TRADITIONAL JAPANESE AESTHETICS WITHIN A MODERN FRAME:

JAPANESE LITERARY SOURCES IN RELATION TO

TORU TAKEMITSU'S RAIN TREE SKETCHES

BY

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For centuries in Japan, certain aesthetic principles have shaped literature, fine arts, music, architecture, gardens, culture, and daily life. Some examples of these principles are impermanence, simplicity, naturalness, understatement, the balance of simple and complex, suggestion over explicitness, darkness, mystery, unconventionality, unworldliness, irregularity, asymmetry, and imperfection. Among the wide range of literature dealing with the subject of Japanese aesthetics, *Essays in Idleness* (ca. 1330) by Kenko Yoshida, *The Book of Tea* (1906) by Kakuzo Okakura, and *In Praise of Shadows* (1933) by Junichiro Tanizaki, are three of the most well-known and respected books by Japanese writers that explain these principles with great care and detail.

Toru Takemitsu (1930-1996) was a Japanese composer whose music shows a unique combination of the modern Western classical musical language from Europe, with the traditional Japanese aesthetic ideas listed above. Even though his early works showed a deliberate rejection of all that was related to the Japanese, and in the following few decades, he explored sophisticated experimental techniques that originated from Europe and America, Takemitsu, in his late period of composition, achieved an ideal subtle blending of East and West.

Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982) and *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992) are two works for solo piano that clearly capture the stylistic fusion of the composer's late style. In these works, he uses classical Western notation (primarily on two staves, treble and bass clefs, bar-lines, conventional rhythmic values, Italian tempo and dynamic markings) and compositional techniques (motif, sequence, repetition and recapitulation), in ways

that evoke elements of traditional Japanese aesthetics. Additionally, the aspects of the music that are considered modern in terms of the Western musical language (for example, irregular rhythmic groupings, unmarked changing meters, fragmentation, atonality, and octatonicism), can also be related to traditional Japanese aesthetic principles that have existed for hundreds of years.

Many studies of Takemitsu's music have been from a theoretical angle, focusing on pitch collections and set-class theory. I would like to explore his music from a different angle: by presenting ideas and passages from the three literary works listed in the first paragraph, as well as from Takemitsu's own writings on music and aesthetics, I will show how these abstract and often ancient ideas can be related to specific passages and compositional techniques in Takemitsu's modern language.

CHAPTER 2: TAKEMITSU BACKGROUND

Toru Takemitsu was born on October 8, 1930, in Tokyo, Japan. Although neither of his parents were professional musicians, his father was a *shakuhachi* (Japanese vertical flute) player, and an enthusiastic collector of jazz records. This introduced Toru at an early age to both Eastern and Western musical styles. At the age of 14, during the Second World War, Takemitsu was sent to do work in a provisions base in the province of Saitama, where he heard a French *chanson* being played on a gramophone by a fellow soldier. Having never heard Western classical music before because of its ban by the Japanese government, he was astonished by its beauty and was deeply moved. This experience, along with hearing César Franck's *Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue* on a Japanese radio broadcast, were pivotal moments in Takemitsu's career choice: he knew he needed to become a composer.

After the war, Takemitsu was ill with tuberculosis and spent much time in the hospital. He used this opportunity to familiarize himself with music from the Western world, through radio broadcasts that played Western classical music during the American occupation of Japan. After his recovery, Takemitsu studied briefly with fellow Japanese composer Yasuji Kiyose (1900-81) in 1948, but left him after only a few months, preferring to learn on his own. While studying with Kiyose, Takemitsu was invited to take part in a group of Japanese nationalist and conservative composers, led by senior members Yoritsune Matsudaira and Fumio Hayasaka. The group, named *Shinsakkyokuka* ("New Composition Group"), consisted of the above-mentioned composers in addition to several others, and organized concerts to premiere new compositions. After the debut

performance of Takemitsu's first solo piano work (*Lento in Due Movimenti*) was criticized harshly in the newspaper, the composer was deeply hurt and lost much of his confidence.

After the failure of *Lento*, Takemitsu wished to try out a new approach, and in 1951, he, along with music critic and poet Kuniharu Akiyama, composer Joji Yuasa, and several other colleagues, founded a new group named *Jikken Kobo* ("Experimental Workshop"). This group was interested in avant-garde experimentation. The mentality of this group differed from the *Shinsakkyokuka* in that it was anti-academic and anti-Japanese-tradition. Traditional Japanese music brought back miserable memories of the war for many of these younger composers, so they sought out experimental techniques that were as far from it as possible.

Over the next decades, Takemitsu's music covered a wide range of experimental techniques, including serialism, graphic notation, and indeterminacy. However, in the late 1970s, a much simpler style emerged, and remained until the composer's death in 1996. It is in this late period that Takemitsu "was eventually to achieve the most successful integration of 'Eastern' and 'Western' elements of any Japanese composer to date."[1]

Representative of the late style, *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982) and *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992) were among Takemitsu's last compositions, and were the last two works written for solo piano (another late work, *Litany*, written between the *Rain Tree Sketches*, is a re-composition of the previously mentioned debut piece *Lento in Due Movimenti* from the 1950s). The titles are derived from the title of a short story named *A Clever Rain Tree*

[1] Peter Burt, *The Music of Toru Takemitsu* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 112.

(1980) by the Japanese author and friend of the Takemitsu, Kenzaburo Oe, but the music is nevertheless devoid of programs or specific non-musical associations.

CHAPTER 3: JAPANESE AESTHETICS LITERATURE

The three Japanese books, *Essays in Idleness* (ca. 1330), *The Book of Tea* (1906), and *In Praise of Shadows* (1933), are unique in their format and style but share with one another Japanese ideas about what is considered tasteful and beautiful.

Essay in Idleness was written by the Buddhist monk Kenko Yoshida (ca. 1283-ca. 1350), who began his life in the Imperial palace, but later retired to live as a hermit in a Zen temple in what is now modern Yokohama city. The format of the book is a collection of 243 short essays on random topics, organized in a haphazard way. They range from one line to several pages long and consist of stories, anecdotes, ideas about aesthetics, lists, and fragments of thoughts.

The genre of random compositional style is called *Zuihitsu* in Japanese, meaning "follow the brush," an allusion to the genre author's thoughts not being planned, but rather being directed wherever his brush takes them. This method adheres to many of the Japanese aesthetic principles: simplicity (they are all very brief essays with only one central idea in each), naturalness and irregularity (like some elements of nature, they flow from one idea to the next without planning), impermanence (each thought is presented as a fleeting one as the topics change from page to page), and mystery (the author's style is often vague, leaving a lot up to the reader's interpretation).

The Book of Tea was written in English in 1906 by the Japanese scholar Kakuzo Okakura (1862-1913), during a time when Japan was re-opening its doors to the Western world after 200 years of isolation, leading to the country's attempt to Westernize as many aspects of life as possible. Okakura's goal was to remind the Japanese people of their

native culture, and to introduce it to Western readers through his use of the English language. Even though tea is the main topic of the book, it is merely a channel through which Okakura can discuss other elements of traditional aesthetics. Unlike *Essays in Idleness*, this work is divided into chapters.

Junicihiro Tanizaki's (1886-1965) *In Praise of Shadows* was written in 1933 in Japanese and translated into English in 1977. Like *Essays in Idleness*, it is written in a stream-of-consciousness style, without chapters or a logical sequence of topics. Tanizaki's main topics of discussion are the contrasts between Western and Japanese aesthetics, both literally and metaphorically, and the longing to cling to tradition in a world where modernity is taking over. Subtopics include architecture, food, crafts and fine arts.

The three books, *Essays in Idleness*, *The Book of Tea*, and *In Praise of Shadows*, delve into all of the predominant principles of Japanese aesthetics: impermanence, simplicity, naturalness, understatement, the balance of simple and complex, suggestion over explicitness, darkness, mystery, unconventionality, unworldliness, irregularity, asymmetry, and imperfection. In the next chapters of this essay, I will relate these ideas to specific passages in Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II*.

CHAPTER 4: *MONO NO AWARE*

The Japanese phrase *mono no aware* translates approximately to "the sadness of things" or "sensitivity to things"; more specifically, it is the subtle feeling of sadness created by the transience of life, nature, and art. A well-known example of this is the Japanese culture's appreciation for cherry blossoms: the flowers bloom all over the country, and then fade after only a week. Impermanence is explained in the following passage from Kenko's *Essays in Idleness*:

> "If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribeyama, but lingered on forever in the world, how things would lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty."[2]

This passage implies that the things that move us the most strongly are those that are impermanent; if the cherry blossoms were permanently in bloom, they would no longer have emotional power. Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketches* are full of the feeling of *mono no aware* in their frequent evocations of fading into nothingness, and fleetingness of the arrival points.

