On Witold
Lutosławski's
Artistic Self-
Awareness.
A Survey of Very
Recent Research

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*This publication has been co-financed from the funds of the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Warsaw.
This publication has been co-financed from the funds of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.*

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of the most recent research concerning Witold Lutosławski's artistic self-awareness, based on critical source editions of Lutosławski's writings (publ. 2007–08). In the first part I discuss the edition of the composer's 'official' writings contained in the collection *Lutosławski on Music*. These writings provide us with knowledge of the key elements of Lutosławski's compositional technique and aesthetic principles, his attitude towards new music, and also to various problems of contemporary music culture in Poland and abroad. The second part of the article concerns Lutosławski's notes contained in what is known as the *Notebook of Ideas*. Written in a characteristically personal tone, they illustrate the transformation of the composer's artistic self-awareness that took place in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, when Lutosławski's individual musical language was taking shape. The *Notebook of Ideas* sheds light, amongst other things, on the circumstances of composing *Jeux vénitiens* – the first work that puts into practice Lutosławski's vision of twelve-tone harmony and controlled aleatorism.

Key words: Witold Lutosławski, new music, twelve-tone harmony, controlled aleatorism

The artistic personality of Witold Lutosławski (1913–1994) has attracted the interest of musicologists, music critics and journalists ever since October 1956, when the political situation in Poland changed together with the central communist authorities. This change marked the end of the doctrinal dominance of socialist realism, which limited the freedom of Polish artists in all the disciplines of art. So at that time Lutosławski could finally realise the artistic projects he had already begun to plan during World War II which led to his new concept of twelve-tone harmony, bipartite form, as well as the radical (for that period) principle of the organisation of musical material in time (taking into account the element of chance) which he called 'controlled aleatorism'. This is how the composer himself looked back at that crucial moment from the perspective of the 1970s:

When I finished *Symphony No. 1*, I clearly realized that the language I had used in it would not lead me very far – at all events it would not lead me to where I wanted to go. I thought that in order to learn some way of using the traditional twelve-tone, equally tempered scale, I had to start from the very beginning. There existed nothing outside this that could be used in any way to gain the end I was then dreaming of. Neither the tonal and posttonal language (in which I wrote several works) nor dodecaphony could serve my purpose. Therefore, I decided to start almost from scratch, assuming only some axioms which were then obvious to me, such as that not even the simplest move in music, even an interval understood vertically or horizontally, a rhythm or a timbre, or the slightest musical element

is unimportant from the point of view of expression. This was all I knew with complete certainty, and very little else besides. Therefore I decided to try everything that would lead me to where I intuitively wanted to go.¹

The scale and significance of Lutosławski's innovations are naturally of great interest to new music researchers which is evident in interviews conducted with the composer and in the first publications covering the more recent period of the composer's work, which include pioneering studies by such authors as Ove Nordvall,² Lidiya Rappaport,³ Bálint András Varga,⁴ Jean-Paul Couchoud,⁵ Irina Nikolska,⁶ and Tadeusz Kaczyński,⁷ as well as the first monographs by Steven Stucky⁸ and Charles Bodman Rae.⁹

Among the wealth of publications dedicated to Lutosławski's life and work, we can distinguish, apart from biographical studies, those dedicated to compositional technique (i.e. to pitch and time organisation, including the so-called controlled aleatorism) as well as analyses of individual compositions. A separate group consists of texts analysing Lutosławski's artistic self-awareness, that is his aesthetic principles and more precisely his understanding of the creative process, the status of a work of art, and the mechanisms of its perception. Much can be gleaned on these subjects from the numerous interviews conducted with Lutosławski, yet his own writings remain no less important as points of reference.

¹ *Lutosławski on Music*, (2007). Z. Skowron (Ed. Transl.). Lanham-Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, pp. 155–56.

² O. Nordvall, (1968). *Lutosławski*. Ch. Gibbs (Transl. et al.). Stockholm: Wilhelm Hansen.

³ L. Rappaport, (1976). *Witold Lutosławski*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Muzyka.

⁴ B.A. Varga, (1976). *Lutosławski Profile*. London: Chester Music.

⁵ J.-P. Couchoud, (1981). *La Musique Polonaise et Witold Lutosławski*. Paris: Stock.

⁶ I. Nikolska, (1994). *Conversations with Witold Lutosławski* (1987–92), V. Yerokhin (Transl.). Stockholm: Melos En Musiktidsskrift.

⁷ T. Kaczyński, (1995). *Conversations with Witold Lutosławski*, Y. May, Ch. B. Rae (Transl.). London: Chester Music (2nd ed.).

⁸ S. Stucky, (1981). *Lutosławski and his Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Ch.B. Rae, (1994). *The Music of Lutosławski*. London-Boston: Faber and Faber (3rd rev. ed., 1999).

