Marcin Stańczyk's Afterimages and Aftersounds – Reflections and Self-Reflections

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ABSTRACT

One of the most frequently recurring topics in Marcin Stańczyk's (b. 1977) self-commentaries is the idea of translating the phenomenon of afterimages into music, in the form of his original concept of aftersounds. Direct inspiration for this concept came from a cycle of solarist paintings by Władysław Strzemiński entitled *Afterimages of the Sun*. The concept of aftersounds can be considered on the level of music material (resonances and reflections of various kinds, contrasts on the sound level) as well as metaphorically (when the composition becomes an afterimage of an external phenomenon). Particularly important to Stańczyk's work as a composer are explorations in the field of music perception and the theatricalisation of performance, which turns every gesture of the performers into a meaningful element of the composition, as well as an element of expression. This paper aims to present an outline of the ways in which Stańczyk implements the idea of aftersounds in music. The text is based on the composer's own statements as well as on characteristic examples from his works.

Keywords: Marcin Stańczyk, afterimages, aftersounds, idea, musical gesture, theatricalisation of performance

A LOOK AT THE COMPOSER

Marcin Stańczyk has in fact never ceased to reflect on his own musical language. The central category in his artistic work is an idea translated into musical form, which organises all the elements of his compositions, gives meaning to his musical discourse and provides each of his works with an individual character. Inspiration with the phenomenon of afterimages and search for the ways of translating it into music – are one of the main topics of the composer's self-commentaries, and have already become his trademark. The composer has developed his original concept of aftersounds, which is going to be the main subject of this paper. I am going to look at this important element of his compositions from two perspectives: that of the sound material, and as a metaphor. Stańczyk's output of compositions includes a number of works which apply this concept in practice. It also provides ongoing inspiration for his artistic quest and explorations. The composer's self-commentaries, which can be found in interviews, conversations and scores, will serve me as a guide in my musicological research.

Marcin Stańczyk, born in Łęczyca in 1977, owes his first contacts with music to his grandfather, who, as the composer recalls, taught him "little tunes" by the ear, though he himself could not read music. His regular music education began in the accordion class of the State Primary Music School in Łęczyca and continued in the State Secondary Music School in Kutno. Apart from learning the accordion, Stańczyk also played the alto saxophone, and even the trumpet.

I decided to apply to the composition department since I remembered how often, fed up with instrumental "practice", I moved smoothly from performing a piece to free improvisation. As an instrumentalist, however, I had not paid much attention to music theory, and this proved a hindrance. At the entrance exams to the Academy of Music in Łódź, I made some mistakes. It was only thanks to the good will of the then Dean, Marta Szoka, that I was enrolled on a theory course, and a year later – allowed to add composition to my curriculum. It was precisely at the time when Prof. Zygmunt Krauze began to teach in Łódź.¹

Zygmunt Krauze was and remains a great authority for the composer. It was Krauze who initiated Stańczyk into the mysteries of contemporary music, played him inspiring recordings and presented directions along which creative imagination could develop. It was also Krauze who introduced Stańczyk to the world of Strzemiński's paintings, which inspired his idea of aftersounds.

Having graduated in music theory and composition from the Academy of Music, Stańczyk took up postgraduate studies with the composer Ivan Fedele at Rome's Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, as well as taking part in numerous courses in composition, e.g. under Brian Ferneyhough. He recalls his stay in Italy as extremely rewarding from the point of view of learning various technical and methodological solutions applied by composers, which allow him to convey his ideas precisely as far as notation and sound are concerned. Another important stage in Stańczyk's artistic development were the electronic music courses at IRCAM, Paris in 2011–14 (Cursus I and Cursus II), where he studied programming in the MAX MSP environment and the application of electronics in composition practice.

Marcin Stańczyk also holds a degree in law and is employed at the Provincial Administrative Court in Łódź. He is a chorister at Łódź Philharmonic and an academic teacher at the Academy of Music in Łódź. As a composer, he has won numerous awards and distinctions, e.g. the 2nd prize in the 3rd Sun River Student Composition Competition 2006 in Chengdu, the 1st prize in the Franco Donatoni International Composers' Competition in Milan, and the 2nd prize in the Salvatore Martirano Memorial Composition Award (international annual composers' competition). His greatest achievement to date is his victory in the prestigious Toru Takemitsu competition in 2013. In the same year he obtained a doctoral degree from the Academy of Music in Łódź

¹ M. Baczyńska, (2013). *Moja znaleziona muzyka* [My Discovered Music]. *Art. Papier*. No. 15–16 (231–232). Text available on-line <http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=182&artykul=3904> (accessed on 10th September 2015).

