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LUTOSŁAWSKI–NORDHEIM: TWO STYLISTIC MODELS AND THEIR INTERRELATIONS

The aim of my paper is nothing more (and, I hope, nothing less) than to provide some introductory observations on certain similarities and differences between the musical styles of Witold Lutosławski and Arne Nordheim. I propose their comparison based on Nelson Goodman's theory of artistic style, on my own conception of what may be called a 'stylistic model' and, of course, on a classic 'close reading' of both composers' notable works.

The point of departure for Goodman's conception of style was

[a critic of] the widespread how-what definition of style as how something is said by contrast with the content or substance of what is said. [Goodman observed] that in many artworks what is said and how it is said are so intertwined that it is impossible to distinguish the two for purposes of identifying an artistic style¹.

This problem was quite clear also for Igor Stravinsky, who noticed:

no one says the same thing because the saying is also the thing. A technique or a style for saying something original does not exist a priori, it is created by the original saying itself.² [...] What a Chinese philosopher says cannot be separated from the fact that he says it in Chinese.³

Goodman argued for an account according to which the stylistic features are those properties of a work that allow us to place the work in

¹ D. Jacquette, *Goodman on the concept of style*, "British Journal of Aesthetics" 2000, vol. 40, no. 4, p. 452–466.

² Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (New York, 1959), p. 25.

³ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and Diary* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 108.

a certain location, a time period and the artist's oeuvre; that is, the stylistic properties help us answer questions about 'where?' 'when?' and 'who?' in respect to a particular work: 'style consists of those features of the functioning of a work that are characteristic of author, period, place or school'.⁴ Thus, according to Goodman, an individual style may be defined as a given artist's metaphorical signature. For instance, the representation of human eyes as almond-shaped is an important property of the individual style of Botticelli, as the extraordinary length of sentences is of Marcel Proust's. Such properties are not characteristic in the sense that they appear only in the works of one particular artist, yet their presence is important when we need to decide whether a certain work belongs to the oeuvre of a given author or not. One should emphasise, however, that the definition of style applied here does not reduce it to a device for attribution. 'Rather', said Goodman, 'attribution is a preliminary or auxiliary to or a byproduct of the perception of style; *its discernment* is an integral aspect of the understanding of works of art and the worlds they present'.⁵ That is also true when it comes to considering the musical styles of Lutosławski and Nordheim.

Any description of style is a question of well-trained taste or accurate intuition rather than any methodical investigation and, therefore, it can be recognised as arbitrary and unjustified, especially when a comparison of different styles is concerned and the matter becomes more complicated. In order to resolve this problem, I propose to compare artistic styles within a simple theoretical framework, which may systematise a comparative description and thus restrict, to some extent, its arbitrariness.

I assume that any adequate description of a given style has to define its model, that is, a complex entity including the following:

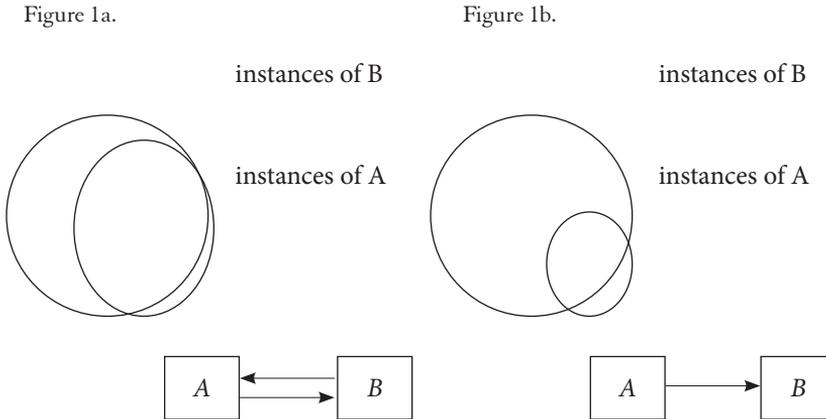
- the set of all the properties significant for the composer's works (the stylistic features),
- a structure defined on this set by a division of the features into standard (central) and non-standard (peripheral), and by relations of co-occurrence (collocation) between them.

