

ABSTRACT

Kevin Volans's music has generated much international recognition and attention. As a result, his influence is increasingly evident in the work of younger composers. As yet, little research has delved deeply into Volans's music at the technical level. His piano etudes consist largely of transcriptions, paraphrases and variations of a wide range of his previous work. So, as a microcosm of his oeuvre, they provide the ideal opportunity to understand his unique compositional voice. A twofold, overarching question informs this study. What historical conditions produced Kevin Volans's etudes and how are they constructed?

In response to this question, this dissertation presents a written analysis of Kevin Volans's piano etudes using the notions formulated by Michel Foucault (1926-1984) in his genealogies. The genealogical theoretical framework accommodates a multiplicity of analytical approaches while providing the tools to synthesise a plurality of findings. The author has used Foucault's genealogical model to underpin the analysis of both the historical context surrounding the etudes and the scores themselves. The goal is to gain a thorough understanding of the musical material of the etudes in terms of the ideological landscape which produced them.

Part one of the dissertation lays out the broader epistemic conditions which produced the etudes. The initial two chapters trace nodes of influence in parallel spheres: the ideological and musical landscape of Volans's life and issues surrounding the genre of the piano etude are juxtaposed to set the scene for the textural analysis. The third chapter of part one traces the transcription sources and outlines the most distinguishing characteristics of the etudes. Together, these spheres yield the epistemic conditions within which the textural analysis can take place. The three chapters in part two focus on the scores of the etudes. They each deal with the organisation of the material by applying slightly different existing and modified analytical parameters. Chapter 5 analyses the stratified, almost sedimentary forms evident in the etudes. By mapping out levels of non-hierarchically layered groupings of material in the etudes, strong reference points within the structure of each are identified. Chapter 6 takes a semiotic viewpoint, reading the musical images through the lens of metonymy, metaphor and allegory. The final chapter seeks to understand the organic and mechanical composition techniques used in the etudes. The conclusion reunites the scattered findings of the preceding chapters by tracing the genealogical web of power relations between them. This web of power relationships represents both the internal and external dynamics at play within Volans's etudes.