Galina Ivanova Ustvolskaya was born in 1919 in Petrograd and has lived there throughout her life. She had her formal musical training in the Leningrad Conservatory between 1937 and 1950, where she studied with Shostakovich. Later she worked as a teacher in the same institution for most of her life.

Although the Soviet Union possessed an elaborate system of music education (Schwarz, 1965, p. 278), the Stalinist era imposed harsh limitations to the actual creative work of composers. The 1948 Decree that laid down the principles of Socialist Realism required composers to produce music of accessible nature, ‘understandable’ by the people, with thematic in accordance to the political scene of the day. “Like any other artist in the USSR, [Ustvolskaya] needed to live, and to live she had come to an agreement with the state” (MacDonald, 1995). Even though she wrote many pieces in the Socialist Realism tradition, later in the nineties she withdrew them all, in an attempt to “clean up” her past and her catalogue of works.

Due to her resistance to fully compromise and submit herself to the official compositional guidelines, Ustvolskaya became largely ostracized during the Soviet period. The life and career of a Soviet composer was basically determined by the Union of Composers, the institution that managed commissions, performances, concerts, recordings and so forth. For example, only two of her works were recorded in the Soviet Union by 1970, and these two pieces are among the ones she came to reject in the 1990s (MacDonald, 1995). Some of her ‘formalist’ pieces—the word ‘formalist’ was highly pejorative within the official Socialist Realism discourse—remained unknown for

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1 The city of Petrograd became Leningrad in 1924, and back to the original name, Saint Petersburg, in 1991.
2 Her studies were partially interrupted during the Siege of Leningrad, Second World War.
3 This is a reactionary principle that largely underestimates the intelligence of people in general, to say the least. It is a dogmatic idea that we still have to confront nowadays, although it comes in more or less disguised clothing.
decades. Her first Piano Sonata had to wait twenty-seven years to be performed in public, and her Trio for clarinet, violin and piano, finished in 1949, only had its premiere in 1968 (Bradshaw, 2000). The composer gradually went into a sort of self-reclusion throughout the years, apparently not attempting to establish professional contact with composers elsewhere, nor trying to promote her music in any way. Her works begun to be more systematically promoted and explored only after the 1990s.

The Sixth Piano Sonata

As is the case with many of the individual compositional voices that flourished in the second half of the twentieth century, Ustvolskaya requires a “bottom-up” analytical approach—especially if we consider that, in her case, there is very little published literature available. We have to face directly the concrete elements presented to us by the piece, seek for their internal organization in a somewhat empirical manner, and try to judge our collected observations against a possible historical context and compositional trends. The fact that the piece is called a Sonata already suggests some degree of dialogue with the past that must be taken in consideration as well.

To begin with, here are some general descriptive characteristics that stand out after a first listening of this piece and an initial look at the score:

- Extensive use of clusters;
- Dynamic range around ffff most of the time;
- Steady, unchanging slow pulse of quarter notes throughout the piece.

By looking at Ustvolskaya’s previous piano sonatas, the sixth and last is clearly the one in which the cluster as a musical object is assigned the role of primary material, of substance of the work itself. Cluster-types defined in the score can be summarized in

4 Unfortunately, a few possibly important books published in Russian have no translation to English or other accessible Western language, and thus were not consulted for this paper. Existing articles in English are generally limited to an overview of her life and works, and even important reference books on Soviet music such as Schwarz (1983) dedicate no more than a few scattered paragraphs mentioning Ustvolskaya almost en passant.
three categories:

1) Random selection of notes with thematic top note;
2) Largest possible number of notes within the notated interval;
3) Precise selection of notes (up to 7 notes fully written out).

Also, specific ways of playing these clusters are often indicated: strike notes with the thumb, with edge of hand, with palm, with both hands, with arm etc.

These combinations allow for a variety of clusters ranging from small to large (in number of notes) and from less precise to more precise (according to the degree of randomness or lack thereof in the selection of notes). Upper and lower note boundaries are always indicated, and this is actually used in order to generate some sort of melodic perception of clusters moving through the pitch space. The first cluster type listed above is the only one that does not indicate a lower note-boundary; however, the instruction makes it clear that the top notes in this case are thematic and thus should be emphasized while playing.