Composers' writings on music became particularly intense in the 20th century, when many representatives of new music felt compelled to express their broadly conceived aesthetic views. In Poland, this trend is represented by the writings of Karol Szymanowski, and, in the second half of the 20th century, by Witold Lutosławski who, together with Bogusław Schaeffer and Konstanty (Constantin) Regamey, made major contributions as authors of texts about new music.

Lutosławski's writings are scattered in different sources, kept both in Poland and abroad, which until recently made it impossible to provide a comprehensive overview and therefore also a coherent reconstruction of his treatment of the various themes. The editions of Lutosławski's texts already have their own history, which started in 1967 with the appearance of the first and only collection published in the composer's lifetime entitled *Witold Lutosławski. Materiały do monografii* [Witold Lutosławski. *Materials for a Monograph*].¹⁰ This collection, though limited to texts written in the first two post-war decades, demonstrated the wide scope of Lutosławski's artistic activity and of his references to past and present musical culture. The collection also presented the composer as a skilful and competent writer, whose distinctly individual style combined economy and communicativeness of style with the aptness and accuracy of judgment. The next collection of Lutosławski's writings and statements, edited by Danuta Gwizdalanka and Krzysztof Meyer, was published in 1999 (five years after the composer's death) under the title of *Witold Lutosławski. Postscriptum*.¹¹ It consists of three chapters: I – *A Message from the Ideal World*, II – *Combined Sounds*, III – *Lutosławski About...* The central aim of this collection was to present a multi-faceted profile of Lutosławski as a composer, but the texts collected in this volume also confirm his talents as a writer. "In his articles and interviews," wrote Gwizdalanka in her introduction to the *Postscriptum*, "we can admire the great power of his intellect and his broad horizons. In this respect, Lutosławski was a unique figure among composers. Just as every note of his music, so also every word in his texts was precise and unambiguous."¹²

The collection of Lutosławski's writings which I myself published in 2007 was the first complete edition of

these texts in the English language,¹³ and it allowed me to present his views from several perspectives. First and foremost were the writings on the concept of beauty, on the musical form, composition technique, and on artistic creation and perception, presented by Lutosławski at lectures for young composers (e.g. in Tanglewood, USA) as well as research conferences in Poland and abroad. These texts introduce the key aspects of Lutosławski's workshop, in particular his original concept of musical form, pitch, and time organisation, as well as the principles of the so-called controlled aleatorism depending on the combined elements of chance and strictly composed sound structure. These texts shed light on the systematic principles of Lutosławski's work. From the late 1950s and the early 1960s, composition theory, as represented in his writings, was closely linked to musical practice as exemplified by his individual pieces of music but also to his thoughts concerning perception and aesthetic experience. These interrelations prove that Lutosławski always designed a specific effect that his music was to have on the audience. His original approach to problems of perception combined, in an instinctive or intuitive way, a perfect non-academic knowledge of the psychological mechanisms of music perception with a sense and understanding of solutions introduced by great masters of the past (such as Haydn, Beethoven, Chopin and Brahms) which he translated into the modern musical language of his own compositions. Lutosławski's openness with regard to the concepts of form and process in music, rooted in the Classical-Romantic heritage, as well as his ability to create modern equivalents of such forms and processes, always with audience reaction in mind, are crucial features of Lutosławski's musical style.

In the context of 20th-century composers' reflections on music, Lutosławski's texts, beginning with his 1937 debut as a writer in "Muzyka Polska"¹⁴, exhibit a highly individual profile, which distinguishes them quite clearly from the numerous writings of such composers as John Cage, Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen. While these three leaders of the musical avant-garde, working in the 2nd half of the 20th century, openly proclaimed their

10 Witold Lutosławski. *Materiały do monografii* [Witold Lutosławski. *Materials for a Monograph*], (1967). S. Jarociński (Ed.). Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne.

11 Witold Lutosławski. *Postscriptum*, (1999). D. Gwizdalanka, K. Meyer (Eds.). Warsaw: Fundacja Zeszytów Literackich.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

13 See note 1 above. The Polish version of this collection was published four years after the English edition under the title: W. Lutosławski, (2011). *O muzyce. Pisma i wypowiedzi* [On Music. Writings and Statements], Z. Skowron (Ed.). Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria.

14 It was an article entitled *Tchnienie wielkości* [The Breath of Greatness], written as a tribute after Karol Szymanowski's death ("Muzyka Polska", April 1937, No. 4, pp. 169–170).

radical aesthetics (or, as it was then called, anti-aesthetics) in the form of manifestos, Lutosławski assumed a pragmatic approach and wrote first and foremost (though, one should stress not exclusively) about the practical problems of his composition technique. He preferred to present and explain specific solutions applied in individual works, to help the listeners understand his music rather than creating a theory and aesthetics for their own sake. Another difference between the approach presented by Lutosławski and that of post-war music avant-gardists is his stance concerning the essence of contemporary music. Though an enthusiast of new music in general, he maintained a critical distance from radical innovations, especially those which did not take audience perception and listener experience into account in the process of music communication. This is why many of Lutosławski's texts contain a critical assessment of the principal tenets of both main 20th-century musical avant-garde movements such as the Second Viennese School and the post-war avant-garde associated with such names as Boulez, Stockhausen and Cage.

