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Examining Toru Takemitsu's Compositional Techniques, Aesthetics, and their Contexts by Focusing on his Piano Piece *Rain Tree Sketch*

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1. Introduction

Tōru Takemitsu (1930-1996) is a renowned classical composer of postwar Japan. His works can be divided into three periods. In his early works from the 1950s, he explored his own style by studying the music of French composers such as Olivier Messiaen as well as the music of the Second Viennese School. In the early 1960s, which was the beginning of his second period, Takemitsu was deeply impressed by the 20th century American composer John Cage's radical thoughts of indeterminacy and chance. Takemitsu adopted a graphic score in some of his pieces, such as *Corona for Pianist(s)* (1962), and even composed "theatrical pieces" like *Seven Hills Events* (1966), where the performers were given specific instructions, such as "Walk around the stage," and "Take pictures." On the other hand, during the 1960s, Takemitsu also absorbed European avant-garde techniques, such as tone clusters and micro polyphony, which are controlled more strictly. Takemitsu also used traditional Japanese instruments in some pieces, like *November Steps* (1967). It appears that such ambivalence captured the tumultuous intensity of the 1960s.[1] Takemitsu's compositional style started to change again around the mid-1970s, triggering his third period. He almost completely abandoned Japanese instruments in his works after 1973 because he wanted his music to be universal, and according to his essays, universal music meant European music.[2] Thus, the sound of his compositions became more tonal, with motives or melodies becoming more important to the music. Additionally, he started to stress certain words, such as dreams, water, stars, and gardens, when explaining his own works.

Takemitsu received much attention from researchers even before his death. Many researchers analyzed the structures of his works using the pitch-class set theory. For example, Timothy Koozin closely observed Takemitsu's piano works and clarified how their structures were woven, referring to the Octatonic and Whole-tone collections.[3] Although Koozin's research laid the groundwork for further studies, the analytical tool which he used focused on pitch organization, and other compositional aspects, such as rhythm or note duration, were not sufficiently examined. Also, pitch-class set theory is not suitable for considering compositional contexts, such as social or cultural issues, which go beyond formalistic analysis. Moreover, in a

[1] For Takemitsu's works in the 1960s, see Narasaki, 2004.

[2] Takemitsu was impressed by the idea of the "Universal Egg" of Backminster Fuller in the 1970s. Although Takemitsu was greatly fascinated by Eastern music, he thought that it was difficult to separate Eastern music from its local context. Thus, he decided to compose European music based on the ideas of pluralism. See Ono, 2019, pp.220-222, 232-234. Takemitsu's pluralism is discussed in Section 4 in this paper.

[3] Koozin, 1988.

previous study, Peter Burt examined the influence of other post-war composers on Takemitsu's compositional techniques, and more recently, Wataru Miyakawa discussed the close connection between Takemitsu's works and Japanese traditional culture.[4] However, the integration of Takemitsu's compositional techniques, aesthetics, and their contexts has still left something to be desired. This paper examines the details of these three aspects in Takemitsu's works, especially from his late period, and clarifies how they are related to each other, by mainly focusing on his piano piece *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982). This piece is good for our consideration for the following three reasons: 1) *Rain Tree Sketch* consists of only 60 measures. Thus, it is possible to analyze the entire construction of the piece; 2) The word "rain" surely relates to Takemitsu's notion of "water," something that was very important to his aesthetics[5]; 3) *Rain Tree Sketch* got its inspiration from the short stories, *Women listening to the "Rain Tree"*[6] by Japanese author, Kenzaburō Ōe (1935-). Through the examination of the common ground and interaction between Takemitsu and his peer, Ōe, we can put Takemitsu's works into Japan's social and cultural contexts.

This paper will proceed as follows. Section 2 will examine how Takemitsu explained his own compositions in his late period by reading parts of his transcripts from a two-day lecture in 1984, *Dreams and Numbers*,[7] and show the tendencies in Takemitsu's compositional process, where he started from a specific image and expressed it concretely in his score. Section 3 will analyze *Rain Tree Sketch* and point out that an important compositional technique which Takemitsu adopted in this piece is symmetrical construction, a technique where some musical elements, such as the durational values of notes and the phrasing of melodies, are distributed symmetrically. Section 4 will examine Takemitsu's aesthetic notion of "water," while Section 5 will point out that Takemitsu and Ōe had a common ground which was rooted in Japan's social and cultural situation in the 70s and early 80s. Finally, Section 6 discusses the connection between Takemitsu's image of "Rain Tree" and the construction of *Rain Tree Sketch*, taking his aesthetic as well as social and cultural contexts into consideration.

2. Image as a starting point

Let's start our consideration by reading Takemitsu's book *Dreams and Numbers* (1987). It has been a main source for research of Takemitsu's late works, because he talked about his own compositions in detail there. This book was based on the scripts of his two-day lecture held in 1984 at Studio 200 in Tokyo, the first day of which was entitled "Dreams and Numbers," and the second day "Nature." On the first day of his lecture, Takemitsu explained the process of composing his orchestral work, *A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden* (1978). According to Takemitsu, when he visited a museum in Paris, he saw a photograph of Marcel Duchamp taken

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[4] Burt, 2001. Miyakawa, 2013.

[5] As already mentioned, in this period (his third period), Takemitsu stressed aesthetical words when explaining his own works.

[6] Only the English titles for Takemitsu and Ōe's works are used in this paper. For the original Japanese titles, see the Bibliography at the end of this paper.

[7] The original English title of this book is *Dream and Number*.

by Man Lay, and that night, Takemitsu had a dream which is described below:

> Lots of white birds were descending into a star-shaped garden, but there was a black bird leading the flock. I didn't usually have dreams, so the dream I had that night was very impressive for me. When I woke up, I thought this scene was very musical, and I wanted to express it through music.[8]

In this lecture, Takemitsu characterized his concept of "dreams" as an inner shapeless desire and the source of his music.[9] This explanation by Takemitsu may resonate with the following passages written by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962), who was quoted by Takemitsu in another essay in which he mentions his own definition of "dreams" and "numbers."[10] Here, Bachelard explained an original image and its change as follows;

> We always think of imagination as the faculty that forms images. However, it is rather the faculty that distorts the images captured by our perception; it is, above all, the faculty that frees us from the original images and changes them. If there is no unintentional change and fusion of images, there is no imagination or imaginative action. If a present image does not make us think of an absent one, and if an accidental image is not determined by the prodigality of images or an explosion of images, there is no imagination.[11]

Looking at Takemitsu's explanation through the words of Bachelard, we can see that Takemitsu believed that he was changing the original perceived shapeless image of "dreams" in his music using his imagination. Takemitsu said that he learned about imagination from Ōe more than from any other person,[12] and Ōe was deeply influenced by Bachelard's ideas of imagination.[13] Thus, Bachelard was an important philosopher for both Takemitsu and Ōe.

However, in my opinion, Takemitsu's generalization of "dreams" and Bachelard's ideas don't completely match Takemitsu's specific explanation about his dream quoted above. Previous studies focused on the idea that Takemitsu's dream about the flock and garden was very abstract, meaning vague and shapeless, while his description and musical interpretation of the dream was concrete (clear and shaped).[14] But I think that the dream itself was concrete (shaped) with clear images— black, which was the color of the lead bird, and the star-shaped garden (pentagonal),

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8 Takemitsu, 1987, p.8. All quotations from Takemitsu's essay are translated by the writer of this paper.

9 *Ibid*, p.7.

