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Musical Analysis of *Regard de l'Onction Terrible* by Olivier Messiaen: Context, Symbolism, Form and Performance

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Abstract:: This article addresses the work *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (Twenty Contemplations of the Infant Jesus) by Olivier Messiaen with a focus on its eighteenth piece, *Regard de l'Oction terrible*. Our primary objective was a musical analysis of the piece by contextualizing the symbolic references engaged in its composition, form, and aspects of performance through a careful study of the score, both textually and at the piano. To that end, we use the thoughts and reflections of the composer himself (MESSIAEN, 1944, 1947, 1995, 1994) in interlocution with the studies of musicologist Siglind Bruhn (1997, 2007), with aspects of contour theory as presented by Joseph Straus (2005), and with the disparate considerations in respect to its form published by Messiaen scholars Reverdy (1978), Rogosin, (1996), Bruhn (1997), and Healey (2013). In conclusion, we identify symmetry as a striking element of the piece within the scope of its form, structure, and symbolism.

Keywords: Olivier Messiaen; musical analysis; musical performance; twentieth-century music; *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*.

Análise musical de *Regard de l'Onction terrible*, de Olivier Messiaen: contexto, simbologia, forma e performance

Resumo: Este artigo aborda a obra *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*, de Olivier Messiaen, com foco em sua décima oitava peça, *Regard de l'Onction terrible*. Nosso objetivo principal é realizar uma análise musical da peça, contextualizando-a através de referências ao simbolismo que envolve sua composição, à forma e a aspectos da performance, com base em nosso estudo atento da partitura, tanto ao piano como textualmente. Para tanto, utilizamos considerações do próprio compositor (MESSIAEN, 1944, 1947, 1995, 1994) em interlocução com os estudos da musicóloga Siglind Bruhn (1997, 2007), com a Teoria do Contorno apresentada por Straus (2005), e com as considerações díspares anteriormente publicadas a respeito de sua forma, propostas por Reverdy (1978), Rogosin, (1996), Bruhn (1997) e Healey (2013). Na conclusão, destacamos a simetria como um elemento marcante da peça, nos âmbitos formal, estrutural e simbólico.

Palavras-chave: Olivier Messiaen. Análise musical. Performance musical. Música do século XX. *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jésus*.

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Regard de l'Onction terrible is the eighteenth piece of the work *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus*[1] owing its origins to Henry Barraud, then director of Radio France, who invited writer Maurice Toesca and composer Olivier Messiaen to produce a radio Christmas program. From January 4, 1944, Messiaen had been in contact with Toesca to collaborate on the presentation that would include Nativity poems by Toesca and twelve small pieces by Messiaen. By September 8, 1944, Messiaen completed his greatest composition ever, *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus* for piano, that was dedicated to the pianist Yvonne Loriod (MOREIRA, 2008: 88). Once the project was finished, Henry Barraud told Messiaen that a solo piano piece was not suitable for the occasion. Thus, *Vingt regards...* was "born" from a project having specific theological aims that did not come to fruition. Its public debut took place on December 19, 1944, at the Paris Conservatory with Yvonne Loriod at the piano and Olivier Messiaen providing spoken commentaries for each piece (BRUHN, 2007: 141-144, FORMAN, 2007: 13-17).

The fact that the work had originally been composed to include textual narration may have induced Messiaen to include the commentaries at the premiere. Bernard Gavoty who, under the pseudonym "Clarendon", published an unfavorable critique of Messiaen's choice of approach in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro*. This was the first of a series of critiques, both favorable and unfavorable, published over the next two years that came to be known as "Le Cas Messiaen"[2] (HILL, SIMEONE, 2005: 144-162, SHENTON, 2008: 45; MOREIRA, 2008: 137).

Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus: symbolism and form

Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus is full of theological content made explicit by Messiaen not only in the title of the work, but also in its preface. Religious inspiration came from a variety of sources, such as theological texts by St. Thomas Aquinas, Dom Columba Marmion, Maurice Toesca[3], Ernest Hello, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, the Roman

[1] *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant'Jésus* (1944) is composed of the following pieces: I. *Regard du Pére* ("Contemplation of the Father); II. *Regard de l'Étoile* (Contemplation of the Star); III. *L'échange* (The exchange); IV. *Regard de la Vierge* (Contemplation of the Virgin); V. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils* (Contemplation of the Son upon the Son); VI. *Par Lui tout a été fait* (Through Him everything was made); VII. *Regard de la Croix* (Contemplation of the Cross); VIII. *Regard des hauteurs* (Contemplation of the heights); IX. *Regard du temps* (Contemplation of time); X. *Regard de l'Esprit de joie* (Contemplation of the Spirit of Joy); X1. *Première communion de la Vierge* (The Virgin's first communion); XI1. *La parole toute puissante* (The all-powerful word); XIII. *Noël* (Christmas); XIV. *Regard des Anges* (Contemplation of the Angels); XV. *Le baiser de l'Énfant'Jésus* (The kiss of the Infant Jesus); XV1. *Regard des prophètes, des bergers et des Mages* (Contemplation of the prophets, the shepherds and the Magi) XVI1. *Regard du silence* (Contemplation of silence); **XVIII. *Regard de l'Onction terrible*** (Contemplation of the awesome Anointing); XIX. *Je dors, mais mon coeur veille* (I sleep, but my heart keeps watch); XX. *Regard de l'Église d'amour* (Contemplation of the Church of love).

[2] We believe that Le Cas Messiaen may have influenced Messiaen's change in position with regard to the use of explicit theological references in his works, which can be identified in his works composed during what Pierre Boulez (1985:346) considers an experimental period that comprises the years 1946 to 1952.

[3] In regards to the author Maurice Toesca, he comments that they practically worked independently on the Radio France project that was supposed to be presented together and that at least eleven of the twenty musical pieces of *Vingt regards...* had already been composed before Messiaen had access to the Toesca's writings. Therefore, the author's primary influence is mainly the original commission of the work.

Missal and the Gospel, as well as images from artworks, such as paintings, engravings and tapestries[4] (MESSIAEN, 1947. JOHNSON, 1975. BRUHN, 2007. FORMAN, 2007).

Siglind Bruhn (2007: 129-144) details the main sources of inspiration from works by Columba Marmion, Ernest Hello and Maurice Toesca. Columba Marmion is recognized by Bruhn as *Vingt regards'* most important resource for theological content, specifically the work *Le Christ dans ses mystères* [Christ in His Mysteries], which contains three parts and twenty sub-parts within a palindromic structure. Bruhn sustains that other influences of Marmion's work can also be found in works for organ by Messiaen e.g., *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1935) *and Le Livre du Saint Sacrement* (1984). From works by Ernest Hello, Bruhn identifies the specific idea of "drunkenness" caused by the Holy Spirit and is used by Messiaen in the title of the tenth piece *Regard de l'Esprit de joie*.

> What others promise without delivering, what humans seek unto furor, bloodshed, and delirium, the Holy Spirit gives. It gives drunkenness, drunkenness without regret, drunkenness that fills instead of making empty, that enriches instead of destroying, that nourishes instead of killing [...] It is the supreme, the most intense, and the most ardent activity of the soul. This drunkenness does not lie but teaches the truth that is above all common truths (HELLO apud BRHUN, 2007: 140).

Messiaen describes the extra-musical and symbolic idea that permeates the work as being contemplations on the birth of the baby Jesus and "contemplations", "adorations" (*regards*) about him (MESSIAEN, 1947: i, MESSIAEN, 1995: 438)

Siglind Bruhn (2007: 145) discusses the symbolic characteristics of the titles of each of the twenty pieces, separating those that refer to "looks" from those that turn to principles of the Christian faith, as well as others that based on aspects of the manifold nature of the Holy Trinity. According to Messiaen (1947: i), six pieces address the "looks" of theological entities (the Father, the Virgin, angels, prophets, shepherds and the Magi), and six others on the "looks" of "immaterial or symbolic creatures" (time, silence, the heights, the awesome anointing, the star and the cross). *Regard de l'Église d'amour* and *Regard de l'Esprit de joie* hold an intermediate position among the pieces mentioned above, and *L'échange* and *Regard du Fils sur le Fils* address the duplicity of God as Father and Son. Six pieces do not suggest "looks upon the boy Jesus", but principles of the Christian faith, such as divinity and the power of creation (*Par Lui tout a été fait* and *La parole toute-puissant*), the miraculous birth of Jesus (*Première communion de la Vierge* e *Noël*) and the love of the newborn Christ for humanity who came to redeem (*Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jesus* and *Je dors, mais mon coeur veille)*.

The work's writing for piano was certainly influenced by Messiaen's admiration for Yvonne Loriod as a pianist, as perceived in the following passage from an interview by Claude Samuel with the composer:

[4] In the preface of *Vingt regards...*, Messiaen specifies the main motivators of the composition as *Le Christ dans ses Mystères* by Dom Columba Marmion and *Les douze Regard*s by Maurice Toesca (MESSIAEN, 1947: I-III). Detailed information on references for each piece of the *Vingt regards...* can be found in the preface to the work (MESSIAEN, 1947: I-III) as well as in Volume II of the *Traité* ... (MESSIAEN, 1995).

> [...] I'll never have the transcendent virtuosity and the absolutely amazing technical facility of Yvonne Lorriod. […] It's obvious that while writing *Vingt regards* or *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, I knew they would be played by Yvonne Loriod; I was therefore able to allow myself the greatest eccentricities because for her, anything is possible (SAMUEL; MESSIAEN, 1994:113-114).