Clusters are organized in a way that their relative position in the pitch space is to be perceived in relation to other clusters’ positions, both in a global and local level. In a local level, upper and lower notes define boundaries that are perceived melodically across a sequential movement of contiguous clusters. In a global level, cluster sequences are differentiated by their positions in the overall register of the keyboard, making it possible to discern polyphonic streams of clusters.

It is interesting to note that the intrinsic “statistical” qualities of a cluster—in the sense that it tends toward white noise, thus lacking fine-grained harmonic and even timbristic specificity—, in other words, this undefined nature of the cluster receives such a treatment in this piece that it is eventually domesticated into a very well defined sonic universe. Clusters are actually converted into the raw material responsible for providing enough variability to keep the music moving ahead. This variability, as we shall see, is mainly achieved through manipulations of density, register and melodic (contiguous)
movement of clusters. There is also a more traditional type of “phrasing” that seems to be organizing sequences of clusters. These sequences are eventually set in motion simultaneously to create a sort of two-voice polyphonic texture. A couple of other subsidiary non-cluster elements are also employed in the polyphony, such as straightforward scales (isolated notes mostly descending by tones and semitones, but without necessarily defining any mode or other recognizable “scale” in the traditional sense), and one identifiable, slow melodic figure based on thirds.

In order to see how these elements are put together, let us now proceed to a page-to-page survey of how the work unfolds. In the analysis that follows, we will refer to system numbers,\(^5\) indicated by the letter s, as a substitute for measure numbers.\(^6\)

A first more or less straightforward division of the work into smaller segments can be made in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>From – To (s.)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1 – 4a</td>
<td>cluster “exposition”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4b – 6a</td>
<td>No clusters; clean two-voice texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>6b – 12a</td>
<td>two voices of clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>12b – 20a</td>
<td>m3-theme + clusters + downward scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C’</td>
<td>20b – 24a</td>
<td>identical to C but transposed down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24b – 33</td>
<td>More development based on C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>34 – 35</td>
<td>identical repetition of B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’</td>
<td>36 – 46</td>
<td>development based on D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>anti-climax (m3-theme from D, harmonized, pp sub.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’</td>
<td>48 – 53</td>
<td>reversed A + coda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section A**

Clusters with thematic top-notes form the basic phrase that begins the piece. This phrase is immediately literally. Following restatements of this same pitch sequence

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\(^5\) When necessary, we will refer to a secondary specific location within a given system, indicated by a letter “b” after the system number. Therefore, “s. 4b” means a point along system 4 where a significant change of the musical flow takes place. Consequently, “s. 4a” means everything from the beginning of system 4 up to s. 4b. Generally these changes are very easy to find simply by looking at the music. In the accompanying copy of the score, we have marked such sub-locations in pencil.

\(^6\) To prevent the division of the steady quarter-note pulse into metrical accents foreign to the piece, Ustvolskaya uses no barlines throughout the score. Moreover, every event, be it an isolated note or a cluster, has an accent mark [<] on it.
undergo a process of register expansion progressing towards a more spaced distribution across the keyboard (Fig. 1). Eighth notes are added to the weak part of each beat in the second and third phrase-blocks. Every phrase is followed by its exact repetition. Thus, Section A comprises six (3 x 2) phrases of development of the same material, which can be grouped into 3 blocks of 2 identical phrases each.