By stylistic properties, I mean some devices or 'tricks' an artist purposefully uses in his works in a significant way. (Obviously, it is difficult

⁴ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, 1978), p. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

to say for certain why a particular feature is classified as a significant one in the context of a given work or oeuvre. Such a decision is made intuitively most of the time and is not subject to any systematic explanation.) Some of the significant properties belong to the principal strand of an artist’s creative practice; other devices are used rarely, although their appearance is also stylistically important. Therefore, I call the former ‘central’ and the latter ‘peripheral’. The relation of co-occurrence connects two stylistic devices, A and B, when both of them are normally used to form the same material. The two are connected symmetrically if and only if an instance of A is usually also an instance of B (Figure 1a), and conversely; an asymmetrical connection occurs when the converse relation does not happen (Figure 1b).



Given the above, one can assume that any two models of style (and thereby two styles represented by them) may differ with regards to the following:

- the set of stylistic properties,
- the role of some common features as peripheral or central,
- the way the common features are interconnected.

The extent to which any two styles are similar depends on how many pairs of stylistic properties are connected in the same way and on a number of properties that are central or peripheral in both stylistic models. If any two models share no common features, the degree of their similarity remains unspecified.



In both Lutosławski and Nordheim, one finds a large number of compositional devices, central or peripheral, that could be recognised as elements of the composer's 'trademark' or 'metaphorical signature'. In order to specify the degree of similarity between those two individual styles, I will consider only those musical phenomena which are common to both composers. For the sake of simplification, both styles will be discussed as stable, temporarily invariant entities, that is, 'synchronically', although it would be desirable to analyse the matter 'diachronically' to show how the degree of similarity between Lutosławski's and Nordheim's idioms varies from one period to another. I propose a general description of some compositional devices that are essential to both styles, speaking of them as a whole. Many of these basic and simple 'tricks' are common to a large part of twentieth-century music, which does not prevent us from classifying them as important for any individual style.

To begin with, let us enumerate the stylistic features (stylistically important musical devices) that play the central role for both Lutosławski and Nordheim.

The use of strictly defined 'sectors' of the chromatic material (the pitch-class sets in which the number of pitch classes included is less than twelve) is obviously one of the fundamental procedures of twentieth-century composition technique. Nordheim and Lutosławski developed this device independently, using selected sets of pitch classes. Notable examples may be found almost everywhere in their music. The Adagio movement of the unfinished Violin Concerto introduces various carefully selected ninth chords; Arne Nordheim's *Adieu*, dedicated to the memory of the Polish composer, elaborates all three possible forms of the octatonic collection.

Likewise, the set of interval classes occurring between adjacent notes of a chord or melodic lines is usually restricted by both composers. Nordheim frequently reduces the set of possible aggregates to his favourite combination of a minor second, a perfect fifth and a tritone, as may be observed on the first pages of the score of his orchestral piece *Magma*. At the same time, vertical and horizontal formations built up of interval pairings (minor second and tritone, major second and perfect fifth, major and minor third) are common to the majority of Lutosławski's pieces.

In spite of their tendency to atonal writing, neither Nordheim nor Lutosławski avoids harmony based on the intervals of major and minor third. Tertian structures allow Nordheim to build some tonal passages that emerge unexpectedly from the atonal context (as in Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* and Violin Concerto). One can observe such passages in Nordheim's cantata *Wirklicher Wald* and in the aforementioned *Adieu*. Lutosławski normally uses some tertian triads and tetrachords to construct his twelve-note chords, many of which are extensively elaborated in his mature works.⁶

Some major pieces by Lutosławski and Nordheim (especially from the 1960s and 1970s) are filled by sound blocks, in which single pitches, intervals or melodic lines are less important than the musical effect produced through their accumulation. Such is the case with Lutosławski's String Quartet and *Trois poèmes d'Henri Michaux*, as well as Nordheim's *Floating* and *Greening*. The sound masses and other musical ideas are frequently juxtaposed in the way they are assigned to different layers played at the same time, while the elements of one layer overlap the elements of the others. This well-known device, called 'chain technique', occurs in *Floating*, *Greening* and *Lux et tenebrae* by Nordheim and in numerous scores of Lutosławski, such as the Concerto for Orchestra, *Musique funèbre*, *Grave* and the three compositions entitled *Chain*.