(on the basis of the vocal-instrumental composition *Le teste scambiate* for chamber orchestra and three characters).

It is amazing how the artist manages to concentrate to the utmost on composition despite all the professional duties described above. He uses all his free time to note down ideas for compositions and to translate those notes into actual music. His work is always based on an idea, a concept of the composition, for which he then selects an adequate type of sound. Despite working with ideas, the composer retains a rational and intellectual attitude to his work: "Virtually all the time I work to find answers to the question concerning beauty in music. Just like the classics, I need two simple things. I need a sense of inspiration, and I need to derive intellectual pleasure from work on the structure and form of the piece."² His music demonstrates a consistent balance of logic and emotion, order and expression.

AFTERSOUNDS

During Stańczyk's composition studies, Prof. Zygmunt Krauze suggested that he should become acquainted with the works of Władysław Strzemiński exhibited at Łódź Museum of Art. Krauze himself had drawn strong inspiration from this artist, especially with regard to "unistic" compositions directly derived from Strzemiński's concept of unistic paintings. Stańczyk discovered in Strzemiński's art a different aspect that proved crucial to his artistic path: the translation into musical works of the optical phenomenon of afterimages, represented by the painter in the cycle of "solarist" paintings *Afterimages of the Sun* (of the late 1940s). Already in his *Theory of Vision*, Strzemiński discussed the phenomenon of afterimages, which results from the physiology of sight:

We see a colour because an object exerts impact on our eyes through radiation. What does this impact consist in? Photochemical reactions take place in the nerves of the retina. As a result of **chemical** changes in the retina, the nerves lose sensitivity to the colour they "observe". As a result of this loss of ability to see the given colour, if we then move our eyes to a different place or object, we will see it in the colour complementary (i.e. opposite) to that of the previously viewed object. For instance, if we previously looked at a green object and then moved our eyes to another object, we will at first see that object as red, regardless of its actual proper colour. Only after a certain (short) period of time, after the regeneration

process has taken place in the nerves, will we be able to see that object in its local colour.³

Ophthalmology provides the following explanation:

Afterimages are also the result of the antagonistic action of neuronal systems. [...] [A]n afterimage is the consequence of disturbing the physico-chemical balance of processes caused by the impact of a light stimulus on the retina. Once the balance has been disturbed, the retina returns to its original state not at once, but only after a specific time has elapsed. This return to the state of balance (after the stimulus has ceased) is accompanied by certain processes in the retina and the neuronal pathway strong enough to induce specific visual impressions without any further external stimuli.⁴

To sum up, in the theory of vision an afterimage is a visual impression that consists in retaining the stimulus in the retina after it has ceased. Inspiration with afterimages is one of many phenomena of perception that Marcin Stańczyk has been preoccupied with, such as memory and illusion. In compositions drawing on the idea of afterimages, Stańczyk frequently includes a specific painting by Strzemiński in his commentary, thus pointing to his direct source of inspiration.

I have for some time been interested in the paintings of Władysław Strzemiński, and especially in that stage of his work when he began to paint afterimages of the sun – just after the war. Afterimages are coloured spots which we see if we look at a source of light and then abruptly move our eyes to a white page or a wall. We will see streaks of e.g. blue or red light, which are the colours complementary to yellow. I have frequently pondered on how this could be translated into music. I have worked on this subject for several years and it is by no means easy. "Aftersounds" in music... should they be treated acoustically as hum, or rather as the image of a sound that appears in our heads...?⁵

The fundamental feature of an afterimage is the appearance of a visual impression in complementary colours. Importantly, even though these colours are complementary, they also dissonate with one another more than any other colours. This principle is related to the phenomenon of contrast, extremely important for Marcin Stańczyk as a source of creative ideas on many levels from sound material to musical idea. Among the opposites that he most frequently considers, we find the

³ W. Strzemiński, (1974). *Teoria widzenia [Theory of Vision]*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, p. 160.

⁴ O. Palacz, (1986). Układ wzrokowy i jego podstawowa funkcja – proces widzenia [The Visual System and Its Fundamental Function: the Process of Seeing]. In: W. Orłowski (Ed.), *Okulistyka współczesna [Contemporary Ophthalmology]*. Vol. 1. Warsaw: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, pp. 80–81.