![Figure 1. Expansion in register of the initial material (Section A). This example shows the thematic notes that appear on top of clusters.](image)

**Section B**

A radical change in texture happens after the end of the six phrases discussed above (s. 4b). The sudden thinness of this melodic statement in the form of plain notes (without clusters) shifts completely the listener’s pole of attention. A two-voice texture is quickly established, but it continues for no more than two more systems. The strength of this new material, its degree of novelty in relation to what precedes it, seems to be counterbalanced by its short life of exposition. Although one may argue that this material, because of its shortness, is simply functioning as a separator (a bridge) between the first and the second cluster textures of the piece (ss. 1 - 4a and s. 6b, respectively), we believe that the strong contrast offered by this clear-cut two-voice texture, at such an early stage of the piece, confers a higher degree of significance to such passage. However, it is precipitate to tag it as “second theme” of this alleged “sonata”—this could be either simplistic or exaggerated. It would be simplistic in the sense that this new material does not conform to the expected role of a second theme as in a classical sonata form: here, the process of its diffusion throughout the piece is less predictable and more
idiosyncratic. On the other hand, it would be exaggerated to understand this material as a “second theme of a sonata”, for this label inevitably brings a pre-defined set of expectations concerning the relationship of this material with the contrasting “first theme”—expectations that will not be fulfilled by this material, as we will see.

In other words, what we have found thus far is a clear presentation of two highly contrasting and self-contained materials (Sections A and B), the second of which is not allowed enough time to pose itself with quite the same weight of the first. What comes next?

**Section C**

If one is concerned with the task of verifying just how much of Ustvolskaya’s *Sixth Sonata* resembles any idealistic representation of a classical sonata-form, Sections C and D add more uncertainties to such undertaking.

Section C goes from s. 6b through s. 12a, thus being considerably larger than any of the previous sections. It does present a new musical material, even though it may be seen as a recombination of previous basic sonic elements: the clusters and the horizontal, melodic line. Section A was basically a single line of clusters with thematic notes to be emphasized amidst the dense texture, which already indicated some degree of importance of the horizontal element. The melodic line then appeared in Section B in its purest form, freed from the cluster texture. Now Section C recombines those elements by superimposing two voices made of cluster sequences, each with a different horizontal profile:

a) Repetitive semitone: sequence of clusters with thematic top note (stuck to an alternating semitone G-Ab), which is first presented by the right hand at s. 6b (Fig. 2, treble clef);

b) Melodic clusters: clusters extending over a major 9th, moving according to a fixed melodic contour (Fig. 2, bass clef).
Section C: two-voice cluster texture

a) Clusters with thematic top notes

b) Clusters in melodic sequence

one full "phrase"

Figure 2: Two layers of clusters as the basic material of Section C.

Figure 2 shows the way these two layers are arranged in their first occurrence, at the beginning of Section C. The same structure is repeated five more times, every time transposed to a different octave (changing hands accordingly), as we can see in Figure 3:

Figure 3: Register changes in Section C. Roman numerals indicate phrase number. System numbers indicate the beginning of the phrase in the score. Each one of the six phrases is a full repetition of the material shown in Fig. 2, transposed to these different octaves.

To summarize, Section C develops ideas from the two previous sections, namely, the horizontal line and the cluster texture. These ideas are combined in order to form a very well defined new material, which is the essence of Section C as shown in Fig. 2. Moreover, this material is varied in register across its six iterations, a process that relates directly to what happened in Section A (also six identical phrases expanding in register each time). Thus, the main question posed by Section C is its early developmental
quality—reutilization of basic sonic ideas from before—, versus the newness of the actual result of such reutilization. It appears to us that its newness prevails over its correlation with preceding events; if we continue with the sonata metaphor, we would include Section C within the exposition area.

**Section D**

Section D definitely amplifies the ambiguities concerning expository versus developmental qualities just discussed above. Briefly, this Section starts off at s. 12b by the superposition of two melodic elements: one that we will call the “minor 3rd theme” \(m3\text{-theme}\) from now on) and another that is a downward-moving scale suggesting a relationship with the similar scalar motion present in Section B. The \(m3\text{-theme}\) itself can also be seen as a combination of the linear movement principle with a marked tendency to the “clusterization” of its isolated melodic notes:

![Figure 4: The very distinguishable \(m3\text{-theme}\) and its internal movement towards note clustering, synthesizing the two basic contrasting elements of the piece.](image)

