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Pedagogical use of cinematic imagery in Augusta Read Thomas's Piano Etudes

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Approved and recommended for acceptance as a document in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate in Musical Arts.

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Pedagogical Use of Cinematic Imagery in Augusta Read Thomas's Piano Études

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A document submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

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In

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for the degree of

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Dedication

To Kristin Marie

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Table of contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Musical Examples.....	vi
Abstract.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Imagery in Piano Performance.....	6
Avant-garde Cinematic Imagery: a Tool for Addressing Mood and Atmosphere in Piano Performance.....	13
Keyboard Études in Historical Perspective.....	27
The Compositional Style of Augusta Read Thomas.....	30
The Captivating Quality of Augusta Read Thomas' Piano Études.....	34
Analysis of Augusta Read Thomas Piano Études	
I. Orbital Beacons—Homage to Luciano Berio.....	40
II. Fire Waltz—Homage to Béla Bartok.....	51
III. Cathedral Waterfall—Homage to Oliver Messiaen.....	59
IV. On Twilight—Homage to Pierre Boulez.....	65
V. Rain at Funeral—Homage to Morton Gould.....	74
VI. Twitter-Machines—Homage to David Rakowski.....	82

Conclusions.....	91
Bibliography.....	96

List of Musical Examples

Example 1, “Orbital Beacons,” mm.1-11.....	44
Example 2, “Orbital Beacons,” mm. 12-20.....	45
Example 3, “Orbital Beacons,” mm. 21-25.....	46
Example 4, “Fire Waltz”, mm 56-66.....	53
Example 5, “Fire Waltz,” mm. 1-15.....	54
Example 6, “Fire Waltz”, mm. 93-98.....	56
Example 7, “Fire Waltz,” mm. 118-121.....	57
Example 8, “Cathedral Waterfall,” mm. 1 and 2.....	59
Example 9, “Cathedral Waterfall,” mm. 38-45.....	60
Example 10, “Cathedral Waterfall”, mm. 7-16	62
Example 11, “Cathedral Waterfall,” mm. 48-52.....	65
Example 12, “Cathedral Waterfall,” mm. 48-52.....	67
Example 13, “On Twilight,” mm. 1-6.....	68
Example 14, “On Twilight, mm. 56-61.....	69
Example 15, “On Twilight, mm. 56-61.....	73
Example 16, “On Twilight,” mm. 99-101.....	73
Example 17, “Rain at Funeral,” mm. 1-11.....	75
Example 18, “Rain at Funeral” mm. 14-16.....	76
Example 19, “Rain at Funeral,” mm. 22-28	78

Example 20, “Rain at Funeral,” mm. 33-38.....	79
Example 21, “Twitter-Machines,” mm. 26-27.....	83
Example 22, “Twitter-Machines,” mm. 1-10.....	84
Example 23, “Twitter Machines,” mm. 18-22.....	85
Example 24, “Twitter-Machines,” m. 31.....	86
Example 25, “Twitter-Machines,” m. 41.....	89

Abstract

This document is a study of Augusta Read Thomas's piano études from the point of view of mood and atmosphere. These expressive aspects of Thomas's piano pieces spring out from both the descriptive titles and from the suggestive piano writing. The music analysis of Thomas's piano études utilizes cinema art as a means to elaborate on musical imagery, based on the cinema's potential to convey mood and atmosphere. The crossroads between Thomas's piano études and cinema art affords to create a pedagogical tool as a means for expressive and convincing performances of Thomas's pieces.

Introduction

Augusta Read Thomas's six piano études abound on visual images. From the onset, each piece's title evokes images from which the musical material emerges and articulates. In Thomas's études, the association between a visual concept and the corresponding music gives rise to compelling sonic effects. Thomas's études offer an impressive variety of unique musical thoughts that are carefully designed in the style of expressive, character pieces. As Debussy's piano preludes, Thomas's études were inspired by poetic phrases and visual experiences. Consistent with the genre, the études are intended to challenge the performer with technical issues, such as dynamic contrasts and control of multiple layers. Yet, they strike for their precise emotional landscapes, offering the performer the opportunity to explore on their meaning and evocative quality.

In her notes for the G. Schirmer edition, Thomas explains that she conceived them in pairs aiming at creating contrasting sounds from identical materials.¹ From each pair, the first études show meditative and thoughtful characters at slow tempo, whereas the second ones, utterly overt, are written in fast tempos.

Since Thomas's titles and musical materials have sprung from emerging ideas that reflect human life and nature, the study of borrowed imagery will prove useful as a tool for further exploring the scope of their evocative substance and as a means to expressive and cohesive performances. It is well accepted among pianists that piano repertoire reaches maturity when it is studied away from the instrument. Indeed, the contemplation and study

¹ Augusta Read Thomas. *Six Piano Études*. Composer's note. [New York, NY: G.Schirmer. 2006]

of a work in the light of life experiences and other artistic trends can prove a crucial means for merging the musical experience with the musician's personal growth. Therefore, finding pertinent visual images and observing them against the music can trigger a more in-depth and holistic understanding of the pieces. Consequently, the performances of those pieces will be more committed, creative, as well as personal should the pianist have acquired a transcending, composite understanding of them—a sort of background knowledge that is both experiential and musical.

Furthermore, because of the necessity to instill the performer's mind with sensitivity to envision the evocative quality inherent in Thomas's piano études as well as to pay respect to their transcending musical content and sound-worlds, the search for concrete images will prove a useful pedagogical tool for interpretation. In this context, cinematic images can be treated as a toolbox for articulating musical imagery. The exploratory use of cinematic images associated with the sound of the music and its meaning, like a brainstorm exercise of mood and landscapes, however, is not intended to be a substitute for traditional learning process but rather an additional stage—a complement—to the process of building an interpretation. Ultimately, by using imagery, pianists can not only enhance the understanding of Thomas's piano études, but also can more easily convey her music's sensual pleasure and lyricism to the listener. This document proposes a systematic use of imagery that not only attempts a thorough portrait of Thomas's études but also will examine the potentialities of cinema art as a means to explore landscape and mood in piano performance.

The visualization of images as a tool for performing is a prevalent notion among famous performers. In fact, it is not unusual to hear piano teachers and orchestral

conductors referring to visual elements when addressing color effects and moods in a particular repertoire. Pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim, for example, has mentioned that he hears music as he looks at a landscape—the phenomenon in reversed order.² Moreover, pianist Edwin Fischer constantly made use of nature when grasping a sound on the piano. Those assertions confirm the belief that pianists experience visual images and colors as they work on producing specific sounds on the instrument. Regarding what comes first, music or image, is not crucial. What seems to matter is the reciprocity between both music and mental images and flow of the meanings and emotions that moves in an out from both types of media.

The dynamic of imagery that this document is bringing to discussion utilizes explorations on cinematographic scenes that are chosen for each of Augusta Read Thomas' piano études. Pianists can then elicit the reciprocity between the film's and the music's expressive languages in order to draw ideas from the cinema for expressive piano performance of Thomas' pieces.

Cinema offers many parallels with music: it is a temporal art that moves at particular tempos. Like music, cinema narratives and expressive moods can unfold, develop and change over time. Moreover, film theory often usually deals with the composition of the image as one of the most expressive elements in a film. Those visual experiences—the look of the film—can elicit evocative articulations of moods and landscapes in the musicians' mind. In fact, cinematic language is rich in devices that utilize colors, light, motion and spatial relationships within the frame and therefore, as a

² Ludwig van Beethoven, *The Complete Piano Sonatas*. Live from Berlin. *The Masterclasses*, dir. by Allan Miller. DVD.[EMI Classics, 2007]

compelling visual vehicle it can stir up the musical materials in Thomas's piano études in a way that regular musical analysis cannot do.

By connecting Thomas's études with a selection of relevant films, each media becomes an expression of the other, and consequently, the film becomes a metaphor for the piano étude. In fact, images can powerfully evoke emotional states that can influence the way pianist produce sound. This document proposes that the musicians' visual engagement with a cinema art sequence can give rise to a transfer between the look of the film and the expressive sound of the piece, rendering it the latter more expressive.

This document will focus on the study of mood and atmosphere suggested in the musical textures and visual titles in Thomas's études. Attention to mood can bring a holistic approach to performance since the concept of mood encompasses both sound-worlds as well as extra-musical association to music.

Even though the note learning process is a crucial means for the performance of Thomas's piano études, the systematic utilization of imagery can facilitate a more conducive performer's mindset for the goal of expressive and mature interpretation. In order to achieve this task, this document will establish relationship between the six études and cinematic images that reflect the piano pieces' moods and meanings.

Thomas's six études form a collection of vignettes each one quoting six major composers from the twentieth-century. In her pieces, Thomas captures the sonic world of each composer—Berio's lyricism, Bartok's percussive sound and dissonant harmony, Messiaen's bird-like phrases and colorful chords, Boulez's alleatory feeling of

organization, Morton's expansive pace and Rakowsky's keyboard games. In her études, she "adds her own spin to it."³

Composed between 1996 and 2005, Thomas's études are short and thematically concentrated. All six études are highly idiomatic for the piano—she, in fact, composed them at the instrument, playing them very slowly⁴. The pieces show free forms following Thomas's composition usual process where the musical form expands in response to and grows out of the previous material, without being necessary molded into specific traditional form structures. The difficulty of the pieces range from intermediated to advanced level.

Augusta Read Thomas was born in Glen Cove, New York in 1964. She was the Mead Composer-in-residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra between 1996 and 2006. She has been associate professor at Eastman School of Music and Northwestern University. Currently, she teaches composition at the University of Chicago. She was elected member of the American Academy of Letters and Arts in 2009.

³ Edward Reichel. Selected Reviews. Quoted in Augusta Read Thomas's website. <http://www.augustareadthomas.com/pnoetudes.html/> {accessed September, 28, 2012}

⁴ Augusta Read Thomas, phone conversation with author, October, 10, 2012.

Imagery in Piano Performance

Composers have always explored depiction at length in their music for keyboard instruments.⁵ The literature for keyboard has been keen to conjure up not only the sound of other instruments but also landscapes, moods and atmospheres. In fact, keyboard literature, beginning in the early seventeenth-century, has always had a penchant for recreating feelings and moods more than any other repertoire, perhaps with the exception of vocal music. For instance, seventeenth century harpsichord music by Francois Couperin and Jean-Philip Rameau shows already a look into the world of depiction. Their keyboard pieces can be very specific of a sentiment. Works such as Couperin's *Les Idées heureuses* (The Merry Ideas) or Rameau's *Les Rappel des oiseaux* (The Birds Call) attempt to encapsulate a piece's particular mood, opening a window to imagination, like a photograph would capture a person's countenance or a landscape's atmosphere as a hint for performers to explore its expression and meaning.

The modern piano, also a depicting instrument, can bring about images and emotions. In fact, composers have often written at the instrument while searching for sonorities that are beyond the physical sound of the instrument. In German Lied, for instance, the piano part often bears an important role as a creator of atmospheres and moods that supports and complements the poetry and vocal line. Furthermore, the solo piano literature has been greatly enriched by the portrayal of single feelings or moods in character pieces. The ability to represent all types of textures, from homophonic to

⁵ Depiction is intended here to mean associations of extra-musical ideas and programmatic contents in piano music

polyphonic, as well as its large octave range, contributes to the piano's potential for evoking imagery.

According to pianist and writer Paul Badura-Skoda the piano functions as “a sort of magic device that can communicate everything from a singing voice to orchestral sounds—the flute sound comes off very well in the high register, with its staccato articulation.”⁶ Similarly, Daniel Barenboim describes the sound of the piano as neutral. In his view, the neutrality of the piano sound is what “enables us to create far more colors on it.”⁷ Therefore the pianist can rely on external imagery in order to transcend that neutral sound, like an artisan would manipulate mud in order to make a piece of pottery. In piano performance, the pianist—the artisan—can exploit the possibilities of the sound's depictions and meanings through imaginative thinking.

Another reason for relying on the imaginative aspect of piano has to do with the actual mechanics of sound production. The action of the piano involves more than twenty parts that are responsible for propelling the hammer toward the string. In this complex mechanism, the final stroke on the string is quite removed from the pianists' finger. That physical distance can also be seen as removing some intimacy between the performer and the instrument, creating a barrier that can hinder expression. Conversely, the seemingly uncomplicated way to produce sound on the piano, when compared to the violin's tone production, for example, accounts for the real challenge to play expressively and creatively. Thus, connecting to the expressive quality of the piano requires conscious effort to visualize moods and atmospheres. The pianist's investment in compensative work on the

⁶ Paul Badura-Skoda' interview in *Great Contemporary Pianist Speak for Themselves*, vol.1 and 2. Edited by Elyse Mach [New York: Dover Publications, 1991], 6

⁷ Daniel Barenboim, *A life in music*, edited by Michael Lewin. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991], 53.

meanings and expressivity in the music score will make the instrument and the pianist surrender to actual music, so to speak, and thus think more evocatively.

Ironically, the imaginative dimension of the piano has been long neglected in curricula.⁸ Imagination is usually a much less addressed topic in books than technique and mechanics of playing. Consequently, in piano practice, there is a widespread overemphasis on technical acquisition. In fact, the attitude that favors technical command over artistic intentions as well as the pianist's lack of exposure to other art forms brings about an inability to not only conceive piano music as evocative but also to hear it as living sound. This dichotomy between music and artistic thinking and piano playing has resulted in a tendency to flatten out all the musical figures and textures into one homogeneous sound that lacks expression.

More than a century ago, Franz Liszt explored the possibilities of the piano without ever ignoring expression. In his teaching, he “demanded a technique created from the spirit,” and “not derived from the mechanism of the piano.”⁹ As it can be seen, even though Liszt's contribution to piano literature heavily lies on technical virtuosity, he still valued imagination and metaphors as an approach to music making.

There are invaluable recordings of artistically conceived performances on the piano by important piano-composers such as Max Reger, Enrique Granados, Ferruccio Busoni, and Béla Bartok that advocate Liszt's ideals. In all of those recordings, we can not only hear a distinct voice coming from the performance of those composers, but also a great deal of freedom from the printed page in interpretations that go beyond the notes. Those

⁸ To my knowledge, there has not been a systematic approach to the use of imagery in the piano teaching environment.

⁹ Alfred Brendel, *Liszt and the piano* in *Alfred Brendel on Music*. [Chicago, IL: A Cappella Books, 2001], 280

interpretations confirm that composers are often prone to imaginative stimulation and extra-musical concepts when conceiving sonorities of the piano.

Giving this understanding, we can examine how metaphoric applications to music are relevant in piano playing. Two notable books on pianists Alfred Brendel and Claudio Arrau have discussed this topic at length.¹⁰ Both books are filled with accounts on the use of metaphor and subtext in the interpretation of musical works. In fact, Arrau's teacher, Martin Krause emphasized visiting art galleries, attending performances of opera and reading literature as a means to grow personally in order to better understand music.¹¹ Arrau's utilization of the Hero and Leander's myth as subtext for the interpretation of Liszt's Ballade No. 2 in B minor proves likewise.¹² Similarly, Brendel is emphatic in the need for metaphors when looking at music: "It is certainly limiting to illuminate a piece of music from a single angle of vision. The spotlight comes from without, while the best performances bring a work to life from within and shed light in many directions at once."¹³ Furthermore, Brendel also states that "it is absolutely legitimate to think about music metaphorically, as long as one stays in touch with musical structure."¹⁴ According to Brendel, there are enough instances in the writings of composers of the past that describe their own musical works in poetic and psychological ways¹⁵. Comments about atmosphere,

¹⁰ See discussions on Liszt and Beethoven in Joseph Horowitz, *Arrau on Music and Performance*, [New York: Dover Publications, 1992], and chapter "About Music" in Alfred Brendel in conversation with Martin Meyer, *Me of all People*. [Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001]

¹¹ In his article *Teaching strategies and styles*, Malcolm J. Tait suggested connecting music knowledge with the student's personal experiences by using imagery and metaphor for expressive performances.

