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ABSTRACT

Specific examples from the 32 Piano Pieces (1940) by Greek composer Nikos Skalkottas serve as a starting point for an investigation of the ways in which certain aspects of tradition are maintained, albeit in a wholly new and original manner. References to tonality and the great masters of the past are examined, in connection with the teaching of Schoenberg, which Skalkottas followed in Berlin. The paper culminates in the introduction of the term *distillation*, in an attempt to characterize the composer's assimilation of a number of stylistic and other elements which resurface in his music at various intervals.

Keywords: Skalkottas, tradition, Schoenberg, piano, *distillation*

INTRODUCTION

Nikos Skalkottas (1904–1949) composed the 32 Piano Pieces in 1940, in Athens.¹ The impressive variety of styles and genres evoked by the mere titles of the pieces is indicative, amongst other things, of the composer's special relationship to the music of the past. To better grasp and evaluate this relationship we must first determine which aspect or aspects of tradition the composer sought to preserve, and in what way, thus inscribing his work within the continuity of Western art music.

This paper will first examine the question of tonality, as one of the vestiges of tradition. Selected examples of striking similarities between passages from the 32 Piano Pieces and certain older works of the pianistic repertory will serve to illustrate Skalkottas's singular appropriation of elements of the past, through a process of assimilation and incorporation taking place over a long period of time. This process will be explained and defined using the term *distillation*.

¹ Skalkottas left Berlin in 1933 and spent the remainder of his life in Athens. On the composer's life see Romanou 2009: 163-185.

REMNANTS OF TONALITY

For students in Schoenberg's Berlin Masterclass² tradition very likely signified tonality. However, tonality was irretrievably linked with the formal prototypes inherited from previous centuries. Although Schoenberg never ceased stressing the historic necessity of the elaboration of the method of composing with twelve tones,³ he used, in his teaching, examples from the works of the great masters of the past.⁴

His leap into the realm of new music was rendered more legitimate by a profound and extensive knowledge of the musical literature of the past, and more precisely, that of the great German musical tradition. As he states himself in a text written in 1931,⁵ his masters were Bach and Mozart first of all, and secondly Brahms and Wagner. He goes on to give a detailed account of what he learned from each composer in terms of musical construction and formal elaboration. While respecting each student's individuality, in terms of compositional style,⁶ Schoenberg's teaching adhered to certain basic and general principles, such as the following:

»One of the foremost tasks of instruction is to awaken in the pupil a sense of the past and at the same time to open up to him prospects for the future. Thus instruction may proceed historically, by making the connections between what was, what is, and what is likely to be. The historian can be productive if he sets forth, not merely historical data, but an understanding of history, if he does not confine himself simply to enumerating, but tries to read the future from the past.«⁷

2 Skalkottas studied with Schoenberg at the Prussian Academy of Arts, between 1927 and 1930 on a regular basis, and then sporadically in 1931 and 1932. (See Mantzourani 2011: 3-4 and Harrandt 2006: 27-40)

3 »The method of composing with twelve tones grew out of a necessity.« (Schoenberg 1941: 216) »After many unsuccessful attempts during a period of approximately twelve years, I laid the foundations for a new procedure in musical construction which seemed fitted to replace those structural differentiations provided formerly by tonal harmonies. I called this procedure 'Method of Composing with Twelve Tones Which are Related Only with One Another'. This method consists primarily of the constant and exclusive use of a set of twelve different tones. This means, of course, that no tone is repeated within the series and that it uses all twelve tones of the chromatic scale, though in a different order. It is in no way identical with the chromatic scale.« (*Ibid.*: 218)

4 For example, his book *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, which places special emphasis on the Beethoven piano sonatas.

5 Schoenberg 1931: 173-174: »My teachers were primarily Bach and Mozart, and secondarily Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner. [...] I also learned much from Schubert and Mahler, Strauss and Reger too.«

6 Schoenberg 1948: 386: »One more effect derived from it: all my pupils differ from one another extremely and though perhaps the majority compose twelve-tone music, one could not speak of a school. They all had to find their way alone, for themselves. And that is exactly what they did; everyone has his own manner of obeying rules derived from the treatment of twelve tones.«

7 Schoenberg 1978: 29.

The above quotation can be considered to refer to Skalkottas's 32 Piano Pieces. Even a cursory glance at the titles seems to indicate an effort to encompass a great many historical periods, or perhaps even to evoke inexistent or incomplete periods of Greek musical history.⁸

