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**UNDERSTATED SIGNIFICANCE
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AESTHETICS OF POPULAR MUSIC**

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Abstract

In his book *Listening to Popular Music: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Led Zeppelin*, American aesthete of popular music Theodore Gracyk does not specifically examine the problems of the aesthetic form of popular music. Moreover, the role and importance of the listener's aesthetic experience of musical form is not clearly emphasized in his thoughts on the aesthetic evaluation of popular music compositions. However, some of the most important Gracyk's thoughts on the experience and evaluation of popular music – including his critique of „active listening“ thesis and his analysis of the competencies needed for the adequate evaluation of popular music – are inevitably bound to the problems of musical form. In this paper, I am primarily interested in the reasons why the significance of musical form is understated in his aesthetic theory. In the first chapter of the paper, I try to show that Gracyk didn't actually downplay the importance of musical form in his criticism of the notion that „active listening“ to the structural aspects of a musical composition is the only genuine way to aesthetically experience music (a notion he primarily attributes to Hanslick). I argue that Gracyk's arguments against the „active listening“ thesis and his thoughts on the consequences it has on the experience and evaluation of popular music cannot be rightfully applied to Hanslick's theory, in which musical form is the basis for the appreciation of a classical music piece. Following this, in the second part of the paper, I analyze the way in which Gracyk's thoughts on the aesthetic evaluation of popular music, expressed in his understanding of Robert Hatten's views on stylistic and strategic competencies, are directly linked to the listener's ability to experience the musical form of a popular music composition. I conclude by suggesting that although this is not explicitly stated in Gracyk's aesthetics, the musical form in his book *Listening to Popular Music* is of greater importance than it has been explicitly stated. In addition, I explore certain similarities in Gracyk's and Hanslick's aesthetic conceptions that are easily disregarded if the thoughts of American aesthete are interpreted through his critique of the „active listening“ thesis.

Keywords

Theodore Gracyk, Eduard Hanslick, aesthetics of popular music, musical form, listening to popular music, aesthetic evaluation of music

1. Introduction

Theodore Gracyk is certainly one of the leading figures of the aesthetics of popular music today. Having published three books on this matter (with rock music as his main interest) – *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock* (1996), *I Wanna Be Me: Rock Music and the Politics of Identity* (2001), and *Listening to Popular Music: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Led Zeppelin* (2007), he has already covered various aspects of this field of study, from analyzing the aesthetic experience and evaluation of popular music to examining the social role of popular music. However, although his book *Listening to Popular Music* is primarily focused on experience and evaluation of rock music, the problems of the aesthetic form of this type of music have not been thematized as issues of special importance. This author does not devote a chapter in his book to aesthetic problems related to the musical form. Moreover, Gracyk does

not particularly emphasize formal aspects of the compositions of popular music in chapters dealing with other theoretical issues related to popular music, such as the question of evaluating popular music compositions. In this paper, I am primarily concerned with the reasons why understating the significance of form causes some problems in his aesthetic theory.

The lack of an explicit theoretical approach to the musical form of popular music can be viewed as the result of Gracyk's criticism of traditional aesthetic conceptions such as the formalist aesthetics of Eduard Hanslick. Since Hanslick developed his views on the aesthetic experience of music focusing on the examples of classical music and its formal characteristics (while ignoring popular music in his aesthetics), Gracyk asserts that Hanslick's theory would most likely "dismiss much of what is interesting about a lot of popular music".¹ Despite Gracyk's attitude towards Hanslick's theory, I will compare Gracyk's own thoughts on the role of form in popular music with Hanslick's theoretical conception in his famous book mostly known as "On the Musically Beautiful", or, according to the translation I am referring to in this paper, "The Beautiful in Music". With this comparison, my aim is to show that Gracyk's and Hanslick's thoughts have more in common than Gracyk is willing to admit in his critique of the notion of "active listening", which he attributes to Hanslick.² Moreover, I will try to develop this connection even further by presenting Gracyk's ideas on stylistic and strategic competencies needed for the evaluation of popular music as his own way to indirectly promote the importance of musical form in aesthetic experience and evaluation of popular music.

