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The Hermeneutic Priority of the Question: Cultivating the Hermeneutic Ear¹

Hermeneutyczne pierwszeństwo pytania.
Kształtowanie hermeneutycznego ucha

Introduction: a short presentation

In a text written several years ago (2011/2012) and recently published in *Hermeneutics—Ethics—Education* (2015), the issue of the dialectics of listening in the context of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jean-Luc Nancy's works has been elaborated.² One of the main theses of the text is that the question must first of all be heard in the space of somebody's openness to the world they live in. The issue of the priority of the question in philosophical hermeneutics has been undertaken as well in the text written in Polish: *Człowiek jako pytanie. O dialektycznym transcendowaniu w doświadczeniu kształtującego słuchania* (2013) which can be translated as

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² M. Przanowska, "Hermeneutic Conversation and the Piercing Dialectics of Listening", in: *Hermeneutics—Ethics—Education*, ed. A. Wierciński, (International Studies in Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, vol. 8), Münster 2015, pp. 387–414.

KEY WORDS

question, ways of listening, cultivation, taste, hermeneutics, translation, reading

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

pytanie, sposoby słuchania, kształtowanie, smak, hermeneutyka, przekład, czytanie



*The Human Being as a Question. Dialectic Transcendence in the Experience of (Trans)Formative Listening.*³ At the end of the text some main points for further exploration have been outlined: Firstly, the issue of an inner dynamics of (self)formation through a question or thanks to it; secondly, the issue of the human being considered as an embodied question (Polish “ucieleśnione pytanie”); and thirdly, the phenomenon/acoumenon of listening, and moreover, listening as the essence of dialectic *mousike* which is at the same time a kind of a seeing, touching, feeling and understanding of the world in which one meets another and oneself in the *energeia* of the ontological tonality, not: totality. The perspective outlined by these points has been called “psachnological experience of the acouological”. In the context of the three points, one can describe listening as the spirit of every formative experience. And, *ad marginem* one can notice that for a hermeneutist the wording of “formative experience” sounds like a pleonasm: Is any kind of experience a non-formative one? It seems there is no such experience. Another thing is that the Polish word “doświadczać” (i.e. to experience) has a connotation of being a witness of something that happens and (trans)forms, i.e. shapes somebody. In the trial procedure, for example, a witness is the person who participated in the event at least as a bystander. In the meaning of the “experience” taking into account the Polish connotation of the word, the witness is at the same time a participant in not only what happened, but in what is still happening, especially to them. Gadamer was right to point out that an experienced person is the one who is open to the possibilities that the world offers, someone ready for another experience. However, Polish “doświadczenie” that is “experience”, reveals the phenomenon of being directed to bearing testimony (do-świadczanie), being directed towards showing something witnessed.

The perspective of the two texts mentioned above has been enriched by the hermeneutic dialectic. In the very dialectic one can discover the gist of the hermeneutics. It emphasizes the phenomenon of searching/finding the “right” word from within the language⁴ and

³ M. Przanowska, “Człowiek jako pytanie. O dialektycznym transcendowaniu w doświadczeniu kształtującego słuchania” [The human being as a question], *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 2013, no. 2(228), pp. 49–76.

⁴ Cf. J. Risser, “Where Do We Find Words for What We Cannot Say? On Language and Experience in the Understanding of Life”, in: *Gadamer’s*

from the concrete situation that needs someone's ability to recognize a sense in the process of understanding it. The experience of being in search of the "right" word is linked with the phenomenon of *attention* (which is as well a kind of listening, even if there is no acoustic stimuli), the phenomenon of *sensitivity* (however not in the meaning of touchiness), the kind of *a relaxed vigilance* and willingness. In the broadest meaning (in which even an action is always a word for interpretation), the quest for words is connected as well with the phenomenon of expression and the experience of the question.

It is to be assumed that the priority of the question in understanding does not need an extended reference,⁵ because it seems to be a well-known matter. The main aim of the text is to focus on the hermeneutics understood here as "the hermeneutics of listening" which can also be called "the psycho-acouological hermeneutics". One can probably notice that the hermeneutics has its own unique educational aspects; this seems extremely important in the context of contemporary education and educational politics. However, hermeneutics *is* a shaping experience *per se*, and in this sense it is itself an education/formation. Therefore, it cannot be added to some or any kind of education reduced⁶ to a mere soulless training, although it is true that deepened ways of listening and hearing have an important, immense impact on the educational process and its results. Similarly, education focused on an enquiry is more efficient and this explains

Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation, ed. A. Wierciński, (International Studies in Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, vol. 2), Münster 2011, pp. 221–230; J. Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*, New York 1997, pp. 159–199.

⁵ Cf. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, revised edition, translation revised by J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, London & New York 2004 (Reprinted 2006), pp. 355–382; T.S. Wentzer, *Toward a Phenomenology of Questioning: Gadamer on Questions and Questioning*, in: *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, ed. A. Wierciński, (International Studies in Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, vol. 2), Münster 2011, pp. 243–266; M. Przanowska, "Hermeneutic Conversation and the Piercing Dialectics of Listening", *op. cit.*, pp. 396–402.