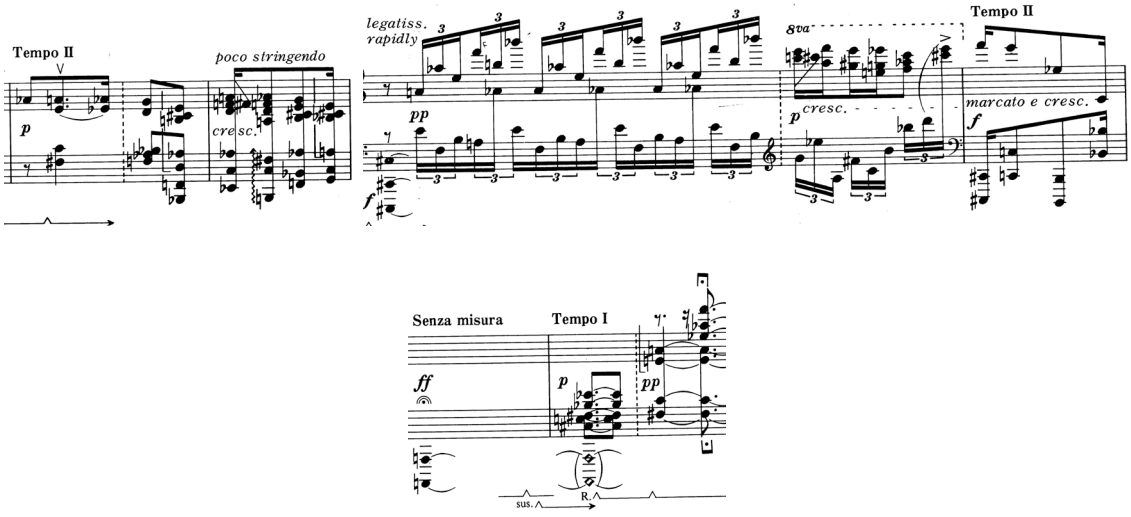
The term arrival point designates a part of the music that occurs after preparation and build-up of tension; these were essential parts of music from the Classical and Romantic eras. *Rain Tree Sketch* has a few distinctive arrival points, while the second has none. However, several things weaken the arrivals, turning them into transitory moments.

The first arrival point is preceded by considerable buildup and is instead like a sudden outburst that is almost immediately forgotten as the music changes into the

[2] Kenko Yoshida, *Essays in Idleness,* trans. Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 7.

something calmer immediately after, "vanishing" or "fading away" in Kenko's words. Example 4.1 shows the first arrival point in *Rain Tree Sketch*. The *forte* low C-sharp triple octave can also be regarded as an arrival, but the music barely settles on it for less than one second before moving onto pianissimo passagework in both hands. The *fortissimo* low A octave in the left hand is the real arrival point of the work, but its impact is softened because there is very little buildup and no winding-down time afterwards. The crescendos leading up to the two loud bass notes last a second or two each, and in both cases, the music stops abruptly and becomes quiet immediately afterwards. The impression one gets is that the climactic bass notes just "happened" without preparation, similar to a thunderclap or the sound of a tree falling, rather than the emotional or structural buildups that were common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

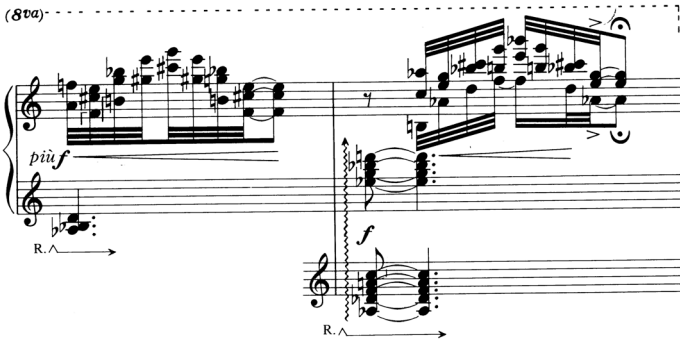
Example 4.1: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm 31-36



The other arrival point (see Example 4.2) is preceded a longer buildup, but several things weaken it: there is no bass note, the loudest downbeat is a rolled chord, and the

final accented chord is an offbeat and is marked with a fermata. The lack of a bass note reduces the volume drastically, a rolled chord sounds much softer than a solid one, and an off-beat accent feels less settled than a down-beat accent. Also contributing to its impermanence is the quick fading of sound of the high register of the instrument.

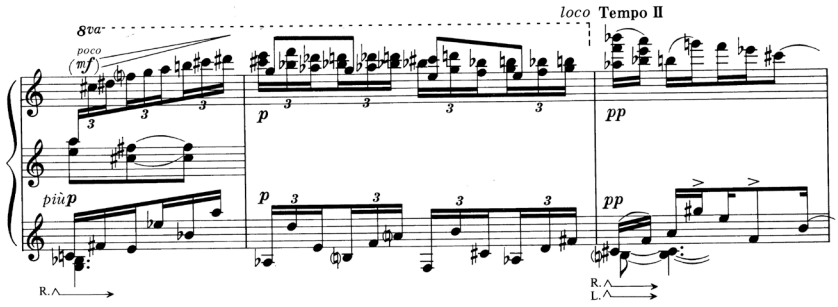
Example 4.2: *Rain Tree Sketch,* mm. 42-43



Another element of impermanence is Takemitsu's treatment of returns. The large-scale form of both *Rain Tree Sketches* is roughly ABA, but the returns of the opening sections are handled passively. This again goes against eighteenth and nineteenth century practice, where recapitulations are highly important structural and emotional points.

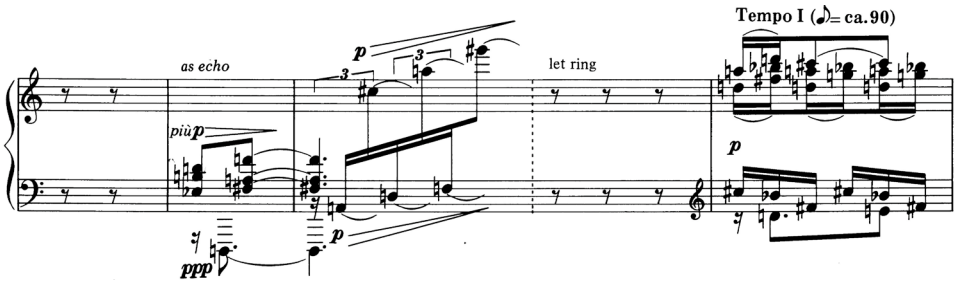
In *Rain Tree Sketch*, the return occurs without a break or set-up and skips the first line of music. It is blended so subtly with the preceding material that it is heard merely as a transient moment rather than an important event (see Example 4.3, the return occurs at "Tempo II")

Example 4.3: *Rain Tree Sketch,* mm. 45-47



In *Rain Tree Sketch II*, the return of the opening material is preceded by a measure of rests, and it begins exactly as it did at the opening. This makes it more clearly defined than *Rain Tree Sketch*'s return, but once again the feeling is transitory because of the lack of preparation and inconspicuous character of the opening music (see Example 4.4, the return at occurs at "Tempo I"). Rather than the feeling of resolution, the return simply appears out of silence without calling any attention to itself.

Example 4.4: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 33-35



Both *Rain Tree Sketches* end with a coda featuring extremely low and *pianissimo* bass notes, and rising lines in the treble. These both suggest fleetingness in their use of sustained bass notes, whose sounds fade more perceptibly than short bass notes, and in their use of thinly textured upper voices in rising lines, suggesting rising into the heavens like the smoke described in the passage by Kenko (see p. 8).

There are many other instances of rising lines marked by *diminuendo* in both works, followed by rests that allow the sounds to fade before moving on to the next idea. Timothy Koozin, one of the most prominent Takemitsu researchers, describes this phenomenon, summarizing the preceding chapter:

> "Takemitsu's music often hovers on the threshold between sound and silence, with musical gestures which characteristically begin softly and gradually fade to inaudibility. […] The lack of any clear point of termination in such gestural endings creates the effect of drawing the surrounding silence into the music as an active presence. This is often accomplished without long spans of total silence. More often, sustained, fading sonorities are used to create an atmosphere of intense, rarefied quietude."[3]

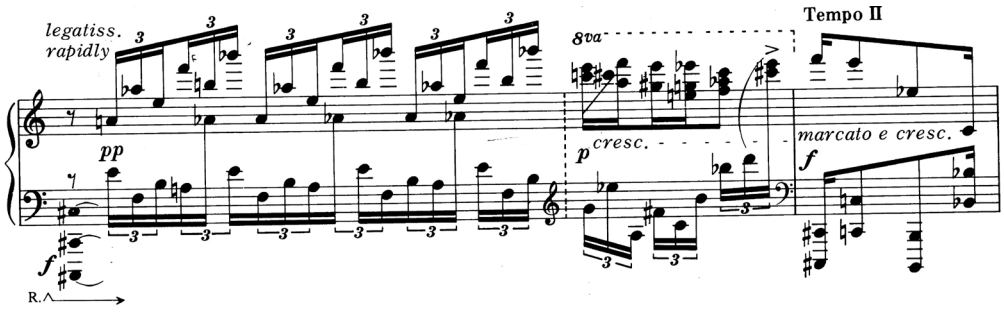
[3] Timothy Koozin, "Spiritual-temporal imagery in music of Olivier Messiaen and Toru Takemitsu," *Contemporary Music Review* 7: no. 2 (1993): 189.

