**MICHAŁ BRULIŃSKI**
University of Warsaw / Chopin University of Music

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# CHOPIN AND THE PIANO. A FEW REMARKS ON A PERSON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH AN OBJECT

This article is an English translation of the Polish original: 'Chopin i fortepian. Kilka uwag o relacji człowieka z przedmiotem', in: Ewa Bogula, Małgorzata Sułek and Grzegorz Zieziula (eds), *Długi wiek XIX w muzyce. Pytania – problemy – interpretacje* [The long nineteenth century in music: questions, problems and interpretations], vol. 2 (Warszawa, 2022), 287–311.

The aim of this essay is to reflect on Chopin's relationship with the piano from the perspective of the most direct sources possible. They have been repeatedly analysed in musicological studies, but rarely with the use of sociological methodology orientated towards people's relationship with objects.[1] For many years, studies of material culture – including in the Chopinological context – were dominated by the archaeological perspective: selected artefacts attracted researchers' attention almost exclusively as preserved traces of human activity. In keeping with the postulate of a 'turn to things', I decided to explore this relationship from a symmetrical perspective. Drawing on research apparatus from literary, cultural and sociological studies, I have attempted to get to the heart of the matter, setting my exposition within the context of a large body of musicological literature. This undertaking may be perceived as writing a fragment of 'the cultural biography of the piano'.[2] The conclusions reached may prove useful in studying the piano's social reception in Polish culture during the nineteenth century, which was unquestionably influenced by Chopin's performance practice.[3]

Ryszard Przybylski stated that Chopin's letters, although not strictly a set of literary texts, belonged among the masterworks of Polish literature.[4] Not overly inclined to verbal expression,[5] the composer left behind relatively few written documents of his singular relationship with the piano. Additionally, a large part of his correspondence has not survived to our

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I have in mind the sociology of objects, the method of which has been clarified through the turn towards things in the human and social sciences. The anthropocentric perspective in research into people's relations with the world around them has been reorientated. See Alex Preda, 'The Turn to Things: Arguments for a Sociological Theory of Things, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 40/2 (1999), 347–366. See also Arjun Appadurai (ed), *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge, 1998).

2
Cf. Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things*, 64–91.

3
Crucial from this perspective seems to be the question of the dependency between Chopin's relationship with the piano and the transformation of the social representation of an object with the status of a mechanical musical instrument (around the turn of the 1820s and 30s) into a key symbol of nineteenth-century Polish culture. In addition, one may state that Chopin effectuated the multiplication of the piano's affordances in Polish culture of his time. The term 'affordance' was adapted for use in the social sciences by James J. Gibson. Affordances are a set of possibilities for action that are linked to a specific thing or substance. They are independent of individuals' capacity for recognising them. See James J. Gibson, 'The Theory of Affordances', in: Robert Shaw and John Bransford (eds), *Perceiving, Acting and Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology* (New Jersey, 1977), 67–82. This term was grafted into Chopin studies by Joel Speerstra, in his article 'Bach, Chopin, and the Affordances of Keyboard Instruments during the Long Eighteenth Century', in Szymon Paczkowski (ed.), *Bach and Chopin. Baroque Traditions in the Music of the Romantics* (Warsaw, 2019), 267–284. Speerstra employs it in relation to the set of performance potentials correlated with a particular instrument or set of instruments. In the present article, I propose a somewhat broader definition, orientated towards the social perception of the piano.

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Ryszard Przybylski, 'Myśli Chopina' [Chopin's thoughts], in: Zofia Helman, Zbigniew Skowron and Hanna Wróblewska-Straus (eds), *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* [Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin] (hereafter *KCH*), i: *1816–1831* (Warsaw, 2009), 13.

5
'So many things remain unwritten', wrote Chopin in a letter to Wojciech Grzymała of 22 June 1849. See *Chopin's Polish Letters* (hereafter *CPL*), tr. David Frick (Warsaw, 2016), 481.

times. Chopin found it far easier to formulate his ideas by means of the piano than with a pen. Yet he did 'reveal himself' in language, in words and sentences, sincerely 'giving his tongue full rein' in his letters, from which we can reconstruct an image of his relationship with the piano. The instrument-centred problem of tension between transcendent music and rational existence recurs throughout virtually his entire correspondence.[6] In this context, we can state that the piano was a keystone of the physicality and metaphysicality of Chopin's being in the world.

Commencing my reflections, I wish to stipulate that I have not addressed in this article strands directly connected to the analysis of the musical work, since references to the remarkably voluminous body of studies would disturb the article's structure. Over the course of my study, I purposely passed over sections of sources linked to the presentation of particular works (e.g. 'Chopin captivated everyone with his performance of the ballade'), unless an anthropological element appears in a given passage (e.g. 'Chopin brushed the keys, touched them with a satin hand like no one else, merged with the piano', etc.). From the set of analysed sources, I have also excluded the recollections of Chopin's pupils linked to his teaching method, unless they include descriptions of the pianist's relationship with the instrument, such as a description of his 'plunging deep into the piano' or his particular predilection for the black keys in the context of the correct arrangement of the playing apparatus.[7] I do not explore deeply the issue of *cantabile* style, which involved transcending the anatomical limitations of the piano. For Chopin, singing formed the basis for the whole instrumental practice; as a pianist, his chief concern was with 'softening the tone of the instrument, removing a little of its characteristic dryness and disconnectedness'.[8] The *cantabile* style is linked directly to pedalling. This aspect of performance obviously refers to issues relating to instrument studies, which require brief commentary.

I decided to divide aspects of instrument studies linked to Chopin's pianos into three categories: archaeology, reconstruction and value judgment. The first is connected to the instruments on which Chopin played or which he owned.[9] Within this group, we can identify two main vectors: market and museum. Setting in order the dichotomy of Chopin's instruments included in and excluded from market-based exchange is a necessary task, but one that exceeds the framework of this article. The second category – reconstruction – belongs primarily to the world of piano tuners and technicians. It covers actions linked both to the reconstruction of historical instruments preserved to our times and also to the making of copies. In the former area, two conservation strategies are

6
Przybylski, 'Myśli Chopina', 16.

7
See Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher in the Eyes of his Pupils*, tr. Naomi Shohet with Krysia Osostowicz and Roy Howat, ed. Roy Howat (Cambridge, 1986), 17.

8
*Le Pianiste*, 15 (1835), quoted after Sandra P. Rosenblum, 'Chopin Among the Pianists in Paris', in Jonathan D. Bellman and Halina Goldberg (eds), *Chopin and his World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 278. Cf. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger's comment: 'Hence Chopin's art of transforming the piano into a leading tenor or a prima donna and creating the impression of human breathing; hence that pre-eminence given to broad *cantabile* style, that intense *legato*, that inimitable sense of line and phrasing, that fullness of sound, that 'cello-like quality which the piano can suddenly reveal', in *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 15. On the *cantabile* style, see Jonathan Bellman, 'Chopin and the Cantabile Style', *Historical Performance: The Journal of Early Music America*, 2/2 (1989), 63–71.