⁶ The issue of reductionism of education is raised in M. Przanowska, "Pytanie o sens (w) edukacji. Od Grondinowskiej semantyki sensu i jej pedagogicznych egzemplifikacji do antyredukcjonizmu hermeneutyki kształcenia" [The question about the sense of (and in) education. Grondin's semantics of sense, its examples within pedagogy and the antireductionism of the hermeneutics of education], *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 2015, no. 2(236), pp. 30–54.



the popularity of enquiry-based projects in education or the didactics of posing questions. However efficient they can be, the presented text is focused on showing the existential and ontological dimensions of the two: question and listening. This is not to belittle the technical and the instrumental in education/training. It is rather, on the one hand, to see in them as well the dimension of a profound experience of listening and question, and on the other hand, to show that artificial and soulless deprivation of genuine question and listening leads to the reduction of every human relation (and educational relationship especially) to an empty, senseless form. This form leads to the manufacture of people, rather than to genuine education which is the process of creative liberation within an understanding of being-with-others' dynamism. Educational liberation can be named *a deep-rooted liberation*. Education cannot be reduced to the pure spontaneous development of the child. Spontaneous development deprived of the real presence of the other (a parent, a teacher, etc.) actually impoverishes the child. Even if from our contemporary standpoint the tradition (not being reduced to traditionalism) appears to be a dubious one, the understanding of tradition which demands constant re-interpretation seems to be always needed. The salient point is *how* the tradition is shared with, even if it is transmitted, *how* we as the adults teach children, and *how* we are in the event of education that is not possible without tradition, especially if we bear in mind the famous message of Gadamer: we are a conversation, we are a language, we are a tradition.⁷

⁷ "Hermeneutical experience is concerned with *tradition*. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is *language* language—i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou. A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us. It would be wrong to think that this means that what is experienced in tradition is to be taken as the opinion of another person, a Thou. Rather, I maintain that the understanding of tradition does not take the traditional text as an expression of another person's life, but as meaning that is detached from the person who means it, from an I or a Thou. Still, the relationship to the Thou and the meaning of experience implicit in that relation must be capable of teaching us something about hermeneutical experience. For tradition is a genuine partner in dialogue, and we belong to it, as does the I with a Thou". H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit. p. 352. One can easily connect this with the famous statement "we are a conversation" and the conviction that the life of language is a conversation/dialogue.

Between question and listening

Acknowledging a debt to Collingwood, Hans-Georg Gadamer explains the notion of the logical priority of the question in the following terms: “[A] person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question”.⁸ David Aldridge’s article⁹ reviews Collingwood’s and Gadamer’s investigations of the logic of question and answer in connection with the notion of enquiry-based learning. Arising from this review, Aldridge encourages educators to consider three important educational consequences that place enquiry-based learning beyond an instrumental context and that highlight the priority of questioning in all learning. The first of these consequences is that questioning is properly significant in education when it “is constituted in the event, rather than prepared or given in advance”; e.g. emergent questions in teaching-learning contexts are more educationally significant than those contained in prescribed curricula or textbooks. A second consequence is that questioning in education properly “concerns some subject matter or issue that is at stake for both the student and the object of study”. The third consequence is an ontological one: that “students themselves are ‘called into question’ and thus transformed by the object of study”¹⁰ in the process of understanding.

All of Aldridge’s points merit further reflection by both philosophers and educators but here we would like to concentrate mainly on his third, ontological consequence. Aldridge’s fuller expression of this is as follows: “any question that emerges in the educational event will concern the subject matter but will also be directed at the student herself—it will put her being into question”.¹¹ In seeking to shed further light on this it is worth calling particular attention to the importance of *listening* in the dialogue, or indeed the dialectic, of learning. Gadamer’s work is widely associated with dialogue, and dialogue can of course be an attractive and reassuring idea; but in

⁸ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit. p. 370.

⁹ D. Aldridge, “The Logical Priority of the Question: R.G. Collingwood, Philosophical Hermeneutics and Enquiry-Based Learning”, *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 2013, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 71–85.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 84.



everyday usage it can also be a rather imprecise idea, even a misleading one. Real dialogue is difficult and one of the things that makes it so is the necessity for listening; not only that, but listening with an attentive and attuned ear to what a text (or another person) has to say. “The hermeneutical experience”, Gadamer writes, “has its own rigour: that of uninterrupted listening”.¹² So, in order to re-enact/ understand the question of a text, first of all one must *learn to listen* (or try to be open, to be able to listen) perceptively for what is said in the text, or for what an interlocutor is speaking about. Moreover, the very “what is said” must be “audible”, therefore *finding co-utterance* in a reader so that a relation between sound and sense, the interplay of sound and meaning, could be experienced in the process of voicing something by the interpreter’s constant co-speaking.¹³ Even if the question is raised by someone else, it needs to be heard or repeated within us and in this way posed by us as our real question.

