

Tōru Takemitsu's Music and the Aesthetic Values of Japan

Annotation

According to Nuss (2002: 86), Takemitsu, similarly to such literary figures as Yasunari Kawabata and Kenzaburo Ōe, “achieved a contemporary voice that transcends geographical and stylistic boundaries and, in effect, speaks Japanese to the modern world”. Some scholars found aspects of Japaneseness in most evident iconic signs, such as the instruments used (Ohtake 55–59) or inspirations from Japanese gardens (ibid. 23–4). Others (like Koozin 1991 and 1993; Koh 1998) noticed some aspects in harmony and narrativity. However, more contextual and systematic definitions of how this Japaneseness is manifested are still lacking. In this paper, I will try to connect Takemitsu’s musical messages with philosophical and aesthetical contexts. Invoking some elementary semiotic terms and reductions elaborated in Greimas’ works and applied to analysis of music by Eero Tarasti (1994) I will try to examine what kind of modalities and narrativity are characteristic of Takemitsu’s music and how they are related to traditional aesthetic values of Japan.

In this paper I will use only a few of the most important terms of Greimasian semiotics that, to our mind, will suffice to realize our aims. These are

- a) **subject and object** that represent the fundamental binary opposition manifested in existence and texts. It is closely related with further polar definitions such as consciousness and objects, immanence and transcendence, me (we) and other, culture and nature etc.;
 - b) **modality** that could be defined as the state, situation, attitude or value emerging from the relationship between subject and object (Greimas 1989: 231–33, Greimas & Courtés 1979: 230–32). In philosophical, aesthetical and musical texts, we can find manifestations of modal utterances of conjunction (S'O) and disjunction (S'O), being and doing, harmony and disharmony, belongingness and separability, between subject and object or human being and cosmological surrounding;
 - c) **semé** that could be defined as a minimal meaningful unit of the discourse (for example, a recognizable motive in music).
- Keywords:** aesthetics, modality, narrativity, subject and object, ambiguity.

Influences

We can trace various influences in Takemitsu’s aesthetics and techniques of composition. However, at the same time from the early pieces, such as *Lento*, *Uninterrupted Rests*, *Litany* or *Requiem*, certain characteristics of Takemitsu musical sensibility are evident, such as the predominance of slow tempos, melancholic moods, and drifting melodic movements rather than developmental ones (cf. Burt 2001: 29, Narazaki: 76). Throughout his life, the music of Debussy and Messiaen was of particular importance for Takemitsu. Debussy-like “pan-focused” textures can be found in the majority of Takemitsu’s pieces for orchestra; a respect for Debussy is also expressed in aesthetic considerations (see Takemitsu 1995: 110) and by quoting him in *Quotation of Dream*, *Sea Sea Take me* or *And Then I knew 'Twas Wind*. Messiaen-like modes and static harmony can be found in many pieces as well (See for details Shomowitz), although, Takemitsu claimed that he was not familiar with Messiaen’s system of harmony at the very beginning of his activities (cf. Burt 2001: 34–5). Beside the adaptations of technical aspects, Takemitsu found in their music much more fundamental affinities with Japanese aesthetic sensibilities. According to him (1995: 96), something close to Heian handscroll painting or Nō theater organization of space and time, also “comes out of the tradition and musical spirit of Debussy and Messiaen”.

After 1960, Takemitsu and other Japanese composers were influenced by John Cage’s ideas. Cage aesthetics demonstrated an affinity to and relevance of Japanese ways of thinking and encouraged composers to look for their adaptations in contemporary music. Takemitsu wrote “in my own life ... I struggled to avoid being “Japanese”, to avoid “Japanese” qualities. It was largely through my contact with John Cage that I came to recognize the value of my own tradition” (Takemitsu in de Ferranti 2002: 51). Beside many points in common regarding aesthetic considerations, Cage’s more direct impact can be found in some aleatoric and graphic scores of the 1960s (see Burt 2001: 92–106). At the same time, Takemitsu adapted elements of dodecaphonic constructivism and serialism. These elements, as Burt (2002) shows, remained important until the last pieces such as *Spirit Garden* or *Dream/Window* in which motto-motives or sequences of the chords are constructed in a Webernian manner. In addition, following tendencies of avant-garde music, Takemitsu expanded the use of instrumental techniques (see Burt 2001: 132–153).

Xenakis, Lutoslawski and Ligeti also could have affected orchestral textures of some of Takemitsu pieces, especially of the middle period (cf. Ohtake 13, Burt 2001: 115). According to Takemitsu, the music of Xenakis is very expressive, despite its extremely intellectual construction. From him he lifted ideas of conjoining in

compositions two radically different approaches – that of “dream” and “number” realized in pieces like *A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden* (cf. Takemitsu 1995: 97–126). Rigidity of “number” should be conjoined with “complexities of the dream” (Takemitsu 1995: 102); “dream” as free choices to be based on “number” – that is, rigid harmony and pitch operations. However according to Burt (2002: 156–7), it is very hard to find in Takemitsu’s music the formal procedures that he professed.

The music of the 1960s is also characterized by “looking to the Eastern mirror”, i.e. adapting aspects of Japanese aesthetic paradigms and using Japanese instruments (see Burt 2001: 110–128). In aesthetic writings, metaphors of the “musical garden” and “strolling in the garden” (cf. Takemitsu 1995: 95, 114) gained a crucial importance. On this aesthetic background, previous techniques and influences were integrated. It resulted in Takemitsu’s recognizable musical style that remained until the last pieces.

Takemitsu’s music from the 1980s is often described as a “sea of tonality” (cf. Burt 2001: 175). In this period, many previous avant-garde conventions were abandoned, the orchestral textures are not so dense, and clear melodic lines and elements of tonal harmony are often used, although, dodecaphonic constructivism, extended techniques of instruments, and elements of theater remained important. Of later Takemitsu, it is also characteristic that self-quotations of melodies or harmonic segments are used in many pieces (cf. Burt 2001: 190–215); also the quoting of other composers, such as Debussy, Berg, and Bach.

Despite the variety of the techniques of composition, in the narrative structures of music we can find many affinities between early and later pieces. These are likely to stem from some fundamental existential and aesthetical values.

Aesthetics

Takemitsu wrote several essays in which he discussed the issues of the identity of Western and Japanese cultures, creative phenomenology, modalities, and technical aspects of his music. Considerations about the cultural identity of Japan illustrate his eclectic orientation:

A mirror is broken and in each shattered piece, different faces are reflected. No longer can you view your image in a single mirror. And a shattered mirror cannot be reassembled. ... Modern Japan has spent a long time trying to discover itself in a huge Western European mirror, but now that some time has passed, it should try to see itself in those countless fragments of the mirror (Takemitsu 1995: 70).