¹² Horowitz, *Arrau on Music and performance*, 142

¹³ Brendel in conversation with Martin Meyer, *Me of All People*, 74

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 126

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 228

character, and poetical ideas abound even more than about music analysis.¹⁶ Arnold Schonberg, for instance, even suggested that “a poem, a story, a play or a moving picture may provide the stimulus to express definite moods.”¹⁷

Even though Thomas already gives imagery clues in all five études, the performer can utilize extra-musical images to expand his or her scope of understanding of those clues. For instance, Thomas gives room to further exploration on the clue of a funeral theme in the implied image of a “rain at funeral” in her fifth étude. The performer can then elaborate on issues such as what the image of a rainy funeral might look like or where and how the actual funeral ceremony could unfold. The mental pictures that can come out as reactions to those questions will trigger more vivid expressions of those specific types of imagery. The addition of certain type of *subtext* to the themes of the music contributes, in fact, to the definition of the mood and landscape in the music to the pianist’s emotional and intellectual understanding. This creates not only a more visceral connection with the piece of music but also contributes to a pianist’s personal and general growth through the music.

But how can the piano playing suggest poetry and arouse visual images? Prominent performer and pedagogue Boris Berman, in his book *Notes from the Pianist’s Bench*, talks about the necessity of *refining* the inner ear in order to create shades of colors in the instrument. There Berman explains that pianists should base their playing on what they hear inside and emulate the type of sound—“the brassy resonance of a gong”, for instance—that the music might call for.¹⁸ In his book, he reveals some specific interactions

¹⁶ Alfred Brendel, *Talking to Brendel (with Jeremy Siepmann)*, in *Alfred Brendel on Music*. [Chicago, IL: A Cappella Books, 2001], 368

¹⁷ Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, edited by Gerarld Strang and Leonard Stein [London: Faber and Faber, 1967], 95

¹⁸ Boris Berman, *Notes from the Pianist’s Bench*. [New Haven and London: Yale

between sound imagination and sound production. In that process of playing, two “musical ears” weave along as the pianist plays.¹⁹ Berman continues saying that “one is the “subjective ear,” the pianist’s inner image that is to be reproduced. The other one is the objective ear that monitors the actual sound that comes under the fingers.”²⁰ It is in the coordination of those two types of hearing—imaginative and concrete—that resides the subtlety that enables pianists to go beyond the mere sound of the piano. The more established the imagery that feeds the music’s meanings, the easier the pianist’s creative approach to expressive sound will be.

In her dissertation on the “Narrative Impulse in Absolute Music,” Karen Boe has argued that, for performers, clarification and inspiration has often come from other forms of arts.²¹ Imagery provides a vehicle that allows musicians to “see” inside the music and to construct a frame and a story that energizes the piece. Similarly, pianist Alfred Cortot advocates for the crowning effect that evocative imagination can bring to a piece during the process of learning and performing. It might be, he says, “that a provocative metaphor will give point to the color and subtlety of musical phrase, and by stimulating the performers imagination through suggested similes, one may prepare a more fertile soil and widen the range of musical emotion.”²²

University Press, 200], 5

¹⁹ Boris Berman, *Notes from the Pianist’s Bench*. [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 200], 4

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4

²¹ Karen M. Boe, *The Narrative Impulse in Absolute Music: Drama as Used by Performer and Teacher*, [University of Wisconsin, 1994. In ProQuest dissertations and thesis], vii.

²² Alfred Cortot, *French Piano Music*. Trans. by Hilda Andrews [New York: Da Capo, 1977], 2

Avant-garde Cinematic Imagery: a Tool for Addressing Mood and Atmosphere in Piano Performance

In his article “*Stimmung*: Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood,” Robert Sinnerbrink states that “moods always reveal or express a cinematic world,” and that cinematic worlds have their own specific kinds of mood.”²³ Interestingly, in the title of his article, Sinnerbrink uses the German term *Stimmung*, “meaning mood, attunement, or atmosphere.”²⁴ These expressive elements can at the same time “evoke a musical condition of the soul” that involves both “physical acoustics and the harmony of vibrations.”²⁵ In fact, in films, mood can be understood as the aesthetic dimensions of the image—“its giving of life and expression to figures, spaces or materials things.”²⁶ What is relevant to the topic of pedagogical use of cinematic imagery in piano playing is precisely this particular expressive quality of the image that conveys mood, which can be analogous to the concept of mood in the musical pieces.

Furthermore, Sinnerbrink suggests that mood in film is like a baseline, a form of attunement that permits the narrative and characters to expressively operate.²⁷ In piano music, that baseline is the sound-world that is achieved by the pianist’s treatment of musical materials—rhythm, harmonies and textures—and with the aid of elements such as

²³ Robert Sinnerbrink, “*Stimmung*, exploring the aesthetics of mood.” *Screen* 53:2 [Summer, 2012]: 149

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lotte H Eisner, *The Haunted Screen, Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves.[Berkeley, CA: University Press, 1969], 199-206. Quoted in Robert Sinnerbrink, “*Stimmung*, Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood.” *Screen* 53:2 [Summer, 2012]: 149

²⁶ Sinnerbrink, “*Stimmung*, Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood, 149

²⁷ Ibid., 154

pedaling, articulation and tempo fluctuations. The mood of a film, when applied to a piano piece, can function as a preparatory phase for the musician to express the emotion itself—it is what primes the understanding of a sonic world in the musical piece. While getting ready to a performance, the mood prepares the musician’s mindset for a proper sound for a piece where dynamics and types of touch can unfold as momentary events belonging to the general, homogenous expressivity.

As it was mentioned before, among cinematic elements, a very powerful tool for setting a mood is the cinematographer’s creation of the film’s visual appearance and texture. The cinematographer’s tools such as lighting, color, depth of field and camera movement gives the film a characteristic personality. The resulting film “look” can transfer a great emotional weight into the mind of the viewer as he or she engages in the film.

Giving this understanding of cinematic appearance, films can range from having a surreal appearance to showing a documentary, realistic look—two opposite sides of the spectrum. For example, some recent films are shot in black-and-white style in order to depict certain nostalgia and flavor from the past. This is the case of Damien Chazelle’s 2013 *Guy and Madeline in a Park Bench*, which tells an urban story about a relationship between Guy, a jazz trumpeter—evoking Miles Davis’s personality—and Madeline, his girlfriend. On the other hand, some filmmakers seek colorful photography in order to create exalted moods and to better convey the beauty of landscapes, such as the Italian villa shown in Mike Newel’s 1992 *Enchanted April*.

Similarly, speed, rhythm, and pacing in a film can convey feelings. In Krzysztof Kieslowski’s 1993 film *Blue*, the sustained and slow-paced scenes that contain only sparse dialogue distill anguish and despair, like the mourning feeling of a funeral march. In

contrast, in the 1969 film *Z*, by Greek filmmaker Costa-Gavras, the scenes are articulated in relentless pace, like in a *motto perpetuo* music piece, constantly keeping the spectators at the edge of their seats. For pianists, the pedagogical use of filmic images occurs when they are able to grasp the cinematic world of the film—“the aroma that pervades every [cinematic] work”²⁸—and then they can benefit from referential visual tonalities and motions that can stir, move and inspire them. Hence, atmospheres, mood, and motion in films can increase pianists’ range of imaginative understanding of piano works, just as life situations and learning experiences offers the potential to accumulate insights and knowledge.

Furthermore, the style of avant-garde cinema—an art form that is much more resourceful than Hollywood movies—offers many parallels between film and modern music as both are reflections of the contemporary world. According to Walter Benjamin, devices such ultra-close-ups, flashbacks, freeze-frame and slow motion, as well as eccentric angles, camera positioning, and time-lapse photography²⁹ allows a penetrating look into real events and can thus generate more expressive and compelling constructed fictional worlds. In this topic of pedagogical use of images, those cinematic devices can be seen as parallels to the extreme tonal ranges, the parenthetical passages, the long pauses, the chordal sonorities as well as the isolated notes in Thomas’s études. As we can see, cinema, a quintessential twentieth century art, utilizes devices that resonate with contemporary music written in the past two decades.

In a 2002 study on the use of imagery and metaphor in performance, music educator Robert Woody found that among the music faculty members who participated in

²⁸ Sinnerbrink, “*Stimmung*, Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood, 150

²⁹ Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory* [New York: Routledge], 85

his study, all but one used mood descriptions, such as ‘happy, sad, serious or mournful’, to extract from students expressive performance on a given melodic material. However, in the same study, Woody noticed that music teachers “shared a relatively limited repertoire of expressive performance devices as well as a limited affective vocabulary to describe them.”³⁰ The music teachers’ responses show very similar images and metaphors to describe the musical examples in Woody’s study, some of which matched the following sentence: “Play with sadness and intensity as you would when expressing the loss of a loved one.”³¹ Therefore, in preparing for expressive performance of piano music, film scenes not only can potentially open up a broad range of sensorial experiences about color and textures but can also help in expanding the musician’s range of descriptive adjectives and imaginative thinking. Particularly, utilizing cinema sequences to build subtext upon the études’ visual clues can spark a more personal, grounded and convincing interpretation of piano music. Consequently, that cinematic image can generate a precise focus of mind for expressive performance, a mental equipoise that allied to an emotional anchorage, can allow the pianist to enter confidently into the core of the piece.

Another practical advantage of utilizing films as a tool for expressive interpretation bears similarities with the benefits of studying literature, examining paintings, or accumulating general life experience for mature music performance. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, for example, state that film cognitivist theorists believe that cinema can be a sort of “default value of human experience.”³² In relation to a movie’s fictional

³⁰ Robert Woody, “Emotion, Image and Metaphor in the Acquisition of Musical Performance Skill.” *Music Education Research, Vol. 4, No. 2* [2002]: 222

³¹ Woody, “Emotion, Image and Metaphor in the Acquisition of Musical Performance Skill,” 220

³² Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 164

world, it is also true that “a film can leave a deep imprint, appealing directly to one’s consciousness and feelings.”³³ According to Tarja Laine, “cinema addresses people’s imagination through the senses in ways that are immediately felt in the body, [and thus] it calls forth emotion from inside.”³⁴ The cinematic type of power resonates with the way music can strongly affect the listener through sound. This correspondence between cinema and music, the way they both interact with life and nature, makes it possible to propose that experiencing a film can be a useful substitute to life experience for pianists.

Moreover, in films, the person not only watches but also establishes personal associations with the images. In fact, in movies, “the assumption of a disembodied eye factor means that the person not simply looks at the space of the shot, but inhabits it.”³⁵ Similarly, in music, the listener experiences a disembodied ear as the music, in its insubstantiality, captures the listener’s mind and, indeed, his or her surroundings, creating strong bonds between the musician’s life and the film’s contents.

The interactive quality of cinema means that the spectator begins a dialogue with the film and establishes a connection with it. In the process, the spectator not only has to make sense of the film, but also make sense of himself as a person, reevaluating his views and life experiences. The emotional sensation of the spectator remains his own and can be utilized as a tool for considering musical interpretations.³⁶

³³ Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 150

³⁴ Tarja Laine, *Feeling cinema. Emotional Dynamics in Films Studies* [London: Continuum, 2011], 3

³⁵ Anne Rutherford “Teaching Film and Mise-en-Scene,” in *Teaching Film*, ed. by Lucy Fischer and Patrice Petro [New York: The Novel Language Association of America, 2012], 307

³⁶ Laine, *Feeling cinema. Emotional Dynamics in Films Studies*, 7

On the other hand, although cinema can be understood as an extension of the human mind or as an analogy of the mind,³⁷ it also offers a rather extraordinary view of reality: the cinema's victory "over the limitations of the human senses and the world they perceive."³⁸ The following quote on early avant-garde movies by philosopher and film theorist Walter Benjamin demonstrates the scope of expression accomplished in film. Benjamin exposes the poetic capabilities of the camera and how a film shot can render an ordinary place extraordinary:

"Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have locked up hopelessly. Then came film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling."³⁹

Furthermore, Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, who championed atmosphere in cinema, renders ordinary things poetic by making the viewer contemplate them with focused attention. Natalia Bondarchuk, who worked under Tarkovsky as an actress, says that "it's as if reality moves to a different dimension, the dimension of art."⁴⁰ It is because of cinema's contemplative dimension, its multi-sensorial nature, and also because it is ideally projected on large screens that this art can more easily reach the unconscious and

³⁷ Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 151

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 85

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn [New York: Schocken, 1969], 236

⁴⁰ Natalya Bondarchuk, interview. Special Features. Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solaris*, DVD.

nurture the imagination. Because of this potential to move the person, film sequences can not only be used to address interpretative musical issues in a deeper way than ordinary analysis does but also to serve as a sort of visual targets to give ground to the atmospheres suggested on Thomas's piano études. Ultimately, by creating a heuristic process that affords expressivity to flow from the cinematic world to the pianist's mind and the keyboard, cinema sequences become then a metaphor for the music. Thomas's études can then transcend the threshold of conventional music narrative and move toward a quest for evocative journeys through the ears, using ordinary piano sounds, economic musical resources, and short forms.

Conversely, without using compatible artistic trends to elaborate on the visual ideas that composers have already suggested in their titles or that they hints at in the scores, musicians might experiences difficulty in feeling their metaphoric meanings and igniting the emotional content within them. In his article "Imagination in the Music of Debussy," pianist and pedagogue Neil Rutman states that process of "*imaging*" a piece of music is enhanced by the *understanding* [emphasis added] and further exploration on the literary or poetic images influencing the music."⁴¹ Those extra musical ideas can be better understood through a diversity of ways, such as painting, literary narrative, or in the case of the topic of this document, can be explored through cinema. For instance, the two imagery clues in "Cathedral Waterfall" invite the performer not only to explore images related to cathedrals, churches, or abbeys as well as the sound of falling water but also to capture the human moods and atmospheres that can occur within those types of enclosures. It is much easier to extract the meaning of the piece's content through a few "extra-musical

⁴¹ Neil Rutman, "Imagination in the piano works of Debussy." *The pianist's craft; mastering the works of great composers* [January 1 2012]: 146

analogies,”⁴² such as cinema’s language, and to benefit from the “simultaneous processing of a [the] huge amount of information that imagery allows to happen.”⁴³

Similarly, imaginative descriptive paragraphs, such as Alfred Cortot’s paragraphs on Debussy’s piano preludes, can evoke encompassing experiences that are simultaneously structured and poetic. Needless to say, those paragraphs infuse the performer with inspirational imagery. For instance, the following pictorial and emotive prose that Cortot wrote, aims at seizing the atmosphere in Debussy’s prelude “Feuilles Mortes”: “Dead leaves flutter and softly gyrate. Dropping silently onto the ground; the sad splendor of an autumnal sunset seems to bear within it all the emotions of a long and wistful farewell.”⁴⁴

Film sequences, like Cortot’s paragraphs on Debussy’s preludes, function as visual frames onto which a pianist can explore a piece’s expressive atmosphere, based on the metaphoric value of those literary images. Similarly, visual parallels between related cinema scenes and piano music can enhance articulation of mood, just as Cortot’s descriptive prose paragraphs offer persuasive frames of atmosphere and mood for Debussy’s music.

Imagery can be revelatory and bring new information—similar to the way life experience feeds the performer with new insights—about the music and its meaning. In a practical way, imagery can bring an anchoring emotional state for the performer as it contributes in setting up a mental blueprint that relates to the pieces’ meaning. In the meantime, reflecting on the score in different contexts—mostly away from the

⁴² Woody, “Emotion, Image and Metaphor in the Acquisition of Musical Performance Skill,” 216

⁴³ Sisterhen, Lesley, “Enhancing your Musical Performance Abilities.” *American Music Teacher*, 54, 1 [August 2004]: 33

⁴⁴ Cortot, *French Piano Music*, 27

piano—proves beneficial since the “mind is unencumbered with notes so that the musician in us hears the sounds and feels the moods.”⁴⁵

Givens this understanding, Thomas’s piano études seem like “a mimetic transformation of thought into sound.”⁴⁶ In fact, the imagery clues that she already gives through the title and in the score, as mentioned above, underline the associative ideas that lie behind the notes. Since Thomas took the trouble to create certain frames of mind for her pieces, as it can be seen in the pieces’ titles and their sound-worlds, performers should further investigate in their meanings and integrate any insights into their interpretive ideas. Indeed, those imagery clues Thomas offers are like the genes of the pieces’ characters that can be further developed into more concrete settings. Those seminal ideas can grow into articulated and elaborate images—bringing together landscapes and feelings—for providing a more holistic approach to the music. Pianists can then enjoy a more rewarding musical experience if, as Brendel states, “whenever possible, they leave pure piano playing behind and think associatively.”⁴⁷

In Thomas’s first piano étude, “Orbital Beacons,” for example, the performer can choose to simply learn the notes and carefully follow the contrasting dynamic indication. On the other hand, the performer could explore the pieces’ clues—light beams and rotating harmonies—and he or she can discover an array of associations with life events such as nature—the stars and the sky or city lights—and thoroughly contemplate the piece’s compelling expression in a more tangible fashion.

