Late Skriabin: Some Principles Behind the Style

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Skriabin was always unwilling to explain the compositional techniques of his late works, starting with *Prometheus*, op. 60 (1910). Composers, like magicians, are often reluctant to give away secrets. Skriabin once invited Sergei Taneiev and Alexander Goldenweiser to his apartment promising to demonstrate some of his procedures, but then got cold feet and sent the two away. Perhaps the puritanically conservative Taneiev, who had been Skriabin's theory and composition teacher, would have reacted badly to his former student's avant-garde ways; Goldenweiser, who was something of a Moscow Steuermann, would almost certainly have been intrigued if not enthusiastic.

The mystery of Skriabin's methodology has been the subject of many analyses since Leonid Sabaneiev published his article "Skriabin's *Prometheus*" in *Der Blaue Reiter* in 1912. From then on, each writer has segregated pitches, isolated scales, and circled hexachords, but, with the qualified exception of Varvara Dernova,[1] none has provided a concise and consistent explanation of Skriabin's pitch organization. In this article I hope to establish four main points. First: most previous attempts to explain Skriabin's music have failed to describe satisfactorily his derivation and organization of pitches. Second: Dernova was right in claiming that the principal elements of Skriabin's later style have their sources in the earlier functionally tonal works. Third: tonally derived whole-tone and octatonic scales are the exclusive pitch sources in the later pieces; tones foreign to these scales are treated as "chromatic" notes and resolved through careful voice leading into the scales. And fourth:

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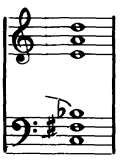
[1] Varvara Dernova, *Garmoniia Skriabina* (Leningrad, 1968).

Skriabin retained an important structural tie with tonal music by constructing the formal design of many works on transposition levels outlining symmetrical chords of tonal music, the augmented triad and the diminished seventh chord.

I

Most analysts of Skriabin's later music have confronted a difficult situation: when a precise analysis predicated on a single set or a single scale is attempted, too many pitches outside the set remain unaccounted for, and when more sets (or more inclusive sets) are proposed, a sense of focused understanding of the style is lost. Sabaneiev, for example, who might have been described as Skriabin's amanuensis, derived the so-called "mystic chord" from the "overtones of the so-called harmonic scale of sounds . . . 8, 9, 10, 11–13, 14"[2] (e.g., C, D, E, F♯, A, B♭). These pitches were then arranged into perfect fourths, augmented fourths, and diminished fourths and became, according to Sabaneiev, the "harmonic principle" of *Prometheus* (see ex. 1). There seems today to be a general consensus that the mystic chord is neither the key nor the generating element in Skriabin's method. That it appears often and is among Skriabin's favorite sonorities is undeniable, but many other similar chords are also present. Glancing through the sketches of the *Prefatory Action* (1914–15), for example, one finds the mystic chord quite often, in many guises, but also a host of other chords containing other dispersions of the mystic chord's characteristic intervals. In these sketches Skriabin often treats the chord as a point of departure by beginning a progression with it (often altered by a note or expanded) and then moving away.[3] Like the "Tristan" chord the mystic chord is an important idiomatic sonority, but it cannot accurately be described as a generating principle. In a



Example 1: The Mystic chord

word, then, Sabaneiev's explanation is simplistic. He is accurate in describing the mystic chord as a characteristic sonority whose pitches are derived from the upper overtones, but his implications of a harmonic system derived from it are vague and misleading.

Dernova's study, which was written in the 1940s but not published until 1968, is currently regarded quite highly, since she is considered by many to have cracked the code of Skriabin's harmonic system. Dernova is at her best when she demonstrates that the principal harmonic elements of the later style have their roots in the music of the middle period (1903–10, from the Fourth Sonata, op. 30, to the *Album Leaf*, op. 58).[4] She is not as persuasive, however, when she discusses the pitch organization of the later style exclusively in terms of two dominant ninths a tritone apart with added and variable pitches.[5] These non-harmonic "problem" tones (variously labeled "v" and "w") are given a singularly unconvincing explanation, unconvincing primarily because Dernova does not satisfactorily discuss Skriabin's voice leading techniques. (According to Prokofiev, Liadov considered Skriabin's voice leading in the early works to be "the purest" of all contemporary composers', although he refused to analyze the late pieces.)[6]

George Perle, and several others perhaps under the influence of the post-Schoenbergian tendency toward over-systematization, have considered Skriabin a pre-serialist who was employing set-theory and who was moving, be-

