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## Did Szymanowski foresee ambient music? Testing the ‘design thinking’ method

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### Design thinking and the musical composition

In music analysis, we sometimes wonder what else we might be able to discover. There also appear the familiar disturbing questions. Are we not sometimes blundering about without justification? Do we really ask questions worthy of in-depth examination? Does analysing really enhance the way people listen to music? Or perhaps the answers we find please only us, and for others remain purely an illusion? We must not conclude that analytical listening to music is a secondary issue, as Lutosławski claimed,<sup>1</sup> upbraiding those unable to free themselves from such a response to art; nevertheless, doubt sometimes creeps into analytical reflection.

The works of Karol Szymanowski undoubtedly remain alive and open to new interpretations that confirm their lasting value. However, the question arises as to what paths we should follow in relation to the works of this composer, and what we should seek that is new in light of the results of analyses to date. Using

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<sup>1</sup> W. Lutosławski, *Postscriptum* (Warsaw, 1999).

the method of design thinking in analysis helps us to discover new paths. In the case of *Słopiewnie*, it reveals certain features shared by this composition with ambient music, which determined the direction of my interpretation. That is what gave rise to the question pondered in this article, as to whether Szymanowski foresaw ambient music. In a sense this is a retrograde question, since it suggests the existence of certain features of the music before they were included within the framework of an officially acknowledged style. It touches on an intriguing issue: was something that exists today already signalled in the past? An inspiring example of this kind of analytical reflection can be found in Leszek Polony's text about pre-Romantic romanticism in the Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.<sup>2</sup> That provides us with justification for following the same path in the case of the work by Szymanowski.

However risky this path might be, let us follow it, since Szymanowski followed it too, clearing the way for puzzling new solutions through the thicket of traditions. This approach forces us off the beaten tracks for interpreting Szymanowski's music in terms of neoromanticism, impressionism, folklorism and nationalism, established by older-generation researchers such as Adolf Chybiński, Stefania Łobaczewska, Zofia Lissa and Józef Michał Chomiński. Those are tendencies that still resonate strongly in the reception of Szymanowski's works, in spite of new approaches to his compositions published in recent years linked to the following concepts and tendencies: orientalism, symbolism (Mieczysław Tomaszewski), expressionism (Tadeusz Zieliński), poetics, figurativeness (Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz), voices of the times (Teresa Chylińska), and birdsong in the sonoristic and symbolic spheres (Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek).

## Why design thinking?

As already mentioned, this analysis of *Słopiewnie* uses the method of design thinking, which can help us to abandon familiar solutions and embrace new interpretations. It is conditional on freeing ourselves from generally accepted solutions, established ways of interpreting and schematic thinking, leaving behind the domain of 'obvious solutions' and boldly searching for new paths.

<sup>2</sup> L. Polony, 'Romantyzm przed romantyzmem. Sonata fortepianowa a-moll KV 310 Mozarta' [Romanticism before romanticism: Mozart's Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310], in M. Janicka-Słysz, T. Malecka and K. Sz wajgier (eds), *Muzyka w kontekście kultury* [Music in the context of culture] (Kraków, 2001), 351.

Using design thinking may seem a little too free, a kind of 'stumbling in the dark', too nebulous to bring concrete effects. However, freedom and abandoning familiar solutions are the main premises of this method. It is based on faith in the creativity and intuition of the seeker, which may lead into unknown waters. In the design thinking method, an important part is played by presentiment, using not only reason but the senses, intuitively deliberating whether 'this something fits with that something'.

Using design thinking has much in common with extemporisation, which is predicated on being creative, going beyond familiar frameworks.<sup>3</sup> It is basically conducted like musical improvisation, the keynote of which is opening up to the unexpected, the unforeseen, something which in a sense is new but which has actually been present for a long time. Opening up to the unforeseen (*improvisum*) may be unplanned and undefined, as in a free improvisation that offers the choice of many elements of creation, including form and language. Many factors can lead to this, such as the atmosphere of the moment experienced during musical improvisation, abandoning oneself to the inspiring thought that comes when speaking (*l'idée vient en parlant*).<sup>4</sup> Creative activity in the spirit of improvisation may resemble freehand drawing.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the direction is determined simply by a movement of the instrumentalist's hand that leads to new discoveries or a sudden revelation, a state of acquiring something in one's imagination that had not been there before, an idea which lights up like Bachelard's candlelight, illuminating the way to new meanings.<sup>6</sup>

What leads us to improvise? It may be one of the following:

- a thought, knowledge, presentiment, immersion in the atmosphere of the moment, but also searching for its traces in the past, in accordance with the idea of an holistic understanding of human activity (the past mixes with the present, aesthetic trends are only 'discovered' by artists, and culture is a reflection of humanity);

<sup>3</sup> 'Jednym tchem – Tomasz Trzcński o sztuce improwizacji' [In one breath: Tomasz Trzcński on the art of improvisation], in conversation with Andrzej Rybczyński, [online], <https://www.polskacanada.com/jednym-tchem-tomasz-trzcinski-o-sztuce-improwizacji/>, accessed 19 December 2022.