10 Takemitsu, 1985, pp.52-55.

11 Bachelard, 1943, p.7. Translated by the writer of this paper.

12 Takemitsu, 1985, p.40.

13 For Ōe's ideas of imagination, see Sugiyama, 2019. According to Sugiyama, Ōe had already read some of Bachelard's books in French just before he graduated from Tokyo University in 1959. However, it wasn't until around 1970 when Ōe began to refer to Bachelard's ideas of imagination. This is possibly because it was around this time that Bachelard's books began to be translated into Japanese.

14 For example, Taniyama said that "Takemitsu gives an abstract dream[-]form a clear musical vision." See, Taniyama, 1991, p.86.

which had five angles and sides,[15] and his interpretation was also concrete, as he depicted the scene by using pitch material based on a scale consisting of the five black keys of the piano; C#-D#-F#-G#-A#.[16] Thus, he went from a concrete image to a concrete interpretation. Here, we can find the restriction of his imagination by a specific image rather than liberation from an original image, as Bachelard emphasized.

The main subject of the second day of his lecture was the connection between Japanese circular gardens and Takemitsu's works. Takemitsu explained the characters of this type of Japanese garden somewhat abstractly. For Takemitsu, it was the relationship between the details and the whole of the garden which attracted him most. According to Takemitsu, the details of the garden are very unique but not too assertive, and working together in harmony, they create the whole. Takemitsu said such a relationship between the details and the whole was an ideal model for his music.[17] Then, he explained his compositional inspiration more concretely, saying that sometimes, he depicts a drawing of a real garden in his music, and other times, he depicts the landscape of a garden which he drew from his imagination.[18] Here, again, Takemitsu's imagination is certainly bound by specific shapes of gardens, even the ones that he drew from his imagination, because once they were drawn, they had specific shapes.

As discussed so far, the connection between image and construction is an important key for considering Takemitsu's late period. However, an inconsistency can be found in Takemitsu's explanation. Although Takemitsu wanted to stress shapeless images as a source of his compositions, he was actually somewhat restricted by specific images and didn't succeed in freeing himself from them completely. Moreover, the fact that Takemitsu said in the lecture that he thought of himself as "a visually-oriented person,"[19] "looking at the notes in the score flatly and understanding them semiotically"[20] reinforces this idea.[21]

Taking this connection and the inconsistency of Takemitsu's explanation into consideration, in the following sections, I will examine Takemitsu's "Rain Tree" creations, which underwent the following unique process. In 1980, Ōe wrote one short story, "The Ingenious 'Rain Tree,'" and after reading the story, Takemitsu composed *Rain Tree* (1981) for three percussion players. Ōe was present at the first performance of Takemitsu's *Rain Tree* and was affected by it deeply. Then, Ōe decided to write four succeeding short stories and published them for a very brief time in a

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[15] The fact that Takemitsu said that when he woke up, he thought this scene was very musical shows that the images were very clear in his mind before waking up. He didn't have time to attach images, shapes, and colors to an "abstract dream." He woke up with clear images in his mind.

[16] Takemitsu, 1987, pp.14-15. In his lecture, Takemitsu originally notated the notes as "C#-E♭-F#-A♭-B♭."

[17] *Ibid*, pp.26-27.

[18] *Ibid*, p.34.

[19] *Ibid.*, p.10.

[20] *Ibid.*, p.21. For my interpretation, "flatly" and "semiotically" both mean "in the score."

[21] At the same time, Takemitsu wanted to stress the importance of the actual sound of the notes in his score (Takemitsu, *Ibid.*, p.21.). However, the relationship between a specific image and Takemitsu's composition is indeed strong. For example, in the case of the pentagonal garden discussed above, the five black keys in the score refer to the angles and sides of the garden and the color of the leading bird.

magazine (from December 1981 to May 1982), which were gathered later in a book titled *Women listening to the "Rain Tree"* (July 1982). Around the time Ōe finished writing and published all the stories in the magazine, Takemitsu wrote another piece, *Rain Tree Sketch*. In addition, ten years later, Takemitsu wrote yet another piano piece *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992) as a tribute to Messiaen. I think the connection between this last piece and Oe's story is weaker than that of the other two pieces, *Rain Tree* and *Rain Tree Sketch,* possibly because of its time distance from Oe's story. For the reasons explained in the introduction, this paper mainly focuses on *Rain Tree Sketch.*[22]

3. The symmetrical construction of *Rain Tree Sketch*

In this section, I will closely analyze the construction of *Rain Tree Sketch*, which is a simple piece consisting of 65 measures, with a duration of about three minutes. I will divide this work into three parts: part 1 is measures 1-26; part two is measures 27-46; and part three is measures 47-65. Measures 47-60 are a repetition of measures 7-20, so I will mainly analyze the first two parts. The pianist, composer, and researcher Ichiro Nodaira mentioned *Rain Tree Sketch* in his paper, which analyzed Takemitsu's main piano pieces. Nodaira said that *Rain Tree Sketch* differs from Takemitsu's previous piano works. Before *Rain Tree Sketch*, Takemitsu gave a pianist a lot of freedom to create the flow of music, based on his or her "body movements."[23] As a result, the interpretation had the potential to become more fluctuating and elusive, depending on who played it.[24] However, according to Nodaira, in *Rain Tree Sketch*, Takemitsu controlled the flow of time by using numerical manipulations which create the fundamental structure of this piece, such as a durational value consisting of four numbers, 6-5-3-2.[25] Even though it is hard for me to recognize this numerical sequence consistently in this piece, I agree with Nodaira's opinion that Takemitsu tried to logically manipulate the structure of *Rain Tree Sketch*. I think this manipulation is symmetrical construction.

Let's start to analyze the micro structure of *Rain Tree Sketch*, first by looking at measures 1-5 [Ex.1]. For phrasing purposes, I will break down each measure into sixteenth notes. Each measure consists of five or six sixteenth notes in the following order: 6-5-5-6-6. Focusing on the melody, which consists of the notes A-G#-E-F♮ in measures 1-3, and on its variation, which consists of the notes A-G#-E-F♮-B in measures 4-5, it is distributed almost evenly between the right and left hands. Thus, there is symmetrical construction in the upper and lower parts of the score here. Moreover, considering the durational values of the notes, this symmetrical construction can be found two more times. As already mentioned, the durational values of the first

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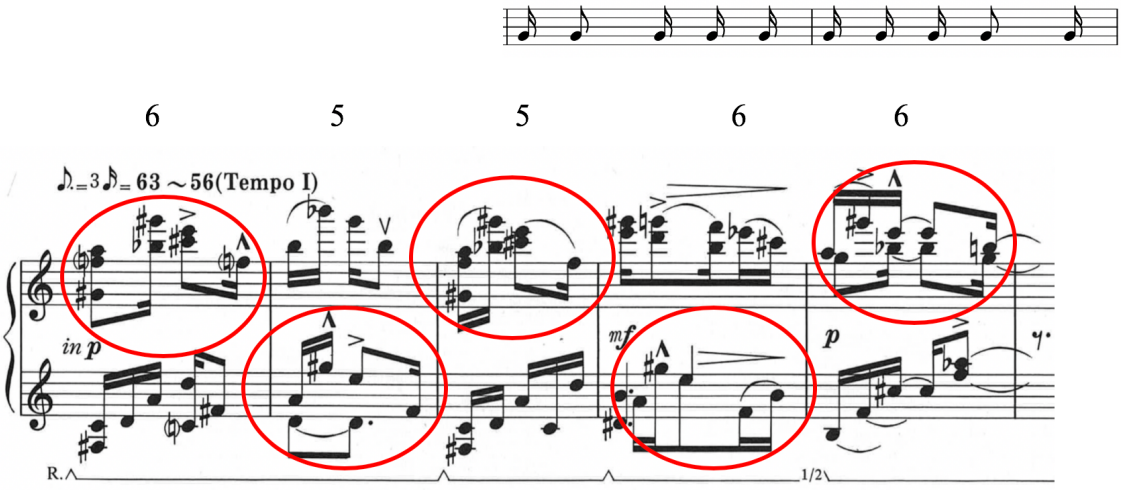
[22] Although *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II* are similar in their length and title, the background of the second piece (the death of Messiaen) is quite different from that of the first piece, and thus, additional research is needed to understand it sufficiently.