⁵ M. Baczyńska, (2013). *Moja znaleziona muzyka*, op. cit..

² A statement from the documentary film *Preludium* dedicated to composers participating in the project "Young Polish Composers' Homage to Fryderyk Chopin," dir. Paweł Zabel, script by Eliza Orzechowska, Tomasz Cyz, Paweł Zabel, National Audiovisual Institute 2011.

pair nature vs. technology, which Stańczyk introduces e.g. by combining natural order in music (resulting from the spectral analysis of sound) with electronics and transformations.

Translating afterimages into music involves the search for such equivalents of the visual phenomenon that can be reflected in sounds. We will therefore divide afterimages into those that are produced by means of the sound material directly or by virtue of a metaphor. Stańczyk attaches importance not only to the consequences, but also to the antecedents of a musical sound. He frequently emphasises the existence of a whole universe of sounds that precedes the actual sound used in a composition. What is characteristic of this composer, therefore, is how he probes into the musical material and its structure so as to take maximum advantage of its energetic potential. One can find a certain analogy between this method and the idea of translating Strzemiński's idea of unism into music as developed by Stańczyk's mentor, Zygmunt Krauze. This is, then, yet another example of how fruitful the association between visual arts and music can be in terms of new formal and structural concepts.

AFTERIMAGES AND SOUND MATERIAL

In the earliest compositions that attempt to translate the concept of afterimages into music, we can point to such elements as noises, resonances and echoes, understood as afterimages of a given sound. In *3 Afterimages* (2008) for solo double-bass, the role of "afterimages" is played by the partials:

In a music composition, partials act as reflections of sounds. The three parts of this work explore the relationships between fundamental tones and partials. In the first part, they are contrasted. In the second, there is a smooth transition between the fundamental frequency and the partial. The third part presents a gradual transformation from the smooth transitions of part two to the contrasts that characterise the opening section.⁶

From the spectral perspective, the base frequency is provided by the tone E on the double-bass. The performer's part contains numerous vocal actions and percussive effects, and the work is notated on as many as four different staves. In this approach, as the composer himself explains, the fundamental tone is equivalent to a flash of light, whereas the partials correspond to its afterimages. Stańczyk refers to this solution as morphological, i.e. based on the theories of sound morphology that view each sound as a complex structure dependent on attack, timbre, duration, etc.

Another composition drawing on the idea of afterimages in the sphere of music material is *Afterimages-Rosso* for piano (2009). The composer himself claims he has a remarkable ease of correlating musical keys with colours. The key of G major is associated in his mind with the colour brown, E-flat major – with green, F-sharp major – with red, B minor – with grey, and E minor – with black. *Afterimages-Rosso* combines two distorted harmonic series whose fundamentals are the tones of E flat and F sharp (with dominant red colour). The colour green (E flat) contrasts with the principal colour indicated in the title. The commentary to this work refers to the cultural ambiguity of the colour red – which includes the opposition of love and passion on the one hand to drama and suffering on the other, "a force that is creative and destructive at the same time." Apart from the question of reflecting colours in music, the composition makes use of various kinds of resonance and reflections. Stańczyk uses suitable pedalling in order to emphasise harmonics as well as additional string preparation with aluminium foil, which results in extra resonance. The example below presents the first two staves of the composition:

$\text{♩} = 70$, *marcatissimo, con tutta la forza*

press pedal sustain for e while and ALMOST let go it in order to obtain harmonic indicated to diamondnote when find it - press pedal again

in the moment of second press of pedal should be remaining for while chord in right hand depressed in order to stimulate the harmonics of sound E flat.

Ex. 1. Marcin Stańczyk, *Afterimages-Rosso* for piano, bars 1–5. Source: composer's own materials.

These earliest attempts at translating afterimages into the world of music material provided the composer with an impulse for further explorations. He was looking for other relations on which to base the idea of aftersounds. "I realised that this idea might mean more to music composition than just the disposition of material. With time, I gradually began to exploit this concept more and more in the context of music perception."⁷

⁶ Source: composer's commentary printed in the score of *3 Afterimages*. The composer's own materials.

⁷ A statement made at the conference *The Musical Languages of Contemporary Polish Composers: Self-Reflections*, University of Warsaw Library, Warsaw 25th September 2015.

