Fashionable Innovation: Debussysme in Early Twentieth-Century France

Dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation traces the development between 1890 and 1930 of a French musical trend referred to in the press of the era as debussysme. Based on analysis of over 250 pieces by more than thirty composers, I describe debussysme as a cohesive collection of techniques that emerged in the works of the earliest debussystes, such as Ravel, Debussy, and Florent Schmitt, with aesthetic roots in contemporaneous philosophy of the mind. With Debussy’s innovations as a guide, a diverse group of composers embraced techniques that made new perceptual demands of their listeners: I examine these techniques by drawing on research in the field of music cognition. This study deepens our understanding of French musical modernism, of which debussysme was a key stage.

A study of debussysme also teaches us about the nature of shared compositional practices: how they are generated, how they are diffused through social channels, and how individuals align themselves with or disavow fashionable usages. I explore the distinct phases of the debussyste movement and the social motivations of the composers who joined it, with the aid of concepts from sociological research on the diffusion of innovations. As the composers associated with debussysme gained prestige in the French musical community and on concert stages, their shared idiom became commercially viable. By 1908 salon composers such as Gabriel Dupont had developed a commodified version of debussysme that offered amateur musicians novel sounds within music that
retained familiar structural norms; the development of this “pop debussyste” practice is a case study of how elite innovations are transformed into cultural products that reach broad audiences.
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Introduction: Did Debussysme Exist?

During the first decade of the twentieth century in France, the term “debussysme” saw frequent use in the musical press. Its meaning encompassed more than just the musical style or ideas of Claude Debussy: it had become a synonym for French musical modernism. In earlier studies other scholars have investigated the discursive use of the term and the role that the proponents of debussysme played in the vibrant musical press of the era. According to Jane Fulcher and Brian Hart, the debussystes were a faction of journalists, including Debussy and his supporters, who argued that the purpose of music was to evoke pleasure and traced their musical roots to French composers whom they considered untainted by foreign imports.¹ Christian Goubault provides a detailed picture of the polemical nature of the discussion about Debussy in the musical press.² All of these studies treat debussysme as a mostly discursive rather than a compositional phenomenon, because it was the discursive aspect of debussysme that was more relevant to the authors’ analyses of cultural politics.

Yet these voices in the French press regularly claimed that debussysme was a compositional phenomenon: they believed that a large group of composers were imitating

the distinctive compositional techniques of Debussy in their scores. One of the earliest references to the *debussyste* composers was made by critic Henri Gauthier-Villars (known as Willy), who in his review of *Pelléas et Mélisande* from 1902 mentioned the “young debussystes, so keen on unresolved appoggiaturas.”³ Willy’s brief description of *debussyste* composers was tinged with derision, which conformed to the typical usage of the term as an insult when applied to composers other than Debussy. Calling composers “*debussystes*” implied that they employed facile techniques derivative of Debussy due to their own creative poverty.⁴ Soon, several French critics were using “*debussysme*” to refer to what they perceived as an alarmingly prevalent imitation of Debussy. Pierre Lalo harshly attacked Ravel as a mere *debussyste* in 1906 and 1907, and in 1910 Raphaël Cor published a book-length study, *Le Cas Debussy*, about the malignant trend. In one of his diatribes against Ravel, Lalo gave one of the longest descriptions of the *debussyste* compositional phenomenon:

> As you already know, Ravel is hardly the only example of his type; it is an incontestable fact that a large portion of young French composers are writing “*debussyste*” music. It has been a few years since *debussysme* replaced outmoded massenétisme and fading wagnérisme. In order to substantiate and define this new phenomenon, a few elementary observations will suffice; *debussysme* is manifested in signs that are immediately apparent. To the ear, the predominance of certain extremely particular, characteristic and recognizable harmonic and orchestral combinations, which at once suggest to everyone the impression and the thought: this is a bit of Debussy [c’est du Debussy]. In the score, the return and the repetition of certain manners of writing, stylistic techniques, turns of phrase, and formulas of which Mr. Debussy has provided the example, and which from the first instant betray their origin. Conscious or not, the

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²⁴ As Carlo Caballero has argued, a claim that a composer wrote inauthentic music was particularly injurious in turn-of-the-century French musical discourse. Carlo Caballero, *Faure and French Musical Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-19.
resemblance is so striking, immediate, and evident that one cannot help but notice it and cry out.\textsuperscript{5}

Lalo was convinced that a large group of young composers were making use of specific “ways of composing” that were unique and immediately distinguishable, and he believed that these strategies originated in Debussy’s music. Although he proposed to specify what he meant by “debussystem” in the statement, Lalo could not describe it with any precise technical vocabulary; this lack of precision suggests that even as debussyste techniques challenged musical norms of French culture around 1900, these techniques were not yet clearly defined by theorists. Admirers and detractors alike circulated the idea in the French press that Debussy had become the leader of a school of composition that lacked a building and courses, yet rivaled the Paris Conservatoire and Schola Cantorum in its number of students and in its influence.\textsuperscript{6}

Many composers claimed that Debussy had a significant influence on them as well as on some of their colleagues, although they typically hesitated to use the term “debussyste” to refer to themselves. André Caplet claimed that he had “two masters, Woollett and Debussy.”\textsuperscript{7} Charles Koechlin admitted Debussy’s influence on some of his

\textsuperscript{5} “Vous savez assez que M. Ravel n’est point ici le seul de son espèce; c’est un fait incontestable qu’une très grande part des jeunes compositeurs français font de la musique ‘debussyste.’ Le debussysme remplace depuis quelques années le massenétisme suranné et le wagnérisme défaillant. Pour constater et définir ce phénomène nouveau, il suffit d’observations élémentaires; le debussysme se manifeste par des signes qui sont apparents pour le premier venu. À l’audition, la prédominance de certaines sonorités harmoniques et orchestrales, extrêmement particulières, caractéristiques et reconnaissables, qui aussitôt suggèrent à chacun cette impression et cette pensée: c’est du Debussy. À la lecture, le retour et la répétition de certaines manières d’écrire, de certains procédés de style, tournures et formules dont M. Debussy a donné l’exemple, et qui dès l’abord trahissent leur origine. Volontaire ou non, la ressemblance est si frappante, si évidente, si immédiate, qu’il est impossible de n’en pas faire la remarquer, et de ne pas se récrier.” Pierre Lalo, “La musique,” Le temps (Mar 19, 1907): 1. All translations from the French are mine unless otherwise indicated.

\textsuperscript{6} Hart, “The Symphony,” 21-64, and Goubault, La critique musicale, 366-369.

\textsuperscript{7} Quoted in Williametta Spencer, “The Influence and Stylistic Heritage of André Caplet” (Ph. D. diss., University of Southern California, 1974), 79.
songs and included a short list of debussyste composers in his biography of Debussy. In his music history, Henri Woollett named forty composers as “debussystes” and provided his own definition of debussysme: “the ultra-modern school which had as its leader Debussy, repudiated the old laws for harmonic progressions and only saw in chords a way of adding color.” Paul Le Flem embraced the label of debussyste with pride, describing himself and other debussystes as composers who followed Debussy’s lead religiously, especially the example he provided to them in Pelléas et Mélisande:

Some young composers, tired of the droning formulas that venerable masters were trying to impose on them as articles of truth, had found in the magic of debussysme an aesthetic, a direction, and even a syntax that allowed them their self-renewal and their liberation from outmoded habits and wheezing instructions.

Like Lalo, Le Flem identified debussysme as a distinctive, new manner of composing. Further, Le Flem found that debussysme broke radically with “outmoded” earlier compositional practices that he and other French composers had been taught.

The aim of this study is to interrogate claims that debussysme existed as a musical practice in France around 1900 by searching for a corresponding phenomenon in scores of French composers during this period. Debussysme existed as a set of techniques which some composers chose to adopt in its entirety in several of their compositions, as a comprehensive strategy for achieving specific aesthetic goals. The practice of such

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10 “Certains jeunes compositeurs, las des ronronnantes formules que de vénérables maîtres essayaient de leur imposer comme articles de vérité, avaient trouvé dans la fée debussyste une esthétique, une direction, et même une syntaxe leur permettant de se renouveler, de se libérer d’habitudes surannées et de prescriptions à court de souffle.” In “Dans le souvenir de Debussy,” Paul Le Flem, undated, unpublished radio transcript at the Fonds Paul Le Flem, Médiathèque Mahler, Paris, France.
committed *debussystes* finds an analogy with Leonard Meyer’s definition of “style” as a repertory of choices limited by constraints that manifest themselves as replicated patterns which interact with each other in accordance with a single aesthetic explanation.\(^{11}\) Jonathan Gilmore proposes a similar definition of “style” for art history that focuses on the coherent styles of individuals. Gilmore’s definition is consistent with the *debussyste* practices of composers such as Debussy, Ravel, Koechlin, Schmitt, Caplet, and Bonheur.\(^{12}\) Many other composers, however, adopted only certain elements of *debussysme*; their aims may have differed substantially from those of the composers who created these techniques. Some composers used the techniques so selectively that they produced music with a strikingly different sound than the music of Debussy and Ravel which had inspired them. Although the *debussyste* practices of some composers find strong resonance with Meyer’s and Gilmore’s definitions of “style,” *debussysme* cannot be neatly labeled a style or even an idiom because it encompasses such a wide variety of engagements with *debussyste* techniques.

The *debussyste* phenomenon is better considered a set of possibilities that manifested differently in each composer’s idiom and even in each composition. These composers shared a practice not in the sense that they replicated each other’s material verbatim in musical scores, but rather that their scores show a persistent use of specific formal and textural patterns, performance indications, and harmonic and melodic idioms.


\(^{12}\) Gilmore argues that an artistic style is born when an artist or a cooperative of artists pose a new problem that art must solve or invent a radically new solution to an old problem. This aesthetic viewpoint, which Gilmore terms the “artist’s brief,” is often tacitly understood. He defines “style” as a technical response to a brief: “those features of a work that derive from the brief are elements of the work’s style.” See Jonathan Gilmore, *The Life of a Style: Beginnings and Endings in the Narrative History of Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 83-92.
The techniques reviewed in chapter 1 are meant as spacious categories to which the elements of the styles of individual debussystes conform.

*Debussysme* was a social as well as a compositional phenomenon: close friendships existed among many of the composers who wrote *debussyste* music, and these relationships often served as a strong impetus for an individual’s adoption of the musical techniques. Furthermore, changes that occurred in the social dimension of *debussysme* affected the compositional choices of the composers who took part in it. Following Dick Hebdige, *debussysme* can be understood as a kind of sub-cultural phenomenon that disrupted the hegemonic French musical culture of its era but then was eventually absorbed into it.\(^{13}\) As the musical practice migrated to different levels of culture, the techniques of which it consisted gained and lost social and expressive meanings. These social changes had a substantial effect on the evolution of *debussyste* musical practice.

Under consideration in this dissertation are works by composers living in France and firmly embedded in French musical culture, either French nationals or long-time residents of France, and works composed no later than 1930. It is without a doubt true that composers of other nationalities utilized the techniques described below during this period, and certainly composers are still making use of them today. Nonetheless, this study had to be limited in scope, and because *debussysme* appears to have begun in France around 1889, these constraints were placed on the research.

The first chapter of this dissertation defines several traits of *debussyste* musical practice based on careful analysis of a subset of all the *debussyste* scores listed in Appendix A: the songs and piano compositions of the earliest group of composers who

utilized *debussysme*. Some potential aesthetic meanings and a cultural contextualization for these techniques is provided in chapter 2, with special emphasis given to the possible influence of contemporaneous literati and philosophers on the formation of early *debussyste* practice. These first two chapters afford us a new view of the beginning of musical modernism in France, which some critics and composers equated with *debussysme*. Chapter 3 treats the course of *debussysme* chronologically as a musical phenomenon over the period between 1889 and 1930. In it I consider the evolution of the compositional techniques presented in the first chapter; the different roles of the thirty-five composers who used these techniques in the *debussyste* movement; and the changing meaning of these techniques in French musical discourse. Following the method set out by Gilmore in *The Life of a Style*, I use the collection of *debussyste* techniques as a set of internal limits that determine who counted as a practitioner and approximately when the trend began and ended.\(^14\) Composers such as Charles Koechlin, Henri Woollett, and René Lenormand claimed that there were different kinds of *debussystes*, who could be distinguished by the extent to which they embraced the musical practice: chapter 4 examines how *debussysme* came to be treated as a collection of separable technical elements. Some of the latecomers to the *debussysme* adopted only selected techniques, in accordance with the demands of the sheet music marketplace.

A few clarifications about the term “*debussyste*” must be made. The term will be retained in this study, even though the critics who coined it did not use it consistently, and despite the fact that it will be employed to signify the practice of several composers,

not just Debussy. Even with its problems, debussysme was the preferred term of individuals writing about the trend during its historical era. Debussysme is also preferable to other designations used in primary and secondary literature which refer to other artistic movements, such as musical symbolism or impressionism, because these designations wrongly suggest that debussysme is merely derivative of earlier artistic movements and that ideas can be translated wholesale between different artistic domains. Another reason to retain “debussysme” is that Debussy did play a principal role in the development of these techniques: several of the composers of debussyste music elevated Debussy as a singular influence on French music of their generation. Koechlin, Maurice Emmanuel, and D.E. Inghelbrecht wrote entire books on Debussy, Paul Le Flem dedicated several radio programs to him, and even the highly individualistic Ravel paid written homage to Debussy. In addition, most of the innovative techniques discussed in chapter 1 appeared earliest and with the greatest frequency in Claude Debussy’s compositions, and the aesthetic ideas debussyste composers used to argue for the legitimacy of their initially controversial practice largely originated in Debussy’s published music criticism. (It must be clarified that the debussystes were not the only innovators of their time, but that they were practicing a distinctive and shared kind of innovation. Fauré and Satie, for instance, were innovative, but in very different ways.)

Although debussysme as a compositional phenomenon can be understood in part as a manifestation of Debussy’s influence on other composers, the principal interest of

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15 Ravel wrote to a friend about Debussy’s Prélude à L’après-midi d’un Faune that “It is the only score ever written that is absolutely perfect.” In Barbara Kelly, “History and Hommage,” in The Cambridge Companion to Ravel, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14. In an article published in 1911 about the differences between French and German musical sensibility, Ravel claimed that he valued Debussy’s Prélude more than Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. See Maurice Ravel, A Ravel Reader, ed. and trans. Arbie Orenstein (New York: Dover, 1990), 410.
this study was the shared practice in which Debussy took part rather than Debussy’s unique style. A great deal of research has already been undertaken on Debussy. My study reveals that many ideas which scholars have offered about Debussy’s music also have explanatory power for the debussyste practices of more than two dozen of his contemporaries. Although the Debussy literature proved very useful to this examination of debussysme, I typically cite studies that focus exclusively on Debussy only when they were also applicable to a large number of scores by other composers that I examined.

Even though I retain the term “debussysme,” I do not define it strictly according to its use in the early twentieth century. Writers generally subscribed to a commonly held understanding of the term as it referred to a musical practice (e.g. no one ever called Saint-Saëns or Fauré a debussyste), but they used it inconsistently and, as Lalo’s definition of the term cited above indicates, vaguely. I define musical debussysme according to technical features of the scores composed during the period in which the term was invented and enjoyed popular usage. I used features of composers’ scores, not the lists of supposed debussystes in primary sources, to determine which individuals took part in the artistic movement. Like the implicit definition of debussysme in the early twentieth century press, such lists of supposed debussystes were inconsistent: Milhaud, for instance, claimed that he was not a debussyste, but Koechlin named him as a debussyste in his biography of Debussy.¹⁶ The discourse about debussysme plays very little part in the first chapter, where the musical practice is characterized, but it becomes

¹⁶ Koechlin includes Milhaud’s “early works” in his list of debussyste pieces in Debussy, 84. About Milhaud’s denial of involvement in debussysme see Barbara Kelly, Tradition and Style in the Works of Darius Milhaud, 1912-1939 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 104.
increasingly important in the following three chapters, which turn to the issue of cultural context.

This study of *debussysme* is intended as a first small step into the investigation of a complex artistic movement that developed in France around 1900. It sketches the analytical and historical contours of the movement, based on the descriptions, theories, and conclusions that could be reasonably drawn from the present state of research. Because this dissertation represents such an early stage of research into *debussysme* as a compositional phenomenon, it is necessarily limited in scope and likely includes significant lacunae. The list of *debussyste* compositions in Appendix A is a significant part of the dissertation because it served as the basis for the study and shows the development of *debussysme* as it unfolded over a period of forty-one years. The 559 scores included in the list were selected according to the traits of *debussysme* identified in chapter 1. Scholars of early twentieth-century French art music are aware of *debussysme*, and some work has already been done on the influence of Debussy on single composers who are fairly well-known today. Roger Orledge provides an excellently detailed study of Koechlin’s idiom and identifies specific instances of known or possible influence from Debussy.¹⁷ Roy Howat and Arbie Orenstein have offered some commentary on the sticky question of influence between Debussy and Ravel.¹⁸ Barbara Kelly astutely notes some ways in which Milhaud’s earliest compositions were indebted to Debussy.¹⁹ In this study, I have considered the similarities in these composers’ scores to Debussy’s sound not as a

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¹⁷ Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*.
matter of simple influence, but as signs of a more complex phenomenon in which innovative ideas moved in multiple directions among several composers. For reasons of prestige, many composers and their friends denied or diminished their role in *debussysme*, and in some well-intentioned studies of individual composers, some scholars have taken these misleading statements at face value. In my study, scores serve as a litmus test for such statements, and this primacy of composers’ deeds over their words has given my research about compositional practice greater clarity. Without wanting to diminish the individual contributions of each composer, I aim to identify the distinctive *debussyste* techniques that individuals shared or borrowed.

Both in terms of findings and methodology, this study of *debussysme* offers several significant contributions. First, it illuminates the development of French musical modernism, in which *debussysme* played a significant role. *Debussystes* turned away from the nineteenth-century conventions they had been taught and embraced experimentation and eccentricity. *Debussyste* compositions display artistic concerns that preoccupied modernists at around the same time in other countries and fields: the necessity of innovation, an extreme emphasis on the expression of individual subjectivity, and a fascination with translating contemporaneous theories about the human mind into art. Second, a history of *debussysme* teaches us about the nature of shared musical practices: how they are generated, how they are diffused through social channels, and how individuals align themselves with or disavow fashionable practices. Third, my detailed discussions of *debussyste* musical works offer music theorists new and historically informed approaches to the analysis of early twentieth-century French music, which is renowned for being difficult to describe. Recent research on music perception
has been helpful can help to illuminate the interplay and cooperation of debussyste

elements. Finally, my application of Everett Rogers’s method of observing the diffusion

of innovations to the social history of debussysme in chapters 3 suggests a novel and

useful point of intersection between musicology and sociology.
Chapter 1: Debussysme as Practiced by its Originators

In this chapter, several elements of debussyste practice will be described. To keep the scores selected for analysis to a manageable size, I limited this project to the subset of pieces by the composers listed in Table 1.1., who were several of the earliest composers to take part in debussysme. These composers were either the creators of debussyste techniques or among the very first to take them into their personal styles, and they did so with an eagerness to experiment. The composers listed in Table 1.1 were also those debussystes who had the most extensive contact with the literary influences upon their shared musical practice, as well as with other debussystes.\(^{20}\) Because of their early position in the movement, their close proximity to the interdisciplinary sources of its inspiration, and their active participation in the debussyste social network, these eleven composers can be considered the originators of debussyste musical practice.

\(^{20}\) The connections between debussysme and symbolism, and the relationships that existed among the composers are discussed in chapters 2 and 3. These early debussystes were avid readers of symbolist literature and all of them except Maurice Emmanuel and Albert Roussel were friends with writers and artists associated with the movement. These social and artistic connections were important to my decision about which scores to include in the analysis for this chapter. Maurice Delage, for instance, was chosen because he had many connections to elite artists and writers, and other debussystes by 1902, even though he did not compose debussyste music until 1908. Delage had become close friends with several of the early debussystes by 1902, such as Ravel and Séverac, but he was an amateur composer who needed years of lessons with Ravel before he had the ability to compose debussyste music. Conversely, Gabriel Dupont was excluded from consideration in this chapter even though he began to write debussyste music by 1903; Dupont’s invalid condition prevented him from engaging in much contact with other people, causing him to be socially isolated. Additionally, Dupont practiced only selective engagement with debussyste techniques, and did not experiment with them as many of the other early debussystes did.
Table 1.1. The Originators of Debussysme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Earliest Debussyste Work and Date of Composition</th>
<th>Debussyste Songs</th>
<th>Debussyste Piano Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>“C’est l’extase,” 1887</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Ravel</td>
<td>Sites auriculaires, Habanera, 1895</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond Bonheur</td>
<td>Huit Poésies de F. Jammes, sel., 1895-7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florent Schmitt</td>
<td>Musiques intimes II, Lucioles, 1901</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Koechlin</td>
<td>“Pluie au matin,” 1898-1908</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>André Caplet</td>
<td>“Chanson d’automne,” 1900</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dédéat de Séverac</td>
<td>“Un rêve,” 1901</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Emmanuel</td>
<td>Violin Sonata, mvts. I and II, 1902</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert Roussel</td>
<td>“Le jardin mouillé,” 1903</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Le Flem</td>
<td>“Mandoline,” 1904</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Delage</td>
<td>Trois poèmes, 1908-10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, Debussy takes a central position in early debussysme according to the number of debussyste works that he composed. Nevertheless, this is not to say that all of the others slavishly imitated him: in this regard the critics who were the first to describe debussysme and coined the name had it wrong. Numbers for other debussystes may seem conspicuously low, but in most cases this is a reflection of a composer’s small compositional output rather than his or her or level of commitment to debussyste practice. The one exception is Albert Roussel, who wrote some of his earliest compositions in a pervasively debussyste idiom but quickly and permanently moved away from it.²¹

The elements described should be understood as broad types that appear differently in the language of each composer and even within each debussyste composition; these unique usages will be noted frequently. Yet despite their uniqueness, realizations of these broad types are fundamentally similar to each other in terms of effect.

²¹ Roussel’s brief involvement with and subsequent denial of debussysme will be discussed in chapter 3.
and general pattern. Description of the practices of the originators is important, because innovative techniques occurred in their scores which then inspired other composers to take up these techniques in their scores. After the practices of the originators have been substantiated, they will then be traced in subsequent chapters as they evolved through time and migrated into the personal styles of other composers.

Methodology

The scope of the analysis undertaken in this chapter was further limited to all debussyste pieces by the originators for solo piano and accompanied songs, which were both the most popular genres for debussyste compositions and the genres in which debussyste adopters tended to be most innovative; in duo sonatas or opera, the same composers often followed genre-specific conventions. Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande, which was a seminal debussyste composition, will be given some attention with respect to vocal melody in this chapter, but it will be discussed more fully in chapter 3. An analysis of 146 solo piano pieces and 132 songs by early debussystes is the foundation of the stylistic theories delineated in this chapter; any statistical counts will refer to these specific subsets of the entire sample of debussyste compositions, unless otherwise indicated. Individual movements of multi-movement piano works were counted separately, as were individual songs that are part of a set, because stylistic elements do not necessarily remain constant across movements. For example, Debussy’s Estampes is counted as three pieces. This is the case for all statistical counts in the dissertation unless otherwise indicated. Piano pieces were counted as debussyste if they displayed seven of thirteen essential techniques, and songs were counted as debussyste if they displayed
eight of fifteen essential techniques. All of these techniques are defined in Table 1.2. For works of both genres, the requisite number of techniques could not be reached unless a composition contained at least some structural elements.

The first stage of the search for the debussyste musical practice was to assemble a large sample of compositions that could potentially be debussyste, based on their distinctive sound. This search was guided by claims in primary or secondary sources that a certain composer was a debussyste (including cases where the composer labeled himself) and evidence that a composer associated with other composers who had already been determined to be debussystes based on examination of their scores. A composer’s output was sifted through chronologically, because composers’ adoption of debussyste techniques typically occurred as a clear stylistic shift. In essence, the gathering stage consisted primarily of comparative analysis by which a large, testable sample of works that potentially shared several distinct traits was identified.

In the testing phase that followed the gathering of potential debussyste scores, I identified specific, observable traits of debussysme and measured them. Concepts that seemed distinctive to debussysme and prevalent in debussyste scores had gradually emerged from exploratory analysis, but these abstract concepts (such as a feeling of incompleteness at the end of a composition) needed to be transformed into operationalized terms, or embodied simplifications of abstract concepts that are concrete and lends themselves to measurement. The prevalence of these operationalized terms was then measured in the sample of potential debussyste scores. A certain threshold needed to be met before a term could be considered prevalent in a score; depending on the nature of the term, this threshold was an intuitive sense (e.g. did I observe several instances of
metric ambiguity or just a few) or a strict number. Not only did counting or carefully estimating the prevalence of operationalized terms lead to a better understanding of the qualities of debussysme, the activity also served as a way to check the validity of the terms I had arrived at in my exploratory analysis. In some cases counting the number of instances of a term revealed that it was not prevalent in debussyste scores. This occurred, for instance, for the idea that intervals of the third are prevalent in debussyste vocal melody and for the hypothesis that it was common for debussyste pieces to end on an unresolved dissonance. A negative finding was just as helpful as a confirmation, because it was a clear indication that a particular technique I had at one time considered debussyste needed to be thrown out or re-worked.

Debussyste techniques were either radically new at their inception or originated in earlier practices but were taken to an extreme. As counts for terms were tallied, they were also compared to a comparison sample as a measure of their distinctiveness: the songs and solo piano pieces Gabriel Fauré composed between 1890 and his death in 1922, a period which overlapped with the lifespan of debussysme. All of the operationalized terms or techniques that had been measured in potential debussyste scores were also measured in Fauré’s pieces. Comparisons to the Fauré sample will be made throughout this chapter and occasionally in the next one, to distinguish which traits are prevalent to debussyste practice but not particular to it alone, and which traits are both prevalent and distinctive.

Fauré was chosen as the control composer because of his similarity to the debussystes on several points: he not only shared the same nationality and era, but was also another composer of elite art music, known to be open-minded, and in his mature style he was unafraid to experiment. If a certain element of debussyste music is shown to be different from Fauré’s, this suggests that the element is distinctive.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operationalized Term</th>
<th>Definition Given as an Aural Impression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Streaming Texture or</td>
<td>Texture separated into stratified streams which are perceptually distinct from each other; streams can consist of single notes or chords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Texture or</td>
<td>Texture consists of single, composite shapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictorial-fused Texture</td>
<td>Texture of one mobile stream that consists of notes with quick subdivisions; can be composite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gestural Texture</td>
<td>Texture consists of distinct fragments that encompass a large vertical space, such as written-out arpeggios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unorthodox Voice Leading</td>
<td>Co-modulation, tonal fusion, voice crossing, breaks in th smooth voice leading of individual voice parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Wide Spacing of Chord Tones</td>
<td>Minimum to be counted as “wide” was a separation of all tones below middle C by at least a perfect fifth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Debussyste Pitched Signifiers</td>
<td>Pervasive extended harmonies; whole tone, pentatonic, and octatonic collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Narrow Vocal Melody (songs only)</td>
<td>Pervasive use of repeated notes and small intervals in the vocal line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Non-Schematic Vocal Melody (songs only)</td>
<td>Lack of repeated and antecedent-consequent patterns in terms of pitch or rhythm; primacy given to the rhythm and contour of the language of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Floating Vocal Melody (songs only)</td>
<td>Melodic pitches lie mostly in the upper chord tones of the supporting harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Metric Ambiguity</td>
<td>Lack of feeling of steady pulse, rhythms of low anticipatory value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Durée Formal Process I or</td>
<td>Material is constantly new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durée Formal Process II</td>
<td>Interaction of undeveloped fragments which persist and return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Coalescing Beginning</td>
<td>Progression from ambiguity to greater regularity, slow increase of magnitude of secondary parameters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Incomplete Transitions</td>
<td>Ideas die out as secondary parameters approach zero magnitude, but there is no syntactical closure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Dissonant Final Sonority</td>
<td>Final chord contains dissonant intervals: 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 7\textsuperscript{th}, tritone, and their replications above the octave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Reminiscence Coda</td>
<td>Ideas from throughout the piece return in a final section and interact in new ways but are not developed; marked change to softer dynamics and a slower tempo than in what immediately preceded the section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Lack of Periodic Phrasing (piano pieces only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This empirical analysis was conducted on all of the 559 *debussyste* compositions collected, not just those of the originators. Counts will be restricted to the originator subset in this chapter unless otherwise stated, but characteristics of the entire sample will
be discussed in chapters 2, 3, and 4. At the end of this multi-stage analysis, the operationalized terms I had settled upon (shown in Table 1.2) were distinctive because they 1) described several technical consistencies present in the vast majority of scores I called “debussyste,” 2) had a low rate of occurrence in a comparison sample, and 3) refined the intuitive guesses I had made about which pieces were debussyste by making it clear that some members of the original sample needed to be eliminated. These operationalized descriptors are not meant to stand as an essentialization of debussysme, as a perfect or final definition of debussysme, or as a thorough description of the particular scores that were considered. Because I wanted to carefully observe through measurement the prevalence of debussyste techniques to guard against my own prejudices and intuitive errors, it was necessary to simplify the abstract notions of these techniques into concrete definitions. The terms in Table 1.2 are reductive, but in a methodological rather than a philosophical sense. In the following three chapters debussyste techniques will be placed in a social context and traced through time as they evolved; these projects would not have been possible until a clear description of debussysme as a musical phenomenon had been created.

The results of this study were imprecise and biased to a degree because of its preliminary nature. One major obstacle to more precise measurement was that very few of the sample scores were available in the format necessary for a computer program to analyze them, which would have generated more accurate quantitative observations. Along the same lines, computer analysis requires extremely specific operationalized terms, and at this stage of research such terms had not yet been formulated. As a result, all tallies were done manually, either as exact counts or careful estimations. This analysis
of the *debussyste* collection of techniques is a modest first step. I hope that in further research my findings will be questioned, re-tested, and refined.

I do not pretend that the techniques reviewed here represent a complete list of the elements that are shared across the population of *debussyste* scores. For instance, Mark McFarland argues convincingly that Debussy’s use of non-diatonic pitch collections creates general areas of tension and relaxation in his scores that help to generate a sense of motion in the absence of older models of harmonic flow. Given the frequent occurrence of whole tone and pentatonic areas that this study revealed in scores by other composers taking part in *debussysme*, future research might consider the juxtaposition of different scale types as another shared trait by the collected scores.

The techniques that constitute *debussysme* in this study are also exclusively concerned with the musical surface, or the phenomena that are generated by sonic events that occur in immediate succession, such as the voice leading between one chord and the very next chord, or the movement between two neighboring pitches of a vocal melody. These elements differ from aspects of a composition that only emerge from score analysis, such as Schenkerian descents, but my exclusion of the latter does not indicate a conclusion that they play no role in *debussysme*. Recent cognitive research has cast doubt on the ability of the human auditory system to perceive deep structural relationships in a piece, where events spaced far apart must be understood to connect (which is consistent with my own experiences as a listener), and correspondingly, surface details were the aspects of *debussysme* to which critics and other writers in the early twentieth century

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paid the most attention. As a result, deeper structures such as Schenkerian descents had little value for this study. *Debussyste* techniques will be introduced and described separately but will eventually be considered as they relate to and complement each other.

In chapter 2 I will propose a central aesthetic concept for early *debussyste* practice: a depiction of the unconscious mind that reflected contemporaneous ideas in psychology and philosophy.

**Streams and Shapes: *Debussyste* Textural Innovations**

My observations about *debussyste* textural types mainly result from analysis of piano pieces by originator *debussystes*; some attention will also be given to the use of these techniques in originator songs. *Debussyste* composers were tremendously innovative in the domain of texture, which refers to the grouping of successive and simultaneous attacks in a piece of music into perceptually coherent units. The three textures common to *debussyste* scores introduced new perceptual paradigms in which musical material could be configured: streaming texture, pictorial-fused texture, and composite texture. I have named all three textures myself. All three *debussyste* textural types tend to all-or-nothing extremes of musical coherence, because they cause components to either strongly attract each other, forming a unified sonic object, or to strongly resist coherence and instead generate several sonic objects existing simultaneously; both extremes result in relative equality of the components. These

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24 Daniel Shanahan, in his very recent study of Debussy’s innovative strategies in the composer’s two books of piano preludes, similarly aims to “provide a theory of Debussy’s music as perceived” and shies away from what he refers to as “post-hoc” analytical tools including Schenkerian and set theory analysis. See Daniel Shanahan, “Debussy’s Forms of Deception: Toward a Theory of Implication, Tension, and Attraction in the Préludes,” (Ph.D. diss, Trinity College, Dublin, 2011), 1-19.
Textural novelties helped *debussyste* music to succeed perceptually, because they provide the listener’s auditory system with perceptibly coherent sounds in the midst of musical material that at the time of its inception was frequently described as vague and ambiguous.

The first *debussyste* texture, streaming texture, typically occurs as a set of three clearly distinguished lines of music occurring simultaneously, but it can also consist of sets of two and occasionally four lines (see Example 1.1, Koechlin, *Matin calme*).


Each of the streams in *debussyste* streaming texture is an independent sonic object, consisting of successive single notes or chordal sonorities that are close together in range and all sound as though they originate from the same source.\(^{25}\) The streams tend to be clearly stratified, with each one designated to its own sphere of operation within the total range. Composers sometimes divided the component streams onto different staves—as many as four of them—which visually depicts the vertical separation among them and their relative immobility within the texture. Example 1.1 shows three streams isolated

\(^{25}\) I call this texture “streaming texture” in reference to “auditory streaming,” a term from cognitive psychology which is discussed below on p. 65-66.
onto three different staves that in the third measure branch into four streams. Streaming texture is similar to polyphony, in that it consists of multiple sonic objects which are coherent, or by themselves sound complete, but the two textures differ in a fundamental way. Whereas polyphonic lines are governed by contrapuntal principles that intertwine them into a close dialogue that evolves through cooperation, *debussyste* streams typically persist stubbornly in their individual distinctive patterns even when they collide, as though oblivious to each other.

Example 1.2 shows streams in Ravel’s *Oiseaux tristes* that exhibit a repetitive, mechanistic quality typical of *debussyste* streaming texture. Some of these streams consist of successive single notes while others consist of successive sonorities. Each stream operates according to a simple and unique pattern, such as the falling third that gradually accelerates in the alto voice, as though Ravel set the parts in motion and allowed them to interact. A monotonous, undulating line of triplets is a specific type of stream that occurs frequently in originator *debussyste* compositions, most often in the middle of the texture as it does here. In m. 6 of Ravel’s scores the falling-third and triplet streams suddenly shift upwards and merge together, acting as a unit while still retaining their respective falling and rising motions. The texture of *Oiseaux tristes* is representative of typical *debussyste* streaming, where perceptually independent streams of sound interact with each other minimally, yet sometimes unpredictably.
Streaming texture is one of the few debussyste elements that was described in words by a composer who used it. Debussy’s term for streaming texture was “arabesque,” a formal concept he gleaned from symbolist and Art Nouveau aesthetics. Although the arabesque is often defined by modern scholars as a single melodic line, in one of his published descriptions of the arabesque, Debussy clearly referred to a whole texture. Taking as a reference point Bach’s prodigious use of the arabesque, Debussy observed the effect that the simultaneity and meeting of musical lines has on the listener’s emotions and thoughts:

In the music of Bach, it is not the character of the melody that is moving but its curve; even more often, it is the parallel movement of several lines

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whose meeting, whether it be fortuitous or planned, elicits emotion. When it arrives at this ornamental conception, music acquires the steadiness of a mechanism that impresses the public and causes the surging forth of images.\(^\text{27}\)

In the statement Debussy noted that the lines in his conception of arabesque texture demonstrated interaction with each other to varying degrees, from “planned,” perhaps referring to contrapuntal polyphony, to “fortuitous,” which suggests the greater independence and separation that characterizes the parts of *debusyste* streaming texture.

