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*Maciej Jabłoński's critique of
Mieczysław Tomaszewski's
Interpretacja integralna dzieła
muzycznego [An Integral
Interpretation of a Musical Work]*

Review article on Maciej Jabłoński's *Bonum ex integra causa... Dialog z koncepcją interpretacji integralnej Mieczysława Tomaszewskiego*

Maciej Jabłoński's criticism of the views of Mieczysław Tomaszewski appeared in a sixty-page text titled *Bonum ex integra causa... Dialog z koncepcją interpretacji integralnej Mieczysława Tomaszewskiego* [A dialogue with Mieczysław Tomaszewski's conception of integral interpretation] published in the volume *Przeciw muzykologii niewrażliwej* [Against Insensitive Musicology] (Jabłoński, 2014, pp. 271–332). Mieczysław Tomaszewski presented the conception given in the title of this text in the volume *Interpretacja integralna dzieła muzycznego. Rekonesans* [Integral interpretation of a musical work. A reconnaissance] (Tomaszewski, 2000, pp. 49–69) in the form of a twenty-page treatise titled *W stronę interpretacji integralnej dzieła muzycznego* [Towards an integral interpretation of a musical work]. In the same volume Tomaszewski included a total of nine essays. When writing his critical appraisal, Jabłoński took into account not only the text from which the volume took its title, but also referred to Tomaszewski's views expounded in other articles in the same volume, mainly to *Muzykologia wobec współczesności* [Musicology and Contemporaneity] (Tomaszewski, 2000, pp. 9–17) as well as papers published in other collections, titled *W stronę muzykologii humanistycznej* [Towards a Humanistic Musicology] (Tomaszewski, 2000) and *Nad analizą i interpretacją dzieła muzycznego. Myśli i doświadczenia* [On Analysis and Interpretation of a Musical Work. Thoughts and Experiences] (Tomaszewski, 1982, pp. 192–200).

I am certain that during this conference much will be said about Maciej Jabłoński's style of doing musicology, but I am not sure whether his writing style will also come into consideration. So, to start with, I would like to present in a few words my views on the subject. One should draw attention to the fact that Jabłoński's style of writing provided an excellent illustration of his beliefs as to how modern musicology should function. In accordance with this stance, Jabłoński's language is fully that of literature, with long, extended sentences, plaited in a manner as meandering as it is intricate. It is a language brimming with inspiration, even carelessness, free yet highly precise, vivid yet with thoughts formulated with clarity. Numerous digressions, asides, excursions (at times seemingly quite unnecessary) colour his writing and make it uniquely attractive. I use the word 'unique' quite intentionally, since in my opinion no other Polish musicologist before him wrote in a style so truly perfect, a style of undoubted aesthetic and artistic value. Even with its excessive turbulence, with the great number of errors, lapses, and even grammatical mistakes or disastrous punctuation, Jabłoński's writing soars to great intellectual heights. This is particularly significant in view of his attitude, so frequently critical that one might describe his legacy as critical musicology. When I read Maciej Jabłoński's texts, I often regret the fact that such undoubted profundity, erudition and brilliance very often concerns itself with texts which in no way deserve criticism of such quality; for many of them this is an honour.

The essay described by Jabłoński as *Dialog z koncepcją interpretacji integralnej* [A dialogue with the concept of integral interpretation] is, like most of his texts, uneven. I even have the impression that it was written in at least two stages; moreover, at least two digressions, the one concerning Ingarden's conception and the brilliant excursus into the significance of the word 'między' [between], as well as the two poetic quotations he used, are superfluous in this discussion; however, no less fascinating in spite of that. One can also recall here something for which Maciej Jabłoński was well known, and which found its expression in his deliberations: he liked to show off, which he did with inimitable, and almost touching grace and self-irony.