Approaching the role of musical form in popular music this way – by introducing it primarily in the context of criticizing traditional aesthetics' thoughts on popular music – is not uncommon in the aesthetics of popular music. Besides Gracyk, Richard Shusterman's examination of the musical form of popular music is directly linked to his "defense" of popular music as a genuine art form.³ However, the issue of this kind of theoretical approach to the role of musical form lies in the fact that it unquestionably links thoughts on aesthetic form either to the theoretical position of traditional aesthetic formalism (in which the popular music is ignored, such is the case in Hanslick's theory) or to the traditional theories of art (such is the case in Shusterman defense of popular music). Shusterman argues that the traditional aesthetics' dismissal of popular music's art status is partially the result of its critique of allegedly inferior formal characteristics of the cultural products counted as "popular art".⁴ Proving its art status, Shusterman talks about "formal devices" of rap as a genre of popular music.⁵ Gracyk does not follow him in this, arguing that popular music should be "defended" without insisting on its art status.⁶ In addition to that, although this is not often the case, formalism sometimes becomes connected with elitism in Gracyk's book on listening to popular music.⁷ It is hard to expect that this aesthetician of popular music will insist on promoting the analysis of formal aspects of a popular music composition when

the analysis of form is closely connected with the theoretical procedures of formalism, and even elitism. Criticizing both the formalism and Shusterman's thoughts on popular music as an art form, Gracyk is on the theoretical standpoint that by itself recommends avoiding the question of the role of form in popular music.

On the other hand, as Gracyk suggests in the second chapter of his book, the importance of aesthetic experience and evaluation of popular music is often neglected in the theoretical works on popular music in favor of emphasizing sociopolitical values that popular music compositions promote.⁸ Thus, Gracyk's attempt in his book *Listening to Popular Music* is to reaffirm the aesthetic discourse on popular music as the interdisciplinary approach which will not conform to the traditional aesthetics' solutions such as the (Hanslick's) notion of "active listening".⁹ However, Gracyk does not examine the role and importance of musical form in his aesthetics of popular music even though he often directly refers to formal aspects of popular music compositions. I will try to show that American aesthetician inevitably comes across the problems related to the musical form when he formulates his own aesthetic theory in this book, in particular, his ideas on the stylistic and strategic competencies required for the adequate evaluation of a popular music piece.

2. "Active listening" thesis and its consequences for listening to rock music

In *Listening to Popular Music*, Gracyk approaches the problem of the aesthetic form of popular music indirectly. He is doing this by analyzing the theoretical conceptions in which the experience of music is genuine only if listening is an activity that concentrates on the formal structure of a musical piece. According to these conceptions, the aesthetic experience of music is achieved if a listener is approaching a composition actively and consciously, which means he is exclusively focused on formal aspects of a composition.¹⁰ If a listener didn't manage to devote his whole attention to the structural base of a composition, then he hasn't been "listening" to music the right way, but solely "hearing" the aural characteristics of a musical work. Although this understanding of listening to music is attributed to several aestheticians including Eduard Hanslick, Edmund Gurney, David Prall, and Monroe C. Beardsley, explicating the consequences that arise from the illustrated theoretical perspective when it comes to the listening to popular music, Gracyk refers mostly to Hanslick's theory in his book "The Beautiful in Music". It is not surprising that Gracyk directed his attention in this chapter primarily to the famous formalist aesthetician and critic. The dichotomy of listening and hearing, which is his main topic in this chapter, he directly attributes to Hanslick's theory.¹¹ However, although he criticizes Hanslick in this chapter of *Listening to Popular Music*, in another chapter of this book Gracyk agrees with his ideas on „auditory imagination“, by which Bohemian critic emphasizes that „music must be

constructed from the flow of sound“ in the imagination of the listener.¹² Therefore, it seems that Hanslick's theory has influenced Gracyk's aesthetics of popular music at least to a certain extent. The most important aspect of Gracyk's interpretation of the “active listening” thesis is his analysis of the ways in which it could challenge the aesthetic experience of popular music. Taking into account that the aim of the advocates of this thesis was not to question the possibility of a genuine aesthetic experience of popular music, Gracyk believes there are at least three negative consequences of this conception as far as listening to popular music is concerned. I will briefly present these consequences in the following section and point out how they are related to the problems of the aesthetic experience of form in popular music compositions.