The distinction Debussy made between “planned” and “fortuitous” arabesque textures also corresponds to the widely different levels and types of stream interaction found in originator scores. In many scores the texture is reminiscent of gamelan, with uniform streams that each progress at a different rate of speed. The streams in gamelan streaming texture, as it might be called, are especially mechanistic and each one operates according to its own parameters. Any interaction among the streams occurs because of the interaction of the parameters that guide their movements, and their contents are not subjected to alterations due to overriding syntactical rules such as the stipulations for the occurrence and resolution of dissonant intervals in contrapuntal polyphony. Debussy’s *Pagodes* is the *locus classicus* of this type of texture, but it was not Debussy’s earliest use of the technique; if his introduction to gamelan music at the 1889 World Exhibition was its main impetus, it is not surprising that early forms of gamelan texture show up in the Nocturne for piano from 1892.\(^\text{28}\) By 1895 the composer inserted a simple, two-part

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\(^{27}\)“Dans la musique de Bach, ce n’est pas le caractère de la mélodie qui émeut, c’est sa courbe; plus souvent, c’est le mouvement parallèle de plusieurs lignes dont la rencontre, soit fortuite, soit unanime, sollicite l’émotion. A cette conception ornementale, la musique qu’acquit la sûreté d’un mécanisme à impressionner le public et qui fait surgir les images.” Debussy, *La revue blanche* (May 1, 1901); reprinted in *Monseur Croche et autres écrits*, François Lesure ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 34.

\(^{28}\)Paul Roberts provides a detailed reading of *Pagodes* as it relates to the instruments and playing techniques of Javanese gamelan in *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2001).
version of this texture into a song for the first time, in a lengthy section of “De soir” from *Proses lyriques* (See Ex. 1.3).  

Example 1.3. Debussy, “De soir” (1893), mm. 38-39

![Example 1.3. Debussy, “De soir” (1893), mm. 38-39](image)

Example 1.4. Bonheur, “Quand verrai-je les îles” (1895-97), mm. 6-9

![Example 1.4. Bonheur, “Quand verrai-je les îles” (1895-97), mm. 6-9](image)

1996), 156-163. Although Roberts’s interpretation of Debussy’s piece as an imitative “transcription” of what he heard at the gamelan exhibition of the 1900 World’s Exhibition seems too reductive, his analysis nevertheless reveals the potential origins of the texture of *Pagodes* in specific elements of gamelan performance practice and compositional techniques.  

Roberts also notes gamelan texture in *Cloches à travers les feuilles* and *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fuit*. Ibid., 167-172.
Debussy’s gamelan streaming texture seems to have been widely influential upon younger composers, for after its publication in 1903 several apparent imitations emerged in other scores. Raymond Bonheur deployed the sound of the gamelan in some of his *Huit Poèmes de Francis Jammes* from the 1890s, the period during which he enjoyed a close friendship with Debussy. In Bonheur’s “Quand verrai-je les îles” diverse streaming sections follow in a sequence: in Example 1.4 a uniquely constructed texture runs across the page, consisting of an undulating middle stream surrounded by a slower, chordal stream. The sound of the gamelan also proliferates in Dédéat de Séverac’s song “Un rêve” (1901, Ex. 1.14) and it occurs in substantial sections of Florent Schmitt’s *Lucioles* (1901) and Gabriel Dupont’s *Voiles sur l’eau* (from *Sillages*, 1907-1909), both for piano. After approaching the gamelan technique in his highly innovative and mechanistic *Entre cloches* in 1897, Ravel saturated *Jeux d’eau* with a novel version of gamelan texture in which one quick and shimmering line plays against a much slower one. The inventive texture would be widely used by other *debussystes*, including Debussy in the coda of *Pagodes* and Paul Le Flem in the final section of *Par grèves*.

In contrast to these examples of gamelan-like textures, other originator *debussyste* scores show individual streams that are more mobile and interact to a greater degree, recalling Debussy’s designation of some arabesques as “planned” rather than “fortuitous,” such as in Koechlin’s *Matin calme* (Ex. 1.1). It is a visually striking arabesque texture: the four lines twist around each other and more closely approach the look of polyphony than the relatively flat, repetitive gamelan lines in terms of interaction, yet they do not adhere to the rules of counterpoint. Recalling the confusion between the subject and the ground common to Mallarmé’s descriptions of the arabesque, the lines
freely change into new patterns almost by the measure, which causes a continual flux in their relationship to each other. In the next system the streams migrate onto different staves, another striking visual image of their curling into each other’s space. Ephemeral, unpredictable streaming textures also pervade the four songs of André Caplet *Le vieux coffret*. In Example 1.5, from “In una selva oscura,” the middle stream suddenly swoops menacingly up towards the highest stream; the convergence of the two causes them to disappear, and a strikingly new set of streams takes their place. Arabesque stream interaction is overall much less common in originator scores and appears at least a decade later than the flatter, less interactive gamelan streams, suggesting that it was a more advanced version of the innovation that was perhaps created in response to changing *debussyste* goals after 1910.

Example 1.5. Caplet, “In una selva oscura” (1914-16), mm. 27-29

Streaming texture was a very common type of texture in *debussyste* songs and solo piano pieces by the originator *debussytes*: 74% (108/146) of the piano pieces and 64% (84/132) of their songs contain significant sections of streaming, and all of the

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originators used the technique extensively. In comparison, Fauré never used streaming texture as it has been defined here in any of the songs or piano pieces he wrote between 1890 and 1922, which suggests that this technique was highly distinctive to debussyste practice.

“Composite texture” is what I term the second most common debussyste texture, and it is characterized by a series of shapes made up of individual bits of material that, unlike in streaming texture, do not cohere separately but are instead perceived as acting in cooperation. Such interaction is present at the outset of the piano part in Maurice Emmanuel’s “Berceuse” from Musiques: a repeated sonority in the middle range of the instrument is capped off by a pithy up-down motion that causes the material to shift vertically, thus introducing an unfolding shape that consists of stasis and then movement (see Ex. 1.6). The projection of the shape begins again in m. 4, as two iterations are linked together, and then a third time in m. 9, where after two more overlapped iterations of the composite parts, new fragments enter the texture. Significantly, there is no dominant component in the texture; all components instead fuse together to create shapes that move through time.

Maurice Delage used composite texture throughout the piano part of “Améthystes,” which creates diverse shapes that follow each other closely in succession. In the brief piano introduction a rising shape is followed by one that spreads outward. At the vocal part enters in m. 3, static shapes materialize in the piano part that return several times but always in a new variation. Debussy made prodigious use of composite texture in several of his preludes for piano, including Danseuses de Delphes, Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir, Des pas sur la neige, La cathedrale engloutie, and
La terrasse des audiences au clair de lune. Deserving special mention is *Les sons et les parfums*, where snatches of material mingle in continually shifting relationships as in a kaleidoscope, and fragments cycle seamlessly in and out of the composite texture.

Example. 1.6. Emmanuel, “Berceuse” (1908), mm. 1-17, marked to show composite shapes

Substantial use of composite texture occurs in 42% of originator piano scores, which makes it a less prevalent texture in *debussysme* than streaming texture. It is, however, still a technique that is distinctive to *debussysme*, as illustrated by its low occurrence in only 13% in the comparison sample of Fauré’s piano scores. During the
1910s composite texture evolved, becoming increasingly intricate and gestural in originator scores.

Example 1.7. Schmitt, *Ombres*

a. *J'entends dans le lointain…* (1913-17), mm. 37-40

b. *Cette ombre, mon image…* (1913-16), mm. 98-99

Caplet’s “Ce sable, fin et fuyant” (1908) is a clear example of this evolution in the piano parts of *debussyste* songs, while Florent Schmitt arrived at stunning textures in *Ombres* (1913), a triptych for solo piano. At several points in the piece he etched the individual components of the texture in sharp relief while still causing them to cohere...
together, in a kind of synthesis of streaming and composite texture (Example 1.7a). In other places the density of the composite texture dazzles the ear, as in Example 1.7b.

Example 1.8. Ravel, *Noctuelles* (1904-05), mm. 1-6

![Example 1.8. Ravel, *Noctuelles* (1904-05), mm. 1-6]

A third *debussystes* textural innovation is pictorial-fused texture, which can be considered a marriage of the perceptual organization of streaming and composite texture. The pictorial-fused technique gives the aural impression of a single, mobile stream of sound, yet it really consists of multiple streams of quick notes that are constructed to blur in the listener’s perception and form a composite sonic object. In general, originator *debussystes* used the virtuosic texture to evoke pictorially a limited range of jubilant images, especially objects or beings that move quickly through the air, such as aerial sprites in Schmitt’s *Sylphides* or the wind itself in Debussy’s prelude. Charles Koechlin

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relied heavily on pictorial-fused texture in *A travers les rues* from *Les heures persanes*, where it suggests the colorful activity of an exotic bazaar.

Ravel was the chief innovator of pictorial-fused texture, crafting intricate manifestations of it in *Miroirs* and *Gaspard de la nuit*. *Noctuelles* opens with three pages of composite material that sounds like a single object that flies erratically around the keyboard (Ex. 1.8). The material suggests a single sonic object to the ear, yet the score reveals that the texture typically consists of two layers that fuse together. Ravel achieved this effect by placing the part of the right and left hand in very close proximity and causing them to move in parallel motion.\(^{31}\) In addition, the simple yet powerful effect of the speed at which the notes fly by deprives the ear of enough time to be aware of individual notes or streams; the ear instead joins several notes at a time and interprets them as all part of the general shape of the line. At other places in *Noctuelles* the texture does truly consist of one fluid line, but Ravel generally preferred the composite type of pictorial-fused texture in the composition. Pictorial-fused texture also alternates with shimmering gamelan textures in Ravel’s *Une barque sur l’océan*, and it is pervasive in the outer movements of *Gaspard de la nuit*.

Other originator *debussystes* used the virtuosic pictorial-fused texture much less frequently than did Ravel—it makes a substantial appearance in around 20% of the originator piano scores—and in these examples they typically opted for the simple version of the virtuosic texture that consisted of a single string of notes rather than a composite stream of multiple strata. Rare *debussyste* piano compositions written by composers other than Ravel in which pictorial-fused texture is pervasive include

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\(^{31}\) In psychology, confusion about the number and position of sound sources is called “tonal fusion,” and its usefulness in describing *debussyste* techniques will be described more fully later in this chapter.
Debussy’s *Ce qu’a vu le vent d’Ouest* and *Les fées sont d’exquises danseuses* from the first book of piano preludes, Bonheur’s *Le soleil qui rit dans l’eau des vasques* from *Sur trois marches de marbre rose*, and Schmitt’s *Sylphides*. More common was a mixing of short bits of pictorial-fused brilliance with the two other *debussyste* textures. For instance, a quick leaping pattern races through the opening measures of Paul Le Flem’s *Par grèves*, but the end of the first page it gives way to homophony and then large sections of gamelan texture.

Early *debussyste* compositions typically show great textural diversity: composers used all of their new textural techniques in single compositions as well as traditional homophony (melody with accompaniment). Streaming texture was by far the most common type of texture in the analyzed scores, followed by composite and then pictorial-fused texture; all of the scores displayed a strict avoidance of polyphony in the conventional sense of their era as governed by syntactical (contrapuntal) rules. The differing levels of popularity of textures utilized in *debussyste* scores suggests that composers who used them assigned them different kinds of aesthetic value, an issue which will be examined in the following chapter. By the 1910s some *debussyste* composers began to layer innovative textural types on top of each other, creating a streaming texture with a pictorial-fused component or the simultaneous use of streaming and composite texture (see Schmitt’s *Ombres* in Ex. 1.7). This trend reflected the increasing fragmentation of textures in *debussyste* songs and piano works over time.

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32 Some occurrences of pictorial-fused texture can also be considered a type of homophonic texture; much of Ravel’s *Ondine*, for example, can be understood as pictorial-fused homophony. The perceptual effect of what has been described as pictorial-fused texture here is, however, quite different from homophonic examples composed during previous musical eras because it is much more mobile, and has a dazzling effect on the ear.
Debussyste Kinetic Form

In originator debussyste songs and piano pieces musical material constantly undergoes change: an effect proliferates through the texture, multiple components gradually come together or deflect off each other in juxtaposition, energy ebbs or flows, a striking new idea takes hold and pushes the composition in a new direction. In most cases the material changes due to processes of constrained interaction of distinct bits of material which can occur simultaneously or successively, rather than due to motivic development. In the simultaneous version two or more images intertwine and collide with each other, such as the murmuring triplets and the distant birdcalls in Ravel’s Oiseaux tristes (Ex. 1.2).

Le Flem’s Vieux Calvaire is saturated with moments of successive interaction of material, with each large section of the piece built around two different ideas that alternate. Example 1.9 shows a dialogue the composer initiated between a subdued chorale fragment and a unit consisting of a bell motive and a brilliant arpeggio. After two alternations of the objects in their full form in mm. 22-24, Le Flem caused them to continue the dialogue, but he truncated the chorale and isolated the bell motive in mm. 28-30. Debussyste formal processes rarely reach completion: although they might suggest that a goal exists, it is rare for arrival at an anticipated goal to occur. Often, there is little sense of formal teleology in debussyste pieces. The last measure of Example 1.9 shows the conclusion of the successive interaction in Vieux Calvaire, which comes to a sudden stop without reaching any sort of climax or conclusion, and is then followed by a completely new set of musical ideas.
Example 1.9. Le Flem, *Vieux Calvaire* (1910)

a. mm. 22-24

![Example music notation for mm. 22-24](image)

b. mm. 28-30

![Example music notation for mm. 28-30](image)

In contrast to the familiar techniques of sonata form, which was still a dominant structural concept in French musical culture during the early twentieth century, little time is taken in originator *debussyste* forms to introduce new material, celebrate the arrival of a main theme, or draw out a climactic moment. As soon as a new idea enters a *debussyste* composition it immediately begins to transform or react to other ideas, and instead of the alternating sections of motion and stability essential to sonata form, there is a constant feeling of motion alone. Several theorists have referred to this kind of generative formal
processes as “kinetic form.” Richard Parks applies this term to Debussy, for in many of his pieces the dominant formal device is “organization of discontinuities” that creates a sense of motion in lieu of the continuity that emerges from stability in older formal paradigms.

Another distinctive quality of debussyste formal processes is that they rigorously avoid development of material in the traditional sense. Debussy’s tirades against “symphonic development,” as it was called in France, find resonance in his compositions and those of all the other originator debussystes. As demonstrated in their scores, debussystes were not opposed to leaving an idea in the musical texture for a lengthy period of time or allowing it to return more than once in a composition, but they were uninterested in the laborious composing out of their rhythmic and melodic profiles that typified the motivic development popular among their contemporaries. In these compositions we rarely see fragments developed through sequences or modulations. Instead, the fragments are left intact and interact with each other or undergo startling, rapid metamorphoses.

Debussyste formal processes will be introduced by way of discussion of a piano composition in the musical practice, Schmitt’s Sur un vieux petit cimetière, which exemplifies many of the most common debussyste formal elements. The entire score of this composition can be found in Appendix B. In addition to a short list of techniques, we will observe in this music some of the common formal strategies that debussystes

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33 For a summary of the history of this term and the variety of theorists who have employed it see Shanahan, “Debussy’s Forms of Deception,” 70-72.
35 See for example Debussy’s comments in Claude Debussy, Monsieur Croche, 30-31 and 241.
manifestly considered most effective for their aesthetic goals, as demonstrated in the originators’ scores.

Kinetic form is pervasive in Schmitt’s *Sur un vieux petit cimetière*, and the piece begins with a clear and brilliant example of processes of interaction and transformation working in cooperation. The opening measures feature two fragments that are juxtaposed in succession, and the tension between them creates anticipation for what might lie ahead. The mobility in m. 5-6 of the dyad figure, which spreads downward and upward in the piano’s range, hints that it might develop into something significant; a listener might anticipate that it will grow in strength and move towards the octave figure to initiate more direction interaction with it. But Schmitt moves on without exploring these possibilities, and the promising dyad figure returns only once in the piece, briefly and in disguise. The relatively fast and rhythmically regular eighth-note pattern that enters in m. 9 startles the ear because it contrasts sharply with what has come before it. This more energetic third idea seems more powerful than the previous two, because its entrance triggers other events: an increased sense of forward motion, its own propulsion into the middle of the texture, and ultimately the entrance of the melody in m. 15.\(^\text{36}\)

In the first fourteen measures of *Sur un vieux petit cimetière* Schmitt demonstrated a key element of *debussyste* kinetic form: the “coalescing beginning” (my term), where material initially displays a high degree of unpredictability, gradually attains a greater feeling of regularity, and then seems to conceive out of itself a significant sonic object. Schmitt achieved this situation by juxtaposing diverse and metrically ambiguous

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\(^{36}\) Bell sounds saturate this opening, a sound originators returned to time and again in their compositions: perhaps for young *debussystes*, looking to break away from old textural and formal norms, bells, with their chaotic yet ordered sound, offered a possible direction for their experimentation.
fragments, a familiar debussyste technique that shows up at the beginning of all three pieces that make up Ombres, Séverac’s Baigneuses au soleil, and Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût by Debussy. The monophonic, undulating melodies that James Hepokoski finds at the beginning of several of Debussy’s pieces are not uncommon in the works of other debussystes—see for instance Maurice Emmanuel’s song “Vibrations.”

This category and the others Hepokoski notes in his study of Debussy can be subsumed in the coalescing beginning paradigm, in which they serve as impulses that provoke the formation of subsequent material.

Hepokoski suggests that Debussy’s ambiguous beginnings frequently thwart listener expectations, and that they might therefore serve to introduce the listener to an esoteric, sacred space and to “re-condition” them to unfamiliar notions of harmony and time. This might be an accurate description of a listener’s experience of the techniques, but we would expect early debussystes, who praised economy of musical expression, to use the opening measures of a composition efficiently, and not just as a warm-up for uninitiated ears. Although his study is useful for its apt descriptions of coalescing beginnings, Hepokoski’s interpretation slices compositions ontologically in a way that is unnecessarily hierarchical, placing opening sections in a subordinate role. Hepokoski’s notion is also problematic because, as in Sur un vieux petit cimetière, the high level of unpredictability in debussyste beginnings is often not sustained throughout the piece: why condition a listener for a situation that will not continue? The different types of

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37 Séverac marks the opening of Baigneuses au soleil “hésitant,” emphasizing the fragmented nature of the beginning.

techniques for creating a coalescing beginning are better thought of as fundamentally connected to the rest of the composition, as the sense of flow common to debussyste scores is set in motion in the opening measures. Schmitt’s technique in Cimetière can be compared to the momentary alighting of a person’s awareness upon several items in a new environment before he or she settles on one for deeper exploration.

Coalescing beginnings are not as prevalent as other debussyste elements. They did not become common in originator debussyste piano scores until 1903, the year in which the debussyste phenomenon gained significantly in strength and several new composers adopted the techniques: perhaps the coalescing beginning was an element of debussysme that was born out of synergy among various composers rather than the innovation of a single individual. This element is even less prevalent in debussyste songs, as less than half of originator scores display a coalescing beginning. Instead, these composers largely continued the conventional way of beginning a song where all elements of the piano texture enter at the outset, followed shortly by the vocalist’s entrance. Caplet and Debussy were the only two composers to make consistent use of coalescing beginnings in songs, and only after they had been composing in the debussyste language for at least a decade. These statistics suggest that innovation at the beginning of compositions was quite disconcerting to listeners of fin-de-siècle France, and that solo songs in particular were expected to meet strongly held expectations for conventional beginnings that even the most radical composers were hesitant to disturb.39

The melody that emerges in m. 15 of Schmitt’s Cimetière will be the dominant sonic object for the next page of the score, during which the music becomes increasingly

39 None of Fauré’s piano pieces and only three of his songs begin with the coalescing paradigm, observations which again suggest that beginning a composition in this manner was particularly unusual.
energetic: the volume level gradually rises to \(mf\), the melody gains an octave doubling, and the left hand increases in speed. The melody itself remains static, consisting of the same scalar figure that continues to iterate as these changes occur, until \(mf\) and 16\(^{th}\)-note subdivisions are reached in m. 26. At this point the melody grows in expressive intensity, as it is doubled at the octave and decorated with chords and grace notes, but after just three measures a strikingly new object interrupts the expanding idea and takes the composition in a strikingly new direction. Sudden injection of new material is another common debussyste formal technique, and so is Schmitt’s use of it in order to cut off increasingly climactic and lyrical material, as though lyricism is only briefly permitted to have its say. Two more waves of rising lyricism follow, each of them similarly cut off suddenly as they reach expressive heights. Roy Howat has shown that Debussy preferred instrumental forms built on waves that grow in size; the rest of the originator debussystes also had a predilection for wave-like processes in their compositions, and we might add the distinction that they preferred waves that are interrupted at their peaks rather than waves that smoothly rise and fall.\(^{40}\)

The interruption to the third and largest wave in Schmitt’s piano piece is a sudden intrusion of the octave bell figure that began the composition, and it like the eighth-note figure in m. 9 another example of the initiating figures that play important roles in debussyste scores. In this case the figure triggers an emptying out of the texture and then a relapse to the lethargy and hesitation of the opening. After the material of the final lyrical climax in mm. 43-52 weakens, its essence persists as a held \(C#^9\) sonority under the ringing of the bell figure, until a forceful arpeggio completes the transition by clearing it

out of the way. Remarkably, Schmitt avoided even a single moment of conventional harmonic completion in *Cimetière* by continually eliding moments where a cadence might occur. In other places he interrupted the music right at the point where a concluding moment seems inevitable, such as the striking dissonance that the lyrical theme freezes upon, teetering, in mm. 21-22.

The final section of Schmitt’s piano piece begins in m. 57, the measure directly following the clearing arpeggio that completes the gradual transition away from the exuberant final moment of lyricism. In this section a typical *debussyste* “reminiscence coda” (my term) ensues in which earlier material returns, but with variation: constituent sonic ideas combine with each other in new ways and in a weakened state, sounding far away from the listener. Schmitt made his desire for the impression of distant sound explicit by marking the beginning of the coda *comme un écho lointain*, a very common indication at the end of *debussyste* compositions. Originator *debussystes* typically achieved this sense of weakened or far-off sound in their distinctive codas through the use of a slow tempo marking and a very soft dynamic level of *pp* or *ppp*. One sometimes encounters requests for a speed “a little slower” at the beginning of a reminiscence coda in a pervasively *debussyste* composition, such as Schmitt’s direction in *Cimetière*, *Elargissez pour revenir au 1er mouvement* (broaden in order to return to the opening tempo).

Richard Parks’s notion of hybrid ternary form in Debussy’s music, in which the return of the opening section is replaced by a section that mixes material from various earlier sections, approaches the concept of the reminiscence coda, and it can be more broadly applied to the scores of several other composers writing in the *debussyste*
idiom.\textsuperscript{41} In Cimetière’s reminiscence coda all three of the introduction’s bell fragments return, but faintly and only briefly, and with alterations to pitch and rhythm. Thrown in with them is an element from a distant section, the arpeggio that started off the coda, which in the next few measures intertwines with the melody that began in m. 9. The melody wanes and the arpeggio falls away. At this point the texture has thinned, and volume and speed has slowed to such an extent that we feel the composition could end at any moment. Yet it continues, as the dyad and octave bells return, nearly unrecognizable and fainter still, and a return of the melancholy material of mm. 19-21 sweeps the piece to its end. Schmitt drew from several points in the composition’s past, generally in the same order but with some asynchrony caused by the new juxtapositions to which he subjects the six recalled objects. Remarkably, the coda takes up one-third (27 measures) of the composition, illustrating the important role many debussystes gave to reminiscence in their music.

The very final measures of Sur un vieux petit cimetière are characteristic of the paradigm for ending a composition in originator debussyste scores. In keeping with the debussyste preference for process and incompletion, sonic objects stop sounding either because the processes underpinning them run out of steam, so to speak, or because they continue to emit sound but gradually move out of the listener’s range of hearing. Stated another way following Leonard Meyer, debussyste scores tend to lack syntactical closure, such as cadential formulae, and instead mimic musically the loss of life and energy that occurs in natural death by causing secondary parameters (speed, volume, thickness of

\textsuperscript{41} Parks, The Music of Claude Debussy, 224.
texture) to approach zero magnitude. In the case of Cimetière processes seem to die out, due to the written out ritardando and the dropping out of the three textural streams one by one. The highest stream, and the last to die out, plays a central role because it is a regular, repeated sound that persists, like a tolling bell that comes to a stop. Bell sounds occur in the final measures of several other originator scores with incomplete endings, for instance in Caplet’s “Préludes” and Debussy’s La soirée dans Grenade, suggesting that it was a particularly successful way to create a “dying out” effect by manipulation of secondary parameters. Charles Koechlin preferred a “moving off ending” in which slow, dissonant glassy chords rise higher and higher in tessitura, as though receding to the horizon, coupled with a smorzando indication. The composer even attached the marking of en s’éloignant to the rising seventh chords that end “Le cortège d’Amphitrite,” making clear his desire to give the listener the sensation of sound moving into the distance; at the ends of other debussyste compositions one also finds similar indications such as lointain or presque imperceptible. Ravel thinned out the texture at the end of Une barque sur l’océan in a way that creates a striking aural analogue of losing sight of a boat at the horizon.

Approximately 30% of originator songs and piano pieces end on a sonority that contains dissonant intervals (the 2nd, 7th, and tritone, and their replications above the octave). This is a rather low rate of occurrence, but the practice is still much more pervasive in this sample of scores than in the comparison sample: out of all of Fauré’s

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42 Meyer, Style and Music, 15 and 209. Meyer argued that in his music, Debussy de-emphasized syntax and gave greater expressive and structural weight to secondary parameters (Ibid., 140).
43 For example, imperceptible in “Epitaphe de Bilitis” by Koechlin; en se perdant et en retenant in “Quand mon coeur sera mort d’aimer” by Bonheur; pp et perdendo…plus rien in “Le faune” by Debussy; and très lointain in Recuerdos and Westminster Abbey by Grovéz.
pieces which were reviewed, just one song (“Dans un parfum de roses blanches”) ends on a dissonant sonority. This comparison suggests that ending on an unresolved dissonant chord was an element of debussysme that was distinctive within French musical culture during the early twentieth century. Analysis of debussyste scores revealed that—perhaps contrary to intuition—ending on an unresolved dissonance is not a necessary ingredient for creating a sense of incompleteness. More important to the incomplete ending of Cimetières is the lack of any kind of tension-to-rest motion: Schmitt denied the listener repose simply by remaining on the same harmony.

The quintessential debussyste transitional technique mirrors the debussyste ending: material grows weak in volume, speed, and thickness instead of reaching a concluding point, and the lull in activity gives new, more energetic material a chance to take over. This is one of the few debussyste elements that Cimetière lacks, but Schmitt does practice it in later piano pieces, especially Ombres. Originators avoided this transitional technique in songs, except for Delage, Debussy, and Caplet, but it features prominently in 67% of their piano pieces. At several transitional points in Bonheur’s multi-movement Sur trois marches de marbre rose the indication of dim. e rit. over mechanistic, repetitive material causes the music to stop sounding because it has died away rather than finishing. In Example 1.10, from L’escalier de marbre, the last two sonorities of one section echo and fade out, and their weak energy level is a sharp contrast to the higher energy level of the material that replaces it, which is marked mf and Un peu plus mouvementé.

Delage and Caplet might appear so frequently in these lists of exceptions because they wrote very few piano pieces and concentrated their energy on songs, causing them to innovate within the genre more than other debussystes.
A similar procedure occurs in Example 1.11, from Debussy’s *Pour un tombeau sans nom*, but it is more drawn out. An indication once again helps to bring about a standard *debussyste* effect, this time an explicit *perdendosi* accompanies the music as it dies away. Debussy made prolific use of dying-out transitions in his piano pieces, often using them to end every section. Related to the incomplete nature of their transitions and endings is the *debussyste* aversion to periodic phrase structure: in 60% of originator piano works local form is not constructed at the level of the phrase but even more locally, as ideas that consist of one measure or less are strung together. See, for instance, Le Flem’s *Vieux Calvaire*, shown in Example 1.9.\(^45\)

\(^45\) A long-standing distinction has been made between the styles of Debussy and Ravel in terms of their differing approach to phrase structure. Scholars often state that Ravel remained faithful to older notions of phrase structure, such as Robert P. Morgan in the entry for “impressionism” in the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*: “the more emphatic rhythm and phrase structure of much of Ravel’s music sets it distinctly apart from that of Debussy.” Robert P. Morgan, in *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 4\(^{th}\) edn., ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 405. See also Orenstein’s comments about Debussy and Ravel in the introduction to *A Ravel Reader*, 21. But Ravel practiced a unique blending of periodic and innovative phrase structure: compare, for instance, the surges of movement that often end by dying out in *Noctuelles*, the series of static blocks of *Oiseaux tristes*.
Paradigmatic *debussyste* compositions are fundamentally linear: a series of waves of activity that build and quiet. Daniel Shanahan notes that in Debussy’s piano preludes, sectional forms with fairly clear structural boundaries are common, but that what distinguishes the formal concepts displayed in them is that material within sections is generative rather than stable. Thus Debussy’s preludes maintain signs of conventional sectional form but are saturated with kinetic processes.46 This observation finds resonance in the entire set of originator *debussyste* piano scores and songs, which tend to be mechanistic in the sense that their material seems to result from a single effect that is set into motion in the score, such as alternating two fragments, that occurs continuously until the components of the effect fade to invisibility or are shut off. *Debussyste* endings and transitions are particularly mechanistic, bringing to mind a music box whose gears gradually stop turning. This formal tendency is at least complementary to the repetitive nature of the contents of *debussyste* streams and likely derives from it: the repetitive material creates the simple parts of the machine that perform the same function over and over, and the form is the action of all those parts at once. This metaphor makes clear the *debussyste* preoccupation with process: the machine that makes the product is depicted

rather than the product, or perhaps the functioning of the machine, as is the case with the
music box, is itself the product. This was a novel approach to form, differing from forms
driven by sonata principles that were still very popular in early twentieth-century France.

*Debussyste* Sense of Time

The originator *debussystes*’ attraction to temporal instability began to emerge in
the discussion of their formal techniques: tempo changes are important to transitional
moments, coalescing beginnings often rely on metrically ambiguous fragments, and a
characteristic element of the *debussyste* process for ending a composition is a lengthy
period at a very slow tempo. Other scholars, including Jann Pasler and Michael Klein,
have noted the striking resemblances between the theories of Henri Bergson about the
properties of thought and Debussy’s approach to meter and rhythm. This apparent
relationship between philosophy and music both extends to the rest of the originator
*debussystes* and to the writings of many of Bergson’s contemporaries. Because
*debussyste* time seems so intimately bound up with some of the theories about the mind
circulating among psychologists and philosophers in the early twentieth century, the
discussion of it in this chapter will be restricted to a cursory introduction. In the following
chapter, which outlines these contextualizing ideas, the peculiar sense of time in
originator scores will be discussed further.

Shanahan, in his thorough study of processes of implication and projection in
Debussy’s piano preludes, suggests that Debussy understood meter as a process rather

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than a stable element of music. The metrical feel in the composer’s music is ambiguous and unpredictable not only because it often contains rhythms which are difficult to assign to a clear meter, but also makes use of passages with clear, stable experiential meter. As a result the listener struggles to find a sense of time that can be considered normative or habitual—even the condition of ambiguity cannot be counted on as stable. For the same reason of metrical mixing, hypermetric structures of a hierarchical nature are rare in Debussy’s piano preludes, which contributes to a frequent lack of periodic phrase structure.\footnote{Shanahan, “Debussy’s Forms of Deception,” 151-155.}

The observations Shanahan makes about Debussy’s preludes are pertinent to other piano pieces by Debussy as well as to the entire sample of originator piano pieces: 76% of the 144 compositions display significant passages with an ambiguous underlying meter. This feature became a consistent element of debussyste practice by 1903 in the genre of solo piano pieces, but in their songs practitioners of debussysme were much more conservative. In less than half of their debussyste songs did originators insert significant passages of temporal ambiguity, and the practice is rare for the composers who took up debussyste musical practice later. In contrast to the debussystes, Fauré, who was an adventurous composer with regard to harmony and formal organization, invited some temporal ambiguity into just one of his songs, the outlier “Paradis” which begins Chanson d’Eve, and in a handful of his piano pieces from the 1890s.\footnote{On Fauré’s formal and harmonic innovations see Caballero, Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics, 57-75.}

We have already heard a slippery approach to meter in Schmitt’s Sur un vieux petit cimetière, where the sporadic and irregular fragments of the opening sound
wandering and unmetered, yet at the interjection of the more regular and rhythmically active tolling bell in the left hand the notated compound meter becomes palpable. The listener’s impression of the passage of time changes from irregular and idiomatic to regular and normatively paced. In addition to the creation of an unstable sense of meter, originator debussystes used several other techniques to present their listeners with experiences of time beyond the predictable, homogenous time engendered by music that stuck to one meter and emphasized a rigidly regular pulse. Scores that contain frequent tempo changes, such as in Debussy’s *La soirée dans Grenade* and Caplet’s “Cloche d’aube,” disorient the listener and engender a heterogeneous sense of time. Extremely slow tempos like those that permeate Ravel’s *Le gibet* and Koechlin’s *Soir d’été* from *Paysages et Marines* cause the listener to lose track of the pulse. The insertion of patches of complete silence into the score, a noted technique of Debussy that was utilized by several other debussystes, creates the impression that the passage of time has momentarily ceased or is no longer being counted. Textures overwhelmed by gestural fragments of diverse rhythmic character seem to evade the meter and the pulse, such as the whimsical figures of Debussy’s “La danse de Puck” or the excerpt from Caplet’s “Notre chaumière en Yveline” in Example 1.12. The many downbeats that lack an attack in either part of the song by Caplet also deny a metrical feel and contribute to the aural impression of irregular time.
Despite their adventurous temporal experimentation, music without notated meter was a domain the debussystes never ventured into, with the sole exception of Charles Koechlin, whose Paysages et marines and Heures persanes for piano contain un-metered pieces with erratic barlines. The necessary effect in originator debussyste constructions of musical time is not the presence of any single temporal type, but a flexible flow of time that responds to changes in musical material, which will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Debussyste Vocal Melody: In the Manner of Pelléas

“Melody, if I dare say so, is anti-lyrical. It cannot express the motion of the soul, and of life,” Debussy once declared in defense of the controversial vocal melodies of
Pelléas et Mélisande. The opera was a rallying point in 1902 for originator debussystes and also a seminal manifestation of their shared melodic techniques. Debussy’s use of the word “anti-lyrical” to describe melody speaks to the decisive break with established conventions in the conception of vocal melody in the opera, and, accordingly, several offended critics attacked it as completely lacking in melody. In the quotation given above, Debussy explained that he was forced to re-invent melody because at the hands of other composers it had become limited in expressive power. Based on the score of Pelléas, this project of melodic renovation ostensibly involved stripping the vocal parts of much of the information a French opera audience in 1902 expected. Debussy suppressed structural techniques such as periodic phrase structure and graceful melodic curves, and, by reorienting the harmonic relationship between the vocal and instrumental parts, avoided the powerful emotional effect created by cycles of tension and release that were a hallmark of late nineteenth-century chromaticism. These conventional techniques imbued the text with signification and guided the intellect and the emotions of an enculturated listener through the composition; in place of them Debussy and many of the other debussystes offered alternative methods for signifying emotional and

50 Debussy, “Critique des critiques: Pelléas et Mélisande,” interview conducted by Robert de Flers, Le Figaro (May 16 1902); reprinted in Monsieur Croche, 270.
organizational content in melodies. These efforts generally followed the paradigms Debussy envisioned in *Pelléas*.