A common method used to organise the internal structure of sound masses is canon technique. Certain rhythmic patterns, a sequence of pitches or their combination, a melodic line, are replicated through canonic imitation and create a homogenous block. It is not difficult to find them in both Lutosławski (*Mi-parti*, rehearsal numbers 1–15) and Nordheim (oboe concerto *Boomerang*, bar 136 ff.). One ought to emphasise that the Polish composer usually applies canonic imitation solely to a sequence of rhythmic values, and the replication of full melodies is almost totally absent (with one notable exception: the outer movements of *Musique funèbre*). Thus the procedure of imitation concerning pitches should be recognised as peripheral to Lutosławski's style, as opposed to the technique of rhythmic canon.

⁶ Charles Bodman Rae, *The Music of Lutosławski* (London, 2012), ch. 'Sound Language and Harmony (1956–1960)'.

Other stylistic features I propose to consider are central for one of the composers in question but not for the other. The key devices for such considerations include the pitch-class disjunction of layers or segments, twelve-note harmony and the use of *Grundgestalt*.

The rule according to which the layers played at the same time have no common pitch classes is fundamental to Lutosławski's composition practice; the law of the pitch-class disjunction of adjacent segments is followed far less frequently but it is also essential. Another basic procedure demands an arrangement of the twelve-note aggregate in a way that a given pitch class is assigned to only one register. In that case, what is a rule for Lutosławski is rather exceptional for Nordheim. One of the few exceptions appears in his early symphonic work *Canzona*. One can observe here (bars 59–61) two registrally fixed formations. The first is a twelve-note chord; the second uses eleven pitch classes, the full complement being made up immediately by the next sonority (a single note B flat), to which the former is disjunctive in respect to the pitch-class content.

Many of Nordheim's pieces stem from single fundamental patterns (*Grundgestalten*) that serve as sources of the musical material for a whole work. The cantata *Wirklicher Wald* and the orchestral *Magma* seem to be derived from particular melodic lines presented in the opening bars. The cello concerto *Tenebrae* was described by the composer himself as a work in which

the total development of the composition is dominated by the musical material presented by the cello at the beginning of the piece. Here we are confronted with the melodic, rhythmic and sound elements by which the whole composing procedure is governed.⁷

In contrast, the principle of *Grundgestalt* is essential to only one of the works of Lutosławski, *Musique funèbre*, which is based on a single twelve-note row using two interval classes (F–B–B-flat–E–E-flat–A–A-flat–D–D-flat–G–G-flat–C).

The stylistic properties described above are summarised in the figures. Some notable works exemplifying these properties are indicated, together with the role the features play in both models as either central or

⁷ Arne Nordheim, [*Tenebrae* for cello and orchestra (1982), composer's note] in *The 30th International Warsaw Autumn Festival* [program booklet], ed. Olgierd Pisarenko (Warsaw, 1987), p. 136.

peripheral. The interconnections between these properties that are common to both composers differ significantly from one to the other. In order to indicate the differences, two sets of stylistic devices may be considered.

The first set contains devices such as the limitation of the number of pitches and interval classes, the use of twelve-note aggregates and the tertian structure of chords. It is usual for Lutosławski (Figure 2a) to display tertian structures within chord-aggregates, yet there are many twelve-note structures organised in a different manner. That is why the arrow in the diagram leads from the frame ‘Tertian structure of chords’ to the frame ‘Twelve-note chords’. Its direction shows that the connection is asymmetrical: if there is a tertian structure, there is usually also a twelve-note formation, but not conversely. Likewise, if there is a twelve-note chord, the limitation of the number of interval classes is also realised, because Lutosławski follows the rule according to which the intervals between temporary or registrally adjacent pitches are to be selected. The rule is in force not only for the twelve-note chords but also for many other formations, so the connection in question is asymmetrical, just like the co-occurrence of the interval class limitation and the restriction of the number of pitch classes. When Lutosławski limits the space of possible classes of pitch, he usually eliminates also some of the interval classes (which is not a rule, for instance, in Elliott Carter’s pieces based on an all-interval tetrachord, in which the use of all of the interval classes is allowed, while only four different pitches are employed). The selection of interval classes does not entail, however, the restriction of the pitch space. Indeed, it is usual for Lutosławski to compose various twelve-note formations built up of only two classes of intervals.