As distinct from many Western composers who considered themselves opponents of tradition, Takemitsu sometimes comments from a traditional Japanese attitude about the inability to transcend the tradition, and about the impossibility of radical novelty. The quote below also reflects his attitude towards adaptations, characteristic of the forming of his style:

I am not concerned about thinking thoughts that no one else might ever think. I just want to make sure that while I am thinking those thoughts that anyone might think, I am doing it in my very own way. Therefore, I think I don’t mind if things are not always my own (Takemitsu 1995: 13).

In addition, the “expressing subject” and traditional ways of listening based on the Romantic paradigm are questioned. According to him,

There is something about this word “expression”, however, that alienates me: no matter how dedicated to the truth we may be, in the end when we see that what we have produced is artificial, it is false (Takemitsu 1995: 3) ... Musical imagination, so long in the grips of self-expression, hears these sounds only as a means to expand self-expression (ibid.: 85).

Similarly to Debussy, instead of “expression”, nature becomes a surrounding, which “calls out” and from which musicality should emerge:

In writing, I frequently use the word “nature”. For me it is a kind of calling out to the world (Takemitsu 1995: 86) ... [R]ather than on ideology of self-expression, music should be based on a profound relationship to nature – sometimes gentle, sometimes harsh (ibid.: 5).

In Takemitsu’s other formulations, we find something very similar to Buddhist or Nishida Kitarō’s as well as Heidegger’s definition of the human/artist as a focus that belongs to the field. Accordingly, “expression” should stem from this belongingness in which composer and sound “merge”, thus:

Expression never means separating myself from other things ... To me the world is sound. Sound penetrates me, linking me to the world. I give sounds active meaning. By doing this, I am assured of being in the sounds, becoming one with them. To me this is the greatest reality. It is not that I shape anything, but rather that I desire to merge with the world (Takemitsu 1995: 12–13).

However, in belongingness there is an aspect of irresolvable tension between the subject and object and other polarities. Consequently, Takemitsu's fundamental definition of artistic activity is one of "confronting silence", keeping this tension:

Confronting silence by uttering a sound is nothing but verifying one's own existence. It is only that singling out of one's self from the cavern of silence that can really be called "singing". That is the only "truth" that should concern artists, otherwise we will never really face the question of art's reality. ... It is in silence that the artist singles out the truth to sing or sketch. Moreover, it is then that he realizes his truth exists prior to everything (Takemitsu 1995: 17).

Silence here is invoked as a metaphor of totality to which human existence belongs; whereas "confronting" could be considered as a span of self and other. In such "confronting" the self is rather insubstantial. Takemitsu found affinities between his poetics and the Japanese novel (*shishōsetsu*). This is contrasted to expressionist values:

The distance between the German *Ich-Romanen* and the Japanese *shishōsetsu* (A Japanese novel in which the author is the central figure; similar to the German *Ich-Romanen*) may also be seen between the Western music-as-expression and the traditional idea of music-as-ceremony. ... I wonder if the deep impression of the *shishōsetsu* might not be that of the beauty of denial of self. It impresses, not by confession, but by the restraint in denying one's self, which, while it limits and narrows the world, is at the same time emancipating (Takemitsu 1995: 11).

Similar ideas can be found in Takemitsu's considerations of musical syntax. The morphological category of *ma* that manifests the removal of the subject "from its position of primacy" is invoked here (Takemitsu 1995: 51). Takemitsu found the manifestations of *ma* in traditional Japanese performing arts such as *nō*, *biwa* and *shakuhachi* music (cf. Takemitsu 1995: 56–76, 96). Our next question is how Takemitsu's aesthetic stance is reflected in his music.

Textures

Spatial stratification is characteristic of Takemitsu textures. Especially, it can be found in pieces for orchestra from the middle or later periods. Similarly to Debussy, in orchestral textures Takemitsu often used several strata, usually from two to four that are individualized by harmony, rhythm, instruments or melodic movement. In vertical accumulations of these strata, we usually can distinguish foreground and background instrumental groups and harmonic structures. Such stratified textures are characteristic of almost all orchestral pieces to give just a few examples from various periods of the oeuvre:

- *Green*, especially sections 5 and 6 (Ex. 1);
- Many places of *Dream/Window* (Ex. 2);
- *Nostalgia*, where two whole tone scales differentiated by registers and instrumentations are used in motto-motive;
- *How slow the wind*, with characteristic textural differentiation between the motto-motive and the harmonic field that surrounds it; this differentiation is especially evident in the very end of the piece where on the background of the euphoric resolution into *Des-dur*, a falling chromatic motive of percussion is superimposed (see illustration 21 below).
- *A String Around Autumn* (1989), especially section S (Ex. 10);
- *Rain Tree Sketch I* (1982) and *II* (1992) for piano, with characteristic differentiations of registers and harmony in the very beginnings of the pieces;
- *Archipelago S* (1994);
- *Music of Tree* (1961);
- *Textures* (1964);
- *November steps* (1967).

Such textural distributions were called by Takemitsu "pan-focus" or "musical garden". It was affected by Debussy's music which, according to Takemitsu, "is also very spatial" and is unique in that "rather than emphasizing one principle theme it displays multiple aspects of sound" and "combines several things at the same time" (Takemitsu 1995: 110; cf. also Takemitsu in Burt 2001: 98, Ohtake: 7). Another source of inspiration for such textural distribution was traditional Japanese gardens. Groups of the instruments – woodwinds, strings, brass and percussion were symbolically related with certain elements of gardens, such as grass and flowers, trees, rocks, sand and earth that have different durations of existence. Shorter melodic segments performed by foreground instruments such as woodwinds or high strings (often doubled by harps or melodic percussion) are compared with rapidly changing mobile forms of short-lived grass and flowers. Slower background groups are performed by brass (often with *sourdines*) – with trees or rocks; whereas long sustained chords of double

Example 1. *Green* for orchestra, bars 29–32
© 1969 by C.F. Peters Corporation

bases (playing silent low tones or flageolets) – with “enduring and stable sand and earth” (cf. Takemitsu 1995: 95–96). Background and foreground instrumental groups constantly interchange. This interchange is compared with the perspective of the observer that changes in time. Spatial stratification is also increased by physically distancing the groups of the orchestra as in *Dream/Window*, *November Steps*, *Dorian Horizon* or *Gemeaux*. We can find here affinities with Debussy’s ideas of decentralization and regrouping the orchestra.