As the first consequence of the “active listening” thesis, Gracyk emphasizes the problem of the knowledge allegedly needed for an adequate experience of popular music. If the genuine aesthetic experience of a musical piece “always requires *conscious* exercise of critical categories concerning musical form”,¹³ then it can be brought into question whether listeners of popular music actually listen to popular music compositions. Gracyk responds to these conceptions by showing that listeners of rock music do comprehend the main characteristics of the compositions they listen to, so that their listening to this genre of music does not require any special knowledge for proper aesthetic experience. For example, this aesthetician believes that listeners of rock music already hear when the same melodies reoccur in different songs, the identical parts of the song are repeated in different compositions, or certain ways of creating melodies are used by the composer, such as the frequent appearance of so-called blue notes.¹⁴ Although these arguments eliminate the need for conscious knowledge or proper skills for listening to rock music, it seems that Gracyk still does not dismiss the traditional aesthetic notion of “active listening” – on the contrary. As can be seen in Gracyk's own examples, the listener of rock music is expected to aesthetically experience formal aspects of the composition he is listening to – to perceive the basic characteristics of the melody of these compositions, but also to recognize the special formal devices in this kind of music, such as the presence of blue notes. Although Hanslick's analyses of various formal aspects of the classical music composition a listener is concerned with are much more in-depth, there are similarities in the way Gracyk examines the activities of a popular music listener and Hanslick's own approach to the listening of classical music. For example, Gracyk's suggestion that a popular music listener recognizes the characteristics of a melody of popular music reflects the way in which Bohemian critic points out in his examination of Beethoven's Overture to "Prometheus" that a listener is able to discern to the main aspects of the melodic movement in this composition (but not the emotional content allegedly represented in it).¹⁵

Another negative consequence of the traditional aesthetic notion of “active listening“ is that every genuine aesthetic experience of popular music would be reduced to perceiving the formal structure of a composition. According to Gracyk, the traditional aesthetics of music believes that a listener needs to “extract a pure sound structure“ from the “total aural experience“ to approach a musical piece adequately.¹⁶ This includes neglecting both the characteristics of the “concrete performance“ of a composition and other aspects of a musical piece that do not contribute to the formal unity of a composition, such as the lyrics of a vocal composition. Gracyk's main concern here is the role of lyrics in a particular musical composition: when we exclude the lyrics from the aesthetic experience of a popular music tune, “[o]ne twelve-bar blues is remarkably like another“.¹⁷

However, emphasizing the importance of the aesthetic experience of a formal structure need not be done by dismissing the significance of other aspects of a composition. Interestingly enough, although Hanslick considers the aesthetic experience of musical form the most important aspect of the experience of classical music, he does not think that the words (“libretto“) in a non-instrumental classical music compositions would in some way distort and jeopardize the aesthetic experience of this composition – the opposite is the truth. Hanslick himself stressed out that „poetry“ is “enhancing the power of music“.¹⁸ Even though Hanslick talks about „poetry“ when he states that words can improve the expressiveness of a musical piece, which suggests he is considered solely with the aesthetically valuable examples of the poetic art, he is actually concerned with every situation in which „words are set to music“.¹⁹ Therefore, his thoughts on the role of poetry can be directly applied to the examination of the contribution of lyrics to the aesthetic value of popular music, regardless of the value of lyrics themselves. However, it seems that „poetry“, whether it is good or bad, will not affect the aesthetic evaluation of the music if the specifically musical aspects of a composition have already made this composition valuable or not-valuable for the listener. In a note in the second chapter of his book, Hanslick agrees with Ferdinand Hiller that “even the most wretched poem, when set to beautiful music, can scarcely lessen the enjoyment to be derived from the latter, whereas the most exquisite poetry fails to compensate for dullness in the musical part“, while later in the same chapter refers to the similar Mozart's thoughts in another note.²⁰

