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**Witold Lutosławski's *Epitaph*
for oboe and piano (1979) against the background
of the composer's style characteristics**

Lutosławski's musico-poetic language, immanent and formulated, permits him to be described as a 20th-century Classicist, for the composer, in alluding to the most wonderful ideas familiar from the past, at the same time introduced novel artistic concepts to the music of his times, establishing a coherent set of compositional procedures. The artist attributed great significance to such traditional values as beauty of harmony and proportion of musical form, in which a specific role is entrusted to each note. Witold Lutosławski's masterpieces—to mention among them, just as examples: *Funeral Music*, *Paroles tissées*, *Mi-parti*, *Preludes and Fugue*, *Partita*, *Symphonies* nos. 3 and 4—can be compared to crystals, on account of the beauty of their timbres, their transparency and perfection of construction. As is shown by the composer's statements and written records of his thoughts, he attached great importance both to the architectural plan of a work as a closed whole, and to each detail thereof:

Before setting out to write a composition, one must have [...] some vision of the entirety of the work, if only a very hazy one. Very often, I imagine a work not yet written just as I would a city from a great height, from an airplane. Only later does reducing the altitude permit me to concretize the fine points and details of such a vi-

sion. If one possesses such a vision and key ideas which are now visible from up close, then one can set about writing the work.¹

[...] To me, however, one thing is undeniable: no pitch sequence, no sonority can be created without taking into account details of expression, color, character, physiognomy. Even the tiniest detail must satisfy the composer's sensibilities to the greatest degree. In other words, in music, there can exist no indifferent sounds.²

The statements cited contain the quintessence of the composer's reflections on the subject of the components necessary to the composition process: 1. an overall plan, 2. key ideas, 3. working out of the details; but the individuality of his style results from a sort of musical dramaturgy within the framework of that whole, from the attractiveness of the key ideas and the quality of the detail. In the area of the formation of this purely musical sound 'drama', Lutosławski felt himself to be the spiritual heir of tradition.

The originality of Lutosławski's musical style and his compositional mastery are based on a skillful, creative drawing upon the works of the most distinguished composers of bygone eras, as well as on experimentation leading to the creation of concepts revealing to the audience a beauty which is new, yet grows out of traditional roots.

The composer never did reject tradition—quite the contrary: he emphasized many times the inspirational effect on his creative imagination of the music of the great masters from former eras, especially Haydn and Beethoven. Lutosławski drew on their achievements, taking up the main ideas associated with the shaping of the musical action in a large, closed form. Analysis of the building of tension in the Classical symphonies and the meaning of the key ideas contained therein became the source for the composer's original concept, and permitted him to work out his own model for a musical work, whose various configurations we discover in his pieces, beginning in the 1960s.

Creative perception of the works of distinguished composers—among others Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel, Bartók, Stravinsky—went hand-in-hand with Lutosławski's active participation in contemporary musical life and keen observation of the activities of the avant-garde. 'For the sake of order', as it were,

¹ Statement of Lutosławski in: *Witold Lutosławski. Prezentacje, interpretacje, konfrontacje* [*Witold Lutosławski. Presentations, Interpretations, Confrontations*], Symposium materials, ed. K. Tarnawska-Kaczorowska, Warszawa 1985, p. 154.

² Statement of Lutosławski in: Balint Andras VARGA *Lutosławski Profile*, London 1976, p. 23.

we ought to recall the well-known fact that it was J. Cage's extremely novel *Piano Concerto* which became the impulse for the creation of Lutosławski's original technique, the so-called 'controlled aleatorism'. This technique is without doubt evidence of the inspirational effect of the avant-garde *œuvre*.

What is my relationship to the avant-garde?—wondered Lutosławski—It is characterized, above all, by a feeling of affinity. However, in the fundamental role played by the avant-garde in the development of any art, I see in this phenomenon, at the same time, something sad. [...] The 'avant-gardist' engages his/her energies, above all, in a polemic with the situation at hand. His/her *œuvre* is mainly a dialogue with other artists; for this reason, the scope of its meaning is limited. [...] In my music, one can find elements of the avant-garde. But elements, and the fundamental aim—these are two different things. [...] This fundamental aim in my *œuvre* [...] is to give the most faithful possible expression to all which imposes itself on my compositional imagination and which corresponds to my desires and tastes. To achieve this, it is necessary to constantly work on enrichment and renewal of one's own compositional language.³

Constant renewal of compositional technique and, at the same time, 'revival of the imagination' with the music of earlier eras—both of these ideas were permanently present, though in varying degree, along the artistic road of Lutosławski. The intersection of traditional and novel ideas in the composer's artistic thought is particularly clear in his music composed beginning in the 1970s.