9
At this point, I wish to cite several fundamental publications: Beniamin Vogel, 'Fortepiany i idiofony klawiszowe w Królestwie Polskim w latach młodości Chopina' [Pianos and keyboard idiophones in the Kingdom of Poland during Chopin's youth]; idem, 'Fortepiany epoki Chopina a współczesna praktyka wykonawcza' [The pianos of Chopin's day and contemporary performance practice]; idem, 'The Warsaw Piano of Fryderyk Chopin', in Kamila Stępień-Kutera (ed), *Fortepian Chopina / Chopin's Piano* (Warsaw, 2018); idem, 'Ciekawe uzupełnienia' [Interesting addenda], *Spotkania z Zabytkami*, 11 (2001), 40–42; Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, *Chopin et Pleyel* (Paris, 2010); idem, 'Chopin and Pleyel', *Early Music*, 29/3 (2001), 388–396.

applied, correlated with the purpose of the instrument. If the technical condition of a given piano makes it impossible to play, in parallel to the instrument's potential museum display, actions are undertaken designed to protect it from further degradation. If, however, artistic performance is still possible, then piano technicians pursue more complicated revitalising strategies, often with the use of modern-day materials. The priority for reconstructors in the process of making copies is either the absolute authenticity of the sound, using historical techniques and materials, or adapting the sound quality to modern-day performance conditions, employing techniques and materials as close as possible to the originals. In the last category of instrument studies linked to Chopin's pianos, that of value judgment, I decided to include reflections on his perceptions of the products of particular makers: Buchholtz, Leszczyński, Streicher, Graf, Erard, Broadwood and – last but not least – Pleyel.[10] Among them we find not only a few laconic mentions,[11] but also more striking leads that afford us potential insight into the organisation of the structures of the field of music at that time.[12]

Irena Poniatowska has defined the piano as an object that served to manifest aspects of spiritual culture, being a bearer – as a cultural phenomenon – of numerous traces of social interaction.[13] Those 'social interactions' can be traced also in Chopin's correspondence, referring conclusions from their analysis to selected aspects of the field of music, which was becoming more defined in Chopin's day.[14] It was common practice among piano makers at that time to provide the best instruments for the concerts of virtuosi, so that they could dazzle their audience. For pianists and constructors, that was a mutually beneficial arrangement: the former received excellent instruments and technical support in preparing the piano according to their preferences; the latter effectively advertised their wares. This practice, dating back to the end of the eighteenth century, is today one of the fundamental mechanisms of the piano market. Yet Chopin mentioned several times that instrument makers had supplied him with practice instruments,[15] and that kind of action in the context of the segment of the field of music under discussion is worthy of attention. For 'practice' purposes, Chopin visited, among others, Buchholtz's showroom in Warsaw.[16] In a letter to Tytus Woyciechowski, he complained that the Rondo in C major, Op. 73 for two pianos sounded

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Chopin described Pleyel's instruments as *non plus ultra*. See Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski (12 December 1831), in *CPL*, 249. Information on particular makers can be found in Beniamin Vogel's book *Fortepian polski: budownictwo fortepianów na ziemiach polskich od poł. XVIII w. do II wojny światowej* [The Polish piano: piano makers in Polish lands from the mid-eighteenth century to the Second World War] (Warsaw, 1995), which includes a register of piano makers and manufacturers with a detailed bibliography (pp. 197–280).

11
E.g. 'the piano is a good one, a Graf' – Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 26 August 1829, *CPL*, 123. 'Buchholtz has finished his instrument à la Streicher; it plays well, better than his Viennese instrument, but it is far from the Vienna Viennese' – Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 4 September 1830, *CPL*, 173. 'Erard hastened to offer his services and he has placed one of his pianos at my disposal. I have a Broadwood and a Pleyel – three pianos in all, but what's the use of them, since I have no time to play?' – Fryderyk Chopin to Adolf Gutmann, 6 May 1848, *Selected Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin*, tr. and ed. Arthur Hedley (London, 1962), 315. One valuable example here is Chopin's mention of 'Leszczyński's miserable instruments'. Based on this statement, Beniamin Vogel asserted that Chopin was accusing the maker of an unsatisfactorily efficient mechanism and shoddy finishing (Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 27 December 1828, *CPL*, 110; Vogel, *Fortepian polski*, 242). It is worth examining the composer's words rather from the perspective of the ironic convention of this passage.

12
See Eigeldinger, *Chopin et Pleyel*.

13
See Irena Poniatowska, *Muzyka fortepianowa i pianistyka w wieku XIX: aspekty artystyczne i społeczne* [Piano music and playing in the nineteenth century: artistic and social aspects] (Warsaw, 1991), 15.

14
I refer here to the notional apparatus (field, habitus, game, cultural capital) and sociological methodology proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. See idem, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA, 1984); idem, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, tr. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA, 1996).

unsatisfactory there, because 'the pantaleons were not completely in tune, the feeling didn't always come off, and all those details that give, as you know, so much shading to everything'.[17] The above passage attests to Chopin's marked sensitivity to contact with an instrument; he did not wish to 'tame' it, like many pianists of his time, but rather to 'befriend' it.

Virtuosi's relations with instrument makers were very delicate, as Chopin himself noted at the age of 19, writing to his family from Vienna: 'I have chosen for my concert one of Graf's instruments; I'm afraid that I'll offend Stein through this'.[18] Up to the 1860s, the piano remained an incredibly varied phenomenon from a construction point of view: makers were continuously introducing innovations to instruments, in cooperation with virtuosi. Audiences' expectations with regard to the piano's sound were still taking shape, so the choice of instrument conditioned the success of a musical show.[19] Yet Chopin was interested not in the process of manufacturing an instrument, but in the 'finished article', which enabled him to express himself artistically in the fullest possible way. Such is suggested by an account from a visit he paid to a Berlin piano maker.[20] It is worth mentioning that it was not just manufacturers who addressed issues relating to the supply of instruments; aristocrats anxious to cultivate a status as art patrons also offered virtuosi their assistance. Traces of that type of relationship can also be found in Chopin's correspondence.[21]

The composer appreciated Pleyel's pianos not only for their light action, the ease with which the sound was produced and the possibility of quick repetition; the instrument's delicate sound also suited him, favouring refined performance and the shading of tone colours.[22] Ferenc Liszt recalled that Chopin loved in the Pleyel 'its slightly veiled (yet silvery) sonority and its easy touch'.[23] It is difficult to state unequivocally whether in the latter case Liszt had in mind the action and the regulation of the keyboard, which still today is divided in piano jargon into 'soft' and 'hard', or rather the actual physical contact with the surface of the keys. The multi-stranded relationship between Pleyel and Chopin in the early 1830s in Paris has been insightfully described by Jean-Jacques

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E.g. 'Stein wanted immediately to give me one of his instruments for my lodgings, and then for a concert, were I to give one. Graf, who is nonetheless a better manufacturer than he is, told me the same thing' – Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 8 August 1829, *CPL*, 113. 'Three *Instrumentmachers* offered me a pantaleon for my lodgings' – Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 12 September 1829, *CPL*, 126. 'Graf, the piano manufacturer, will send us an instrument to the house' – Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 1 December 1830, *CPL*, 202. 'I have just received the piano, for which I am most grateful. It arrived in tune and completely in concert pitch' – Fryderyk Chopin to Camille Pleyel, 18 July 1842, *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina* [Correspondence of Fryderyk Chopin], ed. Bronisław E. Sydow (hereafter *KorSyd*) (Warsaw, 1955), ii:353.