[23] Nodaira, 2000, p.81. I interpret Nodaira's term "body movements" here to mean the player's interpretation and/or technical ability.

[24] *Ibid.*

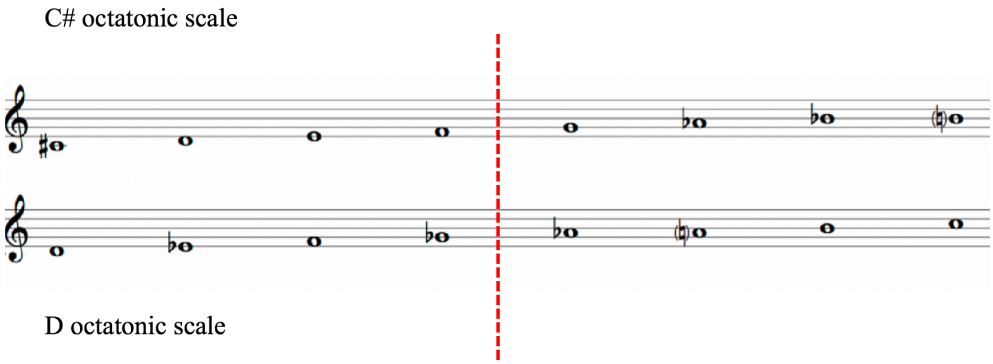
[25] *Ibid*.

four measures are 6-5-5-6, so there is a symmetrical axis between measures 2 and 3. Looking at the right hand of measures 4-5, measure 4 consists of a sixteenth note, an eighth note, and three sixteenth notes, in this order. Measure 5 consists of three sixteenth notes, an eighth note, and a sixteenth note, so we can find a symmetrical configuration (not withstanding the tie in measure 5) defined by Olivier Messiaen as a non-retrogradable rhythm, which is a pattern of note duration that is read the same way forward or backward.

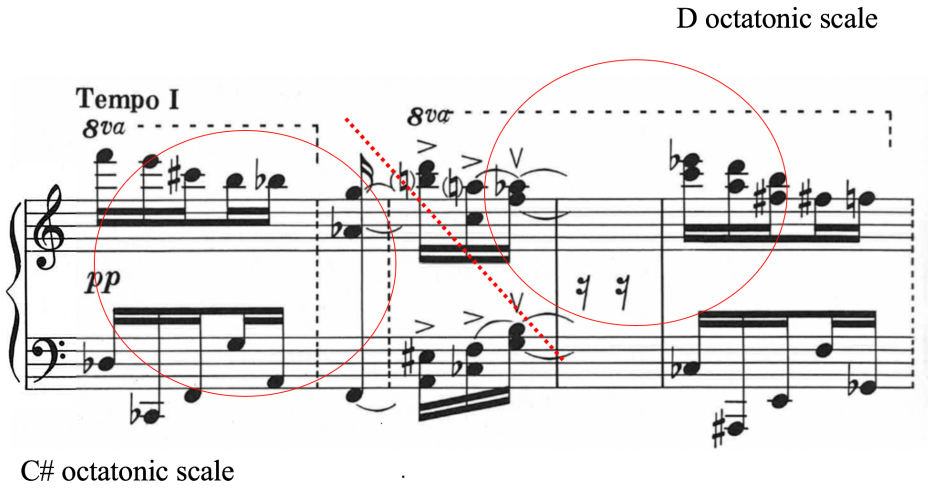


[Ex.1] Tōru Takemitsu *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm.1-5.

Closely observing the pitch material of measures 14-16, more symmetrical construction can be found. These measures consist of representative notes from two scales, C# octatonic and D octatonic, which are the second of Messiaen's modes of limited transposition, and can be derived by dividing an octave into two parts, symmetrically [Ex.2-1]. The first half of measure 14 (both right and left hands) and the left hand part of the second half of the measure are the C# octatonic scale notes, C#-D-E-F-G-A♭-B♭-B. The right hand part of second half of measure 14 and the first half of measure 16 (both right and left hands) are the D octatonic scale notes, D-E♭-F-F # -A♭-A-B-C [Ex.2-2]. Thus, an oblique axis can be drowned here. My analysis of these measures is not affected by the criticism against pc-set theory, which says that this theory lacks the criteria of making a segment from given pitch materials, and is therefore somewhat arbitrary. My analysis of measures 14-16 is free from this problem, because the pitch material is obviously divided by an oblique line into two parts based on the two octatonic scales.

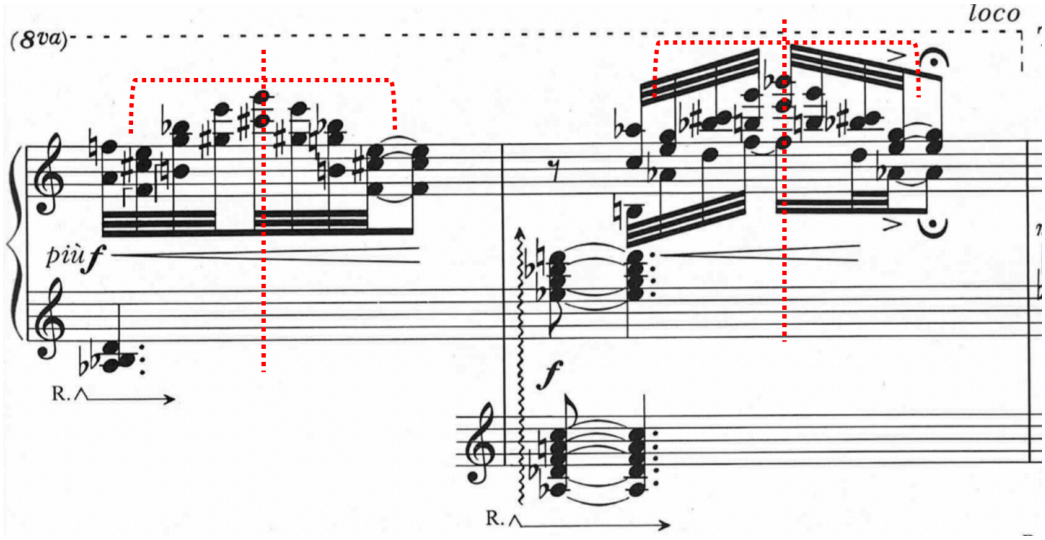


[Ex.2-1] Octatonic Scales.

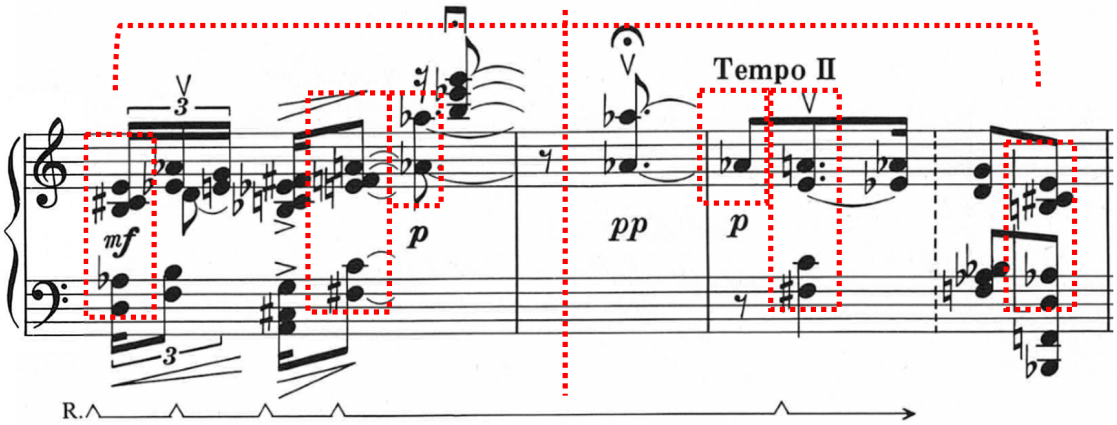


[Ex.2-2] Tōru Takemitsu, *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm.14-16.