In Witold Lutosławski's *œuvre*, one can discern several caesurae resulting from changes in his compositional technique,⁴ but at the same time, a certain stylistic unity in his music, which unity is an expression of the composer's attachment of particular importance to certain artistic ideas present in many of his works. Among these ideas, of particularly essential importance was the idea of building the entirety of a work on a foundation of strictly-observed rules of pitch organization. The set of principles built by the composer over the years,

³ Witold LUTOSŁAWSKI *Zeszyt myśli* [*Notebook of Ideas*], entry from 12 September 1965, cited acc. to Zbigniew SKOWRON 'Estetyka sformułowana Witolda Lutosławskiego' ['Formulated Aesthetic Language of Witold Lutosławski'], in: *Estetyka i styl twórczości Witolda Lutosławskiego* [*Aesthetic Language and Style in the Œuvre of Witold Lutosławski*], ed. Z. Skowron, Kraków 2000, p. 21.

⁴ A subject which has been the object of many papers, among others: Steven STUCKY 'Ciągłość i zmiana: istota stylu Lutosławskiego', in: *Estetyka i styl...*, op. cit., pp. 151–196; in English: 'Change and Constancy: The Essential Lutosławski', in: *Lutosławski Studies*, ed. Zbigniew Skowron, Oxford 2001, pp. 127–162.

concerning horizontal, vertical and diaphoral⁵ relationships, was subject to constant evolution. One can discover some new principle in almost every one of the successive works from his mature period, but there exist in the composer's *œuvre* works of crucial significance, in which the artist introduced novel sound ideas which made a particularly important contribution to change in the expression of his music; among these works are: *Five Songs* to words by Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna (new twelve-tone harmony), *Funeral Music* (twelve-tone harmony linked with the idea of the series), *Venetian Games* (controlled aleatoric technique), the *Cello Concerto* (instrumental cantilena), or the *Preludes and Fugues* (polyphony of instrumental groups).

The *Epitaph*, which begins the late period, can also be categorized as a work of particular significance in Lutosławski's *œuvre*, not only on account of its introduction of new principles in pitch relationships, but also on account of the presence in the work of a set of procedures particularly characteristic of the composer's style.

Witold Lutosławski considered the *Epitaph* to be a work opening a new stage in his *œuvre*, in which he deployed a new technique in the area of pitch organization.⁶ The composer emphasized that in this new technique, he assigns a particular role to two intervals: the major seventh and the minor ninth, using them to build pitch structures which have a different—as he was wont to say—sound 'quality', and a different role in the musical action.

Those sonorities built on the minor ninth have an—I would call it—centrifugal tendency: a tendency to fall apart, while the major seventh is something more stable and aimed toward the center'.⁷

The minor ninth and the major seventh, whose application in the formation of harmony was pointed out by the composer, are also intervals of particular import in the building of individual segments of the form of the piece, and play an important role in the overall pitch organization plan of the work.

In the *Epitaph*, the composer utilized a pitch structure concept which I would call **tonal projection**, displaying, on the one hand, a kinship with the

⁵ Term introduced by the author in her works on Lutosławski in, among others: *Lutosławski i jego styl muzyczny* [*Lutosławski and His Musical Style*], Kraków 1997, p. 66.

⁶ Statement of the composer in: *Muzyka to nie tylko dźwięki* [known in English as *Conversations with Witold Lutosławski*]. An extended interview of the composer conducted by Irina Nikolska, Kraków 2003, p. 75.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

scale, and on the other, with tonality; but tonal projection is in essence neither the one nor the other structure of pitch relationships. This projection results from the combination of two tonal axes. By **tonal axis**, I mean here a structure of two pitches and the interval between them which designates the relationship between the first, culminating and last pitch of the work, between the first and last pitch of a given horizontal or vertical pitch structure; it designates the range of a given sound whole, or is clearly in evidence in the internal construction of a given horizontal or vertical structure. By virtue of the significance of the two pitches of the axis in the work, they can be compared to the role of a tonic in the major-minor tonal system; while on account of the importance of the interval relationship between them, to the role of a scale; however, especially in the second case, these relationships are quite distant. The tonal axis designates the nodal points of the work and the interval relationship between them. It should be emphasized here that the expression 'tonal' is, in this context, part of a broad understanding of tonality—namely, as pitch organization which includes the singling out of some tone or tones in the musical construction.