<sup>4</sup> 'Thought comes when speaking'. H. von Kleist, 'On the gradual construction of thoughts during speech', *German Life and Letters*, 5/1 (1951), 42–46, [online], <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-0483.1951.tb01029.x>, accessed 18 December 2022.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. J. Ruskin, *Niewinne oko. Szkice o sztuce* [The innocent eye: sketches on art], tr. J. Szczuka (Gdańsk, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> See G. Bachelard, *Plomień świecy*, tr. J. Rogoziński (Gdańsk, 1998).

- an idea, a motion, a sudden revelation, awakening one's imagination, 'provoking imagination into motion'<sup>7</sup> (W. Lutosławski).

As far as I know, design thinking has not been applied in a literal form in research into any musical composition, although this approach does function in analytical work and can be an inspiration for it. This method may bring significant advantages for our activities, since it forces us off the beaten track, makes us open up and free our thoughts, seek new, surprising solutions; according to its premises, everything is possible, there are no limits. Moreover, it requires us to test the solutions – to see how useful they are, how appropriate, how well they fit the task – and to confront them with the expectations and needs of the recipients.

The design thinking method has been used to discover and design solutions to problems and complex issues in business, and recently also in the social sciences, where it has proved successfully mainly in practical terms. In my view, its theoretical premises can be applied successfully in theoretical-musical research, and it can inspire some of the practical solutions that lie at its foundations.

## About design thinking

Design thinking is based on taking cognitive processes into account and linking them to strategic and practical activities. This leads to the production of design concepts (proposals for new products and services or processes) aimed at solving problems creatively, devising innovative solutions not previously applied, by defining the true needs of the user.<sup>8</sup>

Three main models are distinguished within design thinking:

- the five-stage model;
- the Double Diamond, or alternating cycles of divergent thinking (searching for many possible paths, going beyond familiar solutions or 'political correctness') and convergent thinking (seeking 'the only right path');
- McKinsey Design, a model which takes into account analytical leadership, multifunctional talent, continuous iteration (repeated use of the same approach, i.e. a loop) and the experience of the recipient.

<sup>7</sup> W. Lutosławski and Z. Skowron, 'Spotkania z Lutosławskim' [Meetings with Lutosławski], *Res Facta Nova*, 2/11 (1997), 29.

<sup>8</sup> See T. Brown, *Design Thinking* (Harvard, 2008).

Problem analysis most often employs the classical five-stage model of design thinking:

1. empathising, that is, feeling your way into the situation and arriving at a deeper understanding of the problem;
2. defining the problem;
3. generating ideas for solving the problem;
4. creating model solutions (building prototypes);
5. testing these solutions in a social environment and in practice.

Let us try to translate this process into the language of analysing a musical composition, taking into account the stages and elements of the design thinking process.

To start with, as in the design thinking process, in music analysis we are interested in the object/problem/issue to be solved/researched. In this article, this is the work *Słowieńie* by Karol Szymanowski.

### The object as a 'wicked problem'

It is worth noting that design thinking relates to objects that constitute 'wicked problems'. Such issues do not have one obvious solution, and various approaches to them may lead to the revelation of unexpected benefits or risks related to them. A musical composition, particularly an outstanding one, may easily be classified as a wicked problem that appears to be intriguing. A highly valued musical composition may be approached as a work open to interpretation in the spirit of the conception of Umberto Eco, for whom a work lives through its interpretations and, perceived anew, seen from different perspectives, assumes ever new meanings, revealing new content.<sup>9</sup>

Szymanowski's work is undoubtedly the kind that attracts, and even provokes, new interpretations, almost like a 'work in motion', without a fully defined sense or meaning, which inspires the interpreter to acts of conscious freedom, activates an inexhaustible network of associations through which one can impose one's own shape on the work. Szymanowski's composition is open to new perspectives because of its multi-layered and multidimensional nature, as well as its individual style and expression. Also of importance here is the multiplicity of possible specific versions of its performance and interpretation, which means that the work is constantly present in Polish musical culture; in fact, it is rooted in it.

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<sup>9</sup> See U. Eco, *Dzieło otwarte*, tr. L. Eustachiewicz et al. (Warsaw, 1973), 31.