Lutosławski's writings on composition technique include some long texts which were only first published in the complete edition of 2007: *Problems of Musical Form, Pitch, the Interval, and Harmonic Aggregate, Some Problems in the Area of Rhythm*, and *About the Element of Chance in Music*. Most of these were written for the previously mentioned Tanglewood lectures of 1962.

When asked to describe the details of his composition technique in interviews, Lutosławski answered that, if he had enough time, he would write a kind of treatise similar to Olivier Messiaen's *The Technique of My Musical Language*. It seems that those previously unpublished lectures, along with several other published texts, can give us an impression of what the main chapters of that unwritten treatise might look like. Of special interest in this context is the hitherto unknown text on orchestration in which Lutosławski betrays many details of his approach to traditional instrumentation.

The second group of his writings consists of commentaries (general in nature) written for concert programmes as well as detailed analyses presented at musicological symposia. Especially worth mentioning in this context are the texts dedicated to the *Trois Poèmes d'Henri Michaux*, *String Quartet*, *Paroles tissées*, *Symphony No. 2*, *Cello Concerto*, *Preludes and Fugue*, *Les Espaces du sommeil* and *Mi-parti* – the core of Lutosławski's mature output from the 1960s and 70s. In some texts (*Today's*

Moment, *Sounds in No Matter What Scale*, *Reflections on the Future of Music*) Lutosławski comments on his own development as a composer and stresses the importance of the breakthrough that took place in the late 1950s when, fascinated by the ideas of John Cage and Werner Meyer-Eppeler, he was finally free to develop his concept of twelve-tone harmony, and consequently also the idea of bipartite form and limited use of the element of chance ('controlled' aleatorism).

The third group of writings comprises Lutosławski's opinions on composers and musicians whom he found particularly close to his heart. In these texts he admits to spiritual and artistic affinities and points to his own references to musical tradition including his fascination with composers of the Baroque (J.S. Bach), Classicism (Mozart, Beethoven) and Romanticism (Chopin). The texts also contain references to Lutosławski's contemporaries, amongst whom, apart from Sibelius, Stravinsky, Bartók, Shostakovich and Webern, a special place is given to the French composers: Debussy, Roussel and Messiaen.

A separate group is made up of texts on Polish composers and musicians. The first of these, *Tchnienie wielkości* [*The Breath of Greatness*] was a posthumous tribute to Karol Szymanowski, published in "Muzyka Polska" in 1937. Lutosławski also kept in vivid memory the figure of his only composition teacher, Witold Maliszewski, as well as such composers as Grażyna Bacewicz, Konstanty Regamey, Michał Spisak, Grzegorz Fitelberg, Jerzy Lefeld and Witold Małcużyński. He also dedicated some space to the excellent performers of his own compositions – Jan Krenz and Anne-Sophie Mutter. Some texts, such as his review of the *Symphony No. 2* for 13 string instruments (1983–1984) by Andrzej Krzanowski (an eminent representative of the so-called Stalowa Wola generation who died prematurely in 1990), document Lutosławski's participation in the current music life in Poland.

The most varied group of Lutosławski's writings consists of his texts and statements concerning various aspects of contemporary music life in Poland and abroad, as well as notes of personal character, which demonstrate the composer's sense of humour. This chapter opens with Lutosławski's reports from foreign music festivals. A text that attracts special attention in this group is the composer's report from the Berlin festival in 1952 at the time when the socialist-realist doctrine was obligatory in Poland. From today's far removed perspective, this account is astonishingly free of the omnipresent ideology imposed on artists in that period. Contrary to the official

guidelines postulating a return to 19th-century tradition, Lutosławski does not approve of such an approach in the works of young composers from the then German Democratic Republic. He wrote:

On the opposite end of the stylistic spectrum, we have the works of young composers, pupils of Hanns Eisler. Their central postulate seems to be the rejection of all the influence of the interwar period – at any cost. Their desire to avoid the mistakes made by their predecessors is naturally a healthy and highly commendable incentive. Unfortunately, however, the young German composers see no other way of achieving this goal except by making liberal use of the stylistic and technical leftovers of the 19th century. One cannot approve of contemporary music having all the characteristics of a piece composed sixty years ago. Such music will lack one of the key qualities of a real work of art – namely, artistic truth.¹⁵

The motive of artistic truth as the foundation and aim of creative work returned many years later in Lutosławski's speech at the Congress of Polish Culture in December 1981.¹⁶ In the early 1950s this theme was extremely rare in writings on music then dominated by the official cultural policies subordinated to the 'truth' ordained for Polish composers at the infamous conference in Łagów Lubuski in September 1949.