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At the beginning of the article which lies at the core of my reflections, Maciej Jabłoński conducts a general critique of Mieczysław Tomaszewski's conception, formulating six objections or, as he puts it 'general theses concerning my [M. J.] interpretation of Tomaszewski's view of the situation in musicology' which he regards as fundamental. When doing this, he uses phrases that are typically his, as original as they are eccentric (in the best sense), describing the totality of Tomaszewski's views as a 'mysterious-solar model'. Here we have an excellent example of Jabłoński's style: the description is original, eccentric and itself mysterious; it gives expression to irony, so frequent with Jabłoński, and the sense of humour which never left him. Further on we learn that the author understands this phrase to refer to certain 'calming procedures, [...] where the

dominant mood and methodology are those of what is positive, constructive, cohesive, [...] healing'. In other words, that which we might describe as the optimism of a familiar prescription (i.e., we know what we have been prescribed, but we do not know whether it will help).

The six consecutive general objections thus concern:

(1) the 'mysterious-solar model';

(2) the vision of the future of musicology, viewed by Tomaszewski as 'interpretation supported by the authority of history and estimable historiography', whereas in reality we live in a 'culture of exhaustion', which means that the "direction of hope" indicated by Tomaszewski, i.e., a return to humanistic-artistic research [...] is hardly realistic'. Moving on, Jabłoński thinks that

(3) Tomaszewski attributes too limited a role to the 'critical moment' and shows excessive 'critical-methodological restraint' at a time of dynamic changes. The author of the critique next notes in Tomaszewski's writing

(4) the use of 'one-sided and traditional tools', which 'today are not capable of ordering the whole range of the subjects of musicology'. According to Jabłoński

(5) Tomaszewski places too much stress on hieraticity: "unity" as the centre, "integrality", "moments", "aspects"; he uses phrases with optimistic-pompous connotations, such as 'adding splendour', when it would be more appropriate to take a dispersed view typical of today's post-modernistic stance. Finally, Jabłoński accuses his adversary of a

(6) too narrow understanding of musicology as a subject (Jabłoński, 2014, pp. 277–280); he claims that Tomaszewski is in general 'a supporter of prescriptive interpretation of our discipline' (Jabłoński, 2014, p. 277).

These are undoubtedly serious accusations, concerning the ideological stance of a scholar and researcher; in my view, undoubtedly justified. In brief, and highly simplified, they may be summarised in three points: an attitude that used to be described, in a somewhat different context, as propaganda of success; excessive optimism in assessment and prognosis; and unquestionable lack of realism in theoretical thinking. Further charges detailed in Jabłoński's text may also be reduced to these three points, in particular the frequent charge of lack of realism in assessments and proposals. Instead of being integral, Jabłoński describes Tomaszewski's conception as 'floodlighting', since it does not so much take a holistic approach as simply tries to direct a spotlight at all the consecutive phases of the aesthetic situation, to use Maria Gołaszewska's term (Gołaszewska, 1984).

The first part of Jabłoński's article consists mainly of discussions and digressions, naturally linked to his main premises; it is only in the second part of his critique that the author moves on to specific charges against Tomaszewski's conception of integral interpretation (Jabłoński, 2014, p. 295f). It is then that, keeping closely to the article about integral interpretation, he begins to formulate a number of further, more detailed objections. These are no less important for being detailed. Jabłoński, while critically questioning the various formulations of the theory, reflects on music as a text, a language, a sign, an intentional object, deprecating the inconsistencies between Tomaszewski's and Ingarden's

conceptions (which to me are immaterial)¹; he points to the narrow, nineteenth-century historiosophical horizon, the absence of declaration about the manner in which values exist, not agreeing fully with Tomaszewski's view of values; he discusses some inconsistencies, suggests others in passing, makes a start but then breaks off.

Jabłoński naturally takes this opportunity to 'have a go' at musicology as well since, as he correctly says, 'questions as to the origins of music, its ontological status, the interrelationships between music and language, the laws of perception or links between nature and culture, between that which is fundamental and primary (determining) and that which is differentiated and secondary (determined), are today examined from various points of view with increasing frequency.' However, according to Jabłoński, all in all they are examined not very often and from insufficiently differentiated points of view, and he holds it against Tomaszewski that the latter ignores them totally. Yet 'that which is inexpressible [...] the mystery of art, its metaphysical grounding, the fundamental concepts [...] continue to be important, inspiring, and at times even essential to us.'