Let's move on to the second part of *Rain Tree Sketch*. The ascending and descending figures in measures 42 and 43 provide a clear example of symmetrical construction [Ex.3]. Here, the peaks of these mountain-shaped phrases are the center lines of symmetry. Compared with the clear examples of these two measures, the symmetrical construction of the chords in measures 29-31 is more obscure [Ex.4]. Here, the chords highlighted by the red rectangles in the example create micro-structural symmetry. The symmetrical axis is set between measures 29 and 30, where the notes are stressed by using the fermata signs. Considering the fact that measure 30 is near the center of the piece, this part is also important from a macro-structural point of view.



[Ex.3] Tōru Takemitsu, *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm.42-43.



[Ex.4] Tōru Takemitsu, *Rain Tree Sketch*, mm.29-31.

Let's shift the focus to the overall macro structure and also point out the symmetrical construction of this piece by looking at the tempo instructions. In this work, Takemitsu used two tempo markings, Tempo I and Tempo II. He used this notation first in his string quartet *A Way a Lone*, composed in 1980. Masanori Sugano pointed out in his doctoral thesis that this two-tempo technique in *Rain Tree Sketch* is distributed so that the two tempos mirror each other starting from measure 34, where we can see the Tempo II mark [Fig.1].[26] In my opinion, this tempo distribution suggests that Takemitsu set another axis of symmetry near the center of this piece in addition to

[26] Sugano, 2010, pp.113-115.

the one in measures 29-31 mentioned before. Sugano also said that the usage of this two-tempo technique by Takemitsu was probably inspired by the composers Stravinsky, Berg, and Mahler.[27] In my opinion, considering the symmetrical construction of *Rain Tree Sketch*, it was Berg who was the biggest influence on Takemitsu's two-tempo notation, because Berg was the composer most interested in symmetrical construction.[28] We can find similarities between the passage from Berg's *Der Wein* (1929) and the central point of *Rain Tree Sketch*. In one passage from the *Der Wein*, Berg set the note with a fermata sign as the center of the symmetrical construction [Ex.5].

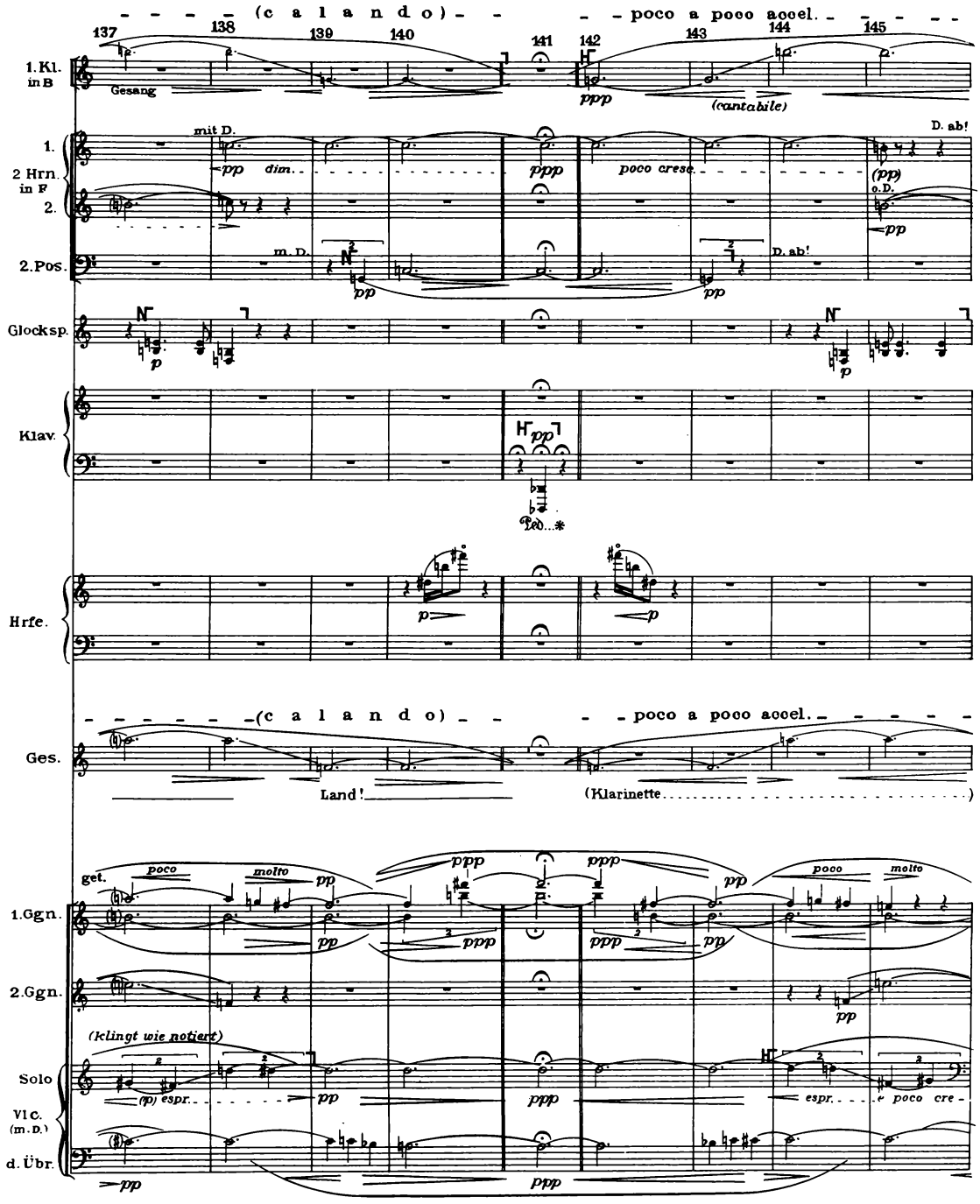
	measure	Tempo mark
Part 1 (A)	1～	Tempo I
	7～	Tempo II
	14～	Tempo I
	21～	Tempo II
	22～	Tempo I
	24～	Tempo II
Part 2 (B)	27～	Tempo I
	31～	Tempo II
	34～	Tempo II
	36～	Tempo I
	40～	Tempo II
	43～	Tempo I
Part 3 (A')	47～	Tempo II
	54～	Tempo I
Coda	61～	Tempo II
	61～	Tempo I

[Fig.1] Two tempo marks in Rain Tree Sketch.[29]

[27] *Ibid.*, pp.95-96.

[28] Berg utilized symmetrical construction in many works, such as *Chamber Concerto* (1925) and three-act opera *Lulu* (1935). For close analysis of Berg's music, see Headlam, 1996.

[29] Sugano, *Ibid.*, p.113. The dotted lines were added by the author of this paper.