Thus, from the perspective of Hanslick's theory, „poetry“ can affect the aesthetic evaluation of a composition only if the value of composition hasn't been already established on specifically musical grounds. Applying these Hanslick's thoughts to the aesthetics of popular music, it seems that the lyrics of popular music would have the same role, altering in some way the evaluation of a composition that has not been already judged aesthetically on the basis of its musical characteristics. Surprisingly, Gracyk would agree to a certain extent with Hanslick here,

having in mind that he emphasizes „four decades of empirical research“ that proves that listeners judge music usually before understanding the lyrics.²¹ In Chapter 2, Gracyk is primarily interested in analyzing those listening activities in which listeners marked a certain piece of popular music as valuable before understanding its lyrics, so that their subsequent interpretation of the lyrics would improve their overall experience by suggesting them certain non-musical content.²² Analyzing the examples of this kind, Gracyk tries to show that aesthetic evaluation of a (non-instrumental) popular music piece cannot be reduced to listeners' comprehension of the lyrics' meaning and thus evaluated according to the non-musical values promoted in it.²³

In addition to that, Gracyk's argumentation assumes that the lyrics of a popular music composition do not contribute to the very structure of a listened piece. But having in mind that the lyrics usually provide a listener with the basic orientation in the arrangement of a song – telling her which part of a tune is the verse and which is the chorus – it is doubtful that any of the above mentioned traditional conceptions in the aesthetics of music would completely ignore the lyrics, and the same goes for the contemporary analysis of popular music. In the section dedicated to the aesthetic form of hip hop music in his famous text "The Fine Art of Rap", Richard Shusterman examines the structure of a hip hop song exactly by talking about lyrics – by describing the relations between stanzas and the chorus in a song that belongs to this genre of popular music.²⁴

Finally, the third consequence of the traditional aesthetic notion of “active listening” on the aesthetic experience of popular music is very similar to the second one. Gracyk argues that the active listening to a popular music composition leads to ignoring the entire “expressive force” of popular music, so that rock music composition will not get any aesthetic qualities via the very sound of a distorted electric guitar and powerful drum beat.²⁵ Just as in the case of the previous consequence, these sounds are marked as “nonstructural” and thus disregarded in the aesthetic experience of a popular music composition. It is obvious that rock music will lose much of its charm with this formalist intervention. Still, this does not need to be the unavoidable consequence of stressing the importance of the formal and structural aspects of a composition when it comes to its aesthetic value. Hanslick himself often emphasizes the role of an instruments' timbre in the aesthetic experience of classical music.²⁶ Certainly, this formalist aesthetician does not claim that the timbre of the instruments in a composition will have a decisive effect on the aesthetic evaluation. What is Gracyk's opinion on this matter? In Chapter 2, he refers to Robert Walser's research in which this musicologist shows that people often listen to heavy metal music because of its „powerful drums & bass“.²⁷ However, despite the fact that Gracyk uses the results of this research to prove that people most often listen to popular music because of their „aesthetic interest“ in it,²⁸ it seems that he is unwilling to formulate his own

theory of the aesthetic evaluation of popular music that will legitimize the evaluations solely based on the qualities of a timbre. As I will try to show in the second part of this paper, Gracyk's thoughts on the stylistic and strategic competencies are mostly concentrated on formal aspects of a composition, but also include the remarks on the timbre of instruments used in a composition that belong to a certain genre of popular music.

Gracyk expands the topic of „active listening“ further by analyzing the thesis that this kind of listening should be only reserved for the situations in which the listening is an „exclusive activity“. ²⁹ However, I will not analyze this problem in this paper, because it is not directly relevant to the examination of the role of musical form in the listening to popular music, having in mind that the experience of the form of a musical piece can occur even if the listening is not the only activity of the listener. Such is the case in Gracyk's own example of a couple dancing to the music while perceiving its rhythmic characteristics, and even its „tonality as a guide to determine when the piece is about to end“. ³⁰ In final remarks of the chapter on the dichotomy of hearing and listening, Gracyk conclusion is that "active listening", as traditional aesthetics of music views it, cannot be restricted to grasping the formal structure of a composition. Instead, he promotes the pluralism of genuine experiences of popular music. Our listening practice varies depending on the genre of music we are listening to, and "active listening" of the formal structure of a musical piece is just one practice among other sorts of listening. ³¹

So far, Gracyk's "democratization" of various listening habits doesn't mean dismissing the "active listening" thesis at all. But it seems that Gracyk's analysis of "active listening" in this chapter of the book *Listening to Popular Music* is not limited to this conclusion. After considering the consequences traditional aesthetics' thesis has on the experience of popular music, Gracyk also points out that "applying the skills of analytical listening to a simple popular song can result in sheer boredom". ³² Unlike in the "democratic" conclusion already mentioned, Gracyk here not only disqualifies "active listening" as a way of listener's reaching out for the aesthetic merits that one popular music composition can provide but also warns a popular music listener that "active listening" could distort or disrupt his aesthetic experience of a piece of popular music. Does this mean Gracyk does not recommend this type of listening to popular music?