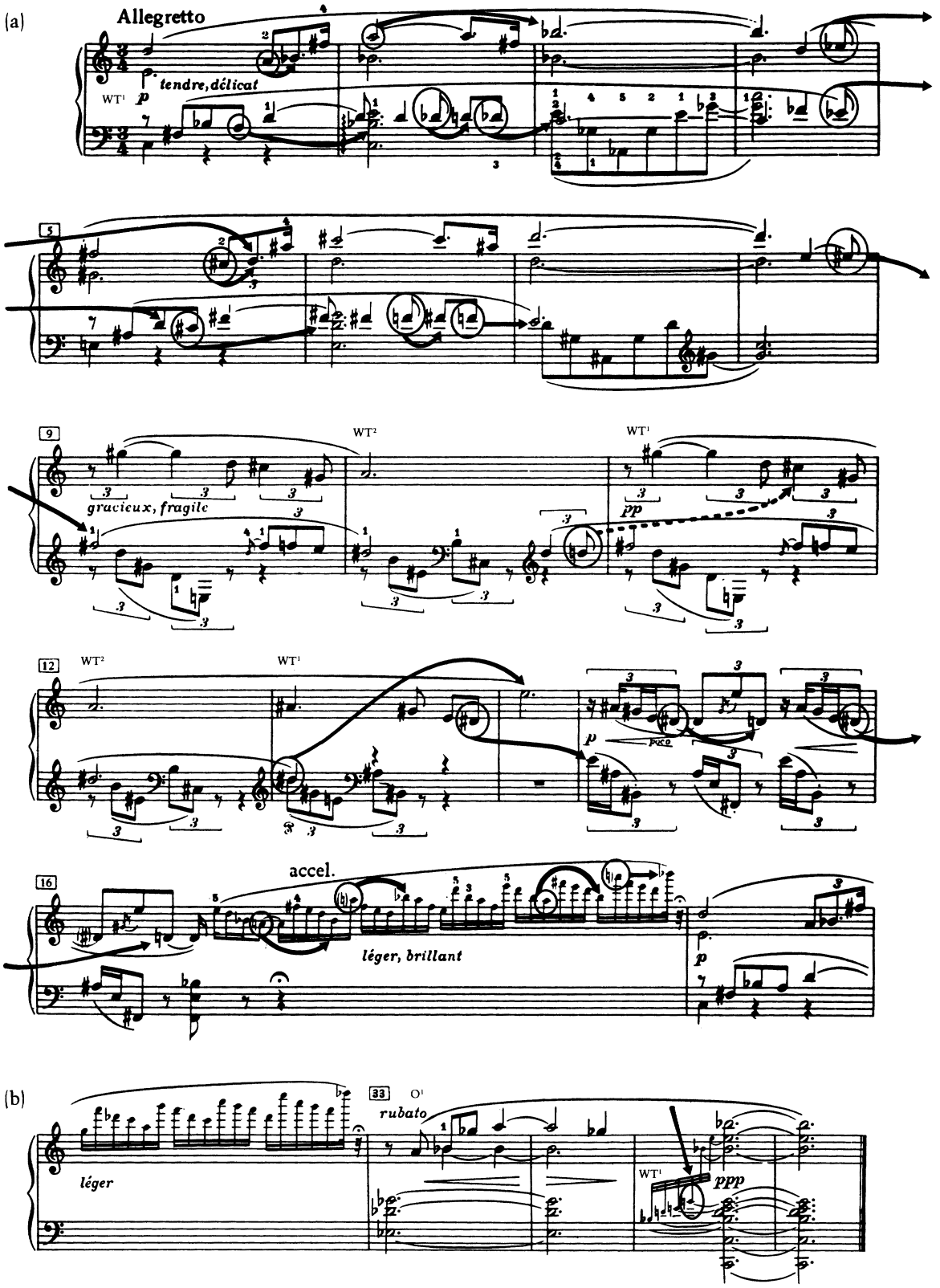
[2]Leonid Sabaneiev, "Skriabin's *Prometheus*," *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, ed. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, New Documentary Edition ed. Klaus Lankeit, trans. H. Falkenstein (New York, 1974), pp. 134–35.

[3]Skriabin, Alexander, *Prefatory Action* (*Predvaritel'noe deistvie*), facs. in Manfred Kelkel, *Alexandre Scriabine, Sa vie, l'ésotérisme et le langage musical dans son œuvre* (Paris, 1978), vol. III, pp. 172–200.

[4]Dernova, pp. 29–68. A connection can be drawn even to the early works in which the French sixth and the "floating 5th" of the V^7 (i.e. V^7, $V^7_{\flat 5}$, and $V^7_{\sharp 5}$ are consistently applied elements: see p. 223. The $V^7_{\sharp 5}$ is a characteristic sonority of the well-known Etude in D♭, op. 8, no. 10.)

[5]Dernova, pp. 21–29.

[6]Sergei Prokofiev, *Prokofiev by Prokofiev*, ed. David H. Appel (New York, 1979), p. 238.



Example 2: Poème, op. 69, no. 1. Reproduced by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.

fore his premature death, toward dodecaphony.[7] This is a somewhat questionable hypothesis, since it is only in the initial works of the late period, such as the Sixth and Seventh Sonatas, opp. 62 and 64, that Skriabin employs rigid sets (i.e., the octatonic scale). In the final works, pitches foreign to the basic set are used with increasing frequency.

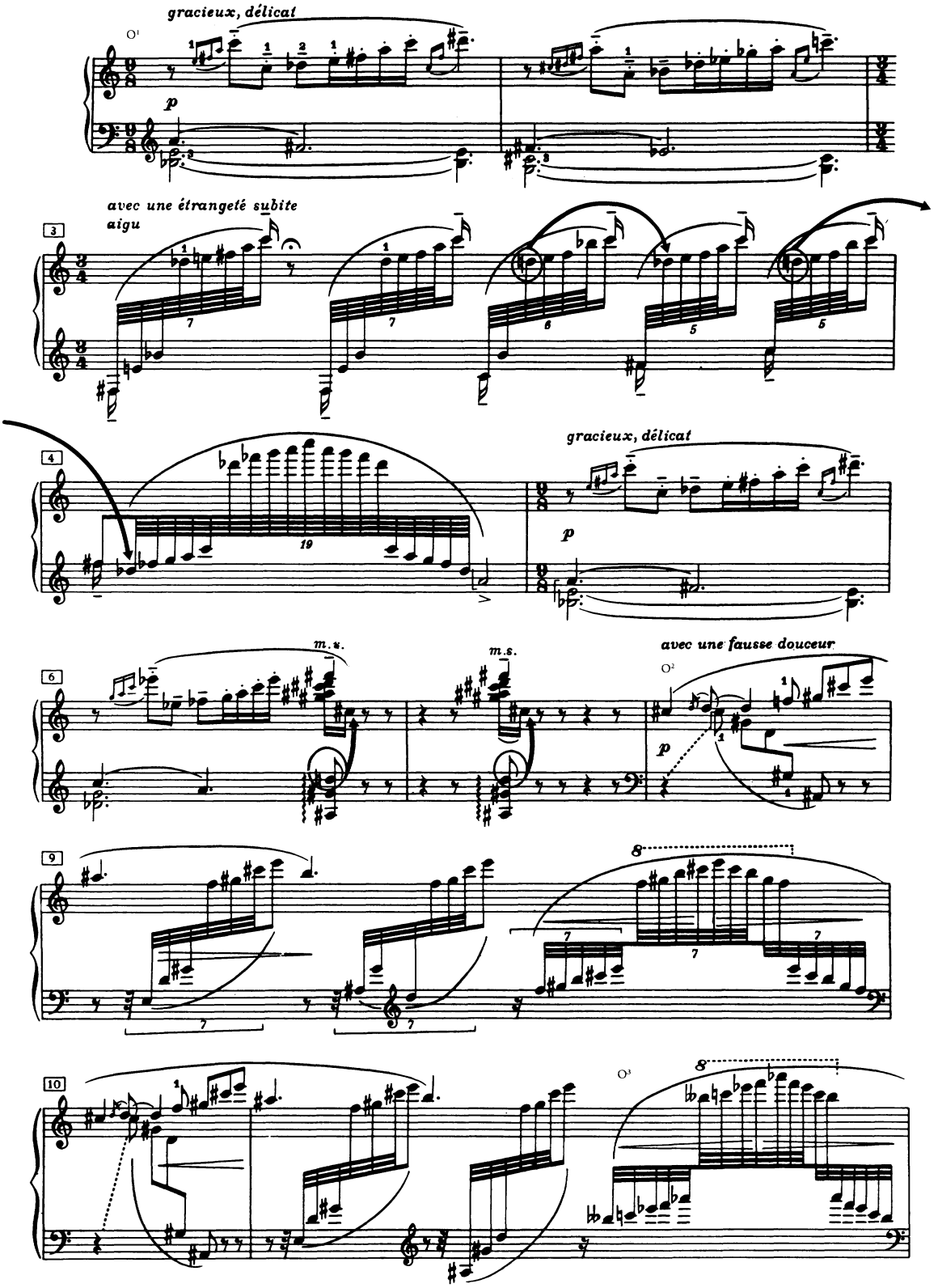
In his book *Zwischen Tonalität und Atonalität, Studien zur Harmonik Alexander Skrjabins* (1978), Gottfried Eberle seeks an explanation on a middle ground between tonality and set-theory. Eberle is correct when he points out that the bass line of local harmonic progressions sometimes outlines a diminished seventh chord,[8] but his derivation of pitch vocabularies from synthetic modes or sets beyond the octatonic and whole-tone scales is again arbitrary and vague.[9] Like Dernova, Eberle provides no satisfactory discussion of voice leading, and his invocation of a plethora of modes[10] certainly does not lead to an understanding of a style so limited, unified, and refined as that of Skriabin's opp. 60–74.