It is worth noting that in Eco's conception the decisive voice in interpretation lies not only with the work and its creative intent, but above all with the recipient, who brings to the work new, current meanings. In the analytical work presented further into this article, we will take note of the recipient's perspective.

In an analytical approach using the design thinking method, there are three important premises:

- **empathising** – concentrating on the recipient/user, aimed at an in-depth understanding of their conscious or unconscious needs. In music analysis, this may include not only the recipient, but also the performer and the creator;
- **creative cooperation** – examining the problem from many perspectives, seeking new solutions, going beyond established schemas; this focusses on looking at the work from different points of view and putting surprising questions to it, abandoning familiar solutions and turning to controversial approaches;
- **experimenting and testing hypotheses** – putting forward experimental interpretations and testing their social reception among a group of people interested in the issue, such as researchers, creators, performers and listeners. It is here that solutions are created and feedback from recipients is gathered.

In music analysis, these premises may manifest themselves in the search for research interpretation on the three levels mentioned above. A map of empathy between the creator and the recipient may be created, which will serve to produce a fuller description of the research problem and will be used in the generating and social testing of creative solutions.

Empathising and creating a map of empathy in music analysis may be based on defining the dynamics between the needs of the creator and the needs of the recipient. It is possible to equate these two sets of needs. However, asking how the creator thinks allows one to enter more deeply into the area of creative process, leading us to discover creative inspirations and how creative imagination works, something discussed by Władysław Stróżewski and Marzena Karwowska.<sup>10</sup> Another issue is the reaction to the work by the recipient. In the case of contemporary reception of Szymanowski's work, what happens is that something like a filter of the processes of perception and of transgressions possible within that area comes into play; today we listen to Szymanowski's works in a different way than at the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>10</sup> W. Stróżewski, *Dialektyka twórczości* [The dialectic of creativity] (Kraków, 2007), 36; M. Karwowska, *Antropologia wyobraźni twórczej w badaniach literackich* [Anthropology of creative imagination in literary studies] (Łódź, 2015), 15.

Summing up, design thinking may be translated into the language of analysis in the manner presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Premises of the design thinking method and music analysis.

Design thinking – premises	Aim – business, social environment	Aim – music analysis
Discovering and designing problem solutions	In relation to complex issues in business and society	In relation to interpreting a musical composition and its social environments: researchers, performers, creators, listeners
Taking into consideration the recipient's cognitive processes	In relation to the user's needs	In relation to the impressions of the recipient/creator/performer
Linking strategic and practical activities to the recipient, testing solutions	In relation to business and social solutions: the design and implementation of new products and services	In relation to research activities: new proposals for interpreting music and their dissemination with the aim of enhancing the reception of works and producing new creative tendencies; active dialogue within the music community

## Defining the problem

The most crucial step in using the design thinking method is *defining the problem*, that is, capturing the key issue. This is done after analysing the information gathered during the empathy stage. Defining the problem requires breaking out of the thought frameworks and habits which limit one's field of vision. This stage may diametrically change the direction in which one seeks a solution. The methods we may use here are described as re-framing or reconstructing the problem and the 5x why technique (asking why? five times).

Let us choose the method of re-framing the problem. Let us reverse the classical analytical question as to what is encoded in the work and what the creator's idea was and ask instead what it is that a contemporary recipient hears in this work and how s/he understands that message.

Why and how do we listen to this work today? Why do we focus attention on the original, avant-garde text, the numerous suspensions, as if making unreal the clearly displayed sound? Why can we hear this composition as sonoristic in character? Why are we continuously interested in this music? What might be its aim,

the effect that it has on listeners today? We might ask the following questions of the composition *Słopiewnie* (applying the 5x why method):

- Why was this particular text chosen for the composition?
- Why do we feel suspension, dispersion in the narrative?
- Why do we mainly pay attention to the sound?
- Why is there a sense of mystery, of derealisation?
- Why do we continuously show interest in this composition?

## Generating ideas

We now move to the stage described as *brainstorming*, where it is permissible, and even desirable, to come up with unconventional solutions, to free one's thoughts. The recommendations at this stage of the design thinking method are as follows:

- suggest even the most ludicrous solutions, do not judge, build on the ideas of others, do not get attached to your idea, get rid of your ego, don't focus on limitations;
- create a map of the thought process, for example by jotting down ideas on post-it notes and placing them on a board (a kind of storyboard), treat the arrangement of the notes as temporary, something that can be freely changed, with the notes re-stuck and arranged in various configurations; thus they will remind you that the process demands elasticity and distancing oneself from one's own ideas.