The use of cyclical themes in the composition suggests an inheritance of nineteenth-century music, more specifically from works by Berlioz, Liszt, Schumann, César Franck and D'Indy (JOHNSON, 1975: 42. LEE, 1992: 40-41). However, in *Vingt regards...,* these themes have a more symbolic than descriptive function. Besides having a specific theme for each piece, four cyclical themes pervade throughout work: (1) Theme of God (*Thème de Dieu*), (2) Theme of mystical love (*Thème de l'amour mystique*), (3) Theme of the Star and of the Cross (*Thème de l'Étoile et de la Croix*), and the (4) Theme of chords (*Thème d'accords*) (MESSIAEN, 1995: 438)[5].

The Theme of God (*Thème de Dieu*) appears in the three pieces dedicated to the three theological entities of the Holy Trinity (*Regard du Père*, *Regard du Fils sur le Fils*, *Regard de l'Esprit joie*); it is present in *Par Lui tout a été fait* (since Creation is attributed to the Word, without which nothing was done); it is in *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jesus* and *Première communion de la Vierge* (since the Virgin carried Jesus in her womb); and, finally it is enlarged in *Regard d'Église d'amour* (symbolizing the Church and all believers as the body of Christ). The Theme of mystic love (*Thème de l'amour mystique*) is in *Par lui tuit a été fait*, *Je dors mais mon coeur veille*, *Regard d'église d'amour*. The star and the cross share the same theme (*Thème de l'Étoile et de la Croix*), symbolizing the beginning and end of Jesus' earthly stay (*Regard de l'Étoile* and *Regard de la Croix*). The Theme of chords (*Thème d'accords*) is the piece that undergoes the most variation during the course of the work. It appears "fractioned, concentrated, enveloped with resonances, combined with itself, with changes of rhythm and register, transformed, transmuted from all forms"[6] (MESSIAEN, 1995: 438, our translation).

In Fig. 1, we present the four themes that pervade the work. The first three–the Theme of God, the Theme of the Star and the Cross and the Theme of chords–are listed in the order presented in the preface to the work by Messiaen. The Theme of mystical love has four very distinct configurations, appearing in *Par Lui tuit a été fait*, *Je dors mais mon coeur veille*, and *Regard d'Église d'amour*, varying significantly in the first, third and fourth versions. In the second version (in *Par Lui tuit a été fait*, page 43, 3rd system, m. 2), it plays the role of an *ostinato* and is portrayed only once.

[5] In the preface to the work, Messiaen (1947: I) only refers to three themes: the Theme of God, the Theme of the Star and the Cross, and the Theme of chords. However, in a section of volume II of the *Traité* ... (MESSIAEN, 1995: 438), which is devoted to the analysis of *Vingt regards* ..., and had been a subject of a lecture during a course taught by Messiaen at the Musikhochschule in Saarbrücken in 1954, the composer makes reference to four themes, having added the Theme of mystical love. This analysis was included in the edition of *Traité* ... by Loriod, who realized it was important to publish it. However, according to Rogosin (1996: 210), Messiaen only writes on the Theme of mystical love for the first time during a recording of *Vingt regards* ... by Michel Béroff in 1969 which was marketed in 1970.

[6] "[...] l'abstrait comme une série, mais bien concret et très aisément reconnaissable par ses couleurs: un gris bleu d'acier traversé de rouge et d'orangé vif, un violet mauvre taché de brun cuir et cerclé de pourpre violacée" (MESSIAEN, 1995: 438).

In her doctoral thesis, Adriana Lopes Moreira (2008) ascertains the main characteristics of the formation of each theme by use of set theory and melodic contour theory analysis techniques, especially highlighting, from this perspective:

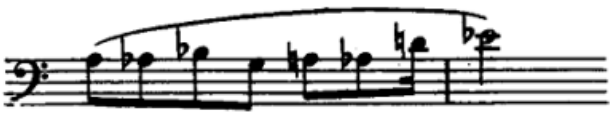
> [...] the versatility of the *Theme of God* because it is composed of triads and a tetrachord with all of its intervals organized on the octatonic scale. The *Theme of mystical love* and the *Theme of chords* provide great pitch diversity due to the collection of chromatic reference. We emphasize the expansive aspects resulting from the contrary movement present in the conductive voices of the *Theme of the chords*. The contour of the *Theme of the Star and the Cross* includes the *chromatic formula that returns* (MESSIAEN, 1944a: 23), where the movement of an ascending 2M is compensated by a descending 2M and vice versa, or that of an ascending 2M is compensated by a descending 2M and vice versa – in this case, <213> <021> (MOREIRA, 2008: 90-91).

(a)



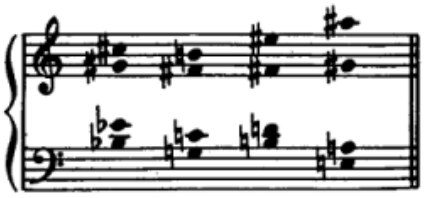
Theme of God
(*Thème de Dieu*)

(b)



Theme of the Star and the Cross
(Thème de l'Étoile et de la Croix)

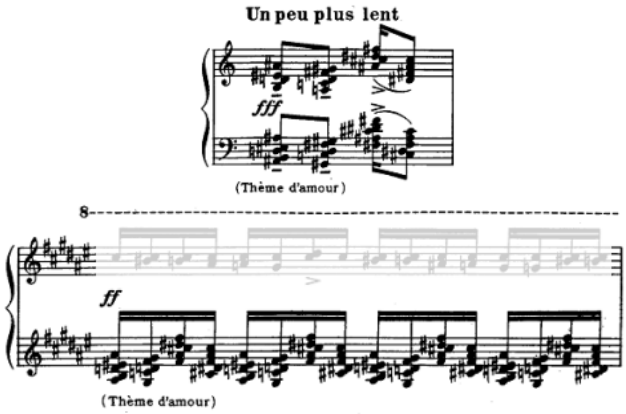
(c)



Theme of chords
(*Thème d'accords*)

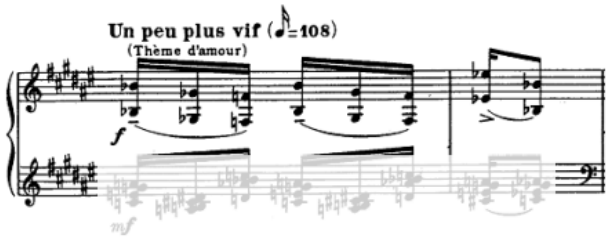
Fig. 1: The four themes pervading *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* by Messiaen.

(d)



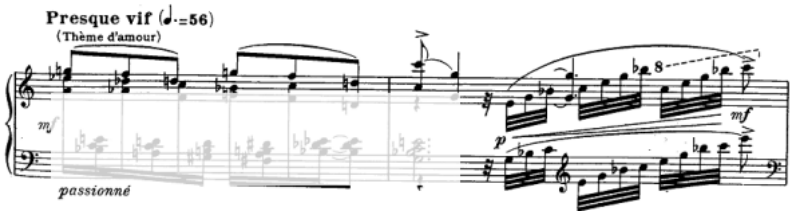
Theme of mystic love
(Thème de l'amour mystique)
Par Lui tuit a été fait
(p. 39, 5the system, m. 1 and p. 43, 3rd system, m. 2)

(e)



Theme of mystic love
(Thème de l'amour mystique)
Je dors mais mon coeur veille
(p. 153, 4th system, m. 1-2)

(e)



Theme of mystic love
(Thème de l'amour mystique)
Regard d'Église d'amour
(p. 161, 5th system, mm. 1-2)

Fig. 1: The four themes pervading *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* by Messiaen (cont.).

Messiaen took care to number the pieces taking into account time constraints, intensity, color and symbolism. For example, the number five is linked to pieces that deal with the Divinity (every fifth piece)–1. *Regard du Père*; V. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils*; X. *Regard de l'Esprit de joie*; XV. *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jesus*; XX. *Regard de l'Église d'amour*. The number seven, the number of perfection, is assigned to *Regard de la Croix*, which symbolizes the sufferings of

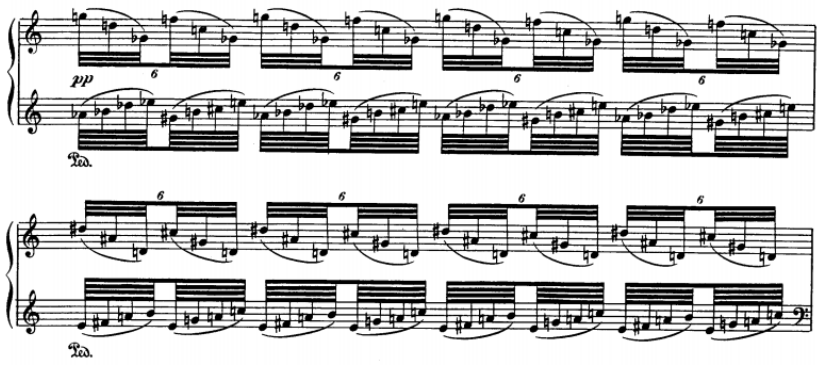
Christ on the cross for the redemption of man's sins. XIV (2 times 7) is attributed to *Regard des Anges*, "beings confirmed in grace." The number nine is given to *Regard du Temps*, symbolizing the nine-month gestation period required for the birth of the Eternal One. The number eighteen (2 times 9) is assigned to *Regard de l'Onction terrible*, which represents Divinity personified in Christ, the son of God, symbolizing incarnation and birth. The numbers six (the number of days God created the world) and twelve (2 times 6) are given to *Par Lui tout a été fait* and *La Parole toute puissante* respectively, symbolizing the creation and the divine government over all things (MESSIAEN, 1995: 438).