This is merely a brief account of a few of the better-known attempts at revealing Skriabin's methods. Each author, and most especially Dernova, makes useful observations about Skriabin's style, but none of them is convincing in explaining the fundamental question: how does Skriabin derive and organize his pitches? In pursuing an answer to this question, it might be best to first trace the evolution and clarify the function of the mystic chord, and then proceed to discuss the very separate issue of pitch organization.

The mystic chord is the sonority always associated with Skriabin, but in its seventy-year history no adequate explanation of its role in Skriabin's work has been proposed. Sabaneiev, as we have seen, merely presents the chord and then makes unsubstantiated claims for it. A tonal explanation is usually abandoned after the rather unhelpful description of the chord as some sort of dominant thirteenth. More significant, however, is the characteristic that the bottom four notes of the chord form an enharmonic French sixth. The French sixth and its enharmonic sonority $V_{\flat 5}^{7}$ can be found frequently in Skriabin's early works and are among his favorite harmonic devices in the middle period, where they amount to something of a preoccupation: see especially *The Poem of Ecstasy* (1908). (Two of Skriabin's most ardent admirers at the time soon absorbed his influence in this respect with varying degrees of success, Stravinsky in *The Firebird* of 1910 and Glière in *Ilya Muromets* of a year later.) Several pieces from the early and middle periods contain particularly good examples of Skriabin's use of the French sixth/$V_{\flat 5}^{7}$ sonority. In the Prelude, op. 11, no. 2 (1895), Skriabin uses the sonority nine times in the course of the 68 measures of the piece, while in the *Poème*, op. 32, no. 1 (1903), one of Skriabin's most famous pieces, the principal idea of the piece is based upon the ambiguity of the chord as French sixth (upbeat measure), appoggiatura to V^{7} (m. 1), and $V_{\flat 5}^{7}$ (m. 4). The beginning of the *Poème languide*, op. 52, no. 3 (1907) is also noteworthy because Skriabin adds the ninth to the sonority, which now gives us five of the six notes of the mystic chord. The mystic chord then is a characteristic vertical sonority derived from the French sixth, but, as we shall see, it is not the principal element in the process of pitch generation.

The separation of the function of the mystic chord and the generation and manipulation of pitches can be seen clearly in the *Poème*, op. 69, no. 1 (ex. 2a), in which the mystic chord appears at once in the first measure. Throughout the opening eight measures of the piece, one is struck by the whole-tone sound of the music (C/D/E/F♯/G♯/A♯: abbreviated WT^{1}), despite the fact that most of the remaining tones (A, D♭, E♭, F) are to be found in mm. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8. With the presence of so many foreign tones it might seem unlikely that a whole-tone analysis would produce a satisfactory description of the sound, but if we examine the situation a bit more closely, we see that Skriabin treats these foreign tones as "chromatic" to the whole-tone scale, and almost always "resolves" them in the traditional fashion—by half step.

[7]George Perle, *Serial Composition and Atonality*, 3rd edn. (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), pp. 41–43.
[8]Gottfried Eberle, *Zwischen Tonalität und Atonalität: Studien zur Harmonik Alexander Skrjabins*, Berliner Musikwissenschaftliche Arbeiten, 14 (Munich, 1978), pp. 87 and 94.
[9]Eberle, pp. 89, 99, 107.
[10]Manfred Kelkel, in his gargantuan study, also lists too many modes to be helpful.



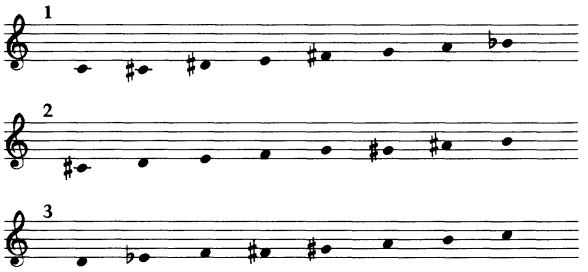
Example 3: Etrangeté, op. 63, no. 2. Reproduced by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.