Table 1. Titles of the 32 Piano Pieces in the fair copy⁹

I. <i>Klavierstück</i>	XVII. <i>Das Frühstückchen der kleiner Magd</i>
II. <i>Kindertanz</i>	XVIII. <i>Foxtrot – Der alte Polizist</i>
III. <i>Kurze Variationen auf ein Bergsthema südlichen Characters und prägnanter Dissonanz</i>	XIX. <i>Etüde Phantastique</i>
IV. <i>Katastrophe auf dem Urwald (Filmmusik)</i>	XX. <i>Berceuse</i>
V. <i>Griechischer Volkstanz</i>	XXI. <i>Romance-Lied</i>
VI. <i>Reveria im alten Stil</i>	XXII. <i>Gavotte</i>
VII. <i>Reveria im neuen Stil</i>	XXIII. <i>Menuetto</i>
VIII. <i>Vierstimmiger Kleiner Kanon</i>	XXIV. <i>Italienische Serenade</i>
IX. <i>Marcia Funebra</i>	XXV. <i>Ragtime (Tanz)</i>
X. <i>Sonatina</i>	XXVI. <i>Slow-Fox</i>
XI. <i>Partita</i>	XXVII. <i>Galoppe</i>
XII. <i>Kleine Serenade</i>	XXVIII. <i>Blues</i>
XIII. <i>Intermezzo</i>	XXIX. <i>Rondo Brillante</i>
XIV. <i>Tango</i>	XXX. <i>Capriccio</i>
XV. <i>Passacaglia</i>	XXXI. <i>Walzer</i>
XVI. <i>Nachtstück</i>	XXXII. <i>Kleiner Bauernmarsch</i>

Attractive as this hypothesis may be, we do not have at our disposal, at the present time, enough evidence to suggest that Skalkottas was sensitive to a linear approach to Greek musical history, or that he could have undertaken the composition of this particular work with such a design in mind. Nevertheless, in the several unpublished texts he wrote on various musical subjects,¹⁰ he expresses

8 See Romanou 2009: 99-124 and 125-161, for a history of art music in Greece, starting from 1824 and the founding of the first music school for Greek inhabitants in Corfu.

9 There are two existing autograph manuscripts of the 32 Piano Pieces, a draft and a fair copy, where the pieces are presented in a slightly different order. Table 1 follows the order in the fair copy. For a discussion on the composer's hesitation concerning the order of the pieces see Tsioutis, forthcoming.

10 Demertzis 1999: 48: »Πρόκειται για είκοσι δύο κείμενα μουσικού και γενικότερα μεθοδολογικού προβληματισμού, πάντοτε πρωτότυπου και ιδιότυπου, συχνά φιλοσοφικού στη δομή του. Αχρονολόγητα όλα πλην ενός (της Περισυλλογής Ιδεών, στις 24.9.1939), θα υποθέσουμε ότι γράφονταν, σποραδικά και κατά περιόδους, από το 1934-35 ως το 1949. [...] Οι τίτλοι τους : *Η τεχνική του βιολιού, Η τεχνική του πιάνου, Αρμονία και αντίστοιχες, Ανάπτυξεις*

ideas which resonate with those of his teacher. In the text entitled *New Musical Literature* he states:

»The musical works of our time stand in line for the future judgement of their solid value, those worthy of remaining as eternal specimens of good Art, a modern Art continuing in the road of the older one. Exclusively new creation interests us in that we can thus see whether what we create is for the present time, the future, or only for a short-span use. [...] New musical literature will of course in time take its place in the future to prove that it pursues the grand and difficult pathways of the older literature, this is indeed what it takes for us to prove that each new work does not bring about disorder but that its existence is useful and justifies its musical trend.«¹¹ (translated by the author)

Here Skalkottas underlines the fact that new music does not appear out of nowhere, but continues along the path initiated by older music. Continuity thus emerges as a crucial concept, one which justifies the existence of new music and makes its acceptance – by both the general public and interpreters – easier. If we consider the method of composing with twelve tones as the evolutionary outcome of the dissolution of the tonal system, of extended tonality¹² through the emancipation of dissonance,¹³ then the following extract from Skalkottas's text entitled *Harmony and Counterpoint* would seem to refer exactly to this intermediate period of transition.

μουσικών θεμάτων, Ύψος, Πρωτοτυπία και απομίμησης, Το δημοτικό τραγούδι, Μουσική χορού, Μουσικές επιδράσεις, Μουσικές υποκρούσεις, Η Σχολή των Μοντέρνων Συνθετών, Μουσικά ανέκδοτα, Η συμφωνία, Περισυλλογή Ιδεών, Θεωρία και πράξις των μουσικών κανόνων, Η μουσική αναζήτησις, Συνθετικά λεπτομέρειαι, Η δύναμη των συμφωνικών συναυλιών, Η νέα μουσική του κινηματογράφου, Πώς θα γράψουμε για το θέατρο, Η ενορχήστρωση, Η νέα μουσική φιλολογία.»

