

Foreword

Vladimir Jankelevitch begins his work on **Debussy** (Debussy et le mystère de l'instant - Published by Plon) by making the distinction between mystery and secret.

The secret, the principle behind esoteric societies, contains knowledge that should not be divulged; the code separates, and cryptography becomes a weapon in the struggle between forces which may or may not be deliberately esoteric.

Mystery, on the other hand, is beyond the rational. It is the shadowy area that is impenetrable to logic, and it may have the outward appearance of simplicity.

If we apply this distinction to the subject under study, there is no doubt that a significant part of contemporary music draws on codes and procedures that confer on it the appearance of a language for the initiated - codes that are in fact extended or contested by each successive creative wave.

However, it is legitimate to pose the question of whether these codes and procedures are not simply protected by the effort to be accomplished to assimilate them, or even to actuate them, for the border between the unknown and the unknowable is blurred, and all human manifestations that are of the nature of a message imply a technique.

For an example of the ambiguity attached to this distinction, we only have to take the case of Olivier Messiaen, a religious thinker steeped in the mystical, who founded his language on a tight fabric of mathematical properties and algorithms, from which he distances himself only by refusing abstract explanation.

Of course, the actuation of these relations and mechanisms reveals neither the fundamental choices behind them nor their implementation at metalanguage level.

It does, however, provide a better apprehension of the margin of unknowable inside of which creation effectively takes place. This holds for works of the past, which today we still have too much of a tendency to place entirely in the mystery zone.

The effort to be accomplished is considerable, but the expansion of nascent disciplines, a good number of which are related to the development of information technology, provides an arsenal of tools that are incomparable in scope to the rudimentary means of traditional analysis.

In addition, several contemporary composers, including Messiaen, have described the more or less intuitive use of these tools in their own way, even to the degree of consciously basing certain works on procedures that have now become formalised. Here, the distance between synthesis and analysis is reduced and may help us to advance. Formalism; there, the word is out; Iannis Xenakis already

underlined it in his book "musiques formelles (formal music)". Since the fact that all music has formal bases cannot be contested, I feel it would be useful to continue the efforts at clearance begun by several pioneers, quoted below.

This will perhaps contribute to re-mystifying music, since some of the "secrets of composition" in question will be brought into the public domain; however, I believe that the simple nature which Jankelevitch assigned to mystery is nothing more than the transition to the next level of complexity, for example, on the scale of macrostructures.

Let us not delude ourselves about the general nature of what follows; the efforts at actuation assembled here are still nothing more than isolated milestones on a vast territory, the exploration of which will, I hope, a lot of appetites, and even more regarding creation than concerning musicology.