Jabłoński extracts from Tomaszewski's text those issues the handling of which seemed to him to be especially inappropriate, but of course he travels along them guided by matters which were of greatest interest to himself. On the issue of the essence of 'integral interpretation', Jabłoński does not make a general statement, instead breaking it up into individual segments. However, taking the charges as a whole it is clear that he disagrees with the very core of 'integral interpretation', expressed most strongly by Tomaszewski in the subchapter *Zasada ontologicznej pełni* [The principle of ontological completeness]. It clearly stands out among Tomaszewski's other chapters since, while the other fragments relate to issues that are profoundly obvious, that part of the text postulates something inherently impossible. Disregarding the fact that the sense of this paragraph, according to Jabłoński, does not at all ensue from the problematics of Ingarden's well-known text on music, Tomaszewski postulates here a kind of interpretation of a musical composition that, were it truly possible, at least in some limited sense, it would undoubtedly become integral.

In response, Maciej Jabłoński quotes a number (six to be exact) of possible ways of understanding the term 'integrality' (Jabłoński, 2014, pp. 319–320), arguing that what Tomaszewski is concerned with is something fundamentally different. I will not quote here these individual explanations; what is important is that all of them together, obviously point to integrality understood, with some nuances, as completeness, a totality. However, Tomaszewski's understanding of integrality is purely mechanical; the author of 'integral interpretation' would like to add up and synthesise all possible interpretations together, in order to create one total, complete one. Apart from the fact that most individual interpretations usually contradict each other to some extent, if such a synthetic interpretation were possible, all hermeneutics, with its never-ending interpreting, would be unnecessary fiction. Tomaszewski, however, has come up with a prescription

¹ In my view, intention is an act of a living being, and an object is not intentional, intentional is only an act by a conscious entity.

for his integration, which should be carried out in four stages. Jabłoński's comment on this is brief: 'I am also intrigued by the division of the process, [which] provides a somewhat limited model, one that knocks out from the picture some quite significant aspects' (Jabłoński, 2014, pp. 310–311). What is even worse, Tomaszewski seems to be unaware that in each of these proposed four stages the interpretation is a totally different process, requiring a totally different definition.

Mieczysław Tomaszewski wants to encompass the whole process of a work's dissemination, or as he says 'its realisation in the space of culture', within four phases: creation, performance, reception, and collective experience of a musical work, i.e., to unite four processes extremely distant from each other into one unity which it is impossible to imagine. Some time ago Maria Gołaszewska provided an excellent solution to this problem (Gołaszewska, 1984) by introducing the concept of 'aesthetic situation', precisely in order to unite all these phases. This can only be done at such an extraordinarily general level as a situation, since in fact it is a long chain of a composition's functioning within society that can only be joined into some extended aesthetic whole purely arbitrarily; there is no other way of hammering the separate segments together to make them one (Jabłoński, 2014, pp. 316–317).

Jabłoński regards this ordering of the phases of the functioning of a musical composition as limited in four ways; he also regards as particularly untrue the idea that all four aesthetic elements are present only in some of Tomaszewski's phases and not – as would seem obvious – in all four of them.

In truth, I am fully in agreement that it is impossible, in spite of Tomaszewski's mistaken claim, for some integral interpretation of a musical composition to encompass together its creative aspect, performance, reception and its life in a community, and then to add up these consecutive actions and also draw from them some common interpretative conclusions. When we examine more closely the four individual components of what is a complex process, the falseness of this vision becomes striking.

1) The 'creative conception' of a composer's work arises as a result of a complex psychological process (emotional-intuitive-volitional-intellectual), of which the author is aware only in the most general outline; behind the creation of every composition there are innumerable components: its author's innate predispositions, upbringing, societal, cultural and national influences, education, as well as the influence of all works from all possible arts and epochs; creation also involves memory, imagination, inspiration, inventiveness, talent, the unconscious, the passions etc., in other words everything that exists, dreams or acts within the psyche of an artist. One may analyse a completed score, but everything beyond what results from the notation can only be guessed at; even the author's declarations are usually not reliable or coherent. Thus even at the point of considering the creative process itself, the possibility of its integral interpretation is an illusion.