Well-known is Lutosławski's statement criticizing the association of pitch orders in 20th-century music with tonality:

Music researchers who are involved not only with 20th-century music, but also with older music, read traces of tonality into every phenomenon which has any similarity to the tonal system. Perhaps even—conscious allusion by the composer to the tonal system. What ensues here is a misunderstanding not unlike linguistic misunderstandings. For example, not knowing a foreign language, we catch a word we know. It could mean one thing in this language we do not know, and another in the one we use. And such similarities, or even identities—completely by chance—do happen. It is similar with those tonal allusions. The fact that some note is repeated throughout an entire work, does not have to arouse associations with a tonal center.⁸

The cited statement of the composer shows that he was speaking of the association of selected phenomena of 20th-century music with the major-minor system, and not with broadly-understood tonality. No doubt we will not detect relationships with the major-minor tonal system in the mature and late *œuvre* of Lutosławski, but it is certainly possible to point to tonal centralization phenomena in many of his works, consisting of recurrences of selected

⁸ *Witold Lutosławski. Prezentacje, interpretacje, konfrontacje*, ed. K. Tarnawska-Kaczorowska, op. cit., pp. 145–146.

pitch classes and their appearance at nodal points of the work. Probably the strongest exposition of one pitch class, perceived as a tonal center, appears in *Symphony no. 3*, in which notes from pitch class *e* begin and end the symphony, represent dividing points between refrains, and initiate the main movement of the composition. We can also speak of the significance of pitch class *e* as a tonal center in the case of *Livre pour orchestre*, *Novelette*, *Mi-parti* and *Symphony no. 4*. In the expansive symphonic works, the tonal axis phenomenon appears rather in the framework of segments or phases of a work; while in the short (ca. 5') chamber work *Epitaph*, a structure of two tonal axes decides the overall pitch organization principles of the composition.

In the *Epitaph*, the two tonal axes were presented at the beginning of the work in the oboe part (Example 1): the first of them encompasses the notes $f^1-f^{\#2}$ in a minor-ninth relationship, representing the range of the first melodic phrase; and the second, the notes e^2-f^1 in a major-seventh relationship, forming the range of the second phrase.

Example 1. *Epitaph* for oboe and piano. Initial fragment of oboe part (Refrain I)

The pitch classes of the first axis appear as nodal points not only in Refrain I, shown above, but also are heard in the oboe part at the beginning of the work (f^1), at the culmination ($f^{\#2}$) and at the end (f^3). The interval of Axis I—a minor ninth—finds application in a form expanded by an octave, between the initial note of the work and its culmination; thus, the pitch classes and interval of Axis I are equally as important in the work as a whole, as in the construction of Refrain I.

The manner of use of the two axes in the individual segments of the work, called in other papers on Lutosławski ‘refrains’ and ‘episodes’,⁹ is shown by the

⁹ Cf. e.g. Charles Bodman RAE *The Music of Lutosławski*, London–Boston 1994; in Polish: *Muzyka Lutosławskiego*, Warszawa 1996; Danuta GWIZDALANKA and Krzysztof MEYER *Lutosławski*, vol. II: *Droga do mistrzostwa* [*The Way to Mastery*], Kraków 2004.

chart below (Example 2). In it are indicated the axes in their basic version, occurring in the Refrains (Axis I: $f'-f\sharp$ in Refrains 1, 2, 3 and 5; Axis II: $f'-e''$ in Refrains 1, 2, 4); and in transposed form, in the Episodes (Axis I: $eb'-e''$ in Episode 1, Axis I $g\sharp'-a''$ in Episode 2, and Axis I $d\sharp''-e''$ in Episode 3, as well as Axis II $g''-f\sharp'''$ in Episode 4); they designate the range of the entire melody in a segment, or the range of a given phrase in said segment:

- R 1:** Axis I ($f'-f\sharp$) Axis II ($f'-e''$)
E 1: Axis I t ($eb'-e''$)—range of Phrase II
- R 2:** Axes I and II
E 2: Axis I t ($g\sharp'-a''$)—range of Phrase III
- R 3:** Axis I
E 3: Axis II t ($c'''-c\sharp'''$)—interval between Phrases II and III
Axis I t ($d\sharp''-e''$)—end of Phrase III
- R 4:** Axis II
E 4: Axis II t ($g''-f\sharp'''$, culmination on $f\sharp'''$)
- R 5—**Epilogue: Axis I ($f'-f\sharp$)—range of Phrase I

Example 2. Chart of occurrence of tonal axes (Axes I and II) in refrains (R) and episodes (E) in the oboe part, in original form and in transposition (t)

The absence of a tonal axis in the form of a range in a given segment of an Episode, or in Refrain V (Epilogue) in the oboe part does not mean it is absent from the sound of said segment, for the piano part also contains the aforementioned intervals and pitch classes of the axes. The following can serve as an example: minor ninths: $b-c''-d\flat'''$; in the piano part, introducing Episode II, the sonority: $D-d-c\sharp''-c\sharp'''$; from Refrain V (Epilogue), accompanying Phrase III of the oboe, containing Axis II in octave expansion; or the piano sonority ending the work: $F_1-F-c-g-b\flat$, in which is emphasized a pitch class proper to both axes, in the octave F_1-F .

Use of the intervals of a minor ninth and a major seventh as components of the axes, as elements of horizontal and vertical structures, is only one new aspect of Lutosławski's technique visible in the work under analysis. Equally essential is the departure therein from the twelve-tone structures which had been the basis for the composer's technique since the end of the 1950s.

In the *Epitaph*, we find no twelve-tone sonorities, but rather sonorities of less elemental character, comprised of a few components: five, four, three, or even only two. The effect is a clear, audibly tangible harmony and transparent texture of the piece.

This type of harmonic simplification became the main principle in the chamber works composed after the *Epitaph*, e.g. the *Partita*, as well as a principle present in the symphonic pieces.

Aside from a change in the structure of sonorities via reduction in the quantity of pitches comprising them, it is also worthwhile to turn our attention to the manner of their construction. Aside from the principle of symmetry of sonorities familiar from the mature period of the composer's *œuvre*, which finds application in the construction of four-note sonorities, e.g. $C-c-e^b-e^b$ ' (a pitch structure containing the minor ninth e^b-e^b '), there appears a sonority comprised of an octave, a minor third and perfect fifths (e.g. the aforementioned chord ending the *Epitaph*, containing a combination of the interval classes 3 and 7), often occurring in pieces from the last period of Lutosławski's *œuvre*, e.g. *Symphony no. 3*, *Chain II* and the *Piano Concerto*.

Tonal projection based on the idea of the tonal axis, and simplified harmony, do not exhaust the pitch organization principles of the *Epitaph*. The composer links the structure of tonal axes with a principle of building melody from a pair of interval classes, a principle familiar from other pieces of his (e.g. the *Funeral Music*, the *Grave* and many other compositions from the mature and late periods). In the *Epitaph*, the composer utilized in the refrain a structure of two interval classes (2 + 3) in Phrase I of the refrain. In Phrase II of the refrain, while there does appear a structure comprised of three intervals (1 + 3 + 5), in the episode, again, there appears a pair of interval classes, this time 1 + 6. The axis intervals (minor ninth and major seventh), belong to Class I; thus, its strong relationship with the formation of the oboe melody both in the episodes (NB Episode III is based exclusively on Interval Class I, i.e. on progressions of minor seconds, major sevenths and minor ninths), and in those refrains which contain Phrase II (Refrains I and II) or a fragment thereof (Refrain III).

In the *Epitaph*, Lutosławski also utilized means typical of his style to build melodic language, consisting of expansion or abbreviation of a given pitch-interval model, as well as of use of transpositions and inversions of the model.

We find an example of the building of a phrase from transpositions of a four-note model in the already-cited beginning of Refrain I (Example I),

whose first phrase is formed from the pitch progression $f'-g'-bb'-c''$ (2 + 3 + 2), the grace note d'' and a transposition of the 2 + 3 + 2 model starting with the note b^2 . Examples of transposition of the model, as well as its abbreviation and expansion, can be pointed out in the oboe part, in the Epilogue, e.g. in the *tranquillo* segment (cf. Example 3), in which the 3 + 2 + 2 model $e'-g'-a'-b'$, expanded initially over the course of three measures, is then repeated in abbreviated form, with the addition of only one note with grace note; in turn, it is subject to transposition beginning from the note c'' , with expansion by 1 note with respect to the preceding variant.