One more aspect of stratification, noticed by Nuss (p.209) and compared with Gagaku’s orchestral textures, is “end segmentation” in which the extreme registers, the highest and the lowest are simultaneously presented.

The image displays a page of a musical score for orchestra, specifically bars 7-9. The score is organized into sections: C-B (Corns, Bassoons), C-M (Corns, Mutes), R (Violins, Violas, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses), and L (Violins, Violas, Violas, Double Basses). The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (poco rall., f, p, sfz), articulation (acc., marcato), and performance instructions (Change to Fl., Change to Bassoon, Min. Lat. Sul). The score is written in 4/4 time and features a complex texture with multiple layers of sound.

Example 2. *Dream/Window* for orchestra, bars 7–9
© 1988 by Scott Japan Company Ltd.

It can be seen, to give just a few examples, in the very beginning of *How Slow the Wind*, *Dream/Window* (section R), or in the very end of *Rain Tree Sketch I*. Here again we find similarities with Debussy's span of extreme registers, especially characteristic of piano music.

The textural stratification and plurality of sound layers is characteristic of Takemitsu's musical space. However, when we listen, this music does not sound as a dissonant plurality of events that shade one another. There are certain aspects of tonal organization that homogenize and balance this plurality.

Harmonic Preferences

As mentioned, Takemitsu’s harmony could have been influenced by Messiaen’s system of modes of limited transposition (see discussions in Burt 2001: 32, 42, Ohtake 79–80, Shlomowitz 177–188) and Dorian Jazz harmonies (see Burt 2001: 86–89). Very often, Takemitsu used transpositions of more or less the same pitch class sets (see Burt 2001: 70). Thus, similarly to Debussy or Messiaen, local teleological harmonic sequences are possible, but they are not long. Thus, “[I]t seems that Takemitsu felt an affinity with Debussy and Messiaen, in the way that their melodic and harmonic structures were liberated from any functional obligation” (Narazaki: 77).

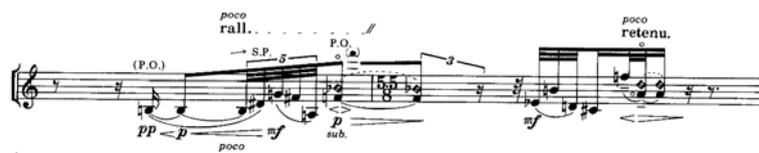
Besides Messiaen’s mode II, most important for Takemitsu harmonic structure, which appeared in early pieces like *Distance de Fée* and remained important until the last ones, according to Burt’s set analysis definition, is 7–33 pitch collection (cf. Burt 2001: 34, 43, 67, 71). It can be simply defined as a whole tone scale in which one sound from another tone scale is inserted. In the pieces based on the technique of serialism, such as *Uninterrupted Rests* (see Burt 2002: 158–160) and *Hika* (ibid., 163–164), the same structures of a whole tone scale + 1 and the remaining five sounds out of 12 as a complimentary unit, are extensively used. However, most often not only one but also two or three sounds from a complementary whole tone scale are used as harmonic segments or diachronically intertwined in melodic lines.

The whole tone scale was extensively used by Debussy too; because of the absence of semi-tones, it is the most integrated, balanced, and has the least possibilities of a tonal hierarchical scale. In such a scale, an “arabesque-like” melodic movement can be best realized. However, in Takemitsu, one or several pitches from another whole tone scale introduce a split to this integrity and homogeneity. Thus, most important for Takemitsu’s harmonic structure is that it remains semantically ambiguous: integrity is at the same time cleaved, fragmented and disunited. In Takemitsu, as Koozin (p. 138) noticed: “[O]ctatonic, whole-tone, and other referential collections, which suggest the influence of Messiaen and Debussy, are used to generate new sonorities that are rich in mystery and ambiguity”. We will find a similar ambiguity in Takemitsu’s melodies.

The harmonic structures of whole tone scale + 1 or + 2–3 pitches from a complementary whole tone scale can be found in referential chords in pieces like *Spirit Garden*, *Dream/Window*, or in the melodic structures of *From far beyond Chrysanthemums and November Fog* (1983), *I Hear the Water Dreaming* (1987), or *Far Calls. Coming Far!* (1980) (Ex. 3–6).



Example 3. Referential chords of *Spirit Garden for Orchestra* (Example is taken from Burt 2002: 165)



Example 4. Violin melody of *From far beyond Chrysanthemums and November Fog* for violin and piano, bars 77–78



Example 5. Harmonic structures of *Far Calls. Coming Far!* for Orchestra (Example is taken from Ohtake, p. 35)



© 1989, Schott Japan Company Ltd.

Example 6. Motive from *I Hear the Water Dreaming* for flute and orchestra (Illustrations from Burt 2002: 169)

This harmonic structure distributed as chords and their transpositions can be found in various instrumental groups. Pitches of these groups are sometimes summarized in celesta parts, like in some sections from *Green*, *To the Edge of Dream* or *Vers, L'Arc-en-Ciel, Palma* (see Ex. 7–9). In many cases, not all the 6, but 3 or 4 sounds from the whole tone scale are joined with several sounds from a complementary whole tone scale. Often, this forms diatonically sounding harmonic segments, like in the example from *To the Edge of Dream* below.

Example 7. *Green* for orchestra. Celesta's parts.
© 1969 by C.F. Peters Corporation

Example 8. *To the Edge of Dream* for guitar and orchestra. Celesta's parts
© 1983 by Schott Japan Company Ltd.

Example 9. *Vers, L'Arc-en-Ciel, Palma* for guitar, oboe d'amore and orchestra. Section N. Celesta's part
© 1989 by Schott Japan Company Ltd.

Usually, sounds of a complementary whole tone scale mode are distributed in various registers and groups of instruments; thus, they cannot be so easily localized. (See Ex. 2 above; also *Entre-temps* (especially bars 32 and 65) or *A String Around Autumn*, especially strings of section P.) The whole tone scale functions as a kind of harmonic background on which various foreground melodies, collections of pitch or sequences of chords, are superimposed. More diatonic melodies on this background can be found in later pieces (see for example the viola solo part from *A String Around Autumn*).