The application of brainstorming to *Słopiewnie* may be outlined as follows:

- Nationality? In what sense today? In relation to the works of Tuwim?
- Folk tradition? What points to it? What kind of folk tradition appears here?
- Modernism? Needs clarifying.
- Impressionism? If present, then more as postimpressionism.

Brainstorming may concern the work itself, but it can also help define what design thinking refers to as the 'needs of the user'. I have in mind here considering the listener's expectations, person, experience and individual profile. Who is the contemporary listener interested in Szymanowski's *Słopiewnie*? This may be a conception of a listener who is thinking, dreaming, changing the trajectory of ideas about the work, participating in its co-creation.



## Constructing prototypes

After generating ideas that take into consideration the listener's profile, we choose the one we find most convincing and begin looking for analytical solutions. As already noted, entering the process of design thinking may lead one into surprising areas. That is what happened with my thinking about *Słopiewnie*. I have been little inclined of late towards structuralising music; I prefer to think of it as a whole which carries within it some information, message, meaning, and which affects the listener in some way. I followed this path, trying to discover what might happen if we were to ask interpretive questions of *Słopiewnie*.

Turning to the 'thought map' method, regarded as a kind of board with solutions, ideas and reflections, enabled me to look at the issues from a 'bird's eye' point of view. It turned out that impressions of Szymanowski's composition can be reduced to such categories as forging an atmosphere, suspending the motion, permanence, sensitivity to the background, ambiguity and the interpenetration of multiple sound planes. From a contemporary point of view, they are associated with the premises and character of ambient music. Such an association may have been revealed by the application of design thinking, which stimulates references to what we hear, how we receive a work, what associative processes are then activated and what experiences are triggered by this reception.

Associations also included composing in the spirit of a landscape, present in today's music, which echoes the ambient trend quite strongly. These associations allowed me to focus on the following characteristic features of *Słopiewnie* (thought map, storyboard):

- atmosphere
- duration
- background
- permanence/flux
- interpenetration of multi-level landscapes
- time slowed down, contrast levelled out
- gentleness
- striking sounds
- inducing a certain state of consciousness
- surrounding, accompanying.

## Ambient music and Szymanowski's *Słowieńie*: atmosphere, background, accompaniment

Forging an atmosphere, subtly enriching the listener's reception, wandering through the background with sound, a discreet accompaniment to non-sound events in the foreground – these are the premises of ambient music. That is how Brian Eno described his discovery when, during a stay in hospital, he heard music coming through a speaker in the distance, as if in the background. Listening to the barely distinguishable sounds of a harp, he realised that they created a subtle yet vivid background, turning into a healing musical accompaniment, full of subtlety, complementing the mood, delicately weaving itself into the scenery of his evening rest.

Karol Szymanowski's song cycle *Słowieńie* seems to evoke similar impressions, not only in its aural reception but also in its compositional idea. The slow tempo, the air of mystery, the calm flow of notes which at the same time coagulate, the low level of dynamics, the intimacy, the direct relationship captured in the dialogue between the parts of the piano and the human voice, the association with a bounded, enclosed, sheltered space.

'Słowisień' – the first part of *Słowieńie* – begins with the piano part, that is, the instrument which accompanies the vocal part. Its role is to create a background and a sound environment. The first notes of the piano appear from a distance, in a *pp dolce* dynamic. The metre of the song is made up of 3/8 and 2/8, which produces 5/8 in an irregular arrangement and an irregular division of the rhythmic values. Such a complex approach to metre inevitably creates an impression of hesitation, rhythmic understatement, ambiguity, of disturbing the regular order and at the same time revealing a freedom of movement.

The forging of a specific atmosphere, particularly in the piano part, the delicate enrichment of the sound space by means of freely wandering sound motifs, the discreet accompaniment to the foreground events of the vocal part – those are the main premises of the composition. The mysterious scenery of the landscape presented in the poetic text, unspecified in terms of time and place, suggested rather than described, appears in the frame of a picture emerging from contentment, gentleness. *Słowieńie* is a kind of work that produces pleasant impressions, builds up an atmosphere which may be associated with the ambient trend. One of the reasons for the emergence of these associations is the tempo of the composition – *andantino*, meaning stepping calmly, with a long breath that allows one to immerse oneself freely in the sound environment (see Example 1).

Example 1. K. Szymanowski, 'Słowisień' from the cycle *Słowieńnie*, Op. 46 bis, bars 1–5, © Copyright Universal Edition 1923, repr. Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne 1984.