The third and last relatively new element introduced by Section D is the fully notated cluster: all cluster notes are written out, and the precise number and choice of notes become a developmental element by itself. The first of these happens by the end of s. 13, and can even be understood as an outgrowth of \(m3\text{-theme}\)’s “clusterization tendency”. The appearance of the next few clusters of this type later on this page reveals a curve of increasing density. If we consider \(m3\text{-theme}\) as the starting point of this process, we have the clusters expanding downwards, with the same note (B) always on the top (see Fig. 5):
Figure 5: “Clusterization” process in Section D: expansion from one\(^7\) to seven notes between s. 12b to s. 19. First three events belong to the m3-theme (see Fig. 4)

The process depicted above is not completely linear, since there is an interruption followed by a restart at s. 14b, with the restatement of the m3-theme. Clusters arrive at a maximum density of 7 notes in the middle of s. 16. The multiple combinations of all these elements (clusters, m3-theme and scales) throughout the remainder of this Section reinforce the perception of a continuous development. In this sense, one may recall the Schoenbergian concept of developing variation to describe this ongoing process of presenting a material and immediately reworking it, extending its capabilities, and generating a somewhat continuous flow that makes it hard to close off any of these sections as a simple “exposition” of a given musical idea.

Thematic inter-relationship

Although sections A, B, C and D clearly present different musical ideas deserving the status of “separate segments”, it is important to note that they are not completely unrelated and that their relationship is not limited to the already mentioned characteristics of cluster textures vs. melodic contours. If we group together the important notes of each Section and compare them, important intervallic similarities can be found:

\(^7\) Obviously, only one or two notes do not qualify as clusters, but they clearly fit in the logic of increasing density as the “starting point” of this process.
Figure 6: Intervalloc connections between Sections A, B, C and D.

In Figure 6 above, the five thematic pitch classes used in Section A are grouped in ascending order. Such scale outlines a diminished fifth (tritone). The letter $x$ indicates a recurrent three-note figure of a semitone followed by a whole tone ($s\,t$). A very similar pattern is found by grouping together the first six pitch classes used in the upper voice of Section B (differing only by the position of one tone/semitone pair). Figure $x$ is clearly present at the beginning of the B scale, as well as the diminished fifth. Letter $y$ represents another intervalloc shape that will recur. Section C reveals not only the same scalar pattern and intervalloc figures $x$ and $y$ but also the same pitch classes used in Section A (plus an E natural). Finally, the scalar component of Section D begins with an exact inversion of what we just saw in B and C, and $y$ is presented just a little later.

To sum up, so far we have shown that the piece begins with four sections of exposition of new material, A through D; that the opposition of the cloudy cluster textures (variability of vertical density) to the transparent linear movement (melodic contours) establishes the main initial contrast of ideas in the piece; that Sections C and D expose new musical ideas based, to some extent, in derivations of those two basic ideas already presented in A and B; that all these first Sections are not merely expository in content since they do have different degrees of internal development of their core material; and lastly, that these multiple interconnections between sections and their increasing developmental quality already suggest that any attempt to relate this piece to the traditional idea of sonata-form must be made with caution and in a relatively flexible manner.
The “development”

For the sake of space, we will proceed to the examination of the rest of the piece in a less detailed fashion. We need to discuss now the developmental nature of the middle sections and the idiosyncratic recapitulation of ideas that take place by the end. According to our formal diagram presented on page 4, there are two middle sections clearly devoted to a continued development of ideas from the exposition: C’ and D’. Note that these two are separated by a literal repetition of Section B, which causes a significant perceptual mixture of development and recapitulation. Also, sections are developed in ‘closed containers’: Section C’ develops solely elements from C, and D’ is exclusively dedicated to elements from D. There is no intermingling of ideas from different sections of the exposition. This helps to solidify the sense of block structure that permeates most of this music: blocks move forward within themselves, and the piece moves forward by the juxtaposition of these internally moving blocks; but never are these blocks faded in and out onto each other, nor the fixed set of ideas from one block is ever decomposed to be recombined with fragments of another block.\footnote{One single exception to this rule will be seen later on in Section D’.

