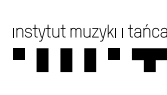


# *The Strategy of “Controlled Reception” in Witold Lutosławski’s Commentaries on His Own Works<sup>1</sup>*

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## ABSTRACT

Witold Lutosławski's commentaries on his own music are often defective in many regards. These defects could be explained as resulting from a strategy according to which the aim of a commentary is not to provide a truthful description of musical phenomena but to form a desired image of a composition or a musical style in the minds of the listeners. This idea of ‘controlled reception’ was clearly outlined by the famous Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz (whose writings Lutosławski knew and highly appreciated) and is especially noticeable in the composer's remarks on “controlled aleatoricism”, “thin textures” and the connections between his music and the twelve-tone technique. The view of reception of art common to Gombrowicz and Lutosławski could be characterised in the writer's own words: *A style that cannot defend itself before human judgment, that surrenders its creator to the ill will of any old imbecile, does not fulfil its most important assignment. [...] the idiot's opinion is also significant. It also creates us, shapes us from inside out, and has far-reaching practical and vital consequences. [...] Literature [art in general – note by M.K.] has a dual significance and a dual root: it is born of pure artistic contemplation [...], but it is also an author's personal settling of accounts with people, an instrument in the battle waged for a spiritual existence.*

**Keywords:** Lutosławski, reception, Gombrowicz, serialism, aleatoricism

## INTRODUCTION

Witold Lutosławski sometimes confessed that he had wasted much time in his life, because external circumstances made it difficult for him to focus on what he saw as the most important: improving his composition technique and composing new works. It may therefore seem the more surprising why he dedicated so much time to explaining and commenting upon different aspects of his music – an activity that could be considered as of secondary importance in this hierarchy.

This secondary aspect of Lutosławski's activity as a composer has long been the subject of academic research, most of which concentrated on the basically **philological-contextual** tasks of documenting, summarising, establishing the chronology, origins and reception of these texts. This kind of research ought to be seen as preliminary in relation to proper **contentual** studies, i.e. to analyses of the logical structure of Lutosławski's statements (most of all, of their internal cohesion) and their adequacy with regard to the musical phenomena they purport to describe. The latter type of studies are at a much less advanced stage than the preliminary research, which is not surprising, but it is also unfortunate. Contemporary research into any kind of ideas and concepts demonstrates the same kind of general regularity. For instance, the views of philosophers are often treated as documents or as literary fiction, which means that they are only summarised, and their origins

or sources are studied, but the task of what a modern author calls “extracting from them a grain of truth about the world”<sup>2</sup> is not taken up. Consequently, the history of philosophy is taking the place of philosophy proper, and the history of musical thought replaces reflection about music.

Lutosławski's commentaries (including those that reflect on his own works) have been the subject of valuable publications, in the areas of both philological research and content analysis. The latter type is represented, among others, by the works of Steven Stucky,<sup>3</sup> Krzysztof Meyer and Danuta Gwizdalanka.<sup>4</sup> All these researchers studied the relation between the composer's views and his compositional practice, indicating where (and sometimes also – why) they encountered puzzling incongruities. I would also like to focus on similar cases. I will take up topics already partly described in the literature of the subject, analysing some rather randomly selected statements that Lutosławski made concerning his own music and that for many reasons can be considered as inconsistent, false, or seriously incomplete. A brief analysis of their contents will confirm this initial opinion, and the incorrect character of those statements will be explained in a new and hopefully more convincing manner. I also hope that my analyses will shed light on the reasons why Lutosławski dedicated so much of the limited time which external circumstances allowed him to use for composition – to public self-reflection. My key thesis in this context is that the composer adopted an attitude which (in the title of this paper) I called – by reference to his well-known composition technique – the strategy of “**controlled reception**”.

## CASE STUDY NO. 1: INSPIRATIONS WITH CAGE'S ALEATORICISM

Lutosławski commented on his invention of the *ad libitum* technique in the following words:

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**2** B. Wolniewicz, (2001). *Naukowość i przewidywanie* [Scientific Knowledge and Prediction]. In: *Filozofia i wartości II* [Philosophy and values II]. Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, p. 128.

**3** S. Stucky, (2001). *Change and Constancy: The Essential Lutosławski*. In: Z. Skowron (Ed.), *Lutosławski Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 129–131.

**4** D. Gwizdalanka, K. Meyer, (2004). *Lutosławski*, Vol. II: *Droga do mistrzostwa* [The Road to Mastery]. Kraków: PWM Edition, pp. 159–170; D. Gwizdalanka, K. Meyer, (2014). *Witold Lutosławski. Wege zur Meisterschaft*. Ch.M. Hauptmeier (transl.). Saarbrücken: PFAU-Verlag, pp. 320–323.