2) In the phase of 'artistic realisation' (performance) we are dealing with a plurality raised to an unknown power. Every composition is performed on many occasions by thousands of performers, in a great variety of places and at different times; sometimes it is recorded and published, sometimes it is not. No

artist ever interprets the same work in an identical way every time. There is thus no such thing as the 'phase of realisation'; once a work has become public it is in a state of permanent interpretation not capable of being traced. In order to carry out integral interpretation of a work's artistic realisation one would have to interpret all its performances in existence without exception; moreover, the artist who performs the work is in the same unclear inner artistic and psychological situation as its composer. The idea of integral interpretation of the realisation of any individual composition is thus a pipe dream.

3) Identical problems arise in investigating 'aesthetic perception'. When one musician plays a composition, it is received by millions of listeners, and everything further on is multiplied beyond imagining. Moreover, even when listening to the same recording, the perception of it will be different on each occasion for each listener. There is also no method of investigating even selected examples of perception understood in this way. Thus even this stage of the social functioning of a work cannot be analysed, and its integral interpretation is a pipe dream.

4) Finally, the phase of 'cultural reception' is simply a duplication of the perceptual situation. 'Intersubjectivity and objectivisation', which is how Tomaszewski describes the last of the four segments, is only an illusion produced by statistical optics. Every reception by every experient is totally different and as changeable as perception, and as unclear, and here the pipe dream is duplicated again (Jabłoński, 2014, pp. 310–314).

Thus, if we want to follow Tomaszewski in dividing the aesthetic situation into the four stages described above, then none of these stages individually and in itself provides the possibility of conducting an integral interpretation. Let alone of combining them into a unified whole.

And here I repeat the fundamental argument (not clearly formulated by Jabłoński): the composer's interpretation is something totally different from the performer's interpretation, while the interpretations of perception and reception also have to be different; these four diverse interpretations have only one point of contact: the same work, the identity of which, by the way, is not quite clear (even for Ingarden).

However, even more puzzling is yet another aspect of Tomaszewski's conception. The author adopted the principle of integral interpretation in the 'cultural space,' therefore he must have conceived somehow of a common denominator for all the four phases associated with the social functioning of a work. Thus, even if we ignore the unimaginable task of encompassing the multiplicity and diversity of aspects to be interpreted in each segment without exception of this supposedly holistic process – and in principle it is theoretically possible, e.g. we select statements by a composer, an outstanding performer and a perfect recipient (even though there is no integration here), in order to work out some average of the subjects' attitudes – one nevertheless needs some common platform for all the individual manifestations of a work of art to coexist. The somewhat nebulous term 'cultural space' does not solve the problem, since it is purely conventional and does not make it possible for all these interpretations to come together within it in a productive way. One would need to find some existential point where

the creative, performative and receptive processes might come together if only symbolically, and be synthetised into that hypothetical integral interpretation. There could only be one such point: the place of some ideal Platonic existence above or beyond the world, among eternal ideas, where one might gather effects of integral analyses and interpretations to one's heart content until the end of the history of the universe. However, I do not think that Mieczysław Tomaszewski would be satisfied with such a solution.

Additionally (as if the foregoing was not enough), I regard as the key argument against 'integral interpretation' (and not only that) Maciej Jabłoński's statement: 'notabene, I am of the opinion that no 'state' of knowledge – in particular knowledge about art – at a given "historical moment", and taking into account the parameters which organize such knowledge – is [or can be! – K. L.] satisfactory, while the need to look for new solutions and formulation of new points of view is forced on the interpreters by the works/objects themselves, since it is also in their nature to subvert our knowledge about them' (Jabłoński, 2014, p. 305). In principle, this is demonstrated by the history of every branch of science, all knowledge, including philosophy, and in the light of this regularity no 'integral interpretation' is possible.