One example of an application of the idea of afterimages that relies to a greater extent on phenomena of perception, though is still based on elements of articulation, is *Afterimages* for guitar (2014). In this work, the composer introduces quasi-percussive actions on the guitar, which trigger the resonance of a sustained chord – or its afterimage. As the strings are attacked at various points of the fingerboard, this chord resounds now distinctly, now weakly, as a faint reflection, though the manner of playing is similar. The composer takes advantage of the potential of extended performance techniques in order to play a game with listeners' expectations. This is evident in the following example:

Ex. 2. Marcin Stańczyk, *Afterimages* for guitar, bars 53–56. Source: composer's own materials.

MUSICAL AFTERIMAGES OF PHENOMENA IN THE EXTERNAL REALITY

The method of work that is most characteristic of Marcin Stańczyk is collecting sounds in the form of notes and recordings ("I carry a sound recorder and notebooks with me: this is how I work"⁸). The composer "collects" interesting sounds from the world around him, as well as – indirectly – impressions that are associated with those sounds. He uses these as material for his compositions: He breaks them down into constituent parts, transcribes and transforms them, or sometimes treats them as a kind of ideas for the creation of new sound worlds. He recalls that performers called him a "sound hunter." He collects individual sounds, but also whole situations that influence the perception of sounds:

I can well remember those outdoor cafes with parasols whose canopies are held up by metal rings. When the wind blew, the rings

produced a sound with highly elusive pulse, while the parasols flapped in the breeze. The place was empty, almost no living soul, and the wind blew sand into the eyes. The entire acoustic situation was so extraordinary that I decided to record it. It is common practice with me to record things that I find fascinating, whether it is some kind of atmosphere or a sound.⁹

In the composition *Laterna* for clarinet, cello, 2 percussions and piano (2008), whose title refers to the part of the lighthouse where the light beam is produced, Stańczyk builds an incredibly suggestive image of the sea without any conventional illustrative music. In his self-commentary printed in the score, he writes: "The sea – the fascinating unity of different phenomena, diversity in unity."¹⁰ The *laterna* of the title may also be interpreted metaphorically:

On the one hand, the sense of complete lack of stability in the open sea, where one eagerly awaits the first visible flash of light from the lighthouse, the first point of reference and the relief, feeling of safety associated with that sign. On the other hand – the awareness of the receding shore, of looking back at the dwindling light from the lighthouse, anxiety growing, loss of stability, eventually – panic that gives way to helplessness and resignation, like a lullaby that never puts us to sleep and does not lead us anywhere.¹¹

The sound of the sea serves Stańczyk as a fascinating source of inspiration. Apart from the sound itself, he also analyses the energetic profile associated with it, the tension and release of ebb and flow, the whole process and its changeability, which establishes a peculiar type of pulse.

Another example of the influence of soundscapes familiar to the composer is his opera *Solarize* (2014), written mostly during the composer's stay in Paris. The Parisian streets provided Stańczyk with sounds that represented a mix of influences, environments and characters. The acoustic chaos of Rue Saint Denis exerted its daily impact on him. These sound experiences influenced – subconsciously as it were – the eclectic language of Stańczyk's opera, liberated from the limitations of contemporary music. This language is used to express, as best it can, the complex personality of Leon Botha, a DJ suffering from the progeria syndrome. The opera fuses sound worlds of different provenience, with audible influences from jazz, rock and hip-hop.

⁹ M. Dębska, (2015). *Chropowatość dźwięków Łodzi #2 – wywiad z Marcinem Stańczykiem* [The Harsh Sounds of Łódź #2 – An Interview with Marcin Stańczyk]. Text available on-line <http://www.glissando.pl/wywiady/chropowatosc-dzwiekow-lodzi-2/> (accessed on 10th September 2015).

¹⁰ Source: preface from the score of *Laterna*. The composer's own materials.

¹¹ Source: preface from the score of *Laterna*. op. cit.

⁸ A statement from the documentary film *Preludium*, op. cit.

Woven Music for orchestra (2013) was inspired by weaving machines which the composer listened to and recorded at the Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź. The piece is a product of fascination with the machine sound, rhythm, and the phenomenon of self-synchronisation, which the composer frequently emphasised. On the other hand, the composition also reflects Stańczyk's rooting in the Łódź urban environment, in which he has lived and worked for many years. The textile industry is the city's hallmark.