In. m. 1 of the *Poème*, the first A in the right hand is resolved to the B♭ immediately, while the corresponding resolution of the A in the left hand is delayed until the first beat of the next measure. The A on the first beat of m. 2 is resolved on the first beat of m. 3, while the D♭ in the left hand of m. 2 resolves first back to the D♮ immediately following and then to the C on the initial beat of m. 3. This measure is entirely within the whole-tone scale. The two E♭s of m. 4 are outside the scale and the resolutions of both are delayed until m. 5, as shown. Mm. 5–8 are essentially a transposition of mm. 1–3 with a few alterations, and all tones foreign to WT^1 resolve by half step. On the third beat of m. 9, pitches from WT^2 (C♯ and F) are introduced, producing a chromatic blur. These new notes are "binding pitches" to WT^2 and represent a pivotal area from which WT^2 emerges almost in its entirety in m. 10. The next "problem" tones are the D♯s of m. 13. The upper one (in the left hand) resolves to the E of m. 14, while the resolution of the lower D♯ is delayed until the initial beat of m. 15. The D♯ is repeated in m. 15, and this time it moves down to the D♮; this procedure is similar to the D♭–D♮–D♭–C figure in mm. 2–3. Throughout the "*léger*" passage of m. 16, the "chromatic" note is A and it always resolves to B♭. The second half of the piece (not shown) is, for the most part, a repetition of the first half with a few additions.[11]

In the last four measures of the piece (ex. 2b), Skriabin alters his procedures somewhat. Mm. 33 and 34 contain an octatonic reinterpretation of the melodic material of m. 1, which is similar to the tonal procedure of reharmonization. The chord of mm. 34 and 36 is the mystic chord with a few alterations: the F♯ and A are missing, the E is doubled, and the B♭ is tripled (note that the B♭ was the melodic goal of mm. 1 and 2, resolving the A of m. 2). The note G, which is not found in the mystic chord, is also present. The G is the twelfth above the root C, is the missing element in Sabaneiev's overtone series, and would be the next perfect fourth above the D of the mystic chord (compare ex. 1). In the post-*Prometheus* piano works, many of which are offshoots of the *Prefatory Action*, Skriabin often extends the mystic chord by its characteristic intervals and rearranges the pitches. This procedure can be seen clearly in the sketches of the *Prefatory Action*.[12] The G, of course, is not a member of WT^1, but it does not require resolution because Skriabin's process of chromaticism is not at work here. In this final chord of the piece, Skriabin has returned to the "home" sonority slightly elaborated.

We have seen how the pitch organization of the *Poème* is based upon the handling of chromaticism within the whole-tone scale. In many of his late compositions Skriabin uses another symmetrical scale, the octatonic scale, as the fundamental pitch group, and again includes the tones foreign to the scale as chromatic notes which are resolved.

In *Etrangeté*, op. 63, no. 2 (ex. 3), Skriabin uses all three transpositions of the octatonic scale (ex. 4):



Example 4: Octatonic scales

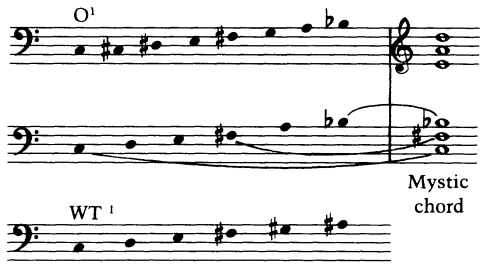
The first seven measures employ octatonic scale 1 (abbreviated O^1). "Chromatic" pitches occur at several points. In groups 3 and 5 of m. 3, the note D resolves to D♭ in the following groups. In m. 6 the D in the chord splash moves immediately to C♯. In m. 8 this twice stated C♯/D combination is used as the first two notes of the contrasting phrase which is constructed with the second transposition of the octatonic scale. A modulation between O^1 and O^2 thus takes place when the chromatic D asserts itself as a diatonic element binding the two phrases together and resulting in a transposition of scale. This is, of course, similar to certain procedures of modulation in tonal music. In m. 11 the shift from O^2 to O^3 is accomplished through a device again borrowed from tonal music, the sequence (compare the last beats of mm. 9 and 11). Through the remainder of the piece these techniques are employed consistently.

The mystic chord is not as recognizable in *Etrangeté* as it was in the *Poème*, but its characteristic intervals are found throughout the piece. All of the notes of the first four beats of m. 1, except for the D♭, are members of the chord, and the three notes of the first-beat chord maintain

[11]Space does not permit me to demonstrate that these principles are applied consistently throughout all of the pieces from which examples have been taken for this paper.
[12]Kelkel, III, p. 179, col. b, system 4. Here the added G is present in a twelve-note version of the chord.

the vertical placement of the source (cf. ex. 1). This configuration could be described as the mystic chord in second inversion. The first group in m. 3 is an arpeggio of the mystic chord in first inversion, but we have a D♭ instead of a D♮. The D♮ of the mystic chord appears in the third group of m. 3, but since it is a chromatic note in O[1] it resolves to D♭ in the fourth group.

At this point, we have the evidence to draw several conclusions regarding Skriabin's methods of pitch organization. Unlike Debussy (cf. "Voiles") and Messiaen (cf. "Regard du Père" from the *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus*), who only exceptionally use pitches outside of the symmetrical scale of a given octatonic or whole-tone passage, Skriabin employs a subtle but traditionally treated principle of "chromaticism" within whole-tone and octatonic contexts. Notes foreign to the scale are introduced as chromatic elements, which are then resolved back into the given scale by half-step. The mystic chord is a vertical intervallic referent, as Dernova states,[13] but it is also directly related to both the whole-tone and octatonic scales. The mystic chord is a whole-tone chord except for the note A, and it is octatonic except for the note D (see ex. 5):