⁴⁵ Rutman, “Imagination in the piano works of Debussy,” 147

⁴⁶ Brendel in conversation with Martin Meyer, *Me of All People*, 143

⁴⁷ Ibid.

In an interview published in the journal *International Alliance for Women in Music*, Thomas opens the door to the visual element in her music making. In the interview, she uses words such as shape, density, flux, light, dark, and form, as a means to verbalize and to express aural experiences.⁴⁸ In her set of études, the musical textures can establish associations with the elements in a particular motion picture, just as Monet's painting *Fishing Boats at Sea* resonates with Debussy's prelude *Voiles*. This pedagogical crossroads between music and film images can open the interpretive eyes of the performer for reaching the core of the piece.

Similarly, this associative process can diminish the gap between music making and ordinary life experiences, while simultaneously bringing to the piece a greater degree of musical understanding. Ultimately, the holistic and evocative approach to the pieces' mood and atmosphere can lead not only to a more convincing performance but also to a more rewarding and lasting personal experience and fulfilling the necessary spiritual dimension of music. Furthermore, being able to grasp the character and life of each étude can be a great tool for performing and communicating with assurance and skill, in a similar way that the use of Boris Berman's gut technique compensates for a lack of inspiration in an off-day.

In her dissertation *The Narrative Impulse in Absolute Music: Drama as Used by Performer and Teacher*, pianist and lecturer Karen M. Boe states that "music narrates without revealing the particulars of its story."⁴⁹ It is precisely because of this lack of direct meaning in music that imagery helps the performer to freely travel within its abstract inner

⁴⁸ Augusta Read Thomas. 1998. "When the Muse Strikes." *International Alliance for Women in Music*, vol. 4, no. 2 [Summer]: 13

⁴⁹ Boe, *The Narrative Impulse in Absolute Music: Drama as Used by Performer and Teacher*, 13

world. Boe's assertion supports the proposal in this document because the evocative nature of Thomas's piano études opens doors for drawing subtext from their visual clues and suggestive textures. In fact, in her études, the musical materials seem to be like living entities inhabiting their own sound-world. For instance, the evocative melodies of "Cathedral Waterfall" conjure up an angelic vocal character as they float inside the church-like space.

The pianists' pedagogical exercise with cinematic images finds a parallel with a common voice teachers' pedagogical practice that consists of encouraging students to elaborate vivid images and to subtext. This teaching exercise greatly sparks convincing and expressive renditions of vocal repertoire as students use the imagery approach to enhance their performances with brainstorming explorations based on mood and subtext. As an example, visualizing an actual time-period spinning wheel and Gretchen's despair in Schubert's well-known lied *Gretchen am Spinnrade* can be of great guidance for both the understanding the piano part—the articulation of the right hand figures and short left-hand base notes—and the overall flow of the song—the dynamics and dramatic intensity. In the case of Thomas's études, the effort of engaging the player with a film's expressive cinematic world will have the similar approach: to force the watching pianists' mind into a kaleidoscope of moods and landscapes that can ignite the pianist's creative thinking.

Furthermore, another advantage of utilizing cinematic scenes for exploring mood and atmosphere finds an application in the pedagogical concept of mood congruency, a term used by Robert Woody in his aforementioned article. Woody explains that a mood that was experienced and established during a learning session can be easily retrieved in the mind's eye by remembering the images associated with that mood. This concept is

useful in that cinematic images help to recall and to express in music moods and atmospheres that were learned while experiencing those particular expressive elements during a film sequence. As a result, the musical expression “is best recalled and conveyed later while in the same mood as the performer brings those visual images to mind.”⁵⁰

In this unique brainstorming exercise for awakening creativity, the elements from the scenes can be subjectively interpreted and accommodated in order for them to hold useful for a specific piece. Pianists can draw ideas from the general mood of the film or take a particular aspect of their cinematic world depending on what they want to explore in the piano piece. For instance, the 1995 film *Par delà les nuages* by Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni is chosen in order to delve into the mood in “Cathedral Waterfall” since the film contains a sequence whose visual world matches the mood in this étude. In that scene, the two principal characters have left the church of Saint Malta after a being at a solemn ceremony—our ideal atmosphere for the etude. Later on, the sacredness of the chanting that ended with the ceremony remains with the young couple during the following sequence, an outdoors-walking scene at night. This sequence gives rise to a mystical atmosphere outside the church as the sacred chanting still seems to float and reverberate in the spaciousness of the old town’s streets—not unlike Thomas music’s echoing sound—where the couple talks and wanders. The juxtaposition of the church entourage with the outdoors characters’ wandering provokes a compelling composite that can be superimposed upon “Cathedral Waterfall” in order to enliven the étude’s mood and atmosphere, its wide textures as well as its weaving, wandering melodies.

⁵⁰ Robert Woody, “Emotion, Image and Metaphor in the Acquisition of Musical Performance Skill,” 222

Similarly, the secretary's typewriting shot in Costa-Gavras's film *Z*, as they occur during the crowning scene of the colonels' testimony before the prosecutor, suggests useful imagery for Thomas's "Twitter-Machines." In those typewriters close-ups, the viewer can "physically" watch and hear, almost feels, the action's machines that resemble the repeated notes in "Twitter-Machines." Those percussive images in close-up fill the screen, visually and aurally. They are juxtaposed against the corrupt colonels' gestures of indignation and surprise—that unfold like the abrupt chords in the *étude*—when they are questioned by the courageous prosecutor. In this respect, this interrogation scene contains enough visual elements to construct a composite imagery-frame for the character and pulse of Thomas's "Twitter-Machines."

This document does not propose a customized, strict fit between music and cinematic images like a soundtrack score sometimes would do for a movie. Rather, the proposal is about finding expressive resources for mood and atmosphere that links movie scenes with Thomas' *études*. The unifying factor is a congenial flavor that is shared by the two types of media and their respective works. The associative exercise is a pedagogical tool to study Thomas's *études* for expressive performance, not unlike an actor studies the real circumstances and behaviors that his or her characters might naturally convey in order to assimilate them into his acting. By going into this multi-dimensional assimilation of the character, the actor can perform from inside out, as he or she envisioning more real emotions and attitudes. The study of mood and atmosphere in Thomas's *études* can be undertaken likewise, by looking at them through the dynamic lens of cinema, where events unfold poetically and artfully, vividly and suggestively.

If pianist Alfred Brendel lets his “fantasy run free”⁵¹ and considers Beethoven’s “Waldstein” the epitome of nature as he *perceives* (emphasis added) a vast panorama in the outer movements of the piece—a low horizon in the first movement and the view of a valley from a high mountain in the rondo,⁵² why pianists should refrain from utilizing compelling film sequences in order to create and support their imagery-frames through which they could watch, touch and feel—abstractly, visually and audibly—a piano piece?

⁵¹ Brendel, *Musical Character(s) in Beethoven Piano Sonatas* in *Alfred Brendel on Music*, 72

⁵² Brendel in conversation with Martin Meyer, *Me of All People*, 107

Keyboard Études and Learning Approaches

In a general sense, a piano étude is a short musical work that is intended to develop a specific technical or musical skill. In exercises by Czerny and études by Chopin, two antithesis of a similar musical genre can be noticed. In fact, although both composers' works are based on a musical idea that repeats throughout the piece, Czerny mostly aims for sheer technical dexterity, whereas in Chopin's études, despite the technical challenges, a substantial artistic merit prevails. This merit often depends on the articulation of a particular, expressive sound-world that is inseparable from the technical aspect of the piece.

Moreover, in the twentieth-and twenty-first centuries' piano étude, there is an increasing concern for color, character and atmosphere. Although the expressive aspect of the piano étude genre can actually be a legacy of Nineteenth-century composers, as shown in the poetic titles in Liszt's études, in reality, the overwhelming technical demands that Liszt's pieces exert upon the pianist much too often overshadow their metaphoric dimension.

Given this understanding, contemporary études can be seen as a platform for showing expressive styles that often reflect the musical trends of present times, while they also contribute with technical keyboard novelties. In order not to overlook their meanings of those études, their expressive aspect as well as their sound-world should be in the forefront of the pianist's intentions as they learn them. Notwithstanding, pianists' practicing agenda of piano études is filled with the goal of technical command and

accuracy. In the teaching environment, sound and mood—the artistic merit of those pieces—are often neglected, as it was discussed above with regard to music in general.

Even though Augusta Read Thomas's piano études present the performer with a few technical challenges, such as control of detailed dynamics and unusual rhythms, as well as the execution of wide arpeggios and precise pedaling, the issues of atmosphere, sound, and mood are paramount. Expressivity in those pieces is like the tissue that not only runs along their musical structure but also pervades it. As it occurs with the technically challenging Nineteenth-century étude, in Thomas's études also, "*virtuosité y deviant poésie et constitue le ferment même de l'inspiration musicale.*"⁵³ (Virtuosity there becomes poetry and constitutes the ferment of musical inspiration).

Not surprisingly, Thomas' piano études written between 1996 and 2005 are entitled with words that imply very engaging visual images. Those depictive titles place her études in a three-century old tradition of evocative keyboard music, in the style of single-mood character pieces that includes composers such as Couperin, Schumann and Liszt. At the same time, without relying of special effects such as plucked strings, tapping on the piano lead or obvious sound mimics, Thomas's études mostly search for beauty and expressive sound and evocative moods and atmospheres. Pianists can then recreate those sounds and atmospheres through the complicity of the imaginative mind, just as Chopin's and Scriabin's pianistic tradition utilizes the idiosyncratic piano sound to conjure up moods and feelings with the aid of abstraction and imagination.

⁵³ Jean-Paul Despax, "Les études pour piano: entre esthétiques et interprétation" in Maxine Joos, ed. *Claude Debussy: jeux de formes*. [Paris: Aethetica. Rue D'Ulm, 2004], 241-264

For accomplishing this challenge, utilizing cinematic images can afford to experience sensorial and conceptual ingredients that will help the creative pianist's mind in articulating the music's evocative and dramatic character.

The compositional Style of Augusta Read Thomas

“By some urgency I am not really alive unless I am creating. To be a composer is a calling, not a profession”⁵⁴

-Augusta Read Thomas

Any description of Augusta Read Thomas’s musical style could not be accurate or complete if it did not contain the word *expressive*. In fact, Thomas’s piano music—as well as her orchestral and chamber music—is passionately expressive because it minutely delineates sensations, feelings and emotions and landscapes. She refers to her compositions as being “very dramatic, *molto espressivo*.”⁵⁵ Thomas also describes her music as “having quite a dark poetics to it” as well as “seeking into deep places.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, in the vein of Thomas’s penchant for images, when she describes her music as “a colorful, bold fantasy of sound,” she is actually inviting the listener—and for this document’s concern, the performer—to be part of a complete and organic musical experience.⁵⁷ In a reflection on how to listening to her music, she advocates for the listener have an open heart, mind and ears.⁵⁸

Furthermore, Thomas shows a great vitality in the way she talks about her own music.⁵⁹ In her preface and performing notes to “Traces,” her own set of piano pieces, that

⁵⁴ Augusta Read Thomas, *Prairie Sketches*. Program notes by the composer. ARTCD19912005

⁵⁵ Augusta Read Thomas. 1997. On her way. Interview by Karin Pendle. *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 16, parts 1-2, 37

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 41

⁵⁷ Augusta Read Thomas. 1998. “When the Muse Strikes.” *International Alliance for Women in Music*, vol. 4, no. 2 [Summer]: 14

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 15

⁵⁹ Augusta Read Thomas. *Traces for solo piano*. [New York, NY: G.Schirmer,

urgency for musical expression comes forth. She writes, for example, that she expects the performer to organically draw feeling from the printed text in a way that the music appears spontaneously created on the spot, and that is, fresh, and totally honest. But, even if her music is very expressive, it still fits Ferruccio Busoni's concept of the marriage of opposites.⁶⁰ On the one hand, there is beauty and clear shapes, while on the other, the music is liberated from thematic composition and "can develop freely like a child."⁶¹ As a result, in her music, there is then a union of poetry and compact forms. Her études present the listener with short but free structures that unfold through sophisticated compositional balance and an economy of musical materials.

Regarding the actual process of composition, Thomas constantly says that she has an urgent call to compose music from within. She talks about "emerging ideas" that pop up in her head and hold the subsequent compositional stages together.⁶² She also describes how a composition springs out of a "first sensation that is like a spark or lightning bolt" that brings about a state of inspiration or illumination. Then, that initial spark evokes musical materials, such a chord, a rhythm or a motif that would be worked out in relation to a specific plan or structure.⁶³ As it is evident in these remarks, there is not only an underlying need for expression and creativity in her work as a composer that starts with a "feeling" or idea, but also a suggestion of an intimate, very inward experience that is at the origin of the process. Because her music is so evocative in nature, the pedagogical use of cinematic images in the learning process of her piano études takes advantage of the

2010]

⁶⁰ Ferruccio Busoni, *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music in Three Classics In the Aesthetics of Music* [New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1962], 76,77

⁶¹ Brendel in conversation with Martin Meyer, *Me of All People*, 16

⁶² Augusta Read Thomas. 1998. "When the Muse Strikes," 13

⁶³ Ibid.

hypothesis that those emerging ideas are, to great extent, of imaginative and graphic quality.

In Thomas' piano études, the underlying poetic ground is also enhanced with two-word titles, a juxtaposition that invites the mind to be complicit in creating interpretations on the meaning of the pieces. In this set of études, the first one combines the words 'orbital' and 'beacons,' allowing the performer to picture a light traveling in circles. The third étude, even more radical in its juxtaposition of two very different nouns, 'cathedral' and 'waterfall,' suggests a compelling picture of coloristic sounds flowing down inside a wide-walled enclosure.

The enhanced juxtaposition of evocative words and the connection between words and music are also evident in other Thomas' pieces such as "Love Twitters" for piano, "Prairie Sketches" for soprano and ensemble, and "Spirits Musings" for chamber orchestra.

Another trend in Thomas's music is to pay homage to major composers. In her Six Piano Études, she honors six composers and thereby granting each piece a sort of baptism of sound. From Béla Bartok, she borrows the idea of dissonant and compact chords while from Morton Feldman, she mimics the slowness of tempo. From Messiaen she accomplishes coloristic chords and religious atmosphere while her elliptical lines resemble Luciano Berio's lyricism.

With regard to Thomas' penchant for depiction, her 1996 collection of four pieces for orchestra "... Words of the sea...", Thomas sonically creates a score that springs out of Wallace Stevens' poem "The Idea of the Order at Key West". The poem is about a girl who sings in front of the sea, all by herself. "The ever-hooded sea, the tragic gestured sea was

merely a place by which she walked to sing,” Stevens writes in one line from the poem. Seth Brodsky describes how Thomas captures the logic of this conversation between the singer and the sea by not merely painting the poem, but by collapsing a “six decade distance (Stevens’ poem dates from 1934) into a hyperactive dialogue between two media,”⁶⁴ music and poetry. The result is a “sonic map of Stevens’ landscape that surveys all the poem’s images, and projects an intimate soliloquy into a vast territory of instruments,” he says.⁶⁵ About another line from Stevens’ poem, which reads “what bread does one eat,” Brodsky praises the piece’s creative integration between Thomas’s music and Stevens’s poem, as “the music eats poems, the poem eats music.”⁶⁶ This inextricable relationship between word and sound, which is not dissimilar to that between image and sound, is what allows the pedagogical connections between Thomas’s piano études and cinematic images.