Hill and Simeone suggest that the *Vingt regards ...* are formed as a great theoretical rondo, where "refrains" are characterized by the pieces pertaining to the Theme of God, which appears in God the Father and Son (I and V), The Holy Spirit (VI and X), the Nativity (XI and XV) and the Church (XX). The authors suggest that these seven pieces are intercalated by the remaining pieces (II to IV, VII to IX, XII to IVX and XVI to XIX). These authors consider the work's climax as being *Regard de l'Onction terrible* (XVIII), which symbolizes Christ's coronation (HILL; SIMEONE, 2005: 133-40).

Bruhn (2007) considers V. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils* and XX. *Regard de l'Église d'amour* as variations of piece I. *Regard du Père* and suggests a "sonata allegro" form with exposition, development, contrasting passages and synthesis. According to Bruhn, understanding this form is complex because the development sections and contrasting passages do not occur one after the other, but are regularly intercalated; and the synthesis section is not only presented at the end, but in two pieces that "frame" the development and contrasting sections. Thus, according to Bruhn, piece I opens the exposition section and piece V closes it, while piece XX finalizes the three intercalated sections (development, contrasting passages and synthesis). However, there are two macro-sections of unequal size and duration (macro-section I: pieces I-V; and macro-section II: pieces VI-XX). Consequently, Bruhn has presented an interesting analysis of the work that does not occur in chronological order, but in order of the spiritual content presented in the first five pieces and then, according to him, is developed in the pieces to follow–namely, Messiaen's thoughts on his faith in general and on the incarnation in particular (BRUHN, 2007: 145-276).

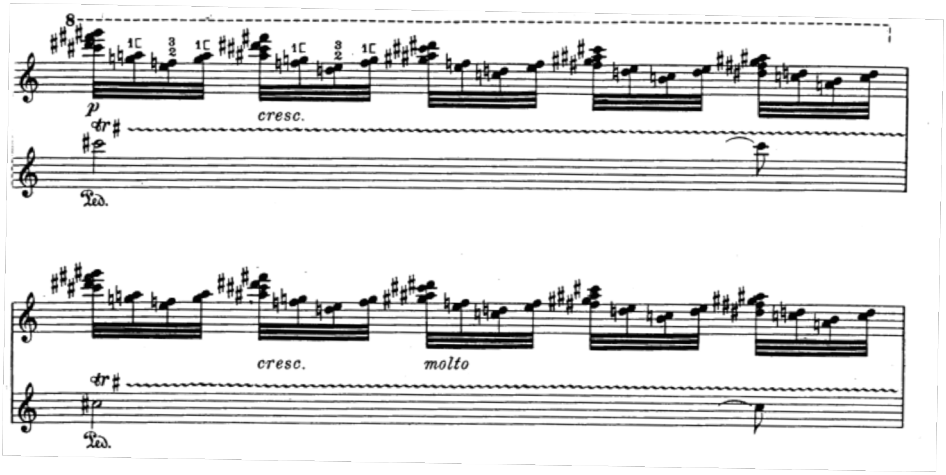
Apart from all its symbolic content, *Vingt regards ...* presents a few compositional devises that Messiaen considers "idiomatic" , like passages in contrary motion where both hands play slightly misaligned arpeggios (an effect largely used by harpists in forte passages, but rare in the piano repertoire); attacks with the four long fingers, where the thumb is used as a pivot (for example, at the end of the tenth piece, *Regard de l'Esprit de joie*); the simultaneous playing of the high and low extremes of the piano keyboard, not only for softer effects, but also for stronger, contrasting effects; and using a combination of *accelerando* and *rallentando* (XVIII. *Regard de l'Onction terrible*), a rare effect, according to Messiaen, and inspired by the music of Bali (SAMUEL; MESSIAEN, 1994: 113-116, 139-140) (Fig. 2).

(a)



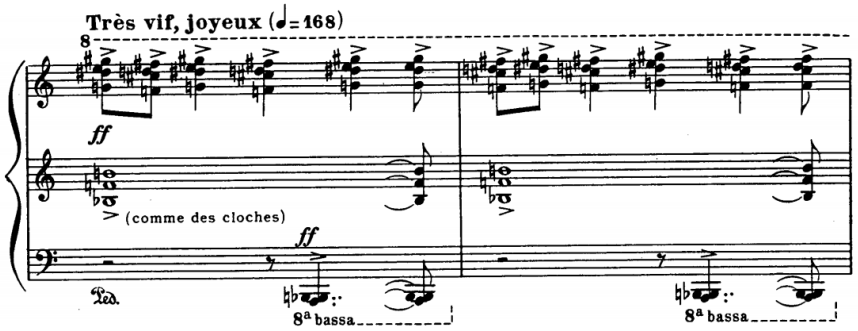
An example of passages in contrary motion with both hands playing slightly misaligned arpeggios in the seventeenth piece, *Regard du silence* (mm. 38-39).

(b)



An example of attacks with the four long fingers, where the thumb acts as a pivot (end of the tenth piece, *Regard de l'Esprit de joie*).

(c)



An example of simultaneous playing of the high and low extremes of the piano keyboard, not only for soft effect, but also for strong, contrasting effects in the thirteenth piece, *Noël* (mm. 1-2).

Fig. 2: Musical examples of "idiomatic" techniques found in *Vingt regards ...*, by Messiaen[7].

[7] The example of combining *accelerando* and *rallentando* was not included in this example since it will be discussed in more detail later.

Regard de l'Oction terrible

Symbolism. Messiaen relates the following introductory text to the eighteenth piece, *Regard de l'Oction terrible*:

> The word assumes a definite human form: the choice of the flesh of Jesus by the awesome Majesty...
> - An old tapestry depicts the Word of God at war under the guise of Christ on horseback; only his two hands are seen brandishing a sword amongst thunderbolts. This image influenced me. The Introduction and Coda have progressively decelerating values superimposed on progressively accelerating values and vice versa.[8] (MESSIAEN, 1947: III, our translation).

From Messiaen's text, several authors wrote about this symbolism and its supposed musical meaning, among which we highlight Franciso Ciscar (2004) and Siglind Bruhn (1997, 2007).

Ciscar (2004: 65) suggests that the phrase "the word assumes a definite human form" is represented in the first Section of the piece where the upper staff "transforms" into the lower staff by using non-retrogradable rhythm. The following phrase, "... the choice of the flesh of Jesus by the awesome Majesty" is represented in the middle Sections that have the mood indication *Solennel plus un peu vif* (Solemn, but slightly alive), a repetitive Section with several transpositions of the musical material that, according to the Ciscar, demonstrates the search for the choice of the flesh of Jesus. This choice occurs in the last Section of the piece, in which the "human nature transforms into the Word of God," a process represented by the inversion relationship between the first and last Section of the piece.

Bruhn (2007: 249-250) conducted a systematic study on the main Christian tapestries, having discovered–later confirmed by Yvonne Loriod–that the tapestry Messiaen mentions was the *Le Christ à cheval poursuit les bêtes* (Christ on horseback chases the beasts), cataloged as number 69 of a cycle of tapestries known as *L'Apocalypse d'Angers* (Fig. 3).

Bruhn (2007: 250) points out that each of the tapestries of the cycle *L'Apocalypse d'Angers* are related to a biblical text and, in the case of the tapestry presented above, the text refers to Revelation 19:11-14 in regards to John's vision of the end time:

> And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean (THE HOLY BIBLE, Revelation 19:11-14).

[8] "Le verbe assume une certaine nature humaine: choix de la chair de Jésus par la Majesté épouvantable...
- Une vieille tapisserie représente le Verbe de Dieu en lutte sous les traits du Christ à cheval on ne voit que ses deux mains sur la garde de épée qu'il brandit au milieu des éclairs. Cette image m'a influencé. - Dans l'Introduction et la Coda, valeurs progressivement ralenties superposées aux valeurs progressivement accélerées et inversement" (MESSIAEN, 1947: III).



Fig. 3: *Le Christ à cheval poursuit les bêtes* (Christ on horseback chases the beasts), no. 69 of the cycle of tapestries known as *L'Apocalypse d'Angers*. Photo by Rémi Jouan (14TH CENTURY ILLUSTRATIONS).

It is interesting to call attention to Bruhn's (2007) reading of the piece based on his knowledge of this text. Bruhn considers the initial and final Sections as derivations of those appearing in XVI. *Regard des prophètes, des berges et des Mages*, and which represent the prophets and/or prophecies, and in *Regard de l'Onction terrible* this relationship extends to John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus three years before his death, and also to John of Patmos.

> The internal relation between the two pieces, then, is one between three prophecies: one from times past, fulfilled in the birth at Bethlehem; a second, born in the moment of Jesus' baptism and confirming his earthly mission; and a third, anticipating the end of his mortal life and pointing into the future (BRUHN, 2007: 244).

Bruhn (2007: 250-253) points out that the two Sections (beginning and end) of the eighteenth piece have dynamic developments that point to the future, the first symbolizing the moment after the baptism of Jesus and the last the moment after his death. The central Section, on the other hand, represents the apocalyptical imagery of the tapestry: "Christ on horseback chasing beasts," which is replete with chords made up perfect octaves and fifths–intervals that Bruhn identifies as being emblematic to the divine majesty in the tradition of musical rhetoric–as well as of figurative passages that Messiaen alludes to in the written introduction of the piece: "you

can only see two hands on the hilt of a sword, which is brandished in the midst of thunderbolts" (*comme la foudre*).

Bruhn (1997: 310; 2007) also discusses the word "anointing" (*l'Onction*) referring to two other moments in which it appears in the story of Jesus: with Mary Magdalene anointing his feet before his crucifixion and at the moment of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, when Jesus would begin his ministry, designating John the Baptist as the "anointed one" for this task. According to Bruhn, what Messiaen may be suggesting with his "striking texture of juxtaposition of upward acceleration and downward deceleration is the prophecy told by John the Baptist: He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease" (THE HOLY BIBLE, John 3:30, KJV).