Example 5

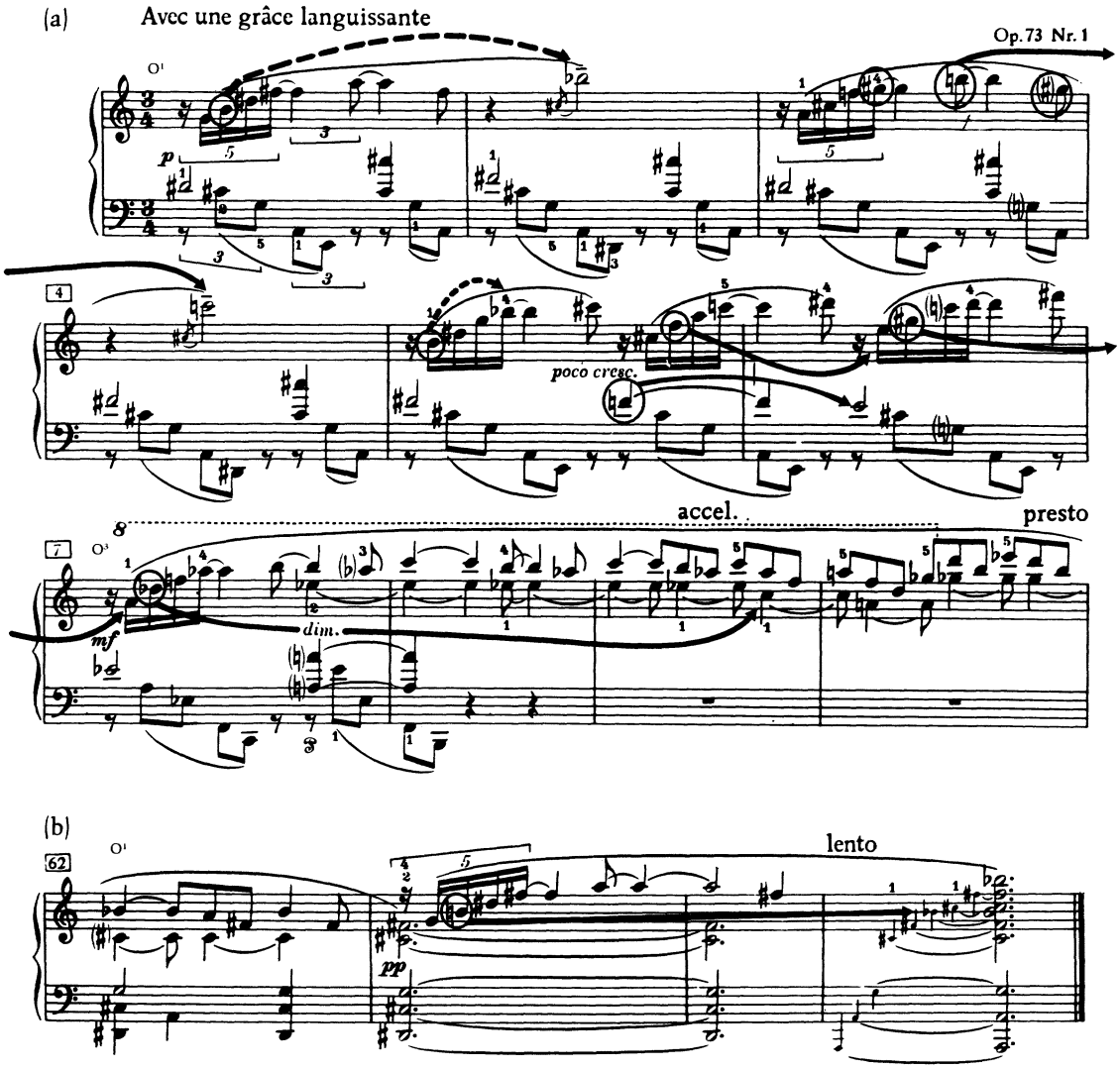
In the whole-tone phrases (m. 1 of the *Poème*, ex. 2), the A is a chromatic element which resolves into the whole-tone scale, and in the octatonic passages (m. 3 of *Etrangeté*, ex. 3) the D is a chromatic element which resolves into the octatonic scale. Examination of the *Prefatory Action* fragment further supports this view of chromatic pitches in the mystic chord. Most of the *Prefatory Action* sketches are octatonic, and Skriabin almost invariably spells the mystic chord C–F♯–B♭–E–A–*D♭* or *D♯*.[14] The octatonic variant of the mystic chord with the flattened ninth is also the final chord in each of the *Deux Danses*, op. 73 (see ex. 6b, from *Guirlandes*, op. 73, no. 1), which are extracts from the *Prefatory Action*.

When we teach the Bach chorales to beginning harmony students, we do not seek to present an airtight system of composition but rather the elements of a style. Similarly, I am not trying to reveal a rigid system in Skriabin's work, but rather a few components of a relatively flexible method of composition, which can explain or at least describe certain characteristics of his style. He himself apparently did not describe his methods as a system, and more likely sought to employ a series of relatively few principles which generated a *small* number of functional relationships (i.e. the symmetrical scales and the application of "chromaticism" within them). These relationships were then used as the basis of the pitch language which could then be employed for a large number of works.

It is important to recognize that such a description applies as well to tonality but not to serialism, since in the latter no predetermined hierarchy supposedly exists among the pitches. Skriabin's approach centers around the concept that any symmetrical scale or mode of limited transposition (Messiaen's term) will generate music of a small number of pitch collections, and although the number of pitch collections varies greatly between the modes of limited transposition and the diatonic major and minor scales (which contain twelve collections for each scale), the concept of diatonic/chromatic is common to both. The diatonic/chromatic concept is not, of course, a property of either serialism or pre-twelve-tone cell composition. Thus Perle's statement that "Scriabin, in his employment of a more complicated set, of transposi-

[13]Dernova, p. 97.

[14]See Kelkel, III, p. 173, col. a, system 3, p. 175/b/2, p. 176/b/2, p. 179/b/3 for several examples I have chosen at random. For the sake of clarity and simplicity I have selected only untransposed examples of the mystic chord. Needless to say, Skriabin transposes the chord freely.