CHAPTER 5: *SHIZEN AND KANSO*

The concepts of *shizen* (naturalness and lacking artificiality), and *kanso* (simplicity and lacking unnecessary clutter) are evident in many aspects of both *Rain Tree Sketches*.

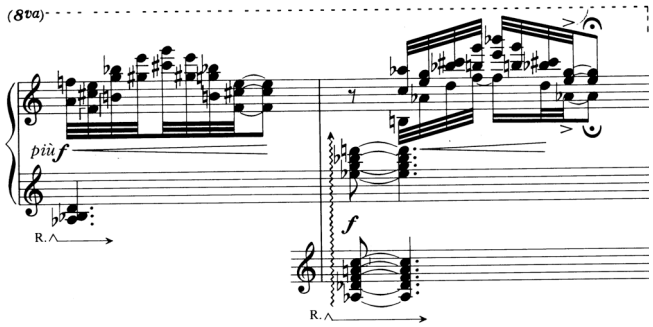
Kenko writes in *Essays in Idleness*: "It is excellent for a man to be simple in his tastes, to avoid extravagance, to own no possessions, to entertain no craving for worldly success. It has been true since ancient days that wise men are rarely rich."[4] We can relate several of the points here to both of Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketches*. First of all, the titles are very modest: "*Sketch*" suggests a work of minor importance or an incomplete piece. Secondly, the avoidance of extravagance is apparent in the lack of virtuoso passages. *Rain Tree Sketch II* is completely devoid of passages written for display, while *Rain Tree Sketch* has a few brief passages resembling the virtuoso piano writing of the past two centuries (for example, fast passagework, octaves and leaps). These are climactic moments that last only a few seconds each (see Examples 5.1 and 5.2).

Example 5.1, *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 33-34



[4] Kenko, 17-18.

Example 5.2: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 42-43



Kenko also mentions the advantage of having space in a home: "People agree that a house which has plenty of spare room is attractive to look at and may be put to many different uses."[5] In music, space is represented by rests and sustained sonorities without any activity occurring around them. Both *Rain Tree Sketches* have plenty of these two ideas: full measures of rest occur in almost every line of music, and fermatas on sustained notes can be found at key structural moments. The importance of the fermata is especially evident in *Rain Tree Sketch*, where Takemitsu specifies three different lengths.

Okakura writes in *The Book of Tea*, in reference to the various different ways the Japanese characters of "tea house" can be read:

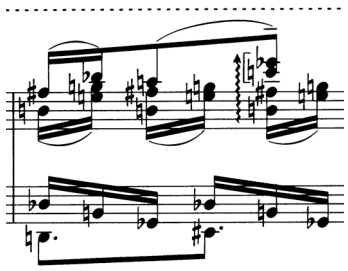
> "It is an Abode of Vacancy inasmuch as it is devoid of ornamentation except for what may be placed in it to satisfy some aesthetic need of the moment. […] The ideals of Teaism have since the sixteenth century influenced our architecture to such a degree that the ordinary Japanese interior of the present day, on account of the extreme simplicity and chasteness of its scheme of decoration, appears to foreigners almost barren."[6]

Matching Okakura's description, both of Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketches* are both devoid of ornamentation or decoration (mordents, turns, trills, or grace notes). Also, there are

[5] Kenko, 51.
[6] Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea* (Rutland VT.: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1956), 75-76.

very few passages resembling purely accompanimental figuration; instead, secondary voices are short motifs that move in similar motion and rhythm to the top voice. The closest thing to decoration would be chords marked with an arpeggiation symbol, which occur only once in each *Rain Tree Sketch* (see Example 5.2 on p. 14 and Example 5.3 below).

Example 5.3: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, m. 5



Here is another passage made by Okakura: "The tea-room is unimpressive in appearance. It is smaller than the smallest of Japanese houses, while the materials used in its construction are intended to give the suggestion of refined poverty."[7] Takemitsu follows these two ideas in several ways. Relating to the word "unimpressive" is his use of the word "sketch" in the titles and the lack of virtuoso display passages. Also, looking at the printed score reveals a generally bare musical language. When compared to many other contemporary music scores, it is relatively sparse in its markings and textures, although there are a few moments of differences in dynamics among simultaneous voices, and different degrees of accents marked on certain notes or chords, . Both *Rain*

[7] Okakura, 77.

Tree Sketches are under four minutes long, making them smaller than most stand-alone works, and conforming to the idea of sparseness of the tea-room.

Simplicity in a musical work makes events of importance stand out with more emphasis than if those same events took place in the context of a complex work. In Japanese aesthetics, a relevant comparison would be to the Zen garden, where an individual stone could represent a mountain in the mind of the viewer.

Takemitsu writes:

> "Music is either sound or silence. As long as I live I shall choose sound as something to confront a silence. That sound should be a single, strong sound. I wonder if the task of the composer should not be that of presenting the basic unaltered form of music. I would like to cut away the excess to be able to grasp the essential sound."[8]

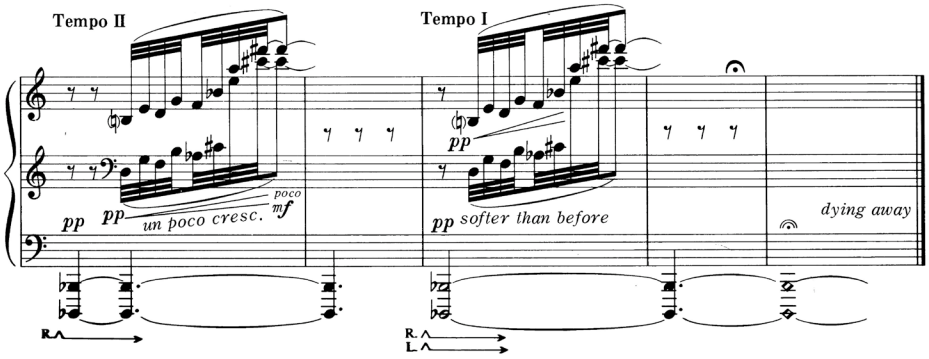
Here, we can see how his approach to composition is similar to the "single stone" notion of the Zen garden, as well as his allusion to avoiding excess (*kanso)*. In both *Rain Tree Sketches*, one way that Takemitsu creates these single events is through his economy of bass notes.

[8] Toru Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence: Selected Writings*, trans. Glenn Glasgow and Yoshiko Kakudo, (Berkeley, CA.: Fallen Leaf Press, 1995), 5.

In *Rain Tree Sketch*, the first bass note, a low F, occurs halfway through the piece (everything before takes place with both hands in the treble clef).

The next few bass notes create a line (C#-C-B-B♭) leading to the climactic low A (the lowest note on the piano) marked *fortissimo* (see Example 4.1 on p. 9). There are no bass notes between this point and the very last line of music, which has two pianissimo low B♭ octaves (see Example 5.4).

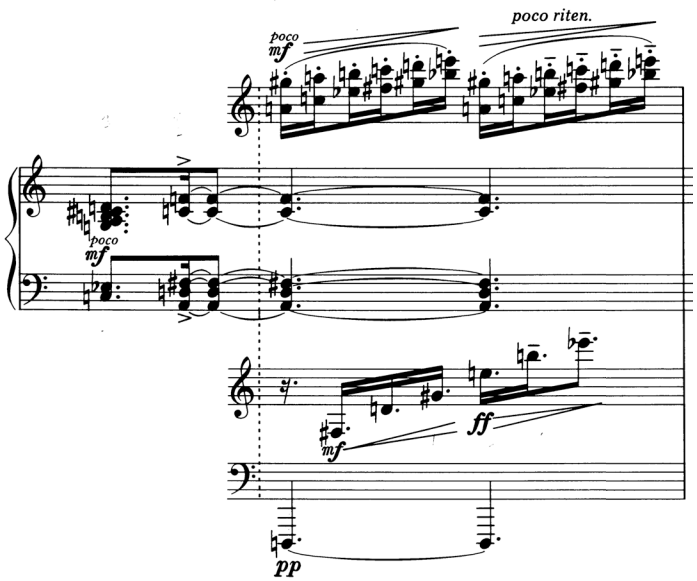
Example 5.4: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 61-65



In *Rain Tree Sketch II*, there are around the same number of bass notes as in *Rain Tree Sketch*, but here, they are all the same pitch (the lowest D on the keyboard) and are all marked *pianissimo* or *pianississimo* (unlike *Rain Tree Sketch*, which had *forte* left-hand octaves in the bass at the climax). Another difference is that there are no octaves in the bass register; instead, all of the bass notes are single pitches.