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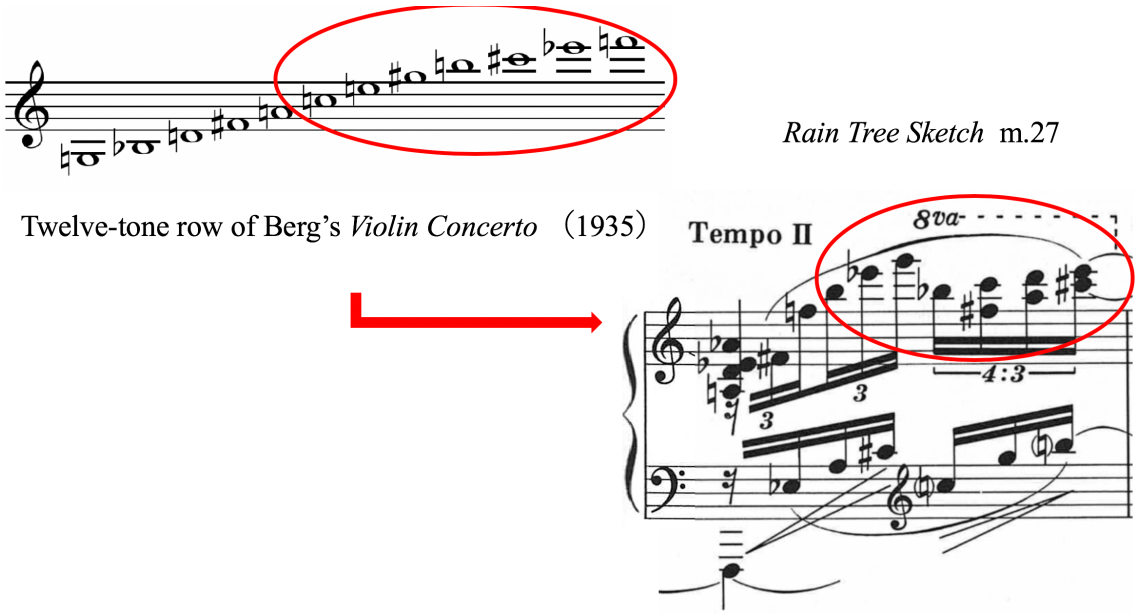
[Ex.5] Alban Berg, *Der Wein*, m.137-145.

This part is clearly in concert with measures 29-31 in *Rain Tree Sketch*, in which the center of the symmetrical construction is stressed by the fermata signs. Moreover, the last measure of the first part of *Rain Tree Sketch* confirms my supposition. The combination of an arpeggio of a diatonic chord and one part of the whole tone scale recalls the twelve-tone row used in Berg's *Violin Concerto*. By transposing the last seven notes of the row one half step below, we can derive the notes Takemitsu used in measure 27 of *Rain Tree Sketch* [Ex.6]. Previous studies pointed out that Berg's violin concerto influenced Takemitsu's violin concerto *Far Calls. Coming, Far!*, composed in 1980, the same year Takemitsu wrote *A Way a Lone*, in which he first used the two-tempo notation.[30] In the dialogue with Ōe, Takemitsu mentioned the symmetrical construction of Berg's opera, so it is certain that Takemitsu was interested in Berg's technique in those days.[31]



[Ex.6] Twelve-tone row of Berg's *Violin Concerto* (1935) and Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketch* m.27.

In his research, John Covach related Berg's obsession with symmetry to the atmosphere of turn-of-the-century Vienna, where intellectuals and artists showed their interests in the world of Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Pythagoreanism, astrology, clairvoyance, numerology, and so on.[32] Covach pointed out that Berg was fascinated by Swedenborg's idea of heaven (described in Balzac's *Séraphita*), which was the timeless realm of the spirit.[33] According to Covach, the palindrome structure of Berg's music—where the music "starts out from a particular spot, reaches a midpoint, and turns back on itself to return to the place from which it began"—implies the

[30] See, Burt, *op.cit.*, pp.195-196.
[31] Takemitsu and Ōe, 1990, p.56.
[32] Covach, 1998, p.5.
[33] *Ibid.*, p.16.

"disruption of chronological time as it is known in the physical realm."[34] If Swedenborgian-Balzacian mysticism and the atmosphere of his environment in those days were the foundation of Berg's music, could it be that similar factors were behind Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketch* and its symmetrical construction?

4. The aesthetics of water and mysticism

In this section, I will examine Takemitsu's aesthetic notion of water, which obviously relates to our keyword, rain. In his liner notes written in 1982 for an LP which was titled "Mizu no Fūkei" ("Waterscapes") and in which works related to "water" were gathered, Takemitsu said that when he thought back, he realized that his music had always had a connection to water, even from the early days.[35] For example, composing the piece *Water Music* (1960), he wanted to express the asymmetrical time of Japanese Noh drama and the cosmic sense which is implied or symbolized by the Japanese notion of "Ma", an intense void or emptiness, by using the sound of water.[36] However, it was only around the early 80s that he began to be fascinated by the "mystic nature of water."[37]

This reference to "water" and its "mystic nature" is important for our consideration, because it shows Takemitsu's interests around 1982, when he composed *Rain Tree* and *Rain Tree Sketch*. In concert with the notable phrase "mystic nature of water", Takemitsu wrote that he composed *Rain Tree* "as a metaphor of the water cycling the cosmos."[38] The word "cosmos," in my opinion, can imply the supernatural world, so we can think that this quoted phrase relates to Takemitsu's interest in "water" and its "mystic nature" mentioned above. Be that as it may, what the metaphor refers to—the water cycling the cosmos—is very abstract and requires further explanations. What did Takemitsu mean by this phrase? Or, more importantly, why did he evoke mysticism? To answer these questions, I am going to refer to some more of his essays.

In his essay titled "Self and Others," printed in his book *From the Edge of Music* (1980), Takemitsu talked about his interests around the early 80s by using more general words, such as nature and religion.[39] After talking about political problems and conflicts around the world, and about his mistrust in a society which develops at the expense of the environment, separating people from nature, and thus isolating them, Takemitsu finished this essay by saying that when he contemplated people's lives, two words came to mind; nature and religion.[40] He continued by saying that he was seriously worried about Japanese people who drifted away from religion. Takemitsu was deeply impressed by the Indonesian percussion music called Gamelan, as well as

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[34] *Ibid*.
[35] This text was printed in the collection of writings by Takemitsu, published in 2000. Takemitsu, 2000, pp.454-456.
[36] *Ibid*., p.454.
[37] *Ibid*.
[38] Takemitsu, 2003, p.130.
[39] Takemitsu, 1980, pp.22-26.
[40] *Ibid*.

by other Indonesian art forms, and these helped him to think deeply about people's connection to religion and nature.[41]

Takemitsu traveled to Bali from the end of 1972 to the beginning of 1973. After coming back to Japan, he wrote a long essay "Mirror", where he talked about seeing a shadow show performed by an old man in a garden near a temple. When Takemitsu asked the old man, with the help of a translator, what he was doing and for whom, the old man said that he was corresponding with the cosmos through his performance for himself and for many other spirits.[42] At that moment, Takemitsu felt "something coming from the outside of my consciousness,"[43] and it's possible that Takemitsu also felt that he was in contact with the mystic world. In addition, Takemitsu was impressed by the music in Bali which was performed by small to large groups of people. He felt this collectivity symbolized the relationships between humans, humans and nature, and humans and gods ("gods" should be interpreted as supernatural things like "spirits").[44]

Experiencing such traditional arts in Bali which symbolized these relationships (at least for Takemitsu), he realized the importance of pluralism—a necessity to see beyond fixed Eurocentrism and the dualism of East and West, because these isms were insufficient for him when trying to incorporate the previously mentioned relationships into his mind.[45] The travel to Bali steered him more towards an epistemological direction. Based on this realization, Takemitsu began to emphasize that his ideal music should take the form of a "prayer," defined as a desire for all the relationships. Takemitsu also said that if we regard music as prayer, "there is no difference between the music of Bach, Jazz, and Gamelan."[46] Thus, for Takemitsu, it didn't matter what religion one had or even if one had a religion. The important thing was whether a person had a desire to have a relationship with other people, with nature, and with the supernatural. Thus, we should understand Takemitsu's mysticism in this context and free it from mere religious meanings. For Takemitsu, mysticism had a broader meaning; it was a means for corresponding with others and overcoming isolation. From this view point, we could say that the phrase "the water cycling the cosmos" symbolizes his "prayer" for the recovery of the relationships between humans, nature, and the supernatural.