Faithful preservation of the semantic meaning of the French text was of paramount importance in *debussyste* vocal lines, and to achieve this goal originators typically created parlando melodies that at once closely followed the rhythm of the spoken French and subtly highlighted emotional content. In the late nineteenth century many French composers grew interested in writing melodies that accorded with the sound of the spoken declamation of the poem being set, but the *debussystes* took up the idea with zeal. Even the individualistic Fauré retained melodies that are still conventionally melodic in the innovative songs of *La bonne chanson*, composed between 1892 and 1894: schematic patterns and pervasive rhythmic motives still provide a clear, pleasant structure that a listener can easily comprehend. *Debussystes* were willing to forego melodic lines built upon rhythmic patterns, unafraid of the unwieldy phrases that the spoken declamation of the text provided. The composers often refused pitch-related patterns as well, and instead of melodies with graceful curves they composed long, flat melodies with narrow ranges and groups of repeated pitches. Debussy explained that in *Pelléas* he wanted the characters to

sing like normal people and not in an arbitrary language of outmoded traditions. It is because of this that others reproach me for my so-called bias in favor of monotone declamation where not even a hint of melody ever appears…

53 “Chanter comme des personnes naturelles et non pas dans une langue arbitraire faite de traditions suranées. C’est là d’où vient le reproche que l’on a fait à mon soi-disant parti pris de déclamation monotone où jamais rien n’apparaît de melodique…D’abord cela est faux; en outre, les sentiments d’un personnage ne peuvent s’exprimer continuellement d’une façon mélodique…” Debussy, “Pourquoi j’ai écrit *Pelléas,*” *La Revue blanche* (April 1902); reprinted in *Monsieur Croche*, 62.
He added that one could find the shallow kind of melody that detractors missed in his opera among the street singers, he adds.\textsuperscript{54} To Debussy, what others generally understood to be melody—which might be defined as a string of notes tunefully arranged in a balanced schema—was in fact unable to approach the rich contents of the words of a powerful text because it privileged extraneous formal conventions over the careful translation of meaning. Elsewhere he warned French composers not to “stifle all feeling beneath a mass of motives and superimposed designs,” an open reference to symphonic development associated with Wagner’s instrumental parts, but with ramifications for vocal melody as well: in texted pieces, the emotional content can potentially change with every word and its nuances would be at odds with musical patterns that contained recurring elements.\textsuperscript{55} The musical setting could only properly capture the significative richness of a text if it faithfully followed this erratic and constantly changing stream of meaning.

Many French critics of the premiere season of $Pelléas$ were delighted to hear how accurately Debussy’s parlando vocal melodies aligned so subtly with the accent and rhythm of their national language and the sentiments of the characters as they sang them. They paid special attention to the “letter scene” of Act I, scene ii, where Geneviève reads an emotional letter from her grandson Golaud, in which he asks his royal family to accept a marriage they were not given a chance to approve. Henri Ghéon singled out the letter scene as an example of Debussy’s new kind of melody and went so far as to claim that

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
with it the composer could attach to Maeterlinck’s words the “movement itself of the thoughts” of the characters.\footnote{Henri Ghéon, “Notes sur une renaissance dramatique,” \emph{L’Ermitage} (July 1902): 12-13. Mallarmé used “le mouvement même de la pensée,” to describe the behavior of good poetry, and Ghéon’s ease in applying the phrase and other Symbolist ideas to the style of \emph{Pelléas} suggests the strong aesthetic overlap of the literary movement and \emph{debussymé}, especially regarding the notion of art mimicking the mechanisms of thought.}

As Example 1.13 shows, the melodies of the letter scene make use of a narrow range and strings of repeated notes, and the rhythmic schema is provided by the rhythm of the spoken French and the changes that would occur in the speaker’s voice due to emotion. The example begins in the middle of the first of three rhythmic waves that crescendo and then decrescendo in speed, a pattern that betrays Geneviève’s difficulty in containing her emotions as she reads; its effect is complimented by a similarly gradual rise and fall in the tonic pitch of the phrases.\footnote{In her linguistic analysis of vocal melody in \emph{Pelléas}, Christiane Spieth-Weissenbacher shows how carefully the shape of Debussy’s melodies with regard to pitch match the speech curves typical in spoken French for certain emotions and types of expression (interrogation, paranthetical expression, etc.). See Christiane Spieth-Weissenbacher, “ Phonétique et analyse musicale: Le récitatif mélodique dans \emph{Pelléas et Mélisande} de Claude Debussy,” in \emph{Méthodes nouvelles, musiques nouvelles: musicologie et création}, ed. Marta Grabocz (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 1999), 157-69.} Debussy was careful to mimic the French tendency to place little stress on any of the words in a phrase until the end, and he even distinguishes the variable length of this stress according to the type of ending: the slight lengthening of “vient” in “ni d’où elle vient et” resulted in less of a stress than that allotted to words preceded by a comma. He also grouped together words that the French say quickly as one unit, such as “doit avoir eu” or later in the scene, “ce qui lui et arrivé,” where he also captured the very slight emphasis the French give to the demonstrative pronoun “ce” and again placed the longest rhythmic value at the end of the phrase. Due to the sparseness of the orchestral accompaniment at this point of the score, the task of
communicating the emotional content of the letter falls mostly to the melody, and many reviewers noted how effectively Debussy succeeded in this challenging task.


In songs written during the composition of *Pelléas* and after it Debussy consistently used this distinctive kind of vocal melody. It first emerged in a mature form in *Chansons de Bilitis*, but the composer had been writing increasingly non-schematic and parlando melodies since the early 1880s, passing through several songs that show the influence of Fauré’s simple, narrow, and loosely schematic melodies before taking the concept even further by 1890.

Several young composers who attended the premiere performances of *Pelléas* were struck by the alternative methods of construction and signification that Debussy presented in it. Later in life many of them wrote fondly of their initial exposure to what they considered a revolutionary composition, and like Debussy, they championed the vocal writing in it as the epitome of the French genius for concise and accurate
communication. Parlando melodies of marked similarity to those in Debussy’s opera show up in originator scores, but just three examples pre-date the 1902 premiere of Pelléas: Bonheur’s “Quand verrai-je les îles,” Séverac’s “Un rêve” and Caplet’s “Chanson d’automne.” By 1903, one year after the premiere season of Pelléas, several debussystes had gained command of Debussy’s idiomatic vocal writing and it pervaded their songs for the rest of the decade. Like Debussy, other originator debussystes were careful to set texts with attention to the spoken rhythm of the words and the particular expression required with each word as the poet’s thought developed, forgoing abstract schemas.

In “Un rêve,” shown in Example 1.14, Séverac gave special weight to the dramatic “Ah” that begins the first line of the poem and then moved speedily through “qu’est-ce qui n’est pas,” a quick, unaccented grammatical unit in spoken French. The slight stress given to “un rêve,” the subject of the poem, aids the listener in interpreting the text. Over the next several words Séverac maintained a narrow range of a fifth and continued to utilize repeated pitches. Caplet composed several stunning debussyste songs in which parlando vocal melodies gently and idiomatically twist across the accompaniment. The sparse piano part in Example 1.15 from “Préludes” is reminiscent of the delicate orchestral part in Debussy’s letter scene, showing how originator debussystes also picked up on the subtly responsive quality of the instrumental parts in Pelléas: the

58 See the discussion of biographies of Debussy and studies of Pelléas written by other debussystes on pp. 145-146 and 179-180, below. Sylvie Douche and Jean-Christophe Branger summarize the statements that French composers, including several debussysts, made about the impact of Debussy’s opera in “Un siècle de regards sur Pelléas et Mélisande: la parole aux compositeurs,” Revue musicale de Suisse romande: Pelléas centennaire 55, no. 2 (2002): 30-39.

59 There are few examples of debussyste operas, as shown in Appendix A, perhaps because an opera was a substantial undertaking that, to be profitable, needed to make use of conventions in order to find favor with large audiences.
expressive quality of the piano part changes with each measure, from calm chords to an energetic arpeggio that prefigures the “ray of sunlight” spoken of in the poem.

Example 1.14. Séverac, “Un rêve,” (1901) mm. 12-17

Koechlin’s “Amphise et Mélita” is another example of debussyste parlando vocal melody composed during the first decade of the twentieth century, which was the height of the technique’s popularity. One of the most individualistic debussystes, Koechlin was by this time already venturing into melodies that maintained highly nuanced rhythms, yet were more mobile and relied less on repeated notes and small intervals, while many of the other originators were still keeping more strictly to the style of Pelléas. Although Koechlin followed the spoken rhythm of the line of poetry with finesse in Example 1.16, the pitch changes with almost every note, and by the end of the phrase it has fallen by a ninth. Just a few years later this Pelléas melody with a twist became a popular trend among the originators.
Example 1.15. Caplet, “Préludes,” (1908) mm. 11-20

Example 1.16. Koechlin, “Amphise et Mélita,” (1906-07), mm. 30-35
In a rich essay on Debussy’s musical language from 1965, Ernest Ansermet argued that Debussy’s melody was profoundly revolutionary because the composer had “unhinged” the tight bond between melody and harmony that had existed for several centuries prior, in which melody was derivative of harmony. Ansermet believed that this greater independence allowed Debussy to assign the melodic and the harmonic parts in a texture two very different yet complimentary roles. A conductor and music scholar keenly interested in philosophy of the mind, Ansermet understood the functions of the parts phenomenologically: Debussy’s melody was the impression of an object, and what could be considered the harmonic or chordal parts of the texture were the enveloping response of consciousness to that object. In this model restrained expression becomes a positive quality of debussyste melodies, necessary for them to fulfill their duty of accurately presenting the text or object to the instrumental part. They must be thinly significative because emotions are produced by the thinking subject that reacts to an object, and not by the object itself. Meanwhile, the greater activity and emotional content of the instrumental parts in debussyste songs stems from their role as a reacting human consciousness, and their frequent organization into streaming textures in originator scores causes them to portray the mechanism and the processes by which the reactions are manifested in addition to the content of the reactions.

Ansermet found that Debussy achieved separation of melodic and harmonic parts by writing them in different modes or keys, for instance the surprising moment when the

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60 Ernest Ansermet, “Le Langage de Debussy,” in Debussy et L’évolution de la musique au XXe siècle, ed. Edith Weber (Paris: Editions CNRS, 1965), 38. Ansermet’s comments addressed Debussy’s melody in all genres, and his primary examples come from Prélude à L’Après-midi d’un faune, but the discussion here will be limited to originator songs. The principles derived from these scores do seem to be widely applicable to the behavior of melodies in purely instrumental debussyste compositions, and this could be a promising next step in this line of research.

61 Ibid., 42.
E-major solo flute opening of Prélude à L'après-midi d’un faune meets the entrance of the rest of the orchestra, whose part implies D major. Although Ansermet focused on purely instrumental compositions in his comments about harmonic and melodic roles in Debussy’s music, his principle carries over to vocal music and to the debussyste phenomenon in general: many originator songs contain vocal parts that consistently sound as though they float above the instrumental parts. There were many situations that could produce “floating vocal melody” (my term) but Ansermet’s idea of the melody gaining harmonic independence is the principle common to all of them.

In “Un rêve” (Ex. 1.14) the melody largely contains pitches generated from the harmony, but Séverac took most of the pitches from the highest chord tones, the fifth and the seventh. In mm. 13-14 he avoided the root and the third of the chord entirely, confining the melody so that it floats among the upper chord tones, and the striking result is a vocal part that seems to float above an instrumental part that sounds “grounded” because it contains all or most of the chord tones of each sonority. The thick harmonies in the piano engender an even greater sense of separation in “Amphise et Mélita” (Ex. 1.16), because the complex and dissonant sound they give rise to blends the chord tones. In relation to an instrumental part that itself seems to float and lack clear harmonic identity, the vocal part in this song tends to sound mismatched, even when it lands upon the root of one of these chords. There are many instances in the song where Koechlin separated the two parts even further by assigning the vocal line pitches that fall outside of the many possible tones of the complex sonorities that fill the rest of the texture, such as the Eb in

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62 Ibid., 38.
m. 33. In a noteworthy 85% of their songs and piano scores, originator *debussystes* made pervasive use of “floating vocal melody.”

Danièle Pistone notes that Debussy often left vocal melodies “unsupported harmonically” at the ends of phrases. Her perceptive observation applies more widely as a characteristic of all of originator *debussyste* songs, but the somewhat vague notion can be further refined. The above examples from “Amphise et Mélita” and Caplet’s “Préludes” both display originator *debussystes*’ proclivity for leaving the vocal part unresolved against the instrumental part at the ends of phrases where some feeling of closure would be expected, by causing it to stop on one of the pitches distant from the root of the supporting harmony or even on a pitch that clashes with the harmony entirely. This practice at the ends of vocal phrases makes an important turn away from the technique of allowing the voice to stray briefly from the harmony and then pulling it firmly back to it that composers writing in a chromatic language that composers such as Massenet and Charpentier used so consistently and to great emotional effect. Instead of a dramatic build-up of dissonance and its release as the two parts reunite harmonically, *debussyste* vocal melodies sustain a low level of tension as the vocal line is passed from one dissonance against the instrumental part to another. The result is a kind of melodic stasis which complements the avoidance of tension-release paradigms of nineteenth-century harmonic practice in favor of juxtaposed sections of harmonic stasis that other scholars have noted in Debussy’s music.

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Debussy composed the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* during a brief phase of functional chromaticism in his career, and they contain masterful examples of the tension-and-release cycles possible in the late nineteenth-century chromatic idiom. In “Le balcon” the piano part guides the melody through slippery and goal-driven harmonies. The two parts are in such a close relationship that the former generates the latter, as in the first measure of Example 1.17, where the highly chromatic vocal melody doubles the soprano line in the piano. In the next measure the melody jumps up to the ninth of the D⁹ harmony, but the dissonance is quickly resolved when in the penultimate measure the harmony cadences and the pitch becomes the 3rd of the tonic chord: the piano part effectively pulls the vocal line back down and neutralizes the distance between the two of them. Debussy quickly moved away from this technique of creating powerful tension and then release between the vocal and instrumental part: there is even a markedly lower reliance on the device in the latest songs of the Baudelaire set, written just one year after “Le balcon.”

**Example 1.17. Debussy, “Le balcon” (1887), final system**

The process of unhinging melody from harmony was steadily achieved in Debussy’s output for voice, and by *Pelléas* vocal melodies regularly float in the upper chord tones.
Nonetheless, Debussy stopped short of allowing vocal melodies to linger in the upper chord tones of the supporting harmony at the ends of phrases; this treatment of melody presents an unusual instance of a debussyste innovation that originated not in Debussy’s scores but those of other originators.

**Debussyste Harmony: Pleasing Confusion**

Although most of the originator debussystes have received little or no attention from scholars, extensive work has been done on Debussy and Ravel, and their powerful and particular harmonic blends are often a point of interest. Yet despite all the attention, it has been difficult for modern scholars to move beyond heterogeneous lists of unrelated techniques when they draw their conclusions about the composers’ harmonic idioms. Such lists of Debussy’s harmonies sprang up immediately in the press after he caught the attention of the French musical world with *Pelléas*: in his review of the opera in 1902 Willy (Henri Gauthier-Villars) named whole-tone scales, strings of ninth chords, harsher and more pervasive dissonance, uni-directional series of consonances, parallel fourths and fifths, and non-functional chromatic movement (fausses relations). One can make the list much longer, adding to it pedal tones, modulation and progression by 3rds, modal scales, pentatonic scales, and the superimposition of tonal and non-tonal material. Over the last century other writers have continued to investigate Debussy’s harmony, and their studies have produced longer lists and better explanations for how individual elements function in his music, but sought-after systematic theories that cause the elements on the lists to cohere together have remained elusive.

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For instance, in the introductory remarks to his thoughtful essay on tonality and Debussy, Boyd Pomeroy describes the frustrating gulf that persists between the experience of listening to Debussy’s music and the experience of analyzing it:

While analysts have usually considered this aspect of Debussy’s art to be rather problematic in the sense of abstruse, elusive, or otherwise difficult to grasp…, it would be fair to say that this conception has not been shared by concert audiences; on the contrary, Debussy remains one of the most endurably popular composers of the post-Romantic era.66

Pomeroy also notes the “unusually diverse range of critical and analytical viewpoints” that scholarship on Debussy has produced, which either indicates that Debussy’s music itself fundamentally lacks consistency, or that we have not yet arrived at the nature of the systems that underlie it.67 A similar situation exists in the scholarship regarding Ravel. Stephen Zank recently stated that “the topic of Ravel’s harmony remains enigmatic; though somewhat explored, few common conclusions have been drawn.” Zank’s own comments on about Ravel’s harmony in the same source as this observation occur in the form of snippets of commentary on Ravel’s usage of a very particular harmonic device (the added sixth, for example) in a single work, arranged ostensibly without regard to order.68

As I attempt to provide some principles that can explain the function of several debussyste harmonic techniques at once, I will focus on surface-level effects instead of deeper harmonic structure. This is because several theorists have noted that the novelties in Debussy and Ravel reside primarily at this level rather than at deeper harmonic levels,

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67 Ibid.
where the composers often retain older paradigms. Additionally, I believe that the strong emotional response that many illiterate listeners experience when listening to Debussy music more likely results from what they hear in chord-to-chord harmony rather than in large-scale harmonic designs that one must learn about to appreciate.69

The latter hypothesis is also supported by an impressive body of experimental research about the fundamental ways in which humans perceive sonic environments. Many researchers have suggested that a primary goal in aural perception is to draw up a sonic picture of an unfamiliar environment by positing the number, location and basic properties of separate sound sources.70 In 1971, Albert Bregman and Jeffrey Campbell first coined the term “auditory stream,” to designate the units into which the brain breaks down a complex sonic fabric: a perceptually independent component of the sound that consists of successive attacks that cohere, and which correspond to what the mind perceives as separate sound sources.71 In his seminal study of auditory perception, Bregman termed the sonic picture that the brain imagines based on this process an

69 Mark DeVoto notes that while functional tonal progressions structure much of Debussy’s music, this is not what we are referring to when we speak of the composer’s characteristic sound, and he goes on to describe a few, specific harmonies that are instead Debussy’s aural calling cards when sounded at the surface level. See Mark DeVoto, “The Debussy Sound: Colour, Texture, Gesture,” in Cambridge Companion to Debussy, 188-189. The frequent recourse of theorists to the term “coloristic effect” to describe the function of individual chord tones emphasizes the apparent dichotomy between the surface and the background in Debussy’s harmony. Zank focuses exclusively on these coloristic added-note harmonies in his discussion of Ravel’s harmony in Irony and Sound, 147-166.

70 The ears therefore serve the vital role of allowing the brain to very quickly understand where hostile objects or beings are located without seeing them. In the distant past, this skill allowed humans to determine that a large animal was moving towards them in the middle of the night, and in modern life it also allows us to pick out the sound of an ambulance on a busy street and guess the direction in which it is moving.

“auditory scene,” and he designed several experiments to determine the principles the auditory cortex uses to parse a mass of sounds into auditory streams. The majority of the perceptual principles he substantiated concerned movements between individual, successive sounds—what music scholars would label the musical surface.

Other researchers have continued along this line of inquiry, focusing on the surface rather than deep structural properties. Of particular interest are developments within the last few decades that have found strong relationships between common-practice voice-leading (part-writing) rules and the perceptual principles of auditory streaming. David Huron, a leading scholar in this area, has shown convincingly that most voice-leading rules taught for centuries to music students are derived from these perceptual laws of auditory streaming.72 This link between long-standing pedagogical advice for what to do and what to avoid in the construction of “good” contrapuntal music and recent findings about human aural perception also offers some systematic explanations of debussyste harmonic techniques. This explanation occurs in the negative, however, because debussyste composers consistently break some of the cardinal rules of part-writing and therefore create perceptually incoherent auditory streams with regard to pitch. Several debussyste harmonic usages appear to be related: they introduce confusion into the auditory scene by disrupting the listener’s ability to either parse out individual tones in a single sonority or discern coherent auditory streams in successions of sonorities. The two perceptually difficulties often occur simultaneously in debussyste

72 These laws have been adduced from experiments involving mostly Western European, Canadian, and American subjects. Until experiments across the world with several diverse populations confirm it, these perceptual axioms cannot be understood as universal. Happily, the studies already conducted have involved subjects who, due to where they are from, would have been enculturated to Common-Practice-era art music, just as the debussystes and their contemporary audiences would have been. See Huron, “Tone and Voice,” 1-64.
scores. This hypothesis locates the distinctive sound of Debussy’s and Ravel’s harmonies not in the individual sonorities themselves, but in the movement between them. Their usages went beyond the concept of neologism (the invention of new words) associated with the symbolists and the notion of “coloristic harmony,” and challenged what were at the time the foundational rules of conventional harmonic syntax.

A truly comprehensive description of the systemic, perceptual basis of Debussy harmonic usages would be a large undertaking involving extensive comparative analysis and perhaps even targeted experiments with human subjects, both of which lie beyond the scope of this study. What I will instead provide here is a first small step in this direction by elucidating the perceptual basis of some of the Debussy techniques and by demonstrating the predominance of perceptually confusing harmonies in these scores. By examining specific instances of the techniques, I also invite the reader to recall and make sense of other bizarre harmonic instances in the scores of originator Debussystes and their contemporaries. This preliminary discussion might lead to more exhaustive studies and the eventual discovery of broader, systematic theories about surface-level harmonic movement common to Debussy harmony that approach the cohesion and wide applicability of Common-Practice-era voice-leading rules.

The simplest example of a Debussy usage that results in incoherent auditory streams is a string of parallel fifths. The technique goes against one of the cardinal rules of voice-leading taught in contemporary music theory, and the prohibition has endured for centuries with good reason. The auditory cortex uses templates (rules based on what it

73 Scholars who have searched primarily in individual sonorities for the novelty of Debussy’s harmony have concluded that Debussy’s harmony is merely derivative of early innovators such as Wagner, Chabrier, and Duparc, who were already using non-dominant function extended harmonies. One example of such an attempt is Christopher Palmer, *Impressionism in Music* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973).
has generally found to be true in past experience) to assemble an auditory scene out of masses of partials, and one of these templates is that partials that form a harmonic series most likely come from the same sound source. One pitch produced by a pitched instrument generates several partials arranged in an ascending harmonic series, and the third partial creates a fifth with the fundamental frequency. As a result of this relationship, the brain has difficulty deciding if two pitches a perfect fifth apart should be interpreted as two sound sources or a more complex sound emitted by a single source. In the field of auditory perception this uncertainty about the number of sound sources is called tonal fusion.\(^{74}\) A string of fifths amplifies tonal fusion because the partials are not only related in a series but are also behaving as one unit, because they all move in the same direction at the same time. This parallel movement is termed “co-modulation,” and it also arouses the brain’s suspicion that the simultaneously-sounding pitches are being produced by the same source.\(^{75}\) Because the brain does not appreciate ambiguity as it tries to make educated guesses about an unknown environment, we might feel frustration and irritation when confronted with tonal fusion; the negative emotions associated with parallel fifths were evidently great enough that European musical pedagogues banned them in part-writing handbooks. The rule endures even today and was still firmly in place during the time of the *debussyste* movement in France: French critics such as Willy, above, regularly noted Debussy’s persistent transgression of the rule.\(^{76}\)

\(^{74}\) Huron, “Tone and Voice,” 18-21.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 30-31 and 36.

\(^{76}\) Tonal fusion and co-modulation were not concepts entirely foreign to the *debussystes’* first audiences in France, because they experienced the effects to some degree in the accompaniment parts of homophonic pieces that were meant to melt into the background behind a melody. The *debussystes* startled their contemporaries by introducing confusing tonal fusion and co-modulation into elements that serve as focal points in the texture.
Debussy’s use of the technique is well-known. Bare parallel fifths are common agents in the lowest part of his textures, for example in the streaming textures of “De soir” and *Des pas sur la neige*, and the composite texture of “Placet futile.” One also frequently finds parallel fifths nested in parallel triads of various types: in the full parallel triads of *Hommage à Rameau* and *La cathédrale engloutie*, or the triads missing the third of “La flûte de Pan” or *Sarabande*. Debussy created a particularly striking effect in the final section of “Le tombeau des naiades” by stringing together perfect and altered parallel fifths.

What has not been addressed in scholarly literature is the enthusiasm with which several other composers took up the technique. Originator *debussystes* both echoed Debussy’s specific usages and invented new ones. Robert Orledge has observed that after 1890, open-fifth pedals in the bass and faster strings of fourths and fifths higher in the texture become standard elements of Koechlin’s style. In originator piano scores and songs parallel fifths are most commonly deployed in the lowest part, for instance in the gamelan streaming texture of Séverac’s “Temps de neige” (Ex. 1.18) where open fifths in the bass ring out in slow note values like a gong. Other instances of the gong-like parallel fifths can be found in *Baigneuses au soleil* also by Séverac, Le Flem’s *Vieux Calvaire*, and “Le Paon” from Ravel’s *Histoires naturelles*. In mm. 9-11 of “Résonnances” (Ex. 1.19), Maurice Emmanuel filled the piano part with thick sonorities with persistent co-modulated triads. Koechlin used a very similar layering technique in “Promenade vers la mer” (Ex. 1.20), which might cause a listener to fuse the chord tones that make up the topmost stream because they are all major triads, creating strong co-modulation; strings

77 For more examples of parallel fifths in Debussy’s scores see DeVoto, “The Debussy Sound,” 186-187.
of major triads can also be found at points of détente in the third movement of Ravel’s *Sonatine*.

**Example 1.18. Séverac, “Temps de neige” (1903), mm. 9-13**

Quartal and quintal harmonies became popular among many of the *debussystes* in the 1910s, and stacked parallel fifths came out of experimentation with these sonorities. Unlike some of the other *debussystes*, Debussy rarely ventured into non-tertian harmonies. As a result, this non-tertian version of co-modulation is an innovation that did
not originate in Debussy’s scores but was rather coined principally by Koechlin and Ravel. A few of these superimposed parallel fifths sound in the left-hand stream in Koechlin’s *Promenade vers la mer* (Ex. 1.20) and Ravel also deployed quintal chords in the lowest voice of *Le gibet* as the principal melody. The opening measures of Caplet’s “Forêt,” shown in Example 1.21, are saturated with superimposed parallel fifths that create quintal sonorities. These chord voices would be particularly difficult for the brain to parse into a consistent set of streams, because in addition to the tonal fusion engendered, on beat three of the second measure the highest voice suddenly disappears and the alto voice splits in two.

**Example 1.20. Koechlin, *Promenade vers la mer* (1915-16) p. 2, system II**

![Example 1.20](image)

**Example 1.21. Caplet, “Forêt” (1914-16), mm. 1-4**

![Example 1.21](image)

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79 Robert Orledge characterizes the development of quartal and quintal harmonies in Koechlin’s songs in *Charles Koechlin*, 87-88.
Originator *debussystes* experimented with other kinds of parallel intervals and chords at least as much, if not more, than fifths. The parallel fourth results in some tonal fusion due to harmonic series overlap, and although the effect is weaker than for octaves or fifths, French critics such as Willy included it on their lists of Debussy’s harmonic heresy. In Debussy’s *Etude pour les quarts* for piano, co-modulated streams of the interval logically pervade the piece. Ravel opened and closed *La vallée des cloches* with quick parallel fourths in the highest stream that resemble strings of pearls in the score. Strings of the same type sound in the piano part of another piece about bells, Caplet’s “Cloche d’aube.”

As the number of pitches that make up co-modulated sonorities increase and the intervals among them drift into the dissonance of sevenths and seconds, their partials clash in inharmonic series of greater disorganization. The most daring harmonic innovators among the originators continued to explore this uncharted musical territory. Caplet preferred parallel intervals of the seventh and seventh chords to parallel fifths. “Hymne à la naissance du matin” opens with several measures of parallel sevenths, and strings of inverted ninth chords that engender parallel intervals of the seventh pervade the piano part of “Doux fut le trait” (Ex. 1.22). Similar use of inverted and root position strings of sevenths is displayed in “Dédicace” by Koechlin (Ex. 1.23) and *Cette ombre, mon image* by Schmitt (see Ex. 1.24).

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80 Co-modulated streams of fourths are a preferred *debussyste* technique for evoking bells, and it is indeed an effective perceptual trick. Bells produce an inharmonic series of partials that tend to clump together into what the brain perceives as multiple pitches, and the partials of two pitches related by a perfect fourth align into an inharmonic series.
In *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fût* and *Feuilles mortes*, Debussy took co-modulated dissonant chords out of the realm of tertian harmony. In the latter piece a chord containing two seconds stacked on top of each other floats gently downward, suggesting both the movement of dead, falling leaves. The auditory scene resulting from
these complex and dissonant parallel sonorities contains mysterious, intriguing sonic objects slithering and bounding through the texture whose composite partials are not generated according to normative rules.

After it has grouped partials into pitches, a major principle that the brain uses to discern auditory streams is the pitch proximity rule: if all other factors are equal, successive sounds that are nearest to each other in pitch will be assigned to the same stream. If the brain must decide between a c’ and an f as the next pitch in a stream following a b, it will choose the nearer c’. Several voice-leading rules deal with this perceptual principle, such as the “common tone rule” (if there is a pitch common to two successive chords, it should remain in the same voice), the “nearest chordal tone rule” (a voice should proceed to the closest pitch in the next sonority), and the prohibition against crossing of parts. The advice to make sparing use of leaps also relates to the precedence the brain accords to pitch proximity in its perception of auditory streams. Debussyste harmony is characterized by leaps, both in terms of wide distances that separate whole sonorities and jumps that occur within a single voice part. What the eye might be able to understand in the score as the voice-leading progression between two chords, the ear might find very difficult to follow. A good example of this is the sudden shift noted earlier at the beginning of “Forêt” by Caplet (see Ex. 1.21). Part crossing occurs at the end of the second measure in two places at once: voice 5 (the highest voice) jumps into the space of 4, and 2 crosses over 1. These voice-crossing occur in tandem with tonal fusion of the individual sonorities as discussed above, which increases the listener’s confusion. Such chordal shifts pervade the compositions of the originator debussystes, yet

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81 Huron, “Tone and Voice,” 34-35.
82 Ibid.
they are rare in the works of their French contemporaries. Caballero claims that Fauré maintained good voice-leading throughout his career, and that the striking harmonies one finds in his later works shock the ear because they result from unconventional progressions, but still possess a “clear contrapuntal rationale.”

Debussy developed unorthodoxies in his harmonic language gradually. In the Baudelaire songs he experimented with non-functional chromaticism, but the individual chord voices continue to progress by small intervals. Just a few years later, however, the composer began “De rêve” with Bb+ and Ab triads that tumble down the keyboard in alternation. The combination of chords is already disorienting because it is not remotely functional, but Debussy makes the gesture even more jarring to the listener’s ears by separating each sonority by a wide falling tritone. Example 1.25b shows the chords first as they are voiced by Debussy in this song and then in an alternate version that keeps them much closer together, so that by the end of the measure the total distance fallen is an octave less than in the original. Another registral shift occurs in the same song in m. 45 (Ex. 1.25c), in between the B♭ and D7 chords. The weakly functional mediant progression is already somewhat surprising to the ear, but Debussy could have voiced the seventh chord in the third or fourth inversion which would have resulted in sonorities that are located much closer together in sonic space. Debussy continued to experiment with disruptive shifts between sonorities throughout his career, arriving for example at the skips of a seventh in La terrasse des audiences au clair de lune, shown in Ex. 1.26.

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83 Caballero, Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics, 62-63.
Example 1.25. Debussy, “De rêve” (1892)

a. m. 1

Example 1.26. Debussy, *La terrasse des audiences au clair de lune* (1912-13), mm. 3-4
Although Ravel did not disrupt streams by inserting confusing leaps in pitch within single chord voices as often as did Debussy, one still finds plenty of examples of the technique in his output for piano and voice.\textsuperscript{84} For example, Stephen Zank notes what he terms “re-registration” in the final measures of \textit{Oiseaux tristes}, where a repeated tonic sonority with the leading-tone attached to it is resolved, but Ravel displaced the tonic note that achieves the resolution upwards by an octave, greatly weakening the effect.\textsuperscript{85} The composer could have easily sounded the tonic note nearest to the unresolved leading tone. Nonetheless, he chose to keep the note in the same high register where it has sounded frequently throughout the piece, perhaps to create the impression of a bird calling from above the listener in the forest canopy.

\textbf{Example 1.27. Ravel, \textit{Ondine} (1908)}

\begin{itemize}
\item[a.] m. 58
\end{itemize}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example_1.27}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item[b.] Original Voicing and Re-voicing of m. 58
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{84} This might be a useful distinction that helps to explain why Debussy’s and Ravel’s harmony sounds at once similar and disparate: both composers create pitch disturbances in auditory streams, but do so in different ways.

\textsuperscript{85} Zank, \textit{Ravel}, 153. Zank also notes registral shifts in \textit{Valses nobles et sentimentales}, which is not a \textit{debussyste} work (see p. 158).
c. m. 61

![Musical notation image](image)

d. Original Voicing and Re-voicing of m. 61

![Musical notation image](image)

Some of the unusual sounds in *Ondine* are achieved by re-voicing chords so that streams in the harmony suddenly jump by a considerable distance. In m. 58 Ravel thickened the melody in the middle staff with entire chords, which, if they were voiced differently as shown in Example 1.27b, would sound much less striking. In any case the progression shown in the example is unorthodox, but this quality is emphasized when on the fourth beat the line suddenly shifts upwards, and the bottom three voices seem to disappear. The measure as Ravel composed it is shown in Ex. 1.27, followed by a re-voicing of the middle staff that seeks to retain as much smooth voice-leading as possible. Another alternative would have been to keep the second chord as Ravel has it, and to then voice the G\(^7\) in second inversion. Combined with the falling octatonic dyads in the highest part of the texture, this strangely voiced progression engenders an otherworldly sound appropriate to the subject of the piece.\(^{86}\) The chordal line in the middle of the

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\(^{86}\) The shift is also practical because it keeps the melody in the highest voice and its harmonic expansion all within an octave, so that it fits comfortably in the pianist’s left hand.
texture rises into the treble clef and a harmonic variation of the progression in m. 58 sounds, also shown in Example 27, but this time Ravel inserts the shift one sonority earlier.

In his first debussyste composition, “Chanson d’automne,” Caplet employed voice-crossing, a violation of the pitch proximity rule, as a principal feature of the work. His precocious enthusiasm for the unorthodox technique continued throughout the rest of his career: in his late songs the texture of the piano part becomes so gestural and mobile that it renders the conventional idea of voice leading largely irrelevant. See Example 1.15, above, from “Préludes” where in m. 12 three sonorities bounce down the upper staff and in m. 20 the composer displaces the $A^b$-C dyad by an octave, so that a ninth rather than a whole step separates it from the $B^b$-D dyad that precedes it. Caplet positioned most of the gestural fragments shown in Example 15 in their own registral space, so that connections between sonorities are very difficult to make. He further exacerbated the perceptual confusion of this moment by separating the fragments from each other temporally with either rests or long notes.