To put it succinctly, the enigma of hermeneutic dialectics lies somehow in the three-dimensional experience: firstly, the experience in the aspect of *co-utterance* (and at the same time intently listening to what is uttered; it is a kind of a recitation or a slow, engrossed reading¹⁴); secondly, the aspect of *translation* (of our inner or previous experiences and our understanding of things as well as the experience of the act of the concrete translation of a foreign text); and finally, the aspect of creative *expression* of our “inner word” (*verbum interius*). Ed-

¹² H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit. p. 461. The subjective and objective ways of the interruption Gadamer discussed in the text *Niezdolność do rozmowy*, cf. H.-G. Gadamer, “L’inaptitude au dialogue”, in: H.-G. Gadamer, *Langage et vérité*, traduit par J.-C. Gens (Bibliothèque de Philosophie, collection fondée par J.-P. Sartre et M. Merleau-Ponty), Paris 1995; Polish translation: H.-G. Gadamer, “Niezdolność do rozmowy”, transl. B. Baran, *Znak* 1980, no. 3(309), pp. 369–376. Yet both the subjective and objective interruptions are not a prevention of being able to hear. Reading the demands of the nowadays more sympathetically, it seems that our civilization tends to extort in a way a new ability to hear somebody *within* our noisy culture. The issue should be elaborated in another text.

¹³ See H.-G. Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation”, in: *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer–Derrida Encounter*, ed. D.P. Michelfelder and R.E. Palmer, New York 1989, p. 46–47.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Przanowska, “Przekładanie, czytanie, wychowanie. Perspektywa hermeneutyczna” [Hermeneutic translation, reading and education], *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 2015, no. 1(235), pp. 27–50.

ucation, considered as a transformative experience that leads to students’—and teachers’—self-examination, needs a space for co-listening and co-speaking in the event of *conversation* (Latin *conversare*), both about the subject matter and the world-reality in which we live. This space brings to mind an education combining *expression* (articulation of a sense) and *impression* (reception of something addressed to oneself, whether from a text or from another person). However, what is worth mentioning, the expression and impression are not separate activities, separately they are not an activity at all and they are not separated experiences. The expression *is* the impression depending on what the aspect of the experience one emphasizes or focuses on. In relation to the translation element, this can be viewed as the opportunity for *cultivating an interpretative ear* for the suggestive resonances of words in their *relationships* to things studied or experienced in life. Here one begins to experience what it properly means to listen to the voice of the other; an experience which also seeks to bring to words the “something new” that arises in us in responding to that voice. One must be open to welcome other possibilities of understanding the thing—possibilities that a *question* introduces.

The *event* character of questioning is hospitable and receptive to the advent of the unexpected. It enables teaching and learning, in the to-and-fro of conversation, to become more open to transformative promise. As Andrzej Wierciński puts it, the conversation as an action is a turn (*versare*) to something. It seems however, such a turn cannot put our being-human into question if, on the one hand, we are unable to come to listen with a vigilant, sensitive ear; if, on the other hand, we are not able to translate *sui generis*, that is to recognize the “thing” in a sense, and to express how we understand what we have heard, what we have experienced. The understanding appears in the process of inner or outer dialogue. Education in this “conversational” sense is *a quest* that seeks to render “audible” the words of the other/the thing¹⁵—whether in a text or in a face-to-face encounter; words

¹⁵ Cf. “Our finite experience of the correspondence between words and things thus indicates something like what metaphysics once taught as the original harmony of all things created, especially as the commensurateness of the created soul to created things. This fact seems to me to be guaranteed not in ‘the nature of things’, which confronts other opinions and demands attention, but rather in ‘the language of things’, which wants to be heard in the way in



that deepen our experience in unexpected ways in which the other might be right.¹⁶

Taking into account Gadamerian hermeneutics and his interpretation of the human being as a conversation (Gadamer's formulation: 'we are a conversation'), one can go further and claim that we are a *genuine openness* which is actually a temporal, dynamic space *for* question and the space *of* question. However, the question is to be heard, to be read and understood. Listening makes the space of question and the space for question as one. And, the question-answer dialectics is the dynamism of human understanding and life. Questioning is an openness in which something is exposed to the open space. The concrete question which arrives, appears, comes and crosses our thoughts, our mind, is similar to an idea that comes to mind. The question itself is the openness which appears within the human being which is the openness as well. And, that is why men are able to welcome the question that comes to them like to a well-known area, like to its own home, metaphorically speaking, the question is originally coming to us and feeling at home. That can explain to some extent why there is no method of controlling the upcoming question. One can try to forget it, to omit or silence it, however the question awaits the right time to be posed again, to be considered, to be voiced and expressed anew. As one can see, the question here does not mean a statement ending with a question mark, but a "message" full of meaning, something that calls us, touches us so deeply that we cannot just go on living a normal life as we had before. The openness of the question meets the openness which we are—the openness to encounter the other and ourselves differently. The human being can therefore be named "being all ears", or "the audible way of

which things bring themselves to expression in language". H.-G. Gadamer, "The Nature of Things and the Language of Things" (1960), in: H.-G. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, transl. and ed. D.E. Linge, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London 2004, p. 81.