Dense harmonic verticals are characteristic of the middle period of Takemitsu's orchestral pieces such as *November Steps*, *Asterism* or *Gemeaux*. However, they are composed of "modal fragments" (Narazaki: 79) and are rather "pan-tonal" than "a-tonal" (Burt 2001: 115). According to Burt (2001: 107), "closer examination of the various strata combining to produce this "panchromatic" texture, however, reveals that they are not always themselves as "atonally" conceived as the overall effect might suggest". Harmonic verticals are usually constructed out of several modal strata – pentatonic, diatonic, whole tone + 1; in the majority of cases these strata are also individualized by instrumentation. Often, one harmonic stratum is highlighted by dynamics and instrumentation; whereas the other instrumental groups perform complimentary background harmonies (see Ex. 1 above).

Intensive chromatic accumulations, characteristic especially for *November Steps* and other earlier orchestral pieces are often "immediately dispersed by the removal of two or three of the semitones" (Narazaki: 80); the result is momentary fluctuations between intensive chromatic and diatonic harmonies. In pieces after 1980, there are not so many heterogeneous modal strata, chromatics is not as intensive as in earlier pieces, and textures are thinner; however, complementariness or poly-focus in harmony and orchestration remains important.

As distinct from Messiaen, Takemitsu uses his modes not strictly but rather “referentially” – the exact collection of pitches is not so important, but the “mode’s presence is nonetheless felt” (Shlomowitz: 188). Shlomowitz’s considerations about the harmony of *Quatrain*, could be to some degree applied to other pieces as well: “If we imagine a passage that contains twenty pitches, in which only one of the pitches cannot be accounted for as being in a single whole-tone mode, clearly, we are still going to identify this passage as having whole-tone flavour” (ibid.). In a similar way, although there are many sound strata sounding together and deviations from exact pitch collection, we can hear the predominance of the above discussed complementary and “cleaved” scales in almost all of Takemitsu’s pieces.

Takemitsu’s saturated harmonic space and transpositions that produce new chords that are “close, but not quite” so was compared by Nuss (2002) with the “phoenix effect” produced by *shō* of the Gagaku ensemble. *Shō* in Gagaku creates a constant harmonic background for foreground melodic movements. The dynamic gesture of *shō*, with the characteristic constant waves of crescendo and diminuendo, has close affinities with fundamental aspects of Takemitsu’s temporality.

Temporality

Takemitsu (1995: 86) considers time as totality in which “the ‘unknown’ is neither past nor future ... it exists only in the precise present”. Some scholars noticed the overall static effect of Takemitsu’s music (cf. for example Galiano: 39). Static time is conditioned by the above-discussed rather homogeneous harmonic background. However, at the same time, it is characteristic of Takemitsu to have constant dynamic, harmonic or textural intensifications that result in local forwards going into foreground melodies or sequences of chords; these usually vanish into the harmonic background or are immediately succeeded by other melodies or chord sequences. Such temporal processes can be found in earlier pieces as well as in pieces after 1980 with characteristic fluctuations between local teleological, chromatically more intensive periods performed mostly by solo instruments or small groups, and that then release into diatonic, more integrated harmonic structures that are played tutti. Temporal continuity and the sense that the foreground gestures belong to the background are conditioned by the above discussed unifying harmonic structures. Fluctuation between local teleological semes and their neutralization can be seen, to mention just a few examples, in:

- *To the Edge of Dream* (see, for example, sudden crescendo in Bar 3 and pianissimo played by the muted brass in Bar 4);
- *A String Around Autumn*, in which a most intensive forte is immediately neutralized by the disappearance to *al niente* (Ex. 10) or processes between sections J and M;
- *How Slow the Wind* (see especially Sec. F);
- *Vers, L’Arc-en-Ciel, Palma*;
- Many places of *Spirit Garden*, *Dreamtime* or *Dream/Window*.

The same juxtapositions and simultaneities of intensive foreground focuses and more static background harmonic fields can be also found in earlier pieces such as *November Steps*, *Gemeaux* or *Le Son Calligraphié III*. In earlier and later pieces Takemitsu distributes over time aspects of the same complementary harmonic structures. Since various semes are derived from the same harmonic continuum, similarly to syntagms of Debussy, morphologically they are neither identical nor different from each other – they are different actualizations of the same predominant harmony and modality. Thus, we can hardly apply Takemitsu’s temporality traditional models of linear narrativity, since as he puts it himself: “[A] single element is never emphasized with development through contrast”. Similarly to the mosaic-like temporality of Debussy, “music is composed as if fragments were thrown together somewhat unstructured, as in dreams” (Takemitsu 1995: 106).

To describe Takemitsu’s temporality, the metaphor of a garden, in which elements and surroundings are always mutually interconnected, could be invoked again. A garden is a spatial-temporal totality (field), i.e. temporal horizon that accumulates in it various focuses. Constantly appearing and disappearing focuses create an impression that there is “a larger background of indeterminate space” (Koozin 1993: 187). Because of the temporal interchangeability of these focuses, musical time can be compared with wandering in the garden, without any teleological intention, as Takemitsu (1995: 88) puts it: “[A] composition should not give the impression it is complete in itself. Which is more pleasurable, a precisely planned tour or a spontaneous trip?”

Touch and Dynamics

One of the most immediately recognizable aspects of Takemitsu's music is its dynamics and articulations. As Burt (2001: 29) notices, from the first pieces such as *Uninterrupted Rests* and *Lento*, Takemitsu's musical gestures are characterized by an emergence from silence and a retreat to it. In this process, quite intensive crescendos are usually immediately neutralized by gradual or subito pianissimo. Such a dynamic gesture is constantly used in later pieces as well (Ex. 11); it reflects the above-discussed temporal processes.

Intensive dissonant textural strata in pieces like *Textures* (from cycle *Arc II*), *November Steps* or *Green* are usually distributed in a high register, and are dynamically silent. Double basses in a higher register usually play flageolets, whereas in low registers the dynamics is also very low. Brass instruments most often play with sourdines; the penetrating timbre of brass is often covered by strings. Metal percussion instruments, such as tam-tams or gongs, are frequently used; however they play in limits of *ppp-mf* and create kind of background drone for forth-ground motives (see Ex. 2 above; the beginning and end of *To the Edge of Dream*; section M of *A String Around Autumn*).

Example 11. *Dreamtime* for orchestra, Section L, strings solo
© 1981 by Scott Japan Company Ltd.

For Takemitsu, the forte is not characteristically extended; the flash-like culminations are usually immediately extinguished (see Ex. 10 above; also *Dream/Window* sections N and Q, *How Slow the Wind*, Section N, or *To the Edge of Dream*, Section Q). Such preferences could be compared with ambiguous “piano sonore” or “forte con sourdine” of Debussy and Fauré (cf. Jankelevitch 244). Takemitsu himself expressed them by instructing musicians to play his *Chamber Concerto* “quietly and with brutal attack” (in Burt 2001: 59) or invoking the example of the Japanese puppet theater bunraku vocal, which “holds the strongest expression of violent emotions, although it is at the same time highly restrained in its use of the voice” (Takemitsu 1995: 11).