Every created work results from a number of personal, individual circumstances. This is why I said that I am from Łódź, not from Geneva – it does translate into my music. My music has been influenced by the urban landscape, not only acoustic, but also visual. Łódź is a special place in this respect. No other city in Poland is saturated to that extent by industrial architecture. Manchester is said to have a similar character.¹²

These examples represent the afterimages of reality typical of Stańczyk – musical reflections and explorations of sound phenomena that the composer has had direct live contact with. In *Analessi rotte* for cello, tenor and trombone (2009), the problem of memory and its distortions (the afterimage of the past) is presented from a slightly different angle. The form of this piece draws on the phenomenon of a flashback – glimpses of memories and past events. Those persistently recurring fragments include e.g. vocalises (borrowed, so to speak, from a different musical dimension) or sounds that stand out from the rest of the musical narration, seem to compete for our attention and look for a way to reach our consciousness.

AFTERIMAGES OF THE PAST?

Though inspirations with the music of other masters are not the leading motif of Marcin Stańczyk's self-commentary, the topic is nevertheless worthy of a discussion. Does the composer's attitude to tradition demonstrate any characteristics of a metaphorical approach to the concept of aftersounds? In some of his works, he openly refers or alludes to the music of others; not in the form of imitation or parody, though. Rather, he transforms his inspirations in a highly individual manner so that they help implement the central idea of the given work. One of the most important artists who influenced the development of Stańczyk's aesthetic is Gérard Grisey. In many of his compositions, Stańczyk draws on spectral techniques, though he has never applied them in an orthodox manner. In *Geysir-Grisey* for two pianos, violin, viola and double-bass (2005),

references to the music of the author of *Partiels* are most distinctly audible, both in musical narration and in the omnipresence of material derived from the spectrum of the tone E.

SIGHS. Hommage à Chopin for chamber orchestra (2009–2010) is not a paraphrase or transcription, nor does it cite Chopin's music, as it is common in many compositions bearing this subheading. Instead, it draws inspiration from an element as characteristic of Chopin's idiom as the rubato, placed in the wide context of temporal phenomena in music, or represented in the form of momentary oscillations and deviations from stable tempo and pulse. Considering Stańczyk's strongly individual approach to inspiration with this phenomenon, we could describe it as a "reflection-afterimage" of the Chopin rubato – in the metaphorical sense. Each of the orchestral parts is accompanied by such an amount of performance notes and instructions that it corresponds in fact to several actions performed simultaneously. Various pulsations on the deep-structure plane overlap, which produces an effect corresponding to the "sighs" of the title.

SIGHS was largely composed during my stay abroad. In that period, I sometimes practised a little Chopin: probably mazurkas or some preludes, and quite certainly – a few of the technically easier miniatures. For me, there is some sort of beautiful slowing down inherent in this music – even for its own time. At times it seems to come to a halt, only to return in a moment, without haste. In comparison with Chopin, my own piece seemed to me terribly "busy" and hastened. I also recalled a broadcast on Polish Radio Programme Two where someone wondered how long Chopin's journeys across Poland had to take, and if the pace of his travels could influence his music. Since in that period I travelled a lot by plane, I thought – perhaps there really is something to it, and SIGHS is simply a metaphor of our times. But at the same time I realised that, whether we want it or not, we sometimes unconsciously choose for our reflection on new music such points of reference that are very far removed from us. It was then that I decided to dedicate this piece to Chopin.¹³

In his composition *Attorno* for alto flute, cello and piano (2013), Stańczyk takes a closer look at the music of Witold Lutosławski. In the commentary to the score we read:

The composer of this piece draws on two selected aspects of Lutosławski's oeuvre: the chain technique and controlled aleatoricism. As in Lutosławski's late compositions, the successive parts of my work do not follow one upon another, but overlap and interlock. The narrative forms a chain of parts which partially take over elements already known from previous parts, but also anticipate new ones. The composer adds a new dimension to the controlled aleatory writing first applied by Lutosławski in his *Jeux vénitiens* (1961) [...]. Side by side with sections with precise rhythm

¹² M. Dębska, (2015). *Chropowatość dźwięków Łodzi #2 – wywiad z Marcinem Stańczykiem*, op. cit.

¹³ From the composer's correspondence with the author of this paper.

and melody, but not synchronised, Stańczyk introduces fragments based on a shared pulse, in which the sound material itself is partly random and unstable, though in a sense controlled.¹⁴

This piece also includes the aspect of the theatricalisation of performance, which I will discuss further in this paper.