16
See Vogel, *Fortepian polski*, 204. Chopin also visited Graf's showroom in Vienna: 'I have spent this entire week on my nose, the theatre and Graf, at whose place I play every day after dinner, in order to get my stiff fingers moving a bit' – Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 1 December 1830, *CPL*, 205.

17
Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 27 December 1828, *CPL*, 110.

18
Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 8 August 1829, *CPL*, 114.

19
E.g. 'Diakov, the Russian general, was so kind as to give me his instrument – better than that one of Hummel's – and only now was the audience, which gathered in even greater numbers that at the first [concert], truly satisfied' – Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 27 March 1830, *CPL*, 147.

20
'This morning I also visited two piano manufactories. Kisting [...] didn't have a single one finished, so I had bothered for nothing' – Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 16 September 1838, *CPL*, 105.

21
E.g. 'Lichnowsky, that protector of Beethoven, wanted to give me his piano for the concert' – Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 12 September 1829, *CPL*, 128. 'I'll play on the instrument that Belleville didn't wish to give me at that time' – Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 10 October 1830, *CPL*, 183.

22
See Eigeldinger, *Chopin et Pleyel*, 7–8 and 103–106.

23
Ferenc Liszt, *Chopin*, tr. Meirion Hughes (Manchester, 2010), 89.

Eigeldinger.[24] Thanks to his success in the concert hall, the young Chopin soon managed to secure an 'unwritten contract' with one of the two major piano makers in Paris.[25] Pleyel supplied Chopin with instruments for practising and giving concerts, whenever possible making his salon available, in exchange for which Chopin performed almost exclusively on Pleyel's pianos and recommended them with conviction to his pupils.[26] We find confirmation of the efficacy of this arrangement in the composer's correspondence and in the press of the day.[27] During the 1830s the socio-musical dichotomy crystallised in the European discourse: the explosive Liszt on the thundering Erard piano and the sensitive Chopin on the delicate Pleyel. From the piano makers' perspective, perpetuating those relations in the social awareness was a key element of what today we might call 'marketing strategy'.[28] The essence of Chopin's relationship with Pleyel's pianos was not confined, however, to the economic reckoning of profit and loss; the pianist felt an intimate bond with the instruments; hence in relation to them he often used the adjectival pronoun 'my'.[29] Chopin also played on Erard's pianos, particularly when he did not feel well, but he found it 'dangerous to work much on an instrument with a beautiful ready-made sound like the Erard;[30] when he felt strong enough, he sought his own sound only on Pleyel pianos.[31]

The piano as an element of Chopin's entourage may be interpreted also in distinctive terms as a luxury item associated with a particular lifestyle.[32] Ryszard Przybylski suggested that Chopin must have 'made an impression' in Paris not just with his playing, but also with the way he organised his life and work: 'Chopin's lifestyle, constituting a dazzling setting to his innate charm, was costly, but worth it. It consisted of his dress, his flat and public appearances'.[33] Chopin 'had an exceptional sense of the importance of interiors; he knew that a home both shaped and presented its owner's personality [...]; he was a connoisseur of materials, cuts and accessories, and he often visited mercer's shops'. At the same time, he was 'the opposite of a dandy', against all provocation.[34] Przybylski's remarks are borne out by Norwid's recollections:

> Chopin [...] had a flat [...], the main part of which was a large drawing room with two windows, where his *immortal* piano stood, and it was a piano *far from elegant* like a wardrobe or a commode and splendidly adorned like fashionable pianos, but triangular, long and on three legs – the like of which, it seems to me, few people use these days in a well decorated flat.[35]

24
See Eigeldinger, 'Chopin and Pleyel', 389. Chopin was not always content with that cooperation: 'The idiot Pl[eyel] has made a mess of things for me, but it can't be helped; there's no point in banging your head against a brick wall' – Fryderyk Chopin to Wojciech Grzymała, 27 March 1839, *CPL*, 298.

25
The other was, of course, Erard.

26
See Fryderyk Chopin to Théodore Gudin, between 1836 and 1838, *KCH*, ii, pt 1, 636. Eigeldinger indicates that of Chopin's 150 or so pupils, as many as 50 featured in Pleyel's records, and the pianist received a provision from each sale; idem, 'Chopin and Pleyel', 393.

27
See Adam Czartkowski and Zofia Jeżewska (eds), *Chopin żywy w swoich listach i w oczach współczesnych* [Chopin alive in his letters and in the eyes of his contemporaries] (Warsaw, 1958), 491.

28
See Dieter Hildebrandt, *Pianoforte: A Social History of the Piano* (New York, 1988), 26–38.

29
See Fryderyk Chopin to Wojciech Grzymała, 13 May 1848, *CPL*, 437: 'I have 3 [pianos]. In addition to the Pleyel, one Broadwood, the other an Erard, but until now I could only play on mine'.

30
See Henri Blaze de Bury, *Musiciens contemporains* (Paris, 1856), 118; Maria von Grewingk, *Eine Tochter Alt-Rigas. Schülerin Chopins* (Riga, 1928), 15.

31
Blaze de Bury, *Musiciens contemporains*.

32
See Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

33
Przybylski, 'Myśli Chopina', 17.

34
Ibid., 18.

35
Cyprian Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie* [Complete writings], vi: *Proza* [Prose], ed. Juliusz W. Gomulicki (Warsaw, 1971), 178.

In his description, Norwid emphasises that it was 'far from elegant'. He contrasts it with 'fashionable', 'splendidly adorned' instruments resembling other pieces of furniture in lavish homes. We might say that although the piano stood in the main room of Chopin's flat, it did not form part of a drawing room the likes of which Norwid criticised for succumbing to convention, appearance and soulless form. In this context, Chopin's piano comes across rather as an essential element in the artist's life, and it became part of his art to such an extent that it was this very instrument which was described by the narrator of Norwid's *Czarne kwiaty* [Black flowers] with the epithet 'immortal'. The poet's account contrasts with that of Emilia Hoffman (née Borzęcka), who recalled lessons with Chopin from a different perspective: 'in his flat [...] everything was soft, elegant, refined, carpets and curtains everywhere, so much so that even the pianos had satin covers, embroidered by *grandes dames*, his admirers'.[36] The pianist himself was certainly aware of the piano's socially distinctive features, as we learn from passages in letters sent from Edinburgh to his family in Warsaw[37] and to Adolf Gutmann,[38] and also from numerous passages in his correspondence devoted to matters related to the provision of objects discharging aesthetic functions.