Andantino dolce

Canto

Piano

*pp dolce sempre*

*ten. dolce*

The song maintains low-level dynamics throughout, ranging from *p* through *pp* to *ppp*. It is interesting that a kind of climax occurs at a moment described as *ppp*. It is a narrative, reflective, timbral climax, accented with great subtlety. The song appears as if from a distance; it remains in the background. During a performance, we should barely hear it. This ephemeral atmosphere is created by the delicate, irregular, discreetly fading notes of the piano that accompany the foreground events. These notes do not form a dynamic course. In a sense they are individual, separate from each other, declaimed. The composer added to them exceptionally light ornaments – grace notes that sound like a bird trilling (see Example 2).

Example 2. K. Szymanowski, 'Słowisień' from the cycle *Słowieńnie*, Op. 46 bis, bars 12–15, © Copyright Universal Edition 1923, repr. Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne 1984.

*sosten.*

W bia - lo - drze - wlu jaś - nie dźni slo - necz - -no  
 Dans les ar - bres le so - leil se mi - -re  
 Wei - sse Bäu - me glei - ssend Son - nen - glu - -ten

12

*pp*

*Słowieńnie* presents a natural landscape. This landscape is not solid, but imagined, as if born in a dream. This vagueness and mystery derives from the abstract character of Julian Tuwim's poetry. The character of this composition brings to mind the idea of 'ecomusic' described by Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawra-

til in relation to her own work, which she defines as sounding art that is friendly to humans, inspired by nature, whose aim is to transfer natural phenomena from the human environment (earthly and cosmic) into animated art – into music.<sup>11</sup> According to this conception, human beings, as part of the world, part of nature, are immersed in matter and constantly draw on it. In this sense, ‘ecomusic’ may be a universal feature of human artistic activity and may be transferred to the interpretation of not only contemporary but also early music.

## Immersion

Within the realm of ambient and ‘ecomusic’, there appears a kind of ‘embracing’ or engulfing, immersive music that allows one to sink into an imaginary world of sounds that fully engages the listener in its reception. In Szymanowski’s work, the following elements point to this phenomenon: the sound figures, the network of timbres and melodic line that melts into the background. The impression of immersion, of being surrounded by sound, is created by the relationship between the solo voice and the piano. The notes of the vocal part, emphasised by articulation (*marcato*), blend into the piano’s mesh of sounds, intricately woven out of short, figured, almost aphoristic melodic passages that seem to ‘enwrap’ the notes of the vocal part, which in turn are lost in this strange web of timbral tangles. The work’s design is dominated by sound figures, particularly in the piano part, creating what feels like microevents realised over short temporal segments, located in compact microspaces that generate a sense of intimacy, proximity, a closeness of reception (see Example 3).

Example 3. K. Szymanowski, ‘Słowisień’ from the cycle *Śłopiewnie*, Op. 46 bis, bars 29–34, © Copyright Universal Edition 1923, repr. Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne 1984.

*in tempo*

A gdy sier-piec na nieb-lo - czu lys - cie, wcie-niem clem-nie Je - no nie - za -  
 Et quand la lune pa - ratt dans les nu - a - ges, l'om-bre bleue fri - son - ne et  
 Und rund grüsst der Mond vom Him-mels - grun - de, Schat-ten träu-men dun-ke-l-, lis - peln

29 *pp*

<sup>11</sup> G. Pstrokońska-Nawratil, ‘Ekomuzyka’ [Ecomusic], in J. Mozrzyk (ed.), *O naturze i kulturze* [About nature and culture] (Wrocław, 2005), 145.

The loss of event-based narration in *Słowieńie* is based on the blurring of the narrative tempo using numerous rests and the slowing-down of the action (*sostenuto*). This breeds a distinct tendency to enter into a state of abiding, of calm reflection, as well as a kind of derealisation.

## A landscape-like quality, visualisation, immersion in a space

In ambient music, an important role is played by visualisation, a landscape-like quality to the sound tissue. The music becomes vivid, suggesting certain views or their representations created in one's memory and the perception of images already seen. The presence of landscape in a work of art is not a new discovery. What is important is how it appears there. In our times, works are being created that constitute what might be described as 'living' images of nature, capturing an event, a moment, an impression; as a result of seeing a landscape, for example, or being in a particular setting.<sup>12</sup>

Szymanowski's music may be a precursor of today's landscape music, where a paraoptical background plays a significant role, something commented on by Aleksander Kościów in relation to his own work.<sup>13</sup> In Szymanowski's composition, there is a penetration and exploration of quasi-visual, multi-plane landscapes and an integration of the sound in terms of its colour and musical time, as in the phases of sustaining (*sostenuto*), of prolongation. The work leads the listener to observe the changeability and at the same time permanence of the landscape through a special journey in sound. In our times, this perspective is indicated, for example, by the poetic essays of Josif Brodsky,<sup>14</sup> who views a composition as an excerpt of the composer's imagination. But Szymanowski was already striving to render the artistic message more vivid and to imbue it with emotionality derived from his experience of the world around him.