We consider the idea proposed by Ciscar enlightening, but it denotes an unawareness of the aforementioned tapestry and its related biblical text. Bruhn is more consistent, especially when relating to Messiaen's references of the tapestry included in the preface of the work. In summary, we consider the opening of the piece as the moment of baptism when Jesus prepares for the next three years of his earthly life, the middle Section as the struggles faced by Jesus on earth and also the fight against the beasts at the end of times represented by the tapestry, and the closing of the piece as representing the moment of death and the ascension of Jesus; the transformation of his carnal nature into spirit.

Form. In our research, we came across different approaches in regards to the form of *Regard de l'Onction terrible*. Healy (2013: 118-119) classifies it as a non-retrogadable form, Reverdy (1978: 54) defines it as an ABA ternary form, Rogosin (1996: 139) classifies it as a more elaborate sectional form and suggests an Xab ABAC ABAC Xba structure, and finally Bruhn (1997: 314) categorizes it as a rondo form that alternates refrains and episodes.

bars 1	20	23	38	53	68	83	98	113	128	143	158	178	180
frame	transi-	R	R^m		R_4		R_8		R	R^m		transi-	frame
(open)	tion			E1		E2		$E1_8$			$E2_8$	tion	(close)

Fig. 4: Formal structure suggested by Siglind Bruhn (1997: 314), where Rm refers to the refrain with mirrored elements, R4, a refrain transposed in 4 semitones and R8, a refrain transposed to 8 semitones.

However, our idea in regards to the form of this piece diverges partially from each one of these proposals. It differs from Bruhn (Fig. 4) since we consider the musical material of the sections that Bruhn classifies as a refrain and episodes, too similar to be ignored. We agree in part with Healey, in regards to his idea of non-retrogradability as an allusion, but since the middle sections are not mirrored, this relationship is not structural. Rogosin's suggestion is quite clear, but in our view, does not explore the inner content of the middle section, which is rich in detail and full of interrelationships.

Our approach is based on a three-scale segmentation (small, medium, and large) of the musical material. Table 1 presents the resulting form of our analysis:

OPENING (1-22)	**X** (1-19)			**Connection 1** (20)		**Y** (21-22)	
MIDDLE SECTION (23-177)	**Middle sub-section S**	**Part 1**	**A** (23-37)	**1 2** (23/ 24-25)	**1.1 2** (26-27/ 28-29)	**1.2 3** (30-31/ 32-34)	**1.3 4** (35-36/ 37)
			A' (38-52)	**1 2** (38/ 39-40)	**1.1 2** (41-42/ 43-44)	**1.2* 3*** (45-46/ 47-49)	**1.3* 4*** (50-51/ 52)
			B (53-62)	**1.4 5** (53/ 54-56)		**1.5 5*** (57-59/ 60-62)	
			Transition 1 (63-67)	**1.2* 1.6** (63-64/ 65-67)			
		Part 2	**A (T4)** (68-82)	**1* 2** (68/ 69-70)	**1.1* 2** (71-72/ 73-74)	**1.2* 3*** (75-76/ 77-79)	**1.3* 4*** (80-81/ 82)
			C (83-90)	**1.3* 6** (83-84/ 85-86)		**1.3* 6*** (87-88/ 89-90)	
			Transition 2 (91-97)	**Dense chords section** (91-95)		**1* 7** (96/ 97)	
	Middle sub-section S'	**Excerpt of Part 1**	**A (T8)** (98-112)	**1* 2** (98/ 99-100)	**1.1* 2** (101-102/ 103-104)	**1.2* 3*** (105-106/ 107-109)	**1.3* 4*** (110-111/ 112)
			B – T8 e T4 (113-122)	**1.4* 5*** (113/ 114-116)		**1.5* 5*** (117-119/ 120-122)	
			Transition 1 (T8) (123-127)	**1.2* 1.6*** (123-124/ 125-127)			
		Parts 1 and 2	**A (T12)** (128-142)	**1* 2** (128/ 129-130)	**1.1* 2** (131-132/ 133-134)	**1.2* 3** (135-136/ 137-139)	**1.3* 4** (140-141/ 142)
			A' (T12) (143-157)	**1* 2** (143/ 144-145)	**1.1* 2** (146-147/ 148-149)	**1.2* 3*** (150-151/ 152-154)	**1.3* 4*** (155-156/ 157)
			C (T8) (158-166)	**1.3* 6*** (158-159/ 160-161)		**1.3* 6*** (162-123/ 164-165)	
			T Transition 2 (T9 with extension) (166-177)	**Dense chords section** (166-171)	**1* 7*** (172/ 173)	**1* 7*** (174/ 175)	**1* 7*** (176/ 177)
CLOSING (178-198)	**Y'** (178)			**Connection 1'** (179)		**X'** (180-198)	

Tab. 1: Form of the piece *Regard de l'Onction terrible*. Bold numbers indicate the material analyzed; measure numbers are in parentheses. In the middle section, A' indicates the same musical material used for A, except mirrored. The labels T4, T8, T9 and T12 indicate transpositions. In the opening and closing Sections, X represents the material of chords by chromatically juxtaposed fourths and Y represents the material with *arpeggios* in contrary and centripetal movement.

The piece has a general three-part form, consisting of an opening Section (formed by retrograde material in relation to the left- and right-hand parts), a central section divided into two sub-sections (sub-section S and sub-section S') and a closing section (formed by an inversion of the initial material). In our study, we initially considered the possibility of naming the initial and final sections as Introduction and Coda, in the manner by which Messiaen refers to them. However, we consider that different names – "introduction" and "coda" – suggest distinct and specific functions and materials, and in this case, Messiaen uses the same material in both sections. Furthermore, the term "coda" carries a historical significance related to harmony that does not fit within the context of this piece. Thus, in light of the tapestry *L'Apocalypse d'Angers,* which inspired the composition of this piece, we realized that using the same material for both parts provides a "frame" to the piece. For this reason, we prefer to define the form as having an opening section, middle section and closing section in an attempt to establish a certain parallel with the delimitation created by the frame, which opens and closes the image during an artistic appreciation.

Each of the S and S' sub-sections is subdivided into two parts, 1 and 2. These parts comprise long phrases called A, B, C and transitional phrases that, in their turn, are characterized by the recurrence of semi-phrases, which have two-part material that can be treated as antecedent and consequent. Consequents are characterized by the multiplicity of generating materials and by the near absence of variations (in Table 3, consequences are numbered from 2 to 7). The material of the antecedent in turn, suffers many variations, but its essence is easily identified. In Table 1, this material is represented by the number 1 and its variations by 1.1, 1.2 etc.

Fig. 5 shows the first semi-phrase (mm. 23-25) contained in phrase A (mm. 23-37), in which we highlight the antecedent material (m. 23) and consequent (m. 24-25).

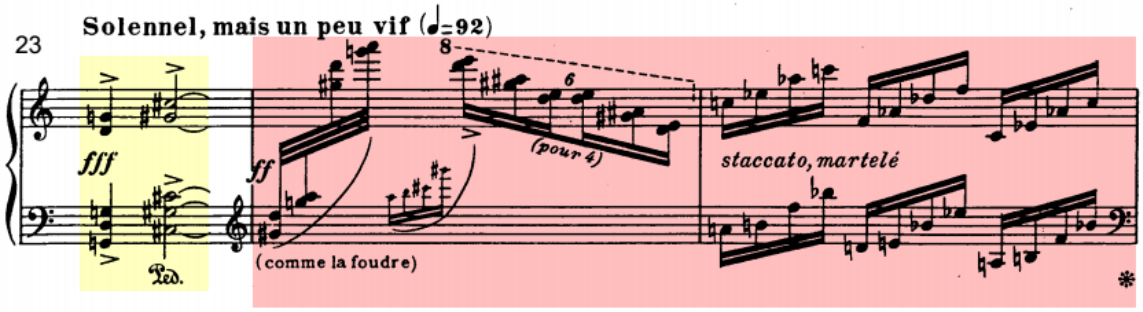


Fig. 5: In yellow, an example of antecedent material (m. 23) and, in pink, an example of consequent material (mm. 24-25).

This constant opposition between disparate materials that characterizes the middle section is characteristic of the musical language of Messiaen who uses juxtaposition as a compositional procedure (GUIGUE, 2011: 169-170). However, looking forward, when we approach the subject of "Pianistic writing and projection" we point out that there is phraseological linearity in the construction of the middle section.

Our Table 1 very much resembles the segmentations of Rogosin (1996) and Bruhn (1997), but our differential is in considering the segmented parts as large phrases and not sections, because, when guided by listening, we notice the continuity of musical materials and piano writing. In this way, what we name as A, B, C and transitions are actually long phrases having common thematic material that make up the piece. In addition, we include the details of semi-phrases in the table and do not regard the form as a rondo.

When referring to *Vingt regards...* as a whole, we see from the above discussion that Messiaen emphasizes some innovative features, among which we highlight those found in *Regard de l'Onction terrible*: the use of *arpeggios* in contrary motion (MESSIAEN, SAMUEL, 1994: 115-116) and a special permutation process that the composer defines as inversion (*interversion*) (Fig. 11) (MESSIAEN, 1996: 319-320):

> The whole piece is a powerful brass chorale, animated by the flashes of lightning. In the Introduction: values that that form a progressive "rallentando" superimposed on values that form a progressive "accelerando", in two chromatic scales of duration, crescendo molto, in convergent [contrary] motion. In the Coda: values that form a progressive "accelerando" superimposed on values that form a progressive "rallentando", while two chromatic scales of duration, crescendo molto, in divergent [contrary] motion[9] (MESSIAEN, 1995: 491-492, our translation).