Subtle feeling was manifest not just in Chopin's milieu, but directly in his way of playing. That playing, 'based on a maximum reciprocal independence of the fingers and on the lightest touch which can be imagined', represented 'a denial of all heaviness'.[39] Unlike most of his contemporary virtuosi, Chopin treated the piano much more like a lofty altar of some 'temple of meditation' than as a circus accessory.[40] There are many accounts from his pupils and listeners who all state that 'Nobody before had stirred the keys of a grand piano like that, nor known how to release such countless sonorities from it'.[41] During his concerts, 'one could forget about the mechanism, imagining that one was hearing an airy harp, the strings of which were set in motion by a pleasant breath of air'.[42] At that time, such a delicate approach to the instrument was a novelty in European pianism, as virtuosi focussed primarily on transcending the physical capacities of the mechanical musical instrument, using strong and rapid striking, numerous accounts of which can be found in press and iconographic sources.

Karl Marx, eight years younger than Chopin, could certainly have stated that for Chopin the piano was a fetish. Throughout history, people have entered into various forms of alienating bonds with objects of desire known as fetishes. The etymology of the word 'fetish' refers us to the Portuguese word *feitiço* (magical) and the Latin *facticius* (artificially created, as opposed to the products of nature: *terrigenus*).[43] A fetish is a material object, but its existence is not confined to materiality. In its nature, extending between the conscious and the subconscious, it embodies

36
Quoted after Czartkowski and Jeżewska (eds), *Chopin żywy*, 450.

37
'London is terribly expensive during the *saison* – just an apartment *without anything* (it is true that I had a very large and high drawing-room, in which 3 pianos stood; one that Pleyel sent me, a second that Erard prepared for me, a third that Broadwood set up for me), the apartment alone, since the stairs were grand and beautiful, and the entrance magnificent, and it was on Dover Street near Piccadilly, cost 80 *pounds*' – Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 19 August 1848, *CPL*, 447.

38
'I wander from one lord, one count to another. And received everywhere with the most cordial kindness and boundless hospitality, I find excellent pianos, beautiful paintings and choice libraries; there are also countless hunts, dogs and dinners, as well as cellars that I take less advantage of. It is hard to imagine the refined luxury and the comfort that one finds in English [*sic*] country houses' – Fryderyk Chopin to Adolf Gutmann, 16 October 1848, *KorSyd*, ii:445.

39
August Kahlert, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 289.

40
See Przybylski, 'Myśli Chopina', 19.

41
Ferdinand Hiller, quoted in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 270.

42
'Wspomnienie o Chopinie' [Remembering Chopin], *Goniec Polski*, 1851/51, 204.

43
Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych* [Dictionary of foreign words and expressions] (Warsaw, 1989), 168.

something that is beyond it, referring us to religious, affective, sexual and aesthetic codes. The exceptional aura of a fetish contains both mystery and promise, steering human perception towards the metaphysical. Hartmut Böhme distinguishes two categories of fetish.[44] The first of them – the primary category – comprises 'good' fetishes, which are excluded from the circulation of gifts and wares; without their presence, a person's identity disintegrates. With their subsistence, they manifest the promise of immortality. The other category, of 'bad' fetishes, is described by Marx in the first chapter of *Capital* ('The fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof'). In Marx's approach, commodity fetishism beguiles people with a false, metaphysical promise, effacing the value of work, which determines an object's true worth. This kind of fetishism is inseparably linked to the exchange and circulation of things: it stimulates consumption. With time, the value of a fetishist artefact falls, and the object of desire 'grows old' and fades, reminding people about the ineluctability of time and about death. Both categories of fetish are reflected in the world of the piano, which in its rich history has become both a metaphysical 'trampoline' and a relic, as well as a luxury commodity, a status symbol, an emblem of idle living and consumption for show.[45] The notion of the fetish seems a perfect fit for the remarkable relationship between people – especially virtuosi – and the piano in the nineteenth-century context. The symbolic loftiness of the piano in social reception grew in proportion to the instrument's fetishisation in different discourses: paradoxically, it acquired greater symbolic capital the more it departed from its most fundamental and natural task – the production of sounds. This phenomenon can be observed also in the case of Chopin, for whom the piano was decidedly something more than just a mechanical object.

The first of our 'fetishist leads' is the singular significance of the piano in the spaces inhabited by Chopin, linked to a sense of security. Chopin consistently divided each of his successive flats into 'lair' and 'apartment'.[46] Both parts usually contained a piano. In the former – the private domain – he would soothe his frazzled nerves, recover from illness, and seek a haven and a sense of safety. Chopin mentioned his 'lair', for example, in a letter to Tytus Woyciechowski: 'There's already a room upstairs designed for my convenience [...]. There I am to have an old piano and an old desk; it is to be my corner for hiding away'.[47] From his Viennese 'lair', meanwhile, he wrote to his family: 'How well I feel here in my room! [...] I feel best of all when, after having played my fill on the marvellous Graf piano, I go to sleep with your letters in my hands'.[48] Thanks to his piano, he recovered his calm,[49] and at his Pleyel instrument in his lair he could 'sleep like a child'.[50] In his public apartment, where the piano occupied centre stage, Chopin would receive guests.[51] Even when 'I have

44
See Hartmut Böhme, 'Commodity Fetishism', in *Fetishism and Culture: A Different Theory of Modernity*, tr. Anna Galt (Berlin, 2014).

45
See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), esp. chapter II, 'Conspicuous Leisure' and chapter III, 'Conspicuous Consumption'.

46
Przybylski, 'Myśli Chopina', 18.

47
Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 27 December 1828, *CPL*, 110.

48
Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 22 December 1830, *CPL*, 210.

49
'I have perfect quiet here [...]. I have a Broadwood in my room and Miss Stirling's Pleyel in the drawing-room', Fryderyk Chopin to Auguste Franchomme, 6 and 11 August 1848, *Selected Correspondence*, 328.

50
George Sand to Charlotte Marliani, 15 June 1839, Georges Sand, *Correspondance*, ed. Georges Lubin, iv (Paris, 1968), 684.