If the "active listening" implies reducing the aesthetic experience of popular music to the formal aspects of compositions of this kind, then I agree with Gracyk that it should be avoided altogether. But the analysis of his views on the consequences of the "active listening" thesis has shown that this is not the case. Affirming formal aspects of popular music composition does not necessarily mean disregarding other aesthetically relevant aspects of a listened musical piece. We can just as well approach the popular music compositions with the intention to aesthetically experience their formal structure without ignoring the non-structural and expressive aspects of it.

In fact, as I will try to show in the next section of this paper, aesthetically experiencing the formal characteristics of a popular music composition is exactly the practice Gracyk praises as the most trustworthy way of achieving the adequate aesthetic evaluation of a popular music composition.

3. The role of form in Gracyk's views on the aesthetic evaluation of popular music

In the chapter "Aesthetic Principles and Aesthetic Properties", Gracyk presented the reasons why the aesthetic evaluation of a popular music composition should not be driven by theoretically formulated aesthetic principles. Instead, he is proposing two "competencies" as the groups of habits a listener needs to develop when approaching a composition that belongs to a certain genre of popular music.³³ Using the terminology of music theorist Robert Hatten, Gracyk distinguishes stylistic and strategic competencies that encourage aesthetic evaluation.³⁴ Stylistic competencies provide a listener with the ability to perceive those characteristics of a composition that are telling her to which music genre this composition belongs to, while strategic competencies supply her with the expertise of identifying those characteristics of a piece of music that make it outstanding.³⁵

Gracyk explains how these competencies govern the aesthetic evaluation of popular music by analyzing three different descriptions of the aesthetic experience of certain blues compositions: W. C. Handy's and D. Scarborough's first encounters with a blues song, as well as Bob Dylan's first time listening to the recordings of the blues musician Robert Johnson. William Christopher Handy is a musician, while Dorothy Scarborough is a novelist. While I will not analyze these descriptions of their listening to the blues separately, I will examine Gracyk's theoretical motivation behind his interpretation of these various experiences. Handy's description of the first blues songs he heard in a train and at a dance event in Mississippi, Gracyk regards as an example of acquiring the stylistic competencies needed for the further aesthetic evaluations of blues compositions.³⁶ In contrast to Handy's description, Scarborough's views on "that peculiar, barbaric sort of melody called 'blues'" Gracyk interprets as her failure to obtain stylistic competencies and think of the observed musical characteristics as the aspects of a distinct musical genre, and not the signs of the negative aesthetic value.³⁷ Finally, in Dylan's praise of subtle and unique Johnson's musical interventions to the standard blues song structure, Gracyk detects not only that Dylan is applying stylistic competencies in listening to Johnson's song, but also that he has acquired strategic competencies that go beyond indicating the main features of a blues song.³⁸

There are some differences in these descriptions of the aesthetic experiences of blues compositions, the most important one being that two of the mentioned listeners of the blues are professional musicians – Handy and Dylan, while Scarborough is a novelist, although already

familiar with „other types of African-American music, the work songs and church music“.³⁹ Moreover, it seems reasonable to presume that Handy successfully acquired stylistic competencies of blues by playing this kind of music, not just by listening to it: „Returning to Clarksdale, Handy set to work on band arrangements of African-American songs, among them 'Make Me a Pallet on Your Floor'“.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it is striking that Gracyk's analysis of the described listening activities is almost exclusively concerned with the ability of these listeners to grasp and adequately interpret the musical form of the compositions. Gracyk is emphasizing how Handy's own journey of acquiring stylistic competencies for listening to the blues started when he first experienced some of the formal characteristics of a blues song, such as repeating the lines of a verse three times. The acquiring of them was certainly completed when Handy identified other "basic elements of the blues" – Handy marked other formal aspects of this music such as "variation of a pentatonic (five-note) scale, with flattened thirds and sevenths" and "rhythmic syncopations".⁴¹ Moreover, Gracyk's interpretation of Scarborough's description shows that this novelist did not manage to recognize the formal structure of a twelve-bar blues song, which led her to conclude that this new music "likes to end its stanza abruptly, leaving the listener expectant for more".⁴² Citing Dylan's own analysis of Johnson's songs, Gracyk is openly speaking about musical form, emphasizing that "Dylan hears a mastery of form and sophisticated, disciplined songwriting".⁴³ This musician highlighted the altered song structure in Johnson's compositions, and this aspect of his unique approach to blues was crucial for Dylan's fascination with the father of the Delta blues. Johnson made the „perfected“ kind of a blues song because „each song contained four or five verses, every couplet intertwined with the next“, in an „utterly fluid“ way.⁴⁴