Example 6: Guirlandes, op. 73, no. 1. Reproduced by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.

tions of the set, of invariant segments that function as pivotal elements among the various transpositions, and of consistent variants of the set, may be considered the first to exploit serial procedures systematically as a means of compensating for the loss of traditional tonal functions"[15] is essentially an overinterpretation of Skriabin's approach. Because the symmetrical scales are derived from the tonal vocabulary, and because Skriabin treats them as diatonic units colored by the nondiatonic pitches, his approach cannot be accurately described as serial but rather as chromatically modal.

This symmetrical-scale approach has obvious limitations, and Skriabin often increases his resources by first establishing a whole-tone or octatonic context and then delaying the resolution of some chromatic tones. In *Guirlandes*, op. 73, no. 1 (ex. 6a), for example, the treatment of chromaticism within the octatonic framework is freer and, in some ways, even more im-

[15]Perle, p. 41. Notice that each of Perle's examples from the Seventh Sonata is constructed from chromatically unaltered octatonic scales.

pressive than in the earlier works. Taking the circled chromatic pitches in the first eight measures in order, the B in the first measure very tentatively resolves to the B♭ of m. 2 by octave displacement, the G♯ in m. 3 is unresolved but will reappear and resolve in mm. 6 and 7, the B in m. 3 resolves to the C in m. 4, the B in m. 5 again weakly resolves by octave displacement, the ensuing Fs resolve to the Es of m. 6, the resolution of the G♯ in m. 6 is delayed through the change to O^3 where it resolves to the A, and the D♭ vaguely resolves to the C in the second group of the descending sequential figure of m. 9. The octatonic sound of the music is carefully preserved by burying the chromaticism (especially where it remains unresolved or is resolved by octave displacement) in thick and rhythmically weak parts of the texture. It is interesting to note that the heavily chromatic ascending first passage (mm. 1–7) is followed by a long descending passage which relaxes the tension and contains no chromaticism at all. Similar patterns are continued throughout the piece. At the very end (ex. 6b), Skriabin repeats the initial quintuplet figure (cf. ex. 6a, m. 1) with its chromatic B, and proceeds to resolve it directly by half step (to the B♭) for the first time.

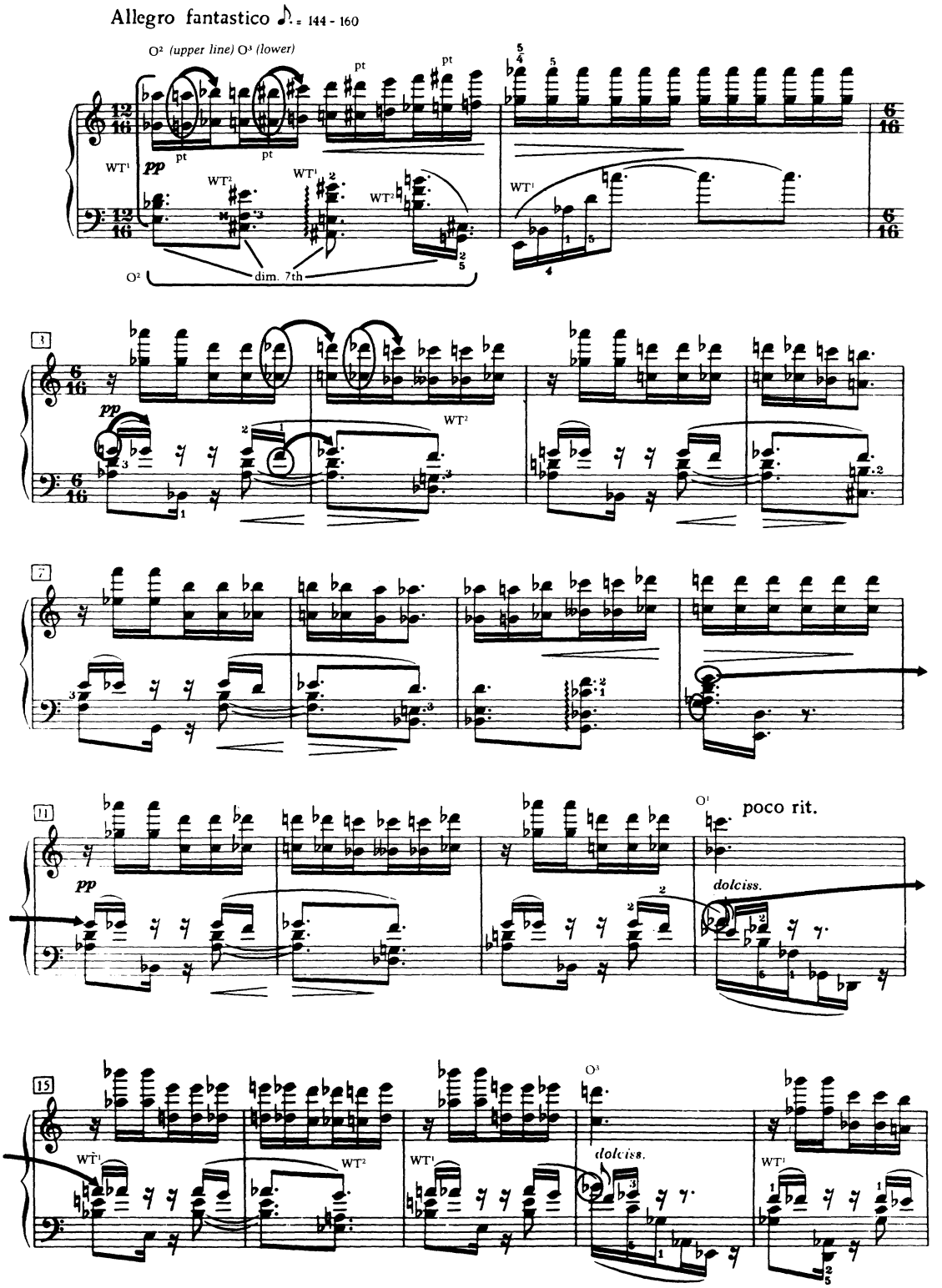
II

I mentioned above that I felt Skriabin arrived at the vocabulary of his later style partially through his earlier explorations of the French sixth/$V_{\flat 5}^{7}$ sonority. This sonority is the basis of the mystic chord, and of the six notes which define the chord they are the four notes which are common to both the whole-tone and octatonic scales; the upper two notes, as we have seen, are "chromatic" depending on whether the context is whole-tone or octatonic. The symmetrical scales can be derived by combining various transpositions of the symmetrical chords of the tonal vocabulary. Combining two French sixths a minor third apart will produce an octatonic scale, and combining two of them a major second apart will yield all of the pitches of a whole-tone scale.