*Słowieńie* might be described as a kind of music evoking a visual element that harmonises with the images of nature blended into the tissue of sound. Also striking is its subtlety and colouristic sophistication. Szymanowski introduces a poetic text ('Słowisień' by Julian Tuwim) which suggests a landscape, a view, but also evokes a feeling of comfort; we are immersed in a bright, sunny summer afternoon, where bees are gathering golden nectar while above them spreads the

<sup>12</sup> e.g. the 'nature writing' style, as used by Robert MacFarlane.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kościów, *Lithaniae. Dzieło jako krajobraz* [*Lithaniae: the work as landscape*] (Warsaw, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> See J. Brodski, *Znak wodny* [Watermark], tr. Stanisław Barańczak (Kraków, 1992).

branch of a tree with an abundance of sweet, juicy fruit. This poetic experiment, aimed at suggesting a certain kind of landscape, its appearance and its vibrant effect on the listener, is meant to emphasise this condition. Moreover, the avant-garde poetical language, formed from neologisms, encourages free, unstructured reception of the suggested visual image, as well as the whole composition.

Let us stay in the sphere of the poetical word for a moment longer. 'Słowiśń' is one of Julian Tuwim's most original works. It takes the form of a linguistic experiment, where the poet appeals not to the readers' intellect but to their senses. This idea expresses a modernistic approach to poetry and to language, rooted in the stylistics of the Polish art renaissance. The verse results from research into language conducted by Tuwim, who, like other poets between the wars, such as Bolesław Leśmian, Aleksander Wat and Stanisław Młodożeniec, strove to create a language that reached beyond the intellect, that introduced freedom of reception. The numerous neologisms which underpin the work's construction and go beyond linguistic norms allowed him to free himself from the limitations of language. This intuitive new language was supposed to be subjective, individually interpreted by the recipients on the basis of their own associations. This premise corresponds to the analytical approach adopted here, which emphasises the role of the recipient in shaping the work and their participation in the creative experiment that *Słopiewnie* represents. Tuwim dedicated *Słopiewnie* to Karol Szymanowski, who set it to music.

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that Tuwim's poetic text is an example of what is known as indirect lyricism, which means that the lyrical subject is only an observer, and does not reveal their presence. The description of a sunny summer landscape is a linguistic experiment in influencing the reader's perception. The poet uses numerous neologisms, epithets and onomatopoeias, which serve to describe the landscape in a vague, sometimes enigmatic way, e.g. 'białodrzewiu jaśnie dźni' [sound associations with the sun shining through the trees], 'złoci białopałem żyśnie' [associations with golden embers], 'drzewia pełni pszczelą i pasieczną' [associations with trees and beehives full of bees], 'kraśnie pęk słowiśnie' [associations with ripening cherries and a nightingale], 'na nabłoczcu łyście' [associations with clouds and sparkling], 'niedośpiewy' [associations with faint singing], 'w białodrzewiu ćwirmie i srebliście słodzik słowi słowisieńskie ciewy' [associations with the sweet, silvery trills of a nightingale]<sup>15</sup>. Tuwim

<sup>15</sup> Quotations from the poem follow the Ossolineum edition of Tuwim's poetry edited by Michał Głowiński (1969). There are other versions of the poem, which differ slightly in terms of lexis and punctuation (editor's note).

creates a subtle vision, his language intended to speak more powerfully to the reader's senses. The mood of the music corresponds to this kind of message – equally ambiguous, vague, suggesting views and feelings that are received as a flow, changing together with the listener's mood. The use of many neologisms means that the form plays a more important role than the content. Tuwim breaks with convention and shows that it is possible to write differently about nature, constantly conveying one's vision to the reader, a vision dominated by a belief in people's connection with nature, more felt than described, speaking through the senses, creating a colourful image in one's imagination not limited by reason. It is worth mentioning here the role played in Tuwim's works by the achievements of the futurists and their special use of language, aimed at bringing out in poetry and in words their sound symbolism, at capturing closer links between words and sounds. In this way, the recipient is shown the way towards individual interpretation of the poetic text as a kind of melody. Szymanowski approached Tuwim's text with the utmost understanding. Being himself a master of language, an essayist, writer and poet, he had a deep understanding of the modern language of poetry. He designed his musical vision of *Słopiewnie* in such a way as to draw out even further, accentuate even more strongly, the original, sublimated sound qualities, intensifying the impression of a landscape and emotional states experienced in the reception of the text.