From this quote, we can relate the symbolism to which Messiaen refers to the nomenclature employed in Table 1, with the "mighty brass chorale" referring to the antecedent material (with its "hard" chords in blocks of fifths) and the "flashes of lightning" referring to the consequent material (with its arpeggios under the indication "comme la foudre" – like lightening) (cf. Fig. 5). In the opening Section, the inversion process involves a grouping of 16 durations organized in increasing order of magnitude in the upper layer and decreasing order in the lower. In the closing section, there is an exchange of these layers–so that the upper voice in the closing constitutes an inversion of the upper voice in the opening. Thus, non-retrogradability is present not only in each inversion individually (Fig. 6), but between the two sections, also constituting timbristic mirroring.

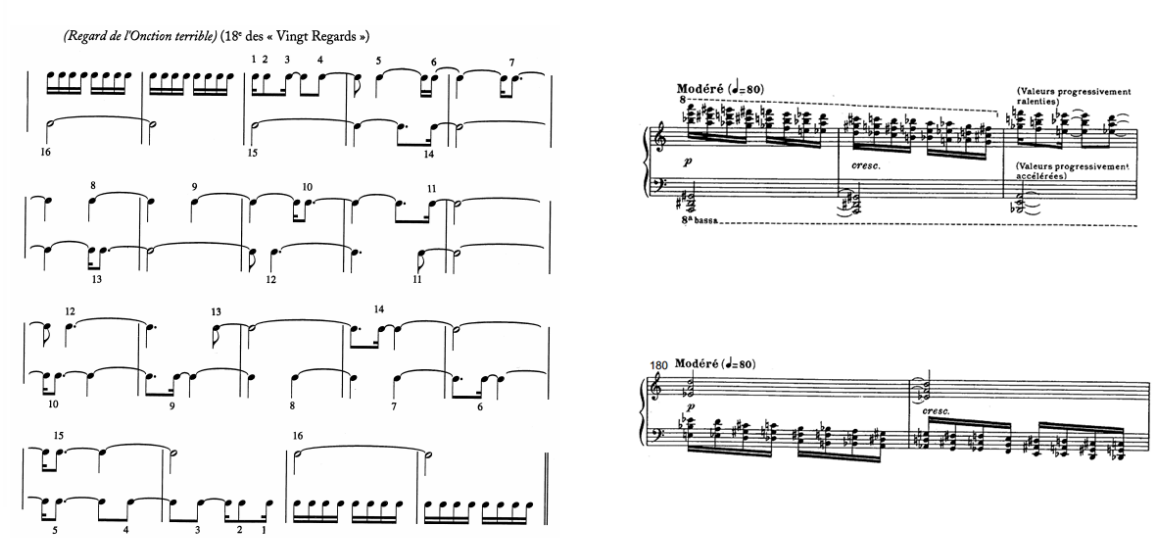


Fig. 6: Rhythmic example with 16 durations superimposed on the introductory section (mm. 1-19, left), and the score with mm. 1-2 (right, above) and 180-181 (right, below) (MESSIAEN, 1996: 320).

[9] "Toute la pièce est un puissant choral de cuivres, animé par les secousses de la foudre. Dans l'Introduction: des valeurs progressivement ralenties superposées à des valeurs progressivement accélérées en deux gammes chromatiques de durées, crescendo molto, se rapprochant jusqu'à très près à des valeurs progressivement ralenties, en deux gammes chromatiques de durées,crescendo molto, s'éloignant jusqu'à très loin, par mouvement divergente" (MESSIAEN, 1995: 491-492).

Understanding that inversion is one type of permutation, Fig. 7 presented by Bruhn (2007) illustrates both the question of permutation between the two sections and the question of non-retrogradability within these sections:



Fig. 7: Non-retrogradibility as a structural process in the opening and closing of the piece *Regard de l'Onction terrible* (BRUHN, 2007: 246).

The concept of symmetry–also present in the structure of non-retrogradable rhythms–is present in the formal conception of the piece, in which a middle Section (S and S') is framed by two mirrored sections (opening and closing).

Rhythmic characters. Apart from its technical characteristic, this inversion procedure used in the opening and closing Sections engenders the embryo of the idea of rhythmic characters[10]. In the case of these two sections of the piece, there are only two characters in action, that which grows rhythmically and that which decreases (Fig. 8).

Within the symbolic context, the opening of the piece *Regard de l'Onction terrible* portrays the moment of Jesus' baptism, which precedes by three years his ascension to the Father, a period of time in which Jesus had been given his strongest moments of spiritual strength. In this context, the inversion of the opening in the closing, besides providing a perception of non-retrogradability in terms of rhythm and timbre, it also inverts the relation between *arsis* and *thesis*, or impulse and rest within these Sections. In the opening, we see a large *arsis* beginning at measure 1 and followed by the *thesis* in measures 21 and 22 (highlighted in blue in Fig. 8). In the closing, there is an atypical and even unnatural relationship of rhythmic nature, that is, a *thesis* (mm. 178-179, highlighted in blue in Fig. 8) followed by an *arsis* (mm. 179-98). Ending the piece with a *thesis* followed by an *arsis* reinforces the symbolism we highlight above: the end of Jesus's mortal period and the beginning of his immortal period, that is, the immortality of that which is eternal.

[10] The idea of rhythmic characters, discussed in the third chapter of Volume III of *Traité* ... consists of imagining three characters, one that is active (rhythmically, uses increasing durations), another that is receptive (decreasing durations) and a third that is stable (durations that do not change) (MESSIAEN, 1995).

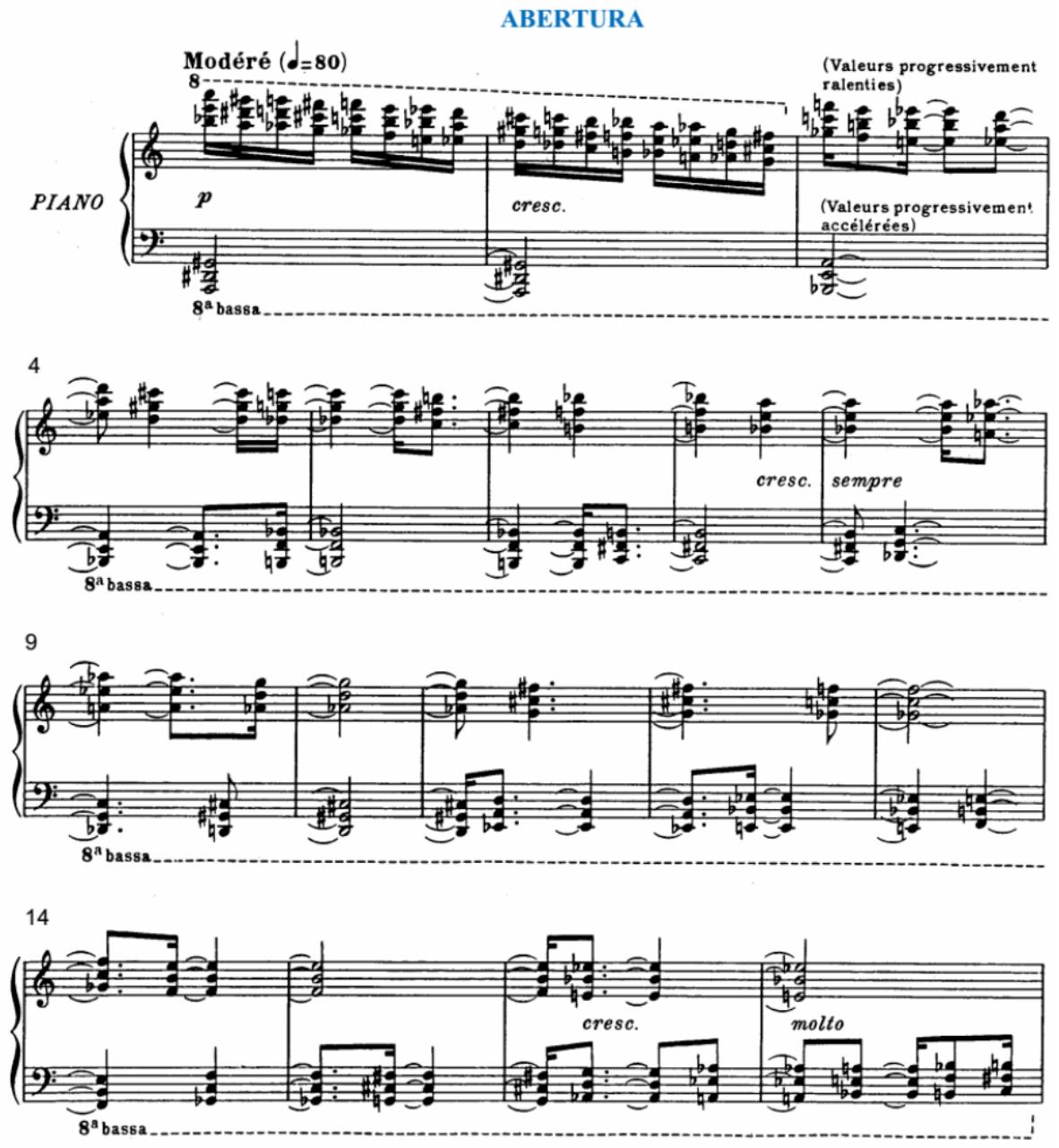


Fig. 8: Score with parts of the opening sections (mm. 1-22) and closing (mm. 178-198) with sections of arpeggios in contrary motion between blue brackets[11].