Not relying on these listeners' own words on the characteristics of the blues songs they have listened to, Gracyk expands these statements by examining them using the terminology of music theory. Analyzing Handy's thoughts on the blues, Gracyk additionally reviews the melodic and rhythmic characteristics of the blues, and while explaining the fact that Scarborough experienced blues song as „incomplete“, he also describes the harmonic structure of a standard blues song.⁴⁵ Despite Gracyk does not analyze Dylan's words in detail, it should be noted that although this musician is referring solely to the formal structure of the lyrics of a blues song, these characteristics directly determine the arrangement of a musical piece, and also its rhythmic qualities. That being said, it seems that Gracyk examines these listening activities almost exclusively on the basis of the ability of a listener to perceive formal aspects, regardless of the fact these descriptions also include commentaries on the lyrics, sound or the performance of the compositions listened. Scarborough is talking about the „mournful liveliness of tone“,⁴⁶ although attributing it to the „melody“ of the blues, but not to the sounds of the instruments played in a blues song, so she might have been speaking metaphorically here. In addition to that,

Handy mentions some of the aspects of the blues musician's performance, such as the fact that he used a knife as a guitar slide (by which he indirectly also refers to the sound of the sliding on the guitar strings, that had the „unforgettable“ effect), and even cites one part of the lyrics of his song.⁴⁷ Lastly, Dylan's words also mention the characteristics of the lyrics: Johnson's songs have „short, punchy verses“.⁴⁸ However, according to his analysis of these descriptions in the manner of music theory, it seems that Gracyk's conclusion on which of these listeners has acquired the stylistic and strategic competencies hasn't been drawn from their ability to aesthetically experience the lyrics, sound or the performance of the blues, but its musical form.

These Gracyk's reviews of described listening activities are reminiscent of the way Hanslick musicologically analyzes a listening experience of classical music.⁴⁹ However, this does not mean Gracyk is promoting the idea of the necessity of this kind of formal analysis and the appropriate „formal musical training“ for the adequate experience of popular music – he insists that stylistic and strategic competencies can be acquired unconsciously.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, without the formal musical analysis of its structure, the experience and evaluation of popular music that Gracyk described in this chapter would still be concerned with the formal aspects of a composition. Despite his expert analyses, Hanslick too doesn't think listeners should theoretize this way when they are experiencing a composition: „An analysis of this kind reduces, it is true, to a skeleton, a body glowing with life; it destroys the beauty, but at the same time it destroys all false constructions“.⁵¹ When Gracyk asserts that Hanslick is „equating listening with an educated response“,⁵² it does not mean that a listener should apply any kind of music theory to the music experienced. According to another Gracyk's commentary on Hanslick's theory, this educated response is „an intense aesthetic enjoyment that can only be derived from anticipations and confirmations of the music's pattern as it unfolds in performance. In order for this process to take place in one's imagination while listening to a performance or reading a score, one must know the conventions of the relevant musical tradition“.⁵³ As suggested in Gracyk's words, it seems that Hanslick's theory just as well presupposes that listeners need to apply some kind of stylistic competencies („conventions of the relevant musical tradition“) in their aesthetic experience of music. Additionally, when Gracyk cites Hanslick's words in which formalist aesthetician criticizes „passive“ listeners because they do not succeed in grasping “what is special in every composition, namely, its artistic individuality“,⁵⁴ it appears that Hanslick himself promotes utilizing procedures of evaluation similar to those conducted by Gracyk's strategic competencies.