In both *Rain Tree Sketches*, only one note is marked *fortissimo*. The low A octave (see Example 4.1 on p. 9) in *Rain Tree Sketch* stands out because of its dynamic level, in addition to its position at the lowest extremity of the keyboard. In *Rain Tree Sketch II*, the single *fortissimo* note is the central note of a six-note rising line, about two-thirds of the way through the piece (see Example 5.5). In both pieces there is a minimal build-up before these single *fortissimo* notes and silences shortly after; this causes them to be interpreted as distinctive events, like a solitary stone in a portion of a garden that is otherwise mainly sand.

Example 5.5: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, m. 30



CHAPTER 6: *SHIBUI*

The term *shibui* in Japanese aesthetics implies understated beauty and is characterized by balancing the simple with the complex. The complexities should be subtle enough that they interfere with the apparent simplicity, as the artwork must still give the impression of always allowing new discoveries to be made in order to appreciate its beauty more and more as time goes on.

Okakura gives some examples of the subtle contradictions of simple and complex:

> "Even in the daytime the light in the room is subdued, for the low eaves of the slanting roof admit but few of the sun's rays. Everything is sober in tint from the ceiling to the floor; the guests themselves have carefully chosen garments of unobtrusive colours. […] However faded the tea-room and tea-equipage may seem, everything is absolutely clean. Not a particle of dust will be found in the darkest corner, for if any exists the host is not a tea-master. One of the first requisites of a tea-master is the knowledge of how to sweep, clean, and wash, for there is an art in cleaning and dusting."[9]

The careful choosing of garments to be unobtrusive, the room purposely being designed to have low eaves to maintain the "sober tint", and the meticulous cleaning to eliminate all dust, all show the thorough preparation needed to make the tea-room aesthetically pleasing. Despite this, there must still be an aura of fadedness and age.

In both *Rain Tree Sketches*, Takemitsu creates a seemingly simple musical language, but when examined closely, we can see the amount of care that he put into the rhythm and sonority. In the following passage, he explains his method of composing:

> "The listener need not understand the different operations discussed here. Actually I have my own theories of structure and systematic procedure, but I wish to avoid overemphasizing these. My music is composed as if fragments were

[9] Okakura, 83-84.

> thrown together unstructured, as in dreams. You go to a far place and suddenly find yourself back home without having noticed the return."[10]

Takemitsu informs us that he does have his own methods of composition but that he would like his music to be perceived as unstructured fragments; this is the kind of combination of complexity and simplicity that *shibui* entails.

Rhythmically, both *Rain Tree Sketches* are very specifically notated and occasionally somewhat complex to play, but they never sound complicated or busy. In the composer's prefatory notes for *Rain Tree Sketch*, Takemitsu designates three different lengths of fermata: short, medium, and very long. But he specify exactly how long (in seconds) each should be, leaving room for flexibility. Cross-rhythms of two against three between the two hands occur several times in both works, and there is one three against four passage in *Rain Tree Sketch*, but otherwise, there are no complex cross-rhythms to be found.

Sometimes there are seemingly complex groupings of notes, but these only create subtle variety and never sound complicated. For example, there are two passages in *Rain Tree Sketch* that have the two hands playing different groupings of notes in repeating cycles with the same note values. The first (see Example 5.1 on p. 13) is written in triplet sixteenth notes, but the left hand plays groups of five while the right hand plays groups of six. However, the complexity is barely detectable by the ear.

Also, the passage of sixteenth notes on the third page (see Example 6.1) looks extremely complex on paper and is extremely difficult to play because of the awkward intervals and hand redistribution, but it sounds like the natural randomness of raindrops falling from the leaves of a large tree. Here, both hands play regular sixteenth-notes,

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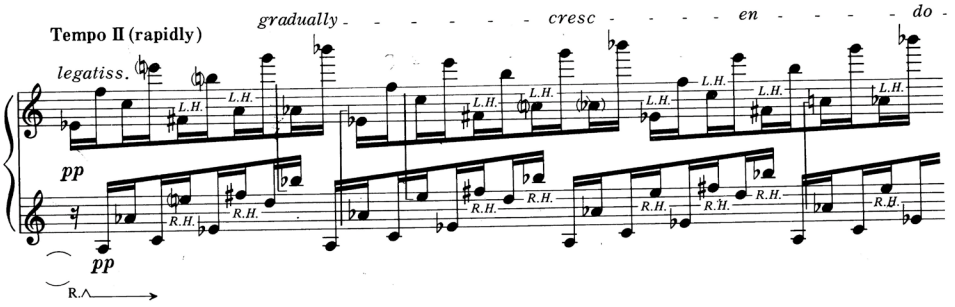
[10] Takemitsu, 106.

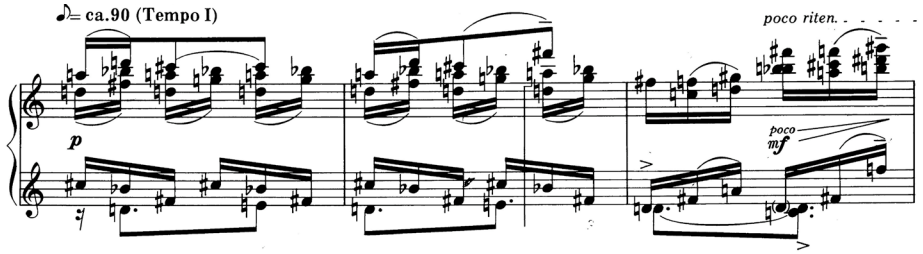
grouped into twos, with the right hand playing groups of ten notes and the left hand playing groups of eight notes. The left hand is displaced rhythmically in relation to the right hand by one sixteenth note.

Example 6.1: *Rain Tree Sketch*, m. 40



The opening of *Rain Tree Sketch II* features two rhythmic complexities: the combination of the groupings of sixteenth notes between the two hands (3/8 in the right hand, and 6/16 in the left hand), and the irregular placement of the lower voice in the left hand (D-E), which alternates between matching the 6/16 grouping and being displaced one sixteenth-note. However, as in the examples described in *Rain Tree Sketch*, these subtle complexities are hardly noticeable when listening (see Example 6.2).

Example 6.2: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 1-3



In both *Rain Tree Sketches*, rests are frequently used to separate fragments of several measures each. They are always specific lengths and change subtly from space to space. In *Rain Tree Sketch*, the number of sixteenth-note rests of the spaces on the first page are 5, 3, 3, 5, 2; in the second, they are 4, 2, 2, 6. The periods of silence between the distinctive section changes are slightly longer than those within sections, but to the listener, these differences are not very perceivable because of the lack of strong rhythmic impulse throughout most of the music. Consequently, when the music stops, the listener is not left with a beat to follow and just accepts each period of rest as an unmeasured silence.

Takemitsu chooses combinations of notes extremely carefully, especially in *Rain Tree Sketch*, where the entire work contains no doubled pitches in any vertical sonority aside from the occasional open octaves. Although this shows a certain degree of strictness, it is far looser than the serial technique or other methods of controlled composition in that there are often inconsistencies from chord to chord if analyzing by pitch-class set theory. Takemitsu's goal in never doubling pitches in chords is to create an impression of never being settled; it is not a compositional method. In his own words: "Too often these days creativity is nothing but the invention of methods. When aesthetics becomes so sharp and distinguished, art becomes weak."[11]

[11] Takemitsu, 13.

CHAPTER 7: *YUGEN*

Yugen is an aesthetic concept that implies subtle profundity, suggestion rather than revelation, mystery, and darkness. Takemitsu applies this idea to both of the *Rain Tree Sketches*, and also to his article-writing style. As described by Sawako Taniyama in her article about Takemitsu's musical philosophy: "Takemitsu is not a systematic philosopher of music and much of his writing tends to be confusing."[12] However, this ambiguity is seen as a positive quality, as Takemitsu himself writes in the introduction to his book *Confronting Silence* (a collection of his own writings translated from Japanese into English): "In addition, aware of the beauty and ambiguity of the Japanese language, I am concerned about how much of its nuance will remain in translation."[13]

One factor contributing to the ambiguity of the Japanese language is the frequent omission of sentence subjects and articles. We can compare this to the lack of basic classical musical elements in both *Rain Tree Sketches*, such as time signature, regular pulse, and tonality throughout (there are only hints of major and minor and these are infrequent). Also similar to the ambiguity of the Japanese language are the openings (see Example 7.1) and closings (see Example 7.2) of both works: they start indistinctly like a sentence without a subject and end with an ellipsis (the linguistic device used for signifying an incomplete thought).