»Skalkottas wrote twenty-two texts on various methodological and musical subjects, always original and particular, often in a philosophical vein. Only the text entitled *Collecting Ideas* is dated 24 September 1939; we can deduce that the other texts were written between 1934–35 and 1949. [...] Their titles are: *Violin technique, Piano technique, Harmony and Counterpoint, Developing Musical Themes, Style, Originality and Imitation, Popular Song, Dance Music, Musical Influence, Musical Accompaniment, The School of Modern Composers, Musical Anecdotes, The Symphony, Collecting Ideas, Theory and Practice of Musical Rules, Musical Research, Compositional Details, The Power of Symphonic Concerts, The New Music of Cinema, How to compose for the Theatre, New Musical Literature.*» (translated by the author)

11 »Τα μουσικά έργα της εποχής μας παίρνουν θέση για μια μελλοντική στερεότητα της αξίας των, αυτά που έχουν αιτία για να μείνουν αιώνια σημάδια της καλής Τέχνης, της μοντέρνας Τέχνης η οποία εξακολούθησε το δρόμο της μη μοντέρνας [παλαιάς]. Η νέα αποκλειστικά δημιουργία μας ενδιαφέρει καθόσο μπορούμε έτσι να δούμε αν αυτό που δημιουργούμε είναι της εποχής, για το μέλλον ή μόνο της ολιγόχρονου χρήσης. [...] Η νέα μουσική φιλολογία θα πάρει ασφαλώς με τον καιρό μια μελλοντική θέση για ν' αποδείξει ότι συνεχίζει τους μεγάλους και δύσκολους δρόμους της παλαιάς φιλολογίας, αυτό χρειάζεται άλλωστε για ν' αποδείξουμε και μεις ότι κάθε νέο έργο δεν φέρει την αταξία αλλά τη χρησιμότητα της ύπαρξής του και τη δικαιολογία της μουσικής του τάσης.»

12 Schoenberg 1941: 216.

13 *Ibid.*: 216-217.

»However a three-tone harmony comprising different intervals of seconds, thirds, or fourths, etc., remains and is called a trichord which can or cannot be classified according to a certain scale, can be major or minor and be based on the independence, or so to speak, of the musical tones, which do not wish to be associated to a specific scale, as they purport positions which are self-sufficient.«¹⁴ (translated by the author)

To what else could Skalkottas be referring here but atonality? Schoenberg did not approve of this term; in a footnote to the new English translation of his *Harmonielehre*, he specifies:

»[...] they call themselves ‘atonalists’. I have to dissociate myself from that, however, for I am a musician and have nothing to do with things atonal. The word ‘atonal’ could only signify something entirely inconsistent with the nature of tone. Even the word ‘tonal’ is incorrectly used if it is intended in an exclusive rather than inclusive sense.«¹⁵

Although Skalkottas does not use this specific term, his 32 Piano Pieces are in their majority atonal, or perhaps one should say written in *freie Tonalität*. When he does use rows, these have, more often than not, less than twelve tones, as in the case of the piece No. XV – *Passacaglia*.

Example 1. The tone row of the melodic ostinato of the piece No. XV – *Passacaglia*, from the 32 Piano Pieces



This melodic ostinato row occurs twenty-one (21) times in the *Passacaglia*: the Theme is followed by twenty (20) variations, all of which are two bars long, except the last one which is four bars long. All the appearances of this melodic ostinato occur within the same harmony, the same six (6) pitch class sets exposed in the Theme, with variations in their registral and/or textural distribution.¹⁶

14 »Όμως μια τρίφωνος αρμονία με διάφορα διαστήματα δευτέρας, τρίτης ή τετάρτης κτλ διαμένει και ονομάζεται τριφωνία η οποία είναι δυνατόν να καταταχθή και σε μια ορισμένη κλίμακα ή δεν είναι δυνατόν, είναι δυνατόν να είναι μείζον ή ελλάσον και να στηρίζεται εις την ανεξαρτησία, να πούμε, των μουσικών φθόγγων, οι οποίοι δεν θέλουν να συγγενεύουν με μια ορισμένη κλίμακα αφού διαδίδουν αρμονικές θέσεις και άρσεις εντελώς αυτός καθ' εαυτάς στηριζόμενας.«

15 Schoenberg 1978: 432; Schoenberg 1926: 263-264.

16 For a detailed analysis of the *Passacaglia* see Tsougras 2011.

Example 2. Theme of the piece No. XV – *Passacaglia*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 1-2 (in red the ostinato in the left hand; in green the notes E flat and D, forming an appoggiatura on the seventh note of the ostinato, G¹⁷; in blue the harmonic pitch class sets accompanying the ostinato)

Klavierstück XV
Passacaglia

The image shows the first two measures of the piece. The right hand (treble clef) features a complex, rhythmic melody with many beamed notes. The left hand (bass clef) features a simple, repeating ostinato pattern. The score is annotated with colored boxes: red boxes highlight the ostinato in the left hand; green boxes highlight the notes E-flat and D in the left hand, which form an appoggiatura on the seventh note of the ostinato, G¹⁷; blue boxes highlight the harmonic pitch class sets accompanying the ostinato in the right hand. The tempo is marked 'Grave' and the dynamics 'p' (piano). The performance instruction 'sehr vorstellend' is also present.