⁶⁴ Seth Brodsky, “On Water, Weather, and Words in Augusta Read Thomas’s ... words of the sea...” Notes in Augusta Read Thomas’s... *words of the sea*... Pierre Boulez, Chicago Symphony Orchestra. ARTCD 19952002

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

The Captivating Quality of Augusta Read Thomas' Piano Études

In modern society, people are exposed to an incredible multiplicity of images that were once unattainable to the human eye. Following the dynamics of this visually-pervaded contemporary era, imagery and contemporary music often intertwines resulting in marriages between images and sound. Thomas's etude, too, exemplify how our contemporary visual media permeates modern life and musical arts. Therefore, her piano music is visually and sensory stimulating and simultaneously arouses images in the listener's mind.

In Thomas's études, we can attempt to capture with sound what a century ago was still out of reach and invisible to the eye. For example, in the etude "Orbital Beacons," a window is opened through which we can look into a science fiction movie. "Twitter-Machines," on the other hand, gives us a snapshot of a contemporary life that is pervaded with mass production, mechanics, and automatic, repeated sounds. Metaphorically, those sounds can also be interpreted as human expressions of emotional distress, and compulsive thoughts—repeated sounds. Along the same lines, the elongated notes in "Orbital Beacons" can also depict an inner journey that meets with human longing and with a sentiment of urban anonymity. Furthermore, the large visual horizon is hinted at in the musical substance—through wide textures and continuous pedaling—from beginning to end. Showing contrasting meaning, "Orbital Beacons" depicts a vast sky that creates a background setting for the whole etude, while in "Twitter-Machines," technology and motion pervades the atmosphere of the piece.

In the music score, Thomas explains in her comments that each pair of études are “like a photograph and its negative.”⁶⁷ The contrasting quality in all her études is mostly achieved by tempo and rhythmical differences. While the first of any pair portrays a calm scene, its counterpart offers a rather anxious or energetic picture. They are like day and night in the figurative sense. Similar to the shifts in tempo, the character of the first and the second of the pair are reverted. While the first is languishing, the next is neurotic; one looks far away in the distance bringing a timeless feeling of nostalgia, while the other occurs right here and now; one is like a meditative contemplation and the other is like a physical work-out, a joyful dance.

Thomas’s études also display another quality that gives them a ritualistic and theatrical appeal. This quality is related to the rhythmic control and timing of events that she brings to her compositions. Even in the very slow études, with their long silences, the moment when a new note emerges, corresponds to a careful overall design that magnifies its effect. Thomas’s pacing waits, pauses and speeds up during the musical journey. Its effectiveness depends upon timing. Similarly, the études unfold in an ingenious development of events, gradually and meticulously emerging through economy and control of musical occurrences. Thomas writes that her études were carefully heard, built and refined throughout a long time.⁶⁸ In fact, Thomas extensively detailed rhythmic notation and dynamics, going so far as to writing several types of quintuples, such as eighth-note and quarter-note quintuplets. This type of rhythmic movement gives the music a hypnotic pulse achieving the feeling of a sort of enclosed time perception. This effect

⁶⁷ Augusta Read Thomas. *Six Piano Études*. Composer’s note.

⁶⁸ Augusta Read Thomas. *Six Piano Études*. Composer’s note.

allows the player and the listener to enter that new *pulse* experience where a high awareness of minute rhythmic details begins, while ordinary sense of pulsation stops.

This enchanting characteristic—a sort of cinematic element—of Thomas’s études brings to mind the style of some great filmmakers such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Krzysztof Kieslowski or Andrei Tarkovsky. In films by those directors, timing is an essential tool for holding the spectator’s attention. The effectiveness in transferring subtle meanings and emotions in their films depends on carefully timed scenes, pauses, silence, and controlled pace. A speculative interplay occurs between the filmmaker and the audience where the audience is called up to a high degree of awareness and participation. The audience’s duty seems only to perceive. Their antennas are hooked up to the signals of the film, which often offers only sparse information during very long and homogenous scenes.

Similarly, in Thomas slow études—the first, third, and fifth, as well as in some sections of the fast ones—her music is quite contemplative, almost mystical. It engages the listener in long, unrelenting waves of sound that establish an atmosphere of expectancy taking the listener to a mental state of openness and deep awareness. The arising of that quasi-metaphysical feeling causes the listener to discover a sort of inner dialogue with the music. On the contrary, the fast études, number two, four, and six are more ritualistic and visceral, and suggest imagery of action and crowd, like in an action film, with many props and characters as well as movement. Still, in these fast-paced pieces, the concentration of material and timing are also essential to hold the listener’s attention and to achieve growth and impact, not unlike the way Haydn achieves the effect of surprise and irony by means of pauses in his piano sonatas. This high degree of perception highlights, in its turn, the idea

of a parallelism of Thomas's music with a visual journey. The music's evocative quality allows her to crystalize pedagogical avenues that will bridge her music with film material.

In exploring the connection between music and dance, we can look at the genre of Baroque dance to gain some insight about how imagery and music complement one another. We can see that it is helpful to study the steps and the dancers' clothes in Baroque dance because they provide an illuminating visual and physical illustration of the gracefulness in the musical phrasing and cadence in Baroque music. In the same way, the pedagogical process of exploring films through piano music is about the film serving as a crucible to illuminate angles in the piano music, and not about molding a piece into a film, allowing room for parallelisms to flow back and forth between the two forms of art.

In the following prose analysis of Thomas's six études, musical issues are combined with pertinent metaphoric descriptions of the études with the aid of cinematic scenes. The imagery will then prove useful in apprehending the feeling of the piece before and during the performance by generating awareness of that sometimes elusive substance, the "soul" of the piece. After completing this brainstorming process of conjuring up imagery associated with the pieces, the performer can then concentrate only on the music performance. "The emotional, psychological or mental shell of the images, the utterance's emotional cast,"⁶⁹ will endure and remain in the piece and in the pianist's mind as he or she performs.

Studying Thomas's études in the light of cinematic art can not only render them more expressive but can also place the musician in a more mature performing orientation.

⁶⁹ Peter Kivy, *Music Alone: philosophical reflections on the purely musical experience* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990], 9

Then the performer can explore issues that pertain to our time and communicate them to the audience.

According to Thomas, the first étude, “Orbital Beacons”, describes rotating harmonies, juxtaposing loud notes with pianissimo ones. This piece deals with resonance, echo, luminosity and natural decay of the piano sound. The second étude, “Fire Waltz”, is a variation of the “Orbital Beacons” and shows an explicit influence of jazz idioms as well as Bartok-like chords. Étude number three, “Cathedral Waterfall”, uses extended jazz harmony and a series of rich chords. A polyphonic piece, it shows an out-of-synchronization note that is struck between the harmonies. The four étude, “On Twilight,” shows three separate layers that creates a mosaic of unpredictable alternations. The central layer, the twilight’ theme, represent the sun that sets slowly at the end. Next is “Rain at Funeral”, which Thomas describes as “an impressionistic miniature funeral march, which requires very subtle shadings in quiet dynamics as well as in timbre and reverberation.” This étude is the slowest and most intimate among the six, and it can be consider the emotional core of the group. Finally, the sixth étude, “Twitter Machines,” is based on repeated note—“oscillating machinelike harmonies”—that are combined with “florid arabesques” passages that cover a large range of the keyboard.⁷⁰

Regarding the dates of composition, the score shows the following information. All études were composed between 1996 and 2005 and came to life in pairs, two at a time. “Orbital Beacons” and “Fire Waltz” are from 1996, “Cathedral Waterfall” and “On

⁷⁰ Augusta Read Thomas. *Six Piano Études*. Composer’s notes.

Twilight” from 2003, and finally “Rain at a Funeral” and “Twitter-Machines” came to life in 2005.

Analysis of Augusta Read Thomas Piano Études

I. “Orbital Beacons”—Homage to Luciano Berio

The eloquent étude “Orbital Beacons” shows Augusta Read Thomas’s fondness for contrasts as she opposes and combines two extreme dynamics to create a “counterpoint of very loud notes and very soft notes.”⁷¹ By indicating in the score to press down the damper pedal for the whole duration of the piece, she achieves a luminosity produced by the interplay between the whispering notes that float like mist over the poignancy of the loud notes. In fact, already by the fifth measure of the étude, the accumulation of sound produced by the held pedal has created a shimmering and colorful reverberating sonority. This unique sound-world contributes to the piece’s borderless and spatial atmosphere whose openness hints at a journey into the space. The resulting feeling can be similar to the groundless spaciousness experienced during a dreamlike experience or a meditative state. The haziness of sound will continue to accumulate until the last measures’ floating, radiant luminosity. During a performance of this étude “Orbital Beacons,” the listener will likely feel as if in a trance-like state where time seems suspended, as he or she experience the resonant accumulation of sound.

The poetic opening thirds’ bold resonance is what sets up the metaphoric journey into space, either outer or within. Outwardly, this opening can signal a silent contemplation of the stars and the planets from a quiet place, making the listener aware of his position in the Earth. In fact, those arising first notes, F and A naturals, can give rise to the imagery of

⁷¹ Augusta Read Thomas, *Prairie Sketches*. Program notes by the composer.

a vast, clean sky where those notes appear like two bright beacons. (See example 1) Inwardly, these opening thirds might suggest an inner personal travel, a search for answers to existential matters. At some point, both types of journeys cross each other as the left hand part in “Orbital Beacons” evokes a chant-like melody, more immediately human, while the right hand articulates an ethereal, almost intangible and more distant sound. Furthermore, this interaction of contrasting sounds makes the listener reflect on the interplay between the solid world of objects versus the atemporal world of sound.⁷²

In a musical sense, Thomas’s lyrical and singable style shown in the chant-like quality of the loud notes is complemented by the also lyrical but murmuring upper soft melodies in the right hand. In fact, the upper part, marked *pianissimo*, “speaks” gently and intimately, over the prominent beacon-like notes in the left hand. This lyrical quiet part articulates in short phrases, and even though each one is rhythmically different from the previous one, they actually emerge from the same pitches’ combinations. In fact, the similarity in the phrases achieved by the use of the same pitches gives the impression of hearing a distorted series of echoes, as can be seen in measure one through ten. (See example. 1) After that sequence of echoes, measure eleven shows a closing inflection to this first lyrical, soft section that had begun in measure two. This closing statement unfolds in a triplet figure using F, F-sharp and A, with an ascending third that leaves a sort of question in the air—a metaphor for inner quest. (See example. 1)

The piece’s eloquence relies also on the slow and discreet introduction of new notes—like a new light in the sky that suddenly becomes visible. For instance, it is not until measure seven that Thomas introduces a *sforzatto* B-flat followed by a *sforzatto* F-natural

⁷² Augusta Read Thomas. 1998 “When the Muse Strikes,” 14

that was previously heard in the beginning of the piece. Also striking is the introduction of a *sforzatto* E-natural in measure eleven. Actually, the B-flat and the E-natural have already been heard as early as measure one and two, but only in *pianissimo* dynamic. Another new note that is introduced in measure six, a G-natural, brings a new sentiment to the previously heard pitch collection of B-flat, C-sharp, D, E, and G-sharp. This careful introduction of new notes alongside old notes not only brings a sense of unity to the piece but also creates a compelling forward motion.

Furthermore, despite the two contrasting voices, “Orbital Beacons” displays a cohesion sound that is partially achieved by the intervallic relationships between the two parts. In fact, a continuous voice can be perceived flowing in and out from the loud part to the soft part and vice versa, through recurring intervals, such as the minor second, major third and minor sixth. For instance, left and right hand parts in measures one, six, ten, and eleven are at the distance of a minor second, while the minor sixth functions as the connecting interval between F-natural in the third measure and the C-sharp in the fourth measure, as well as between the C-natural and G-sharp in measure twenty-one. (See examples 1 and 2) In general, the distance between the hands is often the minor second’s pivotal interval, which not only allows to hear an intimate dialoging quality between the two parts but also helps in achieving the unity suggested in the aforementioned cohesive flow of sound.

Although that minor second interval prevails as the main distance between the hands, the melodic material in the étude actually favors wide intervals. These wide intervals occur throughout the piece, showing major ninths, sixths, and tritons that can depict both spaciousness as well as appearances of distanced light objects in the sky. However, Thomas still introduces the minor second at times in order to bring a more

human, sighing effect to the melodic contour. For instance, between measures six and seventeen, the minor second can be heard increasingly, as in the rather complaining appoggiatura—F-sharp to F-natural in measure seventeen—that concludes that section. (See example 2)

In the next section, between measures eighteenth and twenty, where the melodies weave around major thirds and tritons, there is a total absence of minor seconds. In that passage, the sound concentrates rather on very high, luminous pitches, which will become the most prominent sound exploration toward the end of the étude—the fresh and soft light at dawn turns into midday’s dazzling sunlight.

Similarly, the two contrasting parts in “Orbital Beacons” conjure up two acoustic spaces. After the bold opening of the melodic thirds, while the first soft melody is presented, the listener might wonder where that airy sound comes from. This suggestion of a new sound source opens a new musical dimensionality within the acoustic room and a new relationship between from the two sounds. In fact, the soft sounds appear to arise from far away. They then meet with the loud notes that seem to come from below and closer to the listener.⁷³ Thereupon, the two sounds—loud and soft—engage in a conversation between spaces as they open a dialectics between audible and muted, frontal and distant, bright and dimmed as well as between times—present and past. Or perhaps they start a conversation between two contrasting characters—bold and shy, masculine and feminine.

⁷³ Brendel in conversation with Martin Meyer, *Me of All People*, 191

Example 1, "Orbital Beacons," mm 1-11

$\text{♩} = 48$ (*l.v. sempre*)

1

pp elegant and sensuous

pp

bell-like

sfz sfz *sfz*

Damper pedal *sempre*
U.C. pedal *sempre* (but use only on the *pp* figures, not on the *sfz* notes)

5

$\text{♩} = 54$

pp *pp* *pp*

(Ped.) (Ped.)

sfz sfz *sfz sfz* *sfz*

8

pp *pp* *pp*

(Ped.) *ff* *ff* *ff* *sfz ff* *sfz*

Example 2, "Orbital Beacons," mm. 12-20

12 *accel.* $\text{♩} = 58-60$

pp *pp* *pp*

sffz *sffz* *sffz* *sffz* *sempre* *sffz* *sempre*

(Ped.) (Ped.)

15 *rubato* *p* *rit.*

sffz *sempre* *sffz* *sffz*

(Ped.) (Ped.)

18 $\text{♩} = 54$

pp *pp* *pp*

sffz *sffz*

(Ped.) (Ped.)

Example 3, "Orbital Beacons," mm. 21-25

21

pp *pp* *pp*

(Ped.) sfz sempre sfz sfz sfz sempre

rubato rubato

23

pp

(Ped.) sfz sfz

24

pp

sffz sempre

(Ped.)

As a result of this encounter of sounds, the soft part, instead of being overpowered by the loud notes, mixes with them and blooms with luminous colors.

By grasping the dual quality in this étude through imagery, the pianist can better assert the technical challenge of dealing with two contrasting types of sound that converge during the entire piece. This challenge resembles the execution of *subito piano* passages in Beethoven's sonatas in what the performer has to adjust radically and quickly to the new dynamic. Therefore, a clear mental image that embraces the sonic opposition in "Orbital Beacons" can definitely contribute to an easier execution of those dynamic changes.

Besides the dynamic contrast between the parts, the two layers of sound show also an unsynchronized conversation as the parts' entrances occur irregularly. Often, the low voice enters unexpectedly and immediately after the upper has finishes, while in other times, the delay between entrances is long enough for the listener to flavor both "pure time passing" as well as a feeling of liberation from any type of strict phrasal scheme. This lack of synchrony can be seen as a metaphor for nature and life since unknown and unpredictable forces govern events. In fact, those delays and the irregular phrasing of the piece offer the unique chance to the listener to stop and ponder, as occurs in Michelangelo Antonioni or Andrei Tarkovsky's cinematic contemplative style.