¹⁶ J. Grondin focuses on the issue describing education as the openness that the other might be right, cf. J. Grondin, "Gadamer's Experience and Theory of Education: Learning that the Other May be Right", in: *Education, Dialogue, and Hermeneutics*, ed. P. Fairfield, New York 2010; Polish translation: J. Grondin, "Gadamera doświadczenie i teoria edukacji: uczenie się, że inny może mieć rację", transl. M. Przanowska, *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 2015, no. 2(236), pp. 11–29.

being” (“słuchający sposób bycia”), “a listener” or “a listening”. That is why listening to the voice of the other is not only a justified way of understanding Gadamerian hermeneutics (as James Risser rightly emphasizes), but the listening to the voice of the other is a unique way of being human. Listening enables men to welcome reality and express an answer, to give a reaction, a response to it. The necessity of responding and making the answer understood by the other initiates of the adventure of being-with-others and at the same time to be ourselves. A solitude—as a way of dealing with questions—determines being with and for other(s) and cannot be equated with an isolation which is a misrepresentation of the solitude. There is the need to be able to experience genuine solitude and not to be afraid of the—sometimes conversational—silence it brings. This courage to be with oneself in the truth of this being makes our encounters with the other(s) in the *energeia* of question and response possible.

The necessity to respond has a twofold aspect: on the one hand, it needs to be heard—that is why a human being makes the response loud, audible, visible, touchable, that is a sensory, communicative one, but in a different, individual manner of understanding this audibility, visibility, etc. In these contexts one can recognize the beginning of the arts stemmed from the aspect of the necessity to respond. On the other hand, the need to be understandable/audible entails the risk of showing oneself and silencing someone else. The whole history of education and human relationships can easily be presented as the history of the silencing of the other. If we are to consider the subject of silencing it is a history of silencing either the ‘child’ or the ‘teacher’,¹⁷ both understood symbolically. Another way of silencing is to promote some balance between the speaking and listening of the interlocutors. It seems to be after all a methodological, or rather a didactical hint to guarantee some educational outcomes. The balance can arise from some claims as to the justice of equal rights. Yet, in the kind of time-based balance there is no real dialectic between speaking and listening, and between question and answer, but rather something resembling a trick, an artificial equilibrium imposed on

¹⁷ “Child” and “teacher” are used here as figures which have a metaphorical meaning, playing the role of the symbols of the different positions that people put themselves in during their lives.



completely different experiences. The dialogic dialectics does not operate in the scheduled time management. The dialectic is an event assuming only the ability and readiness to listening. Speaking without listening is not speaking but emitting sounds or uttering someone's opinions prepared in advance or taken for granted.

Listening happens when someone co-utters the heard "thing", the voice; it is a kind of profound *repetition in a soul* and *sotto voce* of what is heard. The soul echoes what is heard, and what is attentively uttered. Becoming engrossed entails something audible that is in a sense co-uttered, and only in this sense repeated. It is not a soulless, lifeless, blind or wooden copy, a duplication, a reproduction or an empty recitation without understanding of what is being recited. The 'repetition' enables one to see the thing uttered, to feel it, to understand it. It is an interpretation—a rendition, a performance. It brings us alive, because it enables us to *understand* differently, and in this way to *be* different. And the difference itself means we can hear and listen to what is different. When something—even so tremendous as the music of spheres, if we are to believe the ancient philosophers and the recent news about a sound emitted by a dying black hole—operates constantly in the same way we cannot hear it. In a way, the change, a transition, the *difference* makes sound that can be heard and recognized as something meaningful. This point shed some light on our everyday routine, which seems to us as being devoid of any deeper meaning. But everyday life is full of meaning. It is like a ground *for the differentiation* which introduces something unusual, some extraordinary events one can experience. We probably should sensitize, sharpen our inner ear to hear the sense of our everyday life. And similarly, our knack for criticism (critical thinking and reasonable actions) and the ability to make a commitment (being able to be in a relationship with others), both assume our way of listening. The knack for criticism and the kind one gives are directly connected to ways of listening and with the listening one becomes or one undertakes.

Ways of listening

In the light of this consideration, several kind of listening can now be presented. It is worth emphasizing that the aim does not consist in making references to some typology of listening described and developed by psychologists and theoreticians of management or

education in order to show their application regarding the issue of listening. It is not a discussion with philosophical elaboration of the issue either.¹⁸ The author ought to dare to present his/her own way of understanding—risking misunderstanding, an unforgettable mistake or a ridiculous one.

First of all, there is an *unwitting listening* when different sounds simply reach our ears and we can hear something even if we do not want to listen it or we are engaged in a listening to something else. In our everyday experience we can easily observe or realize the situations in which we hear somebody and do not listen to them at the same time. What is interesting in this experience—at least in educational and therapeutic fields—is that even if one does not really listen to the other (the child or the patient), the simple experience of being heard has its own results: a kind of an effectiveness (in the best possible meaning of the word)—one can feel better, to look at oneself in another way, create a feeling of being received, attended to, etc. A suffering, a deep disappointment caused by the discovery that in fact somebody did not really listen to us shows this immense difference between getting a fair hearing and being treated like an object which issues sounds that do not mean anything to the other person. It is in particular painful when we trusted the person or we—even unconsciously—thought