Apart from reports from artistic trips and festivals, with which Lutosławski made his debut as a music critic in the Polish cultural press, there were also occasional speeches for various anniversaries, papers delivered at assemblies of the Polish Composers' Union and conferences, texts on new music and various aspects of contemporary culture, as well as others on varied subjects, including, notably, his statement concerning the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope.

The wealth and variety of subjects taken up by Lutosławski testifies to his deep involvement in various aspects and events of contemporary music life, in its cultural and political contexts, which he described not only as a passive observer, but also as their active participant who brought his own original contribution into this life. In this context one should mention a group of texts dedicated to the perspectives of new music, such as the article *Music Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. The value of these texts lies in the fact that they document the radical changes in Polish music after 1956: the aesthetic and technical ferment than characterised the

works of 'Generation '33', led by Krzysztof Penderecki, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki and Wojciech Kilar, who made their debuts during the early editions of the 'Warsaw Autumn' in the late '50s / early 60s. Lutosławski submitted ideas from contemporary Polish music and West European avant-garde as well as his own assessment, combining an openness to innovation with balanced opinions concerning radical ideas and sound solutions.

In his numerous statements regarding his own music it is difficult to find any that would demonstrate a close relation to the fine arts, particularly to painting, although one cannot rule out the possibility that it was, in a way, close to him. What corroborates the claim that he particularly valued modern painting is that he had in his house the paintings of Henryk Stażewski, Jerzy Tchórzewski, and Jerzy Stajuda. Stajuda's large painting *Strefa* (*The Zone*, polymers, 1990), exhibited in the drawing room of Danuta and Witold Lutosławski's Warsaw home, is particularly impressive. "It is," as the composer wrote, "a source of constant joy, not only decorating our house, but giving it a new life".¹⁷

Stajuda's celadon-tinted painting, with its subtle composition of descending loosely composed coloured strips, was particularly close to Lutosławski's world of softened sound-colours. Although it is difficult to answer the question whether, and to what extent, modern painting influenced the shape and character of Lutosławski's works, there is no doubt that the common denominator between his autonomous sound-world and the domain of modern painting was the notion of *abstraction*. His sound-visions could be considered as genuinely abstract ones because they materialise only in the intrinsic qualities of pure sound-constructions. They rivet the attention of the audience by their sound-qualities *per se*, without evoking extra-musical associations although sometimes, as in the case of the *Cello Concerto*, such associations were clearly pointed out and articulated by reviewers.

Of crucial importance to any discussion of Lutosławski's writings, apart from their classification by topic, is their dating. Published texts present no difficulty in this respect, but in the case of unpublished and undated ones preserved in the composer's archive, dating still remains an open question. If the time of writing cannot be gleaned (precisely or approximately) from indirect clues, the text is left undated. It was also common practice for Lutosławski to publish one text in different language versions at various times.

¹⁵ W. Lutosławski, (1953). Festiwal współczesnej muzyki niemieckiej w Berlinie [The Festival of Contemporary German Music in Berlin], *Muzyka*. Nos. 1–2, p. 39.

¹⁶ See W. Lutosławski, About the Issue of Truth in a Work of Art (1981). In: *Lutosławski on Music*, (2007). Op. cit., pp. 257–261.

¹⁷ O Jerzym Stajudzie [On Jerzy Stajuda], in: W. Lutosławski, *O muzyce. Pisma i wypowiedzi*, (2011). Op. cit., p. 354.

NOTEBOOK OF IDEAS

Apart from Lutosławski's wide spectrum of official writings, we find a valuable source of information about his artistic self-awareness in a notebook now kept, along with his entire archive, at the Paul Sacher Stiftung (Foundation) in Basel. The notebook contains various entries made by Lutosławski in the period 1959–1984, and the author himself called it the *Notebook of Ideas*. Its critical source edition in Polish¹⁸ and English¹⁹ has made it possible to analyse the various topics taken up by Lutosławski in his private personal reflections, and to signal their historical and cultural contexts (as discussed in the extensive footnotes).

The first scholar to mention this notebook and describe its contents was the Polish musicologist and music critic Tadeusz Kaczyński. It was he who popularised the title *Zeszyt myśli* [*Notebook of Ideas*], though this title actually came from the composer himself (he mentioned it while reading out fragments of his notes in the documentary *Portret Witolda Lutosławskiego* [*A Portrait of Witold Lutosławski*] broadcast on Polish television in the autumn of 1985. True to this title, it is a typical late '40s / early 50's notebook, 150x218 mm, 88 pages of squared paper (green lines) bound in a hard dark blue cover with a characteristic slightly grainy surface. All the entries were made in pencil and the quite numerous crossings out (of individual words and longer fragments) prove that these were spontaneous notes, revised on an ad hoc basis.