[...] I heard on the radio a short fragment of John’s Cage second *Piano Concerto* [i.e. the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, completed in 1958 – note by M. K.]. The use of the element of chance opened for me a way to use a lot of musical ideas that were kept “in stock” in my imagination without any way to use them. It was not a direct influence of Cage’s music, but the impulse, which enabled me to use my own possibilities. So I wrote to him that he was a spark thrown on a barrel of gunpowder inside me. In fact my music is not at all similar to Cage’s. No wonder, bearing in mind my approach to the role of the element of chance in music, which is just opposite of Cage’s.<sup>5</sup>

There is indeed very little similarity, and one could hardly imagine how the sophisticated “mobile” structures could be inspired by a piece in which

The solo is sixty-three pages long, with fragments of music scattered throughout and frequently crossing page boundaries. The location of the notations on the pages was randomly determined, as was the rectangular space allowed for each. The process of composing the piano solo was based on the premise of continuously inventing new notations and new methods of composition. For each musical fragment in the score, the first decision made (via the *I Ching*) was whether it would use a wholly a new method of composition, a repeat of a method already used, or a variation on a method already used. As a result of this procedure, Cage was forced to invent new methods of composition as he went along, and through the course of the sixty-three pages, some eighty-four different types appear.<sup>6</sup>

It might seem that the source of inspiration (“negative,” so to speak) ought to be sought somewhere else. That source was most likely total serialism, with its characteristic effect of a static, restless sound achieved thanks to painstaking technical work and a level of rhythmic complication that usually exceeded the possibilities of both the performers and the audience. Similar, but more colourful and more aurally attractive structures can be obtained in a way that puts much less strain on the composer, and especially – on the performers. Within a given section of the work, the musicians should play their parts independently from one another, and with some degree of rhythmic freedom. The static and restless sound obtained in this manner will not be quite predictable, but in serial compositions, due to the complexity of rhythm invariably causing performers’ errors, the sound was not fully predictable, either. What is more, the unpredictability of “free structures” can easily be limited by defining the approximate rhythm of the various parts as well as the pitch organisation within each of them, and most of all – by limiting the pitch material to selected classes of pitches or by assigning pitches

to specific octaves (i.e. register disposition). This was the essence of the type of aleatory technique invented by Lutosławski. That the composer thought along similar lines is suggested not only by the above-presented “profit and loss account”, but also by his own statement on the rhythmic structure of Karlheinz Stockhausen’s serialist *Klavierstück I*:

One can admire the precision of the composer’s rhythmic vision, which differentiates so subtly the durations of a module within such a short segment. [...] The musical text poses difficulties that are almost impossible to surmount in a live performance [...]. One can assume, however, that the composer cared not so much for an absolutely precise realization of complex rhythmic structures as for causing an impression of irregularity and of non-modular character of these structures, that is about a result that was possible to obtain in spite of a not entirely precise performance.<sup>7</sup>

If Lutosławski was inspired, as it seems, by Stockhausen rather than Cage, why did he decide to emphasise the influence of the latter?

## CASE STUDY NO. 2: LINKS TO DODECAPHONY

Shortly after the first performance of *Musique funèbre* in 1958, Bohdan Pilarski asked Lutosławski about the links between his current work and the twelve-tone technique. The composer answered: “No, I do not see any relationships to twelve-tone technique. But if they should exist, they are secondary and superficial.”<sup>8</sup> Thirty years later, while describing the linear organisation of his *Preludes and Fugue* (1973), he claimed: “It has absolutely nothing in common with dodecaphony, which is alien to me [...]”<sup>9</sup>

Lutosławski denied the presence of twelve-tone structures in these and other works just as consistently as he introduced them in his music. Even a very superficial analysis of *Musique funèbre* and of nearly all his later works (including the already mentioned *Preludes and Fugue*) reveals a widespread use of twelve-tone rows as well as horizontal and vertical structures derived from those rows.

<sup>5</sup> W. Lutosławski, (2007d). Sound Language. In: Z. Skowron (transl., ed.), *Lutosławski on Music* (pp. 95–101). Maryland-Toronto-Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> J. Pritchett (1992). *The Music of John Cage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 113.

<sup>7</sup> W. Lutosławski, (2007c). Some Problems in the Area of Rhythm. In: Z. Skowron (transl., ed.), *Lutosławski on Music*. Maryland-Toronto-Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, pp. 39–40.

<sup>8</sup> B. Pilarski, (1958). Witold Lutosławski odpowiada na pytania [Witold Lutosławski Answers Questions], *Ruch Muzyczny*. No. 7, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> I. Nikolska, (1994). *Conversations with Witold Lutosławski* (1987–1992). Valeri Yerokhin (transl.). Stockholm: Melos, p. 116.