51
In his pupils' recollections, we find information that in the room in which Chopin gave lessons a cottage piano [*pianino*] also stood alongside the grand. See Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 63. Liszt gave the following description of an improvised soirée in Chopin's flat on rue de la Chaussée d'Antin: 'His salon [...] was lit by a few candles gathered around a Pleyel piano [...]. The light concentrated around the piano fell on the floor rippling, like a spreading wave, until it mingled with the flickering firelight, from which burly orange flames occasionally erupted [...]. Gathered around the piano in a lit area were several figures of great renown', Liszt, *Chopin*, 89–90.

neuralgia and I'm swollen',[52] Chopin would take care over the décor of his drawing room, as we learn from a letter written from London to Wojciech Grzymała in Paris:

> Please, ask that the sheets and pillows be *dry*. Have them *buy pinecones* – have Mrs Etienne spare nothing, so that I'll be able to warm myself up once I get there. I wrote to Derozierka. Make sure the carpets and curtains are there. I'll pay *Perrichet*, the upholsterer, right away – even tell Pleyel to have me sent any sort of piano on Thursday evening; have it covered. Have a bouquet of violets bought on Friday, so that it smells sweet in the drawing-room – let me have a bit of poetry still at home when I return – passing from the living room to the bedroom – where I will certainly lie down for a long time.[53]

Living in permanent exile, Chopin was oversensitive to the antinomy between home and flat. We might hazard the assertion that in his life 'full of worries, orphanhood, longing, tribulations, misfortune and woe'[54] – essentialising characteristics of the existence of an exiled Polish artist in the mid-nineteenth century – the piano as a rational instrument[55] discharged a harmonising function: it organised Chopin and regulated his mood, preventing him from falling into the abyss of melancholy imagination. Not by chance did George Sand write in a letter to Pauline Viardot: 'Chopin is having his piano tuned and would like to be able to have himself tuned.[56]

Practising on an instrument helped Chopin to organise his time. He wrote to Jan Matuszyński from Vienna: 'My room [...] is large, well-shaped, with 3 windows. The bed stands opposite the windows, a (wonderful) pantaleon on the right, and a sofa on the left [...]. In the morning an unbearably stupid servant wakes me. I rise – they bring me coffee; I play, and often I drink a cold breakfast; then, around 9, comes the German teacher. Later, most often I play [...]. All of this in a dressing-gown until 12; only at this point [...] we go for a walk along the fortifications [...]. After dinner, black coffee is drunk [...]; after which, I make my visits, and I return home as it is getting dark, coif myself, *shossure* myself, and off to the soirée. Around 10, 11, sometimes 12 (never later) I return. I play, cry. I read, look. I laugh, go to bed, blow out the candles, and you all always appear in my dreams'.[57] When in good health, it often occurred that '[creativity] arrived at his piano suddenly, completely, sublimely, or it sang in his head during a walk, and he would hasten to hear it again by recreating it on his instrument';[58] similarly, when afflicted by melancholy, 'he falls back on his piano and composes beautiful pages'.[59]

In his correspondence with friends and family, Chopin several times confessed that he treated the piano like his closest friend, to whom he 'gave his tongue full rein'. In this context, we can even perceive a fetishist symmetry to the pianist's relationship with the

52
Fryderyk Chopin to Wojciech Grzymała, 21 November 1848, *CPL*, 474.

53
Ibid.

54
Ryszard Przybylski defines them collectively as *aerumna* – see idem, 'Myśli Chopina', 22.

55
Referring to Weber's notion of the piano's 'rationality', see Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, tr. and ed. Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel and Gertrude Neuwirth (Carbondale, Il, 1958).

56
George Sand to Pauline Viardot, November 1841, George Sand, *Correspondance*, ed. Georges Lubin, v (Paris, 1969), 516.

57
Fryderyk Chopin to Jan Matuszyński, 26 and 29 December 1830, *CPL*, 217.

58
George Sand, *Story of My Life*, coll. tr. ed. Thelma Jurgrau (Albany, 1991), 1108.

59
George Sand to Charlotte Marliani, Nohant, 24 July 1839, Sand, *Correspondance*, iv:726.

instrument, which was consolidated in the social discourse and memory by Józef Sikorski, writing that Chopin's reflective character 'developed within him essential tendencies to seek a confidant in the piano'.[60] Already in 1828 Chopin wrote to his family in Warsaw: 'Our innkeeper expresses his admiration for me every day when I visit him (or rather his instrument)'.[61] A year later, he told Tytus Woyciechowski plainly: 'how unpleasant it is not to have anyone to go to in the morning, to share your sadness with him, or your happiness. How deplorable it is when you have a burden and you have nowhere to lay it down. You know what that is an allusion to. I say to the piano what I would often have told you'.[62] In a highly intimate letter written during the last days of 1830 from Vienna to Jan Matuszyński, Chopin confessed his intention to 'express my longing on the piano', declaring that 'The tears that were supposed to have fallen on the keyboard bedewed your letter'. He wrote that the piano was his only true friend in his Viennese isolation.[63] We also find plenty of evidence of Chopin's 'friendship' with the piano in letters from his last years. In 1848 he wrote to Wojciech Grzymała from London: 'Broadwood, the true local Pleyel, was the best and truest friend to me'.[64] Chopin stressed the intimacy of his contact with the Pleyel piano several times in letters to the maker, assuring him: 'No one will play on it [a particular piano] but me'.[65]

The absence of a friend can lead to yearning and sorrow. This comes out in a report that the 16-year-old Chopin gave of his stay in Silesia to Józef Elsner: 'I am delighted and charmed by the splendid views that beautiful Silesia offers, but there is one thing that all the charms of Reinertz cannot replace: a good instrument. Can you believe, Sir, that there is not a single good piano here? I have seen nothing but instruments which give me more pain than pleasure. Fortunately this martyrdom will not last long; the time for my departure from Reinertz is approaching'.[66] Of course, that 'martyrdom' can be ascribed to literary convention, but the form of his narrative attests to the young pianist's remarkably profound bond with the piano. Sorrow turned to anger during his stay in Majorca, when Chopin wrote to Pleyel: 'My piano has not yet arrived. – How did you send it? [...] I dream music, but I don't do any – because there are no pianos here ... it's a savage land in that respect'.[67] George Sand also mentioned that the delayed delivery of the Pleyel piano drove Chopin to rent a local instrument, 'He has hired a local [piano] which gives him more vexation than consolation'.[68]

Chopin, who described his instrument as his best friend, was offended by a lack of delicacy in contact with the musical instrument: he 'abhorred banging a piano'.[69] From

60
Józef Sikorski, 'Wspomnienie Chopina' [Remembering Chopin], *Biblioteka Warszawska*, 1849/4, 535.

61
Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 16 September 1828, *CPL*, 105.

62
Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 3 October 1829, *CPL*, 139.

63
'I can't do what I feel like, I have to dress up, coif my hair, *shossure* myself; in the salon I pretend to be calm, but once I get home, I thunder away on the piano' – Fryderyk Chopin to Jan Matuszyński, 26 and 29 December 1830, *CPL*, 211.