A characteristic feature of the notes contained in the *Notebook of Ideas* is their distinct division into two sections. The first (the unnumbered leaves 1–5) concerns the composition technique and is a typical composer's draft book consisting of Lutosławski's notes on the construction of several planned projects, such as *Nonet*, *Piano Concerto*, *Lamentations*, *Elegy*, as well as a piece for choir and for two (or one) soloists with orchestra and an electro-acoustic layer, based on Franz Kafka's short story *Before the Law*. A special place among these compositions (none of which interestingly eventually followed the drafts contained in the notebook) is occupied by the *Piano Concerto*. The sketches dedicated to this work represent an advanced stage of composition which suggests that this one was the closest to the actual writing phase. And still, assuming that these sketches

were made in the early 1950s, the composer waited for approximately thirty years more before he actually wrote his concerto. In this first section of the notebook we find two dates that make it possible to define the approximate chronology of these sketches. The first date, 18th October 1958 appears on page 8, the second on page 9, which is the last of the unnumbered 'draft' pages. What confirms that the *Notebook of Ideas* was originally (in its first part) just a composer's draft book is the lack of any mention of the contemporary situation of music in Poland. It looks as if the composer of *Musique funèbre* had tried to keep out of his mind the 50's reality, marked by the central administration of culture and the socialist-realist ideology, so that it should leave no traces in his consciousness or his daily experience. Did he wish to keep what he had experienced before 1956 somewhere deep in the recesses of his memory? This question must remain without an answer. The only entry that may echo his thoughts from those dark years comes from 25th October 1960:

These works [*Postludes* – Z. S.] show how far I have travelled in recent years. It seems to me today that my *Concerto for Orchestra*, written only six years ago, between 1950 and 1954, is the distant past, something like a memory from another incarnation. Was I aware then that I would depart so far from the technique and aesthetic which this work presents? Certainly yes. And even more: I fervently desired that this would happen as soon as possible. In one of my published statements at that time I expressed this thought as follows: since I don't possess at present any of the elaborate means which would allow me to write as I would like to do, I write as I am capable of doing now.²⁰

Lutosławski's distancing himself from his own *Concerto for Orchestra* reflects his state of mind in 1960, when he found himself at the turning point with regard to his own style and technique, between neo-Classicalist and folklorist poetics on the one hand and the poetics of an open work applying an original version of twelve-tone harmony on the other. No wonder that in the heat of his artistic explorations he wished to distance himself from pieces that represented his early '50s style (the 'functional' style, as he himself called it).

Even if we assume that the author of the *Notebook of Ideas* preferred to keep his silence about the experience of the first post-war decade, the lack of any references to his situation as man and artist after the political 'thaw' of October 1956 is rather harder to explain. As in literature, graphic arts and film, so also in music this thaw opened up the possibility of unrestricted creative freedom. Lutosławski clearly preferred not to express his opinions

¹⁸ W. Lutosławski, (2008). *Zapiski* [Notes], Z. Skowron (Ed.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

¹⁹ W. Lutosławski, *Notebook of Ideas, 1959–1984*, in: *Lutosławski on Music*, (2007). Op. cit., pp. 291–329.

²⁰ W. Lutosławski, *Notebook of Ideas*, op. cit., p. 296.

and experiences concerning the current political situation. He remained consistently silent on these matters until the last page of his notebook. What he did reveal, though, were some secrets of his creative process as well personal opinions about different aspects of musical life in Poland and worldwide.

The second part of the *Notebook of Ideas* differs radically from the first in that it mostly consists of text with only a few musical sketches, diagrams, etc. We have very good reasons to believe that from 22nd January 1959 Lutosławski made up his mind systematically to take note of his thoughts and ideas, either in the form of brief comments or longer portions of text. He changed the purpose of his notes, turning them from a technical draft book into a kind of artistic diary and this is confirmed by the numbering of the pages, marked with a green pencil on the successive recto pages of the notebook starting on leaf 6. The final section of the notebook, consisting of ten unnumbered leaves of paper contains many fewer notes in two cases separated by a distance of nearly five years (between 25th November 1974 and 26th August 1979, then between 24th November 1979 and 10th January 1984, which is the last date in the *Notebook of Ideas*).

Lutosławski's notebook falls outside the usual criteria normally applied to such sources. It is neither a 'classical' personal diary responding to day-by-day events and reflections, nor a systematic working notebook dominated, as one might expect, by issues of technique and composition. When he first opened his dark blue notebook, most likely at some time in the early 1950s, Lutosławski probably could not guess what direction his future notes would take. His original intention was to write down some technical ideas, details of several compositions which, with the exception of the *Piano Concerto*, he never put into practice. However, beginning on 18th October 1958, the first date recorded in the notebook, he introduces topics related to modern composition technique, such as 'non-pulsating rhythms', 'non-measured rhythms' or 'the revolutions of the series'. This change from drafting details of technique toward gradually developing reflections on his own technique notably corresponds with the important period of transition in Lutosławski's work, from *Musique funèbre* (1954–1958) to *Jeux vénitiens* (1960–1961), a period best represented by the 'borderline' cycle of *3 Postludes* (1958–1960, revised in 1963). This change in the character of notes most likely reflects the creative dilemmas that Lutosławski experienced at that time. He found himself at the crossroads between music still rooted in neo-Classicism and the overwhelming

