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'Jeux vénitiens': Lutosławski at the Crossroads

My original purpose in writing an article on Lutosławski's *Jeux vénitiens* (1960-61) was to reassess and elaborate on an analysis I had made some time ago.¹ But on a recent visit to Warsaw I was able to make a study of the sketches of the first and third movements of the work: what follows are preliminary observations based on a brief conversation with the composer and the subsequent perusal of the sketches. As always with Lutosławski, the sketches are kept neatly in an envelope. They are written in pencil and consist of three 16-stave and three 10-stave half-sheets, plus twelve sheets of A5 graph paper (first movement); and five 16-stave and seven 10-stave half-sheets, plus seven sheets and two half-sheets of A5 graph paper (third movement). These sketches seem to be of a fairly advanced nature; if there were earlier sketches, they appear no longer to be extant.

Jeux vénitiens is arguably Lutosławski's most significant work. The composer himself dates his maturity from this composition, mainly on account of his employment in it for the first time of certain aleatoric elements. In this respect *Jeux vénitiens* does mark an important departure from earlier works, although other features of Lutosławski's mature style, such as harmonic structures, were already evident in the *Five Songs* (1956-7), and there is a clear debt to previous works in the *moto perpetuo* style of the second movement. Even more intriguing than the familiar procedures that look either forwards or backwards are those aspects of *Jeux vénitiens* that explore the side-roads and reveal compositional ideas rarely if ever found elsewhere in Lutosławski's music. There is a raw and combustive energy in *Jeux vénitiens* which arises out of the stark juxtaposition of different styles and materials: in contrast with later works the heterogeneity is remarkable. The four movements seem to bear little relationship to one another—hence perhaps the plurality of the work's title. But if these are games, their spirit of play disguises a serious purpose and complex structures.

When studying *Jeux vénitiens* some twelve years ago I was struck by several features unique in Lutosławski's *oeuvre*, the first two of a structural nature, and the third concerning motivic design:

the harmonic link between the third and fourth movements;

the motivic relationship between the first and third movements;

the detailed motivic design of sections *A C E G* in the first movement.

The harmonic link between the third and fourth movements is curious. Essentially it consists of a series of *pizzicato* string chords which start just after letter *Q* in the third movement. These chords expand vertically at each appearance until they reach full stretch (a stack of alternating perfect fifths and tritones) as the first string chord, *arco*, of the fourth movement (Example 1). Yet these *pizzicato* chords hardly carry against the activity of the woodwind, harp, piano, and solo flute: untypically, here is a process which counts for little if it is a realistic attempt to bridge the gap between the third and fourth movements. The listener is probably aware only that the last of these chords expands the registral limits of the third movement, bringing a sense of fulfilment and the start of something new.

¹ *Rhythmic Articulation in the Music of Witold Lutosławski, 1956-65* (MA dissertation, University College, Cardiff, 1971).

The first performance of *Jeux vénitiens*, in Venice on 24 April 1961, consisted of the first, second, and fourth movements only: the third movement had not yet been finished. And by the time of the first complete performance, in Warsaw on 16 September 1961, Lutosławski had not only revised the notation of the last movement (the notation of the main 'pile-up' proved particularly difficult), but had also completely rewritten the first movement. He does not now know what became of the April version. Such a sequence of events is unusual for Lutosławski and suggests that he was having problems in deciding the road ahead. It is also significant when considering the two remaining features on my list.

The link between the first and third movements is the most unexpected aspect not only of *Jeux vénitiens* but of Lutosławski's musical outlook as a whole. The order of their composition is not clear from the sketches (few of the pages are numbered, none dated), but I deduce that the third movement either preceded or, as seems more likely, overlapped the composition of the second draft of the first movement.

The third movement is a lyrical and relaxed unfolding of melody (solo flute), sustaining harmony (woodwind, piano, and harp—the last slightly soloistic), and independent string chords. The music for the solo flute has the air of an improvisation, yet sharp ears might detect a familiar motivic phrase or two. In fact there is little material in the flute part that does not relate fairly directly to the seven-part woodwind *ad libitum* sections in the first movement (*A C E G*). The relationship consists of precise rhythmic and articulatory cross-references, while melodic intervals and dynamic markings in the third movement are frequently different from those devised for the motifs in the first. Lutosławski does not label any of the motifs here, but they are already distinctive. Using the letters attached in the sketches to the motifs as they occur in the first movement, we can see that they proceed towards the centre of the third movement before creating a roughly palindromic structure as the movement draws to an end:

A B A C D E F G H G I B G F E D C B A

In the sketches for the third movement, the flute part differs marginally from the published score in sections *A* to *D*, but elsewhere corresponds closely, as do the parts for the remaining instruments. The sketches show that rhythmic and durational elements were mostly worked out separately from the harmonic and melodic designs, and there exist alternative versions of a number of the twelve-note chords in the movement.