Koechlin emphasized long, uni-directional strings of loosely connected chords in his characteristic harmonic language, and he did not hesitate to dot the gauzy chordal lines with leaps. In his earliest debussyste songs he crafted passages of sonorities with disjunct voice-leading, such as in the piano introduction and conclusion to “Accompagnement.” The unpredictable nature of his harmonic progressions is due in part to free transgressions of the proximity principle, which would only become more extreme in his late debussyste songs and piano works.
Non-functional chromaticism, which Pomeroy notes is a principal feature of Debussy’s harmony, is also pervasive in the harmonic languages of other originator debussystes. The practice creates some perceptual confusion by breaking schematic principles, or the expectations one learns from exposure to several examples of a certain category of music where a certain rule is consistently followed. Functional, diatonic tonality is a schematic edifice in which a very restricted number of moves between the chords of particular scale degrees are normative, and non-functional chromaticism pushes beyond these few possibilities. When a composer does not adhere to these normative progressions the brain will likely be unable to reliably predict future sonorities, yet if it can habituate to this loss and if the voices in the non-functional progression in question generally move by step, the brain can at least follow along. As a result, non-functional chromaticism challenges a listener’s perceptually to a lesser degree than non-functional chords in which the voices move by leap.

Schmitt was a masterful craftsman of innovative, non-functional chromaticism, and this is the principal distinguishing harmonic technique in all of his debussyste piano works. One of his favorite usages was an alternation of two triads a half-step apart that break with the key of the material directly preceding it: principal, recurring fragments in both Mauresque and Cette ombre, mon image… consist of it. As shown in Example 1.28a, Schmitt typically arranged the chords involved in this non-functional harmonic usage in different inversions, respectively, which helps to guard against co-modulation. The brain of a Western listener would likely lack a schema for this unusual, non-

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87 Pomeroy, “Debussy’s tonality,” 156.
88 Radocy and Boyle, Psychological Foundations, 182.
functional root movement, but it could probably follow the perfectly smooth voice leading. Schmitt’s writing in his *debussyste* piano works generally consists of flowing passages of these smooth yet surprising non-functional movements, with occasional moments interspersed throughout the score where the perceived auditory streams are severely disrupted. This can occur with a flick of the composer’s wrist, and Schmitt had a seemingly infinite array of strategies for it.

Example 1.28. Schmitt, *Mauresque* (1913-17)

a. mm. 32-33

A good example is the F⁹ shown in Ex. 1.28b, from *Mauresques*. Schmitt perhaps inserted the chord into the progression after composing it, because it disrupts what would have otherwise been smooth chromatic movement between the A⁹ and G♯⁹ chords on either side of it, requiring the voices to momentarily hiccup out of position. Some measures later he disrupted what could have been a satisfying dominant-tonic resolution
(G\(^7\)-C\(^{13}\)) by merely re-voicing the tonic chord to create leaps in the voices and by delaying the sounding of the root and the fifth of the second sonority (see Ex. 1.28c).

Schmitt’s harmonic strategies are typical of the first three decades of *debussyste* practice (1890-1920). A low to moderate amount of perceptual inconsistency is engendered: a minority of the chord voices seems to get lost among the sonorities but others progress smoothly, or a single hiccup creates momentary confusion. We hear a similar mix of non-functional chromaticism studded with harmonic perceptual obstacles in Example 1.29, from Le Flem’s *Par landes*. The chromatic voice leading of mm. 64-70 is briefly interrupted by the sudden fullness of the texture in m. 66 and the falling seventh in the bass, but regains its perceptual footing after a pause. At m. 70 the bold, dissonant sonorities whose chord tones Le Flem arpeggiated out of order in the opening measures of the piece return. At this point, also shown in Example 1.29, the composer managed to break all three types of perceptual principles that have been so far discussed. The proximity principle is transgressed in the latter half of m. 70, where co-modulation by a downward leap of a fifth or a sixth occurs in every voice, and in the very next progression across the barline the stream in the highest voice becomes incoherent, as it simply drops out of the texture. The unusual progression of iv\(^9\)-I\(^{6/4}\) across the barline goes against schematic expectations of functional tonality, and the dissonant f\# in the first sonority does not resolve to a consonant chord tone in the second sonority.
Example 1.29. Le Flem, *Par landes* (1907), mm. 64-72; areas of perceptual confusion marked with arrows

Example 1.30. Hypothetical (a,b,c,d) and actual (e) progressions in Le Flem, *Par landes*, mm. 70-71

In Example 1.30, the progressions labeled a, b, c, and d are all possible ways in which Le Flem could have followed this schematic rule about dissonant chord tones resolving to consonant ones, and some of them are even non-functional. Yet he chose possibility e, where even after the second sonority has been rearranged and the accented appoggiatura removed to make the voice leading as smooth as possible, the resulting
sound is still “odd” or “wrong.” This is because the f# remains a dissonant chord tone, and even in this best voice leading scenario three of the voices move in the same direction, causing co-modulation. Albert Roussel, who by 1907 had moved away from *debusyste*, advised Le Flem to temper the audacity of the progressions in the final section of *Par landes*. Roussel’s behavior suggests that Le Flem’s harmonic experimentation in the piece had achieved definitive breaks with the perceptual principles to which his contemporaries were accustomed in art music. ⁸⁹

Unwilling to cease their harmonic evolution, some of the composers who had utilized *debusyste* harmonic techniques entered the realm of high perceptual confusion in pieces they wrote around 1920, where a majority of the chord voices consistently jump rather than smoothly slide, and this technique causes the listener extreme confusion that he or she may experience as harsh dissonance. This group includes Roussel, Schmitt, Roger-Ducasse, Ibert, Milhaud, Ravel, Honegger, Tailleferre, and Debussy (see the highly dissonant passages in *En blanc et noir*). Schmitt reached this perceptual tipping point in *La tragique chevauchée* (1921), where the chords buck and bound like a wild horse. The piece does not qualify as *debusyste* in regard to several other techniques. Based on *debusyste* practice, there seems to have been a threshold of sensory dissonance that composers were unwilling to cross while writing in the *debusyste* style.

In his book devoted to the perceptual roots of voice leading rules, Huron says that the brain does not favor inconsistent auditory scenes that it cannot parse into unambiguous sound sources and that the resulting sensation that rises to consciousness is discomfort. Composers might have followed conventional voice leading rules for so long

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because they generate a great deal of mental success for the experienced listener, who will be presented frequently with opportunities to anticipate the movement of chord voices in the next sonority and will often feel the pleasant satisfaction of guessing correctly. Yet, Huron notes that there is in most cases nothing that forces a composer to write perceptually clear music; with this notion in mind this section will conclude by examining why debussystes desired to create a perceptually difficult harmonic language.

By the turn of the twentieth century perceptual streaming principles codified in voice leading rules were firmly ingrained into French musical practice, including the practices of listening to and judging music. In going against them as well as the schemata of common practice diatonicism, debussyste harmony offered anyone who could put aside the discomfort of unpredictability a powerful sensation of surprise associated with harmony: critics noted Debussy’s ability to “titillate” the sensibility of an audience with his harmonies. The originator debussystes, all trained composers, had been taught these rules in years of music instruction, and might also have enjoyed the innovative perceptual challenges their harmonic practices created. The effect seems to have been very attractive to composers, for debussyste harmonic techniques were the most consistently used elements of the practice: in nearly 100% of originator songs and piano compositions some combination of the usages discussed here are pervasive, and in the larger population of all debussyste scores they are also prevalent. When the social meaning of debussysme changed and it migrated to new communities of composers and listeners, it was this feature that remained the most common and undiluted.

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90 Huron, “Tone and Voice,” 55-56.
91 Debussy’s contemporary Robert Richard went so far as to state that listening to Debussy’s Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune had enriched his own field of sensation. See Le Cas Debussy, 95.
Perceptual Problems and Solutions in Debussyste Practice

The confusion caused by unorthodox debussyste voice-leading results from a loss of the pitch-based information that guides the perception of auditory streams that might help a listener make sense of a composition. A listener confronted with a composition imbued with debussyste techniques also loses, to a certain degree, the structural signposts of repetitious and recurring patterns in rhythm and pitch, because debussyste composers sought a “wealth of musical material” and scorned (following Debussy) the idea of repeating themselves. A typical originator debussyste form does not eschew repetition entirely, but it is generally de-emphasized. These composers preferred to juggle several recurring items that frequently transform and combine in unexpected ways, instead of relying on formal devices that rely on repetition of a compact idea, such as sequences and themes. Meandering debussyste vocal melodies bring out the subtle beauty of poetic texts, but they also translate into a lack of schematic structure. Debussyste rhythms that freely combine different values and maintain an ambiguous relationship with the metric framework test a listener’s sense of temporal orientation. Repetition, the use of conventional structural schemata, and metrically clear rhythmic patterns are all consistent compositional strategies that aid a listener in predicting future musical material. When the debussystes de-emphasized or even excised them from their compositions, they significantly altered the ways in which meaning was communicated in art music. Someone whose perceptual frame of reference is based on nineteenth-century conventions will be challenged while listening to a debussyste composition to place less reliance on the predictive aspect of the listening activity and be open to an increased

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92 See the discussion of debussyste opinions on motivic development in chapter 2, pp. 150-153.
feeling of surprise and disorientation. I will suggest in the next chapter that these novel 
debspaste techniques were conceived as solutions for the aesthetic problem of how to 
portray the mind in music; yet they created perceptual difficulties that in turn needed their 
own solutions.

Originator textural innovations provided useful solutions to many of these 
perceptual problems. Streaming, pictorial-fused, and composite textures all create 
perceptually salient shapes, filling in the gap of structural information that a listener 
might expect to find in rhythmic and melodic schemata or nineteenth-century formal 
constructs. These textural shapes are particularly effective in smoothing over the 
perceptual incoherence of the auditory scene that arises from dbspaste harmony, taking 
over the role of creating auditory streams in many instances. Rather than realizing the 
pitch proximity principle in the harmonic voice leading, originator dbspastes created 
distinct areas of proximity in the texture. The translation is nowhere clearer in streaming 
texture, where multiple zones are defined in the overall register, and well-defined streams 
of sound are created within them. Ravel’s Jeux d’eau is an example of a dbspaste 
composition where unorthodox voice leading is pervasive, but the sound is still pleasing 
because the musical material is doled out in distinct streams that remain coherent over 
long stretches of time. In the two-part texture of the piano piece’s first section, both parts 
are disjunct, and the left-hand is nothing but parallel fifths. Yet each part strongly coheres 
because it remains in a defined range and manifests a distinctive and repetitive rhythm.
The brain has no difficulty in deciding which pitches belong to which stream, because it is presented with two objects that behave quite differently from each other.93

Like streaming texture, pictorial-fused and composite textures help to achieve perceptual clarity, but by engendering sonic objects with different kinds of behavior. A listener will hear one sonic object in pictorial-fused texture, but because composers like Ravel often layered components, this single object might be indistinct, producing multiple sounds at once like a bird that rustles the leaves of a tree while it sings. This characteristic might create more of a perceptual challenge than streaming texture, but the speedy note values of pictorial-fused texture, played in close succession, compensate for this challenge by imitating a continuous sound such as flowing water, and humans generally perceive continuous sounds as emitting from the same source.94 The shapes characteristic of composite texture, where composers have linked several shapes in rapid succession, also tend to involve the entire musical texture at once. Although they do not evoke streams of sound, the composite texture shapes are still tightly coherent, because they typically display a distinct musical profile and are often placed into delimited registral space. The resulting auditory scene that develops in the brain is one where several unambiguous sources sound in turn, as in Debussy’s Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir.

Debussy’s textural innovations allowed for harmonic experimentation and rule-breaking because the significant role that harmony had played for the last few centuries in organizing musical perception was instead assigned to the parameter of texture (the

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93 Recall that the auditory cortex’s primary goal is creating an auditory scene that is consistent, unambiguous, and leaves no perceived sounds unaccounted for.
94 This perceptual guideline is referred to in the literature as “temporal continuity.” See Huron, “Tone and Voice,” 12.
grouping of successive and simultaneous attacks in a piece of music into perceptually coherent units). With this exchange in place, composers no longer had to conform to the restrictive voice-leading rules that engendered coherent streams; they could instead construct sonorities and progressions according to other objectives. Streaming texture was the most common arrangement in which originator debussystes deployed their musical material, suggesting that at some level they might have been aware that it was the texture that best approximated the role in auditory streaming formerly fulfilled by the harmonic techniques that they chose to suppress. These composers had furthermore developed methods of parsing material into coherent scenes that, unlike the harmonic voice-leading method did not require listeners to develop specific, schematic expectations to appreciate it; although the concept was new at the time of its inception and therefore required a period of listener readjustment, it had a lower learning curve than what it had replaced.

This liberated and experimental approach to harmony generated another significant perceptual issue in addition to the breakdown of coherent auditory streams. A predilection for thick sonorities and an inviting attitude toward dissonance meant that originator debussystes confronted contemporaneous listeners with more sensory (perceived) dissonance than they had grown used to hearing in older compositions.95 Describing this problem and then the strategies that originators arrived at to solve it will require a significant discussion of human auditory physiology, but it will be worthwhile

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95 Before 1903, when Debussy achieved greater acceptance, many critics claimed that his music was unusually dissonant. Paul Flat complained that in Pelléas, Debussy made such pervasive use of the minor mode and dissonant harmony that it irritated him. Paul Flat, “Théâtres: Opéra-Comique: Pelléas et Mélisande,” Revue bleue 10 (May 1902): 592.
because at the end we will see just how ingeniously originator debussystes dealt with the issue.

The irritating sensation of friction or roughness between pitched sounds that “dissonance” denotes is an aural and not an acoustic phenomenon, meaning that it occurs during the process of auditory perception but does not exist outside the mind. (This is why psychologists and hearing scientists refer to it as “sensory dissonance.”) At several points along this process there are physiological limitations, and the perception of dissonance results from some of these limitations. A single complex sound, such as a pitch produced by a trumpet or a piano, actually consists of several partials. Humans initially detect these simultaneous partials mechanically, as they excite specific points on the basilar membrane (cochlea or inner ear), and this information is then converted into electrical signals in the auditory nerve, which connects to the auditory cortex. Scientists have discovered that the human basilar membrane, which has an average length of 33 millimeters, cannot clearly resolve (distinguish) two points of stimulation that are only one millimeter apart or closer. This distance is called a critical band.

The auditory cortex receives the interference between two inputs that fall within a critical band as auditory masking, where the partial with the higher amplitude will cancel out some of the partial with the lower amplitude. This interference reaches its maximum strength when the partials are 0.4 millimeters apart. We perceive an interval as dissonant, such as a tritone or a minor second, because several of the partials in the resultant sound are approximately 0.4 millimeters apart, eliciting a feeling of frustration because the auditory cortex can hardly perceive a significant number of the partials that it knows
reside in the sound.\textsuperscript{96} As \textit{debussystes} piled more pitches onto chords, increasing the number of partials that could potentially conflict, and made daring use of dissonant tritones, seconds, and sevenths, they risked arousing the irritating feeling of significant sensory dissonance due to auditory masking in their listeners.

These composers did make choices that attenuated the sensory dissonance their harmonic languages had the possibility to engender, and in systematic ways: in score after score, \textit{debussystes} displayed essentially similar solutions to this problem. Their strategies reflect the properties of sound and the nature of the human auditory system. Yet, \textit{debussystes} had no access to scientific data about these properties, because the earliest experimental research about auditory masking was not undertaken until the mid-twentieth century. Originator \textit{debussystes} must instead have arrived at the solutions based on the feedback of their own auditory systems, registering different degrees of sensory dissonance as they experimented at the piano and gravitating towards configurations and spacing patterns that evoked a relatively pleasant response.

One of these \textit{debussyste} strategies mitigates the masking effect of dissonant intervals simply by lowering the amplitude (volume) of all of the conflicting partials, which in turn lowers the amplitude threshold that the weaker partial of a conflicting pair has to overcome in order for the auditory cortex to register it as a salient component of the sound. An astounding number of originator compositions—94\% of piano pieces and 80\% of songs—spend a vast majority of their time at a volume level of \textit{piano} or softer. For the entire population of \textit{debussyste} songs the total is even higher (84\%). While

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{96} David Huron and Peter Sellmer, “Critical bands and the spelling of vertical sonorities,” \textit{Music Perception} 10, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 129-149.
\end{footnote}
Debussy’s likely had aesthetic reasons for composing such quiet music, as will be
discussed in the next chapter, directing a performer to play at a low volume level would
also have been an easy way to lower the amplitude of any masking partials.

Another simple way Debussy seems to have taken advantage of the correlation
between amplitude and sensory dissonance in scores for piano was to set complex chords
to long note values. As the pitches are sustained in the pedal after the initial attack they
fade in volume, causing the intensity of the sensory dissonance that they generate to also
gradually diminish.

Example 1.31. Koechlin, “Accompagnement” (1902-07), mm. 1-5

In “Accompagnement,” shown in Ex. 1.31, Koechlin utilized both volume-related
strategies by marking the string of extended harmonies set to half-notes that open the
piece pppp and lent. The indication appended to the tempo marking, d’une sonorité très
éteinte (with a very subdued sound), further suggests the very low energy that Koechlin
desired for these introductory chords.97

97 A counter example that illustrates the usefulness of this strategy for mitigating sensory dissonance is
Clair de lune sur des terrasses from Heures persanes by Koechlin: even though construction of the
sonorities of the climactic middle section are typical for this composer, they create a surprising amount of
sensory dissonance because of the dynamic level of fortissimo at which they are to be played.
In solo piano works and the piano parts of songs, originator *debussystes* consistently spaced sonorities with wide intervals in the bass and smaller intervals above middle C. This pervasive practice serves as another strategy for decreasing sensory dissonance, because critical bands (the one millimeter segments on the basilar membrane where auditory masking of multiple inputs will occur) have a logarithmic relationship to frequency and are generally wider in the bass region of a particular instrument. As a result a major third on the piano sounds consonant above middle C, but noticeably more dissonant if it sounds two octaves lower, for instance. In his perceptual explanation of voice-leading rules, Huron derives the “minimum masking principle” from what is known about the nature of auditory masking: “In order to minimize auditory masking within some vertical sonority, the spectral energy should be spread fairly evenly across the basilar membrane. For typical harmonic complex tones, this generally means that simultaneously sounding notes should be more widely spaced as the register descends.”

More specifically, we can generalize that consonant intervals of a perfect fifth or larger sounded in the bass region will generate little sensory dissonance. In the upper bass region a perfect fourth will generate little dissonance, and above middle C pitches need only be of a minor third or larger.

A cursory glance through the examples in this chapter reveals how consistently originator *debussystes* kept intervals smaller than a perfect fifth out of the bass region of the piano and inserted wide spaces between chord tones throughout the register. Their spacing practices left such large gaps between simultaneous pitches that originator *debussystes* frequently utilized systems of three staves and the ledger-line spaces above...
and below the staves. By contrast, Fauré stuck closely to the lined space contained in just two staves in all of his late piano pieces. This perceptual understanding of dissonance in music also offers another rationale for the strings of long, open parallel fifths in the bass region of originator piano parts. At least one originator debussyste, Charles Koechlin, was aware of the perceptual effect of wide spacing of dissonant chord tones. As Orledge notes, in his harmony treatise Koechlin advised the use of the technique to make dissonances sound agreeable to the ear.100

Because both critical bands and amplitude tend to grow smaller as the average frequency of a sonority increases, one final way a composer can decrease sensory dissonance is by placing chords that contain dissonant intervals in the upper register of an instrument. This strategy was also employed by originator debussystes in some compositions, but it is not nearly as pervasive as wide spacing of pitches in the bass or the use of low dynamic levels. Koechlin’s La Caravane and La chanson des pommiers en fleurs, Debussy’s The Snow is Dancing, Schmitt’s Cette ombre, mon image..., and Caplet’s “Préludes” are examples of originator compositions that contain large sections where most of the material resides in the treble clef. All of these pieces were composed between 1908 and 1920, and during the same period, these composers were making greater use of dissonant intervals between chord tones, especially the major second. Perhaps the two trends were related: shifting the entire texture upwards became a favored way to retain these innovative, more daring chord spacings while keeping sensory dissonance relatively low: a major second sounded at the bottom of the bass clef sounds much more grating than one at the top of the treble. Ravel showed particular affinity for

100 Orledge, Charles Koechlin, 40.
the technique, spending much of *Ondine*, *Noctuelles*, and the *Habanera* from *Sites auriculaires* entirely in the treble clef, and his harmonic language was also one of the most dissonant among the originators.

**Conclusion**

Composers used the principal textural, temporal, formal, melodic, and harmonic techniques outlined in this chapter to create music that has succeeded in pleasing audiences and intriguing theorists since its inception. Despite the fact that *debussyste* techniques broke a number of rules that had endured for centuries, their cooperation produces a satisfying auditory scene in which sonic objects are grouped into perceptibly coherent textures. Listeners with a wide variety of musical experience can make sense of this new system if they are willing to adapt to unfamiliar schemata and new conceptions of musical norms, because *debussyste* techniques work with the nature of human auditory perception even as they break old habits.

*Debussyste* techniques are cohesive because when present at the same time in a composition, they magnify each other’s effects. The more pitches a composer piles onto sonorities in the piano part of a song, the greater sense one will have that the pitches of the vocal part are detached from it. A generally fragmented musical surface is conducive to processes of coalescence and disintegration featured in *debussyste* beginnings, endings, and transitions. The cohesion of streams and shapes that occur in *debussyste* textural types are strengthened by tonal fusion resulting from strings of co-modulated sonorities.

The earliest *debussystes* (Debussy, Ravel, Koechlin, Schmitt, Bonheur, Emmanuel, Roussel, Delage, Caplet, Le Flem, and Séverac) developed the elements of
their shared musical practice gradually, arriving at effective ideas after periods of radical experimentation, and absorbing them from each other through extensive study of each other’s scores. This activity encompassed borrowing and reconstituting older compositional techniques, but expanded in every parameter into true innovation. The next chapter will examine potential aesthetic meanings that early *debussystes* attached to their radical techniques.
Chapter 2: Debussysme in Light of Contemporaneous Philosophy of Mind

The elements of debussysme tended to appear together: very rarely does a piece from the originator subset of debussyste scores considered in the previous chapter display just a few of them. Debussyste techniques that might seem disparate because they fall under different musical parameters complement each other perceptually and reinforce each other’s effects. Leonard Meyer suggested that although composers continually create new strategies, only a few strategies have persisted in the history of a particular culture. Successful compositional strategies that are replicated in several compositions must possess properties such as symmetry and coherence, stability, and a degree of redundancy. Because they are especially memorable and their fundamental structure can be readily replicated, such patterns can be significantly extended and elaborated without losing their identity and the ability to shape musical experience.¹

In addition to cohesion, debussyste techniques also exhibit a high amount of redundancy. As a glance over the list of operationalized elements of the practice in Table 1.2 makes clear, several debussyste techniques engender weak expectation or non-tendency. The music that results from the pervasive employment of these techniques is strikingly different from the late nineteenth-century styles of Massenet, Wagner, and Brahms,

¹ Meyer, Style and Music, 22-23.
where strong expectations build and then reach powerful conclusions in which expectations are surprisingly thwarted or happily confirmed.²

The weak sense of expectation built into debussyste musical practice is also conducive to the aesthetic goal of evoking the contents and mechanisms of the mind. I hypothesize that the early debussystes were working toward this goal based on theories of contemporaneous scholars and under the influence of the symbolists. Their project was specific and nuanced: debussystes were not interested in just any thoughts, but focused on the mirroring of their own unconscious or pre-conscious states and processes, which many philosophers of their era argued constituted the seat of the true self. At the same time, they were repulsed by the artificial and domineering nature of the intellect and any conscious processes that relied on standardization or systems of reason. This predilection emerges in the debussystes’ written statements and in their compositional choices.

The debussyste project can be considered an extension of the notion that a composer’s loftiest goal was the sincere expression of his or her inner state. Carlo Caballero demonstrates that the concept of sincerity, which he defines as “the translation of the artist’s inner life into music by force of innate creative necessities,” was already well-established in French musical culture at the end of the nineteenth century as a critical element of a good composition.³ This concept of sincerity was also a prevalent idea in nineteenth-century French literary culture and it was emphasized in the symbolist movement, which had a decisive influence on debussyste aesthetics and, to a lesser extent, on debussyste techniques.

² I would like to thank David Huron for bringing this common quality of debussyste techniques to my attention.
³ Caballero, Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics, 12.
The early *debussystes*’ understanding of authentic music retained this pre-existing value of sincerity in French musical culture, but their version of it was distinguished by their interest in translating the mechanisms and behavior of thoughts as well as their ideal contents. Put another way, *debussystes* were just as interested in form as in content, an aesthetic viewpoint that parallels similar modernist trends developing the same time in other countries and other domains of art, as well as the growing interest in materialist explanations of the human psyche in French philosophy. The most vocal *debussystes* had definite opinions about the value of various compositional techniques to their aesthetic goals, as revealed in what they said as well as trends in their scores. Other scholars have made some connections between *debussyste* music and contemporaneous ideas about the mind, but they have restricted their consideration to Debussy, Ravel, and Henri Bergson.\(^4\)

In this chapter the inquiry broadens to include several other composers writing in similar idioms, a richer philosophical context, and a wide variety of specific compositional techniques.

Somber subject matter (denoted by texts or descriptive titles) and a subdued tone are strikingly consistent in *debussyste* scores, suggesting that there was a coherent set of musical values underpinning the *debussyste* sound. Instrumental compositions that manifest *debussyste* techniques rarely appeared without a descriptive title, and although

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many of these composers wrote in genres associated with absolute music, they tended to revert to more academic styles and nineteenth-century formal concepts in their symphonies and sonatas.⁵ According to the correlation of descriptive titles and *debussyste* instrumental music, we can draw the simple yet significant conclusion that the *debussystes* intended their music to evoke concepts or associations. Over half of the *debussyste* compositions in Appendix A are texted works, which implies that the composers understood *debussyste* music as a medium by which some kind of textual meaning could be passed on to the listener.

More specifically, *debussyste* scores tend to create a somber atmosphere of subdued emotion, in which a subject intensely contemplates serious subject matter. Common subjects include autumn, sunsets, moonlight, snow, glistening gardens, loneliness, rain, and ennui. A poem that both consistently expresses strong and unadulterated joy and is set to *debussyste* music is a rare find: even in *debussyste* songs that set romantic poems the prevalent sentiment is usually melancholic. Composers paired *debussysme* with emotions that fall to the sad side of the spectrum to such an extent that some song collections lack diversity, as one melancholy song follows after another. Maurice Emmanuel’s *In memoriam* is about the harrowing grief of a mother and son when they must part because the mother dies, and his *Musiques* are settings of weighty symbolist texts about the higher realities of life and the angst provoked in one who contemplates them. All three of the poems that Debussy chose for *Chansons de* ...

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⁵ Compare Inghelbrecht’s *Automne: esquisses symphoniques* (1905) to his *Prélude et sautarelle* (1906) for violin and piano, written just one year apart. The latter piece uses conformational (sectional) form, homophonic texture, and the technical skill of the violinist is highlighted in several virtuosic passages; the former one with a programmatic title contains whole tone sections, long stretches of consonant triads, and simple, and kinetic formal techniques in which undeveloped musical images shift in a kaleidoscopic texture.
Bilitis are somber and the music matches the tone; the same is true of Koechlin’s song cycle with the same title. In Paroles à l’absente, set by André Caplet, poet Georges Jean-Aubry wrote from the perspective of a man who has lost his beloved and now finds that everything in his life reminds him of her absence. The narrative traced by the three poems ends sadly: the couple does not reunite, and the final image with which Jean-Aubry ends the work is the subject’s memory of his beloved in tears.

There is a conspicuous absence in debussyste scores of depictions of simple pleasures, such as peasants joyfully going about their work, festivals, and parties. The subject of debussyste compositions instead passes the time in the solitude of cemeteries, forests, and ancient ruins. He seeks out the water, but to contemplate it rather than to play in it; the inscription Ravel placed at the head of Jeux d’eau describes the river god laughing as the water tickles him, but we do not hear much of his jolly laughter in the music. The listener is instead placed in a pensive mood by the delicate music, marked très doux at the outset and dominated by a quiet volume level, low harmonic expectation, monotonous textural streams, and incomplete transitions.6

Another indication of the relationship between the debussyste practice and sadness is that in multi-movement works with explicit programs, composers often assigned debussyste material to subdued scenes but then moved away from it to describe more lighthearted moments. In periodic indications on the score, Déodat de Séverac provided a narrative for Vers le Mas, en fête from En Languedoc. The first two sections of the movement are designated “by the waterfall path” and “pause at the fountain,”

6 These qualities increasingly dominate in the latter half of Jeux d’eau, which conforms to Ravel’s penchant for compositions in which the energy level starts relatively high and then decreases to the point of stagnation in the later sections of the work.
which are both thoroughly *debussyste*. At the start of the third section, a merry feast begins, and the music becomes rigorously metrical and is parsed into simple song forms that suggest folk music; markings of *très joyeux et étincelant* and *très animé* make the extroverted tone of the section clear. Séverac conversely cast the entirety of *Sur l’étang, le soir*, which comes from the same work but whose title suggests a peaceful evening spent contemplating nature, in a consistent and strongly *debussyste* idiom.

Exotic texts or titles are not unusual in *debussysme*, but the predominance of soft sound in the practice gives rise to an exoticism of an interior quality, where the distance between the European listener and the far-away land is emphasized.\(^7\) Examples of this subdued manifestation of exoticism typical in *debussyste* scores include Koechlin’s and Debussy’s *Chansons de Bilitis*, Caplet’s *Paroles à l’absente*, Koechlin’s *Shéhérazade I* and *II*, Ravel’s *Alborada del gracioso*, and Aubert’s *Poèmes arabes*.\(^8\) This is a break with the general tendency in French exotic music of the time to portray an Other as simplistic, extroverted, and exuberant, as in Chabrier’s *España* or Bizet’s *Carmen*. Ralph Locke, in his study of musical exoticism, notes that modernist European composers generally turned away from this kind of exoticism around 1900, and he singles out Debussy as a composer who was particularly opposed to simplistic imitation, which he referred to as “the fashion of the folk theme.”\(^9\) Locke’s portrait of Debussy’s engagement with exotic material can be extended to the rest of the *debussyste* scores.

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\(^7\) It is arguable whether *debussystes* created so many quiet compositions because of aesthetic reasons, such as particular notion of exoticism, or because of the technical advantages to soft sound that were reviewed in the previous chapter. As will be shown in this chapter, composers such as Debussy and Ravel claimed that delicate music was an important quality of effective music.

\(^8\) Exoticism and *debussysme* will be addressed more thoroughly in chapter 4.

Along with this taste for subdued emotion and melancholy subject matter in Debussy's scores comes a pervasive emphasis on delicate sounds: a majority of Debussy pieces maintain dynamic levels that rarely rise above mezzo-piano and contain indications as soft as pppp. Piano or pianissimo is typically the normative dynamic level in these compositions: the beginning and ending of the entire work as well as the beginning of individual sections within it tend to reside at this level. It is as though the musical material remains naturally at a lower energy level, and only with significant effort can it be pushed into a state of greater excitement. Once achieved, the higher level of energy is temporary and the music will soon fall back to its typical state of low energy. This is the case in 207 out of 285 Debussy songs and in 165 out of 207 pieces for solo piano.\(^\text{10}\) Debussy scores are also full of poetic indications that ask for weakening of the sound, particularly at the ends of formal sections and in the final measures: lointain (far away), perdendo (dying out), très doux (very soft), le plus p possible (as quiet as possible), and à peine (barely audible). The Debussystes shared attraction to sounds of very low energy and somber programs suggests that they were in touch with a common aesthetic sensibility.

Certainly, the Debussystes were not the first composers to write music that avoided emotional extremes and reveled in delicacy. They composed Debussy material primarily in smaller genres—solo piano music and accompanied song—that were tied to the French salon culture, in which intimate venues encouraged composers and performers to cultivate a subdued sound. This was especially true for late nineteenth-century French

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\(^{10}\) This total treats each movement or song of each composition as a separate piece because stylistic elements do not necessarily remain constant across movements. For example, Debussy’s Estampes was counted as three pieces. This is the case for all statistical counts in the dissertation unless otherwise indicated.
song in late nineteenth-century, which had retained the restrained emotion and gentle charm of its precursor, the *romance.*\textsuperscript{11} It was of course also standard nineteenth-century practice to designate the middle movement as soft and slow in multi-movement instrumental pieces. What distinguishes *debussyme* in this regard is the sheer frequency with which these composers preferred a soft and subdued sound and the extreme degree to which this practice was taken in their scores.

**Symbolist Inspiration for Debussyste Music**

Another trend among *debussyste* songs suggests a potential source for their interest in soft sounds and subdued subject matter: a little over half of all *debussyste* songs collected for this study are settings of poems by symbolists, who were attracted to poetry with the same qualities.\textsuperscript{12} One need only think of entire sets of poems by Verlaine or Baudelaire which linger in this atmosphere, such as *Sagesse* or *Les fleurs du mal.* Maeterlinck’s *Serres chaudes,* with which several early *debussystes* were familiar, teems with unhappy images: doleful flowers enclosed in glass jars, patients from a nearby infirmary wandering about, and indifferent white peacocks.\textsuperscript{13} Even in the relatively happier love poetry of symbolist authors the tone is subdued and gentle sadness is made explicit. In “Le jet d’eau,” for instance, Baudelaire described love in terms of the tears


\textsuperscript{12} Symbolist poets set to *debussyste* music include Verlaine, Samain, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Henri de Régnier, Jean Moréas, Pierre Louÿs, Francis Jammes, Marcel Schwob, Rémy de Goncourt, Emile Verhaeren, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Charles Lerberghe.

\textsuperscript{13} Ravel owned a copy of *Serres chaudes,* which he lent to an enthusiastic Viñes in 1897. See Gubisch, “Le journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes,” 192. The collection of poems was one of the first works by Maeterlinck that Debussy read. See Robert Godet, “En marge de la marge,” in *La Jeunesse de Claude Debussy,* 76. Koechlin noted that the poem of Debussy’s “De fleurs” was evocative of *Serres chaudes.* See Koechlin, “La mélodie,” in *Cinquante ans de musique française,* Jean Rohozinski ed. (Paris: Librarie de France, 1925), 34.
and ennui of his mistress. Jean Moréas similarly relished “a love full of sadness and
tears…sad like an autumn sky…where in the night the melancholy horn sounds,” in
“Conte d’amour.” Several debussystes set to music Henri de Regnier’s “Le Jardin
mouillé,” in which the poet described gently falling rain that causes plants in a garden to
shiver and whisper.