The structure of *Musique funèbre* is in fact well-known<sup>10</sup>: A twelve-tone row (and eleven intervals belonging to two classes: 1 and 6) forms – together with its inversion – the theme of the canons from the opening and closing sections of the composition (I. *Prologue*, IV. *Epilogue*). The melodic layer of the second part (*Metamorphoses*) is particularly sophisticated. The row is submitted here to regular transpositions down around the circle of fifths, and in itself it determines successive transpositions of the diatonic scale with the interval profile of 1221222. Elements of this mode combine with tones from the row, resulting in its “metamorphoses.” This takes place in accordance with the following rule: Each tone in the row is accompanied (i.e. preceded or followed) in its first appearance (bars 65–76) by the second degree of the scale transposed from that very tone; in its second appearance (bars 77–85) – by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> degrees, in the third (bars 86–100) – by the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> degrees of the scale, and so on. In the course of these *Metamorphoses*, the original row “dissolves”, as it were, in the material of the diatonic, while the latter – if we may continue using physical metaphors – crystallises from a chromatic, serial “solution.”

The contrast between the thematic sections and the bridges in the main part of *Preludes and Fugue* is related, as the composer himself admitted,<sup>11</sup> to the mutual opposition of contrasted twelve-tone series. The serial organisation of successive appearances of the series emphasises intervals of classes 2 and 5, while in the case of the bridges (and the introduction) intervals of classes 1 and 6 are underscored. The refined application of the “1+3” row (i.e. one in which intervals between neighbouring tones come exclusively from classes 1 and 3) becomes the determining factor in the most complex part of the *Fugue* – a stretto bringing all its six themes together (nos. 38a–44a in the score).<sup>12</sup> A similar use of twelve-tone rows divided into sections of 5, 7 or 11 elements and split into two layers – also appears in the sketches for the *Partita*.<sup>13</sup>

**10** W. Brennecke, (1963). *Die Trauermusik von Witold Lutosławski*. In: A.A. Abert, W. Pfannkuch (Eds.), *Festschrift Friedrich Blume zur 70. Geburtstag*. Basel: Barenreiter Kassel, pp. 60–73; S. Stucky, (1981). *Lutosławski and His Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 73–76.

**11** W. Lutosławski, (2007b). *Preludes and Fugue (1970–1972)*. In: Z. Skowron (transl., ed.), *Lutosławski on Music*. Maryland-Toronto-Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, p. 159.

**12** M. Homma, (1996). *Witold Lutosławski. Zwölf-ton-Harmonik – Formbildung – „aleatorischer Kontrapunkt“*. Studien zum Gesamtwerk unter Einbeziehung der Skizzen. Köln: Bela Verlag, pp. 544–546.

**13** Paul Sacher Foundation Archive in Basel – the Witold Lutosławski collection (Sammlung Witold Lutosławski): unidentified sketches, file marked “OWD 5.”

Even in such a minor piece (one could say – an exercise in harmony) as the song *Who Can Say?* to words by Tennyson, Lutosławski took care to relate the harmonies to successive sections of his chosen series (*F-A b -C-D-C#-A-B b -G-F#-B-D#-E*) and its transpositions (successively from *F*, *C*, *G* and *D*, progressing regularly up around the circle of fifths).

Lutosławski's manuscript legacy kept at the Archive of the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel (Archiv und Forschungszentrum für die Musik des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts, Paul Sacher Stiftung) contains – in files marked as OWD (Polish abbreviation for the organisation of pitch material) – several hundred pages of studies on various types of twelve-tone series and the possibilities of their use. These materials were analysed in some detail by Martina Homma, but a brief survey suggests that much still remains to be explored here. For instance, we find in the file an intriguing, isolated experiment with an all-interval row and a strict disposition of pitch classes in registers following a predetermined formula. The composer sketched<sup>14</sup> the following sequence of twelve pitch classes: A–E–G#–F–G–F#C–C#–B–D–A#–D#, constructed symmetrically and using all the six classes of intervals. The original numbering of tones is based on the distance of the given pitch class from the class of E, measured up the chromatic scale (i.e. E = 1, F = 2, F-sharp = 3, and so on to the class of D-sharp, marked as “11”). The octaves were also numbered: the range of pitches between E1 and D#2 (in the great octave) corresponds in this notation to the Roman number I, the range from E2 to D#2 – to number II, and so on up to VI for the octave from E6 to D#7 (three- and four-line). The sequence of pitch and interval classes is completely regulated by the series quoted above, whereas the order of intervals and pitches is subordinated to the following 6-element series of registers: II IV III VI I V. The combination of these two was represented by Lutosławski in the form of a table:

6	1	5	2	4	3	9	10	8	11	7	2
II	IV	III	VI	I	V	II	IV	III	VI	I	V
IV	III	VI	I	V	II	IV	III	VI	I	V	II
III	VI	I	V	II	IV	III	VI	I	V	II	IV
VI	I	V	II	IV	III	VI	I	V	II	IV	II
I	V	II	IV	III	VI	I	V	II	IV	III	VI
V	II	IV	III	VI	I	V	II	IV	III	VI	I

**Figure 1.** Register disposition in an all-interval series of 12 pitch classes. One of the sketches by W. Lutosławski (Paul Sacher Foundation Archive in Basel).