Tarkovsky's 1972 film *Solaris*'s emotional depth constantly acknowledges two opposing dimensions and realities within the film's atmosphere, much like the two-voice interaction in "Orbital Beacons." The film offers an unhurried, dual visual language, as the camera slowly circulates around the spatial set while it also shows sequences of colorful scenery back from the Earth. At some point in the film, the spectator is taken within the dream of the main character, Kris Kelvin: his deluded reality is torn between present and

old memories—“the claustrophobic concavities of the space station yielding to the rain-sodden beauty of the island earth.”⁷⁴ In another sequence in the film that shows Kris along with his ghostly wife Hari, who has just emerged from a spatial ocean, there is a floating quality that is achieved by the characters’ loss of sense of reality and gravity, offering a “stylized representation of transcendence borderline.”⁷⁵ This cinematic language offers a compelling metaphor to the spatial sonic representation of beauty, color, and lightness and isolation in “Orbital Beacons.” The film’s mood also provides an image to fit the dilemmatic interaction between the two sounds in the piece.

Furthermore, *Solaris* affords a picture of the inner and outer contemplative quality that “Orbital Beacons” offers to the listener. In fact, *Solaris* sets a complex spatial atmosphere where characters debate and struggle, paralleling the two voices that dialog through the far-reaching textures of the étude. In *Solaris*, the spatial atmosphere that is juxtaposed with earthy scenery of pastoral and familial memories also parallels the exploration of light and vaporizing resonance in the étude. Ultimately, the étude offers a contemplative sound-world that challenges the conventional flow of time. Its musical *mise-en-scène* suggests a rhythmical quality that not only implies letting go of strict pulse but also growing slowly and organically. Similarly, in *Solaris*, the slow pace builds “one sequence upon another, until in the last conclusive image, the overall meaning of the film is made clear.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Philip Lopate. Essay on *Solaris*. *Solaris*, dir. by Andrei Tarkovsky. DVD. [The Criterion Collection. June 2002].

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Timothy Hyman, review of *Solaris by Andrei Tarkovsky* *Film Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 3, [Spring 1976] [54-58]57

In Carlos Saura's 1998 film *Tango*, there is a feeling of circularity throughout the whole film. From the start, the camera rotates, beginning with a general view of the port of Buenos Aires, taken from a very elevated shooting place, moving slowly from right to left. Below in the distance, the spectator perceives the busy streets with its running cars. Those two cinematic places—the aerial shooting view and the city below—establish a metaphor to the two distances in “Orbital Beacons.” Moreover, later in the film, dancers also are constantly turning within themselves and around one another as the camera turns around them. In close-ups, the spectator can see the choreographies' dancers and their feet turning, just like the rotating soft melodies in the étude. The orbital feeling of the film is also accentuated by turning cameras around the illuminated dance studio's sets. By feeling the motion and spatial relationships in *Tango*, the pianist acquires a great sense of physical orbiting that is not only shown in the virtuosic dancing but also in the graceful dance gestures that are not unlike the lyrical pianissimo passages in “Orbital beacons.” Furthermore, the gradual changing of coloring and lighting in the picture of the film offers a journey moving forward throughout time and changing moods, not unlike the accumulating sound that creates changing colors and new visual perspectives in the étude.

The 1992 Ron Fricke's film *Baraka* offers another analogy with “Orbital Beacons” that can enhance imaginative thinking. In the walking monk scene of the film, the monk's steady steps represent the beacons as he greatly protrudes, completely focused, from the crowded and busy streets. He walks slowly, grounded, striking a bell from time to time, resembling the spaced out *sforzatto* notes in the piano piece. People around him move in contrasting speed, unfocused, like random wandering caravans—a metaphor to the multiplying *pianissimo* notes. The sound that both create—the tolling bell and the urban

noise sound around it—makes an eloquent counterpoint of human layers similar to the musical counterpoint of “Orbital Beacons.” Moreover, *Baraka* shows a view that is rather “elegiac than angry” as well as a “non-linear style, like a collage structure [of] disconcerting cuts”⁷⁷ that resonates with the musical discourse and mood in “Orbital Beacons.”

In Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1962 film *L’Eclipse*, a film that deals with human loneliness, the final scene quietly captures a thorough orbital trip to the previously shown places of Rome. This last scene is a silent contemplative coda of cinematic poetry that shows a plot-less style of cinematic language where ordinary places and nameless people are simply shown over subtle background music. Moreover, in resonance with the pervading murmurs and silences in “Orbital Beacons,” the opening of the film presents “scenes of silence and exhaustion”, “emptiness and absence” between the characters of Vittoria (Monica Vitti) and Ricardo (Francisco Rabal) as they are about to separate. In the following sequences, the film “is stepped [in a] harrowing and dream-like climate” combined with “a futile murmur and noise” that underlines the characters’ unwillingness to communicate.⁷⁸

Furthermore, in the final scenes, the huge summer sky leaves room for wandering thoughts in the absence of dialogue. The many street lights are turned off, people and objects seem unattainable, in the distance. The scene continues until twilight when street lights finally turn on and the sky becomes darker and darker, in growing intensity. This cinematic style challenges the spectator to stop inner chattering and force him or her to

⁷⁷ Martin Roberts, *Baraka: World cinema and the Global Industry*, Cinema Journal, Vol.37, no.3, Spring, 1998, [62-82] 68,

⁷⁸ Michel Chion, trans. Alain Renaud and Don Siegel, What a Time it was! An Essay on Antonioni’s *L’eclisse*.

simply watch and wonder, in a state of awe. Because of this, the visual experience serves as a metaphor to the compelling and meditative sound quality sound in “Orbital Beacons.”

At the end of *L'Éclipse*, the straight shooting of a street light in close-up,⁷⁹ with its incandescent white light, represents the spectator's closest distance with pure light. Similarly, in the étude, the final two notes brings the same sharp effect, pure sound of rising major thirds above the entire piece's shimmering accumulation of resonance. In the film, the eclipse shines over the memory of all the places of the city, not unlike the étude's last notes that floats over the whole piece's reverberant poetry. *L'Éclipse*'s visual language relates to “Orbital Beacons” not only in that both works offer wide spatial views and light themes but also in their lyrical and poetic vein within which they slowly unfold.

II. Fire Waltz. Homage to Béla Bartók

The second étude, “Fire Waltz,” comes as a counterattack against the peaceful backdrop of “Orbital Beacons.” This second étude can depict a picture of ruthless reality that is shot from the frontline and that is unaware of the sky's vastness of “Orbital Beacons.” Despite the fact that both études share the same collection of pitches, the earthy “Fire Waltz” cannot possess a more contrasting nature to the magic glance and lightness of “Orbital Beacons.” In fact, the second étude's sound-world is heavy and solid, and its bursting brassy sound, written in a more compressed keyboard range, offers a great contrast to the ethereal luminosity and wide texture of “Orbital Beacons.”

⁷⁹ James Williams, “The Rhythms of Life” an appreciation of Michelangelo Antonioni's extreme aesthete of the real”

Given the understanding that the first two études share material, metaphorically, it can be said that if “Fire Waltz” was observed from “Orbital Beacons” clear sky, the action of the former would appear crystal clear, and thus, scary and brutal. In fact, in the case of a back-to back performance of the two pieces, there would be a transmutation of material that occurs between them. The sound-world of “Orbital Beacons,” now just memory, somehow filters into “Fire Waltz” as can be seen in the *pianissimo* short eighth-note passages that appears like flashback moments, in measure sixty-one and sixty-two. (See example 4) Furthermore, this transmutation of material between the first and second études is observed in the way Thomas treats the quintuplets in both pieces. The quintuplets that were used to bring ampleness and rhythmic suppleness in “Orbital Beacons” are now used to provoke rhythmic excitement and drive in “Fire Waltz.” For example, the notes B, F, A, D-sharp, and G, in measure fourteen in “Orbital Beacons” are the same notes in the quintuplet figures that appear in measure eleven in “Fire Waltz.”(See example 5) These connecting figures between the two études makes the listener hear the contours of “Orbital Beacons” somehow imbedded and concealed in the rugged lines of the second étude “Fire Waltz,” which supports the notion of an old memory transmuted into a new landscape.

Example 4, "Fire Waltz", mm 56-66

The musical score for "Fire Waltz" (Example 4) spans measures 56 to 66. It is written for piano in 3/4 time. The first system (measures 56-60) begins with a piano introduction marked *ff sub.*, followed by *pp sub.*, and then *ff*. The second system (measures 61-66) continues with *pp sub.*, *ff p sub.*, *mf*, and *ff sempre*. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and a key signature of one flat.

Given this understanding, metaphorically, moving from "Orbital Beacons to "Fire Waltz" is like awaking from a dreamlike or contemplative experience and suddenly walking straight into a town's crowded sidewalks. In the aforementioned Antonioni's film *L'Eclipse*, the very final encounter between the principal characters Vittoria (Monica Vitti) and Piero (Alain Delon) clearly follows this passage from bliss to hostility. In that scene, *Vittoria* unavoidably and unwillingly throws herself into the crowded city, at a rush hour, after having spent a blissful and quiet time at her lover's apartment. Her unassertive walking along the sidewalk as people bump into her is mingled with the remaining blissful memories from the preceding quiet scene, creating an abstract unification of times and atmospheres.

Example 5, "Fire Waltz," mm. 1-15

Perpetual motion-Bartók boogie-woogie ♩ = 132

The musical score consists of three systems of piano notation. The first system (measures 1-6) shows a right hand with accented chords and a left hand with a perpetual motion bass line. Dynamics include *ff* sempre. The second system (measures 7-12) continues the bass line and introduces *sfz* and *mp* sub dynamics. The third system (measures 13-15) concludes the piece with a final chord in the right hand and a continuation of the bass line.

With regards to the musical textures, "Fire Waltz" simultaneously shows two almost independent, yet, complementary parts in a similar way "Orbital Beacons" does between the loud and soft notes. However, the chords in "Fire Waltz", which are collections of notes from the soft, right hand part of the first étude, do not now blend smoothly with the left hand as it happened in "Orbital Beacons." Rather, the chords violently attempt to upset the bass boogie-woogie line with accented intrusions that can be symbolically perceived as night gunshots. Consequently, the utilization of elements of jazz piano style in "Fire Waltz," such as "comping" chords, as well as the already

mentioned boogie-woogie bass line, can also take on a meaning beyond the mere musical figures: the “comping” chords can sound like blows or punches that are heard against the boogie-woogie line that marks the tempo of a chasing choreography of hastening steps.

Furthermore, considering the importance of that boogie-woogie base line in “Fire Waltz,” the *étude* can be heard as an improvisatory display of pianistic virtuosity. In fact, the shifting quality of the textures can be heard as a spur-of-the moment improvisatory style, where the player is bound to choose his notes almost on the spot. (See example 6, m. 96-98) In fact, the sudden shifts from block chords to single melodic textures can denote the freedom of the jazz improviser, giving support to the idea of choosing imagery of frenzied action as a means to grasp the mood and atmosphere of “Fire Waltz.”

With regards to the reference to a waltz dance in “Fire Waltz,” it is worth raising the question whether the actual triple meter dance is concealed underneath the quarter-note chords in triplets that are heard throughout the piece. Or rather, this *étude* straightforwardly offers a distorted waltz in duple meter: the violent motion of the piece is the result of its emancipation from the waltz triple meter. If that is the case, “Fire Waltz” can be seen as a ritualistic waltz to be rather danced around a bonfire or, following the idea of its jazz style, as a piano improvisation at a jazz club during the ebullient Bebop era.

In terms of visual images, the urgency that this *étude* conveys calls for a street fight picture that could portray its high energy and off-pulse struggle between the hands. The musical figures can evoke several fighters, and consequently, blows, falls and people rolling in the ground. For instance, the boogie-woogie can depict the runner who escapes to avoid being beaten, but who is eventually caught. The right hand figures—the chaser—sings victory and leaves the scene, as the ascending, as shown in the ascending

high figures of the last five measures of the piece. Furthermore, the last two notes of the piece, G-sharp and E natural, hint the victim's sudden and final collapse. (See example 7)

In Costa-Gavras's 1969 political thriller *Z*, the intense atmosphere of peril and suspense is felt throughout the entire film in the actors' dramatic performances, in the overall fast-paced film's tempo and quick cutting of scenes, the extreme close-ups, and in the realistic cinematic style. For example, crowd scenes such as the street instigators' fights against the anti-nuclear rally organizers, shot at daylight and vividly seen from the perspective of high building, generate a great visual appeal that emulates the pulsing figurations and in "Fire Waltz." Another thrilling scene that provides a graphic view of the emotional drama of "Fire Waltz" shows a car attempting to run over a deputy, mercilessly and furiously, across downtown at midday. The deputy's running steps resonates with the epic display of incessant rhythmical figures in the *étude*, and the car's sharp turns and a frightening escape provides an exciting visual statement that parallels the *motto perpetuo* and angularity in "Fire Waltz."

Example 6, "Fire Waltz", mm. 93-98

93

f *ff* sempre

98

ff

Earlier in the film *Z*, that intense rhythmical pace had already reached astonishing visual impact in another attack scene that happened at night. The scene occurs when another organizer of the anti-nuclear rally is heavily beaten by a henchman while he is kept in the back of a car. The scene continues to show the victim in the three-wheeler car trunk as he is driven through narrow streets and into a dark neighborhood—in a zigzag-like manner—depicting the boogie-woogie pulse that is interpolated with fist blows-like, abrupt chords. In a realistic cinema style, the film shows as he is finally propelled from the vehicle and sent directly to the ground, affording a dreadful metaphor to the last two notes of the étude, low and decisive.

Example 7, “Fire Waltz,” mm. 118-121

The “visceral impact” of those breathtaking images is accentuated by the previously street scenes showing a frightening military presence that construct a cinematic world akin to the social drama and “political exactitude” of the film’s themes.⁸⁰ The scenes strike even more as Costa-Gavras deliberately wrote that his film deals with real facts and real people: “Any resemblance . . . is intentional,” the captions read.⁸¹ Similarly,

⁸⁰ Armond White, *Sounding the Alarm. Z*, dir. by Costa Gavras [DVD The Criterion Collection, 2009].

⁸¹ Ibid.

the title “Fire Waltz” can also be taken as literal—its rugged pace’s duple meter squeezes an incandescent and furious waltz in order to convey its dramatic weight.

In Alejandro González Iñárritu’s 2010 Spanish film “*Biutiful*,” the dramatic cinematic frame reaches a pick in the striking scene called “Chase in Plaza Cataluña,” paralleling the urgent pace of “Fire waltz.” In that scene, the police pursuit in Plaza Cataluña is presaged by furtive gazes between illegal street sellers that work in the streets of Barcelona. Suddenly, the peaceful morning is interrupted by the police sirens and then, chaos breaks off. The frenetic running away of the Africans immigrants seems to springs out like the fury opening of the étude “Fire Waltz.” The police chase then takes place both by car and by foot, unmercifully and counter-wise, like the weaving eight-note parts in “Fire Waltz,” until the police bring down the last immigrant. Metaphorically, the textural sudden shifts as well as the disjunctive materials in “Fire Waltz,” such as the ones shown in measures fifty-six through sixty-six, [example] can depict the immigrant’s flees—in utter despair—as they scattered throughout center-town.

Filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu needed hundreds of shots, set-ups and takes to create this two-minute scene—just as the many hours “Fire Waltz” took to compose,⁸² in order to control the shooting’s real chaos while simultaneously recreate the uncontrolled chaos of the fictional events in “Chase in Plaza Cataluña” sequence.⁸³ “I wanted to utter this idea of accumulation of excessive pain and abuse,” he states in his own flip notes from the making of “*Biutiful*.” “Chase in Plaza Cataluña” represents a real virtuosic cinematic display that is similar to the virtuosic writing of “Fire Waltz.” In fact,

⁸² Augusta Read Thomas. Phone conversation with author.

⁸³ Alejandro González Iñárritu. “Director’s Flip Notes.” *Biutiful*, dir. by Alejandro González Iñárritu [DVD Lionsgate, 2000].

the étude's impetus also demands a great pianistic control to convey the piece's chaotic drama while keeping the necessary mental equilibrium for performing.