Section C’, extending from s. 20b to the end of s. 33, varies register and density of the exact same ideas of the original C. Overall register tends to be lower, one or two octaves below the original. Increased cluster sizes (up to four octaves and a half in extension) and phrase fragmentation (through caesura marks) become important elements after s. 24b. The middle of this development is probably the most intense moment of the piece in terms of gestural violence and sheer sonic intensity.

Section B is repeated literally right after the end of C’, thus restating in a more dramatic way the contrast between low and high sonic definition (dense clusters versus plain isolated notes in a two-voice texture). The presence of a literal repetition of a previous material at this point suggests recapitulation to the listener. The next section
negates this impression, thus transforming this return of B in a sort of breathing island in between two large sections of development. It is interesting to remember that Section B was marked by its shortness, which even put in doubt its status as an independent section. The fact that it comes back just after that rather dramatic moment of cluster development (C’, s. 33)⁹, almost serving as an “ear-cleaning” device, strengthens its identity as an independent block. It sure is a block that does not gain a development on its own, but it serves to a crucial purpose amidst the other block’s developments.

Section D’, from s. 36 to the end of s. 46, is a clear development of all three original elements from D: the fully notated clusters, the downward scalar motion, and the m₃-theme. Similar processes of register change and phrase fragmentation continue to be consistently applied here as they were in Section C’. Reaching the climax of this whole development we find the one single exception to our observed rule of not mixing material from different blocks (sections): at s. 45, the downward scalar movement has two of its notes placed high up, about four octaves above the range of the other surrounding notes. The appearance of these isolated high notes immediately connects this material to Section B, the only place in which this type of note displacement had occurred. Finally, what we have called “anti-climax” in our table (p. 5) appears at s. 47. After more than half way through the piece, always at a constant dynamic level between ffff and fffff, Ustvolskaya surprises the listener with this completely unexpected short sequence of delicate, contemplative chords pianissimo subito. After several minutes of increasing pianistic violence, this very special spot of placidness ends up being as breathtaking as the heaviest two-arm cluster. The enigmatic nature of such moment, highlighted—not weakened—by its fugacity, almost distracts us from the fact that these chords are simply a harmonized version of the m₃-theme from Section D (see the top notes of each chord). This is the formal reason that led us to group this passage under

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⁹ Note that s. 33 also has the indication Espressivissimo, just like Section A had at the beginning of the piece. Although the material C’ in s. 33 has nothing to do with the A that preceded B the first time, it seems to be suggested that this spot is a potential recapitulation moment, not only of Section B alone, but of its relationship to a preceding mass of clusters (A in the first time, C’ in the second time).
the same Section D’ in our scheme, even though it has the actual effect of a complete
rupture not only in relation to Section D’, but also in relation to the entire piece.

**Section A’: The “recapitulation”**

At this point, it must be noted that Section A itself did not have a developmental
counterpart in the same way that C and D had. For this reason, when A comes back as A’
at s. 48, it sounds more recapitulative than anything else. Such strong impression of
recapitulation is not lessened by the fact that the material is presented backwards. The
six original phrases (as shown in Fig. 1) are reversed, not note-by-note, but as phrase-
blocks. Thus what originally was a process of register expansion becomes now a process
of compression. The Tempo is slowed down (quarter note equals 92 in Section A, and 80
in Section A’), and the dynamic level goes back up (**fff**, one extra *f* in relation to the
beginning). After the reverse presentation of the initial material is over, a short coda
filters out intermediary notes and concentrates on main pitches Eb and B, curiously
ending the piece in a very cadential manner.

**Conclusions and speculations**

A few structural elements in Ustvolskaya’s Sixth Piano Sonata can be directly related
to aspects of classical sonata-form adapted to a non-tonal context. These are:

a) The clear expositional character of the first sections;

b) The duality represented by the opposition *cluster* (verticality) versus *line*
   (horizontality);

c) The existence of middle sections functioning as development of initial material;

d) The clear recapitulation by the end.

