

Rachmaninoff's *Etude Tableaux Op 33 No 8* is a humble and stylistic rejection of the traditional Austro-German form of classical music. Many of his radical counterparts completely abandon tonality, rhythmic loyalty and the sonata-allegro structure to create music that critics regarded as "as a mere intellectual exercise that could not be seriously regarded as music at all," Some examples of this are Terry Riley's *in C*, John Cages *4'33''* and Riech's *It's Gonna rain*. (Dawson, *class notes*). Rachmaninoff's protest, however, is much more subtle and astute.

The conventions that characterize the Austro-German form are strongly associated with the classical approach to cognitive sciences. As this paper unfolds we will see how Rachmaninoff's exploitation of these conventions is an insightful representation of the arguments the embodied discipline of cognitive sciences holds against the classical approach. ✓

In 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Austro-German music, the audience is viewed as being independent to the message the music carries. Meaning that we are passive recipients of the musical content, a view that composers Arnold Schoenberg and Virgil Thompson strongly enforce (*class notes*). This belief is reminiscent of the notion of multiple realization. In classical cognitive sciences one adheres to a sense-think-act scheme. The "think" is characterized by representational states in which we manipulate symbols and carry out algorithms. The fact that the product does not depend on the type media we utilize to carry them out is the principle of multiple realization. Accordingly the semantics rely only on the syntax in the same manner the musical messages rely on the score and not the audience. ?

However Rachmaninoff "preferred to leave such interpretations to listener and performer... painting for themselves what it most suggests," (Wilson, 2012). The argument here is that musical symbols can have diverse and various meanings dependent on the person who is receiving them. This redirection of emphasis to the media as being an interpreter is essential to embodied cognitive sciences. We begin to see the score a vague template whereas how we interact with is what determines what message is elicited. The fact that he would "record a piece over and over again until he was satisfied," (Ravas, 2007 p.843) is not so much a testament to his perfectionistic nature as it is to the insufficiency of a score. Each time he played it, it was different. This demonstrates the value of embodiment and the employment of feedback. The performer's behaviour is manipulated directly by the product of his active engagement with the piano. To illustrate further, there is an interesting anecdote regarding the first time Rachmaninoff heard his music being played, he expresses "I stuck my fingers in my ears to prevent myself from hearing my own music, the discords of which absolutely tortured me" (Ravas, 2007). However, much unlike other composers, he did not blame the performer nor was he enraged with the ignorance of the crowd. He simply hated the sound of his music. If we are just passive receivers

of the musical message upon which we interpret using an infallible set of algorithms why would he suddenly become revolted by his own music? A point that begins to question the classical paradigm.

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ITALICS The exploitation of traditional techniques and conventions of classical music is abundant in Etudes Tableaux op 33 no 8. Note the presence of a strong melody and harmony and a clear distinction between them dynamically but the unconservative manner in which he pushes the boundaries of the typical melodic harmonic interface. There is no consistent, calculated manner in which the harmony traverses across hands, bars or the melody. It extends without notice from high to low notes, appears suddenly in the middle of bars or fades unexpectedly and is almost indistinguishable at times from the melody (in regard to tonality). A simple analogy can be made regarding this. That is, our behaviours do not coincide with a computational model that is consistent, effective and predicable rather we employ heuristics, cognitive blunders occur frequently, and behave and contradictory ways. All of the latter are artifacts of embodied cognition.

What is even more dissident however, is the simplicity and insignificance of the harmony. Many critics dismissed Rachmaninoff's works because in the Austro-German model the harmonic patterns drive the tension of the music, a quality not present in Rachmaninoff's repertoire. Instead it is the interplay between the melody and harmony and the "emotive power of specific motifs" that defines this piece (Ravas, 2007, 843). Specifically in bars 8 and 26-39 the sounds that emerge from integrating the melody and harmony together is not only impressive but elicits a quality that is much different than playing the melody or harmony separately. This is something not present in Austro-German pieces. Emergent behaviours are also observed in robots that are build with "well considered building blocks" but yet behave in novel ways. A field that has contributed much to developing embodied cognitive sciences' theory's (Dawson *et al*, 2010).