[11] We suggest listening to the recording of Roger Muraro (MESSIAEN, 2008).

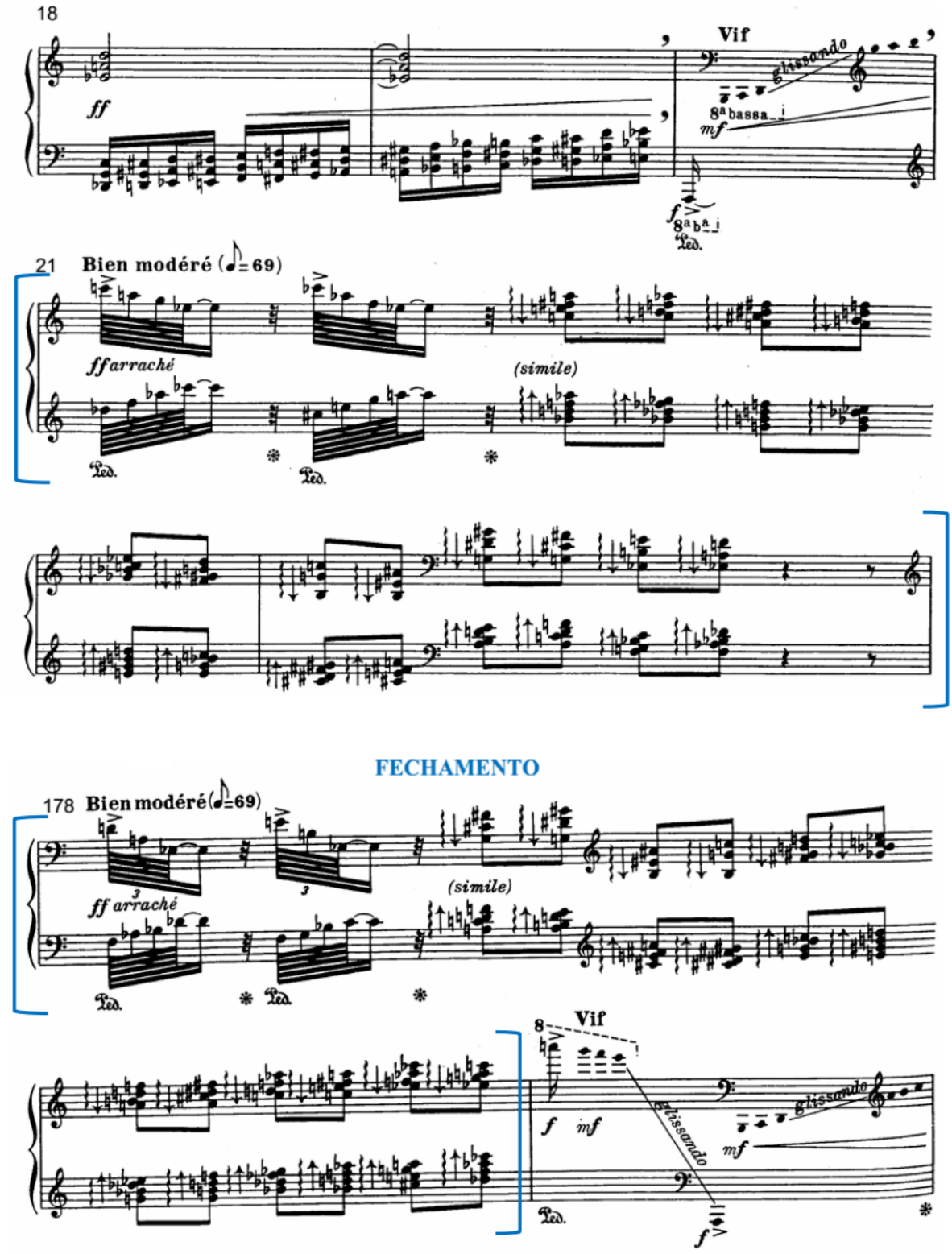


Fig. 8: Score with parts of the opening sections (mm. 1-22) and closing (mm. 178-198) with sections of arpeggios in contrary motion between blue brackets (cont.).

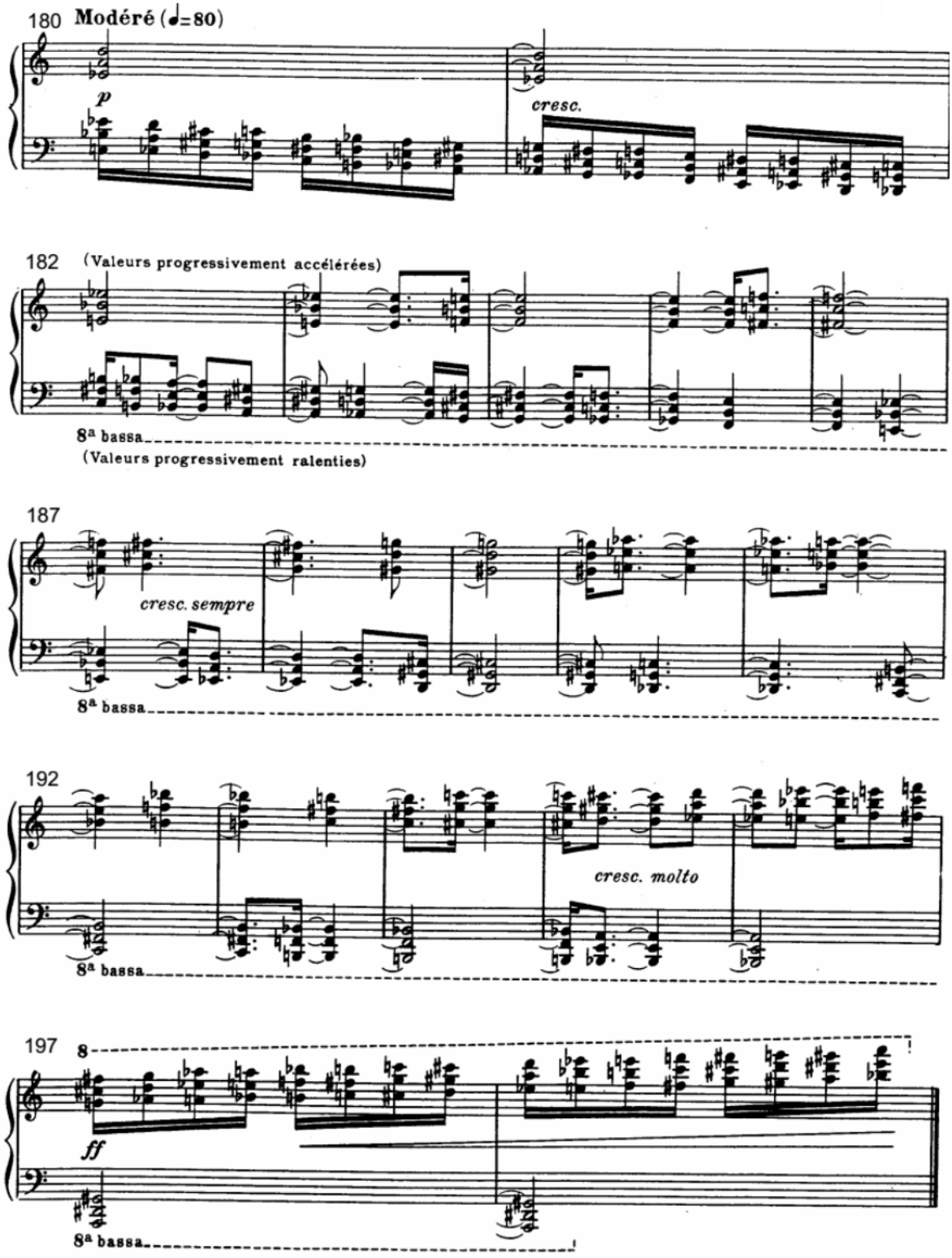


Fig. 8: Score with parts of the opening sections (mm. 1-22) and closing (mm. 178-198) with sections of arpeggios in contrary motion between blue brackets (cont.).

Rhythmic languages. Each of the macro-sections of the piece (opening, middle and closing sections) explores different rhythmic languages [12]. The opening and closing are characterized by a greater variety of rhythmic languages, namely: the rhythmic language of durations, intensities, pitches, timbres and duration interventions. On the other hand, the middle Section, homo-rhythmic for the most part, explores in its two-part materials the duality between the rhythmic language of durations (antecedent material) and the rhythmic language of pitch (consequent material). The preceding material is characterized especially by exploring the concept of iambic rhythm (short duration followed by long duration) and the consequent material always explores the reiteration of a few elements in figurative writing with varying pitches.

Origin and synthesis of musical materials by quarters. In this piece, we identify that Messiaen works by alternating a few musical materials that are striking and permeate his work as a whole. The first of these consists of the material of origin of the "special chord by quarters" (specific to Messiaen), described by the composer in Chapter XIV of *Technique* ... (MESSIAEN, 1944a: 44) as being specifically characterized: by the superposition of the augmented fourth and the perfect fourth (4A+4P), because it contains all the notes of the fifth mode of limited transpositions and because it originates from the "melodic formula" (Fig. 9):

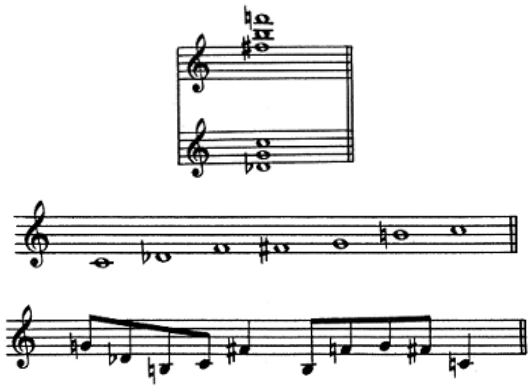


Fig. 9: Example of a "special chord in fourths" (4P+4A), fifth mode of limited transpositions and melodic formula (MESSIAEN, 1944b: 37, ex. 213, 214, 215).