III. "Cathedral Waterfall"--Homage to Oliver Messiaen

"Cathedral Waterfall," the most impressionistic étude of the set, shows Thomas's penchant for written indications of poetic and visual quality in the score. In several places in the music, the notation is beautifully painted with evocative adjectives, in addition to the impressionistic quality of her dynamic marks. For instance, the first upward stroke of notes is marked *dramatic*, while the next two-note attack is marked *bell-like*. (See example 8)

Example 8, "Cathedral Waterfall," mm. 1 and 2

The musical score for Example 8, "Cathedral Waterfall," mm. 1 and 2, is presented in a grand staff format. The tempo is marked *Molto rubato* with a quarter note equal to 52-58. The score includes the following markings and features:

- Tempo:** *Molto rubato*, quarter note = 52 - 58.
- Dynamic:** *f* (forte) at the beginning of the first measure.
- Performance Instruction:** *dramatic* written above the first measure.
- Articulation:** A slur covers the first two measures, with an accent (>) over the final note of the second measure.
- Figuration:** A triplet of eighth notes is indicated with a '3' below the notes in the first measure.
- Dynamic:** *sfz* (sforzando) at the beginning of the second measure.
- Performance Instruction:** *bell-like* written above the second measure.
- Articulation:** A slur covers the second measure, with an accent (>) over the final note and a *ca. 5''* marking above it.
- Signature:** The name "Lea" is written below the first measure.

Furthermore, the étude's two-word title confirms Thomas's fondness for using juxtaposition of words that shows visual images in her works. In "Cathedral Waterfall," the cathedral evokes the acoustical chamber where the musical materials unfold, while the waterfall indicates the motion and direction at which the piece moves. In fact, throughout an echoing atmosphere, this étude affords a visual journey into cathedral-like chambers and their glass windows and sacred images.

Example 9, “Cathedral Waterfall,” mm. 38-45

The musical score for Example 9, "Cathedral Waterfall," mm. 38-45, is presented in two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with dynamics ranging from *ff* to *p* and various articulation marks. The lower staff provides a harmonic and bass foundation with chords and bass notes. The piece concludes with three measures marked "ca. 3''", "ca. 3''", and "ca. 2''".

As in both “Orbital Beacons” and “Twitter-Machines,” in “Cathedral Waterfall” as well, two intertwined musical fabrics run along together, showing an important aspect of Thomas’s style. In fact, in this étude, there seem to coexist two actual pieces of music that are assembled into one single musical discourse, the first one based on the chords and bass notes—evoking the solid dimension of the building, its pillars and walls—and the second one consisting of repeated, linear notes that can depict the human feelings and emotions that arise within that architecture. (See example 9)

Within this textural layout “Cathedral Waterfall,” the chords add color to the atmospheric sound of the piece and create its enchanting sound-world. In metaphorical sense, those chords achieve to draw in light through the cathedral’s glass windows and to illuminate the colorful ornamental tile floors of the church. Furthermore, the overall harmonic language also produces a liquid quality of sound that conjures up an oceanic-like atmosphere that is both vast and grand, within which the sound reverberates and travels. It is within this fluid and floating quietness, that music brings a kaleidoscope of tonalities and emotions.

On the other hand, the repeated and insisting single notes—the linear layer of the étude—help in carrying the piece forward throughout that quiet space of the cathedral

chambers like visiting tourists. In this respect, the repeated notes can not only be heard as echoes that are acoustically produced within the church's thick walls but they also extend the emotional life of the chords into the space. (See example 9)

Furthermore, those single-note chains can become personalized, showing a wide gamut of moods ranging from bold to tender, depending on the dynamic markings, and having life in their own as they vibrate against the floating sound of chords, like in measures seven through sixteen. (See example 10) In fact, the single notes can be very striking, as in measure thirty-eight, where the effect is amplified with the addition of extra notes, or they can be gentle as a child's sigh heard within the church, as in the last B natural, marked *piano espressivo*, in measure forty-five. (See example 9)

In terms of their languishing effect, these chains of notes are reminiscent of the textures in Chopin's prelude Op. 28 in B minor, even though in Thomas's piece the repetitions follow an off-beat rhythmic patterns that is more spaced out. Interestingly, Chopin's prelude was, in fact, composed in a remote and religious cloister, the Carthusian monastery of Valldemossa, in the Spanish Island of Mallorca, a place that points out to certain affinity with the atmosphere in "Cathedral Waterfall." Also, the off-beat rhythmic quality that pervades "Cathedral Waterfall" resembles the repeated notes lines in Ravel's piece, *La Vallée de Cloches*. As in Ravel's piece, this étude also evokes bells and chimes throughout its echoing sound. In all those three pieces mentioned above, that note continuity serves as a filament that weaves throughout the pieces, making them sound timeless, and therefore, removed from ordinary experiences. Moreover, due to the characteristic sound decay of the piano, in all those three piano pieces, the continuous note

line becomes like a recurring complaint that renders the mood of the pieces somewhat *dolente*.

In “Cathedral Waterfall,” the single-note thread mostly moves in a narrow range, either staying in the same pitch or moving in step-wise motion. Sometimes it moves at intervals of major and minor thirds, reaching its climax in measure forty-one, at the intense conjunction between D-flat and C-natural, marked *fortissimo*, in the high range of the keyboard. (See example 9) Earlier in the étude and after several measures of this single-note insistency, there is a sudden arrest of sound that gives room to an elegant and flexible melody in measure nine. (See example 10) Lyrical passages like the one just mentioned as well as the passages in forty-nine, appear like luminous parenthetical statements within the lethargic atmosphere of the piece. In fact, they can conjure up a blissful radiant light coming from high above through a circular glass window. Moreover, those melodies also confirm Thomas’s fondness for a lyric writing style that can be also seen in the suggestive markings—the quintuple in measure nine is marked *pianissimo*, *expressive and dreamy*, while the dynamics in the lamenting chromatic notes in measures twelve to sixteen articulate a varied range of nuances. (See example 10)

Example 10, “Cathedral Waterfall”, mm. 7-16

The musical score for Example 10, “Cathedral Waterfall”, measures 7-16, is presented in a two-staff format. The right-hand staff (treble clef) contains the primary melodic line, while the left-hand staff (bass clef) provides harmonic support. Measure 7 begins with a triplet of eighth notes marked *mp*. Measure 8 features a quintuplet of eighth notes marked *pp* with the instruction *espr., dreamy*. Measure 9 continues with a quintuplet marked *pp* and *espr.*. Measure 10 has a single eighth note marked *p*. Measure 11 contains a half note marked *mp*. Measure 12 has a quarter note marked *mf*. Measure 13 has a quarter note marked *f*. Measure 14 has a quarter note marked *mf*. Measure 15 has a quarter note marked *mp*. Measure 16 has a quarter note marked *p*. The score concludes with a final chord marked *ff* *sub.* and an *8va* marking. A small asterisk is placed below the left-hand staff in measure 8.

In the story called “A Body of Filth,” from the 1995 film *Par-delà des nuages* by Michelangelo Antonioni, tells of a beautiful mystical young woman who wants to leave her never satisfied body. In that film scene, the absorbing cinematic world is partly captured by that introspective young female character—called la fille—as she metaphorically embraces the sacred and the beauty of “Cathedral Waterfall.” The darkened atmosphere of the scene—the old buildings and cobblestone streets from a town in Aix-en-Provence, France, at early evening—presents a suggestive visual backdrop for expressing the mood in “Cathedral Waterfall.” Furthermore, within that encompassing feeling of sacredness in both the étude and the film, there is also a sudden awakening to a new dimension that occurs in both works. In “Cathedral Waterfall,” the awakening is signaled by the opening upward arpeggio, while in the film, the awakening is accomplished when the young character, Niccolò, wakes up alone inside the church of St. Jean of Malte. In the film, the young male character’s awakening can show affinity with dramatic effect of the opening arpeggio figure in “Cathedral Waterfall.” (See example 8) In fact, in the film, Niccolò wakes up just to enter into the core of the story, the uncovering of La fille’s mystery. In a similar way, in the étude, the rising arpeggio constitutes a signal for entering to the piece’s floating sound-world and be enthused by the cathedral’s enchanting space.

Upon waking-up, Niccolò searches for La fille and finds her walking alone through the empty streets of the town. The cinematic world of the scene consists of echoes of a water fountain as well as the young couple’s wandering around the dormant streets, surrounded by the imposing thick architecture of the old town. Everything is bathed in opaque but defined cinematographic tones. Within that slow pace scented with sacredness and silence, the young couple’s wandering and their conversation bring a certain

movement to the scene, similarly to the way the moving melodies flow within a rather static floating pulse in “Cathedral Waterfall.” La fille’s enclosed inner world seems to hold the mood of the film within her well-kept secret: the following day, she will, in fact, enter a convent to become a nun. In the film, the enigmatic beauty that La fille embodies can certainly point out to the pianist a similar feeling of both mystery and beauty that unfold throughout the striking chords, sustain long notes and weaving melodic in “Cathedral Waterfall.”

Another metaphor to “Cathedral Waterfall” is the seemingly timeless abbey of Jean-Jacques Annoud’s film *The Name of the Rose*, from 1986. This film provides a canvas of sacredness and discovery for the pianist to explore the floating sound-world of the étude. The film, based on Umberto Eco’s novel of the same name, is set in the year of 1327 in a medieval monastery in Northern Italy. The chosen scene for imagery shows the main characters, the novice Adso and the friar William of Baskerville, discovering a hidden library that is secretly locked high in a tower. The library, like the intricate three-layer texture in “Cathedral Waterfall,” is actually a confusing labyrinth where the friar William and Adso suddenly lose each other. While they try to retrieve themselves in the dark chambers of the library, the camera only follows Adso while the friars’ voice continues to be heard as Adso unknits a thread of his robe along the narrow hallways in order to mark his way around in the labyrinth. Metaphorically, this film scene establishes a visual frame where the pianist can see Adso’s thread around the library as the connecting thread of repeated notes in “Cathedral Waterfall.” The friar’s resonant voice will then points out to the echoing sonic ambiance of the étude. During the time they try to find each other, a

sense of timelessness takes place in the film’s cinematic world, creating a feeling of suspense and mystery.

Moreover, the friar and Adso’s dialogue in the scene delves on the topic of forbidden books—heavy, old and precious, showing dark red covers—that can appear striking like the colorful chords throughout the étude. Overall, the heavy-stoned library’s décor offers an ideal acoustic interior—both solid and reverberant—against which pianists can explore and gain insights on the sonorous material in “Cathedral Waterfall.” The last chord of the piece, thin and high, can evoke the library’s exiting door that eventually leads outdoors to rather fresh, open air and some light. (See example 11)

Example 11, “Cathedral Waterfall,” mm. 48-52

48 *ca. 5''*

ff sub. (mf) *p graceful (mp)* *(mp) mf* *f bell-like* *ca. 6''*

al fine

**Ped. down just after the attack*

IV. “On Twilight”--Homage to Pierre Boulez

In “On Twilight” there is recollection of materials that were presented in the previous three études of the set. In fact, in this fourth étude, Thomas assembles in one piece the elliptical melodies of “Orbital Beacons,” the bass boogie-woogie line, pulsating drive and “comping” chords of “Fire Waltz,” as well as the coloristic chords and repeated notes

of “Cathedral Waterfall.” However, in “On Twilight, those motifs are integrated into a fabric possessing a rather light and jocular mood. Consequently, “On Twilight” unfolds as a sort of *entre-act* between two more serious dramas, “Cathedral Waterfall” and “Rain at Funeral.” Furthermore, in great contrast to the sustain tonal quality of “Orbital Beacons” and “Cathedral Waterfall,” “On Twilight” displays firework-like themes in the vein of Debussy’s prelude *Feux d’artifice*. In fact, “On Twilight,” instead of presenting a floating atmosphere, the vitality and rhythmical buoyancy of the materials manages to create fleeting sonic illusions that evaporate quickly, like mirages, vanishing gestures or rapid rays of light.

As a result, the diversity of musical elements creates a playful, almost childish character that permeates the whole *étude*. From the start, in measures one through five, this playful quality can be seen in the oscillating major and minor musical figures that create an undecided mood thrown between the two modes. In measure five, there is a B-flat can sound like a grimace or a surprise. That B-flat teasingly revolts against the brightness’ major quality of the playful fanfare that occurs in the first measures of the *étude*. (See example 12)

Example 12, “On Twilight,” mm. 1-6

The musical score for Example 12, "On Twilight," mm. 1-6, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-4) begins with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 116-132$ and a dynamic of *ff*. The right-hand part features a syncopated theme with accents and slurs. A luminous chord in the second measure is marked *sffz*. The second system (measures 5-6) starts with a dynamic of *mf*, followed by *f* and *ff*, and then *f* and *sffz*. The score includes various musical notations such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Because of this variety of materials, “On Twilight” can be seen as the most mischievous and agitated among the six études of the set. The jittery narrative of Prokofiev’s piano sonata Op. 83 in A major can be compared to “On Twilight” not only because of the opening’s intervallic alternation between major and minor modes that both pieces share, but also because of their whimsical, disjoint quality of musical materials. An example of this fragmentation is shown in the way the syncopated theme of the opening is suddenly interrupted by a luminous chord on the second eight-note in third measure, marked *sffz*. (See example 12) Furthermore, in measure four, the last note of the beginning theme, C- natural, survives to the intromission of the chord in measure three, and continues to articulate the theme as it affords to jump straight to the downbeat of measure four to finish the phrase with a third—D and B naturals. Those two notes foresee the last notes of the étude. The second entrance of the theme, in measure five, will be, at its turn, interrupted

twice by bass strokes that occur in measure six—a chord and a single note with appoggiaturas—until the same closing third of the previous entrance, B and D-naturals, appears again, now free and victorious, in measure eight.

This interpolation of bits of sounds—chords, bass notes, and bursts of arpeggios—that emerge within the syncopated theme is responsible for generating the playful and dialoguing character of the étude. Even the rather long line built upon repeated E’s natural that runs from measure thirty-five through measure sixty makes its way across this chain of little interruptions. In fact, in “On Twilight,” the listener gets the impression of being at a bazaar of sonic ideas that bump against each other, charmingly and lightheartedly. Therefore, in order to maximize and explore through a visual means the conversing, whimsical, and glittering nature of “On Twilight,” an animated children movie or a lighthearted comedy scene can best provide a suitable type of imagery for this étude.

Example 13, “On Twilight,” m. 35 and 36

The musical score for Example 13, "On Twilight," measures 35 and 36, is presented in 5/4 time. The upper staff (treble clef) begins in measure 35 with a forte (*f*) dynamic, followed by a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic, and then a forte (*f*) dynamic with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 36 starts with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic, followed by a forte (*f*) dynamic, and ends with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic. The lower staff (bass clef) provides harmonic support with chords and rests. The score includes various musical notations such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Example 14, “On Twilight, mm. 56-61

The musical score for Example 14, "On Twilight, mm. 56-61, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 56-58) is in 3/8 time. The treble clef part begins with a melodic line in 3/8 time, marked *mp*. The bass clef part has a dynamic of *sfz*. The second system (mm. 59-61) is in 3/8 time. The treble clef part has a dynamic of *mp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and a triplet.

A scene in Jean-Luc Godard’s film *À bout de souffle*, from 1960, offers a glimpse into the charming, spontaneous, and witty quality in “On Twilight.” The scene unfolds in the conversation between a young American aspiring journalist, Patricia, and a Michel, a young fugitive criminal, and takes place in Patricia’s apartment in Paris. In fact, Michel and Patricia, finally isolated from the hassle of the surrounding town, seem to enjoy a lighthearted dialogue that is enhanced by a cinematic frame filled with compelling snapshots of photos and objects in the room as well as by some occasional poetic or whimsical remarks from the characters. In fact, during the sequence, a youthful, almost candid, dialoguing style sets in the scene as characters provoke an interpersonal pull-and-push that parallels the étude’s abrupt thematic shifts.

Moreover, the two main characters opposing natures also parallel the contrasting nature of motifs in “On Twilight”—the opening syncopated thirds and seconds against the

sforzato high chords. But despite that characters' opposing natures, the cinematic world of the film also shows certain homogeneity that is achieved through elements such as the stripped clothing the characters wear—Patricia's dress and Michel's pajama—that cloak their unique personalities. The cinematic world is also enhanced by actress Jean Seberg's striking facial features and extremely short hairstyle, conjuring up a Martian allure that adds to the amusing atmosphere.