Figure 2a. Lutosławski

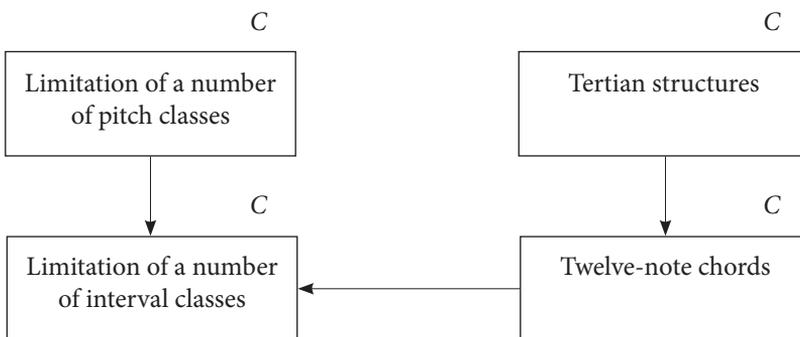
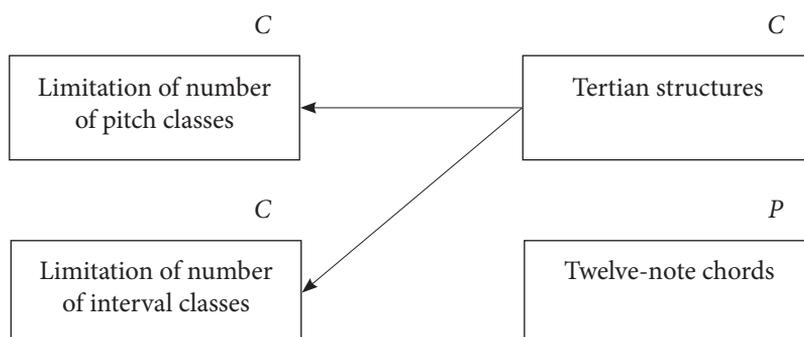


Figure 2b. Nordheim



As far as Nordheim is concerned (Figure 2b), one can observe that the composer’s use of twelve-note chords is not fixedly correlated with any of the other three devices discussed here. Tertian structures are usually associated with the limitation of pitch and interval classes, but not conversely.

Another set of stylistic ‘tricks’ I propose to consider comprises the ‘chain technique’, the pitch-class disjunction of layers or sections, massive sound blocks and canon. Nordheim usually applies a chain-like connection to juxtapose blocks, as he does in *Lux et tenebrae* and *Floating*,⁸ yet the sound masses are connected in many different ways, and the chain-like montage is only one of them. There is no single stable correlation between any of the two devices and the pitch-class disjunction (Figure 3b). The latter was essential for Lutosławski (Figure 3a) and governs almost all the arrangements of layers within the chain formations and the superimpositions of sound blocks. Lutosławski’s chain technique is frequently used to connect single lines; blocks are often connected independently of the chain procedure, so there is no fixed co-occurrence between the two. Although both composers employ canonic imitation to create the sound blocks, these ‘tricks’ are connected in a different way. Nordheim replicates whole melodic lines, while Lutosławski does so only exceptionally; he is usually interested in rhythmic patterns. The mutual connections between two kinds of canonic imitation and building blocks are more fixed in Nordheim.

⁸ Asbjørn Blokum Flø, ‘Memorables – Arne Nordheim’s Electronic Music’; <http://asbjornflo.net/en/info/text/arne-nordheims-electronic-music> (accessed 21 January 2016).