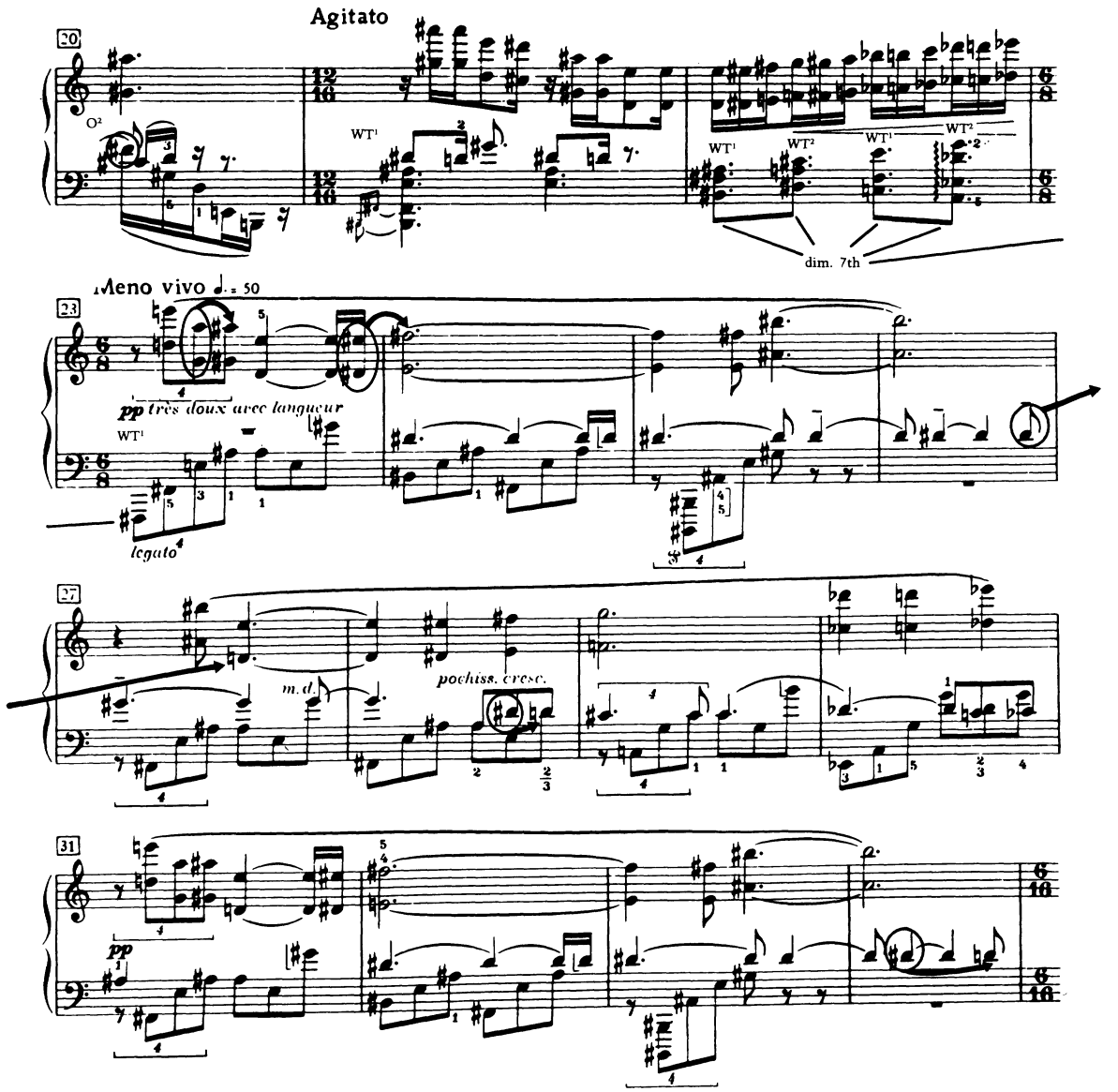
The other two symmetrical chords common to the tonal vocabulary of the nineteenth century are the augmented triad and the diminished seventh chord. Combining two augmented triads a major second apart will produce a whole tone scale, and combining any two diminished seventh chords will produce an octatonic scale. Given these characteristics of the whole tone and octatonic scales, it is interesting to observe that Skriabin, probably trying to avoid the idiomatic sonorities of Wagner and Liszt, used relatively few pure augmented triads and diminished seventh chords in his later music. He did, however, continue to employ the nineteenth-century device of building sequences and structuring the sections of a piece on degrees that would outline the diminished seventh chord or the augmented triad. Such structural use of symmetrical chords is often found in the music of Chopin and Liszt. Sequences built on the diminished seventh chord can be found in the Chopin Mazurka in C♯ Minor, op. 50, no. 3 (mm. 161–65), and in Liszt's *Via Crucis*, Station VIII, "Die Frauen von Jerusalem" (mm. 1–8). Key structures based on an augmented triad can be found in Liszt's Consolation No. 3 (D♭ major, F minor, A minor/major), and in Chopin's Ballade in F Minor, op. 52, where important structural keys are F minor, A major, and D♭ major.

Skriabin uses these structuring techniques in a very similar fashion in much of his later music. In the Prelude, op. 67, no. 1, a long sequence (mm. 19–27) returns us to the beginning of the piece. Each of the four phrases of the melody in the sequence is built a minor third lower than its predecessor. The beginning soprano notes of each of the four phrases combine to form a diminished seventh chord. Within this same sequence, the notes of the bass line combine to produce a different diminished seventh chord. These pitches form the bass line for the entire piece except for four measures in the middle (mm. 15–18) where the bass pitches are members of the third diminished seventh chord.