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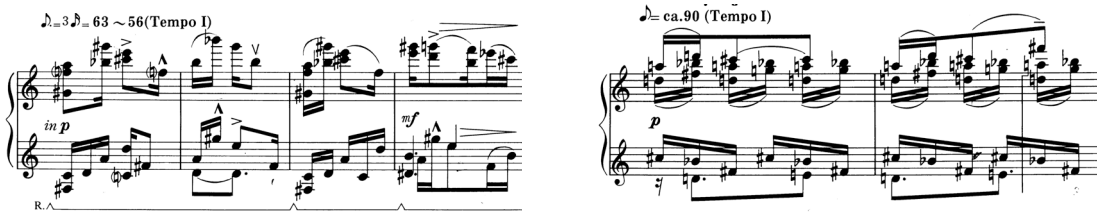
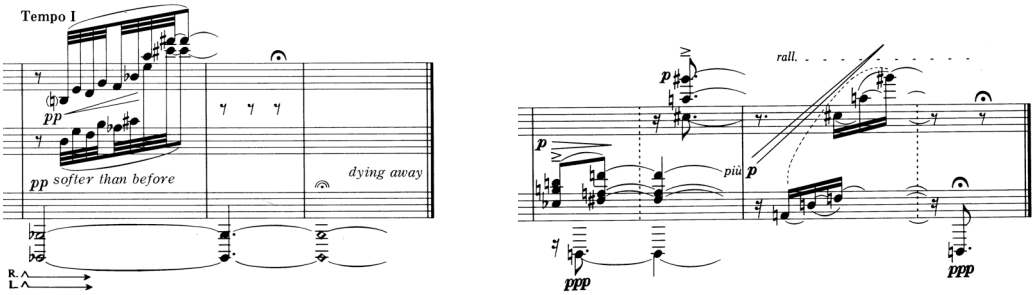
[12] Sawako Taniyama, "The Development of Toru Takemitsu's Musical Philosophy," *Kobe Joshi Tankidaigaku Ronko* 37 (1991): 78.
[13] Takemitsu, ix.

Example 7.1: *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II*, opening measures



Example 7.2: *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II*, closing measures



Both works end with a very quiet passage in the high register followed by the sonority of an even quieter bass note. In *Rain Tree Sketch*, the harmonics symbol (the diamond-shaped note) on the low B♭ octave is ambiguous because there is no indication to release the damper pedal. However, the separate bar line seems to indicate that the only sound remaining should be the mysterious sound of the harmonic. Because the final notes of both works are held sonorities that fade into nothingness, their sense of finality is weakened. A staccato final bass note or extended final chord that is cut off abruptly, would always sound more final.

The large-scale form of both *Rain Tree Sketches* is roughly ABA, but it is impossible determine exactly where the middle sections start. In both works, by the time clearly contrasting new material ("*rapidly*" in *Rain Tree Sketch* and "Joyful" in *Rain Tree*

Sketch II) is introduced, that point seems too far into the piece to call it the beginning of the B section.

Okakura explains the Japanese people's love of suggestion over revelation:

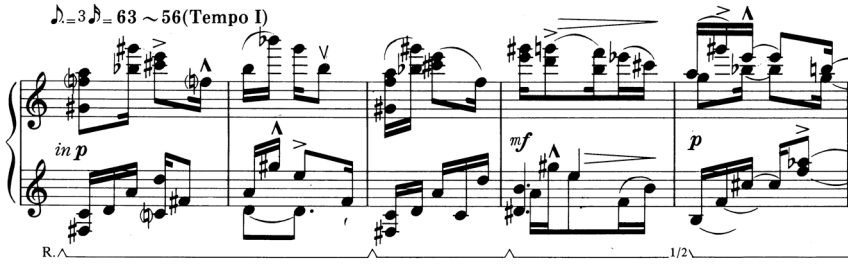
> "Charles Lamb, a professed devotee, sounded the true note of Teaism when he wrote that the greatest pleasure he knew was to do a good action by stealth, and to have it found out by accident. For Teaism is the art of concealing beauty that you may discover it, of suggesting what you dare not reveal."[14]

Several aspects of the *Rain Tree Sketches* are suggestive rather than explicit. These include pedaling, dynamics and tempo. Adding to the sense of mystery, it is impossible to know whether Takemitsu deliberately made these choices or whether they were simply inconsistencies in the printing.

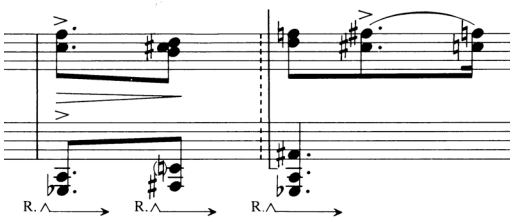
[14] Okakura, 38.

In *Rain Tree Sketch*, Takemitsu sometimes uses the traditional horizontal line with __∧__ to indicate a pedal change (see Example 7.3), but other times he simply adds a right-pointing arrow to the pedal line, even when the next pedal change is close by (see Example 7.4). Perhaps the pedal markings with the arrows indicate phrasing (pedal changes after the lines broken by the arrows could be felt more as phrase beginnings, while the other changes are more continuous), but the interpretation is left up to the performer, as there is no explanation about the difference.

Example 7.3: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 1-5



Example 7.4: *Rain Tree Sketch*, m. 19



Rain Tree Sketch II has different kinds of pedal ambiguities. Takemitsu abandons the arrow notation from *Rain Tree Sketch*; instead, the pedal lines are sometimes broken by the indication *ad lib.*, leaving the pedaling unmarked for several lines at a time. The

first few lines have no pedal markings, but one assumes that the pedal should be used because of the nature of the texture and "Celestially Light" marking at the beginning. "Celestial" implies endless space, so playing without pedal would go against this direction. The texture is very thin and in the middle-high register of the piano, so the pedal is necessary to avoid a brittle and disconnected sound.

The dynamics in the two works are usually conventional, but we sometimes find mysterious directions with ambiguous meanings. The opening line of *Rain Tree Sketch* contains two *piano* dynamics; the first is "*in **p***" and the second is simply ***p*** (see Example 7.3 on p. 26). The next two lines then have "*in **pp***" and ***pp***. Though it is not explained anywhere in the prefatory notes, when using the word "in", we can assume that Takemitsu wanted to instruct the performer to convey the feeling of a specific dynamic, rather the play at a specific volume level. In both *Rain Tree Sketches*, we can find examples of the dynamic *poco **mf***. While *poco **f*** is a common dynamic, Takemitsu's *poco **mf*** is not, and one must interpret what it might mean. Most likely, it indicates a moderately loud volume with the character of tentativeness; the *poco* and *mezzo* together serve to emphasize this tentativeness.

Likewise, most of the other indications are preceded by *poco*, corresponding to the concept of suggestion over revelation, and understatement over exaggeration: *poco piu mosso*, *poco meno mosso*, *poco rallentando*, *poco stringendo*, *poco ritenuto*, and *un poco crescendo*. These occur multiple times in both pieces. The only directions that suggest extremity are *molto diminuendo, legatissimo*, and *marcato*; of these three, only *marcato* implies overstatement (but lasts for only one measure), while the other two are associated with understatement.

The octatonic scale is a very important element of Takemitsu's musical language. In the *Rain Tree Sketches*, he is never strict about following this scale, but we do find it much more frequently than major/minor or random pitch clusters. There are numerous ways that make it relevant to Japanese aesthetic of *yugen*. One of these is the lack of a tonal center, making chords or melodic passages based on the octatonic pitch collection feel unsettled. A floating or dreamlike quality is commonly associated with the octatonic scale, and this fits suitably with both Takemitsu's musical style and the Japanese aesthetic style.

Another aspect of octatonicism related to *yugen* is its closeness to the minor scale because of this scale's association with darkness. The octatonic collection can be arranged so that it forms the first four notes of the minor scale stacked into one octave (i.e. C-D-E♭-F-F#-G#-A-B is the first four notes of c minor, followed by the first four notes of f# minor).

Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows* features many descriptions of the Japanese love for darkness. For example:

> "As a general matter we find it hard to be really at home with things that shine and glitter. The Westerner uses silver and steel and nickel tableware, and polishes it to a fine brilliance, but we object to the practice. While we do sometimes indeed use silver for teakettles, decanters, or saké cups, we prefer not to polish it. On the contrary, we begin to enjoy it only when the luster has worn off, when it has begun to take on a dark smoky patina."[15]

In both *Rain Tree Sketches*, if we associate tonality and distinct articulation to brilliance and shine, then Takemitsu's preference for octatonicism and ambiguity adheres more closely to Tanizaki's dark smoky patina.

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[15] Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward Seidensticker (New Haven CT.: Leete's Island Books, 1977), 10.

CHAPTER 8: *DATSUZOKU*

Datsuzoku translates to unworldliness and unconventionality. Frequently in Japanese art, elements of supernatural or the unexplainable appear; these are meant to be accepted as they are without needing to ask the questions "why?" or "how?"