The twentieth and last variation of the *Passacaglia* is texturally amplified, with massive aggregates in the right hand and octaves in the left hand. In the last bar of the piece the left hand plays the pitch class C, which was not present, until this moment, in the melodic ostinato in this position. Greek musicologist Kostas Tsougras points out that the C thus becomes a sort of tonal basis for the whole preceding work.¹⁸ We could further suggest that the entire piece functions as an intricate appoggiatura for the final C in the left hand.

¹⁷ This double appoggiatura is present only in the Theme and half of the variations. When they are not present in the ostinato the two tones in question appear in the harmonic set class accompanying the note G. For more on this subject see Tsougras 2011: 10-11.

¹⁸ Tsougras 2011: 20, 24.

Example 3. No. XV – *Passacaglia*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 41-44

Grave Fine

(20)

If we were to replace the last tone of the melodic ostinato row, the C sharp, by a C natural, the row would acquire a pronounced tonal character, not least because of the closing descending perfect fifth (between the last two tones of the melodic ostinato row: G and C). Skalkottas avoids this evocative aural reference, by concluding the melodic ostinato on a C sharp. The fact that in the final variation Skalkottas levels out both the articulations and rhythmic values of the melodic ostinato row further supports the hypothesis that the C natural played by the left hand in bar 44 can be considered to be the real aural basis of the piece.

Another piece offering a similarly twisted approach to tonality, and more specifically the tonality of C, is the No. VII – *Reveria im neuen Stil*. The basic thematic material is exposed in the first two bars of the piece.

Example 4. No. VII – *Reveria im neuen Stil*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 1-2

$\text{♩} = 180$ *Ein wenig schneller und nicht zuruckhalten*

pp

Ped. ----- Ped. -----

In the beginning of bar 2 the left hand plays E flat and the right hand E natural.¹⁹ This is consistent with the composer's general practice of avoiding the octave, in accordance with Schoenberg's teaching, except in cases pertaining to textural augmentation.²⁰ When these two bars are repeated, further on in the piece, the repetition is almost identical.

¹⁹ This has been verified in both existing autograph manuscripts of the piece.

²⁰ As has been noted a propos the *Passacaglia*, see Example 3. For more on the avoidance of the octave by Skalkottas and the differentiation he operated between octaves resulting from polyphonic writing and those employed for textural augmentation, see Tsioutis 2019: 158-179.

Example 5. No. VII – *Reveria im neuen Stil*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 45-46

Identical, but not quite: this time, in the beginning of bar 46 (corresponding to bar 2) both hands play E natural.²¹ Thus an octave is sounded, clearly, on the strong beat of the bar. From this point on and until the end of the piece, the pitch E natural gains in importance, and is treated almost as a sort of pedal point. An E natural is given in the bass in bars 46, 47, 49, 50 and 52.

Example 6. No. VII – *Reveria im neuen Stil*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 46-54 (in red the occurrences of the pitch E natural in the bass)

21 This has also been verified in both existing autograph manuscripts of the piece.

The rare octave on the strong beat of bar 46, followed by the quasi pedal point on E natural, culminates in what can be considered a C major triad in the last bar of the piece: if we consider that the E natural played in bar 52 will be sustained by the damper pedal throughout the two following bars, we hear, in bar 54, the pitches C, E natural and G. Thus the piece entitled *Reveria im neuen Stil* (Reverie in the new style), as opposed to *Reveria im alten Stil* (Reverie in the old style) which immediately precedes it, concludes on the resonance of a C major triad. Ironic?

IN THE GRIP OF THE PAST?

Skalkottas was a violinist, composer, arranger, conductor and pianist. A combination of these musical activities and abilities allowed him to survive during the difficult years of the inflation in Berlin,²² the German occupation of Greece,²³ and the subsequent civil war. We do not know if he composed at the piano; we do however know that he was an excellent improviser, accompanying silent film projections, as well as dance lessons on the piano. His evident pianistic skills are visible and tangible in the 32 Piano Pieces, as is his extensive knowledge of the music of the past. As has already been pointed out, this is obvious through the titles, which offer an initial indication as to possible connections to older music and ancient masters, and to the composer's wider preoccupation with what may generally be considered as the tradition of Western piano repertoire. Other than the titles, however, the music itself, its texture, disposition and graphic layout, often indicate a knowledge of and/or familiarity with older works.