Melodic Structures

Poly-focused, complimentary harmonic structures are reflected in Takemitsu's melodies. Harmonic bipolarity, noticed already in early twelve-note technique based compositions, such as *Le Son Calligraphié III* (cf. Burt 2001: 71), *Uninterrupted Rests* or *Hika* (cf. Burt 2002: 160–163) is predominant in the majority of his later pieces too. Melodic motives most often are constructed by juxtaposing segments of two whole tone scales. The segments of different whole tone scales are often separated by registers, and in this way fragmentation and bipolarity is more emphasized. Similarly to Debussy's intentions to create something “more divided, detached and impalpable” (Debussy in Jarocinsky 104), Takemitsu in his later years expressed the necessity of a “melody of many threads intricately twisted together” (in Narazaki: 77). How the harmonic bipolarity and melodic “threads” are realized, we can see in the melodic examples 12–17 below.

Fragmentation is also characteristic of late Takemitsu's motto-motives, i.e. certain melodic or harmonic structures that function as a recognizable semes. Similarly, to Debussy's narratives, motto-motives appear and reappear several times during the piece. In later pieces, such as *Vers*, *L'Arc-en-Ciel*, *Palma*, *Spirit Garden* or *Dream/Window*, motto-motives are constructed using all the twelve pitches of a chromatic scale. However, similarly to twelve-note serialism-based pieces of the 1960s, the pitch collection is divided into three or four distinguishable fragments that are often distributed as a sequence of chords in which the above discussed whole tone scale flavor and harmonic poly-focus can be found (see Ex. 3–6 above).



Example 12. *Far Calls. Coming, Far!* for violin and orchestra, bars 10–13 (This melody is constantly used in various other parts too.)
© by Schott Japan Company Ltd.



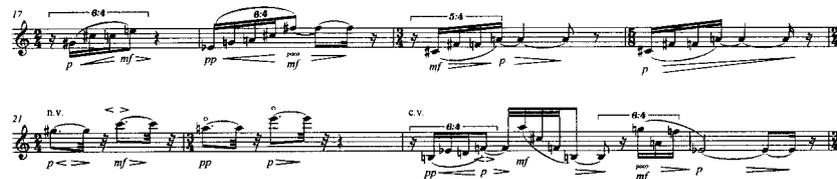
Example 13. *Vers, L'arc-en-ciel, Palma* for guitar, oboe d'amore and orchestra. Oboe d'amore's solo part, section I, bars 4–8.
© 1989 by Schott Japan Company Ltd.



Example 14. *Entre-temps* for oboe and string quartet. Oboe's part, bars 70–72.
© by Schott Japan Company Ltd.



Example 15. *To the Edge of Dream* for guitar and orchestra. Guitar's solo part, sections C–D.
© 1983 by Schott Japan Company Ltd.

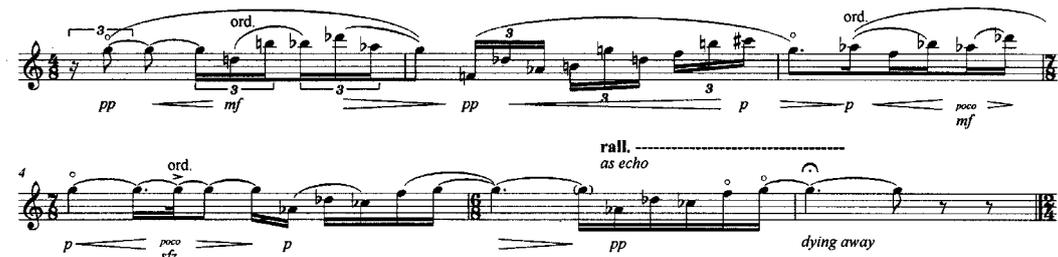


Example 16. *Air* for flute solo, bars 44–51.
© 1996 by Schott Japan Company Ltd.



Example 17. *And Then I Knew 'Twas Wind* for flute, viola and harp. Flute's part, section N.
© 1992 by Schott Japan Company Ltd.

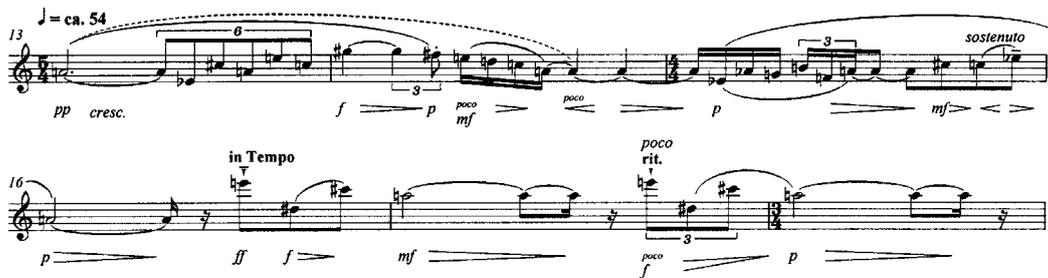
Takemitsu's melodic structures are also characterized by centripetal tendencies, when one tone of the poly-focused melody is constantly emphasized by being longer sustained (see Ex. 18–20 below). In many later pieces, such as *How Slow the Wind*, *Air*, *And Then I Knew 'Twas Wind*, *Entre-Temps* or *Spirit Garden*, motto-motives, fragmented-bipolar melodies, and centripetal melodies are interchanged: recognizable motto-motives and centripetal melodies are constantly juxtaposed with bipolar melodies. However, since all these melodies-semes are derived from the same harmonic field, morphologically they can be defined as neither identical nor different from each other. Such a relationship between semes is close to that of Debussy. However, as distinct from Debussy's longer euphoric states conditioned by diatonic harmony, Takemitsu's more fragmented and tense harmonic structures results in constant ambiguity as a predominant modality.



Example 18. *Entre-temps* for oboe and string quartet. Bars 127–132 (last bars), oboe’s part
© by Schott Japan Company Ltd.



Example 19. *Dream/Window* for orchestra. Section M, flute’s part
© 1988 by Schott Japan Company Ltd.



Example 20. *Air* for flute solo. Bars 1–6
© 1996 by Schott Japan Company Ltd.