The image displays a musical score for an oboe and piano. It is divided into three systems. The first system is labeled 'tranquillo' and 'mp'. The second system is labeled 'rit.' and 'pp'. The third system is labeled 'rit. al fine' and 'ppp'. The score shows various time signatures (7/8, 2/4, 3/4, 6/8) and dynamic markings (mp, p, pp, ppp). The oboe part features a melodic line with grace notes and transpositions, while the piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with sustained chords and moving lines.

Example 3. Epilogue, from *tranquillo* onward. Manner of formation of melody via transposition, abbreviation and expansion of a given pitch-interval model

Numerous examples of transposition of motifs also occur in the episodes, in which there sometimes appears, beyond this, the inversion of a motif, as for example at the beginning of Episode IV: the motif $g^{\flat}-g^{\flat}-f^{\flat}-e^{\flat}$, transposed twice at the interval of a tritone, occurs in inversion beginning from the note f^{\flat} , after which ensues a motif containing an ascending leap of a tritone, as well as its inversion.

Example 4. Episode IV. Transpositions and inversions of motifs in the oboe part (from the tempo designation $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 176$)

In the *Epitaph*, beyond this, we find two types—or, to put it differently, melodic ‘characters’—which have been applied with the aim of strong contrast between refrains and episodes. In the refrains and in the epilogue, we hear a sort of cantilena of arched contour, designated in others of the composer’s works as *dolente* on account of the slow tempo and even rhythm (longer phrases in the same rhythmic values), disturbed only by grace notes creating the impression of ‘sobbing’ (cf. Example 1). We also hear this type of lyric melodies in, for example, the cantilena of the *Cello Concerto*.

In the episodes of the *Epitaph*, a type of recitative-figurative melodic language appears; during figurations based on a given pitch-interval model, played at a fast tempo in small rhythmic values, there appear frequent repetitions of notes, which—depending on their duration and manner of articulation—either melt into a figurational continuum (in the case of small-scale rhythmic values), as in Episode IV (cf. Example 4), or take on the character of a recitation (in the case of longer values and the accentuation thereof), as in the first phase of Episode II (cf. Example 5). This type of figurative-recitative melodic language often appears in aleatoric sections in many of the composer’s works.



Example 5. Episode II, 'recitation' of note a^2

Both types of melody, expressing sorrow and anxiety, are associated here with the character of the piece *Epitaph* 'Alan Richardson *in memoriam*'.¹⁰ The point here is not just the application of the 1 + 5 interval structure occurring in the composer's works of funereal character (*Funeral Music* in memory of Béla Bartók, *Grave* in memory of Stefan Jarociński), but rather the expression of the two melodies. Anxious, here searing, there grotesque episodes lead to the lament ending the piece, developed from the melody of the refrain. The aforementioned musical characters of both types of melody gain fullness of expression by virtue of solicitously worked-out details, i.e. articulation and dynamics of each note; the refrains acquire gentleness from a *legato* articulation; and the episodes, nervousness and anxiety from appropriately distributed *staccato* and *portato*.

The lamenting melody of the refrain and the grotesque melody of the episode are two basic key ideas of the composition riveting the audience's attention, whose metamorphoses co-create the whole of the musical action.

The form of the *Epitaph*, which authors have described as a sequence of segments of contrasting pitch organization—refrains and episodes (C. B. Rae¹¹)—or even, very traditionally, as a rondo (D. Gwizdalanka, K. Meyer¹²), presents a structure characteristic of Lutosławski's two-phase formal concept. This concept (described by the composer himself, as well as by analysts of his *œuvre*, encompassing an introductory phase and a main phase, leading to a cul-

¹⁰ Work dedicated to the memory of English composer A. Richardson.

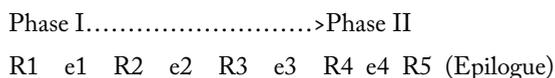
¹¹ Charles Bodman RAE, op. cit., p. 158.