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THIS DOESN'T SEEM LIKE INSIGHTFUL ANALYSIS

ITALICS Furthermore, the manner in which Rachmaninoff's emulates the sonata-allegro form and tonality in Etude Tableaux op 33 no 8 is creatively facetious in nature, as if taunting the Austro-German conservatism instead of rejecting it. He begins with dominant (as opposed to tonic) notes but in the tonic key, at rare times introducing the dominant key accidentals. Rather than progressing to the dominant key for part b of the exposition he just makes the melody into a 2<sup>nd</sup> inversion tonic chord. These techniques are so clever without looking at the notation the audience could be fooled into believing he is following the traditional form. To continue, he makes an amusing entry into the development by repeating a simple string of notes faster and faster until the speed cannot even be notated by typical conventions (bar 25). The development is

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defined as a section where the composer invents an array of new ideas utilizing thematic material. Rachmaninoff's takes this notion of innovation to an entire different level. His development abandons the theme and litters the page with accidentals to create a one breathe spectacle of 32<sup>nd</sup> notes. The grandiose style is an emotive incongruity to the solemn beginning. After a dramatic ascending chromatic interlude he begins the recapitulation, exactly the same as the beginning... provoking a feeling of 'as if nothing had happened', even though he has just done something completely shocking to what would be expected by an audience accustomed to traditional music. This manipulating of expectations is a prominent theme in this piece and is most obvious at bar 43 when he brings the piece to a close, but then inserts a whimsical chromatic scale. Lastly he makes use of a cadence to say "okay, now I'm really done," again as if mocking the traditional form.

<sup>15</sup> Rachmaninoff challenging the Sonata-Allegro form can be related to the reaction of embodied cognitive sciences to classical cognitive sciences and the new principles the embodied approach brings forth. For example, rather than the musical conventions or rules dictating to him how he writes his music, he manipulates form, rhythm, emotions, tonality and expectations to create music. In a sense he is directly manipulating what these steadfast rules (or algorithms) are intended to produce, ultimately abolishing the need for representation at all. The score can be considered as a scaffold, an external tool used to preserve the music as well as a sketchboard used to create the music, offering credence to the "leaky mind" attribute of embodied sciences. A concept that allocates thinking to the external rather than internal (Dawson, 2010).

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BUT A  
LITTLE  
UNFOCUSSED

Despite the fact that Rachmaninoff's accepts the audience interpreters, presents radical innovation and protests against the original format his music remains appealing, profound and coherent. This is illustrated particularly well *Etudes-Tableaux Op 33 No 8*. His lavish motifs are not only both a concrete and abstract representation of freeing from traditional constraints but it also embodies the movement from cognition as internal symbol manipulation to cognition as the relationship between ones affordances and manipulation of the environment. The picture I paint is one that begins as a solemn requiem for the classical way of thinking and progresses into a wealth of schemes for a new embodied approach.

## Works Cited

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[setudes-tableaux-opus-33/](http://crosseyedpianist.com/2012/04/22/rachmaninoff)

Moderato ♩ = 48 - 54

*molto legato e cantabile*

Handwritten musical score for Etude-Tableau, op. 33, no. 8 by Sergei Rachmaninoff. The score is written on ten systems of staves, with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) at the top. It includes various musical notations such as dynamics (*pp*, *mf*, *p*, *dim.*), articulation (accents, slurs), and fingerings (numbers 1-5). Handwritten annotations in blue and red ink are present throughout, including circles around notes, arrows, and the word "melody" written in cursive. The tempo is marked "Moderato" with a quarter note equal to 48-54 beats. The piece is in 3/4 time and the key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat).