Although this hypothesis doesn't show the relationship between Takemitsu's way of thinking and his compositions, it is useful to generalize his tendency of thought around the early 80s, a tendency the roots of which can be found as late as 1973.

5. The common ground of Takemitsu and Ōe's works

Next, I want to put Takemitsu's philosophy and his epistemological change in the broader context of Japanese culture at that time, and search for common ground between Takemitsu and his peer,

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41 *Ibid*.
42 Takemitsu, 1975, p.13.
43 *Ibid*.
44 *Ibid*., pp.39-41.
45 *Ibid*., p.21.
46 *Ibid*., p.41.

Ōe. Let's look at the social and cultural situation of Japan from the 1970s. As religious studies in Japan point out, a wide range of Japanese people in those days, from intellectuals to artists, began to think about spirituality, a belief which was not necessarily based on any particular religion.[47] This movement was driven by the mistrust of the shallow idea of blindly pursuing material wealth.[48] This mistrust was caused by various factors, such as the environmental problems around the start or the 1970s and the economic damage caused by the oil shortage of 1973.[49] As a result, many Japanese looked to spirituality in Asian countries including Japan itself rather than to the West, which had been their model of social progress in the postwar period.[50] The German researcher of Japanese modern culture, Lisette Gebhardt, summarized this movement of the 1970s by listing keywords and phrases, such as the awareness of social or environmental crisis, alternative thinking, eco-esoteric,[51] spiritual tourism, and a longing for the re-enchantment of the world.[52] [53]

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[47] For an in-depth look at this movement, see Shimazono, 2007a and 2007b. For intellectuals who are related to this trend, see Shimazono, 2007a, pp,192-214. Shimazono referred to well-known names, such as Takeshi Umehara (philosopher), Hayao Kawai (phycologist), Shinichi Nakazawa (religious scholar), and Munesuke Mita (sociologist), who went by the pen name Yusuke Maki. For artists, Gebhardt's research is useful. For example, she referred to figures such as Haruomi Hosono (musician) and Tadanori Yokō (painter). See, Gebhardt, 2001.

[48] Yumiyama, 2004, p.254.

[49] As Gebhardt said, Munesuke Mita (Yusuke Maki), who was deeply connected to the movement in the 1970s, frequently referred to the Minamata disease caused by toxic chemicals produced in some factories (Gebhardt, 2004, p.54. Mita, 1977, p.45-47.). For the oil shortage as a cause of this movement, see Yumiyama, op.cit, p.254. Takemitsu referred to the oil shortage in his essay, "Self and Others," mentioned in section four, paragraph three of this paper (Takemitsu, 1980, pp.22-26.).

[50] For example, around the mid-1970s, one of the distinctive figures of this movement, Mita (Maki), traveled to foreign countries such as India, Mexico, and Brazil. After coming back to Japan, he published a book which referred to the four books written by American anthropologist Carlos Castaneda, featuring the story of Don Juan. In his book, which is a collection of his essays from 1972 to 1977, Mita said that the sensibility and way of thinking found in Castaneda's books were the clues to discovering a more natural way of living for humans, an alternative to modern western life, which, according to Mita, had reached its limit (Mita, 1977.). For further examples of this movement, see Gebhardt, 2004.

[51] I interpret the word "esoteric" as spiritualism. Thus, eco-esoteric refers to the connection between ecology and spirituality.

[52] Gebhardt, 2004, p.79. Around 1980, all these ideas became popular among non-intellectuals as well. See also Fukasawa, 2001, pp.650-651.

[53] For "the re-enchantment of the world," see Berman's *The Re*[-]*enchantment of the World* (Berman, 1981.). Berman explained the differences between the enchanted world and the disenchanted world by classifying two modes of consciousness toward the world; "participating consciousness" and "nonparticipating consciousness." According to Berman, one who has "participating consciousness" thinks that "everything in the universe is alive and interrelated, and that we know the world through direct identification with it, or immersion in its phenomena (subject/object merger)" (*Ibid.*, p.343.). On the other hand, one who has "nonparticipating consciousness" "sees himself as radically disparate from the objects he confronts, which he sees as being 'out there.' In this view, the phenomena of the world remain the same whether or not we are present to observe them, and knowledge is acquired by recognizing a distance between ourselves and nature" (*Ibid*, p.347.). For the "participating consciousness," the world looks enchanted, while for the "non-participating consciousness," the world

The connection between these keywords and phrases which Gebhardt listed and Takemitsu's behavior and ideas discussed above is obvious. Takemitsu's trip to Indonesia (spiritual tourism), his preference of the plural way of thinking as an alternative to Eurocentrism and dualism (alternative thinking), his idealizing of music as prayer for the relationship between humans, nature, and supernatural things (eco-esoteric or the longing for the re-enchantment)—all these things were rooted in the atmosphere of Japan in those days.[54]

In her book, Gebhardt pointed out that Ōe's works around the start of the 1970s could be related to the social and cultural situation of Japan.[55] As she said, among Ōe's stories, *The Flood Invades My Spirit* (1973) is quite suitable for examining the coFnnection between ecology and spirituality.[56] The main character of this story, Isana Oki, lives in a nuclear shelter. He believes that he can correspond with the souls of whales and trees, which represent nature being destroyed by man, and that he is their agent. As the story goes, Isana gets involved in the activities of a group of young people, "Jiyu Kokai Dan" ("The Free Voyage Company").[57] Isana teaches English in the group for their future voyage by ship using Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* as a textbook. The following passage, which is quoted many times in the story, is important in order to understand the plot;

> Young man be not forgetful of prayer. Every time you pray, if your prayer is sincere, there will be new feeling and new meaning in it, which will give you fresh courage, and you will understand that prayer is an education.[58]

One member interprets the "prayer" as an act of concentrating on something. As long as one concentrates on something wholeheartedly, he can get a "new feeling." Then, he should understand the "new meaning" of his "new feeling," and convey his findings to others. According

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appears disenchanted. Berman said that the "nonparticipating consciousness" became predominant after the start of the Scientific Revolution in the 17th century (*Ibid*., p.16.). Thus, the phrase "a longing for the re-enchantment of the world" here can be interpreted as the desire to know the world again through "participating consciousness," which, according to Berman, was predominant before the Scientific Revolution.

[54] In addition, Takemitsu's trip to Groot Eylandt, Australia in 1980, and his learning about the Aboriginal myth of "Dream Time" can be added to this long list. This trip to Australia shows that Takemitsu's interests continued at least through the early 1980s, when he composed *Rain Tree* and *Rain Tree Sketch*. See Takemitsu's essay titled "The Travel Report of Groot Eyland." Takemitsu, 1985, pp.79-88.

[55] Gebhardt, *op.cit*., pp.125-157. For an in-depth discussion of Oe's belief, see Shimoyama, 2018.

[56] Gebhardt, *Ibid.*, pp.149-157. Japanese historian Akihiro Yamamoto also pointed out that *The Flood Invades My Spirit* reflected Ōe's interests in ecology and spirituality. See Yamamoto, 2019, pp.183-210. However, Gebhardt and Yamamoto's studies mainly dealt with literature and thus, the connection between Ōe and Takemitsu was not pointed out.