Stańczyk's references to tradition and great masters are, therefore, always mediated by his individual ideas and language. Rather than copying, imitating or quoting, he offers a creative reflection. The element that inspires him – such as aleatoricism or the rubato – is not approached from an orthodox perspective, but becomes the raw and living material to be transformed by the composer's imagination; thus – a kind of afterimage, or aftersound.

AFTERIMAGES OF SOUNDS IN RELATION TO GESTURES

The topic most frequently recurring in the composer's self-commentaries, second only to afterimages, is – the theatricalisation of performance. Stańczyk calls this direction in his art "total performance," i.e. that kind of approach to the performance of a work in which every element, movement or behaviour of the musician on the stage becomes part of the composition itself and has its justification. The composer frequently aims to represent the performer's struggle with the musical material, and how the musician's effort generates energy in the given piece of music. The desire to make the performer more deeply involved and to render each performance individual and unique is evident in nearly all of Stańczyk's compositions. The instrumentalist is frequently expected to perform a number of additional actions with his or her voice. Effects most characteristic of Stańczyk's music include many ways of breathing (in and out), repetitions of language sounds, wheezing, or even such original inventions of Marcin Stańczyk as e.g. the "angry cat" – breathing out with a large amount of saliva in the speech apparatus. One of his more frequently performed pieces in which the performer's expressive behaviour proves to be of fundamental importance is *Mosaïque* for cello and electronics (2012). Below I have illustrated selected forms of vocal articulation indicated in the commentary to the score. The cellist is not only supposed to perform the (highly challenging from the articulatory point of view) instrumental part, but to involve virtually all the body in the execution of the composer's instructions:

"angry cat" – expiration sound with saliva and with throat at the same time

"angry cat sound" – wit
pronounce letters indicated

h

"angry cat sound" – double
first sound – explosiv – pronounce P
second sound – just after first sound
letter H (angry cat). Sound is build
from two separate sounds

ph

expiration with rhythm, unnatural
with throat

ph - i

Ex. 3. Marcin Stańczyk, commentary in the score of *Mosaïque*. Source: composer's own materials.

The link between theatricalisation and the idea of musical afterimages depends first and foremost on the gesture itself. By playing with our perception – e.g. by using gestures which are at odds with the produced sounds, or simply by separating the gesture from its musical outcome (for instance, introducing mute actions marked as "pretend to play"), the composer presents his own variety of aftersounds – namely, that of sounds reflected in our imagination. The mute gesture creates a tension in our perception, which results in filling in the mental space of the unheard sound with a product of our mind. Stańczyk describes this phenomenon as separation of gesture from sound. Breaking conventions and habits associated with the reception of musical works is currently the subject of the composer's ongoing explorations.¹⁵

The study of what precedes and anticipates the sound is accompanied by a comprehensive scenario of the performers' gestures and stage presence. This kind of scenarios can be found in many of Stańczyk's compositions. Stańczyk attaches great importance to the impression and image formed in the listener's perception even before the musician has started playing.

¹⁴ Source: preface to the score of *Attorno*. The composer's own materials.

¹⁵ Separating gesture from sound is a device frequently used by composers to achieve various artistic aims. One should mention, for instance, the very end of Gérard Grisey's *Partiels*, where the percussionist grasps the cymbals and spreads his arms as though he were to clash the cymbals together with full force. But the clash never comes, which has its significance in the context of the whole composition, conceived as a study of sound in itself.

A concert is a spectacle. If we decide as composers that the audience should see what happens on the stage, we must also somehow relate to those events onstage. This is why all the gestures performed by musicians from the moment we see them enter the concert hall – are for me already a foreshadowing and an introduction to the music itself. The way a quartet member raises the bow before the music starts – is for me the beginning of the composition proper.¹⁶

In *Attorno* (2013) the preparations of musicians for performance on the stage are treated as part of the performance itself, and become as important as the music itself. As a consequence, the listeners realise that the composition has already begun when they notice the repetitions of some gestures, and their inner structures. Below, by way of illustration, I quote a set of instructions for the flute part:

1. entering on stage
-
2. sit on a chair (flute skip)
3. put the sheet music on the stand
4. move music stand to fit you
5. check the blast - short exp.
6. move hair back (theatrical way)
7. move a flute close to the mouth and put it back
- start playing, stop playing positions (two characters)
9. briefly blow through the instrument
- as bad musicians sometimes do during quiet fragments of music
10. look at the pianist, as just before starting to play

Ex. 4. Marcin Stańczyk, commentary in the score of *Attorno*. Source: composer's own materials.