Narrativity

Since there are no longer teleological processes, as Narazaki (p. 81) notices: “gestures themselves being irreducible “minimal” analytical units, applies to both Takemitsu’s melodic style and textural formations”. What message does Takemitsu send by these “gestures”?

As can be seen from what was discussed above, it is characteristic of Takemitsu that there is a temporal continuity in which heterogeneous aspects (focuses) of the same ambiguous harmonic structure (field) are manifested. The underlying harmonic bipolarity makes forwards-going, dynamically intensified melodic lines fragment or split. Thus, speaking in terms of modalities – the disengagement (intensification, “will”) is immediately “split” (neutralized, negated). Such an ambiguous process is also reflected in dynamics and instrumentation – immediate intensifications and neutralizations, constant appearances and disappearances of “gestures” into a drone-like background.

Following Greimas-Tarasti terminology and models, in Takemitsu’s “gestures” or semes we find ambiguous simultaneity and immediate interchange of contrary modal utterances: dysphoric subject-focus (S˘O) of “doing” is immediately neutralized by belongingness to the field (S˘O). This results in a chain of different, often superimposed semes (Var 1; Var 2; Var 3 etc.), which however signify the same fundamental ambiguity (S˘O + S˘O). Homogenous harmonic structures condition an ecstatic temporal horizon and the predominant background modal utterance of “being” (Em – être modalité). Thus, the narrativity predominant in the majority of Takemitsu’s pieces could be schematized as follows (these two lines should be red simultaneously):

S˘O (focus) → S˘O (field) Var 1; S˘O → S˘O Var 2; S˘O → S˘O Var 3; S˘O → S˘O Var 4 etc.
Em (as underlying S˘O + S˘O – ambivalent being) -----

In the very end of *How Slow the Wind*, the essence of Takemitsu’s narrativity is revealed very clearly: the final pianissimo release into Des-dur traditionally suggests that the piece would end in euphoria; however, this euphoria is “split” by a harmonically contrastive intensively falling and reverberating motive (Ex. 21). The intention to signify such differentiated unity can be found in Takemitsu’s aesthetic considerations:

I use “dream” and “window” as metaphors for the two contradictory dynamisms of facing inward and outward. To make the inner and outer resound simultaneously is the prime object of the music” (Takemitsu, about *Dream/Window*, in CD booklet of *Orchestral Works II*, World Premiere Recordings. CO-78944) “[m]ost important thing in Japanese music is space, not sound. Strong tensions. Space: ma. I think ma is time-space with tensions. ... It is vital. ... Not “rest” (Takemitsu 2002: 229).

The narrativity of Takemitsu could be also compared with shakuhachi’s honkyoku pieces, in which the “master shakuhachi player, striving in performance to recreate the sound of wind in a decaying bamboo grove, reveals the Japanese sound ideal: sound, in its ultimate expressiveness, being constantly refined, approaches the nothingness of that wind in the bamboo grove” (Takemitsu 1995: 51). Thus, according to Marrett (p. 240), we can listen to Takemitsu’s music “in the way that one listens to honkyoku and it works very well”.

Example 21. Final bars of *How Slow the Wind* for orchestra
© 1994 by Scott Japan Company Ltd.

Aesthetic Categories

Now we should come back to our initial question of how Takemitsu's modalities and narrativity are related to the aesthetic values of Japan. Japanese aesthetic sensibilities are manifested in several aesthetic categories which are necessary to discuss in a nutshell. Most essential of them are aware, *yūgen*, *sabi* and *wabi*. These categories emerged in different ages and were used in different form of arts. Nevertheless, there are many structural affinities between them conditioned by East Asian worldviews.

In old treatises these categories were mostly used for defining poetic states (Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 31), or metaphorical descriptions of aesthetic qualities in certain arts. In works of scholars of the late 19th and 20th centuries and their attempts to create a "conceptual system" (Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 144) of Japanese art they started to be used as key definitions characterizing Japanese aesthetic consciousness (emphasizing its difference from the West), and manifestations of them were found in various arts. Thus, to some degree, Japanese aesthetic categories could be considered as a modern construct with purpose of articulating national identity in aesthetics (cf. Marra). Aesthetic categories are seldom mentioned in Takemitsu's aesthetic considerations; however, the values they express evidently are reflected in his musical messages.

Mono no aware was presented by the first major literature theorist and nationalist of Japan, Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), as the oldest, and a genuine Japanese aesthetic concept. The term aware already appeared in *Kojiki* (714) and *Tosa Nikki* (935) (cf. Meli 2002a: 60); however the aesthetics of aware is usually related to *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu (973–1014), where aware was mentioned 1018 times (cf. Morris 207). It is often translated as "the pathos of things" and defined as a deep emotional response or ability to react with empathy to the beauty of things (jap. mono). In Norinaga's explanations:

The word "aware" is a combination of "aa" and "hare"... "Today we would use the exclamation "Ah" (aa) and "Oh" (hare). Looking at the moon or at cherry blossoms, for example, we are deeply impressed and say: "Ah, these splendid flowers!" or "Oh, what a beautiful moon!" (*The Jeweled Comb of the Tale of Genji* in Marra: 127).

However, the noun aware derives from the verb awaremu (哀れむ), that is usually translated as "to have pity on an object; or feel compassion for an object", thus at the same time aware is defined by Norinaga as "the voice of sorrow that comes out from what the heart feels after seeing, hearing, or touching something" (ibid.).

According to Yoshinori, aware is not a direct response but rather taking a contemplative distance from the object or "a kind of indirect feeling or exclamation at the time of quiet resignation" (in Marra 125). It is characteristic of a lot of places in the *The Tale of Genji* where "the essence of nature and human life tends to be grasped in terms of their end, in their dying moments rather than in their birth or creation" (Shirane 123). In this way, aware reflects the situation "in which the individual seems to have lost the will, power, or desire to control his or her destiny" (ibid.). In this sense, aware is not so far from the values of Buddhism; according to Heine (p. 80), aware is closely related to the philosophy of Dōgen, which maintains that life and death are equally the manifestation of the total dynamism or "impermanence-Buddha-nature" (mūjo busshō 無常仏性). Speaking in terms of Greimassian definitions, aware could be defined as a conjunction with the thing (mono) (SˆO), in which the moment of disjunction (pity) (SˆO) is already included; in the temporality of aware, the intensive being (praise, love) already includes in itself a moment of perishability (pity, sorrow). Such a constellation of modalities can be considered as ambiguous simultaneity of conjunction and disjunction (SˆO + SˆO); and in this sense it relates to predominant modality Takemitsu's music – ambivalent being.