Among the musical elements which support the text, one should mention above all the choice of forces that build up the mood – the close, intimate relationship between the piano and the human voice. The intention of Szymanowski's work as a whole appears to have been sensorily sonoristic, employing states of density and rarefaction of the timbre, a dotted structure and background music. It is also a work where the composer seeks a sublimated, even surprising, sound.

Szymanowski demonstrates his ability to sublimate sound not only in this short song, but also in many other compositions. Here, however, he does so with intense effectiveness, introducing, for example, lively grace notes more than a step away from the principal note in the vocal part and the vocalise, which create melismata. In a way, Szymanowski's effects anticipate the increasingly distinct trend in contemporary performance of searching for specific sound qualities and for organising concert repertoires with that aspect of composition in mind.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Evidence to this effect includes the idea and programme of the concert *Sublimacja brzmienia/ Extreme Harmonies* performed by Huelgas Ensemble, which took place during the Wratislavia Cantans festival in 2021.



## Permanence/changeability/duration

In ambient style, as in Szymanowski's composition, there is a tendency to induce in the listener a certain state of consciousness different from that of the surrounding world. It is worth mentioning that it was precisely this feature of ambient music which was emphasised by the creator of this trend, Brian Eno.<sup>17</sup> In *Słopiewnie*, we witness the concept of the motion of 'flowing' and 'standing' sounds, building not so much a narration as a kind of flux, already expressed by Szymanowski in relation to his *Mity* [Myths], Op. 30. However, the key element in this process remains the tone, the timbre, foregrounded in relation to the structures, motifs and rhythms that are traditional in music. The latter are clearly disturbed and form a fluid background to the composition. The use in the piano part of notes not as single sounds but rather as groups, clouds or figures produces a special kind of reception, described as passive, free, uncontrolled or delicately active, incorporating the listener in subtle forms of musical 'happening'.

This music, like ambient music, inclines one towards calm contemplation, allows one to distance one's thoughts from the surrounding world, and at times also to focus on listening intently to the pure sounds and timbres (see Example 4).

Example 4. K. Szymanowski, 'Słowisień' from the cycle *Słopiewnie*, Op. 46 bis, bars 38–45, © Copyright Universal Edition 1923, repr. Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne 1984.

The musical score for 'Słowisień' (bars 38–45) is presented in three systems. The top system shows the vocal line with lyrics in Polish and German. The middle system shows the piano accompaniment. The bottom system shows the vocal line continuing. Performance markings include 'sostenuto', 'ppp', 'poco cresc.', 'allargando', 'poco meno rit.', 'Tempo I', and 'allargando'.

**Vocal Lyrics:**

ćwir-nie i srebr-łiś - cie sło-  
un ttr-lir - li son - ne ros-  
klingt aus Sil-ber-mun - de Nach-  
-dzik sło - wi  
-sig-nol chan-  
-ti-gal - len

**Piano Accompaniment:**

38  
poco meno rit.  
Tempo I  
allargando

**Vocal Lyrics (Continued):**

sło - wi - sień - kie cie - wy.  
-ton - ne des ca - res - ses!

<sup>17</sup> After V. Szabo, *Ambient Music as Popular Genre: Historiography, Interpretation, Critique* [online], [https://web.archive.org/web/20200210140757/https://libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/public\\_view/td96k274j](https://web.archive.org/web/20200210140757/https://libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/public_view/td96k274j), accessed 8 Oct. 2021.



## Free music shaped naturally

Tendencies to model music on the sophisticated ambient trend allow it to be experienced as 'free music', shaped without constraint, geared towards the listener's comfort and relaxation. This refers to the 'natural music' trend, represented by works closely associated with nature, understood as the living world and human nature. Important features of this trend, pointed out by Krzysztof Szwałgier,<sup>18</sup> then evoked by Katarzyna Bartos, include: 'truthful expression, [...] simplicity, freedom, reference to nature and everyday life, and a return to the sources of music and to primal sound. "Natural" compositions are distinguished by slowed time, a lack of contrasts and, in the area of harmony, a new tonality, characterised by gentleness, euphony, moderation and expression.'<sup>19</sup>

Features of natural music such as the interpenetration of multi-level landscapes, slowed time and lack of contrasts are also characteristic of *Słowieńskie*. This music seems to circle around tonal centres and structures rather than reaching them directly and clearly. This resembles the liberation of a music that is more non-teleological, that is, not employing a purposeful order, that seems to be part of a long continuum.<sup>20</sup>

As John Cage remarked, music realised in this atmosphere freely engages the sounds of the environment in which the listener is embedded. It focuses on purely musical connotations, employing a set of motifs, patterns and accessories that surround and strengthen the central motif or design.<sup>21</sup> In *Słowieńskie*, we find a similar balance between ornamentation and expressiveness, places focused on conveying the artistry of the musical structure and the timbre, and places where that artistry is dominated by expression, the desire to convey emotion, to raise the temperature of the artistic message, or even to surprise the listener (see Example 5).