**14** Paul Sacher Foundation Archive in Basel – the Witold Lutosławski collection, unidentified sketches, file marked “OWD 13.”



The numbers in the rows represent the octaves in which the different pitch classes are situated in the successive appearances of the series. The successive Roman numbers in the second row correspond to the location of the different classes during the 1<sup>st</sup> appearance of the all-interval series, in the third row – their location during the 2<sup>nd</sup> appearance of the series, and so on. We arrive at a sequence of 72 pitches (12 classes x 6 octaves): A2–E4–G#3–F6–G1–F#5–...–C5–C#3–B4–D4–A#6–D#2. Each of the pitches is used only once in the whole sequence, and each of the pitch classes, interval classes (except for class 6) and registers – is used six times. The distance between the successive appearances of the given class or register is constant. The all-interval twelve-tone row and the “register series” have been selected in such a way as to constantly guarantee the maximum changeability of intervals, registers and pitches, so that the resulting sequence of tones is “grey”, i.e. without any pronounced characteristics. The differentiation of expressive qualities was important enough for the composer to allow also for the use of quite unremarkable types of sound. What is particularly important from the point of view of our discussion is that for the production of this “grey” or “dull” material the composer chose to use the twelve-tone technique.<sup>15</sup>

The composer claimed that his solutions have nothing in common with dodecaphony. However, these various applications of the twelve-tone technique in Lutosławski’s music are far too numerous to take such claims seriously. Not only the rows, but also the use of twelve-tone chords links Lutosławski’s music to Schönberg’s technique. In fact, as Homma rightly suggests,<sup>16</sup> the former could be interpreted as a sophisticated transformation of the latter. The rules of classical dodecaphony determine the organisation of tones on the temporal axis (what can be called the “successive twelve-tone technique”). Within each successive appearance of the row, the relative position of each tone in time (i.e. its temporal position in relation to the other elements of the series) is determined, and none of the tones is allowed to reappear

(in a different position) before the other eleven have been sounded (each in its own relative position imposed by the series). In Lutosławski’s serial technique, the chord determines the placement of each tone in a **register** (i.e. its place on the pitch scale, the registral position), which allows us to call this type of dodecaphony “simultaneous”. None of the tones is allowed to change its position before the others have taken their respective places.

Both Schönberg and Lutosławski could be described as members of the great church of dodecaphonists, even though they belonged to different denominations and followed a different rite. This is true regardless of what the author of *Mi-parti* said on this subject. It should be explained, however, why he said what he did, though he must have been (at least dimly) aware of the mutual affinities between his own and Schönberg’s technique. I am inclined to interpret this case – as well as the previous one – as a result of the phenomenon of “controlled reception” that I pointed to in the title.

### CASE STUDY NO. 3: THE RIDDLE OF THE “THIN TEXTURES”

Lutosławski’s late compositions significantly diverge from his earlier mature output (i.e. from works written in 1957–1979). This stylistic breakthrough comes with *Epitaph* for oboe and piano, completed in August 1979. The phenomenon that is crucial to the composer’s late style<sup>17</sup>, but foreign to his “middle period,”<sup>17</sup> is the uncomplicated homophonic texture and lucid polyphony, closely linked to the rich melodic invention. The dense blocks of sound known from *Jeux vénitiens* (1961), the *String Quartet* (1964) and *Symphony No.2* (1967) are rare after 1979, and do not play such a significant role as before. The new transparent type of sound organisation in which “only a small number of notes is involved at any given time”<sup>18</sup> were called “thin textures” by the composer.

This change of style was widely commented upon. Commentators mostly focused on its technical basis. Of particular importance was – they suggested – the technique of “tonal projection”,<sup>19</sup> specific types of operations (interval union, transpositional combination)

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Remarks made by Zygmunt Mycielski and by Lutosławski himself concerning the “greyness” of sound in classic dodecaphony. Z. Mycielski, (1994). Jeszcze o wyborach wysokości dźwięku [More on the Choice of Pitch Material], *Res Facta Nova*. Vol. 1 (10), p. 12; I. Nikolska, (1994), op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> M. Homma, (1999). The Twelve-Tone-Chord – Towards a New Definition of Twelve-Tone Music? Considering Early 12-Tone Chords (since 1911) and Discussing Theoretical Implications of 12-Tone Chord Music by Darius Milhaud, Nikolaj Obuchov and Witold Lutosławski. In: J. Astriab, M. Jabłoński, J. Stęszewski (Eds.), *Witold Lutosławski. Człowiek i dzieło w perspektywie kultury muzycznej XX wieku* [Witold Lutosławski. The Man and His Work in the Context of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Musical Culture]. Poznań: Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, pp. 109–127.