These melancholy symbolist poems attracted debussyste composers, especially those who developed the archetypal debussyste techniques in the final decade of the
nineteenth century (Debussy, Ravel, Bonheur, and Koechlin).\textsuperscript{14} Debussyste practice
coalesced in Debussy’s output during this decade in settings of several poems by
Verlaine and Baudelaire, in addition to one poem by symbolist Georges Le Roy. Debussy
confirmed the link between symbolist and debussysme when he composed his own poems
in the symbolist vein in Proses lyriques and set them to music that manifests several
debussyste elements. All of Bonheur’s songs that have survived from the 1890s are
settings of Francis Jammes, who unlike the older symbolist wrote poems expressing a
wide variety of emotional states. In Huit poésies de Francis Jammes (1895-97) Bonheur
allied debussyste techniques with somber texts but turned away from them in happier
poems. Thus he composed exuberant material whose simplicity imitates French folksong
arrangements to set “Le paysan,” which tells the story of a farmer who takes his unruly
goats to the fair; the song’s general impression is perfectly captured in the opening
indication of Lourd et rude. The “monotone countryside” and “lazy trees” of “Le village

\textsuperscript{14} It was also true that symbolist poetry had a connection to the salon sound. Fauré and Reynaldo Hahn
often set symbolist poets, but only Samain and Verlaine, two of the more approachable, older poets in this
group. The debussystes set a wider variety of symbolist poets, although they also preferred Verlaine. More
importantly, many of the debussystes knew symbolist writers personally, whereas this was not the case for
these other composers. See the discussion of relationships between symbolists and debussystes below.
à midi” are conversely evoked with parlando vocal lines that eschew expressive chromaticism and a piano part whose sparseness and pervasive triplets are reminiscent of Debussy’s Pelléas. Koechlin likewise correlated debussysme and subdued emotion in Chansons de Bilitis. He made much greater use of debussyste elements as well as soft dynamics and poetic markings calling for hushed sounds in the latter four songs than in the opening song, “Hymne à Astarté,” where the poetess describes ecstatic worship of a goddess with violent, strong imagery.

The symbolists’ predilection for delicate, monotone atmospheres issued from theories about the purpose and function of art. Artistic products with these qualities were the natural outgrowth of the fundamental symbolist aesthetic of suggestion that Mallarmé famously described in 1891 as “contemplating objects, the image vanishing in the dreams elicited by them.”15 Mallarmé frequently idealized poetry in metaphors with exquisite objects, for example enthusing to a friend in 1866 that he was creating “marvelous pieces of lace” in his poetry.16 Charles Morice articulated the symbolist goal similarly, as “providing people with the memory of something they have never seen.”17 This approach was required by the writers’ belief that human experience of reality was necessarily bound to subjectivity: two subjective people could not directly communicate their thoughts by describing them to each other, but had to instead gently evoke similar states in each other’s minds.18

16 Mallarmé to Aubanel, 1866, quoted in McCombie, Mallarmé and Debussy, 22
17 Huret, Enquête, 85.
Symbolists further believed that an artist in a contemplative state and free of superfluous emotional extremes could produce the most authentic translations of his interior mental life in another person’s mind. Albert Samain, for example, believed his task as a poet to be the translation of his own interior states and frequently described his favorite literary passages as moments enveloped by sadness and softness where the soul of the author seemed to float toward him like perfume. Consider his description of the symbolist poem *The Blessed Damsel* (which he knew in its French translation as *La demoiselle élue*) in a letter to Raymond Bonheur:

> In every way it is exactly what you said to me, of an exquisitely white inspiration, of an ideal and diaphanous atmosphere where visions almost without bodies, all floating in lines, move in a luminous music…at its essence a flux of continuous and monotone sadness that accumulates at certain moments and resolves with a kind of poignancy.  

Samain valued the poem’s effect on him both for its lightweight and airy quality and for the restrained, “monotone” sadness it transmitted. Samain’s metaphor of art as perfume is particularly evocative of the aesthetic of suggestions, because it is a delicate stimulus that triggers mental activity. He marveled to Bonheur in a letter from 1894 about the ability of certain poets to cause him to sense “the most remote and precious corners of [his] sensibility” wafting towards him “as perfume.”

Mallarmé, Samain, and Morice emphasized the interior mental state, both of the artist and the one who experiences the

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19 “En tout les cas, c’est bien ce que vous m’aviez dit, d’une inspiration exquisement blanche, d’une atmosphère diaphane et idéale, où les visions presque sans corps, toutes flottantes en lignes, se meuvent dans une musique lumineuse…Au fond de tout cela, un flux de tristesse continue et monotone, qui s’accumule à certains moments et se resout en une sorte de poignance.” Letter from Samain to Bonheur, April, 30, 1887, in Albert Samain, *Des lettres: 1887-1900* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1933), 2.

artwork, and this idea would become useful to philosophers who wanted to explain the quality and effect of *debussyste* music.

Symbolist ideas would have been familiar to many of the *debussystes,* and intimately so to many of the earliest adopters, who had several ties to the Francophone symbolist movement. The closeness of Debussy and Ravel to this movement has been well-established. Debussy sought out not fellow musicians but writers and artists during his time as a student at the Paris Conservatoire. During the 1890s he frequented the Librairie d’Art, a symbolist haunt, and his close friends included poets Pierre Louÿs and Henri de Regnier. Debussy also attended Stephane Mallarmé’s exclusive Tuesday night gatherings, where the host articulated his complex aesthetic theories. Ravel took part in the avant-garde literary circle associated with *La revue blanche,* where he met Henri de Régnier and Paul Valéry, and Ricardo Viñes recalled that among the young Ravel’s favorite authors were Baudelaire, Huysmans, Poe, and Villiers de l’Isle Adam. Ravel also exchanged ideas and artistic creations with writers who joined the Apaches, including the symbolist Léon-Paul Fargue, whose poem “Les noctuelles” inspired an eponymous movement of *Miroirs.* That over half of the nearly 300 *debussyste* songs I have collected set symbolist poems illustrates the strong connection between the two movements. Taken as a group, the *debussystes* were at least familiar with French

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23 Ravel dedicated the piece to Fargue and according to Vlado Perlemuter, a piano student of Ravel, this was because the poet had inspired the composition. See Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d’après Ravel* (Lausanne: Editions du Cervin, 1970), 22. About the Apaches see Jann Pasler, “A Sociology of the Apaches: ‘Sacred Batallion’ for Pelléas,” in Barbara Kelly and Kerry Murphy eds., *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, Contexts, Legacies* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 149-166. For a discussion about Mallarmé’s influence on Ravel see Theo Hirsbrunner, *Maurice Ravel, Sein Leben, Sein Werk* (Laaber, Germany: Laaber-Verlag, 1989), 144-151
symbolism because they had read so much of it, and in addition to Ravel and Debussy, a handful of other members of the group knew some of the writers. Schmitt, Séverac, Delage, and Caplet also took part in the fertile environment of the Apaches, and Séverac counted Huysmans and Jammes as friends. Debussy’s close friend Raymond Bonheur moved in avant-garde artistic circles and was a close friend of Jammes and Albert Samain; Samain expounded many of his aesthetic ideas in his letters to Bonheur.

Thus, the project of gently suggesting inner states was likely transmitted from writers to composers. Séverac, for instance, stated in an article that “the musical work cannot impose itself upon the listener, not by its design nor its techniques, but by the feelings that it arouses in us.” Debussy composers realized this aesthetic transmission in several ways in their scores. One such avenue was in the titles of many instrumental compositions that point to the material therein as subjective and mediated. Titles such as Ombres, Mirages (both by Schmitt), Sillages (Aubert), and Miroirs (Ravel) denote the image of an object projected on a surface rather than the object itself. With Clochers à travers les feuilles, Masques, and Reflets dans l’eau, Debussy suggests the concept of an intermediary in the metaphors of leaves, masks, and water. One also finds titles that indicate more precisely the mediating entity as an aspect of the human mind: by human perception (Debussy’s and Tailleferre’s Images, Debussy’s and Inghelbrecht’s Esquisses, and Roussel’s Evocations) by human memory (Schmitt’s Souvenir and Grovlez’s Recuerdos, which he notes on the score are “Souvenirs”;

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Wurmser’s and Woollett’s use of the title *Impressions,* or by the dream state (*Rêverie* by Debussy, *Songe de Coppélia* and *Rêves* by Schmitt).\(^{27}\) In every case the titles imply that the material does not represent objective reality, but rather versions of reality that are captured or have coalesced in the mind.

The ephemeral nature of thought and the delicate means required to induce thought in someone else’s mind were evoked by the debussystes’ habitual use of quiet dynamic levels. One also frequently finds in their scores poetic performance indications demanding weak and subdued sounds, principally *doux, sombre, tranquille, calme, triste,* and *sans nuances.* Debussy began to use poetic indications that invoked the limits of human perception by describing faint sounds as faintly perceived by various senses, such as *lointain, s’éloignant, effacé, effleuré.* This move occurred in Debussy’s scores around 1890, in tandem with the appearance of several debussyste stylistic markers. A similar correlation occurred in the works of other composers, whose scores showed a correlation between debussyste techniques and indications that referred to faintly perceived, soft sound. Koechlin introduced *imperceptible* and forms of the verb *éteindre* into his vocabulary of poetic indications for weak sounds in *Chansons de Bilitis,* and they continued to play a role in his later debussyste compositions. Ernest Moret used *impalpable* several times in the debussyste songs of *L’île d’émail* and in “Clair de lune.”

\(^{27}\) In his *La logique des sentiments,* Théodule Ribot described an “impression” as a type of emotional reasoning in which one uses external events as a way to explain an interior state. According to the influential philosopher, the term “impression” approximated the symbolist notion of the symbol, which was typically an external occurrence or object that could evoke a subjective state. Ribot, *La logique des sentiments* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1905), 93 and 97.
In his tribute to Debussy, *La plainte, au loin, du faune*, Dukas tellingly marked the opening with the subdued *ppp, à peine sensible.*

In songs setting symbolist texts, the transfer of symbolist aesthetics and atmosphere would have been relatively smooth, as the text provided a pre-existing atmosphere that could be used as a guide. Although the earliest *debussystes* first experimented with their innovative techniques in songs, they quickly took the notion of a transparent artistic window into the mind into purely instrumental music. Examples of this migration from texted to un-texted works during the 1890s include Debussy’s *Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune* and Ravel’s *Shéhérazade.* This probably involved greater conscious effort, because the composer had to create the atmosphere entirely through musical means. As time progressed and the generation of composers that included Milhaud, Lili Boulanger, and Jacques Ibert took up *debussysme* around 1913, they also paired it with contemporaneous avant-garde poetry, which was the proto-surrealist and absurdist works of poets including Tristan Dérémé and René Chalupt. Several composers used *debussystes* idioms in settings of old French verse: Caplet in “Doux fut le trait,” and Debussy in *Trois ballades de Francis Villon.* Yet they continued to link *debussysme* with melancholy poems in these songs and to envision the *debussysme* as fundamentally somber and subdued in quality. The exquisite *debussyste* writing of Ibert’s setting of Derème’s *La verdure dorée* (1922) exemplify the expressive

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28 Nigel Simone’s comment that in Debussy’s scores indications and dynamic markings are illustrative of more than a desire for more nuanced sound, but also a manifestation of the composer’s attempt to exert greater control over expressive content, can be applied to these other *debussyste* scores. See Nigel Simone, “Debussy and Expression,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, Simon Trezise ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 101 and 114.
power composers continued to find in these techniques even after the symbolist movement had subsided.

These developments illustrate the considerable influence the symbolist aesthetic of suggestion had on debussyme: a refined quality reigned even in debussyste scores where there was no direct literary catalyst for it. Throughout the four decades of the debussyste trend, these techniques were used to set poems outside of the symbolist movement, associated with several different poets and schools of poetry, a variety of subjects, and for compositions in a variety of instrumental genres. All the while composers continued to understand debussyme as a subtle means by which to evoke subjective, inner states in a listener, as shown in their continued predilection for quiet dynamic levels and melancholy emotion.

Philosophy of Mind in Turn-of-the-century France

The debussyste movement emerged during a period of great scientific and public interest in the human mind in turn-of-the-century France. During this era, composers, poets, philosophers, and psychologists were keenly interested in the unconscious, or the non-representational thought that existed beyond or at the edges of one’s conscious attention. In their understanding, the difference between conscious and unconscious thought was not one of essential content; the brain produced several mental states at once that were all originally of the same non-representational or unconscious nature. Some of those states would be transformed into representational thought regulated by language and systems of logic, which would make it amenable to consciousness, a kind of window into an individual’s mind that allowed him or her to communicate interior states to other
people. Other mental states, however, would remain in their non-representational state, but would as a result be much harder or even impossible for an individual to perceive. The intellect, the will, and the reason were terms that signified conscious processes in this discourse, and they were regarded with suspicion by philosophers and artists alike because they purged the unique nuances from a thought and forced it into artificial formulations. In the late nineteenth century, the concept of pre-conscious, non-representational thought was signified by several names—pure duration, instinct, intuition, unconscious, primitive consciousness—but it will be referred to generically in this chapter as the unconscious.

Part of this interest in the unconscious was due to the increased popularity of hypnotism in medicine, which by the late-nineteenth century had become a reputable tool in France for exploring the hidden elements of a patient’s psyche and for treating mental illness. The technique tantalized the medical community because it so easily revealed previously undetected mental states and behaviors in subjects. Reports of experiments on hypnotized subjects filled scholarly journals, and these undertakings revealed the astoundingly fragmented nature of the human psyche and the large portion of it that existed beyond the narrow view of consciousness. French psychiatrist Pierre Janet used hypnotism on several patients at the Salpêtière mental hospital in Paris, and he believed that in countless cases the technique revealed that the origin of severe symptoms of mental illness existed in an entirely new and cohesive persona that a patient manifested under hypnotism but was entirely unaware of in the waking state. Fears based on past traumatic experiences in the patients’ lives manifested themselves in these hidden states,

which could cause acute mental and bodily symptoms.\textsuperscript{30} As a result of his experiments, Janet concluded that the mind consisted of multiple levels that operated independently of each other, and that “there are crowds of things which operate within ourselves without our will.”\textsuperscript{31} Even when the hypnotism fad waned after 1900, the scientific community in general continued to place the unconscious and irrational parts of the mind at the center of their theories.\textsuperscript{32}

These astounding findings of doctors and psychologists captivated scholars in other domains of study. The unconscious mind was used to explain the cause of powerful events, such as the crazed behavior of a violent mob and apparent demonic possession. Many European philosophers of the era became so interested in a materialist understanding of the mind that they essentially crossed into the field of psychology, devoting their efforts to describing the nature of dreaming, the workings of perception, and the storage of memory. The mind had long been a subject of philosophical inquiry, but this new generation of thinkers gave serious consideration to empirical observations about the human body; some of them conducted their own experiments and tried their hands at hypnotism. A glance at the table of contents of \textit{Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger}, a large and influential French journal that amassed the most current studies from across Europe and elsewhere, makes this clear. Observatory studies about the nature of dreams, hypnotism, bodily sensation, and the unconscious abound, as

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 370.
\textsuperscript{32} Henri Bergson made the enduring importance of the unconscious to the field of psychology clear in a public lecture on dreams in 1901: “Exploring the deepest secrets of the unconscious, working in what I have called the basement of the conscious mind, this will be the principal task for psychology in the century that is just now beginning.” Henri Bergson, \textit{Mélanges}, ed. André Robinet (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972), 462.
well as more traditional philosophical inquiries into the mind. Furthermore, each issue of
*Revue philosophique* featured regularly appearing columns that summarized the latest
issues of other journals, many of them devoted entirely to the human brain, such as *Brain*,
*Encéphale*, and *Mind*.

The educated public of turn-of-the-century France had an appetite for literature
and philosophy, and both domains exposed them to cutting-edge theories about the
human mind. Serialized novels that dealt with the powerful effects of hypnotism or the
bizarre behavior of a character with multiple personality disorder appeared in journals
that targeted this part of the population, such as *Sister Marthe* in *Revue des deux mondes*
(1889). The Parisian public attended philosophical lectures as a leisure activity, and some
of the most popular attractions were the lectures that Henri Bergson gave at the Collège
de France beginning in 1901. One member in the audience was *debussyste* Paul Le Flem,
who attended the lectures for an entire school year while simultaneously enrolled at the
Paris Conservatoire.33 Bergson considered his scholarship as bridging the gap between
experimental science and philosophical inquiry, and his ability to fuse what the two
methods concluded about the mind captivated large audiences of scholars, artists, and the
general public. One arrived an hour early to his lectures to secure a seat, and those who
were too late spilled out onto the lawn and listened at the windows.34 Bergson painted
pictures of the mind in vivid prose of a stream of activity, the pure duration, which lay
deep in the mind and consisted of perceptions and memories. This stream of thought
varied in intensity, often quickening at a perception or sensation which triggered

Charles Koechlin worked on a philosophical treatise that drew heavily from Bergson; see Robert Orledge,
memories, all of which intertwined and caused vast numbers of atoms in the body to vibrate together.\textsuperscript{35}

Like Romantic metaphysicists such as Schopenhauer and Hegel, Bergson partitioned the mind into the confined, symbolic thought of the intellect and the pre-representational sphere of thought that contained the true self. Like the symbolist poets, Bergson also understood the individual to be caught in a battle against society, because the rational part of thought, the “symbolic duration,” was a social necessity. It was a rigorous, formulaic way of thinking that could be articulated in language and communicated to other people. The delicate and spontaneous inner sanctum of mental life was so idiomatic that it was of little social use; it was easily overshadowed by symbolic thought and, if not exercised through self-reflection, it could atrophy.\textsuperscript{36} The \textit{debussystes} seemed to have a similar distrust of rationalistic thinking: as demonstrated in the previous chapter, they avoided preconceived forms, motivic development, schematic vocal melody, orthodox voice leading, and repetitive rhythmic patterns.

Bergson’s interest in the material components and mechanisms of the nervous system, especially as they concerned unconscious thought, was part of a new materialist direction in philosophy of the mind. Théodule Ribot, a widely read philosopher and editor of the \textit{Revue philosophique}, shared Bergson’s methodological perspective. Ribot described this new philosophical inquiry as a turn away from metaphysical descriptions of the “states of the soul” toward a materialist concept of the mind as a physical object operating according to natural laws that could be detected through empirical


\textsuperscript{36} Bergson, \textit{Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience humaine} (Paris: Alcan, 1889), 96-105.
observation. Based on the empirical findings of his contemporaries, which he read widely, Ribot concluded with Janet and Bergson that human mental processes were dizzyingly intricate. In *Les maladies de la mémoire* (1881) he described the psyche at any single moment as a conglomeration of multiple cerebral states. Most of them would fall into the realm of unconscious thought because conscious attention could accommodate very few of them at a time. As a result, these states constantly jostled each other for a place on the conscious stage. Memories were just as complex, each one a dynamic association of multiple physiological states that resided in different collections of cerebral tissue.

Several philosophers carried the materialist theories emerging about the unconscious mind into the realm of the arts. Alfred Bazaillas spoke about specific musical works and the liaison between unconscious thought and music in *Musique et inconscience* (1908) and his articles appeared in music journals. Paul Souriau, who influenced avant-garde painters and writers, connected art and hypnotism in *La suggestion dans l’art* (1893), and made contributions to the aesthetic discourse on the ornament. Charles Henry deserves particular attention in this investigation into the philosophical and literary correspondences to *debussysme* because he moved in both of these worlds. A lauded philosopher who wanted to bridge the gap between his discipline and the experimental sciences, Henry was particularly interested in describing and even quantifying the translation of perceptions into art. With the other foot in the artistic world, Henry was also part of symbolist circles and significantly influenced the

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38 Ibid., 22.
39 Ibid., 15-20.
movement’s aesthetic formulations: he both ran the psychophysics laboratory and gave popular lectures on art and the mind at the Sorbonne.\footnote{José Argüelles, \textit{Charles Henry and the Formation of a Psychophysical Aesthetic} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 78-81 and 103-109.} Henry believed that all forms of art produced strong effects on the perceiver by exciting the nervous system in a consistent way that could be mathematically described. He thus attempted to create a kind of materialist psychological aesthetic theory, which was based on the assumption that works of art could arouse positive aesthetic reactions or uni-directional movement in the nervous system that were similar to a feeling of pleasure. Conversely, negative reactions to art produced inhibition and pain in the nervous system. For Henry, aesthetic sensation was fundamentally about motion, speed, and direction, and he developed concrete ideas about how to measure these sensations indirectly in visual art and music.\footnote{See Charles Henry, \textit{Introduction à une esthétique scientifique} (Paris: Alcan, 1885), 78-81 and 103-109.} He argued, often to an eager audience of symbolist writers and like-minded painters at the offices of \textit{La Vogue} and \textit{L’indépendent}, that the important task of art in the modern age was to mimic the unconscious mind, where the complete array of thoughts were expressed as mechanical states and functioned according to stable laws. In contrast, Henry discounted the derivative and illusory images generated by consciousness.\footnote{Ibid., 78-81 and 103-109.}

In her influential work on the cultural meanings of Art Nouveau in France, Debora Silvermann provides convincing evidence that both visual artists and writers of the \textit{fin-de-siècle} era were in direct contact with psychologists who practiced hypnotism and investigated the nature of the unconscious.\footnote{Debora Silvermann, \textit{Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 33-38.} She argues that “although the symbolists are usually credited with redefining rational consciousness and with championing a new
subjectivist relation to the world, the diffusion of medical psychology facilitated a broader re-evaluation of space and self in the French fin de siècle." Immersed in a culture in which the theme of the complex human psyche radiated from so many locations, it is not surprising that the symbolists would be so interested in the mind, nor that some of the debussystes wanted to infuse artistic expression with fascinating, popular psychological theories.46

Many early twentieth-century scholars believed that of all human phenomena, it was music that most directly interacted with the breadth of activity that composed the human psyche. Bergson, for example, turned exclusively to music whenever he sought an artistic metaphor for the pure duration. This conception of music originated among the German Romantics, who elevated music because its non-representational quality made it the best artistic medium through which to reveal sublime truth. The argument was popular throughout the nineteenth-century and it was absorbed by the symbolists, who often declared their intention to arrive at the powerful quality of musical expression in poetry. Ribot devoted an entire chapter of his La logique des sentiments to music and maintained that musicians were at a greater advantage in translating the unconscious mind than the symbolist because sound bypassed language.47 By the 1920s the idea that music corresponded to the unconscious had become accepted knowledge. For example, in 1929 author Paul Valéry explained in a coffee table book about music that among all the

45 Ibid., 78.
46 Samain began to connect the symbolist expression of interior states to scientific understandings of the mind by 1893, speaking of the “unconscious” mind and “cerebral” activity in aesthetic discussions. See his letter to Charles Morice, Aug. 1893, in Samain, Des lettres, 30.
47 Théodule Ribot, La logique des sentiments (Paris: Alcan, 1905), 142.
arts, music “accompanied or imitated organic functioning” and “took hold directly of the affective mechanism, which it plays with and maneuvers at its will.”

Nineteenth-century German aesthetics still held sway in French musical discourse at the turn of the next century, but many writers combined their foundational ideas with what they had learned about the mind from recent psychology. Hanslick and Schopenhauer had privileged the status of music among the arts, but the two philosophers diverged about which kind of thought was most valuable, and therefore the analogue of music: Hanslick emphasized the intellect, while Schopenhauer looked to the will, the instinctual thought that operated outside of the intellect’s control. Most of the French writers who connected music to unconscious thought followed Schopenhauer, often explicitly. This was ironic, because of the two German aestheticians it was Hanslick who attempted to meld Romantic idealization of music and materialism, and materialist science gave legitimacy to the concept of the unconscious; Schopenhauer conversely wrote *The World as Will and Representation*, the cornerstone of his theories, at the height of Romanticism, and largely remained an idealist who believed that music possessed metaphysical content. But despite this irony, Schopenhauer was a natural ally for any writer who valued the unconscious, because of the type of thought he elevated.

Bazaillas made the connection between the unconscious and Schopenhauer explicit in *Musique et inconscience*, interpreting Schopenhauer’s theory in terms of contemporaneous psychology. He cited Bergson at several points in the study as a

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48 Paul Valéry, “Conquête de l’ubiquité,” in *De la musique avant toute chose,...* (Paris: Editions du Tambourinaire, 1929), 3. Valéry stated these biological qualities of music as matters of fact in this light fare for amateur art-lovers, demonstrating that by the time of decline of *debussysme* they had become accepted knowledge in France.
“modern psychologist,” who understood the intellect and the interior life in the manner of Schopenhauer. From his more materialist stance, basing his ideas on experience and observation rather than speculation, Bazaillas rejected Schopenhauer’s understanding of the interior complement to music as the ultimate metaphysical force in the world, the will, and replaced it with the dynamic fullness of activity that is entirely contained in human thought:

In passing arbitrarily from the perceptible to the metaphysical order, [Schopenhauer] erected [these concepts] within the absolute; he gave them the consistency of things-in-themselves, the dignity of eternal truths, as though it was not preferable to leave them in their original character as attitudes of the soul and as phenomena of consciousness…The noumenal, where an effort of speculation at one time transported us, thus becomes the domain of subjectivity and emotion; it corresponds not to the essence of things, but to a region in the recesses of the sensibility; not to the highest metaphysical reality, but to the deepest part of the unconsciousness.

Rather than escaping from the phenomenological world, musical creation thus became one of the most magnificent phenomena of human experience. Thus the terms Schopenhauer used to designate the reality that escapes human sensibility such as “the will, the thing in itself, the essence of the world” became in Bazaillas’s materialist framework “the sentiment, the dream, the unconscious.”

Although modifications were necessary, Bazaillas embarked on this project of basing a theory of the unconscious on Schopenhauer’s system because he agreed so strongly with the idea that the intellect could not apprehend the fullness of thought. To

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51 “En passant arbitrairement de l’ordre de la sensibilité à celui de la métaphysique, il les a érigés en absolu; il leur a donné la consistance de choses en soi, la dignité de vérités éternelles, comme s’il n’était pas préférable de leur laisser ce caractère original d’attitudes de l’âme et de phénomènes de la conscience…Le noumène, où un effort de spéculation nous avait d’abord transportés, devient ainsi le domaine de la subjectivité et de l’émotion; il correspond, non à l’essence des choses, mais à une région reculée de la sensibilité, non à la réalité métaphysique la plus haute, mais à l’inconscience la plus profonde.” Ibid., 141.
52 Ibid., 140.
refer to this complete and dynamic mental state Bazaillas preferred the term “primitive consciousness”: the condition of thought before the intellect could divide it into separate representational ideas and relate them in a logical system. The notion of the primitive consciousness was very similar to Bergson’s “pure duration.” Both were ephemeral yet always present, an infinitely complex substrate of thought that cohered in a mass until the rigorous intellect manipulated it into a logical line of thought. To gain experiential knowledge of this substratum of mental activity, one had to diminish the power of the intellect and tune into the primitive consciousness, and he believed that music as understood by Schopenhauer was the best tool for this task. The German philosopher himself once compared the moment of inspiration when the instinct seized a composer to hypnotism, and his ideal mode of listening was one of passive contemplation. Bazaillas built a theory based on hypnotism about how music draws out the unconscious around hypnotism. The activity of contemplating music pacified the intellect, and once in this transfixed state, listeners became aware of the dynamic activity of their own thought life. In this way music served as a door to the unconscious and a psychological tool.53

In *Musique et inconscience* Bazaillas only mentioned composers as late as Schumann, even though he spoke of his goal for the book as the discovery of a psychological understanding of “modern” music. He found a chance to apply his ideas to more recent music one year later, in a published response to Raphaël Cor’s attack on Debussy. Cor believed that *debussyste* music was dangerous because its weak and monotonous sound hypnotized listeners into a passive state analogous to Hanslick’s

53 Ibid., 95-98 and 318-320.
concept of the pathological listening mode. Bazaillas responded by reversing Cor’s argument:

There is a place for this art that begins and does not finish, consisting purely of suggestion and intercession—an indiscreet initiation to a spiritual life. With this gift of activating dreams and provoking the interior motion, Debussy has become a master. His art will be one of musical intercession. Truly, he does not create forms that dominate and subjugate us…Whether he wishes it or not, he must be viewed as a mediator who employs sounds as an interior magic to gently charm us [pour s’insinuer doucement] and to reveal ourselves imperceptibly to ourselves.54

Bazaillas favored the delicate and elusive nature of Debussy’s music, arguing that music of an unfinished quality provided the composer with a means by which he could influence the listener’s mind. Cor had accurately identified Debussy as a kind of hypnotist, but Bazaillas argued that Debussy used his power for good, to produce psychological growth in his subject. In the delicate strains of debussysme he found an advantage rather than a weakness, because this musique inachevée wonderfully permeated listeners’ minds and led them into a contemplative state where the mechanisms of their inner life came, dreamlike, to their attention. In Musique et inconscience and his response to Cor, Bazaillas connected Schopenhauer, hypnotism, scientific and philosophical theories of inner life, and debussysme. His concept of music’s role in building awareness of unconscious thought in the listener is also remarkably close

54 Il y a place pour cet art qui commence et qui ne finit pas, tout fait de suggestion et intercession, - initiation indiscrète à la vie spirituelle. Dans ce don d’amorcer le rêve et de provoquer la mobilité intérieure, M. Debussy est passé maître. Son art sera celui de l’intercession musicale. A vrai dire, il ne créera pas des formes qui nous dominent et nous subjuguent…Qu’il le veuille ou non, il faut voir en lui un médiateur qui se sert des sons comme d’une magie intérieure, pour s’insinuer doucement et pour nous révéler insensiblement à nous-mêmes.” Cor, Le cas Debussy, 66.
to the symbolist notion that profound art re-created delicate mental states in the beholder.\textsuperscript{55}

Ribot, who was well respected among literati and musicians, proved himself to be equally familiar with music, materialist psychology, and symbolist aesthetics. After first defining several categories of thought in \textit{La logique des sentiments} (1907), Ribot devoted more than thirty pages to music’s supreme ability to translate interior states into a form untainted by the intellect. He quoted from Beethoven and Wagner to show that composers have explicitly tried this undertaking, and he declared Schumann’s music the closest to pure affective states. Like Bazaillas, Ribot located the counterpart of music in unconscious thought, and as a materialist understood its meaning as entirely immanent in the human psyche. Both philosophers valued the unconscious to such an extent that they valued types of music that the German philosophers despised. Ribot valued programmatic music above “absolute music,” because while the latter was an empty display of technical skill, in the former the composer treated interior states in their pre-representational form and captured the dynamic current of feeling in a purely affective language.\textsuperscript{56}

Programmatic, instrumental music at its best could be “composed entirely of the vibrations of human passions, their contrasts, their brusque leaps, their infinite nuances, their perpetual transformation.”\textsuperscript{57} The language of the quotation brings to mind Bergson’s pure duration as well as the predominant qualities of debussyste scores. \textit{In La logique des

\textsuperscript{55} At one point in \textit{La Musique et l’inconscience}, Bazaillas stated that although music is capable of translating emotion “it does not impose them from outside by an objective description and, one could say, non-passive: it excites them from within... It is not states that [music] paints, but experiences that it elicits” p. 155). The statement is remarkably similar to Mallarmé’s description of Symbolism in relation to the Parnassians in his response to Jules Huret, \textit{Enquête}, 60.

\textsuperscript{56} Ribot, \textit{La logique des sentiments}, 134-36.

\textsuperscript{57} “Elle est faite tout entière avec les vibrations des passions humaines, leurs contrastes, leurs sauts brusques, leurs nuances infinies, leurs perpétuelles transformations.” Ibid., 137.
sentiments, Ribot noted that the symbolist aspiration towards music was doomed to fail: because their art was one of language they were forced to rely on the intellect. Composers, on the other hand, worked in a language whose fluidity, simultaneity, and ephemeral quality was naturally analogous to unconscious thought.\footnote{Ibid., 164-168.}

The Debussyste Translation of the Principle of Simultaneity

Jules Benda added the debussyste sound into Ribot’s ideas about music and unconscious thought in his review of Pelléas et Mélisande, taking La logique des sentiments (which he incorrectly called La psychologie des sentiments in his review) as an affirmation of Debussy’s techniques in the opera. After introducing the notion that music both expressed and acted upon the unconscious, crediting it to Ribot, Benda stated that “the processes of which music essentially consists are those that best assimilate the processes of the unconscious and un-intellectual life.”\footnote{Ibid., 164-168.} He attempted, as had other writers, to explain precisely the correspondence between music and the unconscious in terms of similar laws that governed their functioning. Benda landed on the principle of simultaneity, or the theory that the psyche existed as multiple mental states at once. He noted that due to the strict limits it imposed on itself, intellectual thought eschewed the fundamental simultaneity of thought and instead experienced single states in succession. Benda believed that throughout history, music had progressively become a better representation of the unconscious, and that Debussy had thus far come closest to the goal

\footnote{Jules Benda, “A propos de Pelléas et Mélisande,” La revue blanche (July 1902): 392.}
because he best captured the simultaneity of instinctive states in the mind. Benda thus added to the materialist discussion about the music and the unconscious by identifying the new principle of simultaneity of distinct states, and he used this notion to position Debussy as a central figure in this discourse.

In spite of his passionate support of Debussy, Benda had difficulty specifying how the composer’s music embodied the concept of multiple, simultaneous mental states in an innovative way. He did note the many places in *Pelléas et Mélisande* where the text and the melody that sets it seem to express different emotions and he also found “the sense of a coexistence of diversities” in the individualistic treatment of the instruments in the orchestra and the complexity of the harmonies. More compelling—but not mentioned by Benda—is the correspondence between multiple mental states and the frequent interaction of undeveloped musical material in Debussy’s music, due to the innovative deployment of material in *debussyste* textures and formal kinetic processes. Streaming texture, which was the most common texture in Debussy’s *debussyste* music as well as other *debussyste* scores, presents several musical ideas with distinct profiles that co-exist. Their typical presentation in simple patterns that reiterate is reminiscent of a persistent image in the stream of thought, and their effect is also strikingly concordant.

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60 “De ces relations de la musique avec l’inconscient, il suit que les procédés qui l’assimilent le plus aux procédés de la vie inconsciente et in-intellectuelle...Cette volonté vient de trouver sa représentation la plus définitive, nous-semble-t-il, et la plus consciente dans la personne de M. Debussy.” Ibid.

61 Ibid., 393.

62 François de Médicis suggests that Debussy’s description of the “arabesque” (what I call streaming texture) as resulting from mechanistic, impersonal processes mirrors his aesthetic fascination with impersonal processes in nature such as flowing water or the wind. De Médicis further states that these pantheistic descriptions of the natural world were not the focal point of Debussy’s aesthetics—Debussy’s goal was not to imitate nature—but rather metaphorical means that allowed him to think through his developing ontology of music. See François de Médicis, “Tristan dans La Mer: le crépuscule wagnérien noyé dans le zénith debussyste?” *Acta Musicologica* 79, no. 1 (2007): 191-251.
with Charles Henry’s idea of thought as directional motion.\textsuperscript{63} Debussyste formal processes emphasize interaction of different fragments of material, which resist changes to their fundamental characteristics. Scores considered in the previous chapter exemplify these innovative processes that leave behind the traditional idea of motivic development, which promotes homogeneity of material. Fragments in debussyste scores intertwine and collide with each other, as in Ravel’s \textit{Oiseaux tristes}, and they mingle with and provoke changes in each other’s energy level (volume, speed, quality of sound as manifested in score indications), as was the case in the opening of Schmitt’s \textit{Sur un vieux petit cimetière}. Some contemporary scholars have been so impressed by the heterogeneity of Debussy’s scores that they have characterized his formal processes as based on discontinuity and interruption.\textsuperscript{64}

The principle of simultaneous mental states was also fundamental to Bergson’s theories about the instinctual sense of time. He identified homogeneous, unchanging time with the symbolic duration (the intellect) because it was an artificial conflation of the concept of time with space that allowed the intellect to neatly separate and quantify perceived phenomena into a regular succession. Conversely, the true self found in the

\textsuperscript{63} Pictorial-fused texture was also an innovative texture and it captured the notion of thought as motion, yet the debussystes made much less use of it than streaming texture. This lower usage suggests that they considered pictorial-fused texture to be of limited value in realizing their artistic goals. In his memoir on Ravel, Vlado Perlemuter offered an explanation for why this might have been the case. Based ostensibly on his many interactions with the composer while his piano student, Perlemuter claimed that in \textit{Miroirs} Ravel’s style took an evolutionary leap, as he made a novel attempt at “impressionism in music,” portraying images “more clearly” than in Debussy’s “symbolism.” See Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, \textit{Ravel d’après Ravel} (Lausanne: Editions du Cervin, 1970), 22. If the musical translation of images filtered through human perception and memory was the original goal of debussyste techniques, which Perlemuter astutely judges as related to symbolism, a more direct rendering of images would indeed stand outside of this project. Debussyste composers might have considered impressionism to be an effect rather than a textural type, useful in making an energetic image more palpable to the listener, or in mimicking the mobile thought described by Henry and Bergson, but rarely able on its own to translate the nature of unconscious mental processes.