wave of new music that began to reach Poland after 1956 and found its most powerful expression in the works of Generation '33 (then making their debuts): Henryk M. Górecki, Wojciech Kilar and Krzysztof Penderecki. When analysing the influence of that new music on representatives of the older generation, on Lutosławski himself, as well as on Grażyna Bacewicz, Kazimierz Serocki and Tadeusz Baird, we can see how after 1956 they distinctly re-oriented their style and technique. All of them experienced a brief transition period which led from neo-Classical poetics to the musical language of the avant-garde. This is precisely the moment that marks the start of Lutosławski's *Notebook*; but the names of composers mentioned above are absent from its pages. It was his personal dilemma that was reflected in his notes: the quandary of his own stylistic, aesthetic and technical re-orientation.

The *Notebook of Ideas* does not exhibit, as I have already noted, the features of a 'classical' diary in the vein of *un journal intime*. The *Notebook* only signals some selected problems of composition technique formulated and solved by Lutosławski as part of his creative process, remaining first and foremost a document of his artistic and aesthetic self-awareness, especially in the groundbreaking period of his artistic life. This kind of a notebook brings to mind associations with the *Notes et contre-notes* by Eugène Ionesco who was close to Lutosławski especially in the context of the Warsaw productions of the former author's avant-garde plays in the 1960s, such as that of *Rhinoceros* at Warsaw's Dramatyczny Theatre. Although we have no proof of the direct influence of Ionesco's journal on Lutosławski's notes, we can observe some similarities between these two. Lutosławski may have particularly cherished Ionesco's comments on the avant-garde and the avant-gardist standpoint which came at the same time as the composer's explorations of a new musical language in *Jeux vénitiens*. Lutosławski also clearly shared Ionesco's rather unfavourable opinion about art criticism and the legitimacy of critical judgment. The title of the already mentioned play by Ionesco (*Rhinoceros*) may have been the origin of the phrase 'rhinoceroses of Webernism' used by Lutosławski in his entry of 29th April 1960:

It is possible that the endeavors of those few who scan music for a new approach to the Webern tradition are a mad enterprise. This is at least what I think of the leading 'rhinoceroses' of Webernism. They even go much further. "Those," they say, "who never went through the Webern school don't belong to our epoch at all." The future starts with Webern, and what does not have any connection with him belongs to the past. It is exactly as if the impact of Webern is a kind of baptism, without which there is no orthodoxy in the New religion.

I totally reject all absolutism; and the utter certainty with which the dogmatic followers of Webern proclaim their own rights to dispose of the future awakens my reluctance and suspicion. Someone who is not modest enough to admit that he *doesn't know everything*, exposes himself, in fact, to the risk of *knowing nothing*.²¹

What led Lutosławski to change the character of his *Notebook* were his own aesthetic and technical dilemmas in the face of new trends reaching Poland from the West after 1956. The state of mind that accompanied this transformation of aesthetic stance, his transition from a period of doubt and hesitation to the affirmation of the newfound solutions in the sphere of composition technique, is reflected in this sequence of entries from 1961:

The period I have been living through for quite a long time (a couple of years) is uninteresting. It is a period of intensive searching for means of expression which are appropriate for me. This leads inevitably to the state of using, more often than not, means which are badly devised, unfamiliar. One loses in this state the readiness of one's hand, one loses accuracy of aim, authoritativeness and full responsibility for a work. What's more, the search proceeds slowly and brings few lasting achievements (12th February 1961).²²

I often see in my finished works only poor caricatures of what their first conceptions were like (6th April 1961).²³

One's own compositional technique is like alcohol in the veins of a habitual drunkard. Three glasses are enough to make him drunk – little invention is needed to compose a work (9th August 1961).²⁴

Enough to say that these entries come from the late period of his work on *Jeux vénitiens*, a landmark work situated between *3 Postludes* on the one hand and *Trois Poèmes d'Henri Michaux*, *String Quartet* and *Symphony No. 2* on the other, that is, before works in which Lutosławski's new style already found its full expression.

Apart from notes from the late 1950s / early 1960s, Lutosławski has left no other comments related to the works he composed, which suggests that his later artistic path was free of such niggling dilemmas. On the other hand, though, one can hardly fail to notice new breakthroughs also in his later work, such as the one initiated by 'thin-textured' pieces that include *Grave* (1981) and *Partita* (1984), which lay emphasis on a revival of the significance of melody. This nagging

puzzle can be solved when we observe that the last entry in the *Notebook* is dated 10th January 1984. We can only speculate why Lutosławski never returned to his notes in the last ten years of his life. One of the reasons might be his incredibly busy life on a global scale which, combined with continued work on new compositions, left him no time to return to the *Notebook*...