One such occurrence is the piece No. XIII – *Intermezzo*. Although a number of composers wrote intermezzi, we are immediately directed towards Robert Schumann,²⁴ via the composer's indication in the first bar, *sehr ernst*, which evokes the piece *Fast zu Ernst*, No. 10 from the *Kinderszenen*, Opus 15.

Example 7. No. XIII – *Intermezzo*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, m. 1

Moderato

22 Huynh 1998.

23 See Mazower 1993: 85 and following, for a description of the civilian population's life during the German occupation.

24 A possible influence by Schumann is also visible in other titles of the 32 Piano Pieces. Unfortunately the scope of the present article does not allow us to further develop this question; the interested reader will find more on this subject in Tsioutis 2019: 41-42.

A comparison of the two aforementioned works does not yield any interesting results. However, if we look at Schumann's *Intermezzo* from *Faschingschwank aus Wien*, Opus 26, certain common features become apparent.

Example 8. Robert Schumann, *Intermezzo*, Opus 26, No. 4. G. Schirmer Inc.²⁵



Both works have the same number of bars (45), and both are conceived with an accompanying background of continuous semi-quavers. In Skalkottas's piece these are in the lower register, in Schumann's work they are in the middle register, shared between the hands. As we progress further on in the piece, the disposition of the accompaniment is modified.

Example 9. No. XIII – *Intermezzo*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 13-14



This is reminiscent of Claude Debussy's *Poissons d'or*, last piece of the second volume of *Images*.

²⁵ Schumann 1897: 18.

Example 10. Claude Debussy, *Poissons d'or*, mm. 1-2. Edition Peters²⁶

VI

Animé (♩ = 112)

pp aussi léger que possible

We could suggest that in bar 13 of Skalkottas's *Intermezzo*, the composer condenses the two types of accompaniment in *Poissons d'or*: the first two beats are reminiscent of the beginning of the piece, and the last two beats, continuing on to the next bar, are reminiscent of the accompaniment in bars 64-65.

Example 11. Claude Debussy, *Poissons d'or*, mm. 64-65. Edition Peters²⁷

64

molto pp

la basse un peu en dehors

These comments on the left hand accompaniment of the pieces may seem trivial, or of secondary importance, compared to other matters concerning form or musical material. They are however indicative not only of stylistic directions, but also of the repertoire Skalkottas was familiar with, and which he probably assimilated through the physical act of playing the score, as well as listening to it. In the absence of sources confirming Skalkottas's knowledge of these specific works, the above comments serve as a starting point for the observation of similar

26 Debussy 1970: 45.

27 *Ibid.*: 53.

situations, throughout the 32 Piano Pieces. The *Intermezzo* provided the material for considerations pertaining to the gestural disposition of the musical basis in the left hand accompaniment; in what follows the starting point will be the graphic representation of the score.

A look at the beginning of the piece No. XXII – *Gavotte*, immediately brings to mind the disposition at the beginning of Schoenberg’s *Musette*, from the Suite, Opus 25.

Example 12. No. XXII – *Gavotte*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 1-2



Example 13. Arnold Schönberg, *Musette*, Suite, Opus 25, No. 3, m. 1. Universal Edition AG²⁸



Both works are in 2/2 time; both present a similar disposition of the musical material: two voices in the right hand with different articulations and an accompaniment in the left hand. The anapaestic rhythmic formula of two quavers – one crotchet, present throughout the *Gavotte* is not only characteristic, but easily identified, by the ear, as well as by the hand.²⁹

28 Schönberg 1925, 1952. Reproduced by permission.

29 This formula or its equivalent in half values – two semi-quavers and one quaver – is present in bars 19, 25, 42, 43 of the *Gavotte*.

Example 14. No. XXII – *Gavotte*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, m. 25

25

subito f

An almost identical rhythmic formula is present in the *Musette*, in the same homorhythmic configuration between the hands.

Example 15. Arnold Schönberg, *Musette*, Suite, Opus 25, No. 3, mm. 4-5. Universal Edition AG³⁰

8

ff

f

pp

8

ff

f

p

In the Suite, Opus 25 the *Musette* forms a pair with the preceding *Gavotte*, which is also performed *Da Capo*. Furthermore, Schönberg's indication of the speed of performance of the *Musette* is given in relation to that of the *Gavotte*: the composer notes *Rascher* (faster) and not *Rasch* (fast). These observations further emphasize the relationship between Skalkottas's *Gavotte* and Schönberg's *Musette*; the *Gavotte* in the 32 Piano Pieces also forms a pair, with the following *Menuetto* (numbers XXII and XXIII of the 32 Piano Pieces). Both pieces are in three part form, both have titles evoking music of the past, and more specifically the dance suite; finally they both make use of the same concluding rhythmic formula.