<sup>17</sup> There are a few exceptions – two works with a solo vocal part: *Paroles tissées* for tenor and chamber orchestra (1965) and *Les espaces du sommeil* for baritone and orchestra (1975), as well as some sections of the *Cello Concerto* (1970).

<sup>18</sup> T. Kaczyński, (1993). *Rozmowy z Witoldem Lutosławskim* [Conversations with Witold Lutosławski]. Wrocław: TAU, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> J. Paja-Stach, (2007). Witold Lutosławski’s *Epitaph* for Oboe and Piano (1979) against the Background of the Composer’s Style Characteristics, *Musica Iagellonica*. Vol. 4, pp. 163–176.

on sets of pitch classes,<sup>20</sup> the principle of “chromatic density”,<sup>21</sup> the division of chromatic material into disjoint subsets,<sup>22</sup> and finally – the elimination of pitch classes situated at the distance of a minor ninth (or its extended versions with added octave(s)) from the lowest layer of the chord, i.e. 13, 25, 37, etc. semitones from the “bass.”<sup>23</sup> The sketches from the Basel archive do not directly reveal this technical basis, but they do lend credence to Martina Homma’s interpretations as probably the closest to the truth, even though she also fails to discuss some of the key aspects of the problem. It is true that the presence of minor ninth intervals and their octave extensions is directly related to the issue of pitch selection, and that those intervals function in opposition to major sevenths, also possibly with added octave(s). It appears that the elimination related to the interval of a minor ninth also affects the bass layer, that the ninths do not always inevitably cause elimination, and that the composer consistently only deletes those pitches whose distance from a certain selected group of tones is “ambiguous,” i.e. a minor ninth from one of the tones and a major seventh from another. An adequate description of these procedures would take much space and a complex theory. As we can have neither of these in the present paper, I am going to return to this subject on a different occasion. Here I will only indicate one aspect of this problem, directly connected with the topic of my article: the composer’s own representation of his “thin textures.”

**20** M.L. Klein, (1995). *A Theoretical Study of the Late Music of Witold Lutosławski: New Interactions of Pitch, Rhythm, and Form*. Doctoral dissertation. Buffalo: State University of New York, pp. 174–268.

**21** M. Krajewski, (2013). „Cienkie faktury” w muzyce Witolda Lutosławskiego – próba nowego ujęcia [Witold Lutosławski’s “Thin Textures”. A Possible New Perspective]. Paper prepared for the conference *Muzyka Witolda Lutosławskiego u progu XXI wieku. Dookreślenia – oceny – perspektywy* [The Music of Witold Lutosławski on the Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Clarifications – Evaluations – Perspectives]. Warsaw 27<sup>th</sup>–28<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

**22** Ch.B. Rae, (1992). *Pitch Organisation in the Music of Witold Lutosławski*. Doctoral dissertation. Leeds: The University of Leeds, pp. 190–191, 193, 244, 308; Ch.B. Rae, (2001). Lutosławski’s Sound-World: a World of Contrasts. In: Z. Skowron (Ed.), *Lutosławski Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 34; D. Gwizdalanka, K. Meyer, (2014). *Witold Lutosławski. Wege zur Meisterschaft*, op. cit., p. 334.

**23** M. Homma, (1996). *Witold Lutosławski. Zwölfton-Harmonik – Formbildung – „aleatorischer Kontrapunkt”*, op. cit., pp. 475–478, 603–606. The topic was also discussed by Ch.B. Rae (idem, (1992). *Pitch Organisation in the Music of Witold Lutosławski*, op. cit., pp. 57, 89–91), who, however, limited his discussion to 8-tone sets; he did not present a systematic analysis of the significance of minor ninths for the elimination processes in the various works.

Lutosławski’s commentaries on this subject – mostly in interviews – are relatively numerous. The composer would start to talk about his method without being asked, on each occasion stressing its unique importance and describing it in general terms, but when questioned about the details – he evaded further discussion. He engaged in a kind of a puzzling game with his interlocutor and the readers, which usually developed in four stages. Stage 1: Lutosławski refers to the “thin textures” and thus initiates the game. Stage 2: he presents the topic in a vague outline, and so (stage 3) provokes the interviewer to ask further questions on this subject, which he (stage 4) politely refuses to answer. This “rhetorical pattern” is clearly evident in the following three examples (from 1985, 1990 and 1993 – cf. Figure 2).

What was the purpose of this game? If the composer wished to attract the audience’s attention to his invention, why did he describe it in such vague terms and avoided explanations? And if he wished to keep the matter secret, why did he so often refer to it himself without being asked?