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Both articles discussed here, Tomaszewski's and Jabłoński's, encompass a large number of significant problems in our branch of learning, which cannot be fully summarised in one paper, especially since solutions to the fundamental issues continue to be doubtful. I must therefore limit myself to that which has already been said, but I would like to summarise my somewhat different opinion in a few points, since I think that without a constructive conclusion my contribution would have no purpose.

Firstly, I hold it against Tomaszewski that his conception is fully based on utopian premises which, unfortunately, the author takes seriously. I understand (and pursue myself) some utopian deliberations, even in a similar spirit (personally I am no stranger to the 'soteriological tone', to use M. J.'s term), but I do it principally in an essayistic style, interpreting philosophy of art as precisely a kind of art, and not a science. Moreover, I have a tendency to apply reductive measures to any doctrinaire claims, precisely in the name of the humanities. On the other hand, Tomaszewski presents his wholly irrational utopia with all the majesty of a theoretical science of the highest order this seems to me not only unreasonable, but simply unacceptable.

Jabłoński's analysis demonstrates that Tomaszewski did not fully think through his own theory, and it would be hard to disagree with this. However, it is worth noting that many of Tomaszewski's ideas (even though banal) testify to what is known as noble intentions, such as concern for the crisis of values and the desire to save them. Neither is Jabłoński driven by pure objectivism: he questions Tomaszewski's conception in all possible ways: on its ontology, ethics, aesthetics, and above all the axiology of a work of music; however, he is perfectly

aware that not only he, Jabłoński, cannot provide the answers to these issues, but probably nobody in the whole world has provided such unequivocal answers to date, as he admits himself (Jabłoński, 2014, pp. 303–395).

Secondly, in my view, a comment is required on Jabłoński's suggestion that today one needs to abandon exalted-sounding concepts such as a work of art, completeness, unity, spiritual message, together with their attributes relating to loftiness, spirituality etc. True, I also feel that Tomaszewski's attitude on that point is too harsh and too old-fashioned, too solemn and subservient, and at the same time too dry, lacking lyricism. However, I cannot fully agree with Jabłoński that this kind of musicological language should be done away with altogether. There exist, and what is more, are still universally relevant, masterpieces by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, Debussy and many others, and no scholarship can cease to pay them their deserved homage, even if merely verbal. Over time, the spirit of many generations has adhered to these masterpieces and I have the impression that the spirit of our times also does not regard them as undeserving of homage. We should not do away with terms that are rightly elevated only because the period which came after the works generally regarded as masterpieces were produced is lacking in such masterpieces. If they are lacking not because of shortage of talent but because there has been a change in the way of thinking, in a situation when the creative means are being exhausted, then the old achievements should be valued even more highly and retain their lofty status; that status comes not from excessive pathos or emphasis, but simply from historiosophical truth.

It is also not impossible that the stances of Tomaszewski and Jabłoński could, to a large extent, be reconciled within Nicolai Hartmann's doctrine of three spiritual strata of being. There it would turn out that works of art (as discussed by Tomaszewski) belong to the stratum of objectified spirit, while the actions, performances and interpretations belong in the domain of activities of the individual spirit, obviously supported by the objectified spirit. The question remains whether both sides would be satisfied with such a solution.

Thirdly, the above leads to an obvious suggestion. If today we divide art as a whole into classical and modern; classical in the sense of the traditional paradigm, including, let us say, Stravinsky and Hindemith, and even Lutosławski and Penderecki, but alongside it we have avant-garde, performative, multi-medial, post-internet works etc., then we should simply have an analogous division of aesthetics into two separate areas: that which will use traditional language to talk about works of art and their spiritual message, and that which must find its own new language, new tools of analysis and new evaluation criteria. The situation will then be clear. Personally I would propose that a set of new aesthetic categories should be created, which instead of beauty, loftiness etc. will postulate such attributes as inventiveness, performativity or the element of surprise. It will then become obvious which language should be used in relation to traditional art, and which applies to new art. Then the whole conflict, not only between people and even metalanguages, but also between attitudes, will be resolved all by itself.

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