[57] This group reminds the readers of Japanese student activism in the late 1960s. The group is finally broken up by the riot police. This student activism shows the connection between Ōe's story and Japan's social situation around the start of the 1970s. For the connection between this story and the social affairs in those days, see Uemura, 2011.

[58] Ōe, 1973, p.187. This passage was quoted by Ōe in English in his story.

to the member, this is the process of the "prayer" which enriches a person.[59] This episode clarifies the meaning of one of the main motives of this story, that is, Isana's correspondence with the souls of whales and trees. As their agent, he is responsible for conveying their message to others.

Combining the examination from Sections 4 and 5, a similar idea of "prayer" can be found in one of Takemitsu's essays and Ōe's writing from 1973. Both of them regarded this spiritual word as a way to correspond with humans, nature, and the supernatural ("spirits" or "souls"). And this idea was supported by the awareness of the crises caused by conflicts around the world and by ecological matters, such as the destruction of nature.[60] Here, we can find a common ground between Takemitsu and Ōe's works, which was the strong connection between ecology and spirituality.[61] Their way of thinking was deeply influenced by the social and cultural situation of Japan in those days. Keeping this fact in mind, let's move on to consider their "Rain Tree" creations.

6. The image of "Rain Tree" and the construction of *Rain Tree Sketch*

In this section, I will start by looking at how "Rain Tree" was described in Ōe's first of five stories from *Women Listening to the Rain Tree*, "The Ingenious 'Rain Tree,'" and examine how Takemitsu expressed the image of the tree in his *Rain Tree* for three percussion players. Then, I will focus on the image of "Rain Tree" more closely by reading parts of the remaining stories of Ōe. Finally, I will demonstrate the connection between Takemitsu's image of "Rain Tree" and the construction of his *Rain Tree Sketch*. In his doctoral thesis mentioned earlier, Sugano argued that Ōe and Takemitsu's "Rain Tree" reflect their opposition to nuclear weapons and symbolizes a hope for peace.[62] Certainly, Ōe was keenly engaged in the anti-nuclear movement, and the fourth story of *Women listening to the "Rain Tree"* shows the fear of nuclear war. In addition, Takemitsu also talked about this problem in some essays around 1980, as discussed in the previous section. However, Takemitsu never said that either *Rain Tree* or *Rain Tree Sketch* reflect his attitude toward such a political problem as nuclear proliferation. Thus, we should proceed cautiously in this discussion. To equate Takemitsu's intentions and the image of "Rain Tree" with Ōe's, it is necessary to keep the two people's common ground into mind, that is, a strong connection between ecology and spirituality.

After writing *The Flood Invades My Soul*, Ōe deepened his interest in ecology and spirituality by keenly absorbing the knowledge of anthropology and religious studies from the books of Japanese anthropologist Masao Yamaguchi and Romanian religious scholar Mircea

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[59] *Ibid.*, pp.196-197.

[60] As to Ōe's story, the existence of the crisis is surely reflected by the nuclear shelter.

[61] As will be discussed in the next section, the main character of Ōe's *Women listening to the "Rain Tree"* goes to Hawaii and Mexico, where he has some mystical experiences. This trip can be regarded as a kind of "spiritual tourism." Ōe's interest in "spiritual tourism" found in this story supports my opinion that Ōe and Takemitsu shared a common ground.

[62] Sugano, *op.cit.*, pp.116-119.

Eliade, whose books were translated into Japanese around the mid-1970s.[63] The knowledge of these fields is reflected in Ōe's *Women Listening to the "Rain Tree"*. The main character of this story is a novelist who reminds his readers of the author himself. In the first story, the main character visits Hawaii to attend a conference for cultural understanding between east and west. At the reception of the conference, a German-American woman named Agate speaks to him. She leads him out of the room to look at a tree in the garden—this is the "Rain Tree". However, the novelist can't see the entirety of the tree, because the darkness of night is too deep, and the tree is too big. It's just the root that he can see with the help of a slight reflection of light. Although in this story, the "Rain Tree" appears vague at first, Agate gives more information later in the book. She says;

> It has been named the 'rain tree', for its abundant foliage continues to let fall rain drops [sic] collected from last [sic] night's shower until after the following midday. Its hundreds of thousands of tiny leaves—finger-like—store up moisture while other trees dry up at once. What an ingenious tree, isn't it?[64]

In my opinion, in his *Rain Tree*, Takemitsu focused on the deep darkness, slight reflection of light, and falling drops, which are found in this first story. In the score of this piece, Takemitsu instructed that the stage should be darkened (Fig.2), and he also wrote the following instructions for the stage crew and players in its opening part; "Spotlights for [players] A and B [in the darkened stage] should turn on and off alternately like falling raindrops."[65] In addition, Takemitsu also expressed the dropping water from the foliage in an auditory manner by writing in the score for the marimba player; "Improvise like scattered raindrops behind the vibraphone solo."[66] These instructions are in concert with his compositional process discussed in section 2, where he started from a concrete image and also interpreted it concretely. Additionally, it seems likely that the stage setting at the first performance of *Rain Tree* reflects Takemitsu's interest in symmetry; the vibraphone was placed at the center of the stage and played by a female performer, while the two marimbas were placed on the right and left sides symmetrically and played by two male performers.[67]

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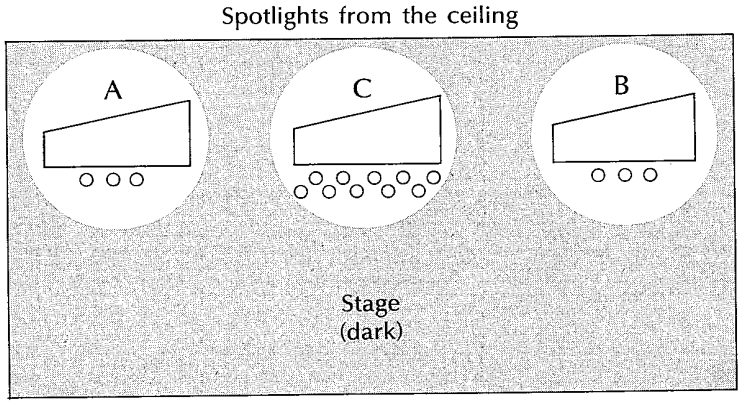
[63] Ōe's knowledge of anthropology and religious studies were reflected in his works in the late 1970s. First, as a preparatory step, Ōe systematized his method of creation based on Structuralism and Russian Formalism and wrote *The Method of Writing a Novel* (1978). Then, by using this method, Ōe utilized the knowledge of anthropology and religious studies as the foundation of his long story, *The Game of Contemporaneity* (1979), which was the predecessor to *Women Listening to the "Rain Tree."* For the connection between *The Game of Contemporaneity* and the knowledge of anthropology and religious studies, see Washiya, 2009.

[64] Ōe, 1982, p.34. This English passage was quoted from the second story.

[65] See Takemitsu's score of *Rain Tree*, p.3.

[66] *Ibid*., p.7.

[67] According to Ōe, this setting was so impressive that he decided to thematize the triangular relationship between one woman and two men in the succeeding four stories. Ōe, 1982, pp.34-36.



[Fig.2] Toru Takemitsu, *Rain Tree*, p.2.

It is in the third story where the specific image of the "Rain Tree" is finally found. In this story, "Man Hanging Himself from the 'Rain Tree,'" the main character describes his memories of Mexico City, where he worked as a professor in residence. At the end of this story, he receives a yarn painting of Native Americans (Huichol) from a colleague at his farewell party. In this painting, two men are facing each other, sitting on opposite sides of a big tree. Above these men, a few suns and moons are depicted in a hallucinatory vivid orange, purple, green, and white. The main character is asked to say something about the painting when he receives it. He says that he sees the tree in the center of the painting as a "Cosmic Tree." He had been having an image of the "Cosmic Tree" for a long time and he called it "Rain Tree".[68] After returning to his country, he hangs the painting on the wall in front of his desk.