¹⁸ Very interesting points are presented for example in: *Educational Theory* 2011, vol. 61, no. 2 (Special Issue) devoted to listening in the context of the main contributors to the history of education; R. Smith, “Half a Language: Listening in the City of Words”, *Educational Research* 2010, vol. 4, pp. 149–160; more scientific approaches to the philosophy of listening: E.F. Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning*, Oxford 2005; C. O’Callaghan, *Sounds. A Philosophy Theory*, Oxford & New York 2007; the phenomenological approach: J.-L. Nancy, *Listening*, transl. Ch. Mandel, New York 2007; E. Holzer, “Listening to Significant Others in the Process of Text Interpretation: An Instance of Applied Hermeneutics”, in: *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, ed. A. Wierciński, (International Studies in Hermeneutics and Phenomenology, vol. 2), Münster 2011, pp. 115–126; and the just published collaborative work *Thresholds of Listening: Sound, Technics, Space*, ed. S. van Maas, New York 2015. The experience of the musical listening needs to be elaborated in another place. See as well, for example P. Szendy, *Écoute. Une histoire de nos oreilles*, Paris 2001 and the Polish author, a pianist and a philosopher inspired among others by the French approach to the experience of the listening to music: A. Chęćka-Gotkiewicz, *Ucho i umysł. Szkice o doświadczeniu muzyki* [Ear and Mind. Essays on the Experience of Music], Gdańsk 2012.



this is a person of great importance to us. Another thing is that different kinds of relation are more valuable for individuals depending on what is more important to them in a concrete situation: whether one wants to simply say something to the other (i.e. to be heard, to be audible for someone else), or it is more important to get a fair hearing, to be listened by this concrete person (and to have some signs that the person follows, at least tries to understand). However, it does not change the fact that being heard, being audible has a crucial meaning. The phenomenon of listening shows we want to be heard out and the audibility itself seems to be of basic significance in human life.¹⁹

Secondly, one can mention a *witting listening* (“słuchanie intencjonalne”), the intentional, deliberate listening to the sounds, to the other’s expressions, to everything the other communicates, transmits. It can describe a situation of attentive listening out for something—it is a tension towards something heard: we strain our ears to access something, to hear it and in this way to get it, understand it, perhaps in order to have a sound grasp of something; yet, in this experience of listening the most important thing is to lean out towards something, and in doing so to forget about ourselves in order to listen raptly to something, to the other. The listening for the thing, for the voice of the other, is already a kind of *exodus* from oneself.²⁰ The paradox is that when it is happening we still are ourselves, however differently: in the process of transcending towards something or someone else. The auto-transcendence that forms our culture is always the *cultura animi*.²¹

This kind of experience is directly connected with the third kind of listening, namely with the *interpretative listening* (Polish “słuchanie rozumiejące”). Intentional listening can be deprived of a sense if we are to think there is something like a glance or a gaze without any interpretation. Further, if we differentiate between interpretation and

¹⁹ From another point of view one can refer to the behavioral theory of conditioning by John B. Watson based on two inborn features: the fear of a fall and the fear of sudden, loud voices.

²⁰ Here one can refer to Frankl’s logotherapy and its philosophical assumptions about the healing sense of the self-transcendence as well as to Grondin’s self-transcendence as the sense of human life—*homo sapiens* as related to *vita sapiens*, see: J. Grondin, *Du sens de la vie. Essai philosophique*, Montréal 2003, p. 142.

²¹ Cf. J. Grondin, “Gadamer’s Experience and Theory of Education”, op. cit., pp. 17–19.

understanding, the difference between the two seems to be more distinct. Interpretative listening can be shown as a process of reading or translation.²² The two—reading and translation—are both needed to know the language of the expression and it entails the ability to decipher, to “read out” a sense, to make sense of something. Without the witting listening it seems senseless, however there is a possibility one listens wittingly without understanding—there is a lack of someone’s soul (gr. *pneuma*), something is missing. A quest for the sense of an expression is meanwhile a creative work. This creativity assumes freedom and genuine involvement, personal commitment to that work. Let say: the commitment of the *heart*. Someone who listens intently can engage their reason (or senses) while refusing to involve their heart in the experience. Interpretative listening must engage the heart of the interpreter. The heart, a fair hearing are in relation to the experience of audibility and of being *heard*.

That is, moreover, why there is the need to—in a way—enter ourselves, to enter our own inner language and silence, and to be in a *tension* with ourselves, i.e. to reveal *ourselves* as an *in-tension* and an *intention*. To be intent means that there is another way of listening. One can risk terming it a *breathing listening* (“słuchanie oddychające”). James Risser says about the voice in the breath²³ pointing out that “speaking is of the breath. [...] The living word is of spirit, and spirit is in flight. [...] To speak the word is to breathe it, sending it forth to be heard when the one with ears breathes in. But the word is itself breath, that is to say, being of life, is of spirit, mind, intelligence”.²⁴ In Risser’s interpretation of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the inner word (Aquinas’ *verbum interius*) is, “the word that says something beyond its grammatical parts. This is the word of *spirit* that occurs in writing when the word is read. This is the word of breath that is heard by the inner ear”.²⁵ In this breathing-in listening the issue of our body appears and its movement in a concrete rhythm or a pulse. Therefore, there is no deep listening without a pulsation of the breath, of a respiration as a space of inspiration. The inspiration—

²² Cf. M. Przanowska, “Przekładanie, czytanie, wychowanie”, op. cit., pp. 27–50.