Unworldliness is linked to the concept of detachment, which applies not only to art, but also to social behavior. Kenko writes "The man of breeding never appears to abandon himself completely to his pleasures; even his manner of enjoyment is detached."[16] Similarly, a performance of Takemitsu's music should not give the impression of deep emotional involvement or exaggerated expression. Rather, more attention should be given to the sounds of the notes and their relation to one another. Takemitsu writes:

> "I wish to free sounds from the trite rules of music, rules that are in turn stifled by formulas and calculations. I want to give sounds the freedom to breathe. Rather than on the ideology of self-expression, music should be based on a profound relationship to nature – sometimes gentle, sometimes harsh. When sounds are possessed by ideas instead of having their own identity, music suffers."[17]

Conforming to this attitude, neither of the *Rain Tree Sketches* have many expression markings. *Rain Tree Sketch* has tempo markings, but not the traditional Italian tempo markings that have associations with specific characters; instead Takemitsu gives metronome markings and distinguishes between "Tempo I" and "Tempo II." The remaining markings (excluding dynamics) are *poco rallentando*, *poco stringendo*, *legatissimo*, *rapidly*, *senza misura*, *marcato*, and *dying away*. None of these words have any connection with the expression of emotions.

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[16] Kenko, 115.
[17] Takemitsu, 4.

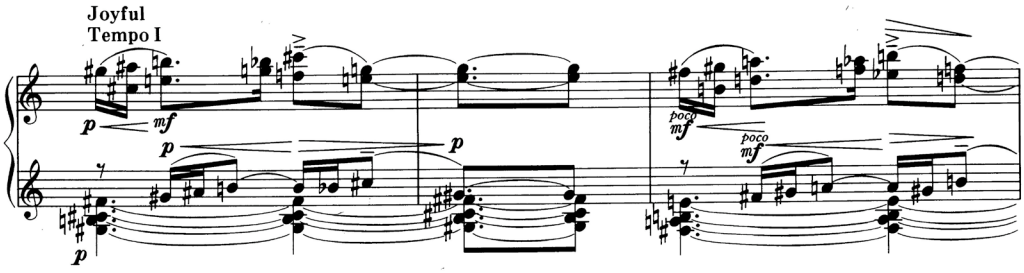
Rain Tree Sketch II is only slightly more descriptive in its directions. In addition to many of the same tempo markings as in *Rain Tree Sketch*, there are two more directions: "Celestially Light" at the opening and its return in the second half of the work, and "Joyful" in the middle section. Takemitsu's choice of the words "celestially" and "light" is to keep a sense of vagueness, as it is impossible to define exactly how music can sound "celestially light," and "light" can mean either bright or not heavy. In place of a more conventional adverb like "very" or "playfully," he chose a word that relates to the skies and heavens instead of to human emotion. Takemitsu quotes Japanese author Yukio Mishima in the following passage, which explains how the spiritual world takes precedence over human relationships in the Japanese language:

> "[Mishima]: The Japanese language consists of sentences that easily eliminate the subject. […] This simplifying technique, which includes the elimination of the third person and mixing of "he" and "I," places the novel in the reader's own spiritual world at the expense of social and human relationships."[18]

[18] Takemitsu, 11.

The "Joyful" section is ironic because the harmonies implied both vertically and horizontally are closer to minor than major (see Example 8.1). The first notes of the melody (the top voice of the right hand, with an imitation in canon in the left hand one eighth-note later) are G#-A#-B-B♭- C#-G (or G# - in the left hand imitation), forming the g# minor lower tetrachord. Also, the lowest note in the accompanying chord is a g# minor seventh chord (with an added C#); together, these two elements give the passage a predominantly minor feel. Being instructed to play joyfully when the passage has more of a melancholy feel conveys *datsuzoku*.

Example 8.1: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 19-21



Playing sad music that is marked "joyful" is similar to what Kenko expresses in the following passage:

> "Are we to look at the cherry blossoms only in full bloom, the moon only when it is cloudless? To long for the moon while looking on the rain, to lower the blinds and be unaware of the passing of the spring – these are even more deeply moving. Branches about to blossom or gardens strewn with faded flowers are worthier of our admiration."[19]

[19] Kenko, 115.

Rather than writing a passage hinting at a major key, Takemitsu deprives the full emotion of joy by writing closer to the minor mode, as if the rain or the lowered blinds are obstructing the joy.

Similarly, Tanizaki writes:

> "In the cuisine of any country efforts no doubt are made to have the food harmonize with the tableware and the walls, but with Japanese food, a brightly lighted room and shining tableware cut the appetite in half. The dark miso soup that we eat every morning is one dish from the dimly lit houses of the past. I was once invited to a tea ceremony where miso was served, and when I saw the muddy claylike color, quiet in a black lacquer bowl beneath the faint light of a candle, this soup that I usually take without a second thought seemed somehow to acquire a real depth, and to become infinitely more appetizing as well."[20]

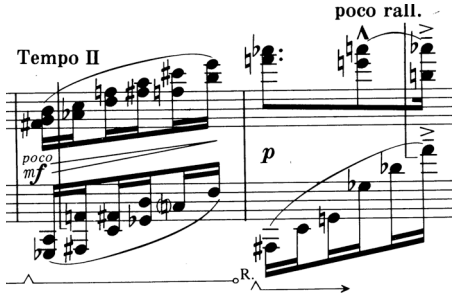
Probably Takemitsu's sense of joy is farther from the Western "brightly lighted room and shining tableware" closer to the "faint light of a candle." The music itself with its minor mode inflections is the miso soup with its "muddy claylike color." As Tanizaki's book title "*In Praise of Shadows*" suggests, there is joy in darkness.

Takemitsu uses the pedal in both *Rain Tree Sketches* to create a constant sense of etherealness and delicate cloudiness. Along with the octatonic pitch collections and combination of the high register of the piano with extremely low and quiet bass notes, the pedal also creates an atmosphere of otherworldliness.

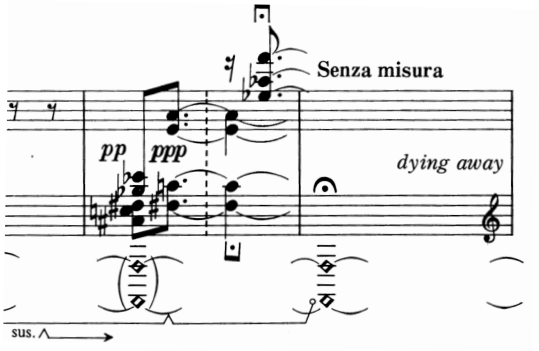
[20] Tanizaki, 16.

Between the two pieces, there is only one indication that the pedal is to be changed with a break in the sound; this occurs around the middle of *Rain Tree Sketch* (see Example 8.2). Because of its placement as close to the next pedal mark as possible, this break appears to be extremely brief and should probably be almost unnoticeable in performance. The other time this marking (a horizontal pedal line with a circle at its extremity) appears, Takemitsu indicates that the sustention pedal must be used to keep the sonority of the low octave A ringing after the damper pedal has been released; this covers up the hole that would be heard without the sostenuto pedal (see Example 8.3).

Example 8.2: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 21-22



Example 8.3: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 38-39



CHAPTER 9: *FUKINSEI*

The concept of *fukinsei* translates to imbalance and is divided into the subcategories of asymmetry, incompleteness, and imperfection. This Japanese aesthetic idea is probably the furthest, among all of the previously examined ideas, from its Western aesthetic counterpart of symmetry and perfection; but like all of the Japanese aesthetic concepts, *fukinsei* must still be achieved through subtlety. Kenko describes *fukinsei* in the following passage from *Essays in Idleness*:

> "Somebody once remarked that thin silk was not satisfactory as a scroll wrapping because it was so easily torn. Ton'a replied, 'It is only after the silk wrapper has frayed at top and bottom, and the mother-of-pearl has fallen from the roller that a scroll looks beautiful.' This opinion demonstrated the excellent taste of the man. People often say that a set of books looks ugly if all volumes are not in the same format, but I was impressed to hear the Abbot Koyu say, 'It is typical of the unintelligent man to insist on assembling complete sets of everything. Imperfect sets are better.' In everything, no matter what it may be, uniformity is undesirable. Leaving something incomplete makes it interesting, and gives one the feeling that there is room for growth."[21]

Takemitsu's music is replete with examples of these ideas: rhythms and the spacing of rests are almost always irregular, ostinatos repeat and are cut off in the middle, making them incomplete, and there are "frays" in motifs presented in sequence (one note or rhythm changed slightly, making it imperfect).