At the same time, other aspects go against a mechanistic understanding of the piece
as being “in” sonata-form:

a) Even those sections labeled as “exposition” contain various degrees of immediate
internal development of their material. In addition, there are verifiable relationships between different materials across expository sections. Thus, the very division between “exposition” and “development” has something artificial to it, although it is useful as a working hypothesis;

b) The binary opposition cluster vs. line does not crystallize itself in only two corresponding, opposed thematic groups; rather, this opposition is simultaneously present in three out of four thematic blocks that we identified as exposition;\(^{10}\)

c) There is no such thing as ‘reconciliation’ of contrasting elements in the recapitulation section, which recapitulates only one thematic material at the very end. The dialectic synthesis of opposing subjects is not present at all in Section A’. Rather, there is more a sense of cyclical form in the way the piece seems to return to the beginning.

But some driving elements at work in this piece may be obscured if we stop our analysis in the verification of its proximities and distances in relation to a historical pre-defined form. To conclude this paper, we would like to propose a possible connection between Galina Ustvolskaya’s personal style and the so-called school of Leningrad’s modernists from the 1920s. Such connection would be especially related to the concepts of linearism and of form as a process proposed by the Soviet musicologist and composer Boris Asafyev (1884-1949).

How can these ideas relate to Galina Ustvolskaya, who was born in 1919 and only entered the Conservatory in 1947, thus about two decades after the climax of the modernist movement in Leningrad?

A brief historical context is helpful at this point.

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\(^{10}\) That is, there are elements of both cluster and melodic line in Sections A, C and D. Section B is the only one that deals solely with one of these dimensions (the melodic one, without clusters).
Haas (1998) makes the case for the existence of a reasonably cohesive group of modernist musicians in the Leningrad of the twenties.\footnote{All the following information in this paragraph is taken from Haas (1998).} At the center of this group of modernists were the musicologist Boris Asafyev and the composers Vladimir Shcherbachyov, Gavriil Popov and, more independently, the young Dmitri Shostakovich. In 1925 Shcherbachyov became the head of the Composition Department in the Leningrad Conservatory; Asafyev became the head of the Musicology department. Up to that point, compositional teaching was dominated by Rimsky-Korsakov’s epigones. Students were submitted to three years of pure music theory involving harmony, counterpoint and form, and were not allowed to compose even simple exercises before the fourth year. The modernists saw this structure as a serious obstruction to the development of creativity and personal style in young composers. Based on numerous theoretical writings by Asafyev and on his own insights into teaching, Shcherbachyov was the mentor of polemic innovations in the Conservatory’s pedagogic system. Although he did not reject most of the content from the previous era, his system was considered way too radical at the time. This was especially due to the inclusion of composition in the very first year of studies, and the emphasis on the development of a student’s personal style without the constraints of pre-defined formal schemes. The theories of Asafyev and their diffusion through composition and pedagogy flourished in that short period between 1923-1929, and then started to suffer strong opposition by conservatives. Eventually the modernists lost their positions and relative prestige, and gradually submerged into obscurity after the beginning of the Stalinist era.

Ustvolskaya must have had contact with the ideas and the music of the early Leningrad modernists. Asafyev was still alive until 1949, and his last major book, Intonatsiya, was published in 1947. In spite of their marginalization, modernist composers such as Shcherbachyov and Popov remained active. And the fact that Ustvolskaya was a pupil of Shostakovich—and the two continued to be close friends for
several years—makes it almost impossible that she wouldn’t be familiar with the important musical events of twenty years earlier in her own city.