### AN ATTEMPTED INTERPRETATION

Lutosławski’s predilection for making comments on his own music can be explained quite simply by reference to Goethe’s proposition (from the introduction to the fourth part of *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*): having completed a work, it is worthwhile to “discuss its origin and story with favourably disposed connoisseurs.”<sup>24</sup> The point is, this is true not only of connoisseurs – and not necessarily favourably disposed.

Witold Gombrowicz writes in his *Diary 1953–1956*:

There are enough innocent works that enter life looking as if they did not know that they would be raped by a thousand idiotic assessments! Enough authors who pretend that this rape, perpetrated on them with superficial judgments, any kind at all, is something that is not capable of affecting them and should not be noticed. [...] A style that cannot defend itself before human judgment, that surrenders its creator to the ill will of any old imbecile, does not fulfill its most important assignment. Yet defense against these opinions is possible only when we manage a little humility and admit how important they really are to us, even if they do come from an idiot. That is why the defenselessness of art in the face of human judgment is the sad consequence of its pride: ah, I am higher than that, I take into account only the opinions of the wise! This fiction is absurd and the truth, the difficult and tragic truth is that the idiot’s opinion is also significant. It also creates us, shapes us from inside out, and has far-reaching practical and vital consequences. [...] Literature [art in general – note by M. K.] has a dual significance and a dual root: it is born of pure artistic contemplation, of the selfless striving

**24** J.W. Goethe, (1833). *Aus meinen Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit. Vierter Teil: Nahchträgliches Vorwort*. Digital Edition, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/dichtung-und-wahrheit-dritter-und-vierter-teil-7128/7>.

	1985 <sup>25</sup>	1990 <sup>26</sup>	1993 <sup>27</sup>
(1) Lutosławski: <b>Reference / Clue</b>	[The <i>Symphony No. 3</i> ] is maybe more traditional but it was purposely so. Maybe it is a sort of delicate matter. A few years ago I discovered a certain rule [...].	[...] twelve-tone aggregates are unfit for fine and “thin” – diaphanous, transparent – textures.	This is the difference of the role played by two intervals: minor ninths and major sevenths. [...]
(2) Lutosławski: <b>Presentation</b>	There is a set of rules that govern, that organize the pitch. I noticed that certain results can be achieved when following some rules and I discovered those rules. And it was not many years ago, maybe six, seven years ago.	The way out is exemplified in the <i>Epitaph</i> [...]. The only thing I can tell you is this: the “field of expressiveness” is polarized by chords with and without minor ninths. and, of course, in all my compositions of the eighties. This way out lies in ... – well, that’s my little secret, which I never reveal to anybody. [...]	Also it has helped me to establish some ways of composing thinner textures. For a long time I thought about that, and one day I found it. [...] One day! In a fraction of a second! [...] It gave me the possibility of writing without thinking about each single note, but just writing music. [...]
(3) Interviewer: <b>Question</b>	<i>Can you specify some of these rules?</i>	<i>But how do matters stand as to these ninths in your “thin”-textured compositions, such as the Epitaph and the Grave [...]?</i>	<i>And the rule that you found was concerning the major sevenths and minor ninths?</i>
(4) Lutosławski: <b>Evasion</b>	Rules? No!... I could not, I should write a book about that.	Permit me to hold the matter back. We had better refrain from going too far.	No. It’s more complicated. No, I really couldn’t explain that rule because it’s too complicated and I don’t want to do that.

Figure 2. “The rhetorical pattern” of three statements by W. Lutosławski on the subject of “thin textures”.

for art, but it is also an author’s personal settling of accounts with people, an instrument in the battle waged for a spiritual existence. It is something that matures in isolation, creation in and of itself, but it is also something social, an imposition on people [...]. And we will receive a complete picture of creativity (the author’s work) only if we see the author in these two dimensions: as a selfless, objective artist and a man fighting for himself among people.<sup>28</sup>

This was also, I dare say, Lutosławski’s own attitude.<sup>29</sup> If he did think in this way, then it was not enough just to compose music. He also had to compose the way this music would be perceived.

Reception depends on so many varied and impenetrable laws that it is almost aleatory, and still this

aleatoricism of reception can be controlled, using words to shape an image of the work or style in the listeners’ minds. This image need not be true. A wise listener will guess the truth without the need for a clue. The others will quite likely stop looking, taking for granted what the composer so suggestively said. Otherwise, some rash and unwise interpretation of the work or style will stick – and it may prove exceedingly hard to wash off. To the wide public, Chopin was for many years a mere *compositeur de salon*, mostly because someone lacking better judgment had heard a “hellish feast” in the *Scherzo in B-Minor* or the “whispers of the Seine” in his Op. 9.<sup>30</sup> The composer’s own words – especially when he is well respected, and the text gets disseminated – may to some extent curb the unreasonable fantasies of the audience. They may also feed those fantasies, of course, but this is precisely what needs to be avoided at any cost.