Figure 3a. Lutosławski

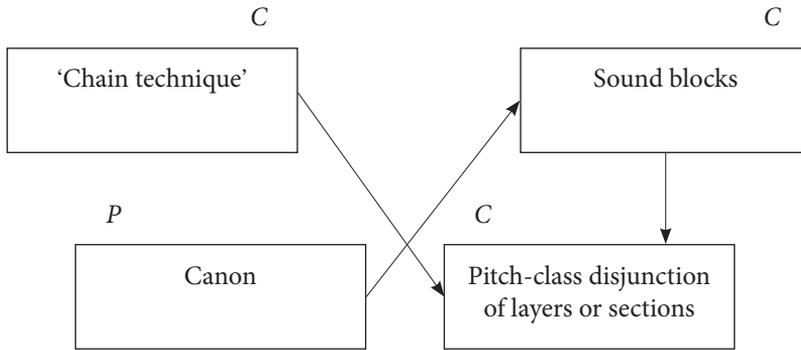


Figure 3b. Nordheim

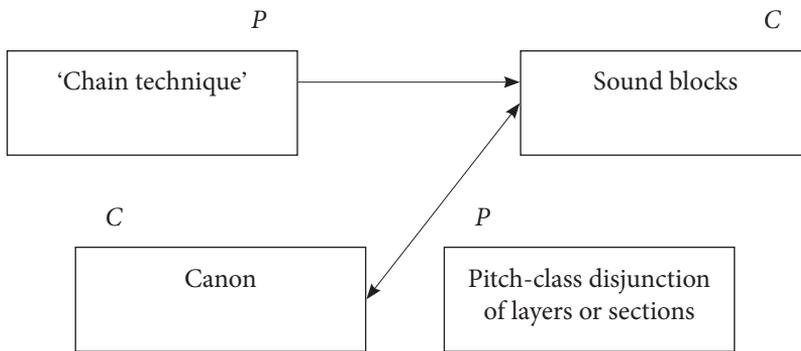
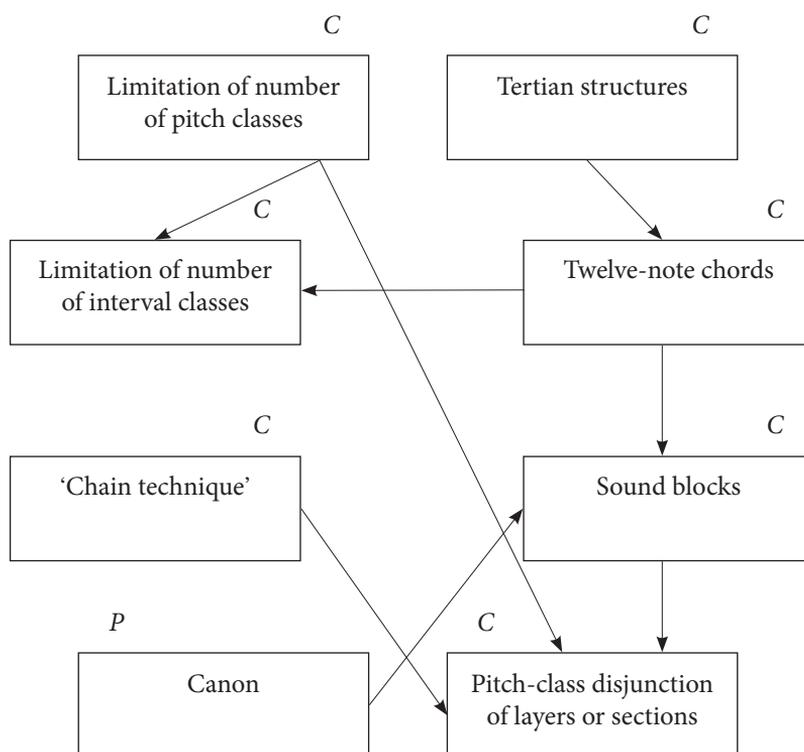


Figure 4a–b summarises the connections occurring within the models of Nordheim's and Lutosławski's musical styles. Although this comparative summary may be considered as a conclusion of the present study, it allows us to make some other remarks.