A less likely partner to the third movement could hardly be found than the opening of *Jeux vénitiens*. The revised first movement plays off groups of sections, *A C E G* and *B D F H*. The second group consists of soft, sustained string writing, a sort of suspended animation set against the cut and thrust of sections *A C E G*:

<i>A</i>	woodwind (fl I, II, ob, cl I, II, III, fg)	(12")
<i>B</i>	strings (with solo vn)	(27")
<i>C</i>	woodwind, timpani	(18")
<i>D</i>	strings (with solo vn)	(21")
<i>E</i>	woodwind, timpani, brass (tpt, hn, tbn)	(6")
<i>F</i>	strings	(2")
<i>G</i>	woodwind, timpani, brass, piano	(24")
<i>H</i>	strings (with solo vc)	(39")

percussion 'coda' (a dispersal of the single blow on percussion used to punctuate sectional divisions above)

The texture of sections *ACEG* is motivically by far the most disparate in Lutosławski's music. It has no parallel in his later works, where he restricts all parameters to give the textures clear 'personalities'. Here the aim seems to be deliberate confusion, with the cross-references to the third movement almost confounded, and one is left with the distinct impression, both on hearing the music and studying the sketches, that these motifs are the result of an intense period of compositional excitement in which the composer gave full rein to his creative imagination.

What holds the group *ACEG* together—a typical technique this—is a harmonic idea. In this instance it consists of a twelve-note chord from which almost all of the melodic pitches are drawn (Example 2). However, the published score² reveals several pitches outside this chord. In most cases the 'correct' pitch is close at hand and indeed would have conformed to the melodic mould of the motif in question. Interestingly the sketches in all but one instance back up the printed score; a case of the heat

² (Celle: Moeck Verlag, 1962).

of the creative moment? Lutosławski himself is surprised that such 'errors' should be there.

The woodwind material of the group rewards close examination; the texture is permeated with variants of the motifs that are shared with the third movement, although only clarinet II and the bassoon play versions of all nine (the bassoon part is given in Example 3). The sketches include two tables, the first of which shows the original distribution of seven variants (one for each instrument) of each of the nine motifs (A to I); the motifs are set out in the order in which they appear in the solo flute part in the third movement, but the allocation of particular variants to each instrument seems not to be governed by any system (Example 4). However, Lutosławski clearly wished to avoid as far as possible the simultaneous sounding of the same motif, even in different versions; he therefore reordered the first table so that, on paper at least, no motif was above or beneath itself (Example 5). In the event Lutosławski ended up with some instruments playing more lengthy variants than others, and he excised those to the right of my dividing line in Example 5. Even so, full sketches exist for all the variants.

Example 1

Example 1 shows three staves of musical notation. The top staff is a treble clef with a sharp key signature. The middle staff is a treble clef with a 'pizz.' marking. The bottom staff is a bass clef. There are various notes, rests, and accidentals throughout. A bracket labeled '[arco]' spans the top two staves, with a '3' below it. The notation is dense and complex.

Example 2

Example 2 shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and one sharp. The bottom staff is a bass clef. Both staves contain several notes with accidentals, representing a twelve-note chord.

Example 3

[taken from the published score]

Example 3 shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. The bottom staff is a bass clef. The notation is highly rhythmic and complex, with many notes and rests. Dynamic markings include 'mf', 'p', and 'sfp'. There are also some markings like '3' and 'pizz.'.

Example 4

fl. I	A1	B6	C3	D7	E2	F2	G6	H4	I5
fl. II	3	1	5	4	7	6	2	1	7
ob.	5	3	1	5	3	4	7	6	2
cl. I	7	4	2	6	6	1	4	5	4
cl. II	2	5	6	1	4	7	3	3	6
cl. III	4	7	4	2	1	5	1	7	3
fg.	6	2	7	3	5	3	5	2	1

Example 5

fl. I	A1	C3	H4	E2	B6	D7	G4	I5	F2
fl. II	I7	H1	C5	D4	A3	B1	E7	F6	G2
ob.	F4	I2	A5	H6	E3	G7	C1	D5	B3
cl. I	E6	B4	F1	I4	D6	H5	A7	G6	C2
cl. II	D1	A2	G3	F7	C6	E4	I6	B5	H3
cl. III	B7	E1	D2	C4	G1	I3	F5	H7	A4
fg.	G5	F3	E5	B2	I1	A6	H2	C7	D3

The rhythmic and pitch elements of the variants are sketched separately, the rhythmic patterns probably antedating the pitch patterns to which they are married. I can detect no consistent order in their sequence on the page, nor a rigid system of variation. It is not even possible on the evidence available to determine which is the original form of each rhythmic motif. Each motif's rhythmic variant is numbered first in the order in which it appears on the page, and then renumbered according to length (1=shortest, 7=longest) and the second set of numbers are those that appear in the tables already cited. The rhythmic component of motif A, for example, shows one principal variational procedure, that of durational extension, while the rhythm of motif I is based on repetition and reordering (Example 6).