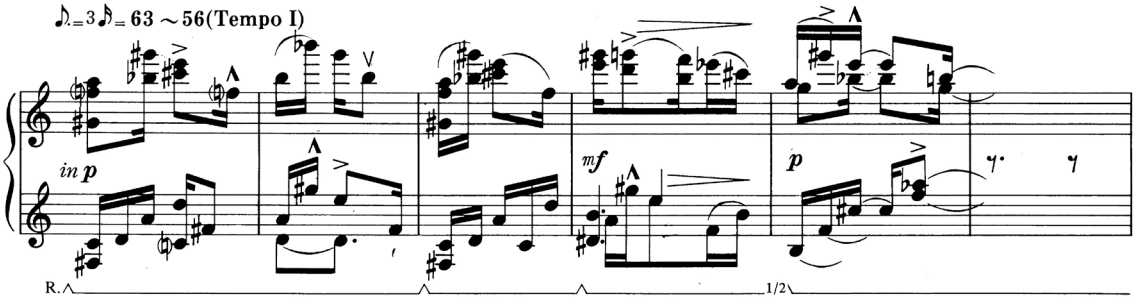
The first thing we notice when seeing the *Rain Tree Sketch* scores is the lack of time signature in both of them. The absence of a time signature is one of the options a composer has for notating a piece that has no regular pulse. The other option would be to put changing time signatures in every measure, but that would that would create unnecessary clutter in the printing. It would also give the music-reader a much more

[21] Kenko, 70.

mathematical and precise impression of the music, even if nothing would actually change in any of the rhythms. This would go directly against Takemitsu's aesthetic in terms of the appearance of the printed music and the interpretation of the performer.

The first *Rain Tree Sketch* features a much higher degree of irregularity than the second, although it still maintains an aura of simplicity at all times. The first line has several instances of *fukinsei* (see Example 9.1). The third measure is written like a repeat of the first, but there are a few subtle differences: the implied time signature changes from 6/16 to 5/16, the voicing of the left hand pattern changes (the chord in the middle of the first measure is changed into a broken pattern and the F# is replaced by A), the articulation changes from none in the first measure to two 2-note slurs in the right hand in the third, and the accents present in the first measure are missing in the third. These changes go by quickly and are so subtle that they are difficult to perceive on a first listen.

Example 9.1: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 1-6



At first glance, the accents in the entire first line seem to form a pattern: Takemitsu is directing our attention to the pitches G# and E that appear alternating between the hands in every measure. However, if we assign numbers to the degree of accents, as indicated in the prefatory notes (0 = none, 1 = ∨, 2 = >, 3 = ∧), and examine the first five measures more closely, we see that there is actually no pattern and that they are all slightly different: 02, 32, 00, 30, 23. Okakura describes the tea-room as having an appearance of refined poverty (p. 15), "yet we must remember that all this is the result of profound artistic forethought, and that the details have been worked out with care perhaps even greater than that expended on the building of the richest palaces and temples."[22] Likewise, Takemitsu meticulously marked these accents irregularly with more effort than it would have taken to make regular accents, and listening to this line of music gives the impression of the "refined poverty" that Okakura speaks of; the "poverty" here is the imperfection of the pattern.

Okakura also talks about the fear of repetition in aesthetics: "In the tea-room the fear of repetition is a constant presence. The various objects for the decoration of a room should be so selected that no colour or design shall be repeated […] in order to break any suggestion of monotony in the room. "[23] Tanizaki presents a similar description:

> "And so, as must if we are not to disturb the glow, we finish the walls with sand in a single neutral color. The hue may differ from room to room, but the degree of difference will be ever so slight, not so much a difference in color as in shade, a difference that will seem to exist only in the mood of the viewer. And from these delicate differences in the hue of the walls, the shadows in each room take on a tinge peculiarly their own."[24]

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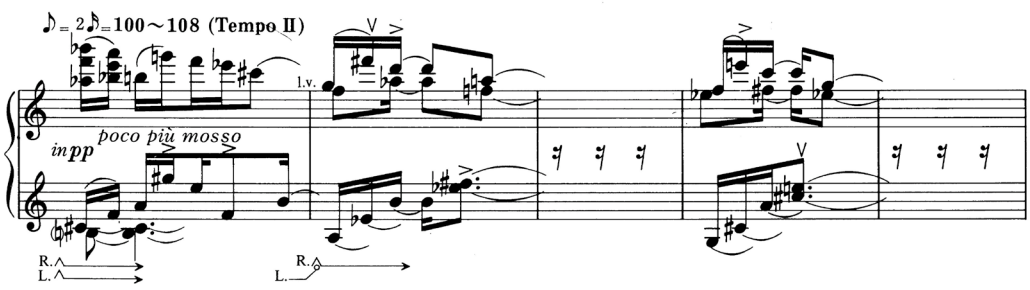
[22] Okakura, 77.
[23] Ibid., 90.
[24] Tanizaki, 18.

Takemitsu accomplishes these goals in his music by making subtle changes in repeated material, that are, complying with Tanizaki's desire for differences so slight as to only exist in the viewer's mood, almost undetectable to the listener. We can find instances of sequences being slightly varied on repetition in the first and second lines of music. The last measure of the first line (see Example 9.1 on p. 35) contains a motif that is repeated two more times, down a whole step each time, in the second line (see Example 9.2).

Example 9.2: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 7-11



In this case, the pitches are all transposed completely, but there are variations in the rhythm and accents. If we analyze the accents (as in p. 36) found on the second and third notes in the right hand followed by the fourth note in the left hand, we see the following among the three parts of the sequence: 232, 122, 201. As before, there is no pattern; rather, it is another example of carefully planned irregularity. The variations in rhythm are similar – each of the three statements have almost imperceptible changes: the first is in 6/16, the second has one added sixteenth note at the end, making it 7/16, and the third is back in 6/16 but shifts the last two beats back one sixteenth note.

Two examples of incompleteness in repetitions are the two passages marked *rapidly* in *Rain Tree Sketch* (see Example 5.1 on p. 13, and Example 6.1 on p. 21). Both hands have the same note values in different rhythmic groupings, but instead of repeating the ostinatos enough times so that they end together, Takemitsu cuts off the patterns in the middle, seemingly at random. Though it looks like a significant imperfection on paper, it is only noticeable enough that one can tell that there is no regular pattern at the moment.

Even though Takemitsu marks accents very frequently in both *Rain Tree Sketches*, downbeat accents are extremely rare. There are a total of three downbeat accents between both works (five if the recapitulations are included). The prevalence of offbeat accents adds to the constant feeling of delicate imperfection. Similarly, around half of the already infrequent bass notes in both pieces fall on off-beats, even in their first appearances.

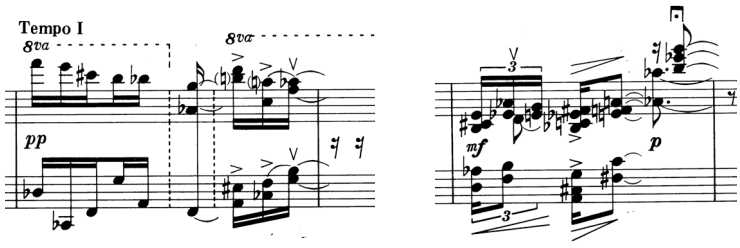
In order to achieve the proper amount of imperfection, the notion of blending can be taken into account. An object painted nine-tenths of the way to one side of an otherwise empty landscape would be an example of unaesthetic blending; there would need to be another object painted on the other side to balance it out. Tanizaki discusses blending:

> "We value a scroll above all for the way it blends with the walls of the alcove, and thus we consider the mounting quite as important as the calligraphy or painting. Even the greatest masterpiece will lose its worth as a scroll if it fails to blend with the alcove, while a work of no particular distinction may blend beautifully with the room and set off to unexpected advantage both itself and its surroundings."[25]

[25] Tanizaki, 19.