One should not, therefore, describe the dramatic *Les espaces du sommeil* for baritone and orchestra as a “symphonic poem”, as the composer did in one of his commentaries,<sup>31</sup> because then some people will listen to this music quite trivially as to an illustration of an anecdote. Most certainly, one ought to be wary of discussing *Les espaces* with someone who described the culmination of the *Cello Concerto* in this manner:

<sup>25</sup> W. Lutosławski, (1993). [Discussion held as part of the International Musicological Symposium in Nieborów, 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> September 1985]. In: A. Czekanowska, M. Velimirović, Z. Skowron (Eds.), *From Idea to Sound. Proceedings of the International Musicological Symposium held at the Castle Nieborów in Poland, September 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> 1985*. Kraków: One Europe Foundation, p. 144.

<sup>26</sup> I. Nikolska, (1994)., op. cit., pp. 122–123.

<sup>27</sup> D. Rust, (1995). Conversation with Witold Lutosławski, *The Musical Quarterly*. Vol. 79, No. 1, p. 216.

<sup>28</sup> W. Gombrowicz, (2012). *Diary*. L. Vallee (transl.), New Haven-London: Yale University Press, pp. 77, 149.

<sup>29</sup> Secondary to our discussion is the influence of Gombrowicz’s ideas on Lutosławski’s views; what we are interested in is only their mutual similarity. It should be noted, however, that the composer read Gombrowicz’s texts, and in a conversation with the latter’s biographer – Joanna Siedlecka – he admitted his admiration for Gombrowicz’s writings. (J. Siedlecka, (1992). *Jaśnie panicz [The Young Master]* [a biography of Witold Gombrowicz]. Gdańsk: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, p. 250).

<sup>30</sup> These works were printed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under such titles as *Le Banquet Infernal* (*Scherzo in B Minor* Op. 20) and *Les Murmures de Seine* (*Nocturnes* Op. 9).

<sup>31</sup> T. Kaczyński (1995). *Conversations with Witold Lutosławski*, Y. May, Ch. B. Rae (transl.). London: Chester Music, p. 103.

After the great reprimand, or the shout, as you once put it, of the tutti, and after the soloist’s mocking reply, the tutti changes its plan of action. It doesn’t go back to the shout, but starts on another course altogether, which I personally associate with beating — because of the rhythmical character of this passage.<sup>32</sup>

To which the composer replied:

I’m horrified to see how one can be carried away by my careless mention of the dramatic conflict between the solo part and the orchestra. I must immediately use the reins on this galloping imagination which prompts you to interpret the work as an illustration to some macabre spectacle [...].<sup>33</sup>

In a later conversation with Kaczyński, Lutosławski argued that a piece with a vocal part could hardly be called a “symphonic poem” and thus cut the discussion short, dismissing conjectures which he found inappropriate.<sup>34</sup>

Unreasonable listeners ought not to know that the organisation of the musical work is regulated by strict “cerebral” patterns, lest they should take the composer for an academic nerd.<sup>35</sup> It is better to suggest to such listeners that the *ad libitum* technique comes from Cage, as hopefully a reference to the pranks of that sharp-witted joker should convince them that Lutosławski is no academic and no traditionalist, even though he composes “cerebrally”, makes no use of electronics, writes for conventional line-ups and gives his works such titles as *Partita*, *Symphony* or *Concerto*.

Listeners who cannot hear diatonic chromaticisms in the *Metamorphoses* section of *Musique funèbre* need not know anything about the role of dodecaphony in this music. If they did, they might see Lutosławski as a follower of the Viennese expressionists (whose style he detested<sup>36</sup>) — and a poor one at that, since he repeats

a primitively constructed row over and over again from the first to the last note in the same monotonous rhythm and plain textures (which is what he does in the opening and closing sections of *Funeral Music*). Such a trivialising interpretation of this piece was proposed by Bogusław Schaeffer in the second volume of *Classics of Dodecaphony*:

Lutosławski’s *Musique funèbre* [...] is not wholly dodecaphonic; even in terms of small-scale patterns, it was built on chromatic material. The composer’s attitude to dodecaphony was only just beginning to form itself. Lutosławski made use of a specific kind of series subdivided into four three-tone sections. Each of those sections depends on the intervals of a tritone and a minor second. The successive sections are not uniform in structure — their structural sum is identical in three cases, different in one (section II), so that the whole is not structurally strict. The third group is a transposition of the first, and the fourth — an inverted retrograde. [...] As the “tempo” [...] accelerates, the structure of the material is gradually simplified, until it becomes (sometimes polytonally) diatonic.<sup>37</sup>