Lutosławski's notes are also an important document of his artistic self-awareness, of his aesthetic stance not only with regard to new phenomena in the music of the 1950s, but also the broadly conceived tradition of 20th-century music. While forming his mature style, Lutosławski related it, in a wider perspective, to the main trends in 20th-century music – to its sources one might say. One such point of reference was the Second Viennese School, particularly the achievements of Arnold Schönberg and Anton Webern (interestingly, Alban Berg is completely absent from this context).

Reflections on Schönberg and his role in the history of 20th-century music, a quite frequent topic of Lutosławski's statements, were dominated by a critical appraisal of that composer. Though he never questioned Schönberg's importance as an innovator, Lutosławski focused on the role of the twelve-tone technique among those innovations and therefore criticised Schönberg (in a conversation with A.B. Varga) for "advocating the primacy of the system over auditory control."²⁵ Lutosławski also denounced what he saw as the destructive influence of Schönberg's technique on the melodic-harmonic dimension of a musical work. It was in the context of harmonic possibilities that he commented on Schönberg's role in his entry of 29th April 1960:

We often hear today that the role of harmony is finished. This is the result of the enormous influence exerted on today's music by the Schoenbergian concept of a sound world based, among other things, on the elimination of man's purely sensuous reaction to sounds and their connections. Personally, I could never write even the simplest work while disregarding this particular sensuous reaction to the vertical or horizontal arrangements of sounds. Therefore, I distrust the statement about the decline of harmony as an element of musical substance. Moreover, I even think that only now can we really start to embrace the whole abundance of the harmonic possibilities contained within the twelve-tone scale; especially now, when we are getting rid of the limitations of tonal thinking forever.

I was particularly interested in these issues, which are so unpopular today, when I was writing *Five Ilkovicz Songs*.²⁶

21 W. Lutosławski, *Notebook of Ideas*, op. cit., pp. 294–295.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 298.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 300.

24 *Ibid.*

25 See note 4 above.

26 *Notebook of Ideas*, op. cit., p. 295.

This is in fact a reference to a far-reaching concept that underlay Lutosławski's search for his own version of twelve-tone harmony, first applied in *Five Illakowicz Songs* (1956–1957).

Lutosławski's attitude to Anton Webern could be described as ambivalent. On the one hand, he genuinely appreciated Webern's innovative musical ideas. In the entry of 1st February 1959 we read:

Webern's most important achievement was – of course – the disruption of continuity, pointillism. It is something completely new, expressively and stylistically. Before it were lines, but also points. After Webern there are only points.²⁷

On the other hand, though, Lutosławski was convinced that Webern went too far with the disintegration of the tonal system and the associated rules for the construction of the musical work and especially with the radical transformation of the idea of melody as inherited from the Classical-Romantic tradition.

Lutosławski's comments on the work of Schönberg and Webern were related to his opinions on the post-war avant-garde, which he saw primarily in the context of the successive "Warsaw Autumn" festivals and broadcasts on new music on Polish Radio. In the light of his notes contained in the *Notebook of Ideas* one could say that Lutosławski's attitude to the avant-garde was one of a listener fascinated by the wide scope of discoveries and experiments, but also one of a highly critical composer and finally one of an artist demonstrating broad mental horizons who, concerned about the current state of affairs, asked questions concerning the future of music. His creative stance was characterised, as we know, more by the gradual extension of his composition technique and tools than by spectacular albeit ephemeral experimentation. This is where he differed from the leaders of the second avant-garde who, in pursuit of novelty for novelty's sake, built their own isolated sound worlds, from one piece to another, losing sight of an integral and coherent individual style.

Lutosławski filtered the inspirations that he derived from the avant-garde through his own creative vision and his own aesthetics. His attitude to the avant-garde is related to the question of his own aesthetic values. Value in music was, as it seems, the highest criterion that determined his artistic choices as a composer and his references to the extra-musical sphere. He linked this value to the historical significance of the musical work. In

one of his early notebook entries (of 22nd January 1959), he pointed to two such areas of significance: 'timeless' whose value was 'absolute' and "directional, developmental, in the sense of the work's impact on later works, authors, generations, etc."

On 10th October 1962, Lutosławski commented:

Novelty is the feature of a work of art that grows old quickest of all. The goal of my search in the area of musical language is not novelty for its own sake. I look for the kind of technical solutions which can be employed many times and endure in a new repertoire of expressive ideas. Overall, I search for lasting values which do not expire immediately.²⁸

Faced with the dichotomy between 'directional' and 'timeless' value, Lutosławski was definitely in favour of the latter. This is why novelty in its radical and shocking version never became for him an aim in itself. Both in his artistic self-awareness and in the soundscape of his music, novelty was there only to express the inner truth in a form that gave the work a chance to last.