The concept of *yūgen* that emerged in Medieval Japanese aesthetics following the meanings of its composites *yū* (幽) – dim and *gen* (玄) – dark is usually translated as "bottomless, mysterious, dark beauty" (translations into English in the 20th century are summarized in Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 488–89). It has close affinities with postulates of Taoist and Buddhist cosmology (Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 300–301) where phenomena are considered as an endless process of changes from actual to potential, from being to nothing. Thus an aspect of mystery of *yūgen* lies in the ambiguous simultaneity of actual and potential, clear and hidden.

This Ambiguity can be seen in Kamo no Chōmei's (1153–1216) and Shōtetsu's (15th c.) descriptions of *yūgen*:

The qualities deemed essential to the style are overtones that do not appear in the words alone, and an atmosphere that is not visible in the configuration [sugata] of the poem ... On an autumn evening, for example, there is no color in the sky nor any sound, yet although we cannot give any definite reason for it, we are somehow moved to tears ... Or again, it is like the situation of a beautiful woman who, although she has cause for resentment, does not give vent to her feelings in words, but is only faintly discerned – at night, perhaps – to be in a profoundly distressed condition ... It is only when many meanings are compressed into a single word, when the depths of feeling are exhausted yet not expressed, when an unseen world hovers in the atmosphere of the poem ... (Nihon Kagaku Taiken 3: 312–13 in Miner, Odagiri & Morrell (eds.) *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature*, p. 269).

Yūgen can be apprehended by the mind, but it cannot be expressed in words. Its quality may be suggested by the sight of a thin cloud veiling the moon or by autumn mist swathing the scarlet leaves on a mountainside. If one is

asked where in these sights lies the *yūgen*, one cannot say, and it is not surprising that a man who fails to understand this truth is likely to prefer the sight of a perfectly clear, cloudless sky. It is quite impossible to explain wherein lies the interest or the remarkable nature of *yūgen* (In Tsunoda, Barry & Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p. 115).

The quality of *yūgen* as the utmost expression was considered as a feature of supreme artistic mastership. In old treatises of Zeami, Mitsuoki, Yūshō, and Jigu (cf. Ueda 1991) artistic mastership is defined hierarchically and described phenomenologically. As in the earlier Chinese tradition, definitions of artistic and existential mastery, in many cases, coincide. Jigū (defining the highest mastery of narrative singing with biwa accompaniment (*heikyoku*) emphasizes that what is most important for the performer is to “realize the Heike story”, i.e. to know what is prospering and decay, being and death. Only such an existential experience can result in the ambivalently described singing that “is empty and transparent, yet colorful, graceful, and shapely” (cf. Jigū, *The Remnants from the Western Sea (Saikai Yoteki Shū)*, from the early 17th century, quoted in Ueda 1991: 117). Such aesthetic preference is very close to above quoted Takemitsu’s instruction of playing “quietly and with brutal attack”; brutality is usually associated with the accumulation of energy; yet, it is not expressed and it makes this state ambivalent.

The concept of *sabi* has two etymological explanations and both of them are used in aesthetical considerations. The noun *sabi* (寂び) can be directly translated as “patina” or “rust” (Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 33, 488). In the context of poetry, the tea ceremony, or the atmosphere of the garden, *sabi* is defined as “the appreciation of the old and weathered or mossy surfaces” (Eliovson, Sima in Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 488) or “the appearance of antiquity, age, hoariness, rusticity, natural textures” (Engel, David H. in Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 488). *Sabi* as “patina” or “rust” has etymologic connections with *sabireru* (寂れる *falter, go downhill*), *sabireta* (寂れた *forlorn*) and the *sabishii* (寂しい *lonely, alone*) – all written using the same character.

In this sense, *sabi* also becomes close to *wabi*, which is derived from the adverb *wabishii* (侘しい *desolate, dreary, and forlorn*). *Wabi*, that is usually translated as “austere beauty”, became an aesthetic appreciation of “rustic simplicity and solitude” (Kuck, Eliovson in Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 489), “impoverished charm”, or “honest ordinariness” (Albright, Tindale in Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 489). The concepts of *wabi* and *sabi* in the sense of “patina” or “austere beauty” were manifested in traditional garden designing or architecture. After Meiji, they were usually used together as *wabi-sabi* (cf. Suzuki & Iwai 454), especially in considerations about architecture and design. Although in current investigations (cf. Suzuki & Iwai 410–12), there is a tendency to separate them, and spirit of Zen is mostly illustrated by *wabi*. However, both *wabi* and *sabi* as aesthetic values stem from the poetics of *waka* in which *sabishii* and *wabishii* were used as words indicating states of solitude, desolation, and realizing the impermanence of being (cf. Suzuki & Iwai 2006: 32–33). In this way, the *wabi-sabi* garden’s design of “rustic simplicity and solitude” was related to loneliness and impermanence as fundamental existential modes.

The interrelatedness of micro and macro planes can be found in the structures of traditional haiku. The narrative principle of Bashō’s poetics principle is described as *shiori*, which similarly to *sabi* has a double meaning: “[a] verb *shioru*, which means “to bend” or “to be flexible” (撓る) . . .” But there is another verb, *shioru*, written differently (萎る) which means “to wither”, “to droop” or “to wilt” (Ueda 1991: 154). Thus, *shiori* in the sense of “bend” is interrelated to the subjective (micro) and cosmological (macro) realms; whereas in the sense of “wither” it interrelates the temporal horizons of present and future, i.e. enables the possibility of seeing phenomena as immersed in the process of change, impermanence. In this way, the dysphorous moment of “wither” makes Bashō’s poetics close to the perishability or sorrow of aware.

Invoking the terms of Heidegger, sensibilities of *wabi* and *sabi* imply the shining of “ground” to which the human “world” belongs (cf. *The Origin of Work of Art*). Again, in Takemitsu’s music, especially in the above discussed belongingness of melody-focus to the field, disappearances of volitional themes (subject) into indifferent background, we can find structural affinities with these aesthetical categories. The principle of preserving the totality is at work there (cf. Motiekaitis p. 37–64). Fundamental ontological realms such as being and nothingness, and temporal horizons such as life and death are considered as a differentiated unity. Accordingly, the modal utterances of conjunction (S˘O) and disjunction (S˘O), instead of dialectical narrative sequences (S˘O → S˘O), are rather simultaneously saturated (S˘O + S˘O). Namely such configuration of modalities, being distinct from romantic “rhetoric of conflict” (Bachtin) characterizes, to my mind, Japaneseness of Takemitsu’s music.