\textsuperscript{64} See the summary Shanahan provides in “Debussy’s Forms of Deception,” 33-37 and 42-44.
pure duration experienced existence as fundamentally heterogeneous and simultaneous:
each of the elements that flowed through the pure duration was unique, and because these
elements freely fused with each other, they could not be clearly distinguished. Rather
than marking off time, the pure duration contracted or dilated with great subtlety,
depending on the quality of the mental states that entered its flow. As a result, the
conventional notion of time as analogous to uniformly parsed space, which Bergson
attributed to Kant, was entirely inappropriate to a representation of the rich, deep recesses
of the mind where simultaneity was inherent. Bergson’s theory of inner temporality soon
became widely influential on other French philosophers and the public: in 1914 La
grande revue deemed it necessary to publish a survey on “Mr. Bergson and the Influence
of His Ideas on the Modern Sensibility.”

The debussystes’ attraction to what could be considered non-normative time is
another correspondence between the debussyste musical practice and late nineteenth-
century theories of the mind, especially Bergson’s. Debussy’s La soirée dans Grenade is
a ruminative debussyste work that is particularly successful at evoking time in the manner
of Bergson. The composer noted fifteen tempo changes in the piece, one for each moment
when the musical material or principal image in the stream of music changes. Time
seems highly sensitive in the piece, reacting to the quality of the unique material present
at any given moment. Musical tempo in La soirée dans Grenade can be construed as
analogous to Bergson’s pure duration: qualitative and irregular. Debussy relied on four
principal indications for the fifteen tempo changes in the composition, and they all

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65 The refutation of the Kantian notion of time as analogous to space was Bergson’s goal in Essai sur les
données immédiates de la conscience. He strongly believed that this artificial construct of the intellect was
one of the strongest chains that bound the true self. See the concluding chapter of the Essai for a clear
summary of his argument (pp. 169-182).
concern the feeling of the passage of time rather than relative speed. *Tempo rubato* and *dans un rythme nonchalamment gracieux* signify a flexible kind of time, the speed of which can modulate according to expressive requirements; it correlates to Bergson’s heterogeneous time. Conversely, *très rythme* and *tempo giusto* indicate a strictly even, or homogenous, pulse.

Debussy carefully matched the two different tempo types with particular musical material in *La soirée dans Grenade*. The markings for heterogeneous time accompany moments of a contemplative, interior nature, such as the recurring whole tone passage that first sounds at m. 23, marked *tempo rubato*. The slow, quiet, ruminative introduction, in which distinct strands of material mingle, is marked *dans un rythme nonchalamment gracieux*. Such moments of arabesque texture are themselves heterogeneous, and it is fitting that Debussy would pair them with a heterogeneous tempo. Meanwhile, the performer is instructed to play all of the snippets of dance music and the only jubilant section of the composition (m. 32) in a strict tempo. Both kinds of material are of a relatively exteriorized nature, bringing to mind images of dancing figures and the musicians that accompany them. These sections of homogeneous tempo are also homogenous in terms of their contents, conceived in homophony rather than the arabesque texture. In *La soirée dans Grenade* Debussy created two different notions of time that are analogous to Bergson’s pure duration and symbolic duration. Heterogeneous time governs the music whenever it seems to turn inward, as though the listener plunges into the contents of the subject’s pure duration, but when the subject’s attention focuses on exterior events, the time becomes regular.
Such a flexible approach to time would have been useful to composers desiring to examine the world through the mind, where following Bergson’s theories about interior experience, the contents of thought determine an individual’s sense of the passage of time. One of the most consistent linkages between content and time in debussyste scores occurs in reminiscence codas, where the tempo slows markedly as fragments of earlier material return in a weakened state. All of the originator debussystes connected the two at least once in their piano scores, and well over half of the 70 reminiscence codas are paired with a marked slowing of tempo, either in an indication or through the consistent use of slower note values. This practice suggests that there was wide—although likely tacit—agreement among originator debussystes that concentrated and complicated processes of reminiscence caused inner time to slacken, which they translated into a slower tempo marking. The technique was not entirely new but related to the older convention of moderately slowing a composition in the last few bars. By pushing it to an extreme, the debussystes ended up with a radical technique that gained a novel signification useful to their innovative conception of music.

The debussyste affinity for the binary model of time espoused by Henry and Bergson is perhaps nowhere better manifested than in markings calling for a general flexibility of rhythm at the openings of their scores. Debussy and Bonheur preferred the direction sans rigueur, which recalls the debussyste championing of the intuitive over the rationalistic: it is as though the composers asked performers to tap into that intuitive, inner sense of time rather than the strict, homogenous kind of time that because of the constant presence of watches and practice room metronomes had become normative to them. The same indication also appears in Roussel’s few debussyste piano pieces, while
other variants of the concept such as nonchalant, souple, rubato and lassitude occur frequently in debussyste scores. The temporal indications in debussyste scores help to portray in music parts of the human psyche that they believed operated idiomatically, free of socially-conditioned constraints.

Although he often turned to music as an example of the nature and richness of the psyche, Bergson never discussed specific composers or compositions in his writings. This was not surprising, because Bergson confessed to being relatively uneducated about music. Other philosophers with a greater knowledge of music found Bergson’s ideas useful to the aesthetic discourse they were developing about contemporaneous music around 1900: we have already witnessed this in Bazaillas. Bergson did avow his “instinctive predilection” for Debussy’s music in an interview from 1910, and claimed that others had shared with him the reflection they saw of his descriptions of mental processes in not just Debussy’s music, but in that of his entire “school,” because they had arrived at “continuous melody.”

Bergson did not explain this statement, but his former student, Vincent Biétrix, did. In an article from 1909 that responded to Cor’s survey on Debussy’s influence, Biétrix (writing under his pen name of Tancrède de Visan) criticized Cor’s use of Schopenhauer’s concept of “melody” in his attack on Debussy, because he mistakenly took it to mean a single line of pitches rather than the general quality of organization common to musical expression. Biétrix explained that “continuous melody” referred to the instinctive organization of debussyste music, which was born “in the very facts of consciousness” as described by Bergson in Les données immédiates de la conscience

humaine. Bergson’s student suggested a close symmetry between certain structural elements of the debussyste practice and the functioning of Bergson’s conception of the pure duration. Biétrix explained musical history as a progression towards greater interiority, and placed Debussy’s music at the pinnacle because the unfinished and delicate quality of his music was a manifestation of the unconscious.

After this first wave of published articles during the first decade of the twentieth century, philosophers and music critics continued to ponder the correlations among debussysme, the action of music on the mind, and the most recent psychological theories. As two articles from the same 1925 issue of La Revue musicale illustrate, Bergson’s thought had come to play a major role in this domain. In “Bergsonisme et musique,” Gabriel Marcel offered yet another way in which Debussy had realized Bergson’s and Schopenhauer’s theories. He explained that a composer of the highest genius placed the listener in a passive state that led to the activation of the memory substrate, Bergson’s conception of the memory as brain tissue that retained in a condensed form all of the experiences of a single person. A composer of genius stature was “like a prism through which the anonymous and neutral Past…which is the basis of each one of us, is made to decompose and becomes specialized and colored with individual nuances.” Debussy was the main example that Marcel proposed of such genius.

In the same issue of La revue musicale, Raymond Petit linked Bergson and modern French music, because just as the philosopher had brought to light the données

68 “Comme un prisme à travers quoi le Passe anonyme et neutre…it is the basis of each one of us, is made to decompose, se spécifie, se colore de nuances individuelles.” Ibid., 226.
immédiates of consciousness, recent music had brought forth the données immédiates of sound.\textsuperscript{70} This had been achieved when “for an entire group of musicians the foundation of harmony ceased to be a certain intellectual systematization, but it instead resulted from the immediate properties of sound [données immédiates du sonore].”\textsuperscript{71} Although he did not provide any specific names of composers, he did describe the liberation of dissonance in this music and the use of seventh and ninth chords in their “pure” states, which brings to mind debussyste harmony. The unorthodoxies with regard to voice leading which were pervasive in these composers’ scores, as discussed in chapter one, added to the harmonic effect that Petit vaguely described. Petit’s article is illustrative of the ironic turn away from Hanslick’s theory of musical beauty that we have seen throughout the discourse of authors who affirmed debussyste music. Hanslick and Petit began from the materialist points of departure that there was a single set of natural laws that governed both music and thought; they both started with the assumption that the power of music is contained in the material of the brain and the forces that act upon it. Yet because they allied music with different types of mental activity, the two philosophers ended up affirming radically different kinds of music: Petit valued recent French music which “tended towards chromatic atonality” because in them the “importance of intellectual crystallizations” had been diminished, while Hanslick had celebrated the rational thought displayed in the tonal system.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{70} Raymond Petit, “L’identité des formes du langage sonore et de la pensée,” \textit{La revue musicale} 6, no. 4 (Feb. 1, 1925): 152-156.
\textsuperscript{71} “Pour toute une partie de musiciens les fondements de l’harmonie cessèrent d’être une systematisation intellectuelle quelconque, mais résultèrent des données immediates du sonore.” Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{72} Mark Burford, “Hanslick’s Materialist Idealism,” \textit{19th-Century Music} 30, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 176. The article is an excellent explanation of the philosophical contortions Hanslick undertakes to show the content of music as ideal but contained within physical material.
None of these authors sought to negate the aesthetic of Schopenhauer or even Hanslick, but to re-formulate the idealist elevation of music in the philosophical and scientific concepts of their time. By searching for correspondence between Romantic musical aesthetics and the empirical findings of their colleagues in the sciences, philosophers like Bazaillas, Benda, Petit, and Marcel arrived at new insights about Symbolism, the nature of various mental processes, and the manner in which humans perceived music.

**The Composers Speak: Debussyste Aesthetics**

Philosophers had woven *debussyste* music into this web of ideas about the mind, and some of the composers who made use of *debussyste* techniques understood musical aesthetics in corresponding terms. Debussy and Ravel, both of whom worked in close relationship with symbolist writers, led the stylistic innovation and produced the most extensive, innovative, and precise articulations of music aesthetics among the *debussystes*. This was especially the case for Debussy, who assimilated complex ideas from outside of music and formulated compelling aesthetic statements. He undertook a marketing campaign to prepare the French musical community for the novel conception of opera he presented in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and in so doing expounded his views on a wealth of important issues including German Romanticism, Wagner, form, musical drama, and vocal melody. Throughout the articles that he published in *La revue blanche* in 1901 and 1902, the relationship between a composer’s mind, musical content, and musical form is a constant theme. Debussy will also figure prominently in this discussion
due to his stature in French culture, which caused others to preserve a relatively large body of his written correspondence and accounts of his verbal statements about music.

Although he was not as prolific as Debussy, Ravel was similarly inclined and able to clearly express his musical ideas, and we have a relatively sizeable written record of his thoughts on music as well. Besides these two, the list of composers who wrote *debussyste* music and for whom there is a record of their thoughts about music is relatively short. Fortunately, a substantial record of aesthetic writings does exist for the composers who were largely responsible for conceiving the fundamental elements of *debussysme* between 1890 and 1905, and likely also had the strongest commitment to the movement’s philosophical underpinnings. Conversely, for many of the later adopters of *debussysme*, such as Ernest Moret and Gabriel Grovlez, no such written record exists. The result of this situation is that there were just a handful of composers who wrote *debussyste* scores who also articulated possible significations for their music. This does not mean that silent composers did not understand and adhere to the ideas others espoused, only that they did not have the opportunity or the means to communicate them. It is also likely that some of the later composers who adopted these stylistic elements lacked an awareness of the philosophical underpinnings that the earlier *debussystes* had associated with these elements (see chapter 4).

Many of the earliest *debussyste* composers were concerned with the mechanisms of the inner life, just as the symbolists had been, and considered their goal as composers to be an evocation of their own powerful unconscious states. They also used terminology and ideas borrowed from the contemporaneous materialist philosophical discourse about the mind. We know, for instance, that Debussy was familiar with the respected status
hypnosis had acquired among doctors, as he joked to Durand that perhaps the coincidence that he and Ravel had chosen the same poem by Mallarmé to set to music in 1913 was a case of hypnosis (he used the French auto-suggestion) that should be presented in a paper to the Academy of Medicine.73

In letters where he gave advice to other composers about how to hone their craft, Debussy emphasized the importance of paying attention to subtle interior activity. He criticized Ernest Chausson for ignoring his unconscious creativity as he composed: “You especially do not seem to allow your fantasy to act, that mysterious thing that causes us to find the perfect impression of a feeling while an obstinate and assiduous endeavor [recherche] will only certainly weaken it.74 Rather than letting his true inner self act according to its wishes, Chausson attempted to craft music according to rationalistic techniques that not only were opposed to this true self but even had the grave effect of weakening the composer’s awareness of it. His instructions to Raoul Bardac from 1906 are notable for their materialist tone: “It’s better to marinate your brain in a bath of good sunshine. Gaze at the flowers and take note of instants—while the nervous material is still susceptible to reflexes. Collect impressions. Do not bother with noting them.”75 He prescribed a treatment to Bardac with precise terminology as though he were a psychologist rather than a musician. Part of his aid to the younger composer was to draw his awareness to how the compositional process functioned within the brain. Particularly

74 “Surtout vous ne paraissez pas laisser assez agir à sa fantaisie, cette chose mystérieuse qui nous fait trouver l’impression juste d’un sentiment alors que certainement une recherche assidue et obstinée ne fait que l’affaiblir.” Debussy to Ernest Chausson, Feb. 5, 1894, in Debussy, Correspondance, 97.
interesting is his description of “nervous material” as a plastic substrate that could absorb the experiences of the senses, which is reminiscent of Bergson’s descriptions of the substrate material of memories, as reviewed above. Like philosophers discussing music at the same time, Debussy re-clothed German Romantic notions about the compositional process and the power of music in materialist terminology in his advice to other composers.⁷⁶

In a published article from 1911, Debussy shared his understanding of what it meant to be a composer:

Who can know the secret of musical composition? The sound of the sea, the outline of a horizon, the wind in the leaves, the cry of a bird—these deposit complex impressions in us. And suddenly, without the consent of anyone on this earth, one of these memories bursts forth from us, expressing itself in the language of music.⁷⁷

Debussy’s many pieces titled after natural imagery (La Mer, Cloches à travers les feuilles, Reflets dans l’eau) have often been interpreted as “impressionistic” descriptions of these images in music that are analogous to a rather facile interpretation of Monet’s paintings as attempts to capture the fleeting qualities of light and color according to the natural conditions and perceptual limitations.⁷⁸ The composer makes clear, however, that it was not the natural phenomena themselves that interested him, but what occurred in his

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⁷⁶ Debussy seemed wary, however, of pushing materialist descriptions of the compositional process to a system of laws that lacked some sort of poetry. For example, he derided Hugo Riemann as someone who could explain a sunset as something purely mechanical. See Debussy, Correspondance, 230.
⁷⁷ “Qui connaitra le secret de la composition musicale? Le bruit de la mer, la courbe d’un horizon, le vent dans les feuilles, le cri d’un oiseau déposent en nous de multiples impressions. Et, tout à coup, sans que l’on y consente le moins du monde, l’un de ces souvenirs se répand hors de nous et s’exprime en langage musical.” Untitled article, Excelsior (Feb. 11, 1911); reprinted in Monsieur Croche, 303.
mind as he experienced them and continued to experience them as memories. In the same article he located the delicacy of his compositions not in the qualities of nature but in the “ephemeral and delicate passengers” that are awed by it. Debussy declared to André Poniatowski that music was “the stuff of a dream from which one had pulled off the veils…not the expression of a sentiment, but the sentiment itself.”\(^{79}\) He was drawn to the entirety of a thought, the nuanced sensation of its operation in his mind as well as its content.

Raymond Bonheur revealed his understanding of artistic creation in several letters he exchanged with André Gide as they tried to collaborate on an opera. The project was eventually dropped, and one of the issues that arose for Bonheur was his belief that Gide created art out of a completely different kind of thought than he did: while Gide saw art as something lucid and voluntary, Bonheur described his “cerebral mechanism” to be “entirely abandoned to sensations and instinct.”\(^ {80}\) He disagreed fundamentally with the idea that a work of art was the work of the will or the reason, he explained in a letter to Gide from 1901. An artist could only arrive at any sense of logic or coherence in an artwork “involuntarily,” without a conscious plan to do so, as though a divine wind mysteriously caused the strings of the artist’s genius to vibrate.\(^ {81}\) Such unequivocal elevation by Bonheur of the instinct over the will is not surprising, given the large dose of

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\(^{79}\) “Mais, sapristi, la musique, c’est du rêve dont on écarte les voiles! Ce n’est même pas l’expression d’un sentiment, c’est le sentiment lui-même!” Debussy to André Poniatowski, Feb. 1893, in Debussy, Correspondence, 72.

\(^{80}\) Quoted in Labussière, Raymond Bonheur, 160.

\(^{81}\) “Je ne peux croire que l’œuvre d’art soit œuvre volontaire, qu’elle soit œuvre de raison; je crois qu’un chef d’œuvre toujours est logique et harmonieux, oui, comme sont logiques et harmonieuses la ligne d’une colline, l’architecture d’une fleur; mais tout aussi involontairement…en sorte que je suis bien près d’admettre que c’est Dieu seul qui à la fois propose et dispense, que lui seul est le grand dispensateur de la grâce, que la génie c’est la vibration plus ou moins harmonieuse d’une harpe éolienne, et que le vent souffle où il veut.” Bonheur to André Gide, Aug. 9, 1901, in ibid., 157.
musings that Bonheur received from Samain. The poet once explained to Bonheur that it was “the unconscious alone” that created art, “the latent forces stored up deep in our sensibility.”

Bonheur’s close friendship with Debussy probably also mutually reinforced the idea of instinctive composition that occurred in the unconscious in both composers’ minds.

In a speech delivered in English at the Rice Institute in 1928, Ravel spoke at length about the process of musical composition and placed repeated emphasis on the interplay of multiple mental states that serve as the composer’s creative forces. He used the instinct-will binary construct once again, but articulated it using a more technical, psychological vocabulary. The speech contains precise, materialist descriptions of the mind, as Ravel made distinctions among the different mental functions, such as perception and intelligence, and how each is involved in the creative process. Like Henry and Bergson he envisioned the non-representational contents of the authentic self as intricate mental states in motion, speaking of the “currents of inner forces” and the “inner motion” that generate art. He understood most of the creative process to take place entirely within his mind:

In my own composition I find a long period of conscious gestation, in general, necessary. During this interval, I come gradually to see, and with growing precision, the form and evolution which the subsequent work should have as a whole. I may thus be occupied for years without writing a single note of the work…Then comes the time when new conceptions have to be formulated for further composition, but these cannot be forced artificially, for they come only of their own free will, and often originate

82 Samain to Bonheur, Aug. 1893, in Samain, Des lettres, 28.
83 Debussy respected Bonheur as a rare composer who was capable of understanding art as he did during the 1890s, writing in one letter to Bonheur of his confidence that both of them would go on to compose music “containing all of their lives,” or the richness of the interior life, that existed in a confluence of fleeting mental states. See Debussy’s letter to Bonheur, Oct. 5, 1890, in Debussy, Correspondance, 60-61.
84 Compare Bergson, Les Données immédiates, 84-90.
Ravel, like Debussy, posited his own memories and not images as they objectively appear in the present reality as the seeds of his compositions. It seemed as though a mysterious process occurred within his mind, seemingly without his conscious knowledge of it, in which a perception was recorded and then transformed slowly into musical material. Although he states this notion with the greatest clarity here, Ravel had subscribed to it in some form throughout his career.  

Ravel believed that the deeper states of thought rather than the conscious intellectual states created valuable art. Therefore, Schopenhauer’s binary opposition between the reason and instinct was a cornerstone of his writings, appearing several times in concert reviews he published during 1912. Witkowski’s Second Symphony was deemed “artificial” because the composer “appears to have been guided by the will alone in this composition,” causing Witkowski to treat the elements of music separately and intellectually, when they should be dealt with simultaneously and “instinctively.”

D’Indy was likewise focused on music in the “pure domain of the will,” that Ravel believed had the unfortunate effect of making the composer inhospitable towards free...
expression of his instinct.⁸⁸ Ravel derided Buffon, too, because in his music he saw evidence of a popular false assumption that “the will alone can direct artistic instinct.” It was instead Ravel’s opinion that “the principle of genius, that is of artistic creation, can only be established by instinct, or sensibility.”⁸⁹

In his speech on composition from 1928 Ravel used the binary construct once more, but described it using a more technical vocabulary: between 1912 and 1928 he had become more familiar with the psychological and philosophical discourse on the psyche. In this later evolution of the construct, inflexible, academic laws of music take the position of the will as used in the 1912 reviews, and “individual consciousness,” “inner motion,” and “the artist’s sensitiveness and personal reaction” specify the more general idea of the instinct:

For each creative artist has within him laws peculiar to his own being. These laws, peculiar to the artist himself, are, perhaps the most momentous elements at play in the whole process of musical creation…⁹⁰

The composer celebrated the individuality of artistic genius, as had many other aestheticians, but he refined the idea based on early twentieth-century theories about the mind: the creative process was at once out of the conscious control of the artist and yet precisely guided by natural laws.

At first glance Ravel seems to have contradicted himself in this statement, but this apparent paradox is resolved by his materialist perspective: Ravel believed that the instinct or unconscious was governed by stable, natural laws as was the intellect, and

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⁸⁹ Ibid. Ravel’s conception of instinctual versus artificial art clearly drew from Schopenhauer’s theories, yet Ravel consistently referred to the intellect as the will. The composer might have made this change in vocabulary to distance himself from the German Romantics, especially Wagner, who took up Schopenhauer’s idea of music as a manifestation of the will in his own writings about music.
⁹⁰ Ravel, “Contemporary Music,” 44.
many philosophers, he believed that intricate thought could take place in unconscious states. At the same time as they are precise, Ravel also considered these laws to be instinctual in the sense that they were unique to each composer. Like many of the other debussystes Ravel elevated Debussy as the composer who tuned compositional technique to his interior life perhaps better than anyone: “His genius was obviously one of great individuality, creating its own laws, constantly in evolution, expressing itself freely…”

A materialist conception of the unconscious and its pivotal role in artistic creation manifested itself in the writings of other debussyste composers, typically with less precision and different terminology. In 1928 Le ménestrel requested Koechlin’s thoughts on the subject of musical inspiration and, writing in the same year as Ravel, he also emphasized the intuitive part of the mind. The musical thoughts that constituted the germ of a composition were “dictated intuitively and unconsciously to [the composer] by his interior being.” If an artist was sufficiently inspired, the resulting piece of music would have a powerful unity that was preserved indefinitely in the artist’s mind. Even after abandoning a work, the “interior emotion” of a composer could reconnect the musical material with the inner seeds that produced it, an idea no doubt attractive to Koechlin because he regularly took several years to finish his compositions.

91 Carlo Caballero argues that Ravel would have been opposed to the idea that the unconscious produced art, because this kind of thought was associated with spontaneity, and Ravel stated his belief that “in art, everything must be thought out.” See Caballero, Fauré, 33-34. This identification of unconscious thought with chaos and disorganization was, however, directly at odds with the multiple-states model of the mind accepted among late nineteenth-century French scholars and well as with their materialist orientation, as discussed above. Ravel, in “Contemporary music,” clearly adhered to these popular views, and he thus would have encountered no difficulty in reconciling his penchant for artistic craftsmanship with the nature of the unconscious.

Koechlin mixed his vocabulary in the response, using the older âme to speak of the depths of the mind as well as the more scientific idea of the unconscious. In a harmony treatise he published in 1927 Koechlin described the compositional genesis from a more materialist perspective. Speaking of the modern approach to dissonance, he remarked that despite the harmonic freedom they had attained, composers still needed to calculate sonorities (procède par l’empiricism). He continued that “in composers of supreme talent, those who possess some measure of genius, this empiricism is at once bold and sure, because it is guided by the musical instinct.”94 In another place in the treatise he turned to Bergson for support, explaining that chromaticism could not be described according to fixed rules, because “as Mr. Bergson says, reality cannot be contained in frameworks.”95

Jean Huré, who composed debussyste pieces and was a strong advocate of other debussyste composers, wrote a lengthy diatribe against musical rules titled Dogmes musicaux, which was published in installments in Le monde musical from 1904 through 1907. The emphasis on “instinctive” composition is again present here, and with uncanny similarity to Ravel’s discourse. In thinly veiled attacks on both the Conservatoire and the Schola Cantorum, Huré bemoaned pedagogical approaches which taught a child rules and labels that result in an artificial kind of composition with no place for the instinct. If the child’s training instead consists of exploration of his inner nature, whatever he produced would be instinctive and therefore good.96 Huré also constructed a materialist conception

95 “Comme dit Mr. Bergson, la réalité déborde des cadres.” Ibid., vol. 2, 263.
96 Jean Huré, Dogmes musicaux (Paris: Le monde musicale, 1904-07), 61-75.
of the mind in the study, quoting from physiological studies to bolster his claims about natural composition, and he tied his idea of instinctive composition to the music of Debussy and Fauré.

Many of the other debussyste composers talked about the specific psychological content or effects of music only in their analyses of Pelléas et Mélisande, which is evidence of Debussy’s preponderant influence on debussyste aesthetics. Maurice Emmanuel described in rapturous terms the pure spontaneity in which Debussy had composed the opera:

He never thought or expressed himself according to the necessities of a system: he obeyed his instincts, at first with spontaneity, then with control; he then formulated these instincts into a discourse, and they finally became triumphant… Debussy merely obeyed the voices within him: they dictated to him a spontaneous work of art, though he elaborated it slowly.97

Key themes that are routine in debussyste discourse appear here: the instinct freed from systematic thought, a combination of spontaneity and craftsmanship, and the interiority of true composition. Emmanuel, like Ravel, also emphasized the long generative period in the mind necessary for precise expression of the inner self in music. Désire-Emile Inghelbrecht, who composed several debussyste songs and a debussyste orchestral sketch, was also a conductor who performed Pelléas several times during his career. In a biography about Debussy, Inghelbrecht described the composer’s opera in terms of its ability to interact with the deepest instinctual parts of the listener’s mind. With language reminiscent of Bazaillas and Marcel, the conductor described how Debussy’s music led

97 “Il n’a jamais pensé ni parlé selon les exigences d’un système: il a obéit à des instincts irréfléchis d’abord, puis controlés, discutés par lui-même et finalement triomphants… Debussy n’a fait qu’obéir à ses voix interieures: elles lui ont dicté une œuvre d’art spontanée, en dépit de la lenteur de son élaboration.” Maurice Emmanuel, Pelleas et Melisande de Debussy (Paris: Mellottée, 1927), 43.
the listener into the depths of his or her interior, “awakening in us deep echoes that were
formerly sleeping” and “to the deepest part of us, to a region so interior that we cannot
leave the performance unchanged.”

In several weekly radio programs about music, Paul Le Flem spoke in rhapsodic
terms of the decisive impact the premiere season of Pelléas had on him. In an
unpublished musical lexicon, Le Flem mentioned Debussy’s opera on a short list of
musical dramas in which “the music is in a direct relation with our passions our emotions,
our feelings [sentiments], episodes of a mobile interior activity that reigns over our lives
more than the abstract conceptions or the light pure logic that is so often deceitful.”
The influence of his teacher, Bergson, rings through Le Flem’s understanding of the
deepest stream of thought as mobile and powerful, despite the apparent control of the
intellect.

The idea of instinctive composition was an aesthetic rallying point for the
debussystes, who in their statements about the creative process showed the influence of
nineteenth-century German philosophers writing about Romantic music, especially
Schopenhauer, who situated musical genius in the instinct rather than the intellect. They

98 “De les premières mesures de la partition, l’âme s’accorde…Cette musique pénétrante éveille en nous
des échos profonds, encore endormis. Nous ferons un double chemin qui ne nous conduira pas seulement
au mystérieux royaume d’Allemagne, au labyrinthe sentimental où se meuvent Pelléas, Mélisande, Golaud,
mais encore au fond de notre être, dans une région si intérieure que nous ne sortirons pas du spectacle tels
que nous y sommes entrés. Nous parviendrons jusqu’à un domaine de poésie intime qui est la plus
précieuse partie de nous-mêmes: celle où nous aînons vraiment, où les grandes questions du monde se
posent, celle où nous rejoignons la nature, celle où la lumière d’une lampe, la voix d’un enfant, un navire
qui s’en va dans la nuit, le vol d’une colombe, une fenêtre qu’on ouvre sur la mer, acquièrent une gravité
significative, une importance considérable.” Germaine Inghelbrecht and D.E. Inghelbrecht, Claude
99 See for instance “Dans le souvenir de Debussy,” undated radio transcript; and “Debussy,” radio transcript
dated March 26, 1936; both items located at the Fonds Paul Le Flem, Méthathèque Mahler, Paris.
100 “La musique est en prise directe avec nos passions, nos émotions, nos sentiments, episodes d’une
activité intérieure mouvante qui règit plus notre vie que les conceptions abstraites ou les clartés souvent
trompeuses de la logique pure.” Paul Le Flem, Lexique musicale, unpublished and undated manuscript at
the Fonds Paul Le Flem, Méthathèque Mahler.
retained the notion that music was a translation of their thoughts, but re-envisioned what was originally a metaphysical concept in accordance with the more materialist ideas about the mind that had emerged during the late nineteenth century. Their assessments incorporated the psychological theory that multiple, relatively independent mental states existed at once in the brain. Creative processes took place in the states residing on the edges of conscious thought or even in the unconscious realm; these states would eventually manifest themselves, fully developed, in the composer’s conscious view. Like the symbolists and contemporaneous philosophers, these composers also believed that the unconscious thoughts that served as the seeds of their compositions were capricious and delicate, and that one could only become aware of them with concerted effort.

*Loïtain* was one of the poetic indications that the *debussystes* considered particularly evocative of how their music was to sound. Rarely used before the inception of *debussysme* except for in programmatic moments of a score, *loïtain* seems to have been a term that either Debussy or Bonheur newly created around 1897 to meet the demands of their innovative musical practice. The term likely began to circulate among the other composers due to Debussy’s use of it in “La flûte de Pan” (1897, first published in 1899) which contains one of the earliest usages and which other *debussystes* hailed as an influential song.¹⁰¹ Composers such as Schmitt, Aubert, Bonheur, Séverac, Inghelbrecht, Ravel, Debussy, and Grovlez also paired some form of *loin* with...
debussyste music. Such widespread usage of the unique term reveals that the notion of distance was especially significant to the meaning composers associated with the debussyste material that they created. The premium the same composers placed on the recreation of deep mental states in their descriptions of compositions suggests that debussyste music came to the listener from far away in the sense that it came from deep within the composer’s mind. These composers were translating mental states that the conscious apparatus could hardly discern, just as a distant sound was weakly perceived.

The debussystes’ tendency to conceive of the mind in terms of material and the laws that worked on it, even the parts of it that lay beyond the attention of consciousness, relates to the attention they paid to stylistic technique. Although they wanted to translate thought outside of the intellect’s control, they were still focused on something precisely defined that needed to be translated in precise ways. The debussystes were not relativists: there were still right and wrong ways to compose a piece of music according to their aesthetic tenets. Koechlin spoke of the “empiricism” necessary to the composition of dissonant harmonies, while Caplet’s remarks from 1913 about Pelléas et Mélisande are exemplary of the intuitive yet precise logic the debussystes admired: “only as the work progresses does he make one feel the truth of his music and become conscious that there is a system of thought and feeling underlying what at first seemed to be the impulse of the moment.”¹⁰² Both Ravel and Huré spoke of the concentrated effort that was required of a composer to become aware of the “laws” that governed the functioning of his mind. Ravel claimed that Poe and Mallarmé had revealed to him the formal precision with

¹⁰² Quoted in Williametta Spencer, “The Influence and Stylistic Heritage of André Caplet,” 114.
which the fantasies of the mind needed to be committed to paper, both having achieved “unbounded visions, yet precise in design.”

Ravel simultaneously attacked composers for not obeying their instincts and for poor use of formal techniques: he saw the two issues as intimately related, because only precisely conceived music could truly express the content and nature of thought. In another article he lauded Chopin’s ability to follow the “rule of his inspiration,” a seemingly paradoxical phrase in itself. Although Ravel stated that true art flows entirely from the subject matter, which suggests that he valued pure ideal content and disregarded form in the manner of Schopenhauer, he lamented the lack of rules in many compositions of his day in the very next sentence. Composers who set out without any kind of plan produced worthless music: beautiful content alone was not enough for Ravel, because a composer who truly follows his instinct produces a work that is coherent, well-designed, and employs the best techniques. Because of his materialist, psychological understanding of the compositional process, a composer could not just set down his impressions in a moment of inspiration. A fundamental step in the process was the concentrated mental effort of self-reflection, by which the composer became aware of his particular laws and was then able to translate them into music.

A majority of these formulations by *debussystes* about the musical realization of irrational, instinctual thought were made by the earliest composers to adopt *debussyste* techniques. These same composers, whose stylistic techniques were the focus of the previous chapter, also managed to realize this aesthetic ideal in their shared musical

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practice in multiple ways. In addition to the qualities of debussyste temporal, formal and
textural strategies that have already been construed as ways in which they created the
impression of liberated unconscious thought, debussyste harmonic techniques also
worked towards this goal. Composers like Debussy, Ravel, Bonheur, Koechlin, and Le
Flem, who placed a premium on the unbridled regions of the mind, might have
understood the freer association of consecutive sonorities that characterized their
harmonic practice as a musical correspondence to the freer association of thoughts in
these regions of the mind where social conditioning exerted less control. Just as Charles
Henry encouraged artists to bring unconscious thought into the realm of consciousness in
their works, the early debussystes brought formerly unimaginable combinations of
sonorities into the minds of their contemporaries.\textsuperscript{105}

\textit{Debussyste Concision}

Debussy often wrote of the need for concision and precise expression in his music
criticism.\textsuperscript{106} The one formal device upon which he repeatedly set his sights was motivic
development, which he believed inhibited the flow of ideas in the composer’s mind. His
problem with the technique stemmed directly from the debussyste project of translating
the mind. In one of his most extensive aesthetic statements, Debussy allied rigorous
academic techniques with imprecise metaphysics and described them as obstacles to the
listener, who should be able to perceive the composer’s thoughts in a composition

\textsuperscript{105} Argüelles, \textit{Charles Henry}, 154-156.
\textsuperscript{106} Debussy for instance appreciated the “finely wrought forms” of Rameau and compared the “conciseness
of expression and form” of the French composers to the burdensome and imprecise metaphysics of
Wagner’s operas. See \textit{Debussy on Music}, 85 and 255.
without having to untangle complicated, abstract ideas. In another article he directed his fellow French composers to “purify” their music by refusing to allow a preoccupation with ingenious, rigorous treatment of motives to suffocate emotion and sentiment. “How might we render the flower or the force,” he asked, “in conserving all of these details of writing?” In these cases and elsewhere, motivic development was an unacceptable technique, an obstacle to the pure translation of inner states, and Debussy encouraged composers of his generation to throw it off. This was a bold stand, considering the respect that music institutions and critics still had for the motivic development around 1900.