The development of pitch patterns proved rather more difficult than the rhythmic variants. Taking a fixed twelve-note chord (Example 2), Lutosławski devised a melodic contour for each of the nine motifs, a contour that could be shifted systematically through the notes of the chord, maintaining its shape but of necessity altering its intervals as it moved (Example 7, phase 2). The first attempts, for motifs A, B, and C, contain many crossings out. B goes through two early phases, descending through the chord in simple patterns, until the third and final version passes through the chord in contrary motion. But a comparison of the final version with the completed sketch and the score shows that flute II and the bassoon take their pitches from the second phase. Such 'borrowing' from earlier phases also occurs with other motifs and explains the apparent inconsistencies of pitch organisation in the printed score. As Lutosławski progresses down the page to the later motifs, he becomes more adept at giving them characteristic melodic outlines, to such an extent that by the time he reaches motif I he assigns just one pitch to each variant (the eventual sustained note in each case)—the full motif does not appear in its final form until the next sketch. Lutosławski seems to have moved straight from these rhythm and pitch sketches to the full instrumental sequence as tabulated in Example 5, without dynamics, articulation or the final excisions (the oboe part is given in Example 8).

Such detailed elaboration of the woodwind motifs is typically thorough but uncharacteristically diverse, and its efficacy in the context might be questioned. However, the experience undoubtedly contributed to the composer's growing sophistication in techniques of rhythmic and melodic variation.

As regards the sketches of the other instrumental groups in *A C E G*, there are rhythmic schemes for the

brass and piano and some seemingly unrelated harmonic ideas. One of the more interesting sidelights is a sheet which gives the twelve-note chord pitched a tone higher, and an instrumental—registral disposition of the chord that includes provision for a harp and celesta (later omitted) to share the same pitch material as the piano.

In its final version the group *B D F H* consists simply of string textures, but there is a suggestion in the sketches that section *B* might at one stage have included bassoon and bass clarinet *furtivamente* (foreshadowing *Mi-parti?*). On the whole, the sketches correspond closely to the score except that Lutosławski has added a few extra *mf > pp* entries in the final version of sections *D* and *H*. But two preliminary sketches for texture and harmony throw light on section *F* in particular. *F* is the shortest of the four and seems to be swamped by *E* and *G*. Lutosławski at one stage envisaged section *F* participating fully in a gradual change of texture as in either Example 9a or 9b. By the time he reached the detail of the harmonic plan this idea had been dropped and *F* was cut down to one event lasting a mere two seconds. The harmonic sketch for the group (Example 10) and the accompanying schematic diagrams for the part-writing (Example 11) show how carefully Lutosławski designed the pitch content: E natural is the solo pitch in *B D H*; the perfect fifth clusters are contained within octave E naturals; and the pairs of secondary seventh chords likewise exclude this pitch (compare bars 21-8 in the third movement of the *Three Postludes* (1960) for a similar use of secondary sevenths). These elements are then superimposed to create three different concertina progressions in sections *B D H*. *F*, denuded of such a context, still maintains its clear harmonic connection with the rest of the group.

Sketches are fascinating by their very nature and I have done no more here than outline the first conclusions I have drawn from the *Jeux vénitiens* sketches. They show a composer intent on combining a high degree of precision with a flair for variation—qualities that have always been admired in Lutosławski's music. That he should have explored such unexpected byways is not to be wondered at, rather that their appearances in published scores should have been so rare and yet so powerful.

Extracts from the sketches for Jeux vénitiens are quoted by kind permission of the composer. Example 3 is reproduced from the published score of the work by kind permission of Moeck Verlag (Alfred A. Kalmus Ltd).

Example 6

Example 7

Example 8

Example 9a

Tutti (B, D, F, H)

eg. B *pp* normal

D *sfp*

F $\frac{\text{mp}}{\text{pp}}$

H $\frac{\text{mp}}{\text{pp}}$

Example 9b

or : development along the lines of ab, bc, cd, da (that's good!) i.e.:

eg. B : normal, imperceptible and *sfp*

D : *sfp* and $\frac{\text{mp}}{\text{pp}}$

F : $\frac{\text{mp}}{\text{pp}}$ and $\frac{\text{mp}}{\text{pp}}$

H : $\frac{\text{mp}}{\text{pp}}$ and normal, imperceptible

start with one kind of attack, introduce the second gradually
!aaaaaabaabaabaababbaababbbb!

[the sign ! may will indicate the sectional divisions marked in the score by the percussion]

Example 10

Example 11

[the figures indicate the chromatic scale, F# = 1, F# = 2 etc.; the full significance of the yellow circles (given here in dots) and of the blue circles and squares is not clear]