²³ J. Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other*, op. cit., pp. 175–182.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 176.



being in spirit (let's add: in the embodied spirit)—signifies often to follow some intuition to fulfill or to make our space for a relaxation in the sense of Latin *otium* connected with some kind of action.

So finally, one can enumerate a *listening within action* (“słuchanie w działaniu”). This is not the ‘active listening’ described by psychology and applied to management and schooling. It is rather the experience of being asked (“bycie zagadniętym”), experiencing the voice of the unknown situation which simply appears in our everyday life. It is a listening in which one lets the other say something to them. It surprises us and requires our openness to the situation and its voice. That is why the listening within action consists in the recognition of something as the thing that means something and summons us to give our own response. It is to allow the situation to speak and to decide what to do. The recognized action is a response to the claims of the concrete situation. This aspect of listening is directly connected with the ethics that can be called *the ethics of taste*.²⁶ What seems to be of great importance in the problematic of the ethics of taste and is worth mentioning here, is that the ethics are not reduced to the aesthetics of choice, but is engrossed in the experience of recognition and understanding the situation which means making a good decision, taking correct action, searching and finding the right words, etc. in this concrete situation. In a word, the ethics of taste is *phronetic*. *Phronesis* has its own rigour and justification. The ethics is happening in the dynamism (gr. *energeia*) of being in a concrete place, rather than in the vision of the subject's identity. The big difference between the question “Where are you?” (or “How are you?”) and the question “Who are you?” should be noticed and taken into consideration. The former is placed into the dynamism of the ethics of taste, the latter can lead to a stiffening, the schematization of actions, and to a false idealization of the person. *Phronesis* is close to *sinesis* (understanding) and the *sinesis* relies on *akoé*, namely listening. The inner ear brings out what is right in the situation.²⁷ So one can risk the thesis: there

²⁶ The issue is elaborated in the paper *The Sense of Education. Toward the Ethics of Taste* presented at the conference “Ethics and Education”, November 20–21, 2015; the outline of the main idea is to be found in M. Przanowska, “Pytanie o sens (w) edukacji”, op. cit., pp. 30–54.

²⁷ H.-G. Gadamer, “Granice języka”, transl. B. Sierocka, in: idem, *Język i rozumienie*, Warszawa 2003, p. 31.

is no *phronesis* without *akouological sinesis*. The right decision is the answer to the question posed by the situation. Without the answer that we give each time in the concrete situation in our life, listening is rather a meaningless giving-out perception of sounds.

Final Remarks

The enumeration of the ways of listening bring the dialectic *di-hairesis* to mind: in order to understand one must differentiate complex reality and somehow organize it; but the reality has its own inner dynamism that makes it impossible to leave it like that. The enumeration is artificial (however inevitable) because each of the ‘types’, the ‘modes’ of listening reside in the human experience. Depending on the thing we are dealing with one kind or another is highlighted and perceptible. What is even more interesting is that the mixture of every kind of listening is accessible to us and their mutual connections can be surprising. However, what is still difficult in the hermeneutics of listening is that thinking about it and trying to speak about it is already immersed in listening itself. Speaking of the acouological experience is to emphasize the salient issue in hermeneutics and about it, if we still remember that philosophical hermeneutics is not a way of establishing a sense, but rather it is the practice of interpretation. We can be sure that practice has its shaping character because it is a genuine kind of education that shapes us and, in doing so, the education livens us up, revives us, makes us open up to make an effort and take a risk regarding the adventure of being hospitable and of being a stranger, a guest. The more the education is a sensible one (namely the more it is wise and sound, full of common sense, full of taste, having a direction and a meaning), education being a real experience is all the more likely—experience *per se* and the *sensu pleno* experience of our life.²⁸

The most important thing in education appears to be *the sense of taste and tact* (of the tutor, a teacher, the parents or in general of the adults), a flair for *listening* about the particular situation, for what is

²⁸ Cf. M. Przanowska, “Pytanie o sens (w) edukacji”, op. cit., s. 30–54. The sense of life is not reduced either to a direction, a meaning, nor to a rational searching for it. The non-reduced horizon of understanding the sense of life is brought from Jean Grondin’s book *Du sens de la vie. Essai philosophique*, Montréal 2003.



happening. It means “possessing”—by constant cultivation—a fine ear for what is happening, for all of our actions. It is the fine ear which reads the situation, recognizes its demands. Education is a living, meaningful experience when it is all about intently listening to the reality and its different sounds. Such listening leads to concrete *decisions* and *actions*, even if the action means to stop speaking, to stop talking (loudly or silently), to stop doing; even if the action means, on the contrary, a full, deep involvement of the heart, and not (only) to carry something out like an order in heartless obedience. The kind of listening which is so connected with our life that it influences it immediately, involving us in a full performance cannot be confused with blind, unquestioning obedience. That does not contradict the possibility of being sensibly obedient when, for example, obedience results from the *energeia* of inner ear for the situation. In a sense to be *phronimos* mean to be ‘obedient’—doing something in accordance with the recognition of the demands of the situation in which the *phronimos* participates. Therefore, it is more correct to use here the wording of ‘to head for heart fair hearing’. Yet, there is the obedience without the inner activity of *sensus audiendi* (the hearing, “zmysł słuchu”, “słuch”)—the obedience as a result of fear or of having the sense of duty that is not arguable (“Don’t argue *just do* what you’re told to do!”). What is worth noticing is that this makes us—despite the undertaken actions—harden, stiffen, even immobilized in a sense. It leads to a process of falling asleep or the inability to activate our intuition²⁹.