Debussy’s negative assessments of other composers are not a rejection of the notion that composers should thoughtfully organize their compositions; he instead attacked the many forms and procedures of the past that were incongruent with the nature of thought. In place of them, he and other debussystes offered kinetic forms that were in Debussy’s words “unceasingly made new,” and were driven by processes rather than conventional schemata. The debussyste rejection of polyphonic texture might have also been a part of their refusal of lingering Romantic techniques that they viewed as overly-complicated and inefficient in expressing authentic thought. It might have additionally

107 “On combine, on construit, on imagine des thèmes qui veulent exprimer des idées; on les développe, on les modifie à la rencontre d’autres thèmes qui représentent d’autres idées, on fait de la métaphysique, mais on ne fait pas de la musique. Celle-ci doit être enregistrée spontanément par l’oreille de l’auditeur sans qu’il ait besoin de chercher à découvrir des idées abstraites, dans les méandres d’un développement compliqué.” Debussy, “La musique d’aujourd’hui et celle de demain,” Comoedia (Nov. 4, 1909); reprinted in Monsieur Croche, 281.

108 Debussy, Revue S.I.M. (Nov. 1, 1913); reprinted in Monsieur Croche, 241. Steven Huebner notes that Debussy was not the only French composer expressing distaste for “musical systems” around the turn of the century. He argues that what made Debussy’s critique of systems unique was the composer’s corresponding predilection for thwarting syntax in his music: “Such ‘formulae’ must be taken to embrace tonal voice-leading and harmony as well as developmental technique. For part of the Debussyist project in Pelléas (and elsewhere, of course) lay in ‘uncomplicating’ music by subverting syntax and, in his way of thinking, tuning it to nature.” See Steven Huebner, French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 470-472.

109 Debussy to Durand, Aug. 8, 1907, in Debussy, Lettres de Claude Debussy à son éditeur (Paris: Durand, 1927), 55.
been jettisoned because the early debussystes viewed it as a technique of rationalistic composition, concerned with order and following precise rules, and thus inappropriate to a convincing translation of the deep recesses of the mind where the instinct worked freely.

While Debussy rejected the stifling control of the intellect, he was similarly critical of the overblown, passionate sensibilité that he considered essential to German Romantic music, especially Wagner’s operas. The path that led to valuable music was narrow: a lack of restraint was no better than too much control exercised by the intellect, because both kinds of expression were not amenable to the project of translating the true nature of unconscious thought. In a review from 1901, Debussy praised Dukas because in his piano sonata he was a master of his emotions, avoiding “unnecessary outbursts.” He refused “parasitic developments” but at the same time a quiet force controlled the musical material in the third movement, where Debussy found “the art of distributing emotion in full force; one could even say that this emotion is ‘constructive’ in the sense that it evokes a beauty similar to that of the perfect lines of an architectural structure.” In these comments, Debussy’s beliefs about good compositional method become clear. A composer had to be in tune with the laws that governed his unconscious mind, utilize

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110 About the relationship of Debussy’s and Wagner’s aesthetics see Leon Botstein, “Beyond the Illusion of Realism: Painting and Debussy’s Break with Tradition,” in Debussy and His World, ed. Jane Fulcher (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 146-148; Rosemary Lloyd, “Debussy, Mallarmé, and Les Mardis,” ibid., 161-163; and François de Médicis, “Tristan dans La Mer,” 228. Lloyd and de Médicis state that after his brief period of attraction to the Wagner cult in the 1880s, Debussy came under the influence of Mallarmé’s ambivalent views of Wagner. Despite Debussy’s adamant instructions to other French composers that they rid themselves of Wagner’s influence, modern scholars have argued that Wagner’s scores did exert an influence on Debussy’s sound. For example see Carolyn Abbate, “Tristan in the Composition of Pelléas,” 19th-Century Music 5, no. 2 (Fall 1981): 117-40. Steven Huebner treats the slippery and speculative subject of Wagner’s influence on Debussy’s opera with exemplary care in Steven Huebner, French Opera at the Fin de Siècle, 472-476.

111 “L’art de distribuer l’émotion dans toute sa puissance; on peut même dire que cette émotion est ‘constructive’ par ce qu’elle évoque de beauté pareille aux lignes parfaites d’un architecture…” Debussy, La Revue Blanche (Apr. 15, 1901); reprinted in Monsieur Croche, 31.
techniques that properly translated unconscious states, and be willing to excise any part of the composition that merely decorated the thought rather than expressed it.

Other *debussyste* composers absorbed Debussy’s identification of motivic development and conventional forms with the stuffy intellect into their own music criticism. Paul Le Flem slighted the pedantic approach of a composer named G. Brun to the symphony in a 1914 review, remarking dryly that Brun had managed to write themes that were “good for development, ripe for the methodical titration that is compulsory in the genre.” Koechlin, in a speech that he drafted about the defaults in German music, described motivic development as a snare of “*fausse profondeur*” that trapped the many German composers, save Beethoven and Bach, who had developed a nervous habit of repeating themselves. Like Debussy, Koechlin also criticized the violent grandiloquence of the Germans, and he noted that French composers had recently rediscovered a state of equilibrium between tact and personal expression, especially due to the example Debussy had provided in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. As they sought to disentangle their music from the influence of the German Romantics, some of the earliest and most vocal *debussystes* used the notion that motivic development obstructed the pure expression of thought as an issue around which to define their French music in opposition to that of the Germans.

Early *debussystes* faithfully matched their strong attacks on motivic development and schematic structures with a consistent absence of these techniques in their scores. Their distinctive manner of composing vocal melodies can also be understood as a

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manifestation of their preoccupation with precise expression. The lack of an emotional, chromatic sound—which they created by avoiding half-steps, wide leaps, and altered intervals, as well as separating the vocal line from the instrumental part—translated their esteem of sober expression. These composers’ willingness to forego schematic melodies and instead follow the natural accents of French texts was a manifestation of their claim that precise translation of thought characterized authentic, effective music. By embracing debussyste techniques, innovative composers presented a counter-example to the music of the German Romantics, which they denounced as a poor mirror of the human psyche.

**Conclusion**

Just as their contemporaries in philosophy had, the debussystes retained in their discourse the nineteenth-century definition of musical content as mental material. They were, however, more focused than the Romantics on materialist theories about the mind, which in their era were gaining ever greater precision and usefulness. This is an important difference between debussyste and Romantic musical aesthetics, and it reveals the modernist perspective of the debussystes. Romantic writers who emphasized the metaphysical truths revealed by music often discounted the importance of the structure in which it was manifested.¹¹⁴ Hegel himself emphasized the ideal beauty expressed in a theme, and viewed motivic development of it as less significant because it served to

¹¹⁴ Burford, “Hanslick’s Materialist Idealism,” 172. This dualist understanding of musical content was still influential in early twentieth-century France, for instance in the criticism that accumulated about the sincerity of Fauré’s music. Critics consistently lauded Fauré as expressing himself perfectly, but always in vague terms that heavily privilege the ideal content of his scores rather than the techniques that clothed them. See the reviews of Fauré quoted in Caballero, *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics*, 13, 15-16.
prolong the theme. Schopenhauer believed that music translated the mind, but in the sense that it captured immortal truths about the human experience. He described the bass line of a composition as the inorganic, primordial matter of the universe and the logical beauty of the melody as the human mind. Whereas for the Romantics the truth that a piece of music expressed was ideal and abstract, the debussystes wanted to think about the link between human thought and musical form and often spoke of the order and logic good compositions possessed. Their writings are pervaded by materialist, psychological descriptions of specific pieces and of the general process of composition.

Like the avant-garde philosophers and writers with whom debussystes felt a kinship, the innovative composers who carved out the distinctive elements debussysme were revolutionaries. Just as Bergson challenged firmly established paradigms in philosophy and Mallarmé experimented with unmetered verse and novel arrangements of the words on the page, several debussystes turned away from established nineteenth-century musical norms that they believed were artificial and incongruent with their project of composing out the nature and contents of thought. The stylistic elements outlined in the previous chapter reflect an understanding of the psyche as a conglomeration of simultaneous mental states, idiosyncratic in their content, and freely associating with each other. Like the thought idealized by Ribot, Henry, Bergson, Bazaillas and other philosophers, material with pervasive debussyste characteristics evades conventional rules, formulas, and rationalistic modes of organization that engender regularity. The qualities of delicacy and incompleteness that characterize the debussyste sound extended symbolist ideas about how to render the mind in art into the

116 Bazaillas, Musique et inconscience, 101-102.
domain of music, and were another way in which composers thwarted the tidiness and regularity that *debussystes* and many avant-garde philosophers believed stifled true creativity.
Chapter 3: The Stages of the Debussyste Trend

At least thirty-one composers wrote debussyste compositions, but they did not begin to do so all at once. Composers instead adopted debussysme at varying points during its history, and each adopted it selectively, emphasizing certain aspects and neglecting others. The preceding two chapters have examined the set of fundamental techniques that emerged in the works of the earliest adopters of debussysme and the aesthetic underpinnings of the practice in its formative period. This chapter will elucidate the chronological metamorphosis of the debussyste trend as it unfolded in several stages. During each of these stages of the trend significant events, such as the premiere of Pelléas, altered the social implications of debussyste musical markers. As composers searching for avant-garde techniques entered the debussyste movement, they further developed the techniques that were outlined in the previous chapter. Other composers sifted through debussyste techniques with a more conservative ear, selecting only the techniques that offered interesting effects but did not interfere with the nineteenth-century structural norms to which they clung. These musical changes will be explored in tandem with the evolving social dimension of the debussyste movement.

The sociologist Everett Rogers has theorized about the social motivations that lead a member of a community to adopt an available innovation at a certain moment; Rogers’s ideas find strong resonance in the trajectory of the debussyste trend. In 1957
Rogers proposed the Technology Adoption Curve (TAC) to describe the adoption of new ideas in a community of Iowa corn farmers. He hypothesized that decisions to adopt or refuse innovative technologies were largely informed by community members’ real or perceived social positions and their social goals. Furthermore, he believed that individuals with a similar social profile tended to adopt an innovation at approximately the same point in time. The concept of the TAC has proven to be such a valuable sociological model that it has spawned a large body of studies on the diffusion of innovations in a wide variety of domains, from high-definition television to hedgerow cropping in Nigeria.

The history of *debussysme* resonates with Rogers’s TAC model because it too unfolded as a series of waves of adoption according to social roles. Some of the *debussystes* thrived in relative isolation, but others craved the encouragement of peers. Some of them adopted *debussyste* techniques as students with little social capital to lose; others were older by the time *debussysme* caught their attention, and they had to negotiate their interest in innovation with the maintenance of positions of power they had already attained. Composers’ different social roles affected their choices: the benefits and risks each composer perceived in *debussysme* depended in part on where they stood in social networks and what audiences they desired to reach. In this chapter, Rogers’s TAC model will serve as a source for adopter categories, but they will be treated with greater flexibility. Whereas in the purest application of the TAC, adopters of an innovation are assigned to a single category according to inferential statistical analysis, I argue that

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1 Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th edn. (New York: The Free Press, 2003). In this edition Rogers both summarizes the original theory and discusses the large body of research that has risen up around it in the last fifty years.
many of the *debussystes* possessed qualities of multiple adopter types and I suggest their categorization based on a combination of qualitative data as well as their chronological position in the trend.¹ The panoramic view provided by this model helps us to identify the social pressures acting on composers and their varying motivations for adopting the *debussyste* techniques, and it reveals how individual adopters cohered in groups that displayed remarkably homogenous behavior and social cohesion.

Debussy’s changing social position in the French musical community will be frequently noted, because it had a strong impact on the social meaning of *debussyste* techniques. He was the personality that this community most strongly associated with *debussysme*, which is evident in the term that they used to refer to it. Thus, when Debussy was given legitimacy in mainstream French musical culture, *debussyste* techniques likewise became a legitimate expression on mainstream stages and in the eyes of more conservative critics. Although this development made it safe for less adventurous composers to try out *debussyste* techniques, it also diminished the appeal of these techniques to composers who desired to be associated with avant-garde trends rather than mainstream culture.

1889-1901: The Formative Period of *Debussysme*

The techniques identified in chapter 1 as essential to *debussysme* were conceived during the 1890s, primarily in the works of Debussy and Ravel. These two composers displayed key qualities of the innovator role as defined by Rogers: independent members of a community who are typically relatively young and respond creatively to a problem or

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¹ Rogers identifies adopters by type according to where they fall under a distribution curve. In the ideal form of his model, categories are delineated chronologically, by standard deviations. See ibid., 280.
need within their profession. This is not to say that only Debussy and Ravel were innovative composers; like all of Rogers’s categories, the “innovator” is taken in this study as a social type representing certain characteristics and experiences. Rogers observed that the community of which the innovators are a part initially takes some notice of their ideas but does not adopt them. They are instead regarded with suspicion by most members of the community, and may even face public ridicule. Debussy experienced this kind of treatment while still in the process of making a name for himself in the 1890s: D’Indy and other older composers for whom Debussy played parts of Pelléas et Mélisande in 1893 at the home of Henri Lerolle responded with open ridicule during the performance by rolling their eyes, yawning, and point to their watches. During the same period, debsysste techniques began to show up in the scores of Raymond Bonheur and Charles Koechlin. Although they contributed much less than Debussy and Ravel in terms of original and enduring compositional innovations, they did play important roles in the creation of social conditions necessary for the maturation and proliferation of debsysste elements.

Debussy, whom critics and other composers consistently viewed as the major creator of debsysme, fits remarkably well Rogers’s profile of the innovator, including a tendency towards social isolation and risk taking and a desire to solve problems. The composer spoke out frequently against the problems he saw in the music his colleagues created, and as outlined in chapter 2, Debussy was dedicated to finding a musical means

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4 See David Grayson, “The Genesis of Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande,” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1983), 56. These disrespectful gestures can be understood as these established composers’ unambiguous communication to everyone in the room that Debussy’s music was not acceptable within the norms they adhered to.
to represent unconscious thought, a problem not easily solved with available musical techniques. During the 1880s Debussy gradually developed the means to achieve his goals, but it was a struggle. He complained repeatedly to Henri Vasnier while on his Prix de Rome sojourn about the frustration he felt as he tried to discover new musical paths while under the Institut’s guard, and the lack of camaraderie he felt towards the other young artists who were living in his villa, especially the musicians.⁵ After passing through a period of searching for innovations by imitating other composers—Massenet in Debussy’s earliest songs that include “Nuit des étoiles,” Wagner in the Baudelaire songs, and Fauré in “Beau soir” and “Fleur des blés”—Debussy developed the set of compositional techniques that coalesced in works he wrote around 1890 such as Révéries, Clair de lune, and the later Baudelaire songs.

While still a student, Debussy dazzled his classmates with the striking sound of novel harmonies, radical aesthetic ideas, and his defiant confidence in both. Maurice Emmanuel recalled Debussy improvising at the piano during a harmony class in 1884, leaving Emmanuel and his peers amazed.⁶ Some students also reacted Debussy with immediate and lifelong dislike, such as Camille Bellaigue, whose cruel recollections of the composer bring to mind the ridicule that Rogers describes as a frequent early response towards innovators.⁷ Perhaps those of Debussy’s peers who would eventually adopt his novel harmonies did not immediately do so because of the disorientation they experienced as his very first audience. His disregard for many of the rules of composition

⁵ See letter he sent to Vasnier in 1885 in Correspondance, 29-34, and Henri Prunières, “A la villa Médicis,” in La jeunesse de Claude Debussy, 26-27.
⁶ Roger Nichols, ed., Debussy Remembered (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 21-22. Emmanuel recalled that after hearing the improvisation, several of his classmates concluded that Debussy was certain to fail in his attempt to win the Prix de Rome.
⁷ Bellaigue remembers Debussy as awful in every way—he was diffident, his clothes betrayed his poverty, he played the piano terribly, and none of his classmates liked him. Ibid., 13.

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might have seemed confusing. Unlike the composers who entered the music schools just a few years later, Debussy’s classmates were also exposed to his ideas without the advantage of acclimation, and in a climate at the Paris Conservatoire that was still quite hostile towards them.

Debussy’s initially marginal position in the French musical community contributed to the lukewarm reception of his works premiered during the 1890s. Rogers describes the important role of “opinion leaders,” or those individuals who hold a high degree of influence in their communities and typically “conform highly to the norms of their system”: opinion leaders tend to refrain from adopting an innovation when it is in the early stages of diffusion. Until an innovator has some of the opinion leaders on his or her side, the community will typically remain uncertain of what to do with the innovator’s new idea. Some critics took note of the novel quality of Debussy’s music, but few of these opinion leaders with strong influence in the press, such as Lalo, Bruneau, and Willy, endorsed it publicly. Perhaps as a result of the wavering support of these members of French musical society, Debussy’s peers were mostly unwilling to take the social risk of adopting his techniques, as suggested by the small number of other composers writing debussyste music during the 1890s.

The reception history of Debussy’s Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune conforms to this theory. The majority of the composers and influential critics present at the premiere of the Prélude were Debussy’s peers or older members of French musical society who had achieved success in part by maintaining its conventions. Writing several

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8 Rogers describes “opinion leaders” as individuals who hold a high degree of influence in their communities and typically “conform highly to the norms of their system.” Until an innovator has some of the opinion leaders on his or her side, Rogers argues that the community will typically remain uncertain about a new idea or technology. See Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations, 330-331.
years later, Léon Vallas argued that despite the favorable audience response to it (conductor Gustave Doret repeated the performance due to the applause), the symphonic work was not well-received by “cultivated listeners,” the established critics and composers who “searched in vain in L’après-midi for that which Debussy had so carefully avoided placing in it...”

In several ways, the piece failed to meet the normative practices and established values of this community. In addition to the novel sounds and techniques present in the work, its reception was especially complicated by what it lacked in terms of late nineteenth-century expectations for symphonic compositions. The Prélude was scored for a large orchestra, but it lacked the imposing stature and impressive yet familiar formal design of a symphony. The material of the piece unfolds in diverse sections, and Debussy does not subject it to motivic development; much of the material does not return in any form. As a result this music could serve little purpose for French critics who desired masterworks by French composers that could rival the works of German masters like Beethoven and Wagner.

In addition, the Prélude could not satisfy the calls of those who wanted French art to answer Wagner because it was not an opera. Only after Pelléas et Mélisande vaulted Debussy to fame did critics and conductors take notice of the short symphonic piece. By 1908 Debussy’s orchestral works, including the Prélude, had become popular on the programs of the large public

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concert series and the concerts of the composers’ societies.¹¹ In the canon of Debussy’s masterworks that coalesced around the same time in the press, the *Prélude* was often elevated as an early manifestation of the composer’s genius.¹²

A broader issue that influenced the initial reaction in France to Debussy’s music was the gendered conceptualization of musical value that Republican politicians and politically-minded musicians had created to bolster the society of the fledgling Third Republic. Building upon Annegret Fauser’s research, Jann Pasler has recently demonstrated that writers with intimate connections to the government defined musical politics in gendered terms.¹³ Republican writers on music drew on the Revolutionary notion that exposure to masculine music would empower French citizens and sustain democratic order, and they also used gendered language to set their government apart from the old one, juxtaposing the strength and uplifting morality of music of the Third Republic with the decadent effeminacy of Second Empire divertissements.¹⁴ Opinion leaders in the press used this gendered paradigm as a rationale for keeping Debussy’s novel *Prélude* out of contention as a French masterpiece. For example, Alfred Bruneau, a composer who was a key proponent of Republican politicians’ designs in music, praised the “intensity of expression” of the *Prélude* but ultimately dismissed the piece as a

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¹² See for example the biography of Debussy in Durand et fils, *Concerts consacrés à la musique française moderne* (Paris: Durand, 1913), 10.
¹³ Annegret Fauser argues compellingly that for many French musical elites the general inferiority they felt towards the Germans after the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War caused them to believe that only masculine French music could overcome that of the Germans. See “Gendering the Nations: The Ideologies of French Discourse on Music (1870-1914),” in *Musical Constructions of Nationalism*, ed. Harry White and Michael Murphy (Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2001), 72-103.
sensual and effeminate curiosity because it did not meet his preference for “something more clear cut, more robust and masculine.”

Bruneau’s view of the *Prélude* as effeminate was a common way of describing Debussy’s sound, even among writers who appreciated it. In his review of the String Quartet Debussy composed in 1894, Paul Dukas used words with a feminine connotation such as “refined,” “exquisite,” and “delicate” to describe the music. Dukas a true peer of Debussy in terms of generational proximity: Dukas was born just three years after Debussy and their time at the Paris Conservatoire overlapped. The two were friends and Dukas was one of the privileged few musicians for whom Debussy played parts of the *Pelléas* score as he composed it throughout the 1890s. Despite this closeness, Dukas’s choice to delay adoption of Debussy’s innovative techniques is consistent with Rogers’s idea that an innovator’s peers tended to refrain from immediate adoption. His early works, such as his Symphony in C (1895-1896), were all composed in a Germanic Romantic idiom in the vein of Brahms. Dukas had quickly achieved prominence as a regular music critic, writing for the *Revue hebdomadaire* since 1892, which placed him in a more authoritative position in musical society than Debussy, who did not yet wield Dukas’s authority in the press. Not until 1899 would Dukas begin his first debussyste work, the opera *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*. Dukas was unashamed of Debussy’s influence on his opera, drawing attention in the first edition of the score to quotations from Debussy’s opera.

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During the 1880s and 1890s Debussy had few close friends who were also composers. The young innovator had found a circle of friends that supported his imitation, but they were mostly writers such as Pierre Louÿs and visual artists like Henri Lerolle. Rogers notes that the innovator figure is typically a cosmopolitan whose closest friends in the community are often geographically distant; in an analogous way, although Debussy’s closest friends also lived in Paris, they were distant from him in the sense that they mostly worked in artistic fields outside of his own.\textsuperscript{18} Debussy sought a like-minded composer in Ernest Chausson, whom he tried to free from conventional techniques and win to his perspective during the 1890s, but the two soon diverged when Chausson sharply criticized Debussy’s string quartet.\textsuperscript{19}

Debussy did discover an alliance with another composer in Raymond Bonheur, whom he met in 1878 at the Paris Conservatoire. Bonheur very well-connected to elite artistic circle because his mother, Rosa Bonheur, was a painter who ran a reputable salon for visual artists. He met Albert Samain in 1883 at one of the artistic soirées held by writer Charles Cros, and in the same year Chausson introduced both Debussy and Bonheur to several innovative writers and painters who congregated at the Fontaine salon.\textsuperscript{20} Bonheur adopted elements of Debussy’s style in his surviving compositions from the 1880s and 1890s; he therefore fits into the “early adopter” category, which Rogers defines as the first members of a community who adopt an innovation. Yet Bonheur also served as a \textit{debussyste} innovator by injecting his knowledge and enthusiasm for the symbolist authors into the movement. He introduced Debussy to the poetry of Mallarmé

\textsuperscript{18} Rogers, “What Are innovators like?” 253.
\textsuperscript{19} Lockspeiser, \textit{Debussy: His Life and Mind}, 123-26. Lockspeiser also notes Debussy’s many friendships outside of the musical world.
\textsuperscript{20} Labussière, \textit{Raymond Bonheur}, 57 and 86.
and Banville, and by the late 1880s he was setting Verlaine’s poems. Bonheur was the only composer who undertook radical harmonic experimentation of the same kind as Debussy’s at the same time as Debussy. By 1895, debussyste unorthodox voice-leading, vocal melody, and streaming texture pervaded Bonheur’s style, as evident in his setting of “L’espoir luit comme un brin de paille” and the songs of Huit poèmes de Francis Jammes. Debussy’s sense that he had found in Bonheur a rare fellow composer who shared his radical artistic vision is clear in a letter that he wrote to him in 1890, the same year in which many of the debussyste traits emerged in a recognizable form in some of his compositions. He declared to Bonheur his confidence that the two of them would “make music that contained all of their lives, and not just a tiny corner of it.” Bonheur was not only one of the earliest supporters of Debussy’s experiments; he was also the only generational peer who walked down the debussyste road with Debussy rather than trailing after him.

Ravel also fits Rogers’s innovator profile in that he showed willingness to experiment in his earliest compositions without fear of how they would be received, and his experiments generated controversy for him while he was still a student. The critical reception of the Sites auriculaires in 1898 and Shéhérazade in 1899 was strikingly negative, and in 1900 Ravel both experienced rejection in the first round of the Prix de Rome competition and was expelled from the Conservatoire’s composition class after failing to show adequate progress in his coursework. He was also highly individualistic.

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21 Lockspeiser, Debussy, 63.
22 Debussy to Bonheur, Oct. 5, 1890, in Debussy, Correspondance, 61
23 About the reviews see Arbie Orenstein, Ravel: Man and Musician (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 23-27. For the fugue Ravel had submitted for the mandatory fugue competition that year,
and wanted others to view him as having a distinct identity. In 1898 he offered the bold *Sites auriculaires* as his debut at the Société nationale. This pair of piano pieces, composed in 1895, displays several *debussyste* elements: pervasive very soft dynamics in the first movement, mechanistic streaming texture in the second, *debussyste* harmonic techniques, and the eschewal of referential form. Debussy was rumored to have taken an interest in seeing the score of the *Habanera* movement. Ravel related more easily to his peers than did Debussy, associating with Schmitt and Koechlin while at the Conservatoire. Yet his penchant for experimentation and his disregard of conventions during the mid-1890s was not yet shared by these two friends, who would eventually become major players in the *debussyste* movement, but were at that point still utilizing the techniques they had learned from their professors.

Ravel occupied a notable distinction among the *debussystes* as the first composer belonging to a generation after Debussy who began studying and drawing influence from Debussy’s scores. *Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune* immediately caught his attention at the 1894 premiere. Whereas most of the early *debussystes* regarded *Pelléas* as Debussy’s masterpiece and remembered it as the composition that had initiated their interest in *debussysme*, Ravel seems to have been most inspired by the *Prélude*, expressing his admiration for the work on several occasions, even after publicly distancing himself from

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professor Théodore Dubois awarded him a score of “0” and commented that it contained “terrible inaccuracies in writing.” Quoted ibid., 26

24 A discussion of this aspect of Ravel’s personality can be found in Barbara Kelly, “History and Homage,” 7-9.

25 See Roy Howat, “Ravel and the Piano” in The Cambridge Companion to Ravel, ed. Deborah Mawer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 74. Howat judges this potential point of influence between Ravel and Debussy to be mostly likely a baseless rumor, but the circulation of such a rumor nevertheless reveals how much overlap existed between the two composers’ styles around 1900.
Debussy in 1906. Ravel thus recognized the potential in Debussy’s innovations much earlier than did other composers. His interest in the symphonic work might have been due in part to the fact that he was a gifted orchestrator who, although still a student at the time of the premiere, already possessed the technical understanding needed to grasp Debussy’s novel scoring techniques. By 1898 he had composed his own symphonic poem, *Shéhérazade*, which was the earliest orchestral piece to make extensive use of debussyste techniques after Debussy. Moments of reminiscence of Debussy’s symphonic prelude occur in Ravel’s: the solo intonation of a serpentine theme that is immediately harmonized in a chordal texture by the rest of the orchestra and the alternation of disparate blocks of material in different scales that begins in m. 25.

Although Ravel drew inspiration from Debussy as he began using debussyste techniques, he was also responsible for conceiving independently several of the innovations that would become popular in scores throughout the population, especially the textural conceptions of *Jeux d’eau* and the idea of mechanistic, non-referential formal processes that had already emerged in *Entre cloches*. As will be explained below, Ravel would also emerge in the next phase of the debussyste trend as the movement’s principal mentor figure.

Koechlin completes the small group of debussystes who displayed the willingness of an innovator type to experiment to the point that it caused social risk. His earliest works were in the established, normative idioms that he was learning at the

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26 Ravel wrote to a friend about the work that “It is the only score ever written that is absolutely perfect.” In Barbara Kelly, “History and Hommage,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, Deborah Mawer ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14. In an article published in 1911 about the differences between French and German musical sensibility, Ravel valued Debussy’s Prélude above Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony because it contains more musical material. See *Ravel Reader*, 410.
Conservatoire, those of Massenet, Fauré, and German masters. “La vérandah” from 1893 is a good example of Massenetian imitation, with its lyrical vocal lines, chromatic harmonic progressions, and orchestral writing for the piano. But by 1894 Koechlin began to experiment enthusiastically, and the *Rondels*, op. 8 (1894-95) exemplify this: in “La pêche” he used novel chords with striking dissonances, in “L’Hiver” the piano part is filled with short glissandos and sonorities that contain open fourths and fifths, evoking cold winter wind. Extended, altered harmonies pervade “Les pierreries,” and this characteristic along with greater dynamic subtlety make the song reminiscent of Debussy’s “Beau soir.” By 1898, the enduring elements of Koechlin’s style, several of which were based on *debussyste* conceptions, had begun to stabilize in “Astre rouge” and *Chansons de Bilitis*. “Astre rouge” (1898) features whole tone areas, parallel voice leading (co-modulation), a sense of floating voice in the vocal line, and a subdued tone. Koechlin undertook musical innovation despite a lack of social support for it.

Koechlin did maintain close friendships with peers such as Max d’Ollone, Henri Rabaud, and Henri Büsser that he met at the Conservatoire during the 1890s, but none of them were inclined at that point to turn away from the late nineteenth-century chromatic idiom that they had learned in Massenet’s composition class.\(^{27}\) Koechlin likely experienced some conflict with d’Ollone and Rabaud, who were suspicious as students and young professionals of modernist music, because he was drawn to Debussy and was already composing his own radical pieces.\(^{28}\) In addition to his artistic individualism and

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\(^{27}\) See, for instance, *La procession nocturne* and *Eglogue* by Rabaud, both written during the 1890s, which follow the manner of Wagner and Massenet.

\(^{28}\) D’Ollone did not hide his dislike of Debussy’s music from Koechlin, yet the two remained friends into the 1920s. Koechlin reminded d’Ollone of the parody he once shared with him of Debussy’s *Pelléas*, titled “Alladine et Palomides.” See the letter from Koechlin to d’Ollone, Feb. 10, 1920, in Koechlin,
resistance to membership in particular musical circles, Koechlin was also a political outsider with strong Communist leanings.\(^29\)

Koechlin admitted the influence of Debussy’s scores on the songs that he wrote during the 1890s, particularly “Mandoline” and the *Proses lyriques*.\(^30\) Because the composer’s exploration was a combination of free experimentation and the absorption of Debussy’s innovations, Koechlin, like Bonheur, exhibited traits of both an innovator and an early adopter. Although Koechlin did not make substantial contributions to the pool of *debussyste* techniques that emerged during the 1890s, he had already embraced an openness to new ideas that he would retain for the rest of his career, and out of this spirit would eventually come techniques that became influential on *debussysme* during the 1910s. In this later phase of the trend, younger composers, particularly Milhaud and Honegger, looked to Koechlin as a mentor because of the idiosyncratic quality of his style. By 1920, the quartal/quintal, widely-spaced sonorities that Koechlin had introduced into his scores by 1905 would enter several other composers’ *debussyste* vocabularies.\(^31\)

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\(^30\) Orledge, *Charles Koechlin*, 5 and 60.

\(^31\) See the piano part of Koechlin’s Samain songs, op. 31, and “Améthyste” from op. 35.
### Table 3.1. Earliest Debussyste Composition of Each Adopter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Baudelaire songs, selections*</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Jammes songs, selections</td>
<td>Raymond Bonheur</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td><em>Sites auriculaires</em></td>
<td>Maurice Ravel</td>
<td>2 pianos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td><em>Chansons de Bilitis</em>, selections</td>
<td>Charles Koechlin</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td><em>Ariane et Barbe-bleue</em></td>
<td>Paul Dukas</td>
<td>opera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>“Chanson d’autômme”</td>
<td>André Caplet</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Lucioles</td>
<td>Florent Schmitt</td>
<td>piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>“Un rêve”</td>
<td>Déodat de Séverac</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Violin Sonata</td>
<td>Maurice Emmanuel</td>
<td>vn, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>“Le jardin mouillé”</td>
<td>Albert Roussel</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>“Les villages”</td>
<td>Gabriel Grovlez</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Poèmes d’automne, selections</td>
<td>Gabriel Dupont</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>“Intimité,” from op. 66</td>
<td>René Lenormand</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td><em>Esquisses symphoniques</em></td>
<td>D.E. Inghelbrecht</td>
<td>orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td><em>Par greves and Par landes</em></td>
<td>Paul Le Flem</td>
<td>piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td><em>Le jour et l’ombre</em></td>
<td>Henri Büsser</td>
<td>chorus, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>“Crépuscule”</td>
<td>Paul Dupin</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>“Brodeuses”</td>
<td>Louis Aubert</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Trois mélodies</td>
<td>Maurice Delage</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Nouvelles poèmes de Klingsor, sel.</td>
<td>Ernest Moret</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>“Au fil de l’eau”</td>
<td>Guy de Lioncourt</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>“Désespoir”</td>
<td>Darius Milhaud</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Vers l’église, dans le soir</td>
<td>Paul Ladmirault</td>
<td>piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>“Instant”</td>
<td>Henri Rabaud</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Crépuscule</td>
<td>Lucien Wurmser</td>
<td>piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Prélude pour un ballet</td>
<td>J. Roger-Ducasse</td>
<td>orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Le jardin du souvenir</td>
<td>Henri Woollett</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Par les chemins de la montagne</td>
<td>Albert Laurent</td>
<td>piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-11</td>
<td>“Reflets”</td>
<td>Lili Boulanger</td>
<td>chorus, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>“Le papillon,” “Embarquement”</td>
<td>Paul Paray</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Trois poèmes de Paul Fort</td>
<td>Arthur Honegger</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Sept petites images du Japon</td>
<td>Georges Migot</td>
<td>piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Images</td>
<td>G. Tailleferre</td>
<td>chamber ens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Persée et Andromède, several others</td>
<td>Jacques Ibert</td>
<td>opera, other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td><em>Au fil du jour and Huit poésies</em></td>
<td>Daniel Jeisler</td>
<td>piano; voice, pf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* See Appendix A for the exact movements or songs in a composition which count as *debussyste*

Debussy’s period of solitary and gradual experimentation lasted for about a
decade. Bonheur, Koechlin, and Ravel recognized the promise of Debussy’s innovations
around 1895, adopting some of his ideas and continuing to develop them. All four of the
composers had taken on considerable social risk by striking out in new directions without
significant societal or peer support: Debussy and Ravel paid especially high social costs for their audacities in the dismissive remarks of some critics and the distance many of their peers kept from them. Despite their varying contributions to the set of *debussyste* techniques, all four of the earliest *debussystes* endured a degree of isolation from peers necessitated by their experimentation, and perhaps uncertainty about whether the wider community would accept their new ideas. The innovators also experienced a degree of economic cost. Koechlin had trouble finding publishers and performance venues for many of his compositions, and although Debussy had an easier time with this task, his pieces published during the 1890s did not sell many copies.  

Some of the *debussyste* pieces Bonheur composed were never published.  

