

# Editorial

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The texts collected in this issue of “Musicology Today” are the outcome of a conference entitled *The Musical Languages of Contemporary Polish Composers: Self-Reflections*, organised on 25<sup>th</sup>–26<sup>th</sup> September 2015 in Warsaw by the Polish Composers’ Union (ZKP), The Polish Society for Musical Analysis (PTAM), the Institute of Music and Dance (IMIT) and the Institute of Musicology, University of Warsaw (IMuz UW). The topic of the conference was inspired by ethnomusicology, which distinguishes two perspectives on musical research, both boasting a long tradition: the approach “from the inside” – describing music in the categories of its own culture, and “from the outside” – describing music in terms of general intercultural standards. In 1954 Kenneth Pike named these two approaches “emic” and “etic”, drawing an analogy with the two ways of analysing language: the phonemic analysis of meaningful units (which reflects the unique structure of one particular language) and the phonetic analysis of sound units, which makes possible the comparison of different languages. The emic and etic approaches result in different constructions based on different premises with regard to the culture under study. Emic researchers claim that culture can best be understood as an internally integrated whole or system, whereas etic scholars prefer to isolate individual components of the culture they explore and to make hypotheses about their general conditions and modes of existence.

The emic/etic dichotomy has played a central role in meta-theoretical debates in various disciplines of social science. In ethnomusicology it became the key alternative to the objectivistic approach to folk and foreign cultures, derived from traditional musicology. The emic paradigm not only places music in a wide internal context of its own culture, but also demonstrates deep respect for the subjectivity of musicians, composers and performers – not as passive “transmitters” of cultural contents, but

as perfectly conscious artistic personalities whose musical competences should always be considered as the highest authority when the validity of the research process is assessed.

For a variety of reasons, the relationship between the musicologist-researcher and the composer-author in Western culture seems to be completely different from that between the ethnomusicologist and musicians from outside the world of European artistic music. Still, some important analogies may be pointed out. The musicologist studies the work in isolation from its author, living its own life not only in the numerous and varied performances, but also in the frequently quite curious musicological analyses and descriptions. Researchers make the final diagnosis with regard to the musical work; they seem to “know better” than the composer what the original idea and meaning of the work is supposed to be. This is not because they regard the composers with contempt, but because they follow the well-established Western musicological tradition, rooted in the remote past when musical competences were divided between those who performed music and those who comprehended it with their intellect. The deep-seated opposition between the act of intellectual cognition and the artistic process of composing music, as well as the high degree of specialisation in these professions, has effectively blocked (or at least seriously hindered) the possibility of collaboration and dialogue between the composer and the musicologist.

It was the aim of our meeting to combine these two perspective and two worlds: those of the composers’ self-reflection and the musicologists’ research. Analyses and interpretations that result from the dialogue between the researcher and the composer are extremely illuminating, as the composers’ ideas and external reflection on music mutually shed light on each other.