¹² Danuta GWIZDALANKA, Krzysztof MEYER, op. cit., p. 264.

mination), clearly present in Lutosławski's pieces, beginning with the *String Quartet*, was subjected by the artist to constant modifications (on the pattern of Classical formal models, which presented different deviations from the model in each piece). The two-phase formal concept found application in both multi-movement and one-movement works. Let us recall here the *Livre pour orchestre*, in which composition Lutosławski developed the last chapter (Chapitre) of his book for orchestra—containing continuous musical action leading to culmination and resolution—from the third (and last) refrain (called in this work *Intermède*). In the *Epitaph*, Episode IV, the most turbulent in this piece, is subjected to analogous development and achievement of culmination, after which ensues a calming effect in the lyric Refrain V, expanded into an epilogue of strong expression.

Episode IV, together with its preceding phrase from Refrain IV, and with its ensuing epilogue, creates a musical action characteristic of the second main phases of Lutosławski's works; while the initial refrains (I–III) and episodes (I–III) co-create Phase I, characterized by interruption and stoppage of the action by short formal elements, separation of them by rests and recurring refrains; they create in this manner a 'pressure increase'—as Lutosławski used to say—for the continuous action of Phase II. This 'pressure increase' was also achieved by means familiar from others of the composer's pieces, consisting of gradual shortening of successive elements of the form. In this work, the refrain is repeated precisely only once, while Refrain III was shortened by the second fragment of Phrase II. We know such devices as shortening of segments of the form, with the aim of producing tension, expectation of continuous musical action, from many of the composer's works, e.g. *Mi-parti*.

Lutosławski utilized the model of the musical work invented by himself many times, just as the Classicists used the sonata allegro model; but in his music, the model takes on the shape of a two-phase whole. In the case of the *Epitaph*, Phase I encompasses 6 elements (3 refrains and 3 episodes), while the second contains only 3 elements (the abbreviated Refrain IV, Episode IV and the epilogue); but these are elements of stronger expression, and are characterized by greater continuity in musical action (cf. chart—Example 6).



Example 6. Model of form of *Epitaph*

The contrasting formal elements (refrains and episodes), differing in terms of type of melodic language (cantilena vs. figurative-recitative melody), intervallic construction (different pairs of interval classes), articulation (*legato* vs. *staccato* and *portato*), time organization (precisely designated—slow tempi vs. *ad libitum*—fast tempi)—and, as a result, in terms of expression (lament vs. grotesque), nonetheless co-create a coherent work by virtue of unity of tonal projection and pitch organization providing relationships among all the elements of the work as a system.

The *Epitaph*—an instrumental miniature by Lutosławski, perhaps underappreciated on account of its small dimensions (after all, it only lasts a few minutes)¹³—brings into focus within itself, as in a lens, many musical ideas characteristic of the composer's style:

1. shaping of a form which develops slowly in the first phase and is meant to put the audience into a state of expectation of the culminating second phase,
2. strong opposition in pitch organization between refrains and episodes,
3. types of melodic language: cantilena with grace notes, as well as figurations with repetitions of notes,
4. construction of melody based on pairs of interval classes,
5. development of a melodic continuum via the use of a pitch-interval model subjected to modifications: expansion with additional elements, abbreviation, transpositions, inversions,
6. a sound plane composition technique consisting of assigning a different set of pitch classes to each individual instrumental part,
7. the piece's original tonal projection and the associated precise pitch organization, as a result of which the work appears as a systemic object.

The *Epitaph*—a piece from the Postmodernist era—only superficially appears to be linked with such traits of music from this era as a melodic character and simplification. In essence, in his late works, the composer attributed important significance to melodies; but these melodies, as has been shown, are closely connected to the principles of pitch organization invented by the composer. Thus, *Epitaph* displays more characteristics typical of the composer's

¹³ Aside from the aforementioned items in monographs devoted to Lutosławski, the literature concerning the *Epitaph* is very modest, encompassing reviews of performances of the work. See in: Stanisław BĘDKOWSKI and Stanisław HRABIA *Witold Lutosławski. A Bio-Bibliography*, Westport (Connecticut)—London 2001.

individual style than characteristics associated with the main tendencies of the Postmodernist era. The aforementioned tonal projection and systemic ordering of pitch have nothing to do with the neo-tonality of many works from the Postmodern movement, which consisted of choosing selected elements of the major-minor system and the modal scales.

Simplification of harmonic language in the composer's late works also does not consist of ordinary repetition of chords of non-complex structure, but is part of the overall pitch-interval plane of the work. In his approach to tonality—understood broadly as a structure of pitch relationships, from which selected pitches are central elements of this structure—Lutosławski is without doubt original and exceptional.