Chords in fourths with the specific characteristics described above structure the aforementioned opening and closing Sections, and the "melodic formula" is used as the interval structure of parts A, A', B, C and transitions that make up the middle Sections.

Melodic formula. When we compare the interval relationship of the "melodic formula" with the interval relationship of the upper line of parts A and A' of the piece, we realize that the fragment that finalizes each of these parts has a relationship similar to that of the fragments of the

[12] The concept of rhythmic languages was elaborated by Messiaen to identify the independent rhythmic movement of each musical parameter that he uses in his writing. In the first volume of his treatise, Messiaen (1994: 46-47) includes a study with 14 "rhythmic Languages" that he accesses when composing: 1st) of durations; 2nd) of intensities; 3rd) of densities; 4th) of pitches; 5th) of timbres; 6th) of attacks; 7th) of rhythmic movement; 8th) of tempos; 9th) of the interventions for durations (but referring to all types of permutations and possible interventions); 10th) to polyrhythm; 11th) the resulting polyrhythm; 12th) the rhythmic language of harmony; 13th) of musical spaces (translating *lieu* as space and understanding spaces as tonality, modality, polytonality, atonality, twelve-tone series and any other type of series); and 14th) the rhythmic language of silence.

melodic formula (Fig. 10)[13]. In addition, we also observe the process note inversion (*interversion des notes*)[14] (MESSIAEN, 1944a: 28). Another strong relationship between the "melodic formula" and parts A and A' refers to the exploration of the mirroring process between its melodic contours[15]. The melodic formula carries within itself the process of contour mirroring, explored in the relationship between phrases A and A' (Fig. 11).

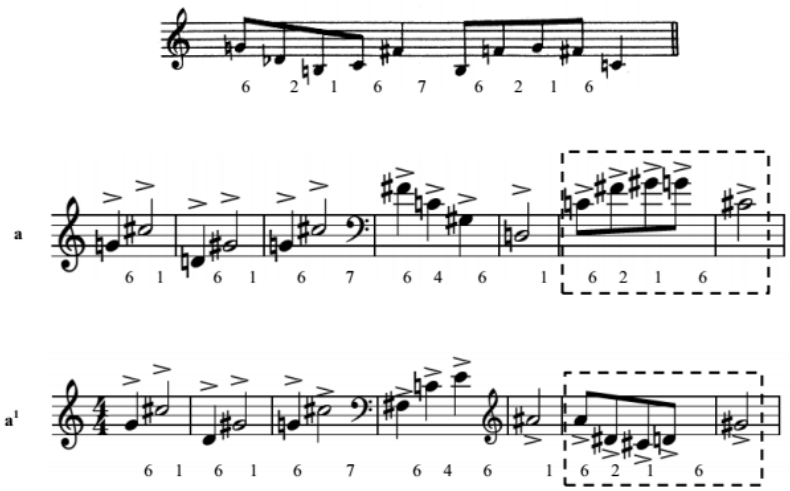


Fig. 10: Comparison between the interval relationship of the melodic formula (above) and phrases A and A[I].

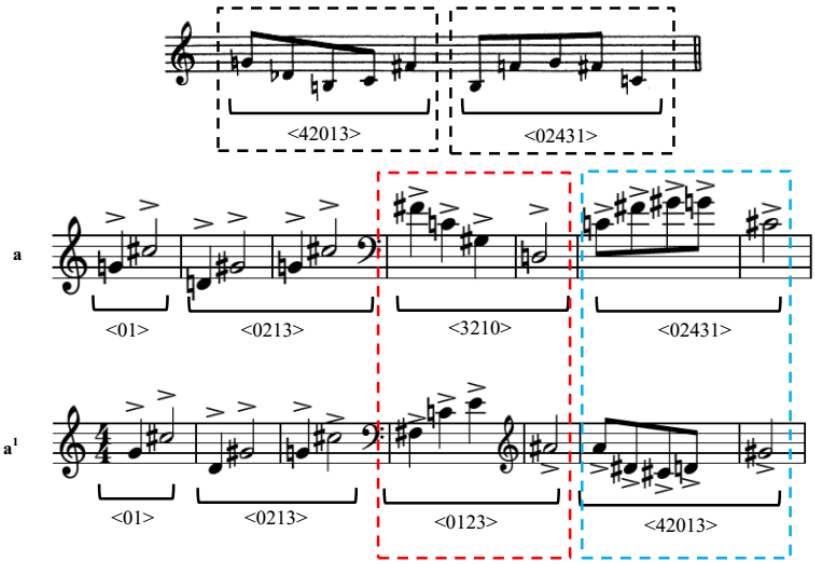


Fig. 11: The top example demonstrates the mirroring process within the melodic formula. The middle and bottom examples compare the mirroring relationship between phrases A and A*I*.

[13] The example brings the top note of this passage with chords in fourths commonly constructed from parallel conductive voices. So, interestingly enough, in the Section where Messiaen melodically explores the material that gave rise to his "special chords in fourths" (4P+4A), the composer makes use of successions of common chords in fourths.

[14] We maintain that the note inversion process (*interversion des notes*) was later used by Messiaen with regard to durations and is the seed of "symmetrical permutations" (MESSIAEN, 1996: 7).

[15] The melodic movement produces a contour, whose equivalences with other contours are subject to discussion. To find a CSEG contour segment, simply number the notes of the fragment according to their position, so that the lowest note is classified as 0, the second lowest, 1 and so on. In the relationship of mirroring between contours, we see that the lowest note of one contour is replaced by the highest note of the other, the second lowest by the second highest, and so on (cf. STRAUS, 2013: 107-111).

Besides the inversion process, Messiaen also uses transpositions to T4, T8, T9 and T12 throughout Sections S and S' as indicated in Table 1.

Theme of chords. Among the four themes already mentioned that pervade the work, the Theme of the chords is the only one that does not have an explicit symbolic meaning in the work and is the only one that appears in the piece *Regard de l'Onction terrible*. Rogosin (1996: 45) points out that, unlike the Theme of God, which is easily recognizable, the Theme of chords is sometimes difficult to perceive since it is very brief and typically placed within densely chromatic contexts that tend to camouflage its use. Rogosin presents two types of possible groupings for the Theme of chords: the vertical and the horizontal (Fig. 12), which corroborates with its construction as a whole.

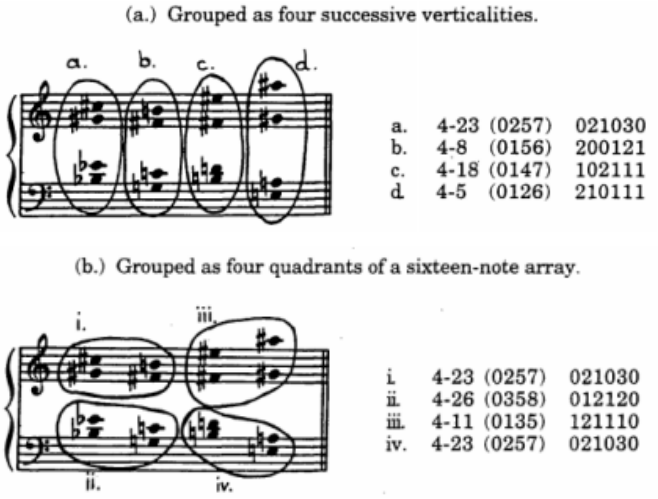


Fig. 12: Two types of possible groupings for the Theme of chords (ROGOSIN, 1996: 46).

In *Regard de l'Onction terrible*, the Theme of chords appears concentrated in only two chords in a context of dense texture making it difficult to perceive. The example below (Fig. 13) compares the Theme of chords as presented by Messiaen in the preface to the work and as a horizontal grouping within the piece:

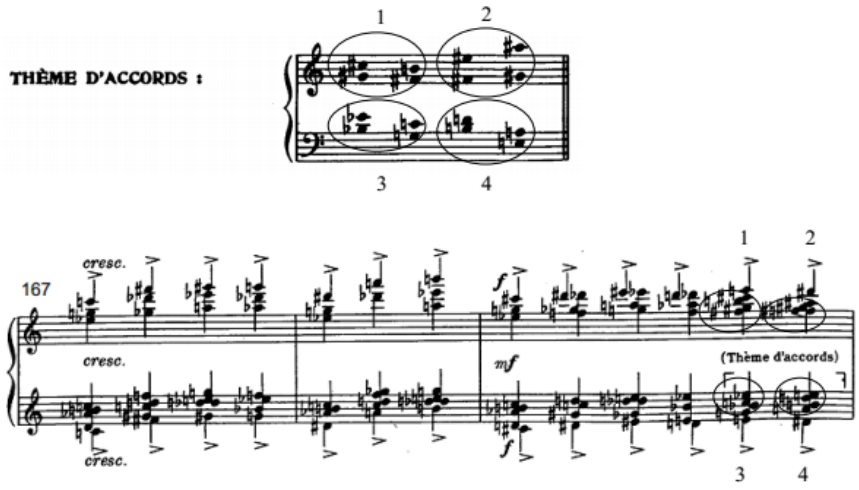


Fig. 13: Top, Theme of chords (MESSIAEN, 1997); bottom, in *Regard de l'Onction terrible*.