An irrelevant feature of the row — namely, its four-part division, devoid of “structural strictness” and playing no function whatsoever in this composition — was analysed in precise terms, whereas the most important element — the process of metamorphoses — was completely ignored. The untypical serialism of that music can easily be criticised as awkward (just as it could also happen to the untypical sonata form of Chopin’s *Sonata in C Minor* Op. 4), whereas in fact it is the opposite — a proof of great mastery.<sup>38</sup>

The technique of “thin textures” — as brilliant as it was simple — will reveal its full charm only after a thorough study and detailed description. A brief characterisation *ad usum Delphini* — as in this simple statement: “The parallel layers ought to be composed so as to take into consideration the number and position of major sevenths and minor ninths occurring between the elements of one and the other” — will not provide a sufficient insight. Presented in this manner, Lutosławski’s idea seems banal, and his long work on the development of thin textures — not fruitful enough. Harmonies based on twelve-tone chords and *ad libitum* aleatoricism are easy subjects

**32** *Ibid.*, 83.

**33** *Ibid.*.

**34** *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

**35** “The academic of modernity” — is an opinion about Lutosławski quoted by Zygmunt Mycielski in his notes (idem, (2012). *Niby-dziennik ostatni 1981–1987 [The Last Quasi-Diary 1981–1987]*. B. and J. Stęszewscy (Eds). Warsaw: Iskry, p. 443). Mycielski suggests that this label was coined by Roman Jasiński (a truly exceptional mind).

**36** During his visit to the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music in Los Angeles (1985) Lutosławski said: “I am always very impressed by some works of Alban Berg, in spite of the very fact that I hate his sound language. I don’t like him at all. But nevertheless, in spite of that, of the very sound language that I couldn’t accept [...], his works have a tremendous impact on me.” The conversation was recorded and used in the documentary film entitled *Open Rehearsals with Witold Lutosławski* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTUUt9NzTLM&spfreload=10>, accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2015). When he talked about Berg’s “sound language,” Lutosławski probably meant the expressionist style, characteristic of the Second Viennese School and many of its followers.

**37** B. Schaeffer, (1964). *Klasycy dodekafonii [Classics of Dodecaphony]*, Vol. II: *Część analityczna [The Analytic Section]*. Kraków: PWM Edition, p. 164.

**38** In his private notes Lutosławski commented on Schaeffer’s text with evident disapproval: “Theoretical analysis of a musical work consists not only in discovering and describing its actual methods, but first and foremost in choosing those which are significant for the construction of the work, and rejecting those which are present by chance. (Schaeffer’s analysis of *Musique funèbre* provides an example of not conforming to this rule.) The result: an erroneous analysis.” W. Lutosławski, (2007a). *Notebook of Ideas, 1959–1984*. In: Z. Skowron (transl., ed.), *Lutosławski on Music*. Maryland-Toronto-Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, p. 316.



for impressive, adequate and compact presentations – a fact which the composer took advantage of with much elegance.<sup>39</sup> As for “thin textures,” he preferred to remain silent on this subject, though he did not want his “master stroke” to go entirely unnoticed. Hence his hints, concealments and evasive answers, which kept the profane (i.e. non-expert) audience at bay, but made experts think.

## CONCLUSION

Lutosławski was like a painter covering his finished work with a layer of varnish. Varnish protects the painting, but also distorts our view. Only after skilfully removing this layer can one see the full colours of the work. In Lutosławski’s case, the skilfulness consists in reading his texts for the sake of their content value (i.e. not in the manner of a philologist-documentalist) and critically, accepting the possibility that they may be absurd or false when taken literally, and that their truth and sense is usually concealed between the lines. Only then “can we see the author in two simultaneous dimensions: as a disinterested, objective artist, and as a man fighting for his own among the people,”<sup>40</sup> that is, in all his true greatness.

Steven Stucky, Lutosławski’s biographer, wrote: “[...] one can hardly blame composers [...] for wanting to tell their own stories while they have the chance, rather than trusting their reputations to the dicey fate offered by musicology”.<sup>41</sup> I would gladly reverse this phrase and conclude my paper with these words: Let us not blame musicologists for wanting to think and talk about music in their own way, rather than entrusting their success to the fate prepared for them by the more eloquent among the composers.

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- 39 D. Gwizdalanka and K. Meyer quote e.g. the vivid and apt characterisation of *ad libitum* textures given by Lutosławski in an interview for a youth magazine. Cf. D. Gwizdalanka, K. Meyer, (2014). *Witold Lutosławski. Wege zur Meisterschaft*, op. cit., p. 323.
- 40 W. Gombrowicz, (2012). *Diary*, op. cit., p. 149.
- 41 S. Stucky, (2001). Change and Constancy: The Essential Lutosławski, op. cit., p. 130.
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