Listening can be compared to a gate that enables us to meet other possibility of being human in the world. The uniqueness of it consists in the fact that the gate is in us and operates as the constant call to be ourselves within the community with ‘the other’ who can be right. Being able to hear the voice of the other and respond to it seems to be the heart of education and every fruitful human relationship.

Hermeneutics can be understood then as the experience of the cultivation of listening. In the process of reading, understanding, interpretation, translation, expression and conversation, people are ‘all ears’. This is the audible way of life and the way of life as listening in

²⁹ Let’s see that the *in-tuition* means being in the process of education, especially *within* the dialogical *tuition* of somebody. In this context intuition can be treated as the inner, beyond particular words, reaction/response to the reality, to the concrete situation: in a moment one simply “knows” what to do.

many of the aspects of life. The judgment of it is accessible only for the person itself, not for the other, the outer observer—appearances can be deceptive. However, it is very fruitful to hear what the other has to say about our way of life and our way of understanding. Why? Because it is very hard to stop speaking to ourselves constantly, to stop idealizing our image of ourselves. We need others and their bad or wrong opinions especially. Hearing them is also a process of recognition (which always needs some measure of an honest criticism) and (self)understanding (which is always a self-criticism).³⁰

The final issue is: What does it mean to cultivate the *hermeneutic ear* in the context of what has been said? The hermeneutic ear can be an allegory of listening intently in the process of understanding. The process needs the ability to welcome what the other says and sometimes the sharpness of the ability to listen. Gadamer used to say to his students: “You must sharpen your ear”³¹ in order to understand. There is no understanding without listening. So, how to cultivate the hermeneutic ear? Apart from the fact that the question can be perceived as the question coming from the instrumental perspective of aims and ends in education, one should read it as the question belonging to the very important perspective of looking for the best possible quality of life. The quality starts from our personal answer to our concrete life situation—the frank answer to the situation can bring a joy and the true *joie de vivre*. The joy does not stem from a rejection of our weaknesses in order to make our life perfect, but rather

³⁰ Gadamer is right pointing out the difference between the criticism of ideology and the hermeneutic criticism. In the two one listens differently.

³¹ “[...] I would say that everything in writing, to be understood, requires something like a kind of heightening for the inner ear. This is obviously true for poetry and the like, but for philosophy too I take care to tell my students: you must sharpen your ear, you must realize that when you take a word in your mouth, you have not taken up some arbitrary tool which can be thrown in a corner if it doesn’t do the job, but you are committed to a line of thought that comes from afar and reaches on beyond you. What we do is always a kind of changing back, which I want to call in a very wide sense ‘translation’. Think a moment what it means to ‘translate’—i.e., to transpose a dead thing in a new act of understanding that ‘reads’ it, or even to transpose into our own or another language what was recorded only in a foreign language and given as a text”. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., pp. 551–552. I quote the excerpt to indicate again the relationship between listening, translation and (self)understanding.



it accepts them as the true colours of our finitude, our *psachnological* way of life. From the hermeneutic perspective, the cultivation of the ear seems to be done by the practice of a hermeneutic reading that is already the process of interpretation based on the process of translation. In the essay *What is called thinking* Heidegger asks: “But how are we to hear without translating, translate without interpreting?”,³² and Gemma Corradi Fumara rightly asks: “[...] how can we theorize about translation and interpretation when the notion of listening is so alien to us that generally we do not even consider it worthy of our philosophical attention?”³³ The process of translation/reading needs however, the willingness to read in a special way: a little bit slowly and freely in order to the interplay of meaning and sound of what is being said and which can then penetrate us and reveal some *sense*. But the sense cannot be reduced to a pure meaning or to a direction, to an end. Thanks to Jean Grondin’s interpretation of sense—the interpretation recalling some ancient understanding of it³⁴—one can state the experience of sense brings as well the issue of being able to *relish*, to savour what is said or to stop ourselves and to stay for a moment or two within the voice of the silence which emerges when we hear something different, shocking, unexpected or quiet but irremovable. It does not mean the listener is to be constantly passive or intently focused on something, although it is true we always listen, even if we try not to. It does mean that we are the openness which welcomes a question. This mean we are a *conversational listening* immersed in so called everyday life. The immersion is so deep and powerful that we can reflectively, even meditatively look at it in its meaningful ways of speaking. However reflective one can be, the most significant way of being contemplative emerges from concrete actions, situations calling for our—broadly understood—‘answer’.

³² Cf. G.C. Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, transl. C. Lambert, London & New York 1990, p. 39. The book is worth reading, however it is hard to agree with the Author when she analyzes Gadamer’s priority of the question. Ibidem, pp. 33–40.