Of particular interest in Lutosławski's notebook are his statements concerning his own technique of composition. The exceptional importance of those statements derives from the fact of their being formulated in that intensive period of Lutosławski's work, the early 1960s, when he completely changed his technique and style. In this context, we should look at the entry of 4th August 1961 in which Lutosławski expressed the need for new conventions and at the same time new limitations which should in his view accompany the quest for musical novelty in order to make those innovations coherent and lasting:

In the dark one walks with a torch in order to avoid a broken nose... Today we cannot afford the luxury of improvisation as in the time of "peripheries of tonalism", when the ample resources of old conventions always protected our imagination from complete chaos. Today there are indispensable new codes, constraints, conventions to be adopted "for a while" or for longer. These conventions are young, they are not fixed sufficiently in the imagination to be taken for granted. They are as indispensable as a torch in the dark or plaster for an almost mended fracture.²⁹

This comment wonderfully explains Lutosławski's need for a system that would support his innovations and endow them with a deeper structural sense. It was at that time, in the early '60s, that he began to build his system of twelve-tone harmony which, after *Five Illakowicz Songs*,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

he applied on a wider scale in such compositions as *Trois Poèmes d'Henri Michaux*, *String Quartet*, and *Symphony No. 2*.

Apart from general aesthetic comments, the *Notebook of Ideas* also contains remarks concerning individual aspects of composition technique. The earliest such remark, of 30th January 1959, concerns serialism and serialisation:

Today it is already obvious that twelve-tone serialism has not generated any specific form. It is an analyzing, partitioning, nonsynthesizing method. It ensures the homogeneity of material. And this is the only reason for its existence.³⁰

Two days later, on 1st February 1959, he developed this idea in a more critical manner:

Total serialization resulted from 'moving away' from a 'repellent' pole, i.e., from tradition, the old elements of style. There was no attractive force, no goal. The evidence for this is the result of total serialization, i.e., the static character of music, '*der schwebende Zustand*', which is not satisfying, and Stockhausen himself, for instance, is looking for a remedy to escape this. [...] Searching for a formal rule for totally serialized material is something contradictory in itself. Black coffee and a sleeping-draught. [...]

Serializing an element is a way of eliminating its activity. Total serialism eliminates activity in general, that is, activity over a long span of time. It replaces activity by simple stasis.³¹

These entries confirm Lutosławski's critical stance toward dodecaphony in its original Viennese form and in the later post-war phase which gave birth to total serialism. The twelve-tone technique was an artistic challenge for Lutosławski and he reacted to it by gradually developing his own concept of it which emphasised the harmonic (therefore also sound-related) aspects of the series. This development is well documented in numerous composition drafts now kept at the Paul Sacher Stiftung archive in Basel. His twelve-tone harmonic concept reflects his fascination with the sound innovations introduced by Claude Debussy, and most probably also the impact of Karol Szymanowski's music, whose *Symphony No. 3 "Song of the Night"*, heard at a Warsaw Philharmonic concert on 11th April 1924 (under the baton of Grzegorz Fitelberg) left an indelible impression on the memory of the future composer of *Paroles tissées*.

Apart from 12-tone technique and serialism in general, Lutosławski also explored the sphere of rhythm in his search for new technical solutions. These explorations

led him, as we know, to the inclusion in his works of an *ad libitum* section whose rhythmic pattern was only initially outlined and where rhythm consequently had a free and random character resulting from performers following the clues in the score. The presence of such *ad libitum* sections, contrasted with a *battuta* ones, was the main tenet of controlled aleatorism first applied in *Jeux vénitiens* where Lutosławski achieved rhythmic effects impossible to notate by inviting the performers to co-create the music, while at the same time retaining control over pitch and in particular over harmonic structures.

Another *Notebook* topic related to Lutosławski's artistic stance concerns the perception of music, that is, the composer's conviction (frequently expressed also on other occasions) that the value of music depends not only on the sound structures being accessible to the audience but also on a 'listener-friendly' structuring of the music's development. In the entry of 28th December 1964, which concerns time organisation in music, Lutosławski observed:

Breath is necessary not only in singing and in playing wind instruments. There is something like a 'breath of the brain' in the perception of music. One should take the listener's capacity for concentration into consideration, and, accordingly, foresee moments of rest, or "breathing," in a composition. Otherwise one has to allow for a slackening of the listener's attention.³²

Eventually, the *Notebook of Ideas* also contains deeply personal remarks which afford the reader a glimpse of the author's personality and character, otherwise unknown to the wide audience.

We should conclude by asking a question concerning the significance of Lutosławski's *Notebook of Ideas* for his artistic development. The *Notebook* does not illustrate all the stages of that development (it contains no references to the first twenty and the last ten years of his artistic life) and not all the aspects of the composer's workshop, or more generally style, are tackled there. Despite its temporal and topical incompleteness, the *Notebook of Ideas* well documents the key period of 1959–1962 which saw a radical change in Lutosławski's technique and aesthetics, fully accomplished in his *Jeux vénitiens* (1961). The notes from that period, entered at short intervals, shed light on the composer's state of mind and the emotions that accompanied his creative choices. Viewed from this perspective, the *Notebook of Ideas* is a unique document of that transformation that paved the way for Lutosławski's own innovative concept of new music.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

³¹ *Ibid.*.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 310.

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