12

Handwritten musical score for measures 12-13. The piece is in B-flat major and 2/4 time. Measure 12 features a melodic line in the right hand with a *dim.* dynamic marking and a bass line with a *p* dynamic. Measure 13 continues the melodic line with a *mf* dynamic. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5. A circled chord in measure 12 is annotated with 'F#'. A circled chord in measure 13 is annotated with 'F2'.

14

Handwritten musical score for measures 14-15. Measure 14 starts with a *p* dynamic, followed by a *mf* dynamic. Measure 15 features a *cresc.* dynamic marking. The right hand has a melodic line with a *f* dynamic. Chords are annotated with 'F2' and 'Eb'. A circled chord in measure 15 is annotated with 'B+4'. Fingerings and slurs are clearly marked.

17

Handwritten musical score for measures 17-18. Measure 17 begins with a *pp* dynamic. Measure 18 features a *mf* dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a *mf* dynamic. Chords are annotated with 'Ab'. Fingerings and slurs are clearly marked.

21

Handwritten musical score for measures 21-22. Measure 21 starts with a *dim.* dynamic. Measure 22 features a *pp* dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a *pp* dynamic. Chords are annotated with 'Bb'. A circled chord in measure 22 is annotated with 'LH'. The tempo marking *poco rit.* is present. Fingerings and slurs are clearly marked.

24

Handwritten musical score for measures 24-25. Measure 24 starts with a *cresc.* dynamic. Measure 25 features a *veloce* tempo marking and a *f* dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line with a *f* dynamic. Chords are annotated with 'LH'. Fingerings and slurs are clearly marked.

Musical score system 1. Treble clef, LH (Left Hand), *ff*. Four measures of music with slurs and fingerings.

Musical score system 2. Treble clef, measure 27. Four measures of music with slurs and fingerings.

Musical score system 3. Treble clef, measure 28. Four measures of music with slurs and fingerings.

Musical score system 4. Treble clef, measure 29. Four measures of music with slurs and fingerings. Includes the marking *rit.*

Musical score system 5. Treble clef, measure 30. Includes markings *ff* and *mf*. Features a large slur across multiple notes.

Musical score system 6. Treble clef, measure 31. Includes markings *pp*, *f*, *p*, and *pp*. Features a large slur and the marking *8va*.

36 **Tempo I**

Musical score for measures 36-37. The piece is in a minor key with a 3/4 time signature. Measure 36 starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic in the right hand and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic in the left hand. The right hand features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the first two notes. The left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata. Measure 37 continues the melodic development, with dynamics shifting to *mf* in the right hand and *p* in the left hand. A fingering of 5 2 is indicated in the right hand.

38

Musical score for measures 38-39. Measure 38 begins with a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, while the left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata. Measure 39 continues with a *p* dynamic in the right hand and a *mf* dynamic in the left hand. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. Fingering 3 2 is shown in the right hand.

40

Musical score for measures 40-41. Measure 40 starts with a *p* dynamic in the right hand and a *mf* dynamic in the left hand. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, while the left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata. Measure 41 continues with a *p* dynamic in the right hand and a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking in the left hand. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. Fingering 4 3 1 4 and 3 1 3 4 are shown in the right hand, and 3 3 3 3 in the left hand. A *poco accel.* (poco accelerando) marking is present.

42

Musical score for measures 42-43. Measure 42 starts with a *p* dynamic in the right hand and a *mf* dynamic in the left hand. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, while the left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata. Measure 43 continues with a *p* dynamic in the right hand and a *mf* dynamic in the left hand. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. Fingering 1 3 4 and 1 2 1 are shown in the right hand, and 1 2 1 3 in the left hand.

43

Musical score for measures 43-44. Measure 43 starts with a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic in the right hand and a *ff* dynamic in the left hand. The right hand has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata, while the left hand has a bass line with a slur and a fermata. Measure 44 continues with a *ff* dynamic in the right hand and a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic in the left hand. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. Fingering 1 2 1 3 is shown in the right hand, and 1 2 1 3 in the left hand.