In our view, the "participation" of this theme in the piece would go unnoticed were it not for the composer's indication in the score (Fig. 13). However, as we saw earlier, Messiaen considered it an easily identifiable theme by its colors: "is a complex of sounds destined for perpetual variations, existing in abstract as a series, but very concrete and easily recognizable by its colors: steel blue gray crisscrossed with red and bright orange, mauve violet stained with leather brown, circled with violet purple"[16] (MESSIAEN, 1995: 438, our translation).

Piano writing and projection. In subsections S and S', Messiaen works with two-part materials, which we call antecedent and consequent. However, when we observe the piano writing and also the indication of pedal use (Fig. 14), we perceive Messiaen's intention to connect the chords that make up each material that we classified as antecedent (1, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6) to the materials classified as consequent (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).

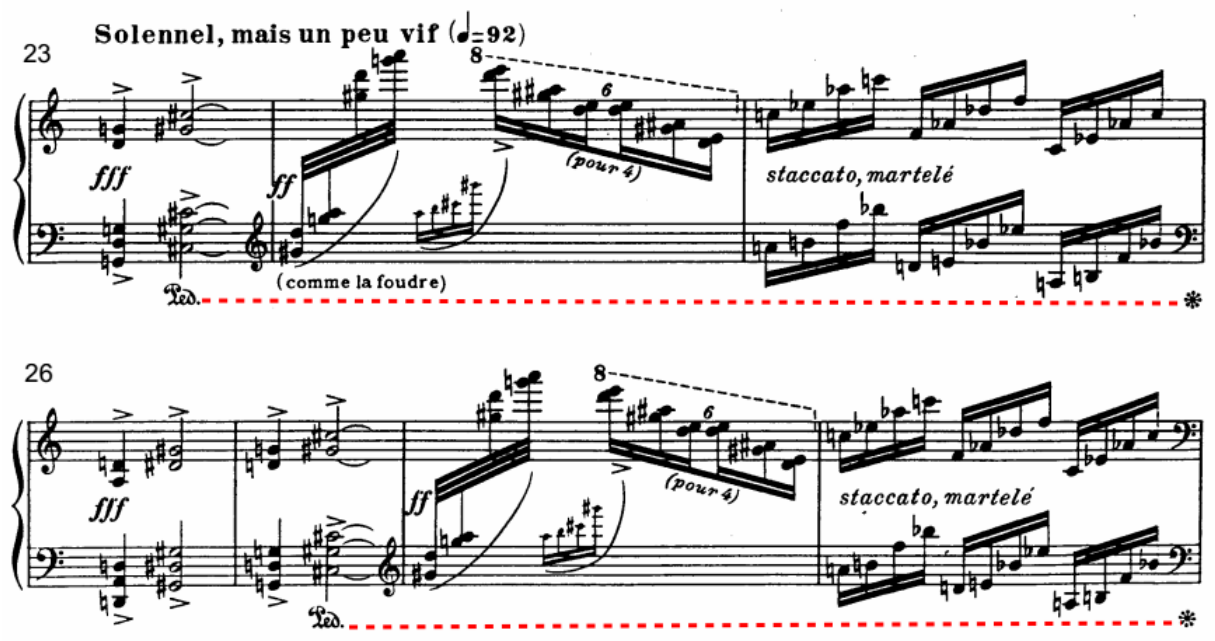


Fig. 14: A passage of the piece *Regard de l'Onction terrible* (mm. 23-29) highlighting the indication for the use of the right pedal as a connection between chords (mm. 23 and 26-27; and materials 1 and 1.1 in Tab. 1).

By connecting these elements (Fig. 15), we can delineate four major phrases that develop within Part 1 of Section S, designated in Table 1 as A, A', B, and transition 1.

[16] "[...] c'est un complexe de sons destiné à de perpétuelles variations, préexistant dans l'abstrait comme une série, amis bien concret et très aisément reconnaissable par ses couleurs: un gris bleu d'acier traversé de rouge et dórangé vif, un violet mauve taché de brun cuir et cerclé de pourpre violacée" (MESSIAEN, 1995: 438).

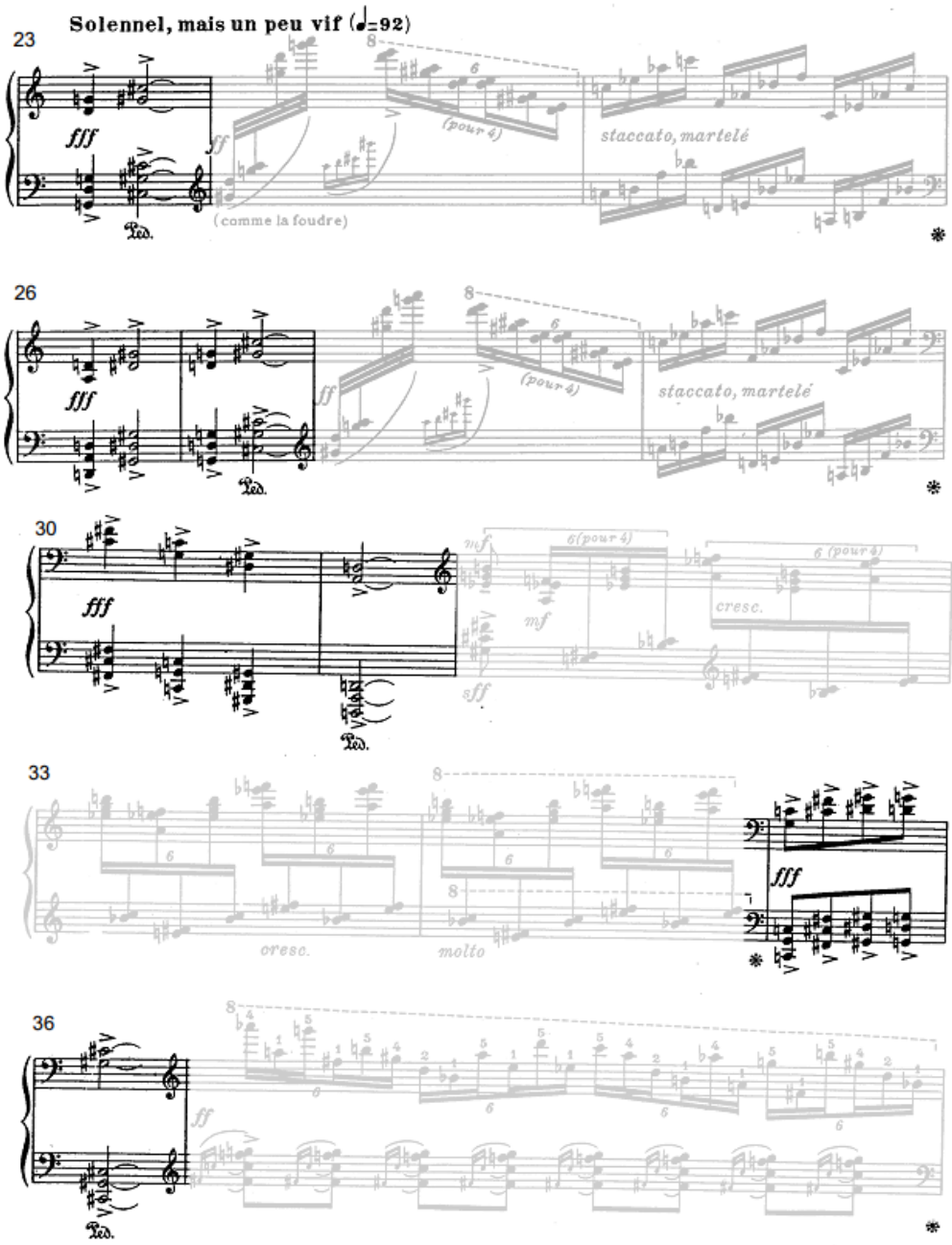


Fig. 15: Phrase A of the piece *Regard de l'Onction terrible* (mm. 23-37) highlighting the intercalated chordal elements that should be connected by the performer.

The pianist should call attention to this connection between ideas spaced in time so that the listener's memory connects them while listening to the entire piece. Fig. 15 highlights phrase A whose antecedent elements are interspersed by the consequent elements along measures 23 to 37. Thus, it is up to the pianist to be guided by the medium, or, preferably, long-range projection, which refer to a long 16-measure phrase. We emphasize that this idea of phrase A can be replicated in all of the other phrases of the piece.

Final considerations

Having a more symbolic than descriptive function, the four themes cyclically presented in *Vingt regards sur l'Énfant-Jésus* use recognition by listening as much as recuperation by memory so that they can be constituted as paths for thematic identity that span twenty pieces.

Throughout the text, the idea of symmetry permeates the piece as a whole, and can be perceived both in the contour of the "melodic formula" that generates the phrases and semi-phrases of the middle section of the piece (micro and medium-scale), as well as a constituent element of the form and structure of the opening and closing sections of the piece (macro-scale). We also highlight the symmetry present in the symbolism of "birth" in the opening and closing sections of the piece, considering baptism[17] as a "birth" for a new Christian life (opening) and the human death of Christ, also as a "birth" for his eternal life (closing).

The great rhythmic profusion from the various approaches to rhythmic language studied by Messiaen confers greater diversity to the choice of few and striking motivic materials. In this seemingly fragmented environment, the projections unveiled by Messiaen's complex "idiomatic" writing (in this piece elicited by pedal indications and formal conformation in phrases) are being gradually revealed by the pianist who acts as a link that induces understanding, by hearing medium and large-scale musical ideas.

Thus, the idea of juxtaposition disseminated on Messiaen's musical writing is also evident in this piece, especially in its middle Section. However, we have shown that there is room for a linear interpretation, connecting antecedent and consequent elements within a phraseological structure. In this way, we emphasize the important role of the performer in conducting phrases and guiding hearing beyond the microstructure.

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[17] "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (THE HOLY BIBLE, John 3:3-5)

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