My final question is whether such aesthetic values are uniquely Japanese or rather universal. Besides the above mentioned affinities with Debussy’s poetic subject, where there are many ambivalent sayings, like “[T]he human being is only a reed, the most feeble in nature; but this is a thinking reed” (Pascal, *Pensées* Section 6) in one period of Western cultural history when the values of anthropocentrism declined, infinity of cosmos and uncertainty of human’s place in it was painfully realized.

Was this ambivalence reflected in some musical aspects of baroque? Is it not visible in insertions of some dissonances into sequences of consonant chords and minor tonalities into predominant major ones (cf. for ex. Bach's C-major prelude of Well-Tempered Clavier); or in a very ambivalent musical message of melody in major which is placed into a descending harmonic pattern (catabasis) (cf. for ex. Bach's Largo of C-major violin Sonata BWV 1005). Does this not speak about our existential ambivalence, of presence that "simultaneously conceals [verbirgt] itself" and "is already absence" (Heidegger 2002: 202)? Is not it the most fundamental message music can send us?

Literature

- Burt, Peter. 2001. *The Music of Tōru Takemitsu*. Cambridge University Press.
- De Ferranti, Hugh. 2002. Takemitsu's biwa. In Hugh de Ferranti and Yōko Narazaki (eds.), *A Way a Lone: Writings on Tōru Takemitsu*. Tokyo: Academia Music Ltd.
- Galliano, Luciana. 2002. *The roaring epoch: works of 1950s and 1960s*. In Hugh de Ferranti and Yōko Narazaki (eds.), *A Way a Lone: Writings on Tōru Takemitsu*. Tokyo: Academia Music Ltd.
- Greimas, A. J. 1989b [1983] Apie prasmę II. In *Semiotika: Darbų rinktinė*. Tr. Rolandas Pavilionis. Vilnius: Minties leidykla. [Orig. Du sens II. Essais sémiotiques].
- Greimas, A. J. and Courtés J. 1982. *J. Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 2002. *Off the Beaten Track*. Tr. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge University Press.
- Jankelevitch, Vladimir. 1976. *De la musique au silence II. Debussy et le Mystère de L'instant*. Paris: Plon.
- Koh, JoAnn Hwee Been. 1998. *East and West: The Aesthetics and Musical Time of Toru Takemitsu*. Ph. D. Dissertation: Boston University. University Microfilms International.
- Koozin, Timothy. 1991. Octatonism in Recent Solo Piano Works of Tōru Takemitsu. In *Perspectives of New Music* 29/1, p. 124–141.
- Koozin, Timothy. 1993. Spiritual-temporal imagery in music of Olivier Messiaen and Tōru Takemitsu. In *Contemporary Music Review* 7, p. 185–202.
- Marra, Michele. 1999. *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Meli, Mark. 2002a. Motoori Norinaga's Hermeneutics of Mono no Aware. The Link between Ideal and Tradition. In Michael F. Marra (ed.), *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Miner, Earl; Odagiri, Hiroko; and Morrell, Robert. 1985. *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature*. Princeton University Press.
- Motiekaitis, Ramūnas. 2011. *Poetics of the Nameless Middle: Japan and the West in Philosophy and Music of the Twentieth Century*. Acta Semiotica Fennica XL.
- Morris, Ivan. 1979. *The World of the Shinning Prince*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Narazaki, Yōko. 2002. Japanese elements evident in Takemitsu's use of atonality and tone clusters. In Hugh de Ferranti and Yōko Narazaki (eds.), *A Way a Lone: Writings on Tōru Takemitsu*. Tokyo: Academia Music Ltd.
- Nuss, Steven. Takemitsu and the cry of phoenix. In Hugh de Ferranti and Yōko Narazaki (eds.), *A Way a Lone: Writings on Tōru Takemitsu*. Tokyo: Academia Music Ltd. NY: Fordham University Press.
- Ohtake, Noriko. 1993. *Creative Sources for the Music of Tōru Takemitsu*. Aldershot: Scholar Press.
- Shirane, Haruo. 1987. *The Bridge of Dreams: A Poetics of the Tale of Genji*. Stanford University Press.
- Shlomowitz, Matthew. 2002. The place of Messiaen in Takemitsu's music: reflections on *Quatrain II*. In Hugh de Ferranti and Yōko Narazaki (eds.), *A Way a Lone: Writings on Tōru Takemitsu*. Tokyo: Academia Music Ltd.
- Suzuki, Sadami; Iwai, Shigeki. 2006. *Wabi, Sabi, Yūgen: "Nihonteki naru Mono" e no Dōtei*. (Wabi, Sabi, Yūgen: the process to be seen as an approach to the essence of beauty in Japan). Tokyo: Suseisha [Orig. 鈴木貞美・岩井茂樹編『わび・さび・幽玄—「日本的なるもの」への道程』水声社、2006]
- Takemitsu, Tōru. 1995. *Confronting Silence: Selected Writings*. Tr. Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasow. Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press.
- Tarasti, Eero. 1994. *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Tsunoda, Ryusaku; de Bary, William Theodore; and Keene, Donald. 1958. *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ueda, Makoto. 1991. *Literary and Art Theories in Japan*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. University of California Press.

Tōru Takemitsu muzika ir Japonijos estetinės vertybės

Santrauka

Tōru Takemitsu muzikoje nemažai klausytojų ir muzikologų išvelgia Japonijos estetinių vertybių manifestacijas, tačiau iki šiol trūksta kontekstualaus ir sistemiškesnio jų tyrimo. Šiame straipsnyje mėginama susieti Takemitsu muzikos aspektus ir filosofinį bei estetinį kontekstą. Pasitelkiant A. J. Greimo modeliais grįstus Eero Tarasti metodologinius aspektus mėginama apibrėžti, kokios modalumo ir naratyvo formos būdingos Takemitsu muzikai ir kaip tai susiję su tradicinėmis Japonijos estetinėmis vertybėmis. Takemitsu muzikos erdvinei architektonikai, harmonijos ir laiko organizacijai bei poetiniam subjektui būdinga ambivalentiška konfigūracija: euforija ir disforija čia funkcionuoja ne kaip dialektinės opozicijos, bet greičiau kaip diferencijuota vienovė. Analogiška semiotinė konfigūracija būdinga ir tradicinei japonų poetikai, paprastai apibūžiamai pasitelkiant *aware*, *yūgen*, *sabi* ir *wabi* estetines kategorijas. Tiek muzikos, tiek kitų menų poetiką vienija gilesnio lygmens sintagminės struktūros, užtikrinančios kultūros homogeniškumą ir aptinkamos atliekant semiotines redukcijas.