The above-listed actions are the typical gestures of a musician preparing to start a performance on the concert stage. What Stańczyk did in *Attorno* was to provide those gestures with rhythm and a recognisable pattern, thanks to which they became part of the music, a peculiar kind of “pre-sound”.

Aftersounds for two percussions and live electronics (2014), composed for the completion of IRCAM's Cursus II, was an important point in the composer's development. In this composition, the idea of aftersounds is associated with the theatricalisation of performance. Gesture is treated here as an afterimage of sound. In the electronic part, we have an afterimage of sound in the form of the transformed text of Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles*. Live transformations accompany each of the performers' gestures, serving as their afterimages. Actions of the “pretend-to-play” type are extremely common in this piece, and their sound result turns out to contradict the listener's expectations.

Stańczyk compares performers to sculptors working with sound material. Their movements model the sound (literally: the percussionists wear motion detectors on their wrists). The composition itself has an intriguing structure: It consists of six consecutive sections called pre-aftersounds and aftersounds (pre POST-SONS 1, POST-SONS 1, pre POST-SONS 2, POST-SONS 2, etc.). The example below shows an excerpt from the first percussionist's part, from the beginning of section three, with the “pretend-to-play” action, live electronics and a vocal part:

Ex. 5. Marcin Stańczyk, *Aftersounds* for two percussions and live electronics, prePOST-SONS 2, bars 1–4. Source: composer's own materials.

Marcin Stańczyk's explorations related to the perception of the musical gesture and the correlation between performer's movement and music reception have their theoretical basis, although the composer's work in this area is completely independent and he does not refer to anybody else's research in the field. At this point of our discussion, two point of view overlap: the methodological approach of the musicologist and the practical one of the composer himself. The field of cognitive studies provides us with Rolf Inge Godøy's theory of motor-mimetic musical cognition¹⁷, according to which musical cognition is a correlate of different sensual perceptions, including those associated with the performer's movement, the mental image of gesture and the manner of sound production. While listening to music, our mind forms numerous images-simulations associated with specific gestures or movements. Those visualisations of music, based on gestures, are referred to as motor programs. Notably, Stańczyk's intuitions and creative concepts agree with contemporary theoretical thought, and his work on the relations between sound and gesture finds its confirmation in cognitivist studies. This fact seems to enhance the potential of the concepts that the composer develops.

One important element should be stressed in our analysis of afterimages in the music of Marcin Stańczyk,

¹⁶ A statement made at the conference *The Musical Languages of Contemporary Polish Composers: Self-Reflections*, University of Warsaw Library, Warsaw 25th September 2015.

¹⁷Cf. R.I. Godøy, (2003). *Motor-Mimetic Music Cognition*, *Leonardo*. Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 317–319.

since it has considerable impact on performance – namely, musical notation. If we assume that a performance is only an afterimage of the composer's idea, we accept a certain amount of distortions in actual performance. For Stańczyk, the question of notation is a crucial one. He takes care to notate his ideas with utmost precision. Hence the numerous markings and indications in the legends to his scores, which the performers need to study with particular diligence. "I put all those marks there in the hope of getting as close to the imagined effect as possible. What is important for me is the very aspiration to make my notation as precise as possible, though I am frequently aware that an ideal notation cannot be produced."¹⁸ The composer emphasises the energy released by the musician's struggle with the music and the effort that must be put in the performance. Let us return for a moment to *SIGHS* – Stańczyk's first composition to entrust vocal parts to the orchestra's instrumentalists on a large scale. The introduction of those additional vocal parts presents an extra difficulty for the performer, resulting in increased effort and expression – which is precisely what the composer intended in this case. Here is an excerpt from the double-bass part:

Ex. 6. Marcin Stańczyk, *SIGHS*, excerpt from the double-bass part, bar 32. Source: composer's own materials.

AFTERIMAGES OF SOUNDS IN RELATION TO MENTAL IMAGES

Marcin Stańczyk's endeavours to express the idea of musical afterimages also involve conceptual projects. One of these is *Possible Music* (*Muzyka Możliwa*), a kind of experiment or contribution to the discussion concerning the essence of a musical work and its postulated reception. The composer prepared a set of instructions for performance and made them available online. (Potential performances took place in several places in Poland. The composition is based on the following commentary (I quote a fragment):

¹⁸ E. Szczecińska, J. Topolski, (2011). Marcin Stańczyk, *Glissando*. No. 18, pp. 103–104.