64
Fryderyk Chopin to Wojciech Grzymała, 19 August 1848, *CPL*, 452.

65
Fryderyk Chopin to Camille Pleyel, October 1837 – *KCH*, ii, pt 1, 691.

66
Fryderyk Chopin to Józef Elsner, 29 August 1826, *Selected Correspondence*, 9.

67
Fryderyk Chopin to Camille Pleyel, 21 November 1838, *KCH*, ii, pt 2, 757.

68
Fryderyk Chopin to Wojciech Grzymała in Paris, 3 December 1838, *Selected Correspondence*, 164. George Sand, in a letter to Charlotte Marliani dated 14 December 1838, mentions: 'he's missing his piano very much' – George Sand, *Correspondance*, iv:531. For that very reason, the composer's companion prepared for him a surprise – ordering a Pleyel piano, as we learn from a letter to Camille Pleyel (George Sand, *Correspondance*, xxv (Paris, 2020), 332), 'Chopin has been playing on cottage pianos for a long time and is craving an instrument more appropriate to his renewed strength').

69
Quoted after Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 57.

extant accounts by his pupils, we know that he could not abide an excessively powerful sound from the piano, calling it 'a dog barking'.[70] He 'wanted absolutely nothing to do with [...] a gymnastic treatment of the piano',[71] and never 'flattened his piano';[72] he generally played 'very quietly, and rarely, indeed hardly ever, *fortissimo*',[73] and 'his *pianissimo* [was] extraordinary'.[74] After concerts in Vienna, Chopin expected a wave of criticism in the press due to his delicate playing.[75] He also mentioned 'banging' in a letter to Tytus Woyciechowski: 'When I'm writing to you, I can't stand it when my bell goes into action, and in traipses something with great moustaches, large, overgrown, stout – he sits down to the piano, and not knowing himself what he is improvising, bangs, beats without any sense, hurls himself, crosses his hands, rattles for some five minutes on one key with one gigantic finger, which was destined somewhere out there in the Ukraine to wield a steward's whip and reins'.[76]

Extremely interesting in this context seems to be the only mention I have come across in the sources of Chopin's 'physical aggression' towards a piano. George Sand described in a letter the pianist's fit of rage against a technically flawed instrument: 'when his steed fails to respond to his intentions, he deals it mighty blows with his fist, such that the poor piano simply groans'.[77]

Besides the 'thundering' evoked earlier, which by no means can be identified with the above-mentioned 'banging', Chopin also writes about 'moaning'; as the uprising was continuing in Warsaw, the pianist lamented in a letter to his friend: 'And here I stand by idly – and here I stand with empty hands – I only moan, express my pain from time to time on the piano – I despair – and what good will that do?'[78] At this point, it is worth drawing attention to something ostensibly obvious, which Chopin incidentally stresses: when performing, a pianist is defenceless, naked in relation to the instrument. He comes with bare hands, with no intermediary, like a bow. Ultimately, however, as Karol Mikuli noted, 'Under Chopin's hands the piano needed to envy neither the violin for its bow nor wind instruments for their living breath'.[79]

Further evidence of symmetry in Chopin's remarkable relationship with his instrument can be found in passages where he mentions the piano's 'voice'. In a letter to Julian Fontana, he wrote: 'The man waited three days in Châteauroux for the piano before I called him off yesterday, once I'd received your letter; but what sort of voice the piano has, I don't know yet, because it hasn't been unpacked'.[80] During Chopin's concerts, the piano's 'voice' was heard also by the audience.[81] Listeners also sensed the subjectiveness of the musical instrument: 'The piano became so intensely animated that it gave one shivers. I repeat

70
Ibid., 56.

71
Ibid., 27.

72
Ibid., 276.

73
Ibid., 56.

74
Ibid.

75
'The general opinion, however, is that I played too weakly, or rather, too delicately for the Germans, who are used to hearing their pianos hammered. I expect to see this charge in the daily paper, especially since the editor's daughter wallops the instrument terribly' – Fryderyk Chopin to his family, 12 August 1829, *CPL*, 116.

76
In the quoted passage, Chopin is describing his reflections linked to the playing of Wojciech Sowiński – Fryderyk Chopin to Tytus Woyciechowski, 25 December 1831, *CPL*, 257.

77
George Sand to Paul Gaubert, George Sand, *Correspondance*, v:391.

78
From the 'Stuttgart album', f. 20v, 16 September 1831, *CPL*, 234.

79
Quoted after Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 46.

80
Fryderyk Chopin to Julian Fontana, 9 August 1841, *CPL*, 331.

81
'And when you had finished, we remained silent and thoughtful, still listening to the sublime song, the last note of which had long since been lost in space. Of what were we dreaming like that all together and what thoughts had the melodious voice of your piano awoken in our souls?' – Félicien Mallefille to Fryderyk Chopin, 9 September 1838, *KCH*, ii, pt 1, 729.

that the instrument which one heard Chopin playing never existed except beneath Chopin's fingers'.[82] Chopin's piano not only 'spoke' and 'sang'; in his correspondence, the pianist depicted it as an active partner in a musical relationship: 'I don't know, for example, how to dance any waltz properly; that's already enough! My piano has heard nothing but mazurkas'.[83]

In the colourful panorama of Chopin's relationship with the piano, there also appeared dark, menacing areas. On many occasions, he 'could not conquer the anxieties of his imagination'. During the stay in Majorca, George Sand found Chopin:

> At ten in the evening, pale at his piano, his eyes haggard, his hair standing almost on end. It would take him several moments to recognize us. He would then make an effort to laugh, and he would play us the sublime pieces he had just composed, or, to be more accurate, the terrible and harrowing music which had come to him unawares in that lonely hour of sorrow and fright.[84]

Several times in her memoirs she mentioned Chopin sitting in 'calm despair' and 'playing a marvelous prelude while weeping'. When he came around, he confessed that 'while waiting for us, he had seen all that in a dream and, no longer able to distinguish dream from reality, he had calmed himself and played the piano drowsily, persuaded that he had died himself. He saw himself drowned in a lake, – heavy, icy drops falling rhythmically on his chest'.[85] Chopin himself described an extraordinary phantasmagoria in a letter to Solange Clésinger:

> I had played the allegro and the scherzo more or less properly and was about to attack the march [of the B flat minor Sonata, Op. 35] when suddenly I saw emerging from the half-open case of my piano the accursed creatures which, one lugubrious evening, had appeared to me at the Charterhouse. I had to go out for a moment to recover, after which I took it up again without saying a word.[86]

Thus far, I have sought to describe what was exceptional in Chopin's relationship with the piano, not just in the context of Polish culture. Yet we cannot overlook less 'sublime', and utterly obvious, aspects of that relationship. However iconoclastic it may sound, the pianist naturally used his musical instrument as a 'desk', although rather in the 'lair' space than in his 'apartment'.[87] In a letter to Jan Białobłocki, he wrote: 'how many hundreds of scores lying in disorder on the piano, a real hodgepodge'.[88]

Many texts in the fields of musicology and cultural studies have been devoted to the relations between the piano and the fair sex. Besides a knowledge of literature and languages, the ability to play the piano was a key element in the upbringing of young ladies in the context of their marriage.[89] In the musical culture of the salon,

82
Quoted after Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 277.

83
Fryderyk Chopin to his family in Warsaw, 16 July 1831, *CPL*, 231.

84
Sand, *Story of My Life*, 1091.

85
Ibid, 1091–1092.

86
Fryderyk Chopin to Solange Clésinger, 9 September 1848, *Korespondencja Fryderyka Chopina z George Sand i z jej dziećmi*, 154.