30 Schönberg 1925, 1952. Reproduced by permission.

Example 16. No. XXII – *Gavotte*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 36-37



Example 17. No. XXIII – *Menuetto*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, m. 49



In the preceding paragraphs a possible influence by Schoenberg on Skalkottas was examined through elements pertaining not only to the gestural configuration and realisation of the pieces (homophonic statements, rhythmic formulas), but also to the graphic representation of the music (time signature and disposition of the musical material between the two hands), as well as the larger overall structure of the work. In the final example we will examine an influence detectable in the textural modifications of the material, its gestural realisation and aural reminiscences. Once again our focus will be on the *Passacaglia*.

A comparison with the works by Schoenberg³¹ and Webern³² of the same title does not yield especially interesting results. It is a whole different matter when one takes a look at Alban Berg's *Passacaglia*, in *Wozzeck*, act 1, scene 4.

31 Arnold Schoenberg, *Nacht (Passacaglia)*, *Pierrot Lunaire*, Opus 21, movement 8 (1912).

32 Anton Webern, *Passacaglia* for orchestra, Opus 1 (1908).

Example 18. No. XV – *Passacaglia*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 3-6

The musical score is presented in four systems. The first system (measures 3-4) is marked with a circled '1'. The second system (measures 5-6) is marked with a circled '2'. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *p*, and articulation marks like accents and slurs. The right hand features a melodic line with various rhythmic values and slurs, while the left hand provides a complex accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

The rhythmic and articulatory modifications that Skalkottas's applies to the melodic ostinato, during the first two variations in the left hand, are intensely reminiscent of the beginning of the Theme in Berg's *Passacaglia*, played by the cellos.

Example 19. Alban Berg, *Passacaglia* from *Wozzeck*, mm. 488-492. Piano reduction. Universal Edition AG³³

Vorhang rasch auf 4. Szene Studierstube des Doktors (sonniger Nachmittag)
 Wozzeck tritt ein Sehr langsam (♩ = 36-40)

Der Doktor eilt hastig dem eintretenden Wozzeck entgegen *parlando* 3 Was denn,

Was er-leb' ich, Woz-zeck? Ein Mann ein Wort? Ei, ei, ei!

pp (flüchtig) (lebense) *quasi Recitativo mit viel Freiheit im Tempo*

p Passacaglia - Thema

U. E. 7382

56

490

Wozz Herr Dok-tor?

Dokt Ich habs ge-sehn, Woz-zeck, Er hat wie-der ge-hu-stet, auf der Stra-ße ge-hu-stet,

immer aufgeregter

Dokt ge-bellt wie ein Hund! Geb' ich ihm da-für al-le Ta-ge drei Groschen? Woz-zeck!

ff p subito

marcatissimo *bedeutend ruhiger* *sehr weich* (rit.)

In Variation 17 of Skalkottas's piece, the ostinato theme is given in octaves in the left hand, a configuration which continues to the end of the piece.

33 Berg 1931, 1958. Reproduced by permission.

Example 20. No. XV – *Passacaglia*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 35-36

17 *f* *appassionato*

36

The material is treated in a similar way at the end of Variation 8 in Berg's *Passacaglia*, in the octaves played by the harp.

Example 21. Alban Berg, *Passacaglia* from *Wozzeck*, mm. 543-545. Piano reduction. Universal Edition AG³⁴

Schritte durchs Zimmer *p* *f* *545* *poco accel.* *

Wozzeck *falsett*
Schein im We- sten, wie von ei- ner Es- se: an was soll man sich da

Doktor *p*
Kerl, Er ta- stet mit sel- nen Fü- ßen her- um, wie mit

Fl Ccl *p*
Hr *f*
Hfo
2co *p*
9 Dar.

Finally, the massive aggregates in the last variation of Skalkottas's work are surprisingly similar to those played by the whole orchestra in (also) the last variation of Berg's *Passacaglia* (compare aggregates in Example 3 with those in Example 22).

34 *Ibid.*

Example 22. Alban Berg, *Passacaglia* from *Wozzeck*, mm. 636-640. Piano reduction. Universal Edition AG³⁵

The image displays two pages of a musical score. The top page shows measures 72 to 21. The vocal line (Dokt) has lyrics: "sterblich! Un". The piano accompaniment features complex textures with triplets and dynamic markings such as *rit.*, *ff rauschend*, and *loco*. The bottom page shows measure 640, with the vocal line continuing the lyrics "sterblich!". The piano accompaniment includes a *fff* dynamic marking and the instruction "dazu Blech". The score is identified as "Der Vorhand".

The above mentioned occurrences of similarities between certain of the 32 Piano Pieces and works of the past, and many more which the scope of the present study does not allow us to explore, cannot be classified as mere coincidences. Their sheer quantity and scope – pertaining to the gestural, textural, formal, graphic and stylistic domains – do not justify their qualification as simple influences or allusions. That is why it was deemed necessary to seek an adequate term qualifying this situation.