You are the performer of the work as well as part of the audience.

It does not mean, however, that you need personally to appear at the Concert Hall on the day of the premiere.

You will perform the piece at the place where you are at the moment. Your task as a performer is to imagine this piece, to hear it in your imagination.

All the performers ought to be well prepared, that is, get acquainted with my music in advance, so that they can prepare for the first performance as best they can, and that the authorship of the music is unquestionable.

I deliberately give you no additional clues for performance.

Everything depends on you and your way of recreating my music in your imagination.

Liberate your imagination and take part in the premiere.

If you cannot be present this time, you are busy or simply do not feel prepared – do not worry, but consider performing this piece at a different time.

I would be very grateful if you – as part of the audience – could share your impressions of the piece with me.¹⁹

Stańczyk then collected the written imagined versions of the piece during "performances" which were part of specific events, as well as via the Internet and social media. As he claims, *Possible Music* is an invitation to the audience to create an afterimage or aftersound of his music (of an imagined piece), which should help understand his artistic quest better. It is also an attempt to implement the idea of aftersounds in the sphere of the imagination and from the perspective of each listener's individual experience.

In *Blind Walk* (2015), commissioned by MusikFabrik ensemble and the Venice Biennale, Stańczyk develops the idea of imagined works and of separating visual from aural perception. The audience listens blindfolded, while the musicians stroll to and fro in various directions, which influences the audience experience of space and sound trajectory. It is a kind of study in human perception. "When we are blindfolded, our aural memory and hearing become keener and more precise. We follow and remember musical events with greater precision, and we associate our imaginings with them."²⁰ The piece needs to be partly performed by musicians from memory, since they are supposed to walk among the audience. In the case of contemporary ensemble practice, this may pose a considerable challenge.

¹⁹ Source: score of *Possible Music* [*Muzyka Możliwa*]. The composer's own materials.

²⁰ Ł. Kaczyński, (2015). Łódzianin oślepi widownię w Wenecji [A Łódź Artist Blinds the Audience in Venice], *Dziennik Łódzki* (Internet publication). Text available on-line http://www.dzienniklodzki.pl/artukul/5905791,lodzianin-oslepi-widownie-w-wenecji,id,t.html?_s=YJRgxooURKRLjw9GMiK2ZFxmT*I*sRjOpl us6zKZHoWecM3pfqrqcr9i0Dbr11LaqhToGS30D8oj9V5AyNjgl AMNYoWw (accessed on 10th September 2015).

MORE REFLECTIONS

Marcin Stańczyk's self-commentaries contain many different approaches to the idea of translating into music the phenomenon of afterimages, borrowed from physics and from Strzemiński's paintings. These include: the choice of musical material (harmonic series as an equivalent of the beam of light, or contrasting harmonies by analogy to complementary colours), recordings, transformations (reality reflected in music), as well as studies in perception and memory. The composer explores his central idea from many different perspectives.

Judging from the composer's own statements, the idea of translating afterimages into music is, therefore, a field of ongoing exploration for him. In each composition he presents an individual approach to this subject. Stańczyk reveals that he has planned to write a composition cycle illustrating the various types of afterimages: "I would like to write a cycle of solo works in which this idea would be approached from different angles. Only nominally a cycle, because I treat this project as a laboratory of ideas rather than an intentionally designed series."²¹ Interestingly, Stańczyk originally intended to arrange afterimages in his successive works by colours, as in *Afterimages-Rosso*, but this idea has not been developed in full. At present, the composer attaches the greatest significance to the potential of musical gestures and the (also – polysensory) perception of music performance. Let us keep our eyes and ears open, therefore, to new compositions and new aftersounds in Stańczyk's art.

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The paper also quotes the composer's own commentaries from

- * the documentary film *Preludium*, dedicated to composers participating in the project "Young Polish Composers' Homage to Fryderyk Chopin", dir. Paweł Zabel, script by Eliza Orzechowska, Tomasz Cyz, Paweł Zabel, National Audiovisual Institute 2011;
- * the conference *The Musical Languages of Contemporary Polish Composers: Self-Reflections*, University of Warsaw Library, Warsaw 25.09.2015;
- * correspondence between Marcin Stańczyk and the author of this paper.

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²¹ From the composer's correspondence with the author of this paper.