Two concepts from Asafyev’s theories—form as process and linearism—are suggestive in terms of a possible connection with Ustvolskaya’s music. Asafyev considered form as a ‘ceaseless coming-into-being’, a dialectic interaction between the creation and recreation of musical works in the minds of composers and listeners, respectively. Although favoring the idea of form as a process as opposed to pre-defined inherited schemas, Asafyev allowed some space for the possible coexistence of both:

Forms or musical structures are based on the development and elaboration of the given sound material moving within the boundaries determined by the material itself. The basis of musical motion is the resistance within the sound material, which is overcome by the human mind (...) But it is also possible to comprehend form as prepared models (schemas), according to which musical works are composed: The corresponding musical material is adapted to them (to the schemas or frames) and allotted to them.” [Asafyev apud Haas (1998), p. 64]

Ustvolskaya’s approach of the sonata-form idea can be seen as a combination of schema (adaptation of inherited frames) and process (freer movement based upon the evolving qualities of a given sonic material). The sense of an unbroken development in the Sixth Sonata, in spite of its clear sectionalization, comes out as a result of the emphasis on the processes to which the blocks are submitted. The sense of a nonstop increase of the energy levels throughout the piece, just to explode—or rather implode—into the sequence of pianissimo chords near the end, is another aspect of the slow accumulative process at work here. The directionality of musical processes is, in this case, particularly shaped by the image of a forward moving line—a sensation reinforced by the composer’s option of sticking to a constant pulse of quarter notes for almost the entire piece.

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12 There is an ongoing debate in the literature about their complex relationship and the reasons for its discontinuation later on. See Blois (1992).
13 Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into his thoughts in more detail; see Haas (1998) for a more comprehensive exploration of the theories and activities of Asafyev and his colleagues.
14 Or we might say: a slow forward moving “locomotive”. The association of Ustvolskaya’s music to the type of “machine music” such as Mosolov’s famous The Iron Foundry (1926-8) is not impossible. However, the urban-industrial subject is not present in Ustvolskaya’s music, at least not in that way. Moreover,
This leads us to the second of Asafyev’s concepts mentioned above: *linearism*. It is very hard to make justice to the breadth of his idea in just a few lines. Basically, according to Haas, “(...) Asafyev [in his explication of form as a process] gave particular attention to the role of the melodic line and melodic process and to the related concept of melos, polyphony, and the “linear” method of composing” (p. 70). Thus the horizontal aspect of musical composition, in a broad sense, comes to the fore as the motor of musical motion. The line, or the melos, in Asafyev’s sense, should be the main element responsible for engendering tension, release and impulse. He makes a clear distinction between the more rigid idea of “melody” and his more fluid perception of “melos”: the melos is to process as the melody is to schema. We could say that Ustvolskaya’s Sixth Sonata presents us a hybrid version of *melos-melody* as one of its main driving forces: at the same time that her lines are often compartimentalized and well-suited to visual schematic representations, they do manage to connect within and across formal blocks in a way that “linear and contour aspects of melody (...) are subjected to meaningful transformation, i.e., linearism”. It is essential to note that Ustvolskaya’s manipulation of the linear elements does not take place in the form of traditional melodic-thematic variations (changing individual pitches, intervals, rhythms etc), but rather she freezes contours across the piece to be able to subject them to transformations in density, register, timbral qualities, and phrase fragmentation.

In conclusion, we should say that our speculative association between Galina Ustvolskaya and the Leningrad’s modernists was made without access to all possible published sources on the matter, especially those in Russian and German languages. It is possible that this hypothesis has already been investigated elsewhere, with conclusions favorable or against that connection. To advance with this hypothesis, such study would need to include, for example: a) Information from basic sources to verify how much exposure she may actually have had to those modernist ideas, and how much she would

Mosolov was from Moscow and apparently had little ties with the type of modernism defended by the Leningraders. Like his other fellows, he was also censored and disappeared into obscurity after the thirties.
have assimilated or rejected them; b) A more thorough investigation of Ustvolskaya’s works (not just one piece), with analytical comments relating them to theory and practice of other Soviet composers, from the early modernists (as we have suggested here) to her contemporaries; and c) An evaluation of other aspects that seem unique to Ustvolskaya’s style and life, such as the non-institutional spirituality more recently manifested by the composer, and the nature of her relationship with the Soviet state, in practical terms, throughout her life.

Bruno Ruviaro, June 2005

REFERENCES