Both styles share many important properties, so the degree of their similarity may be well specified. There are many differences in the way the features are collocated, so the two models are considerably different. Lutosławski established more fixed connections than Nordheim, and it seems the former was interested mainly in repeating his favourite combinations of musical devices, while the latter tried to vary the way they are combined in different works. The more stable the combinations, the easier it is to grasp the style, and that is why Lutosławski's idiom

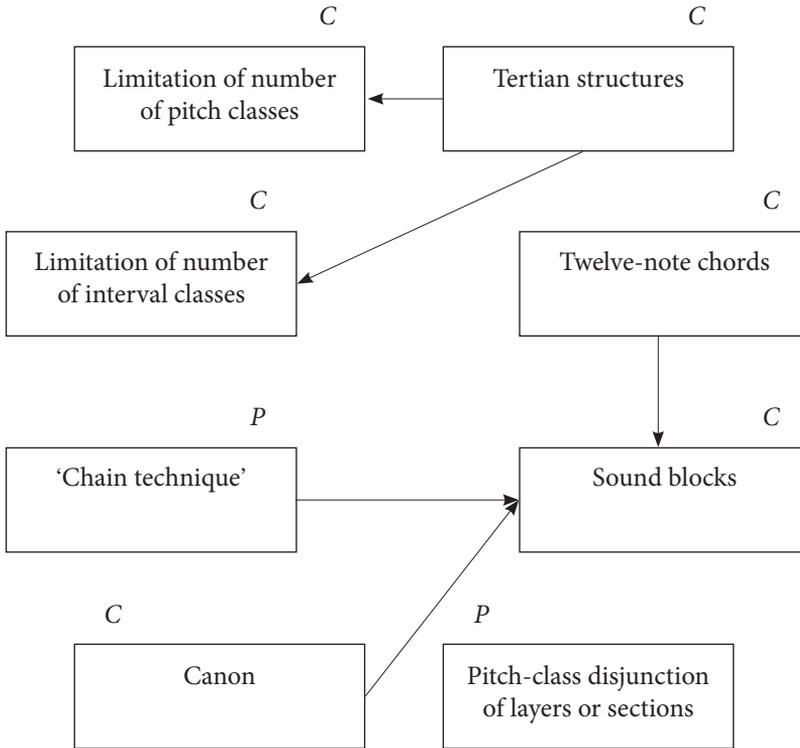
Figure 4a. Lutosławski



might appear more transparent and much easier to describe than Nordheim's. The variety of connections between the elements of style corresponds to a tendency to mix different sound qualities, musical moods and characters of expression. It might confirm the view that Nordheim was inspired by Gustav Mahler and the expressionists, as opposed to Lutosławski. The comparison presented here (or rather a sketch of what it might be) could also facilitate an investigation of supposed mutual influences between Lutosławski and Nordheim. It should be complemented by similar descriptions comparing both composers with some others, like Elliott Carter, Olivier Messiaen, Miloslav Kabeláč, Vagn Holmboe, György Ligeti, Per Nørgaard and Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen.

It also seems that something else becomes quite clear. The comparison, carried out within the framework of the stylistic model, suggests that a musical style (a sound language) is governed by what the linguists call

Figure 4b. Nordheim



a ‘combinatorial syntax’, which enables numerous complex entities (such as sentences or musical works) to be composed using a small number of simple units (single words, stylistic devices). The rules of syntax of a sound language and its vocabulary may vary from one work to another, but many of them are common to different works and composers. I suppose the idea of such an invariance and ‘combinatorial syntax’ was quite apparent to Lutosławski as well as to Nordheim. Let us conclude by quoting both composers:

I think it is true to say that a writer works all his life on the same novel. A composer is also a little bit like that. He likes to go back to his favourite tricks, imagining that he’s never quite finished saying what he’s already said once.⁹

⁹ Tadeusz Kaczyński, *Conversations with Witold Lutosławski*, tr. Yolanta May and Charles Bodman Rae (London, 1995), ch. ‘*Livre pour orchestre*’.

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I like the idea that music is not just something which belongs to its creator, but that it can go on. And I'm interested in transformation; for example, the very simple formula that you put two things together and get a new thing which is called three. Much of my thinking goes in that direction. Combine number one with number two and number three, which consists of those two, is quite unique, a third thing – and so on. It's never ending; it goes on for ever.¹⁰

¹⁰ Julian Cowley, 'Interview with Arne Nordheim'; <https://www.subradar.no/article/interview-arne-nordheim> (accessed 21 January 2016).