87
See Krzysztof Bilica, 'Przy fortepianie czy przy biurku? Kompozytorzy wobec fortepianu jako narzędzia komponowania' [At the piano or at the desk? Composers with regard to the piano as a tool for composing], *Muzyka Fortepianowa*, 8 (1989), 331.

88
Fryderyk Chopin to Jan Białobłocki, 29 September 1825, *CPL*, 63.

89
See e.g. Michał Kleofas Ogiński, *Listy o muzyce* [Letters about music], ed. Tadeusz Strumiłło (Kraków, 1956), 95–96; Łukasz Gołębiowski, *Gry i zabawy różnych stanów w kraju całym, lub niektórych tylko prowincjach* [Fun and games in various social estates throughout the country or in some provinces only] (Warsaw, 1831), 235; Wiktor Każyński, *Notatki z podróży muzykalnej po Niemczech odbytej w 1844 roku* [Notes from a musical journey around Germany undertaken in 1844], ed. Witold Rudziński (Kraków, 1957), 240; Klementyna Hoffmanowa, *O powinnościach kobiet* [On a woman's duties] (Warsaw, 1849), 98 and elsewhere.

centred on the piano, the instrument delineated an important space in female-male interaction. According to an account by Ferdinand Hoesick, it was at the piano that Chopin 'discovered the charms of Polish women [including Maria Wodzińska and Konstancja Gładkowska], their keen, but restrained, outbursts'.[90] Hoesick also stated with conviction that Chopin 'had incredible success with the fair sex. His playing on the piano, full of poetry and feeling, conquered a host of female hearts [...]. He was not only fortunate with women, but he himself was always falling in love [...]. He broke the most hearts among his female pupils'.[91]

By means of the piano, Chopin recalled the times of his youth: 'the pantaleons, the apples, and similar moments pleasantly passed',[92] and also 'conjure[d] boredom away and br[ought] poetry into the home'.[93] It sometimes happened that 'when in a good mood, he would now play the piano, now, not stinting on his innate wit, introduce various farces into the conversation'.[94] Ferdinand Hiller recalled that Chopin 'disliked being without company – something that seldom occurred. In the morning he liked to spend an hour by himself at his grand piano; but even when he practised – or how should I describe it? – when he stayed at home to play in the evenings, he needed to have at least one of his friends close at hand'.[95] We may state, therefore, that Chopin took advantage of his instrument, and he described that act in escapist terms, but also saw the instrument as a central object in the context of social interaction in the salons. Maurycy Karasowski, drawing on accounts from Chopin's family, described:

> If his father's pupils made too much noise in the house, Frederic had only to place himself at the piano to produce instant and perfect quiet [...]. He described how robbers approached a house, but were frightened away by a noise within. [...] He played more and more softly [...] till he found that his hearers had actually fallen asleep. The young artist noiselessly crept out of the room [...]. When the family had amused themselves with the various postures of the sleepers, Frederic sat down again to the piano, and struck a thrilling chord, to which they all sprang up in a fright.[96]

Józefa Kościelska, née Wodzińska, also recalled that Chopin at the piano 'larked about [...] or played waltzes, polkas and mazurkas for us to dance to'.[97]

Interesting in the context of the reception of the phenomenon of the piano in Polish culture through the prism of Chopin is the patriotic strand. One of the first to highlight this was Revd Aleksander Jełowicki:

> with Chopin, as with any good Pole, so much national sentiment that when he sits at the clavicembalo, he transports any Pole listening to Poland, leads him around the whole of Poland and takes him into

90
Quoted after Czartkowski and Jeżewska (eds), *Chopin żywy*, 101.

91
Ferdynand Hoesick, *Chopin: życie i twórczość* [Chopin: his life and work], i: *1810–1831* (Warsaw, 1927), 469.

92
Fryderyk Chopin to Jan Białobłocki, 29 September 1825, *CPL*, 63.

93
George Sand to Charlotte Marliani, April 1839, George Sand, *Correspondance*, iv: 625.

94
Quoted after Czartkowski and Jeżewska (eds), *Chopin żywy*, 329.

95
Quoted after Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 270.

96
Moritz [Maurycy] Karasowski, *Frederic Chopin: His Life and Letters*, tr. Emily Hill, 3rd edn (London, 1938), 29–30.

97
Quoted after Czartkowski and Jeżewska (eds), *Chopin żywy*, 283.

> the heart of Poland, takes him home [...]. Chopin, having seemingly enchanted his clavicembalo with some magical power and invested it with all the sounds and all the voices, bids it sing his poetry, and it sings for I don't know how long, because I have always forgotten about the time; it sings both our past happiness and our present misery, both yearning for our mother and longing for what is yet to come, and the cares of this world and heavenly joys.[98]

A similar tone was struck by Józef Reinschmidt: 'Chopin sat down at the piano and then from beneath his fingers so many wonderful national melodies poured forth that at times we listened with quivering hearts and tearful eyes'. Interestingly, the question of Chopin's patriotism resulting from his relationship with the instrument has been raised not just in the accounts of Poles. Liszt repeatedly evoked the recollections of

> the elderly Niemcevicz [Niemcewicz], a revered survivor of times past who appeared nearest to the grave among us, who listened intently to the *Historical Songs* [*Chants historiques*] that Chopin had written for him. Under Chopin's fingers the popular themes of the Polish bard were heard anew: the shock of arms, the song of victors, the hymns of celebration, the lament of illustrious prisoners and the ballads for dead heroes – all recalling the long and glorious history of the Polish nation. And the old man, taking illusion for the present, believed that the past had come to life again.[99]

Heine also noted: 'When he sits at the piano and improvises, I feel as if some fellow-countryman (*Landsmann*) from my loved home were relating to me the most singular things which had occurred during my absence'.[100] The 'patriotic' strand, remarkably broad in the context of Chopin, goes beyond the framework of the present essay, as it is linked not so much to Chopin's direct relations with the piano as to its mediated reception.