DISTILLATION

As a young student in Berlin Skalkottas took up a number of jobs to make ends meet. He worked in silent movie theatres, either improvising at the piano, conducting small instrumental ensembles, or playing violin; he copied and

35 *Ibid.*

arranged music for record labels; he played in cabarets and cafés; all of these activities brought him into direct contact with the popular music of his age. At the same time, through his association with Schoenberg and his circle of students he not only widened his knowledge of works belonging to the tradition of Western art music, but also became familiar with the new musical scene in Berlin.³⁶

After his return to Athens in 1933 he worked as a violinist in the principal orchestras of the Greek capital.³⁷ He accompanied dance lessons at the piano;³⁸ he made arrangements of songs and short pieces for colleagues. He transcribed Greek traditional songs from field recordings.³⁹ All these musical styles and genres are present in the 32 Piano Pieces, as is evidenced by looking at their titles alone;⁴⁰ furthermore this characteristic can be said to be shared by the Piano Suites nos. 2, 3, 4, also composed in 1940.⁴¹ These multiple influences present in Skalkottas's output have been identified and commented upon by a number of scholars, who have accorded more or less importance to the extent of this practice and its musical importance.⁴²

Skalkottas is not the only 20th century composer to use a variety of stylistic elements in his works as yet another way of inscribing them in the tradition of Western art music. Modern musicology has approached this subject from different angles and has proposed several terms explaining its multiple forms of manifestation. Leonard B. Meyer speaks of *borrowing* with reference to Stravinsky's practice;⁴³ also regarding the latter composer, Anthony Pople uses the term *allusion*;⁴⁴ as for Alban Berg, he considers that he operates a synthesis or symbiosis⁴⁵ between older forms and genres and the new musical language in a subtler way than his master Schoenberg.⁴⁶

The examples cited above, relating certain of the 32 Piano Pieces with works by Schumann, Debussy, Schoenberg and Berg, illustrate the fact that in Skalkottas's case the influence of older or contemporary masters often goes beyond the use of stereotype forms, titles or stylistic elements, embracing a more organic dimension, one that is manifest through the disposition of the musical material, its

36 Gradenwitz 1998.

37 Charkiolakis 2013.

38 In Athens Skalkottas collaborated with dance teachers Koula Pratsika and Polyxeni Mathéy. (See Ramou 2017b)

39 Fidetzis 2008.

40 See Table 1.

41 The titles of the movements of the Suites are: No. 2, *Largo; Gavotte; Rapsodie; Marsch*; No. 3, *Minuetto; Thema con Variazioni; Marcia Funebra; Finale*; No. 4, *Toccata; Andantino; Polka; Serenade*.

42 Ramou 2017a: 107-122; Sirodeau 1999-2000, 2001: 7-15; Sousamoglou 2008: 46-59.

43 Meyer 1989: 347-348. On the term *borrowing* see also Burkholder 2001.

44 Pople 1991: 2-3.

45 *Ibid.*: 6-7.

46 Schoenberg uses older forms in a number of works, such as, for example the Suite, Opus 25 for piano or the *Pierrot Lunaire*, Opus 21, cited earlier.

layout on the page, its textural elaboration and the eventual physical components of its realisation, its execution by the pianist. The term *allusion* is inappropriate, as Skalkottas does not, in these cases, employ themes or melodies from other composers. The term *borrowing*, which can be considered to be an umbrella term, is too general for the practice we are attempting to characterize. Furthermore, none of these terms take into account the physical aspect of this phenomenon; a physical aspect which can be considered to be at the origin of the composer's practice, the assimilation of the material in question, through the study, listening to or playing of the piece, and its subsequent appearance in the score, pointing to a specific *physical realisation* by the pianist. Thus the term *distillation* was chosen, as it encompasses the above mentioned elements, in addition to stressing the organic/corporal dimension of the manifestation of musical influence, which is assimilated over time.

*Distillation*⁴⁷ is an organic process, a bodily integration of certain techniques or musical characteristics, which takes place through years of practice and contact with the repertoire. Its origin as well as its manifestations are kinaesthetic and tactile alike. The process of distillation itself being impossible to observe, we must content ourselves with the observation of the final product, the distillate and to thus infer the likely course of the process, through the study of the transformations and changes in the nature of the musical material. The chronological – as well as geographical, in Skalkottas's case – distance separating the exposure of the composer to the material and its subsequent appearance in the work examined, ought to be taken into account. The graphic presentation and the general format of the score are also elements to be taken into consideration. By detecting possible aural, tactile or visual influences in the composer's work, we attempt to recreate his creative process by identifying those elements which successfully passed through the filter of his memory.⁴⁸ Finally, the distillate, the final result of the process which we examine in order to extract conclusions, can be considered to be as much a reflection of the composer's musical personality as an expression of the organic appropriation and assimilation of the material by his body, their *distillation*.

