

two pianos and percussion - 1998

Duration: 40'

Particules du jour - Umherliegende Objecten -
...in un instante ridivenute nebbia... - Cast a
cold eye...

This composition was started in 1994 and inspired by a famous etching by A. Dürer (1471-1528) of a greatly vexed winged genie meditating on the futility of human knowledge amidst the attributes of knowledge (symbolized by the sphere, dodecahedron, and compass). What do we know that's worthwhile, if nothing makes sense? If the only sure thing about our destiny, uncertain yet inescapable like time (sun dial, hourglass, bell), is its end (saw, plane, hammer, nails, Jacob's ladder), how can we grieve, since no science has solved the enigma of death?

Dürer's answer seems to be the Beauty of Proportions, pictured by the Number: "You shall be melancholy only if you are not initiates to what measures mystery." One does not have to share this conviction nor its apparent good health in order to be fascinated by all the clues that fill the drawing : divine proportions, golden number and the magic square. This one in particular holds one's attention:

16	3	2	13
5	10	11	8
9	6	7	12
4	15	14	1

This square, which uses the first sixteen numbers, can be studied for hours without exhausting its properties. For example, what is the sum of the numbers of a same line ? A same column ? The diagonals ? A small corner subsquare of four numbers ? The central subsquare ? It is always 34. This square governs many things in the composition: the harmony and structur in the first movement, the series of heights in the second one, the lenghts in the third, but nothing in the last one.

The work comprises four movements arranged following the classical sonata form. Its "tale" is that of matter that is alive at first, then reified, emptied out, and finally refilled. It is also the progressive implementation (like in an alchemical recipe) of various percussive materials: metals at first, wood next, and (tuned) skins over them. Beyond seemingly careless post-modernism, *Melancholia si...* is precisely an exercise in mourning focusing on a few past masters - say, in order of appearance, Scriabine, Berg,

Debussy and Bartok, and through them Beethoven: all this science one should be able to draw authority of, but which is nothing without what transcends it to justify it, and thus what cannot be captured. Wanting to encompass everything is getting rid of everything. That is the point in this Faustian monstrosity knowingly put to wrong use.

Particules du jour refers to the minuscule matter in suspension revealed by the close morning light, questioning our idea of emptiness. All dimensions of the movement are based on the proportions of the engraving and calculated after the numbers of the square. *Umherliegende Objecten* is an objectified musical matter in a post-serial type combinatory, a controversial temptation with a central episode highlighting Dürarian death noises such as the hammer, cross, planes, etc. ...*in un instante ridivenute nebbia...* is a part of a sentence from *Emptiness and Shapes* by Guidacci, which ends with these words: *Il vuoto si difende. Non vuole che una forma lo torturi.* (Emptiness defends itself. It does not want a shape to torture it). Emptiness that does not let itself be tortured by a shape is indeed what the third movement seeks to accomplish. *Cast a cold eye...* is the incipit of Yeats' epitaph.

Jean-Luc Fafchamps