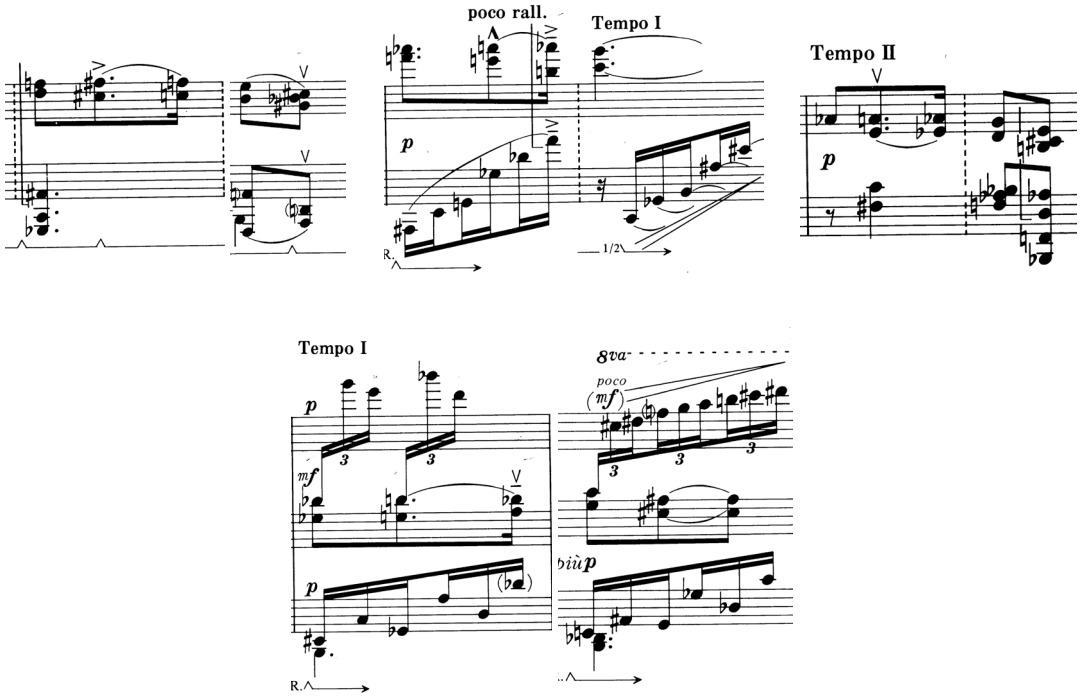
In both *Rain Tree Sketches*, Takemitsu creates a unity that holds each work together through common motifs, without making their appearances obvious and regular. This is similar to the idea of blending. In *Rain Tree Sketch*, he connects the first Tempo I to Tempo II switch by introducing the motif found in the fifth measure of Tempo I (see Example 9.1 on p. 35, second last measure), then repeating it twice, varied, in Tempo II (see Example 9.2 on p. 37). Additionally, the shape of this motif (a large leap up followed by two descending notes of smaller intervals) can be traced back to the first three measures (see Example 9.1 on p. 35), and there are a few later occurrences (see Example 9.3)

Example 9.3: *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm. 14-15 and m. 29



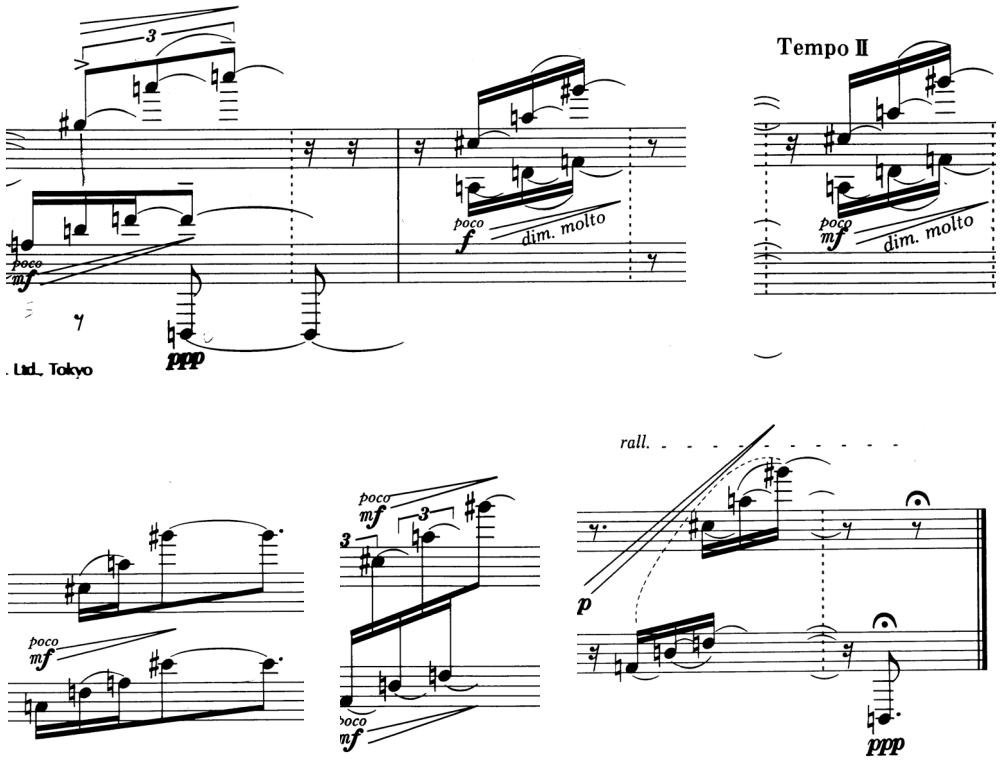
The other important motif that recurs is an eighth-note, dotted-eighth-note, and sixteenth-note, followed by two eighth-notes (see Example 9.4). Takemitsu varies and disperses it throughout the piece (a total of five times, with the last being identical to the first) with an irregular balance in relation to the structure of the work as a whole (three times on the second page, once on the fourth, and once on the fifth).

Example 9.4: *Rain Tree Sketch*, m. 20; m. 22; m. 31; mm. 44-45



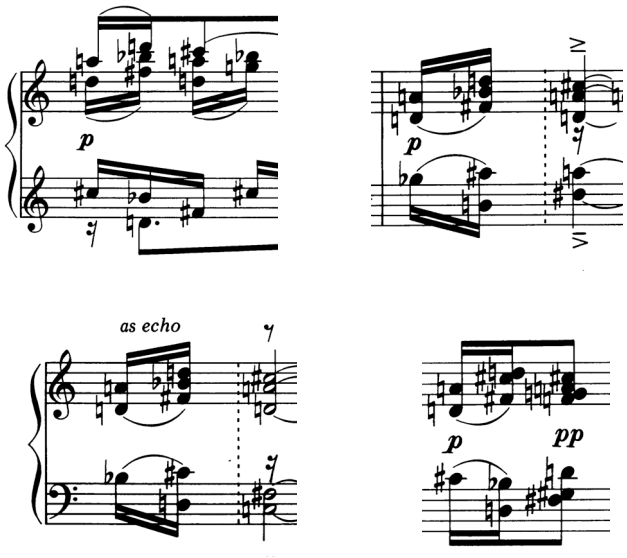
As mentioned earlier, *Rain Tree Sketch II* exhibits far less irregularity than the first, but there are a few motifs that recur varied throughout in a similar manner. The motif featuring the ascending three notes A-D-F in the left hand is featured throughout the work (ten times total, with four literal repetitions on repeats, and two unique statements). Most of them are accompanied by the right hand playing C#-A-G# in parallel motion, but the right hand pitches are sometimes rhythmically shifted, changed completely, or have slight dynamic changes. (See example 9.5).

Example 9.5: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, mm. 10-11; m. 13; m. 14; m. 31; m. 47



The other motif that undergoes transformation is the three-note motif heard in the top voice in the first measure of the piece (A-D-C#). Each time it returns, its rhythm of short-short-long remains the same, but the pitches in the chords underneath change slightly each time (see Example 9.6).

Example 9.6: *Rain Tree Sketch II*, m. 1; m. 9; m. 10; m. 16



CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

The *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982) and *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992) for solo piano by Toru Takemitsu are representative of the composer's late style, which is characterized by a subtle amalgamation of contemporary Western compositional techniques such as atonality, changing meters, irregular rhythms, and fragmentation, with aesthetic principles that are native to Japan. Instead of analyzing Takemitsu's music from a purely theoretical and mathematical angle, I have chosen to relate his modern musical language to ideas and direct quotations taken from three different literary sources dealing with the subject of traditional Japanese aesthetics. These aesthetic ideas include *mono no aware* (impermanence), *kanso* (simplicity), *shizen* (naturalness), *shibui* (understatement and the balance of simple and complex), *yugen* (darkness, mystery, and suggestion over revelation), *datsuzoku* (unworldliness and unconventionality), and *fukinsei* (irregularity, asymmetry, and imperfection).

Impermanence is shown in the general lack and weakness of arrival points, and the tentative character of the beginnings and endings of sections and of the works as a whole. Simplicity and naturalness are found in the absence of virtuoso and decorative piano writing, the generally thin and uncomplicated textures, and the economy of bass notes. The balance of simple and complex is represented mainly by rhythmic intricacies that are very specific in notation and in planned randomness, but give the impression of simple and understated flexibility. Darkness, mystery and implication are characterized by ambiguities in tonality, meter, form, pedal, dynamics, and octatonicism. Unworldliness and unconventionality are associated with detachment from human

emotion, ambiguity of markings, and pedal effects. Finally, irregularity, asymmetry, and imperfection are related to the lack of regular rhythmic pulse, the repetition of motifs with minuscule changes.

Toru Takemitsu's music is a masterful combination of meticulousness and intricacy with a simplicity that is readily apparent on its surface, and that is achieved by careful manipulation of musical material. Although his compositions can be analyzed note-by-note and rest-by-rest, the best way to appreciate it is with the Japanese aesthetic principles in mind. In the composer's own words:

> "My music is something like a signal sent to the unknown. Moreover, I imagine and believe that my signal meets another's signal, and the resulting physical change creates a new harmony different from the original two. And this is a continuous, changing process. Therefore, my music will not be complete in the form of a score. Rather, it refuses completion."[26]

[26] Takemitsu, 142.

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