4. Conclusion

It is doubtful that Gracyk's criticism of the “active listening” thesis has brought into question Hanslick's theoretical conception because this criticism hasn't actually been directly linked to

what the traditional aesthetician has stated in his own theoretical writings. Although less restrictive than Bohemian critic, Gracyk is on the same path as Hanslick in his analysis of stylistic and strategic competencies that govern the aesthetic evaluation of a popular music piece, because the competencies are mainly concerned with the formal aspects of a composition. While primarily promoting the experience of the formal characteristics of a musical piece, Hanslick does not simply ignore the role of „poetry“ in non-instrumental classical music. Although insisting that lyrics should not be counted as less important than the „specifically musical“ aspects of a composition (as Hanslick's theory suggests), Gracyk still does not overemphasize the importance of lyrics in his thoughts on the aesthetic evaluation of popular music. Lastly, taking into account Hanslick's commentaries on the role of timbre in the aesthetic experience of certain compositions, it cannot be said that the formalist aesthetician is insisting on „extracting a pure sound structure“ from the complete aesthetic experience of a classical music piece. Certainly, Gracyk has put a greater emphasis on the qualities of sound in the aesthetic experience of music, but he is aware that Bohemian critic hasn't actually been in the adequate historical position to advocate for it, because Hanslick had written his famous book before the era of recorded music.⁵⁵ However, according to the way Gracyk presents his thoughts on the described aesthetic experiences of blues compositions, it seems that the quality of sound does not play the decisive role in the chapter of *Listening to Popular Music* dedicated to the basic assumptions of aesthetic evaluation of popular music.

This examination of the significance of musical form in Gracyk's own theory of the aesthetic evaluation of popular music gives reasons to think that the experience of the aesthetic form has an important role in his aesthetics of popular music, although this is not explicitly stated. Despite Gracyk's doubts that “active listening” can end in “sheer boredom” when it comes to listening to popular music, it appears that in the chapter "Aesthetic Principles and Aesthetic Properties" Gracyk promotes exactly that kind of listening to popular music – a stylistically and strategically competent experience of musical form. If we draw the consequences from Gracyk's analysis of stylistic and strategic competencies, it follows that not only this type of listening won't distort the aesthetic experience of popular music, but also that this is the only kind of listening that leads to “perceptual and imaginative habits required to appreciate the music”.⁵⁶

¹ Theodore Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music, or, How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love Led Zeppelin* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 139.

² Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 135.

³ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 169-170.

⁴ Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 171, 188, 198-200.

⁵ Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 204-205, 232.

⁶ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 24-26.

⁷ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 141, 156-157.

- ⁸ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 45-59.
- ⁹ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 6, 13-14, 34.
- ¹⁰ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 135.
- ¹¹ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 139.
- ¹² Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 187.
- ¹³ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 139.
- ¹⁴ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 139.
- ¹⁵ Eduard Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music* (London, New York: Novello and Company Limited, The H. W. Gray Co., 1891), 40-41.
- ¹⁶ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 139.
- ¹⁷ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 139.
- ¹⁸ Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, 45.
- ¹⁹ Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, 45.
- ²⁰ Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, 60.
- ²¹ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 62.
- ²² Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 62-67.
- ²³ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 59-62.
- ²⁴ Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 233-235.
- ²⁵ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 140.
- ²⁶ Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, 39, 41-42, 67, 75.
- ²⁷ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 58.
- ²⁸ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 59.
- ²⁹ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 143-146.
- ³⁰ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 146.
- ³¹ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 150.
- ³² Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 142.
- ³³ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 77.
- ³⁴ Robert. S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 29-32.
- ³⁵ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 77.
- ³⁶ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 79.
- ³⁷ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 80, 85-86.
- ³⁸ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 82, 84-85.
- ³⁹ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 82.
- ⁴⁰ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 79.
- ⁴¹ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 79.
- ⁴² Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 80.
- ⁴³ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 83.
- ⁴⁴ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 82-83.
- ⁴⁵ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 79, 81.
- ⁴⁶ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 80.
- ⁴⁷ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 78.
- ⁴⁸ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 83.
- ⁴⁹ Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, 41-42, 75-76, 81-82.
- ⁵⁰ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 79.
- ⁵¹ Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, 42.
- ⁵² Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 145.
- ⁵³ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 136.
- ⁵⁴ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 136.
- ⁵⁵ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 140-141.
- ⁵⁶ Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music*, 85.

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