47 The choice of the term *distillation* seeks to emphasize the fact that, while constituting an organic process, it is one which is completed over time, and which yields an important role to memory – intellectual and muscular/tactile. The scope of this paper, which aims to introduce the term in view of further study, does not allow for a detailed account of the background research, which draws upon the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Daniel Stern, Marc Leman, Marc Rowlands, Lawrence Shapiro, Arnie Cox, Mine Dogantan-Tack, Robert S. Hatten Michel Imberty and others. The interested reader is encouraged to consult Tsioutis 2019: 269-304.

48 Let us not forget that the 32 Piano Pieces were composed in 1940. Because of the general political and social situation in Europe Skalkottas had not been in contact with new music or contemporary artistic trends since he left Berlin in 1933. Levinas 2007: 56: »Memory recaptures and reverses and suspends what is already accomplished in birth-in nature. Fecundity escapes the punctual instant of death. By memory I ground myself after the event, retroactively: I assume today what in the absolute past of the origin had no subject to receive it and had therefore the weight of a fatality. By memory I assume and put back in question. Memory realizes impossibility: memory, after the event, assumes the passivity of the past and masters it. Memory as an inversion of historical time is the essence of interiority.«

Of equal importance in the choice of the term is the fact that as a process distillation takes place over time, it is not immediate; a number of the styles and genres present in the 32 Piano Pieces were distant, both chronologically, and geographically, when Skalkottas composed the pieces in 1940. Titles such as No. XVIII – *Foxtrot – Der alte Polizist*, or No. XXVII – *Galoppe*, clearly reflect the popular music of the Berlin years, the former piece probably referring to a cinematic scene, and the latter to popular dances of the time. Certain titles such as the No. XXI – *Romance-Lied*, can be considered to denote free forms; of the entire work the piece presenting the closest connection between its title and a tangible gestural depiction is the No. II – *Kindertanz*, where a spinning six-note ostinato motif can be considered to evoke children dancing, turning round and round.

Example 23. No. II – *Kindertanz*, from the 32 Piano Pieces, mm. 1-3

Presto et ritmico

CONCLUSION

In order to re-evaluate tradition one must first define its context and boundaries. As a student of Schoenberg, Greek composer Nikos Skalkottas can be considered a proponent of the German tradition of Western Art Music. His respect for older musical forms is evident through his choice of titles; his regard for his teacher outlasted their years of contact in Berlin.⁴⁹ Although he is not considered to be a member of the Greek national school of composers, Skalkottas made use of Greek folkloristic melodies in a large number of works,⁵⁰ exhibiting great originality in the treatment of this type of material, which he often placed in atonal or dodecaphonic environments. His *36 Greek Dances* for orchestra are without a doubt his most popular work, and represent the finest example of the elaboration of Greek folkloristic material in the western tradition that Greek art music has to offer.⁵¹ Furthermore, his original and innovative use of the method

49 Thornley 2002.

50 In the 32 Piano Pieces Skalkottas makes use of traditional Greek melodies in the following pieces: No. III – *Kurze Variationen auf ein Bergsthema südliches Characters und prägnanter Dissonanz*, No. V – *Griechischer Volkstanz*, No. XX – *Berceuse*, No. XXIV – *Italianische Serenade*, No. XXVIII – *Blues* and No. XXXII – *Kleiner Bauernmarsch*. (See Tsioutis 2019: 27-31)

51 Levidou 2014.

of composing with twelve tones⁵² overrides questions pertaining to the number of pitches in a row or the number of rows used per work, to include issues regarding stylistic elements and the graphic representation of the score.

In the 32 Piano Pieces the composer seems to be constantly playing hide and seek with a number of remnants of tradition, such as tonality, textbook forms, and gestural pianistic reflexes. His long personal and physical contact with the piano, through improvisation, interpretation and compositional practice is evident in the 32 Piano Pieces; it is visually obvious on the score, and tactily felt and experienced when playing. The introduction of the term *distillation* has a double advantage; on the one hand it provides a term designating Skalkottas's characteristic and extensive practice; on the other it acknowledges the uniqueness of this very practice, in that it underlines its organic quality and medium of manifestation, through a process of assimilation and incorporation which take place over time. In this sense it stresses Skalkottas's unique appropriation and reutilization of traditional elements, through a sort of bodily and memory filter, one that confers equal importance on eyes, ears and hands. The very idea of tradition thus ceases to represent a bastion of the past, a rigid stereotype canon; its incorporation entails a rebirth, a refreshment and a promise of continuation.

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52 Mantzourani 2013.

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