<sup>18</sup> K. Szwałgier, 'Muzyka naturalna – marzenie i fakt' [Natural music: dream and fact], in L. Polony (ed.), *Przemiany techniki dźwiękowej, stylu i estetyki w polskiej muzyce lat 70.* [Transformations of sound technique, style and aesthetics in Polish music of the 1970s] (Kraków, 1986), 46.

<sup>19</sup> K. Bartos, 'Muzyka naturalna? O podobieństwach między Olivierem Messiaenem i Grażyną Pstrokońską-Nawratil' [Natural music? On the similarities between Olivier Messiaen and Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil], [http://scontri.pl/materialy/scontri4-art/Katarzyna\\_Bartos\\_Muzyka\\_naturalna.pdf](http://scontri.pl/materialy/scontri4-art/Katarzyna_Bartos_Muzyka_naturalna.pdf), accessed 15 Nov. 2022, 75.

<sup>20</sup> After E. Tamm, *Brian Eno. His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound*, [https://monoskop.org/images/f/fl/Tamm\\_Eric\\_Brian\\_Eno\\_His\\_Music\\_and\\_the\\_Vertical\\_Color\\_of\\_Sound.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/f/fl/Tamm_Eric_Brian_Eno_His_Music_and_the_Vertical_Color_of_Sound.pdf), accessed 8 Oct. 2021, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

Example 5. K. Szymanowski, 'Słowisień' from the cycle *Słopiewnie*, Op. 46 bis, bars 23–28,  
© Copyright Universal Edition 1923, repr. Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne 1984.

The musical score for 'Słowisień' by Karol Szymanowski, bars 23–28, is presented. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line with lyrics in Polish, French, and German, and a piano accompaniment. The tempo markings 'poco rall.' and 'rall.' are present. The piano part includes dynamic markings 'ppp' and 'pp'.

Lyrics:

Polish: a przez liś - cie kra - snie pek sło - wiś -  
 French: Et les feuilles'em - pourprent de ce - ri -  
 German: leuchtet froh die hol - de Kir - schen - dol -

Additional lyrics: -nie. -ses. -de.

## Conclusion

Summing up our reflections, let us try to determine what we gain from examining a composition from the perspective of the design thinking method. Besides the boldness of viewing a work from a less obvious, more surprising perspective that consequently reveals new content, one may conclude that sometimes asking questions 'backwards' may be justified. Tendencies that are developing now had their beginnings earlier. At that time, they were not articulated so precisely and in such great depth as today, but their action is distinct and probably intended by the composer. Another observation here is that tendencies in art do not appear in a linear fashion but reside in unexpected places and come to the fore in different times and places. The experiencing of the world by listeners, composers and performers involves all the senses and is expressed, according to the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in the multidimensional experience of creative activity.<sup>22</sup>

Taking issue with Witold Lutosławski's sceptical comments regarding the analytical reception of art, I would add that seeking new areas of interpretation, opening oneself to the unknown and attempting analysis definitely deepen our knowledge and awareness of art and music. Such activities expand the scope of interpretation and make us more aware, more sensitive and more demanding listeners. All this brings more energy to the development of art, both in creating and performing, and a deeper awareness of the processes that govern it contribute to its active creation and to reception that is filled with diversity.

<sup>22</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia percepcji*, tr. M. Kowalewska and J. Migański (Kraków, 1999).

## ABSTRACT

This article proposes looking at Karol Szymanowski's *Słowieńie* from the perspective of ambient music, characteristic of modern times. The retrospective character of this thesis is expressive of free interpretation, going beyond the sphere of traditional analyses of Szymanowski's work. It is the result of the application of the design thinking method in the field of music analysis, breaking with traditional approaches. This method is used to design innovative solutions for business and social services, but it has not previously been used in music analysis. The author uses a five-stage design thinking model based on the following phases: empathising, defining the problem, generating ideas, building prototypes, testing. She also uses re-framing the problem, brainstorming, storyboard and 5xwhy as supporting methods. She discovers areas of *Słowieńie* that have not been analysed so far, close to ambient music, such as forging a specific atmosphere, immersion in sound, landscape, visualisation, permanence, duration and naturally shaped music, relating them to specific features of Julian Tuwim's poetic text as a linguistic experiment, in which the poet addresses not the readers' intellect, but their senses, using neologisms.

KEYWORDS: *Słowieńie*, ambient music, design thinking, immersion in sound, landscape music

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