It is within this compelling décor that the characters enjoy a dawdling time together. For instance, like children, they play the "serious" against the backdrop of French posters in the walls. At some point, Michel utters a somewhat mature remark as Patricia poses herself next to the girl in a Renoir's painting that is hanging in her wall: "when you are afraid or surprised or both at the same time—Michel said—you've a strange gleam in your eyes."⁸⁴ This heartfelt sentence is reminiscent of the few sustain notes in "On Twilight" that brings a more serene and stable emotion to the piece, welcoming some reflection into its piece narrative.

In agreement to the playful mood of "On Twilight," in this *À bout de souffle*'s scene, Patricia has to constantly evade Michel's attempts to gain Patricia's charm, which occur repetitively as the bouncing syncopated motifs in "On Twilight." Patricia's counterattacks are quick as a cat's snap as she slaps on Michel's face quickly, sonorously, not unlike the unexpected accented chords in measures four and five. Throughout the scene, Michel's persuasive behavior continues to grow while Patricia dodges the harassment with feminine charm and witty responses paralleling the contrasting musical materials in the "On Twilight."

⁸⁴ Jean-Luc Godard, *À bout de souffle*, DVD [Criterion Collection, 2007]

Furthermore, the groundless atmosphere of this *étude* is reflected on Patricia's vague and candid comment: "I would like to think about something but I can't do it."⁸⁵ She then hugs her stuffed bear and looks at Michel. "Why do you look at me?" He asks her. She straightforwardly answers: "Because I look at you." Later, Patricia asks Michel to tell her something nice, right after Michel had made a comment on death. As can be seen, in this sequence, the ludic mood that articulates through the combination of flirt and empty talk, as well as the artistic objects in the frame—paintings and posters—not only brings a sparkling quality to the apartment room that parallels the lighthearted charm and gaiety in "On Twilight," but also shows how the seemingly disjoint musical material of the *étude* can be seen as a metaphor to the film's absurdity and childlike chaos.

Similarly to this fourth *étude*, in Jacques Tati's film *Playing Time*, from 1967, incidents—and little accidents—unfold organically, within a hilarious atmosphere that permeates its cinematic world. Examples of this atmosphere are the humorous characters that are masterly weaved into the detailed, flawless film's thread, just as the playful continuity in the musical thread in "On Twilight." For instance, the main character in *Playing Time*, Monsieur Hulot, an unsophisticated gentleman, circles around the entire film like the opening passage in "On Twilight" moves within the *étude*. At some point, he is suddenly lost inside an ultra-modern office building, mistakenly follows the reflection of an usher on a glass door. Later, in another scene in the film, an array of interfering bizarre characters—ordinary people in the street—keep stopping a tourist from take a picture of a charming street florist lady, showing comic snapshots that unexpectedly unfold throughout *Playing Time*'s crystalline cinematographic appearance. As can be seen, *Playing Time*

⁸⁵ Jean-Luc Godard, *À bout de souffle*

shares with “On Twilight” not only the portrayal of a sort of nonchalant atmosphere but also the quick shifting thematic materials. Furthermore, *Playing Time* offers a transparent visual world that reflects the textures heard in “On Twilight”: their sparse pedaled treble passages, single-note chains of arpeggio figures, and accented piercing chords.

With regard to its bright cinematographic appearance and infantile display, the scenery and the characters’ fluid gestures from 2006 *Peter and the Wolf*’s animated film by Suzie Templeton and Hugh Welchman, can also provide a visual frame for grasping the lightness and charm of “On Twilight.” In the film, the pristine images of the goose’s gazes, Peter’s face, and the obese cat, all shown in detailed close-ups, affords to see illustrative imagery that reflects the clarity and gaiety of the piano étude’s musical elements—its thirds, chords, and leaping arpeggios.

The goose, the crow, the cat and Peter creates an ensemble that makes luminous movements with colorful faces and shapes. They all play, slide, fall, and jump under an enchanting sunlight, like the bouncing syncopated chords and wide leaps in the “On Twilight.” Animated cinema can create a kaleidoscope of impossible incidents, as can be seen in *Peter and the Wolf*: the crow flies with a balloon attached to its body and the cat makes his way out—fluidly and gracefully—from the iced lake where he had sunk as he tried to catch the bird. Surprises follow one after another in a stream of tenderly lack of worry, very much in the mood and atmosphere of this charming and playful étude.

Furthermore, in *Peter and the Wolf*, the characters’ shapes are clear, lit and defined, showing graceful and detailed facial expressions. Conversely, the charming characters’ counterparts are rather sinister: the old man and the wolf that parallel the fortissimo chords and the dark, scary sound of the sparse notes of measure sixty-seven through eighty-one.

(See example 15) Toward the end of the film, at twilight, Peter befriends the scary wolf and walks him out of the scene, to everyone surprise. This twist of the story affords to hear a similar farewell bathed in awe in the increasingly sparse last chords of the étude, followed by a long silence that precedes the last minor third chord, B and D-naturals.

(See example 16)

Example 15, “On Twilight, mm. 56-61

Musical score for Example 15, “On Twilight, mm. 56-61”. The score is in bass clef with a 3/8 time signature. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 67 to 73. The second system covers measures 74 to 80. The music features various dynamics including *ff* *sempre*, *sfz*, *f*, *mf*, and *ff* *sub.*. There are also markings for *8vb* and triplets.

Example 16, “On Twilight,” mm. 99-101

Musical score for Example 16, “On Twilight,” mm. 99-101. The score is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 99 to 100. The second system covers measure 101. The music features various dynamics including *mp*, *p*, *(p)*, *pp*, and *sfz*. There are also markings for *rit. freely al fine* and *ossia: pp*.

The expression of a twilight sound in the étude affords to hear a story that articulates with the juxtaposed playful snippets of music. Those motifs metaphorically parallel the interactions of the film's characters' whose last daylight hours of musical gibberish ceases when they are absorbed by the evening darkness. In fact, in both films, *Playing Time* and *Peter and the Wolf*, the daylight stories gradually moves into the night's calming forces, fading away in the manner of the disappearing chords in "On Twilight."

V. "Rain at Funeral"--Homage to Morton Gould

The textural writing in "Rain at Funeral" shows not only Thomas's penchant for oceanic, vast spaces but also a unification of the concepts of depth and height, as can be seen in measures one through nine. In this passage, the score shows more than a four octave range between a high E natural and a low B natural. (See example 17) In fact, in "Rain at Funeral," extreme ranges coexist to depict an atmosphere that is both tall and wide. This large-scale atmosphere in "Rain at Funeral" is slowly shaped by the alternation of those high and low notes, interceded by a few colorful chords and some sparse melodic lyricism. As a result, "Rain at a funeral" shows the most solemn mood among all the six études, not only because of the *funèbre* theme that is attached to the music, but also because of the quasi unbearable slow pacing of the piece that is enhanced by the downward movement of the musical figures.

Example 18, “Rain at Funeral” mm. 14-16

Regarding the étude’s evocative title containing the word *rain*, in the actual music, the *rain* appears only sparsely, consisting of a few gentle drops, suggesting perhaps springtime’s morning rain. Fuller and more thorough is the tolling bell that Thomas thoroughly evokes throughout the music. The tolling bell can be heard not only as a sonorous intermittence in the music but also as a mirror of the human longing that takes place during mourning. This feeling of melancholy in the score can be lastly and prominently felt in measure thirty-five, when an F-sharp is played and sustained against a low G-natural, creating a marked, almost unbearable dissonance. (See example 20) Moreover, the G-natural and F-sharp major seventh touching effect becomes strengthened by the memory of the previous minor seventh—G and F naturals—that Thomas has established at the beginning of the étude. This progression from minor seventh to major seventh shows how the marching effect of the piece has reached its emotional peak toward the end.

In an introduction to a performance of “Rain at Funeral” at a recital by young pianist Nadia Azzi, Thomas described both the introverted character of the piece as well as the meaning of the bells in the étude:

It [“Rain at Funeral”] is very soft in certain places, very evocative, you can imagine a low bell that is constantly tolling, and then something happens, and then you come back to this bell, like the eternal bell; the bell at a graveyard, perhaps at rain at a funeral, the bell of a church, but one that there is very introspective. And I think it takes a lot of maturity to pull out the colors from this piece. It is not a flashy piece. It is a piece like Debussy or Ravel; like coloristic pieces where you paint a very short picture in four minutes.⁸⁶

Furthermore, the depictions of bells in “Rain at Funeral” can bring to mind the religious atmosphere of an ancient European city such as Rome where church towers abound. This image contributes to an understanding of the piece’s sacred mood and makes “Rain at Funeral” the emotional core of the six-étude set, in a similar way *La Vallée de Cloches* stamps a mystical closing to Ravel’s set, *Miroirs*. Therefore, the solemnity and dignity shown in “Rain at Funeral” has the capability of putting the previous études’ atmospheres into oblivion, at least momentarily, just as in real life mourning renders ordinary endeavors insignificant.

⁸⁶ Augusta Read Thomas. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWXTMpGtN0A>

Example 19, “Rain at Funeral,” mm. 22-28

The musical score for Example 19, "Rain at Funeral," mm. 22-28, is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 22-25) is in 3/4 time and begins with a tempo of 80-88. It starts with a *mf* dynamic and an *accel.* marking. The melody in the right hand features a *f* dynamic followed by a *pp* dynamic, then *mp* and *mf*. A fermata is placed over the final measure of this system, with the instruction "Like an interruption" above it. The second system (mm. 26-28) continues in 3/4 time. It begins with a *f sub.* dynamic and a *mp bell-like* dynamic, followed by a *p* dynamic. A fermata is placed over the final measure. The score includes various performance markings such as "accel.", "sub.", "bell-like", and "5".

Because of this fifth étude deals with life and death, a certain pianist’s maturity is called upon to express the meaning of “Rain at Funeral,” as Thomas mentions in the quote above. In the piece, the marching feeling sets the mourner’s life into motion, while the tolling bells are reminiscent not only of the impermanence of life but also of its suprarenal nature. However, the rain—as it falls over the mourners—adds a fresh element of hope to the emotional world of a piece that is pervaded with slow and sustained musical lines, portraying the absence of the departed.

The étude’s evocation of a farewell ceremony embedded in the image of a funeral ritual and cortege is accomplished by the music’s eloquence and calmness. Moreover, as Thomas indications show it, the “étude should feel as if it is always pulling downwards to the low notes.”⁸⁷ The directionality toward the dark register of the piano conveys both the images of burial and graves. In fact, the very last chord articulates a remarkable dark and

⁸⁷ Augusta Read Thomas. *Six Piano Études*, 14

somber effect—a minor third consisting of C-natural and E-flat, accompanied by the resolution of the high F-sharp on F and E-naturals, in measure thirty-eight. (See example 20) The last six measures of the piece give an obvious picture of the union between the aforementioned high and low extremes. At this point in the score, the lowness reaches a more static quality as the music lingers in the *lunga, pianissimo* indication for the last notes, creating a mood of deep solitude.

Example 20, “Rain at Funeral,” mm. 33-38

The musical score for Example 20, "Rain at Funeral," measures 33-38, is presented in a single system with two staves. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature changes from 2/4 to 4/4, then 6/4, then 4/4, and finally 6/4. The music features dynamic markings: *ffff*, *sffz*, *p sub.*, *mp*, and *pp*. The final measure is marked *lunga* and *pp*. A "final bell of funeral march" is indicated above the final measure. The score ends with a double bar line and a final chord in the bass staff.

With regards to the uses of cinema for expressing the mood in “Rain at Funeral,” Krzysztof Kieslowski’s film *Blue* from his 1993 series *Three Colors*, shows an unhurried cinematic world that speaks of dramatic loss. In the film, Julie, the starring character, loses both her husband and her young daughter in a car accident. That event turns her inward as hides her pain in deep silence and stern determination, resembling the pensive mood in “Rain at Funeral.” Throughout the film, Julie’s life moves forward like a slow march while she attempts to ignore the past with stern resolution, creating a most painful picture of mourning. Elaborating on *Blue*, film scholar Annette Insdorf claims that Kieslowski “was aware of his own imminent death.” Perhaps that is the reason that “there is a kind of

darker sensibility in which death is present that one feels in the film,”⁸⁸ Insdorf adds. Consequently, Kieslowski wanted to explore the very interior nature of his heroine’s mind, by articulating the film’s narrative in a very slow tempo. The unhurried shots and the funeral march-like filming style make *Blue* a visually constructed artistic tool for picturing the slow tempo and steady sadness of “Rain at Funeral.”

Furthermore, the étude’s sparse note writing parallels *Blue*’s scarcity of dialogue. In resonance with the thin and spaced out textures in “Rain at Funeral,” *Blue* strikes for achieving sustained intensity while showing sparse dialogue. In fact, *Blue* is a film about silence, intimacy and sustained emotions that are all swathed in masterly cinematographic beauty. Moreover, similarly to the prevalence of legato sound and arch-shapes in the étude, *Blue* cinematic narrative relies heavily on its “visual fluidity—the way of moving lyrically through space to connect characters in the movie”—suggesting that all the elements belong together in the same fabric, the same world.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the fade-outs shots over Julie’s face, shown in close-ups, suggest to the viewer temporary inward moments, just as the striking void spots in the textures of “Rain at Funeral” where quarter-note rests establish a halt on time, as in measures eleven and thirty-seven. (See example 20)

Although in the funeral scene in *Blue*’s there is no actual rain, *Julie*’s housekeeper, Aline, sheds some tears that soften Julie’s stern character. In the film, Aline’s tears along with Julie’s plunges into a swimming pool, fulfills the need of the water element in the cinematic world. Later in the film, a rainy evening scene—a pouring rain that entirely silences the house of the mourners— will bring the presence of water to completion. As

⁸⁸ Annette Insdorf, “Reflections on Blue.” Special features. *Blue* dir. by Krzysztof Kieslowski. DVD. [Miramax, 1996].

⁸⁹ Insdorf, “Reflections on Blue.”

can be seen, in both *Blue* and “Rain at Funeral,” the two visual elements—the rain and the funeral—converge to create an ample drama of loss, mourn and steadiness. A steady despair is the emotion that moves forward—and down—throughout the étude’s textures and the film’s images.

In another slow-paced film from 1989, a meditative style motion picture dealing with Zen views called “*Why has Bodhidharma left for the East*,” by Korean filmmaker Bae Young-kyun, the constant tolling pervades the whole atmosphere of the film.⁹⁰ The tolling is mostly felt in the constant questioning, as well as in the unflagging devotion the young monk’s character shows to his teacher and to the teacher’s instructions for his own cremation ritual. The actual tolling in the soundtrack of the film—a soft bell sound—accompanies the young monk’s slow, march-like ascend to a mountain where he is to accomplish the scattering of his departed master’s ashes. Earlier in the film, during the master’s cremation, an unexpected drizzle falls—“like soft rain drops”⁹¹—that temporarily challenges the burning of the pyre.

Furthermore, since *Why has Bodhidharma left for the East* is a film about Zen koans, both the outdoor scenery and the emotional atmosphere of the film invites the spectator to ponder about life and death in an intimately way, just as the enigmatic and illusive sonorities in “Rain at Funeral” opens the listener’s mind to simply contemplate, as can be heard in the passage between measures twenty-two and twenty-eight. (See example 19) Moreover, the film affords to imbue the viewers’ mind with a cinematic world filled with a feeling of emptiness, shown in slow pacing and in the feeling of isolation from the modern

⁹⁰ Adam Hartzell, *Why has Bodhi Dharma left for the East?*
<http://www.koreanfilm.org/kfilm80s.html#bodhi> [accessed November 15, 2012]

⁹¹ Augusta Read Thomas. *Six Piano Études*, 14

world, as it engages with the theme of death. In fact, one of the koans in the film says: [at death] ‘where does the master of my being go’? Visually, *Why has Bodhidharma left for the East* unfolds through the use of imagery of nature, sacredness, calmness, and a transcendental lyricism that reflect the atmosphere in Thomas’s “Rain at Funeral.”