In the Etude op. 65, no. 1 (ex. 7), we see Skriabin using the degrees of a symmetrical chord as a substitute for key structure in the large sense. The material of this piece consists of two contrasting sections, Allegro fantastico and Meno vivo, each of which is stated, with variation, four times. The Allegro fantastico appears in only two transpositions, beginning (in the left hand) on E (m. 1) and B♯ (m. 35), forming an incomplete augmented triad. The Meno vivo is first heard beginning on a bass note of F♯ (m. 23); its repetitions then occur beginning with bass notes of D



Example 7: Etude, op. 65, no. 1. Reproduced by permission of C. F. Peters Corporation.



Example 7, continued

(m. 47), B♭ (m. 87), and finally again B♭ (m. 111). These structural pitches, of course, outline a complete augmented triad, an augmented triad that is different from the incomplete one on which the Allegro fantastico is based.

Some further analysis of this Etude will give some of the points in this article more substance and clarification. In spite of the chromatic run of major ninths which characterizes the Allegro fantastico theme, this piece is based primarily on the whole-tone scale. The harmony of the first measure consists of alternating French sixths with roots a minor third apart, and the bass line is built on a chain of minor thirds which forms a complete diminished seventh chord. The pitch content of the left hand is thus octatonic, although the pitch content of each discrete beat (including the notes in the right hand) is whole-tone. The middle notes of each sixteenth group are passing tones in two senses: vertically they move to a whole tone sonority, and horizontally they move to pitches of the octatonic scale (O^2 and O^3 for the upper and lower members of the major-ninth run respectively). The pitch content of the second measure is entirely whole-tone. The circled notes in m. 3 would seem to indicate

that the whole-tone scale has been abandoned, but we find that these notes are chromatic elements which resolve into WT[1] by half step, as shown. The G on the first beat of m. 10 is the only chromaticism in this section whose resolution is delayed until the following phrase (the upper G). The lower G is left unresolved; its function seems to be to enrich the sonority emphasizing the clashing dissonance (A♭–G) at the end of the phrase.[16] It is interesting to compare this spot with the end of the piece, which reaches the same chord (m. 112, first beat, missing a few of the doublings), but in which the G immediately resolves to G♭, producing a French sixth (common to both symmetrical scales) as the final chord.

Returning to mm. 14 and 18, both of which mark the ends of four-bar phrases, we see Skriabin shifting to the octatonic configuration. The descending octatonic figure here is used also in m. 20. In each instance, the initial pitch of the tenor voice is chromatic: the A♭ of m. 14 resolves to the A♮ of m. 15, but the analogous pitches of mm. 18 and 20 are left unresolved in favor of a sequence at m. 19 which produces an abrupt increase of tension at m. 21. These unresolved chromatic tones (as well as the resolved one in m. 14) can, however, be assimilated into the octatonic/whole-tone scheme as binding tones in the pivotal area between octatonic and whole tone sections. In each instance, by combining the chromatic pitch with the two notes on the right hand, a whole-tone configuration is produced (mm. 14, 18, and 20). Thus as in the chromatic blurring in the *Poème*, op. 69, no. 1, and the binding C♯ of *Etrangeté*, chromatic elements become diatonic; but whereas those pieces were entirely whole-tone or entirely octatonic, this Etude contains both symmetrical scales, and in the binding areas both scales sound simultaneously although their identities remain clear. In the bass line of m. 22 Skriabin completes the linear diminished seventh chord with F♯ on the first beat of the Meno vivo, thereby moving with maximum smoothness into the contrasting section.

The Meno vivo sections are whole-tone. In the right hand of m. 23 the G and A, and the D♯ and E♯, are chromatic tones which resolve by half step as expected. The left hand presents the mystic chord transposed to F♯, which means that the second pitch from the top, D♯, is foreign to the whole-tone scale. This chromatic D♯ acts as something of a pedal tone throughout the passage, and resolves downward by half step in mm. 27 and 28 (somewhat tentatively) and in m. 34 (more convincingly).[17]

It is perhaps important to emphasize again that the methods and procedures discussed in this article are not an attempt to define or describe an airtight system in Skriabin's work. The search for such a system might be the single greatest problem in the researches and analyses of Dernova and Perle. And although passages exist such as the final measures of *Prometheus* and *Vers la flamme*, op. 72 (1914), and the climax of the Seventh Sonata (1912, m. 313), in which compositional decisions are based on considerations of triadic harmony rather than the symmetrical scales exclusively, Skriabin's basic procedures for pitch organization can be simply and briefly stated: four of the six tones of the mystic chord form a French sixth, while the other two function as "chromatic" notes depending on whether a given passage is in the octatonic or whole-tone scale. Skriabin differs from other composers in his treatment of these symmetrical scales. The pitches excluded from the scales function as chromatic tones, and they are resolved into the given scale by half step. In some instances chromatic tones are left unresolved, but the surrounding pitches so consistently define the scale that the unresolved notes do not obscure the octatonic or whole-tone nature of the passage. With careful rhythmic placement, a great many chromatic pitches may be used—even whole chromatic scales. (The chromatic scale is, of course, still another symmetrical scale, and occasionally functions independently, as in the passage mentioned above from the Seventh Sonata, m. 313.)

On the other hand, formal structures in Skriabin are often determined by major- and minor-third chains, as they were in much of the music of the nineteenth century. With Skriabin these chains are derived, once again, from his favorite scales: the whole-tone scale based on the augmented triad, and the octatonic scale based on the diminished seventh chord.

[16]The added pitches in the *ossia* passages (mm. 73–74, 86–87) are also meant to enrich the sonority and do not fit into the whole-tone scheme. It is interesting to note in m. 10 that the chromatic G, when transposed to the register between the C and D of the right hand, yields the identical sonority of the *ossia* chords, i.e.

[17]In the Meno vivo beginning at m. 47 (not shown) the analogous pedal tone, B, resolves by upward half step to C (m. 57). Skriabin makes the necessary shifts here to move into a transition to the recapitulation. A literal restatement of the Meno vivo would lead to the Allegro fantastico on G♯, nicely completing the structural augmented triad E–B♯–G♯, but would make the piece too long and repetitious. It seems significant that despite the necessary structural and harmonic shifts at this point the resolution of the B has a high priority.