Op. 28 to ‘ruins’, emphasising their fragmentation and ambivalence,¹⁶³ and in the same vein the improvisations can be compared to a type of ‘stream of consciousness’, spontaneous in nature, often turning elements of official creative works into caricature, even mockery (Chopin’s knack for imitation and skill at caricature, as described in various sources, cast a different light on aural sensitivity perceived as feminine, and sometimes neurotic, when brushing up against the harsh reality of his life). An important aspect heightening the ambivalence of elements of improvisation is that of *schizophronic* quotations as a record of a trace appearing in unexpected and not fully controlled contexts, especially since improvisation continually departs from the certainty created by common standards of form and is not subject to the discipline of a prior scheme.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, perception of it, to a contemplative listener, is often characterised by surrender. Crary writes of the ‘fluid economy of psychic experience’, where

all the mental states (sleep, trance, fainting, daydream, disassociation) that classical thought had marginalised or excluded from its theories of knowledge now took center stage as parts of psychological accounts of normative subjectivity.¹⁶⁵

Chopin’s improvisation can therefore be seen as a type of stream of consciousness, conditioned by previously marginalised mental states and requiring that listeners subject themselves to a similar opening up of (un)consciousness. The attention paid in the nineteenth century to the unconscious, a kind of discovery of personality as a key descriptive category, suggests that improvisation, which constituted the majority of Chopin’s creative work, and the manner in which it was perceived, attest to what may be the most crucial change in aural sensitivity, to which an increasingly aggressive counterpoint was provided by the soundscape of modernity.

¹⁶¹ Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 55.

¹⁶² Cf. Leonard, ‘Picturing Listening’, p. 282.

¹⁶³ Cf. Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries*, pp. 146, 154.

¹⁶⁴ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, pp. 88, 90–91.

¹⁶⁵ Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 57.