VI. Twitter-Machines--Homage to David Rakowski

The polyphonic writing in “Twitter-Machines” shows at least two sound layers that move simultaneously, yet, maintaining some rhythmical discrepancies between the two. From the onset of the étude, the addition of new repeated-note layers and occasional sparkling grace-notes creates a sonorous twittering landscape that develops organically into a multiplicity of voices. Moreover, this collectivity of voices is enhanced by several devices such as the abrupt registral shifts of the repeated-note motif, the inherent accelerando quality of the twitter and the changing of texture from individual note-lines to clusters, creating the illusion of hearing more parts than the score actually contains. (See example 21, measures one through six). Furthermore, inside this elaborate textural writing, the sound moves from background to foreground, loosely and whimsically, with the aid of dynamic contrast—like in measures seven to ten. (Ex. 22) This textural writing style offers certain resemblance with Ligeti’s étude, *Automne in Varsovie*, with its use African polyrhythmic and polytempo musical principles where each part moves at a different speed in relationship with the others.⁹² Moreover, Thomas indicates in the score that “the tempo

⁹² György Ligeti. *Works for Piano*. Composer’s notes. Pierre Laurent Aimard. Sony Classical, CD, 1996

should be variable and does not have to be stable from measure to measure,”⁹³ adding to the flexibility of motion in the étude.

In terms of formal structure, although Thomas’s études’s forms usually grow organically and freely, in “Twitter-Machines,” the two main types of textures make us see a three-part structure. In the first section, the material is built upon fast repeated notes where the overall texture is confined to a linear motion written within a compressed range. However, from measure eighteen, the twittering and persistent flow of repeated notes dissolves into a thinner and wider texture consisting of arabesque-like, arpeggio passages, interpolated with grace notes. (See example 23) In this middle section, even though the flow of music becomes less assertive—perhaps even erratic—the music gains in eloquence and variety. For example, in measure twenty-six, the right hand shows the only half-note chords of the piece, placed in the high register above a left-hand soaring melody. (See example 21)

Example 21, “Twitter Machines,” measures 26 and 27

⁹³ Augusta Read Thomas. *Six Piano Études*, 16

Example 22, "Twitter-Machines," mm. 1-10

$\text{♩} = 120$; or, As fast as possible, if 120 is too fast (tempo should be variable and does not have to be stable from measure to measure. This will add a "twittering" and "jazzy" effect.)

1 *ff* (divide between the hands)

3 *Res.* *pp* distant

5 *mf* sub., emerging out of previous resonance, slightly buried

7 *ff* *Res.*

9 *p* sub. *ff* *ff* *p* sub. *cresc. poco a poco* (to measure 14)

In this second section, the machine-like sound of the previous section has now left place to a more bucolic type of sound as the music seems to move from the industrial environment to the woods. In fact, this section even suggests the sound of bird calls which can be heard as the bucolic counterpart to the mechanic noise. In measure thirty-one, the third section of the piece begins with the piece's opening pitch of G-natural, resuming the repeated notes pattern. (See example 24) In this last section combines both materials, the repeated-note theme, now in the left hand, accompanied by the middle section's freer arabesque type of figurations, in the right hand. The merging of two sound-words affords to portray a bucolic atmosphere against a machine-like backdrop, achieving certain integration inside the music narrative of the étude.

Example 23, "Twitter-Machines," mm. 18-22

The musical score for Example 23, "Twitter-Machines," measures 18-22, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 18-19) begins with a piano introduction. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur and an accent, marked *f*, *secco*, and *ff lyrical*. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and an accent, marked *f*. The second system (measures 19-21) features a melodic line in the right hand with a slur and an accent, marked *mf sub.* and *ff*. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and an accent, marked *ff*. The third system (measures 21-22) continues the melodic and bass lines. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur and an accent, marked *secco*, *mp sub.*, and *ff*. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and an accent, marked *secco*, *mp sub.*, and *ff*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and fingerings.

Example 24, "Twitter Machines," m. 31

The imagery in "Twitter-Machines" conveys two coexisting landscapes that establishes a rapport between jungle and factory—nature and machines, as was mentioned above. The image suggests a factory where twitter birds swirl and sing, creating a modern sound-world composed of both alive and mechanically-built creatures. In the same vein, Thomas pointed out the analogous content and expression between her étude "Twitter-Machines" and Paul Klee's famous painting, *Twittering Machine*, from 1922. She actually claimed having drawn ideas from this art work's expressive meaning when composing the étude.⁹⁴

Consequently, *Twittering Machine* painting graphically brings about this fusion between nature and gadgets—"the formal equation between animal and machine, between organism and mechanism."⁹⁵ It can be argued that this dialectic of noise makers might be the reason for "Twitter-Machines" to shift to a more expressive musical language toward the middle of the piece, while retaining the machine-like sound in the outer sections.

With regards to the use of cinema as a means to address the atmosphere in "Twitter-Machine," Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Il Deserto Rosso* (Red Desert) from

⁹⁴ Augusta Read Thomas. Phone interview with author.

⁹⁵ Otto K. Werckmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career* [Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1989], 240

1994, offers an eloquent story that take place amidst the coexistence between nature and modernity. In fact, an innovator par excellence, Antonioni's personal opinion was that the world being created by the industrial development and technology can be undoubtedly beautiful.⁹⁶ In his film, beautiful natural scenery is shot against the constant soundtrack of factory noise—an expression of twitter machine-like sound—marrying organic life with material progress and, thus, creating a metaphor of feelings and neuroses.

In *Il Deserto Rosso*, actress Monica Vitti, plays the character of Giuliana, a neurotic woman, a sort of lost soul who is looking for answers to explain her loneliness.⁹⁷ Her lonely wandering around the factory site conveys in the viewer a feeling of “spiritual imbalance”⁹⁸ that resonates with the human isolation in modern society. In the film, on the one side, there is certain visual pleasure and beauty both in the progressive factory landscape as well as in the character of Giuliana. On the other side, the modern noise can be hell—as the spectator can hear in the “ten-minute pounding soundtrack of the film's opening depicting noise”—as it implies a technological progress that actually moves Giuliana toward alienation.⁹⁹

In this crossroads between the cinematic atmosphere in *Il Deserto Rosso* and the inner dialectic in “Twitter-Machines,” Giuliana, a woman “whose inner being could sufficiently register...complicated and contradictory states of feeling”—progress and

⁹⁶ Michelangelo Antonioni. *The Night, the Eclipse, the Dawn: Godard interviews Antonioni*. DVD [Booklet in *Red Desert*. Criterion Collection, 2010], 19

⁹⁷ Mark Le Fanu. *In This World*. Booklet in *Red Desert*. DVD [Criterion Collection, 2010], 10

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9

⁹⁹ Mark Le Fanu. *In This World*, 9

loneliness—offers a metaphor to the thematic contrasting narrative of the étude: its blending of poetry and lyricism with neurosis and mechanization.¹⁰⁰

Another connection between cinema and music that pinpoints the machine-like twitter theme in “Twitter-Machines” comes from a scene in Mike Nichols’s dark comedy, *Closer*, from 2004. In this scene, two men, a young writer and a doctor, are chatting over the internet using sonorous, twittering keyboards. Since the two characters are unknown to each other, the young writer elaborates a practical joke and passes himself as a woman. He then begins to ignite in the doctor’s mind the most fantastic erotic encounters. The visual frame shows the viewer two dark places: a small office at a hospital and the writer’s apartment, offering a cinematic mood of foreboding quality. The sequence shows the twittering keyboards as they become accelerated as the characters become more engaged with their fantasies. In fact, similar to the tempo fluctuation in “Twitter-Machines,” the articulation and speed of the keyboards varies according to the dynamic of the chat, which appears in their computers’ screens. Therefore, this *Closer*’s chat scene can then evoke elements that can serve as subtext to the musical narrative of “Twitter-Machines”: the written messages can be seen as the arabesque-like figures from the middle section of the étude, while the keyboard tapping noise are a sonic and tactile manifestation of the mechanized of the repeated-note passages. Toward the end of the scene in *Closer*, the internet chat signals an actual personal encounter between the two characters, which is booked *subito*, paralleling the final accelerando, fortissimo chords in “Twitter-Machines.” (See example 25)

¹⁰⁰ Mark Le Fanu. *In This World*, 9

Example 25, “Twitter-Machines,” m. 41

As fast as possible

Finally, Ron Fricke’s film, *Baraka*, from 1992, also offers two different portraits of twittering noises that can be applied to Thomas’s “Twitter-Machines.” The first portrait appears in the scene called “City Chaos,” which describes a counterpoint of cars and people moving quickly during a busy day in the big city of Mexico. The street scenes are shot from an aerial view and, sometimes, in fast motion. This unique perspective brings to the cinematic frame a multiplicity of tiny figures for the eye to perceive. In the crossroads between cinema language and music, the exalted and detailed portrait of a city’s bustle can serve as a parallel to understand the contrapuntal textures, bountiful details, and the unrelenting mood in “Twitter-Machines.” Furthermore, *Baraka*’s soundtrack music cleverly depicts an incessant drum beating that underlined the repeated patterns of the city’s buoyancy: cars and traffic, lights, as well as visually bold commercial signs.

As “Twitter-Machines” opposes pure rhythmic passages with more lyrical sections, in a similar way the film *Baraka*, like *Il Deserto Rosso*, juxtaposes technology with nature. In fact, in contrast to the “City Chaos” scene, the film’s sequence showing a performance of a ritual Kecak dance from Bali, strikes for its exhilarating human collective sound. The Kecak dance unravels a pulsating ensemble of crossed rhythms between several groups of participants. While this ritualistic performance is based on articulated repetition of

syllables that are quick and precise, interpolated sudden collective silence, like fermatas, open the mind's viewer to spacious mental experiences. In a similar way, in "Twitter Machines," the interruption of the motor-like chains of repeated notes that gives room to the spaced-out arabesque-like figures, affords the opportunity for the listener to experience passages of more delightful musical freedom.

Conclusion

With the help of extra-musical expressive visual images, the performer might find it easier not only to appreciate the meaning that lies behind the visual elements of Thomas's piano etudes but also to be enthused by them. Both steps of the process of exploring the mood and landscape in Thomas's etudes are essential to articulate evocative sound-worlds in those pieces. In fact, seeing and imagining those expressive worlds can then minimize the gap between the performer's mind and the music in the printed page.

As has been discussed, cinematic sequences offer a great diversity of imagery that can bring expressive ingredients and insights into the stage of learning piano music and to the actual performance. Moreover, because films often represent experiences that are analogous to human life, they can prove useful for contributing to the maturity that performers need to have in order to deal with Thomas's passionate, evocative and introspective style of music.

Furthermore, studying cinema as a tool to address sound imagination in piano music can reestablish a lost tradition in music performance that had relied on simile and metaphor, as well as poetry and painting, as pedagogical means for addressing interpretive issues. Moreover, there cannot be a better reason for the use of films to illuminate the music than to acknowledge cinema's connection and influence in contemporary life, as was discussed above.

Thomas's piano études can be categorized as intermediate level piano pieces offering certain technical challenges that, although requiring diligent study and practice, will not match the difficulty of other sets of études from the same time period, such as

Ligeti's two books of études or William Bolcom's *Twelve New Études*. For that very reason, Thomas's études afford the opportunity for the student-performer to go beyond the technical aspect of the pieces, and to explore their expressive visual language approaching them as character pieces. As Alfred Brendel claims in relation to the music of Liszt, if the piano performance of his music lacks the poetic qualities, Liszt's music "can be misrepresented," and whereby perceived only within its technical dimension.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Thomas's piano études deserve more than well-trained fingers. The études, well-conceived for the piano, are actually highly crafted expressive piece, poetically and lyrically, and therefore requiring not only a vivid visual understanding of their expressive sound but also a personalized approach by means of subtext.

As pointed out in the analysis of Thomas's études, there are multiple analogies of mood, atmosphere, and pacing that can be drawn between cinema language and the pieces in order to issue a more tangible understanding and expression in the music. Moreover, cinema, like music, relies on the principles of tension and resolution, movement and rhythm, textural treatments and tone colors for the articulation of its narratives and cinematic worlds—the concept of legato in music, for instance, finds its equivalent in cinema in the concept of visual continuity. Ultimately, as parallels between both types of media intensify, the possibility of enhancing piano performance with the use of cinematic images as backdrop for the pieces' sound and meaning can lead to a more holistic and rewarding approach to music. In resonance with the words of Alfred Cortot with regards to his own descriptive paragraphs of Debussy's preludes, even though any attempt to find

¹⁰¹ Brendel in conversation with Martin Meyer, *Me of All People*, 145

parallels between the images and the music may show some type of resistance, it will, “at least, help to establish the suggestive precision of the musical composition.”¹⁰²

Along the same lines, this document will offer a few last observations from the films that can enrich the inner motions of Thomas’ etudes. Taking a few steps further in the parallels between the études and the chosen films can crystallize the idea of how films can, in a practical way, influence pianists’ approaches to the performances of those pieces.

In “Orbital Beacons,” the aerial, rotating shooting point in the opening scene of *Tango* affords pianists the chance to perceive a feeling of ampleness that inspires the performer to hear the open sound-world and vast spaces. Also, *Tango*’s bright colors can hint at hearing a coloristic palette in the reverberant sound of “Orbital Beacons.” Moreover, the long shot in *Tango*’s opening expresses continuity and evenness, which can be reflected in the continuous sound resulting from the pedal down during this entire piece. Similarly to *Tango*’s vast view, *L’Éclisse*’s depth of field brings a feeling of covering a large amount of time and space within one’s mind, giving pianists the opportunity of the enjoyment of a larger dimension. In the second étude, *Z* and *Biutiful*’s use of rapid camera movements provide, on the contrary, a threatening feeling that creates high temperature scenes supplying the fuel for the technical movements required to perform “Fire Waltz” with excitement. Particularly, *Biutiful*’s scene “City of Chaos” shows a bravura style of camera movement that can lead to an exhilarating type of pianism needed for “Fire Waltz.”

Regarding “Cathedral Waterfall,” the slowness and mystery captured in both films *The Name of the Rose* and *Par delà des Nuages* can open pianists’ minds to hear in it an echoing sound and floating tones. The cinematic images will directly affect the use of

¹⁰² Alfred Cortot, *French Piano Music*, 23

pedal, the smoothness of sound production, as well as control of legato. With regard to “On Twilight,” both *Playing Time* and *Peter and the Wolf* present the viewer with two different kinds of playful scenery, one that is urban and the other that is rather pastoral. The clear-cut scenes made of hasty movements and detailed artistry will fill pianists’ minds with ideas for working with small, playful snippets of sounds and with short motifs in an imaginative and playful manner. Pianists’ motions will acquire more lightness and precision and the sound will likely gain a more coloristic approach. *À bout de souffle* creates an ingenuous visual cinematic world that presents ludic situations, offering a visual version of the musical adventures in “On Twilight,” just as *Playtime*’s dinner and subsequent dance scene provides a picturesque representation of humorous, incessant vitality.

The last two études can benefit from the way the film *Blue* will infuse pianists with notions of grief, pain, and inner resolution that will pave the way to the very slow tempo of “Rain at Funeral.” At the same time, the expression of heartbreaking depth and sacredness in *Why has Bodhi-dharma left for the East* will open the musicians’ minds to hear a rather soothing mourning feeling in “Rain at Funeral.” In the films *Closer*, *Baraka* and *Z*, pianists can hear the mechanized noise shown in their cinematic worlds as they unfold in a repetitive and dehumanized way, affording pianists the opportunity not only to visualize but also to feel the mechanical compulsive outbursts of sound in the “Twitter-Machines.”

Until the music piece shows an image to the mind, it remains foreign, unattainable to the musician. Therefore, it is worth taking the time to explore the dynamics of films and use them as subtext and as visual support in Thomas’s piano études. This pedagogical approach will offer the opportunities for increasing visual imagination not only for her études but also for other piano pieces of similar nature. Once pianists feel comfortable with

the process of connecting both types of media and thinking metaphorically, the understanding of the music and the performance will become more holistic, organic, assured, as well as personal and compelling.

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