³³ G.C. Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, op. cit., p. 39. Fiumara takes the Gadamerian priority of the question very critically, however it seems she omits the silent dialectics of listening that is presented in his entire work. It is true however, Gadamer did not elaborate the subject.

³⁴ J. Grondin, *Du sens de la vie*, op. cit.

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Streszczenie Summary

Tekst stanowi zarys hermeneutyki słuchania, przedstawionej w kontekście hermeneutycznego prymatu pytania. Autorka prezentuje różne sposoby rozumienia „słuchania”: słuchanie nieświadome (słyszenie), słuchanie intencjonalne, słuchanie rozumiejące (z uwzględnieniem słuchania interpretującego), słuchanie oddychające (sformułowanie inspirowane badaniami Jamesa Rissera) oraz słuchanie w działaniu. To ostatnie wiąże się z etyką smaku, która ze swej istoty ma charakter fronetyczny. Ucho wewnętrzne rozstrzyga o tym, co w danej sytuacji jest słuszne (Gadamer), a zatem autorka stwierdza, że nie istnieje *phronesis* bez *akuologicznej sinesis* (rozumienie, którego (dia)logika polega na słuchaniu). Wymienione rodzaje słuchania służą, po pierwsze, temu, aby

In the text the hermeneutics of listening (which can be also called “the psachno-acouological hermeneutics”) has been outlined in the context of the hermeneutic priority of the question. The author focuses on different ways of listening: *unwitting listening*, *witting listening*, *interpretative listening*, *breathing listening*, *listening within action*. The latter aspect of listening is directly connected with the *ethics of taste*, which is *phronetic*. The inner ear brings out what is right in the situation, so the author states: there is no *phronesis* without *akuological sinesis*. The enumeration of the ways of listening is to present, on the one hand, the variety of listening, and on the other hand, some paradoxes and difficulties in describing the complexity of “the acouological”. The complexity does not vanish the main conviction that listening is the spirit of every formative experience and it enables to think of the educational liberation as of

a deep-rooted liberation. The cultivation of the hermeneutic ear happens in the process of translation/reading as experiencing something different and differently. It needs the willingness to read in a special way: slowly and freely in order to reveal some sense in the three-dimensional experience of *co-utterance*, *translation*, and a creative expression of our "inner word". In the article an anthropological thesis is pointed out as well: a person is a *genuine openness* which is actually a temporal, dynamic space for question being at the same time the space of question, thus men are able to welcome the question that comes to them like to a well-known area, like to its own "home". If so, the human spirit is rather *psachnological* (or *quaerological*), because question is a "message" full of meaning, something that calls, touches so deeply that one feels the necessity to be in search for a respond. However each question, even the simplest one, must be heard in order to become a real question calling for an answer. The human being can therefore be named "being all ears", or "the audible way of being" ("słuchający sposób bycia"), "a listener" or "an embodied listening".

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pokazać różnorodność sposobów rozumienia „słuchania” (niezredukowanego do opozycji: biernie–aktywne; milczenie–mówienie, słyszenie–słuchanie itp.), po wtóre, aby wskazać na paradoksy i trudności w badaniu tego, co akuologiczne. Złożoność ta nie unieważnia jednak w żaden sposób przeświadczenia głoszącego, że każde formujące, kształtujące doświadczenie jest przepełnione słuchaniem – bez słuchania nie ma kształtowania, słuchanie to duch kształtującego doświadczenia (również edukacji); w zależności od sposobu słuchania, edukacja przybiera rozmaite formy i odwrotnie – rodzaj edukacji zawsze preferuje określone formy słuchania. Stwierdzenie to umożliwi namysł nad wolnością w edukacji, rozumianą jako wyzwalenie w procesie głębokiego zakorzeniania. Kształtowanie ucha hermeneutycznego wydarza się w procesie szeroko pojmowanej translacji/lektury, która jest doświadczeniem czegoś innego oraz w inny niż dotychczas sposób. Formacja taka zakłada – również szeroko rozumianą – lekturę niespieszną i wolną (swobodną) odślaniającą pewien sens w doświadczeniu współwypowiadania, przekładu i wyrażania wewnętrznego słowa „czytelnika”. Autorka bazuje na przeświadczeniu, że osoba to rzeczywista otwartość – temporalna, dynamiczna przestrzeń pytania. Człowiek to istota poszukująca odpowiedzi na pytanie, które jako ważna „wiadomość” rezyduje w jego wnętrzu („sercu”, „duszy”), dotykając go, poruszając i domagając się poszukiwania odpowiedzi (człowiek jako istota psachnologiczna, quaerologiczna). Niemniej jednak, nawet najprostsze, najgłębsze pytanie musi zostać usłyszane, aby w ogóle mogło być pytaniem. Dlatego człowiek, istota rozumiejąca, może być interpretowana w sposób akuologiczny jako „zamiana w słuch”, „słuchający sposób bycia”, „słuchacz” lub „ucieleśnione słuchanie”, które z jednej strony stanowi przestrzeń pytania (i w tym sensie jest ucieleśnionym pytaniem), z drugiej strony odpowiada – całym sobą – na głos przychodzącego pytania.