In the context of the relationship in question, it is worth turning to motifs touching on the anthropology of musical spectacles. In the plethora of descriptions of Chopin's playing, no one has yet drawn attention to the prosaic action of sitting down to the instrument. It appears in many sources: in some, Chopin 'sits down at the piano quietly and modestly, glad of any chair';[101] in others, 'in sitting down to the piano, he had unexpectedly electrified his audience'.[102] Perpetuated in the orally transmitted tradition of Chopin pedagogy, meanwhile, is the instruction to sit 'slightly high at the piano and make as few movements as possible'.[103]

Chopin defined music as 'the expression of thought through sounds'.[104] In that process, an essential 'translator' for him was the piano, which he described as a true friend, singing and speaking with its own voice, an intimate companion of sorrows, joys, anger and peace, the pragmatics of everyday life and the transcendence of

98 Aleksander Jełowicki, *Moje wspomnienia* [My memories] (Warsaw, 1970), 358.

99 Liszt, *Chopin*, 92.

100 Henrich Heine, 'Tenth letter addressed to M. August Lewald', in *The Works of Heinrich Heine*, iv: *The Salon*, tr. Charles Godfrey Leland (Hans Breitmann) (London, 1893), 279–280.

101 'Wspomnienie o Chopinie' [Remembering Chopin], *Goniec Polski*, 1850/51, 204.

102 Liszt, *Chopin*, 111.

103 Quoted after Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 28.

104 Fryderyk Chopin, 'Sketch for a method', in Eigeldinger, *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher*, 195.

artistic raptures, idyllic images and demonic phantasmagorias. By no means should we read Chopin's metaphors literally. Yet they did reflect the experience of the reality surrounding the pianist, as well as helping to shape that reality. It is also worth noting the influence of what Chopin said, wrote and thought about the piano on musical discourses and social concepts relating to the place and function of the instrument in different spaces of culture. In the process of analysing the correspondence, it is easy to overlook Chopin's experience of the piano's material and metaphysical dimensions, because the instrument's presence at virtually every moment in the outstanding pianist's life seems perfectly obvious. With his brilliant playing, Chopin 'launched a new epoch' for the piano,[105] enabling listeners to 'rediscover' the piano 'without its tiresome features'.[106] In accounts of Chopin's relationship with the instrument, we can discern the depth of its symmetry in the fetishist sense: for him, the piano was decidedly something more than just an object; he noticed in it at least a few pioneering affordances linked not only to musical practice, also employing models for the instrument's perception established in the culture of the time. His intimate relationship with the piano was observed by his loved ones and his pupils, spreading Chopin's new take on the piano far and wide. With time, the lofty figure of Chopin and his legacy increasingly catalysed the symbolic status of the piano in Polish culture, and the landscape of associations with the piano forged in the context of Chopin became for Polish artists of the second half of the nineteenth century a key point of reference. Based on analysis of Chopin's correspondence in terms of the symmetry of his relationship with the piano, we can also advance a few hypotheses comparing the dynamism of the piano landscape of Warsaw with other musical capitals of Europe, namely, Vienna and Paris, which I plan to explore in further research.

*tr. John Comber*

105
Elsner, *Sumariusz*, 170–171.

106
We may assume that the author had in mind above all aspects linked to the sound of the piano – the decay of the sound and the instrument's percussive qualities. See Marquis de Custine to Fryderyk Chopin, 27 April 1841, *Selected Correspondence*, 193.

ABSTRACT
Fryderyk Chopin opened a new chapter in the social biography of the piano. The aim of my research was to explore Chopin's unique relationship with his instrument from a 'symmetrical' perspective (the 'turn to things'), distinguishing several categories in order to grasp the current topography of this field of study. The first category is the 'archaeological', oriented towards the market and the museum. The second is akin to the 'reconstruction' (making copies and renovating) of period instruments. In the 'evaluative' category, I have included Chopin's observations concerning the craft of particular piano manufacturers. Another category can be described as 'sociological': Chopin's correspondence gives us insight into the arcana of the field of music and the habitus of individual actors within the social process of playing for limited stakes (Bourdieu). It is worth emphasising that Chopin utilised the piano as a tool of class distinction. Another category, adjacent to the previous one, is that of 'fetish'. The notion of fetish naturally pertains to the virtuoso's relationship with the instrument. This category is related to the key dimensions of Chopin's 'domesticated' space: his 'den' and 'apartment'. The piano was his 'closest friend', to whom Chopin constantly 'expressed himself ', but against whom he also 'inveighed'. He shared his sorrows and joys, released his anger and sought peace in the company of the piano. The symmetry of this relationship was revealed in dialogue: his piano 'spoke' and 'sang'. Moreover, the piano was an important element of Chopin's espaces imaginaires. One should not ignore prosaic but topical areas of the relationship: the instrument was also treated by Chopin as a piece of furniture, a tool for entertainment and an artifact in his interactions with women. The 'patriotic issue', connected with a mediated body of sources, is also noteworthy in the context of the reception of the phenomenon of the piano in Polish culture through the prism of Chopin. His intimate relationship with the piano was observed by relatives and students, spreading new piano affordances on a large scale.

KEYWORDS
Fryderyk Chopin, Chopin's letters, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, Igor Kopytoff, piano, fetish, Pleyel, Érard, Buchholtz, Broadwood, Graf, sociology of things, human beings and objects, cultural biography of things, affordances, transdisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity

BIOGRAPHY
Michał Bruliński, pianist, historian, literary scholar, cultural researcher, and music critic. He graduated with distinction from the piano class of Ewa Pobłocka at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music (UMFC), as well as from the Faculty of History and the College of Liberal Arts (Kolegium Artes Liberales) at the University of Warsaw (UW). He also completed the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Studies Program at the University of Warsaw (2023), with a dissertation entitled 'Przedmiot – symbol – fetysz: o fenomenie fortepianu w kulturze polskiej okresu międzypowstaniowego' [Object – Symbol – Fetish: On the Phenomenon of the Piano in Polish Culture During the Inter-Uprising Period] (in print).
As a pianist, he is a laureate of several national piano and chamber music competitions. His award-winning texts have been published by institutions such as the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), the Fryderyk Chopin Institute (NIFC), the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (ISPAN), and UMFC Press, as well as in scholarly journals including Muzyka, Res Facta Nova, and Kronos.
He has worked for *Opcje*, *Ruch Muzyczny*, and *Muzyka21* magazines, and collaborated with Polish Radio (PR II, Radio Chopin). He has also appeared as an expert on television, including TVP Kultura.
He was a recipient of the scholarships from the Rectors of UW and UMFC, as well as the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. He has been collaborating with the Fryderyk Chopin Institute since 2012, and with the National Institute of Music and Dance (NIMIT) since 2022. Since 2017, he has been a lecturer at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music and University of Warsaw. From 2019 to 2025, he led a piano class at the Karol Szymanowski State Music School in Warsaw. From 2016 to 2023, he served as an assistant to Professor Ewa Pobłocka.