Throughout all the five stories, it is difficult to know whether the person acting is the main character or Ōe himself. Ōe created this vagueness on purpose, possibly to confuse or trick the readers/researchers of his novels.[69] Thus, it could be that the five stories of *Women Listening to the "Rain Tree"* were written in the presence of this painting. Moreover, we can say that the image of the "Rain Tree" as a "Cosmic Tree" is an important motive for each story.

The idea of the "Cosmic Tree" can be related to the famous religious tree called 'Yggdrasill' in Norse mythology, which is depicted in a book by Eliade.[70] According to Eliade, Yggdrasil is the distinctive example of the "Cosmic Tree", which symbolizes the "center" of the universe. He explains below;

The roots of the tree go to the heart of the Earth, where hell and the kingdom of the giants

[68] Ōe, 1982, pp.141-142.

[69] For this strategy of Ōe, see Iguchi, 2004, and Enomoto, 1995.

[70] Art historian Wakakuwa said that Ōe's "Rain Tree" has "the same form" as "Yggdrasil" in Norse mythology or "Sephiroth" in Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. Wakakuwa, 1983, pp.69-70. I think that Ōe's image of "Rain Tree" incorporates these images, as will be discussed on page 20, paragraph 2 of this paper.

> are. Nearby is the miraculous fountain of Mimir ("meditation," "memory"), where Odin left one eye as a pledge and constantly returns to refresh and enrich his wisdom. (…) The serpent Nidhogger is at the roots of the tree, constantly trying to destroy it. Every day, an eagle fights the snake (…). The universe will tremble to its foundation in the cataclysm predicted by [the prophetic poem] Völuspa [told by the prophetess Vala], and this will put an end to the world to inaugurate a new paradisal era. In this cataclysm, Yggdrasil will be severely shaken but will not fall down. Thus, this apocalyptic conflagration, predicted by the prophetess, will not result in the complete disintegration of the cosmos.[71]

Here, we can find some similar motives with Ōe's "Rain Tree," such as the connection between water (the fountain of Mimir) and the tree or the vision of the end of the world. Among them, I want to focus on the motive of the eagle, which has a strong connection with the second story, "Women listening to the 'Rain Tree'" (the second story from the book has the same name as the book itself). In this story, the main character meets his old friend, K. Takayasu, in Hawaii for the first time in years. Takayasu has long aspired to be a novelist, but his dream hasn't gone well. In their conversation, Takayasu talks about the following idea for one of his stories with the main character; the talented men and women around the world, who are responsible for overcoming the bad destiny of this world, stand up to the crisis by reacting to the flapping of an eagle's wings on the edge of the universe.[72] At the end of this story, Takayasu's wife writes to the main character and tells of the death of her husband. Then, she asks the main character to use the image of the eagle in his novel. Ōe uses the image of the eagle in the second story, and this image has a strong impression on the reader.[73]

As discussed above, Ōe's image of the "Rain Tree" surely contains the idea of the "Cosmic Tree," which is represented by Yggdrasil. Takemitsu also referred to the "Rain Tree" as the "Cosmic Tree" in the short commentary in his later piano piece *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1994),[74] even though the connection between this piece and Ōe's stories is weaker than the connection between the other two pieces of Takemitsu's, *Rain Tree* / *Rain Tree Sketch* and Ōe's stories, as mentioned in Section 2. Therefore, the idea of the "Cosmic Tree" is very important for the consideration of the image of the "Rain Tree" and the connection between the image and the construction of *Rain Tree Sketch*. However, before discussing this connection, I want to briefly comment on the fourth and fifth stories from *Women Listening to the "Rain Tree*.

In the fourth story, "The "Rain Tree" Standing Upside Down," another religious tree can be found. It is "Qliphoth," the upside-down version of the "Tree of Life" called "Sephiroth" in Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. In this story, the image of "Qliphoth," which is printed on the jacket of an LP record made by Takayasu's son, symbolizes the destruction of the world caused by nuclear weapons. At the end of this story, Takayasu's wife writes to the main character again and

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[71] Eliade, 1974 [1949], p.238. Translated by the writer of this paper.
[72] Ōe, 1982, p.55.
[73] *Ibid.,* p.73.
[74] Takemitsu, 2003, p.138.

tells him that the “Rain Tree” which he saw in Hawaii, burned up in a fire. Then, at the beginning of the fifth story, “Swimming Man; “Rain Tree” in Water,” the main character declares that he has lost all hope in the rebirth of the “Rain Tree.” It appears that these plots reflect Ōe’s pessimistic view toward the future of the world.

Now, let’s begin to consider the connection between the image of “Rain Tree” and the construction of *Rain Tree Sketch*. As discussed above, Ōe's image of "Rain tree" includes the image of trees mentioned in religious studies, especially the “Cosmic Tree,” which is represented by Yggdrasil in Norse mythology. Given the fact that Takemitsu and Ōe had a common ground, that is, an interest in spirituality and ecology, it is quite possible that Takemitsu also had knowledge of the tree appearing in mythology. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that Takemitsu had several opportunities to know about it, as he was close to not only Ōe but also Yamaguchi and another anthropologist, Junzō Kawada; Takemitsu worked together with Ōe and Yamaguchi as a co-editor of a book series titled *The Culture of Today* (1980-1982),[75] and published a collection of letters with Kawada (1980).[76] Based on all the examination so far, the connection between Takemitsu’s image of “Rain Tree” and the construction of *Rain Tree Sketch* can be considered as follows. Takemitsu and Ōe's image of ”Rain Tree” includes the mystic image of the “Cosmic Tree” standing in the “center” of the cosmos, and Takemitsu expressed this “centricity” of the tree using symmetrical construction in his *Rain Tree Sketch* in various ways, such as using two-tempo makings (upside-down construction) or using chords which symmetrically surround the fermata sign. Some symmetrical construction, which is found near the center of this piece and in the middle part especially, is surely visible. Therefore, in Rain Tree Sketch, Takemitsu again started from a specific image of the “Rain Tree” and expressed it concretely, as discussed in Section 2.

7. Conclusion

Takemitsu’s compositional techniques, aesthetics, and their contexts have been shown to be strongly related to one another, especially in his late period. This paper has argued that in this period, Takemitsu had a tendency to start from a specific image and express it concretely. In the case of *Rain Tree Sketch*, the symmetrical construction was a means of expression for Takemitsu. For the aesthetic consideration, this paper began from the word “water,” which is closely related to “rain.” Water distinctively reflected Takemitsu’s interest in spiritualism and ecology from the early 1970s. His interest was rooted in Japan’s social and cultural contexts of those days, as was Ōe’s. Moreover, based on these considerations, as well as on Ōe’s depictions of “Rain Tree,” this paper has shown that the symmetrical construction found in *Rain Tree Sketch* is strongly connected to the original image of the “Rain Tree,” which depicts it as a “Cosmic Tree”—a

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[75] Takemitsu and Yamguchi’s dialogue are printed in Takemitsu’s *Dreams and Numbers*. There, Takemitsu talked about his interest in the triangular relationship between one woman and two men. See footnote 67.

[76] Takemitsu and Kawada, 1980.

symbol of the "center" of the cosmos. In this way, this paper describes Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketch* as a culmination of his compositional techniques, aesthetics, and contexts. One limitation of this research paper is that it mostly analyzes only one piece, *Rain Tree Sketch*. However, it is the hope of the writer that even the analysis of just one piece can provide the stimulus for further research, one which is comprehensive and incorporates all three factors mentioned above.

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