As shown in Table 3.1, by 1901 three other composers had made their earliest *debussyste* attempts: Florent Schmitt, André Caplet, and Déodat de Séverac. More than Koechlin or Bonheur, they fit the profile of the early adopter rather than the innovator. Rogers states that early adopters “are a more integrated part of the local social system than are innovators”; they are often opinion leaders or respected members of the community who have a significant influence over others. All three composers had mastered conventional idioms and retained them for several years rather than hastening to experiment like Koechlin, Ravel, Debussy, and Bonheur. The former group also had achieved respect and approval from authority figures before taking up *debussysme*:

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33 This list of unpublished *debussyste* works includes *Trois poèmes de Sagesse*, *Un jour*, and *Cinq prose de Gaspart de la Nuit*. The works may have in part remained without a publisher because Bonheur did not depend on composition for his income.

34 Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 283.
Caplet and Schmitt conformed to the expectations of their teachers so well that they were both awarded the Prix de Rome, and only began to use debussyste techniques after this point in their careers. When this group abandoned their older styles, they immediately adopted debussyste practice instead of passing through a period of free experimentation. These newest debussystes also distinguished themselves from the earliest group because their adoption of the practice coincided with personal contact with innovator debussystes.

Although Caplet and Schmitt took up innovations at a point when it was still unusual to do so, the social risk was somewhat mitigated because they received encouragement from a few peers.

Caplet’s chamber works from the late 1890s, Rêverie et petite valse (1897), Pièce (1898), and his Quintet (1899) show no debussyste influence and are instead conceived in the German Romantic traditions of form, texture, harmony, and rhythm. The normative quality of the Quintet was affirmed by an award from a French composers’ society. In 1900 Caplet composed “Chanson d’automne,” which shows the influence of Debussy’s “De rêve” in the parlando vocal line, and in the gestural piano part that responds to the text with nuance rather than merely accompanying the delivery. While “Chanson d’automne” showed a surprisingly advanced assimilation of Debussy’s techniques, Caplet reverted back to conventional idioms in the songs he composed while on his Prix de Rome fellowship. He had shown an interest debussysme, but perhaps he did not persist down this road because he lacked a community to foster this interest. Caplet would not return to debussysme until 1908, when he had become a friend of Debussy, whom he acknowledged had a strong influence on him, and had started to attend gatherings of the

debussyste-leaning Apaches.\textsuperscript{36} Once he had consistent encouragement from this community to explore debussyste techniques, Caplet composed Paroles à l’absente and Légende in 1908. In the former work, the composer displayed an impressive grasp of the debussyste aesthetic, and he would become one of the composers most devoted to debussysme.

By 1899 Ravel, Koechlin, and Schmitt had formed a small circle, having met in Fauré’s composition class at the Conservatoire, and shortly thereafter Schmitt began to write debussyste music. Letters among the three composers reveal that by this year they were regularly sharing their compositions with each other, attending concerts together, and engaging in critical discussion of the events occurring in their musical community.\textsuperscript{37} Schmitt had been a student in Paris for a decade by this time, and before joining up with Koechlin and Ravel, he composed in a style reminiscent of Schumann and Liszt. The formation of this little community propelled Schmitt’s earliest debussyste compositions: Lucioles (1901), where Schmitt experimented with greater fluidity of form and pictorial-fused texture, and the eccentric harmony and widely-spaced texture of Glas (1903).

Déodat de Séverac was the first student from the Schola Cantorum to adopt debussysme, in “Un rêve” in 1901. Debussy’s influence is evident in the static, pentatonic piano material that accompanies a detached and parlando vocal line in the opening

\textsuperscript{36} Caplet once declared that he had learned nothing at the Conservatoire, and owed his compositional skills only to Henri Woollett, who had been his teacher before he moved to Paris, and Debussy. See Williametta Spencer, “The Influence and Stylistic Heritage of André Caplet” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1974), 79.

\textsuperscript{37} See Ravel’s letter to Schmitt in January 1899, in which he reviewed the most recent Société nationale concert and declares the work by Koechlin to have been the highlight of the concert. The high quality of the work, he joked, must have been the reason why the critic, Gautier-Villars, gave so little attention to it in his review. Ravel also grudgingly admits that his Shéhérazade, premiered on the same concert, was received rather well, showing that by this time he already viewed the Société nationale as a bastion of composers to whom he could not and did not wish to relate. See Maurice Ravel: Lettres, écrits, entretiens, ed. Arbie Orenstein, trans. Dennis Collins (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 62.
measures. The song also contains the gamelan-like streaming texture that echoes Debussy’s “De soir,” debussyste poetic score indications, and pervasive extended harmonies. Séverac had already composed several songs before “Un rêve,” but even after he began to set symbolist poets such as Verlaine and Maeterlinck, he continued to use the idiom common in late nineteenth-century French chanson that was exemplified by Fauré. His shift into debussysme coincided with the beginning of his friendship with Ricardo Viñes, who invited him into the group of young radical composers that included Schmitt, Koechlin, and Ravel, who would become loosely known as the Apaches a year later. The adoption of debussysme by Schmitt, Séverac, and Caplet coincided with the beginning of friendships these composers formed with innovators, which suggests that they needed some amount of encouragement from peers to break away from the conventional styles that had garnered them the approval of other French composers. Because the innovators were still struggling professionally themselves around 1900, they could offer the early adopters little material support, but they did lend moral support and compositional advice as they shared their works with each other.

After a lengthy period of gestation, several of the debussyste elements were in place and appearing together in scores by 1901. Streaming texture emerged in Debussy’s Proses lyriques and then in Bonheur’s Jammes songs, and all of the debussyste harmonic techniques had become pervasive but were still understated. Unorthodox voice leading, one of the most recognizable debussyste traits, was appearing, but in a relatively gentle form; the extreme to which these techniques had progressed by 1901 can be observed in Entre cloches by Ravel, “De rêve” and Nuages by Debussy, and Bonheur’s “La maison serait pleine de roses.” A subdued atmosphere had become associated with debussysme
by this time, and some of the unique debussyste indications calling for weak sound had already entered into these composers’ scores, including lointain.

Debussy and Ravel had already created some of their most influential works by 1901. Ravel’s Jeux d’eau would be a formal and textural model for later debussyste piano compositions, and Debussy had begun to arouse the interest of the community of French composers with his Nocturnes and Chansons de Bilitis, both premiered for the Société nationale in 1901. The Chansons de Bilitis were a seminal composition in the history of debussysme. “La flûte de Pan” contains all of the techniques mentioned in chapter 1 in at least a proto-typical form except for a floating vocal line. The songs are particularly noteworthy because in them Debussy had achieved the prosodic technique also admired in Pelléas, which is not surprising because the songs were composed concurrently with the opera.38

Despite innovations in the domains of vocal melody, harmony, indications, and texture, the pool of debussyste techniques was not yet complete in 1901. Composers had begun to move away from conventional phrase structure and larger formal notions in favor of greater fluidity, but Romantic formal concepts, such as the use of motivic development, are still discernible in the first group of debussyste compositions that innovators and early adopters created between 1887 and 1901. Metric ambiguity,

38 Furthermore, Chansons de Bilitis was already associated with Pelléas at the time of its publication (1897-8) because at this time news traveled rapidly among composers that Debussy was composing an opera, and those who were intrigued by his music considered the innovative conception of the vocal and instrumental part of the songs to be a foreshadowing of what he would accomplish in his forthcoming masterwork. Constantin Photiadès, “M. Claude Debussy et la Centième de Pelléas et Mélisande,” Revue de Paris (April 1, 1913): 522. He described the work as “three melodies, perfect and corresponding to the images of the prose of Pierre Louÿs, which lent reason yet again to those who sensed in Debussy an extraordinary musician of the theater.”
characteristic *debussyste* methods for beginning a piece through coalescence of diverse material, and incomplete endings did not appear regularly in these scores.

1902: Debussy’s *Pelléas* and the Invigoration of *Debussysme*

The success of *Pelléas in Mélisande* in 1902 catapulted Debussy into a position of fame and respect, and his compositions rose from obscurity to become model masterpieces of French music.\(^{39}\) Although Debussy’s supporters would emphasize the opposition that Debussy surmounted during the premiere season of the opera, one-third of the reviews of the premiere were positive, and *Pelléas* earned the respect of many opinion leaders in French musical life: composers such as d’Indy and Bruneau, and influential critics who had formerly been suspicious of Debussy such as Willy and Pierre Lalo. Members of the press marveled at the exquisite setting of the French text, the intimate relationship between the drama and the music, the power of Debussy’s harmonies, and the subtle beauty of the delicate orchestration.

With *Pelléas* Debussy had not only given the French a commanding work in their favorite musical genre; he had also offered a solution to the problem of Wagner’s influence, which had troubled members of the French musical community since the 1880s.\(^{40}\) Although Debussy had been of only marginal interest before 1902, a substantial portion of the press accepted his innovative style as a brilliant opposition to Wagner after

\(^{39}\) Johannes Trillig, *Untersuchungen zur Rezeption Claude Debussys in der zeitgenössischen Musikkritik* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1983), 211-224. For a detailed summary of the many positive reviews the premiere received see Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 129-137.

\(^{40}\) In a speech given in 1885, Saint-Saëns made a passionate plea to young composers to turn from German influence and strike out as pioneers for the sake of French music. See “Causérie sur le passé,” in Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et mélodie* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1885.), 276. Carlo Caballero states that “For a French composer maturing between 1885 and 1895, the dominant problem was Wagner” in *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics*, 78. See also Goubault, *La Critique musicale* and Digéon, *La crise allemande.*
it had been packaged as an opera. Fourteen reviewers made explicit comparisons between

*Pelléas* and Wagner’s compositions and found Debussy’s opera to be of equal or

surpassing merit. In a 1902 survey conducted by *Le Mercure de France* about German

influence on French music, *Pelléas* was one of the few compositions named as having

escaped the influence of the German Romantics; Lionel de la Laurencie triumphantly

called it an example of French composition “as far removed as possible” from Wagner in

his response. Debussy had constructed a detailed critique of Wagner’s music and

aesthetic in his own writings in 1901 and 1902. His compelling arguments were echoed

by reviewers of *Pelléas*, who were happy to find in the work an absence of the leitmotif

technique, Romantic bombast, and formal complication that in Wagnerian opera mired

the expression of the drama.

Some writers noted in their reviews of *Pelléas* the shattered hope that recent

operas had given them as they looked for a modern French opera that would gain

canonical status and break Wagner’s hold. They were confident, however, that Debussy’s

work would stand the test of time because it so eloquently captured the French spirit.

Lalo believed that although several French composers had expressed their desire to

produce a composition free of Wagner’s influence, Debussy was the first to do it, and in

an opera more beautiful and novel than d’Indy’s *Fervaal* or Charpentier’s *Louise*.

Amédée Rouquès predicted that in ten years any opposition to *Pelléas* would fall silent,

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and it would stand as a work of the highest quality. With strong language, some critics affirmed *Pelléas* as utterly French. Henri Ghéon declared that he saw in the work “the purest manifestation of the French genius, always exquisite, profound, complete, and measured.” Debussy had by no means reached unanimous acceptance with his opera, but many of the influential voices in French musical life had begun to see the idiosyncrasies in Debussy’s style as appropriate expressions of their own culture, and as a result Debussy gained a great deal of visibility and prestige in his community. This shift might have occurred in part because critics were persuaded by the rationale for *Pelléas* that Debussy gave in articles from 1901 and 1902 or perhaps because with his first staged opera, Debussy finally caught the attention of a culture that highly esteemed dramatic music.

The atmosphere of radicalism and success that surrounded the premiere of *Pelléas* helped to create a palpable social network of support for the debussystes’ experimentation. Many young composers were ardent fans of Debussy’s opera, attending all of the performances given in 1902 and 1903 in a large group in the inexpensive seating section. The Apaches formed as a result of this experience, with the original purpose of meeting to discuss and study the score of *Pelléas* and Debussy’s aesthetic views. Jann Pasler describes the group as a “sacred battalion” for the opera, who so strongly identified with it that they fought for its success with their unrelenting and sizeable presence at the performances of the premiere season. Their determination to attend every single performance can be viewed as fulfilling a social need to meet with

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each other in a space that they viewed as devoted to their shared musical practice and aesthetics as much as a way to learn the score. By 1904 the group had become an intimate community where its young and audacious members could share their works in progress and gain feedback and encouragement. In that year the group included Ravel, Séverac, D.E. Inghelbrecht, Schmitt, Paul Ladmirault, and Maurice Delage; as previously mentioned, André Caplet became affiliated with the Apaches in 1907.

Many of the debussystes regarded the premiere season of Pelléas as a formative period in their compositional development. Maurice Emmanuel, Inghelbrecht, and Koechlin produced book-length studies of Pelléas. Paul Le Flem recounted his memories of the brazen behavior of his peers at the performances in several radio interviews.48 In his biography of Debussy, Koechlin wrote that Pelléas et Mélisande truly revealed Debussy’s génie, and he devoted several pages of the book to this work alone.49 He declared that “a general movement towards the future had captured [French] musicians; Debussy, around 1902, was the most brilliant and attractive comet of that transformation.”50 Implicit in the statement, as well as Ravel’s description of Pelléas as “a wide open gateway to a splendid, altogether new land,” is the notion that Debussy’s opera stimulated debussyste activity.51 Indeed, as the chronological list of compositions in Appendix A indicates, debussysme flourished suddenly in 1903 and the increased activity would persist for more than a decade.

48 Koechlin’s study was never published, but is still extant as a draft at the Fonds Charles Koechlin in the Médiathèque Mahler, Paris.
49 Charles Koechlin, Debussy, 82.
50 Ibid., 60.
51 A Ravel Reader, 368.
The premiere season of *Pelléas* invigorated the *debussyste* movement by increasing the activity and confidence of composers who had already adopted the practice and by attracting new adopters. Composers who formerly cultivated *debussyste* techniques in isolation became aware of each other at the performances of the work at the Opéra comique in 1902 and 1903; they were no longer radical composers working alone or in small groups to bring forth a new French music. Ravel, who was older and more experienced as a composer than most of the young admirers of *Pelléas*, gained a position of leadership in the group. The writer Léon-Paul Fargue, who took part in the Apaches’ soirées, remembered Ravel sharpening his aesthetic views at the meetings and expressing a coherent explanation of the *debussyste* sound.\(^{52}\) For Ravel, who was again facing hostility at the Conservatoire after he re-enrolled there in 1902, it must have been a relief to find himself among a substantial group of friends and even admirers. The supportive community was an important component of Ravel’s social life during his composition of *Miroirs* and *Gaspard de la nuit*, two innovative works that he shared at Apaches gatherings as he worked on them. After 1902 Schmitt and Séverac also displayed a much greater grasp of *debussyste* techniques and began to use them in compositions of larger scale. Schmitt had progressed from the sectional, repetitive *Glas* in 1903 to *Sur un vieux petit cimetièr* and *Solitude* in 1904. Séverac continued to compose *debussyste* songs, but also ventured into expansive *debussyste* piano pieces in 1903 with *En Languedoc*. The enthusiasm of their peers and the wider public for the *debussyste* sound as a result of the

Pelléas experience likely gave both composers more confidence, and they also benefited from the chance to share their compositions with the other Apaches.

The premiere of Pelléas brought Debussy’s compositions and the burgeoning debussyste community to the attention of young composers who had not previously been initiated into it, and some immediately adopted the debussyste style, as shown in Table 3.1, above. This group included Paul Le Flem and D.E. Inghelbrecht, who remembered the premiere season of the opera as an empowering cultural event. Le Flem recalled that period of his life in several of his radio transcripts, preserved at the Médiathèque Mahler in Paris:

I can see it again, the era of 1900-1905. The debussyste fever was rising, causing some to worry, and it enlivened a musical Paris for which anything outside of Wagner was dangerous and perilous…Regarding Debussy, he was considered the apostle of decadence…Recently, I surprised a young musician by recounting for him the assaults that the first debussystes to confess their faith suffered, as martyrs who had to pay personally to justify their admiration…From these battles we emerged with all honors. For our young religion did not shrink from any sacrifice for the idol that we placed high above the contingencies and traditions that we had acquired…Some young composers, tired of the droning formulas that venerable masters were trying to impose on them as articles of truth, had found in the magic of debussysme an aesthetic, a direction, and even a syntax that allowed them their self-renewal and their liberation from outmoded habits and winded instructions.53

53 “Je revois encore cette époque de 1900-1905. La fièvre debussyste montait, causait bien des soucis, et animait un Paris musical pour qui Wagner était un palier en dehors duquel tout n’était que danger, aventures et perils…Quant a Debussy, il passait pour l’apôtre de la décadence…Dernièrement, j’étonnais un jeune musicien en lui contant les assauts que devaient subir les premiers debussystes qui confessent leur foi, souffraient le martyr et payaient de leur personne pour justifier leur admiration. De ces luttes nous sortions souvent avec tous les honneurs. Car notre jeune religion ne reculait devant aucun sacrifice pour l’idole que nous placions très haut au dessus des contingences et des usages acquis…Certains jeunes compositeurs, las des ronronnantes formules que de vénérables maîtres essayaient de leur imposer comme articles de vérité, avaient trouvé dans la féerie debussyste une esthétique, une direction, et même une syntaxe leur permettant de se renouveler, de se libérer d’habitudes surannées et de prescriptions à court de souffle.” In “Dans le souvenir de Debussy,” undated, unpublished radio transcript at the Fonds Paul Le Flem, Médiathèque Mahler, Paris, France.
In a fervent tone, Le Flem emphasized the camaraderie he felt with other young composers at the first performances of *Pelléas*, which was born out of the social chastisement that they endured together for their support of the controversial work. He also connected the experience of *Pelléas* with an initiation into a new “syntax,” the specific, innovative techniques he encountered in the score. Le Flem’s adoption of *debussysme* was interrupted by his decision to leave the Conservatoire and give up a career in music in 1902. Yet in 1905 he returned to composition as a student at the Schola Cantorum, and two years later close study of Debussy’s scores bore fruit in the coherent *debussysme* of *Par landes* and *Par grèves*, two pieces for solo piano. Le Flem would become one of the staunchest adherents and defenders of *debussyste* practice and Debussy into the 1920s.

D.E. Inghelbrecht was still a Conservatoire student in 1901, when he became a friend of peer composers and artists who would become the Apaches just a year later. One of these friends introduced him to *Pelléas*. Emile Vuillermoz commanded Inghelbrecht to hear the work, and it was a revelation for him:

> The young audience, for whom *Pelléas* had been written and who waited for it with great avidity, received a marvelous gift…Young people who were around twenty years of age in 1902 experienced one of those rare moments of spiritual ecstasy in the first performances of *Pelléas*. It was like an instant of clarity…

Like Le Flem, Inghelbrecht highlighted the social dimension of the impression *Pelléas* made on him; part of the “ecstasy” he had felt at the performances derived from the bond with his peers. Significantly, his attraction to *Pelléas* led him immediately to begin study

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54 Inghelbrecht, *Claude Debussy*, 160-161.
of the opera’s score as well as *La Damoiselle élue*.\textsuperscript{55} What began as a social event in Inghelbrecht’s life translated into a concentrated effort to absorb *debussyste* techniques. In 1905 he composed his first *debussyste* work, the orchestral *Esquisses d’automne*. The piece bears strong similarity to Debussy’s *Nuages*, with its simple textures, serpentine melodies, and a formal technique of recycling and re-aligning several distinct motives.

The motivation of other composers who adopted *debussysme* soon after the 1902 success of *Pelléas* is unknown because of the lack of extant written sources. René Lenormand used *debussyste* harmony, texture, and form in some of his op. 66 songs in 1904. Older than all of the earlier adopters, even Debussy, Lenormand met Koechlin in 1902: their acquaintance was probably a significant catalyst for Lenormand’s interest in *debussyste* techniques. According to Koechlin’s journal, the two composers met several times in 1902 and 1903 to play through *Pelléas* and Lenormand’s songs.\textsuperscript{56} Essentially nothing is known about the way in which Gabriel Grovlez encountered *debussysme*, even though the composer would go on to write several songs and some exquisite piano works in which he employed some select *debussyste* techniques. What can be observed is that he began to produce *debussyste* works in 1903, starting with the song “Les villages.” As members of the Société nationale, both Lenormand and Grovlez would probably have been present at the premieres of Debussy’s *Prélude, Nocturnes*, and *Chansons de Bilitis*, but this exposure did not convince them to compose in Debussy’s manner. Yet immediately after *Pelléas*, they adopted *debussyste* techniques, prompted perhaps by the fervent interest of their professional peers; adoption at this historical moment suggests

\textsuperscript{55} Inghelbrecht, *Inghelbrecht et son temps*, 39-40.
\textsuperscript{56} Unpublished journal at the Médiathèque Mahler in Paris, France.
that Debussy’s opera and the animated response to it encouraged the growth of 
debugsme.

The profound attractiveness of Pelléas as a musical and cultural event was so strong that even Albert Roussel took part briefly in the movement. Roussel quickly distanced himself from debugsme after composing a handful of piano pieces and songs that utilize several debugsste techniques between 1903 and 1906. He then allied himself with the aesthetics of the Schola Cantorum, emphasizing his commitment to formal rigor and music of an extroverted, masculine character, qualities which would persist in his works.57 Like many of the debugsstes, Roussel was still a student in 1902; the young composers who banded together with such enthusiasm around Pelléas might have exerted such social pressure on their peers that Roussel, still searching for his artistic voice, was convinced to give debugsme a try.

Le Flem, Inghelbrecht, Lenormand, Grovlez, and Roussel all resemble Rogers’s category of “early majority” adopters, who are willing to take up an innovation but do not prefer to lead the trend. Rogers explains that adopters of this type hold back because they want to observe the changes taking place for a significant period before adopting them.58 These composers showed their cautious social behavior in their slowness to form relationships with the risk-takers who first created and adopted debugsme. When Pelléas garnered widespread and positive public attention, the techniques associated with the work became more widely acceptable and therefore accessible to more cautious

57 Roussel, for example, admitted that he “might have been touched by Debussy” in an interview conducted in 1928 but was quick to assert that “rigor of form and of purely symphonic development preoccupied me unceasingly,” referring to traits that he considered incompatible with Debussy’s style. In Albert Laurent, “Un entretien avec...Albert Roussel,” Guide du concert 3 (Oct. 19, 1928): 55-57; reprinted in Albert Roussel, Écrits, ed. Nicole Labelle (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 211.
58 Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations, 283.
composers. As the number of adopters grew and Debussy received much greater attention in the press, the early majority’s society brought debussyste practice to them. While they may have been just as enthusiastic as the innovator and early adopter debussystes, their adoption was comparatively more passive.

After 1902, the debussyste phenomenon had developed from a stream into a river: before 1902 eight composers had produced fifty-five debussyste compositions, but by 1908 the group included twenty-two composers, and between 1903 and 1908 work on 148 new debussyste compositions had begun.59 The growth of the debussyste social network and the increasingly favorable treatment of debussyste compositions in the press likely had much to do with the fecundity of the debussyste idiom during this period. After Debussy’s operatic success, composers and critics who championed Debussy increased the visibility of debussyste techniques and made them more plausible options for French composers. At the same time, early adopters and innovators received greater feedback from peers as they continued to compose debussyste pieces after 1902, and their persistent experimentation caused them to arrive at techniques that were increasingly compelling realizations of their aesthetic goals and extended the repertoire of available debussyste strategies.

Between 1902 and 1908, early adopters created some of the most impressive debussyste scores, writing in a high-debussyste idiom in which most or all of the elements of the practice were present and well-integrated, and debussyste formal conceptions saturated the structure of the composition. Many pieces that were featured in chapter 1 as notable examples of debussyste techniques were composed between 1903

59 As has been the case in previous chapters, “composition” here refers to every single song and movement that displays pervasive use of debussyste techniques.
and 1908, including Debussy’s *Estampes*, Ravel’s *Miroirs* and *Gaspard dans la nuit*, Caplet’s *Paroles à l’absente*, Le Flem’s *Par grèves*, Emmanuel’s *Musiques*, Séverac’s *En Languedoc*, and Schmitt’s *Sur un petit vieux cimetière*.

**1908-1917: Debussysme Becomes a New Norm**

The year 1908 marked a surge in *debussyste* activity that would be sustained for another decade. Between 1908 and 1911, an influx of new composers adopted *debussyste* elements, so that in 1911, as shown in Table 3.1, the *debussystes* numbered thirty. This new phase of activity also broadened the social meaning of *debussysme*: it captured the interest of several relatively unlikely composers who were socially distant from the young innovators who had crafted these techniques. The phenomenon now attracted composers who were already embedded socially and economically in French musical culture due to their age, career stage, or commitment to a conservative audience. Unlike the students who could afford to be brazenly radical because they had no power to lose, these other composers already had lucrative and secure positions in their culture and financial responsibilities they needed to maintain. As noted above, René Lenormand was the first older, respected composer to adopt *debussyste* elements. Another example is Ernest Moret, who was already a successful composer when he adopted *debussyste* elements into his songs in 1908. Moret had devoted himself to composing charming songs and piano pieces for the salon culture, and he moved in the same circles as Reynaldo Hahn.¹⁶⁰ Henri Woollett was forty-six when he composed the *debussyste* “Dans

¹⁶⁰ Both composers were frequently found at Madeleine Lemaire’s salon, where Saint-Saëns and Hahn exerted particular influence. See Myriam Chiménes, *Mécènes et musiciens: du salon au concert à Paris sous la IIIe République* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2004), 345-350.
le jardin du souvenir” in 1910. He was a respected composition teacher as well as another successful composer of songs and piano pieces for amateurs. Although very little is known about Albert Laurent, he appears to have composed only salon music before trying his hand at debussysme in the same year as Woollett.

Because these composers appealed to a wide audience in early twentieth-century France, their adoption of debussysme signaled that it could be drawn from in compositions aimed at a broad market with low financial risk to the publisher. Moret, Woollett, and Laurent can be considered “late majority” adopters: in Rogers’s terms, “the weight of system norms must definitely favor an innovation before the late majority are convinced to adopt.”

Because they were not at a career phase that rewarded professional risk, and because they relied for their incomes on a conservative public, these composers needed strong evidence of an innovative technique’s widespread acceptance. Composers who already had or desired to gain the favor of the conservative salon audience mitigated the radical elements of debussysme by mixing conventional forms with exciting debussyste surface elements. These hybrid idioms and the marketing of the debussyste sound to audiences who approached novelty with caution will be the subject of the next chapter.

Paul Dupin’s adoption of debussysme in 1909 was striking because he was an amateur composer who resided far outside of the salons and other social circles with which the innovators and early adopters associated. He wrote in an eccentric style that relied on dense counterpoint, and he was such an outsider in French musical culture that his adoption of debussysme and his association with debussystes actually brought him

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61 Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations, 184.
62 Ibid.
into greater prestige and contact with musical elites. Dupin’s adoption of debussysme can be charted in his Douze mélodies, a set of songs with composition dates ranging from 1893 until 1909. As exemplified in “La légende du pauvre Homme,” shown in Example 3.1, Dupin’s early style exhibits clear tonality, rhythms that conform to a regular meter, folk-like melodies, and a preoccupation with densely-constructed polyphony.

Example 3.1. Dupin, “La légende du pauvre Homme” (1897), mm. 20-22

Example 3.2. Dupin “Crépuscule” (1909), mm. 1-12
Even though the mania surrounding *Pelléas* escalated in 1903, the songs Dupin wrote between 1903 and 1907 remained untouched by it. Suddenly, in the songs of 1908, Dupin’s language underwent a radical *debussyste* transformation: a motive consisting of bare fifths begins “Crépuscule,” (Ex. 3.2) and later moments contain sequences of sharp dissonances of a second, a fragmented approach to form, and a dissonant ending sonority. His formerly dense polyphony had been reduced into a sparser and more gestural musical texture in the manner of the *debussystes*.

Calvocoressi’s comment in 1909 that Dupin was an “amateur” whose popularity had recently increased is suggestive of his outsider status and the new respect his recent adoption of *debussyste* techniques had garnered. Indeed, Romain Rolland took an interest in the composer right around this time, intrigued by a set of piano pieces Dupin had published in 1908 that were inspired by his novel, *Jean Christophe*. The writer exchanged several letters with Charles Koechlin in 1909 and 1910 in which they discussed Koechlin’s attempts to teach the amateur composer greater compositional skill, in the hope that he would produce an opera. Koechlin met with Dupin often from 1908 until 1912, and from this contact Dupin likely absorbed the thinner, less contrapuntal texture and *debussyste* harmonies that appear in some of his songs composed during this period. (Koechlin had already arrived at these qualities in his own *debussyste* songs by 1908; see especially the op. 31 collection). Because of his outsider position, Dupin’s adoption of *debussysme* signaled growing interest in *debussyste* techniques among a wide

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variety of composers and illustrated the significant social distance that these techniques had traveled over two decades.

A final example of how much the social meaning of debussysme had changed by 1910 is the adoption of some debussyste techniques by Henri Rabaud, who was a peer of Koechlin at the Conservatoire. While the two composers were on close terms from 1899 until 1904, according to Koechlin’s journal, Rabaud showed no interest in leaving the techniques that he had learned from Massenet and his study of the German masters.65 *La procession nocturne,* composed in 1899 for orchestra, is a beautiful and representative example of Rabaud’s mature style. In 1909 Rabaud published “Instant,” a song whose exotic sound is evoked in the piano part by a pentatonic gesture at the outset, pervasive open-fifths in the bass, chords decorated with sevenths, and frequent harmonic root movement by seconds and thirds. The vocal line is simple and pentatonic, and a subdued atmosphere pervades the song. The style of “Instant” is a far cry from the works in a nineteenth-century idiom that Rabaud had produced since his time as a student.

In his *Histoire de la Musique,* Henri Woollett observed debussyste harmonic techniques in *Marouf,* an opera Rabaud composed in 1914. He marveled that a composer who had formerly written music that was “guided by formulas that were sometimes too conventional” would take up “debussyste” techniques. The move could have been a “pitfall, and the composer risked losing his personality,” but Woollett judged that the exotic context of the opera’s plot and Rabaud’s careful mix of conventional and modernistic techniques were successful.66 The publication of these works tinged with

65 Koechlin’s unpublished journal, located at the Médiathèque Mahler in Paris, France.
debussysme caused no negative consequences for Rabaud, who in 1922 succeeded Fauré as the director of the Paris Conservatoire. By 1909 even a composer who had achieved great professional success writing in a style that avoided “modernist” techniques could find himself writing debussyste music.

The migration of debussysme into more conservative professional circles around 1910 coincided with the arrival of the set of techniques and the composers who used them in mainstream French musical culture. One way in which this shift manifested itself was that Debussy had become a treasured French master in the press. In 1902 Pelléas had aroused the interest of an influential yet relatively small group of adventurous composers and open-minded critics, but when the opera returned to the stage of the Opéra comique in 1908, it became a hit with a wide audience. In a lengthy, illustrated article celebrating the revival of Pelléas in a magazine for theater lovers, George Pioch exalted the talents of the “glorious” Debussy, who had triumphed over all his jealous detractors, such as Lalo. Pioch indicated that although Debussy’s opera was still one of the most avant-garde works in the Opéra-comique’s repertory, it was now regarded as one of the greatest works of modern French music, and it solidified a necessary turn in his nation’s art away from Romantic extravagance. As Pioch understood it, Debussy had at last achieved widespread appeal with Pelléas in the 1908 season, as “the entire mélomane public” had embraced it.

Pioch’s report of the approval of a wide audience for Debussy in 1908 resonated with Constantin Photiadès’s narrative of the composer’s rising status since the 1890s. In an article written in 1913 for the tenth anniversary of Pelléas, he explained that at first

68 Ibid.
Debussy only had the attention of a small group of “proselytes,” but was ignored by the audiences of the major concert venues. *Pelléas* initially shocked or bored the conventional tastes of the mainstream audiences, but at the same time university students with varying backgrounds in music were drawn to the rise of the opera since 1902, and knowledge of the work became a mark of prestige among them; it was their passion for the work that convinced the Opéra-comique to revive *Pelléas* in subsequent seasons. After the premiere season that ended in 1903, Photiadès recalled, it would be “three or four years later” that *Pelléas* would become fashionable among the concert-going public.\(^6^9\)

The enthusiasm for Debussy increased over the next several years, so that by 1913 unequivocal declarations of Debussy’s dominance were common in the press, such as this one from a concert program handed out at a performance Durand organized of modern French music:

> Right now M. Claude Debussy is one of the most visible musical figures; his originality appears as at least clairvoyant; everyone pays attention to him, French or foreigner; he is discussed, people fight passionately for or against him; but no one ignores him; furthermore, he has created a school: he is imitated, something that is for him a crown of glory…*Pelléas et Mélisande* imposes itself victorious in every country.\(^7^0\)

The anonymous author observed that Debussy had gained such visibility and become such a force in French musical society that none could ignore him. Despite Debussy’s personal unhappiness with the *debussyste* phenomenon, this writer viewed it positively, as yet more evidence of how significant he had become.

\(^{69}\) Photiadès, “M. Claude Debussy,” 514, 526-27.  
\(^{70}\) Durand et fils, *Concerts consacrées*, 7.
Another indicator of Debussy’s increasing popularity was the frequency with which his compositions were performed. Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune had confused the audience at its premiere, but according to a reviewer at Le Ménestrel, presentations of it had by 1908 become a “weekly” occurrence.\(^{71}\) By 1909 Debussy’s music was included regularly on the program of the Concerts Colonne, which typically played popular pieces for a mainstream audience, and placed emphasis on nineteenth-century masterworks.\(^{72}\) In the same year the amateur Cercle musical devoted an entire concert to Debussy’s music.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Position held and year acquired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul Dukas</td>
<td>Authoritative music critic for several journals, 1892-1932; orchestration professeur at Conservatoire, 1910-1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>André Caplet</td>
<td>Conductor of several orchestras including Théâtre de l’Odéon, Concerts Colonne, and 1898-1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henri Büsser</td>
<td>Conductor at l’Opéra de Paris, 1905-? Teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, 1904-1931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Ravel</td>
<td>Founding member of Société musicale indépendante, 1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florent Schmitt</td>
<td>“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Koechlin</td>
<td>“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Roger-Ducasse</td>
<td>Inspector General of singing instruction in Parisian schools, 1910-?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Emmanuel</td>
<td>Professor of music history at Paris Conservatoire, 1909-1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel Grovlez</td>
<td>Piano teacher at Schola Cantorum, 1899-1909, conductor at Opéra comique, 1905-08, conductor at Théâtre des arts, 1911-?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the same time, other composers associated with the debussyste movement were also achieving greater visibility on concert stages around 1910. Ravel’s Daphnis et Chloë and Debussy’s La damaïselle eluë and were included on the same program of a Concerts

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\(^{71}\) Le Ménestrel (Jan. 18, 1908): 21.
Colonne performance in April 1911. Calvocoressi, a critic who belonged to the Apaches, noted the popularity of Schmitt and Ravel in his reviews in *Comoedia illustré* from 1909 and 1911.\(^73\) The reviews of the premiere of Bonheur’s “O grand vent” from the *Deux élégies* are representative of critics’ favorable disposition towards *debussysme* during this period. After “O grand vent” was performed in 1910 at a Société nationale concert, reviewers noted that it was perhaps too indebted to Debussy, but that it was “an impalpable and deliciously nuanced work” and possessed “the most remarkable orchestration.”\(^74\) The founding of the Société nationale indépendante in 1909 by Ravel, Koechlin, and Schmitt both strengthened the social fabric of the *debussyste* community and gave the *debussystes* a reliable and prestigious concert stage hospitable to their works.\(^75\) Additionally, several of the *debussystes* besides Debussy gained positions of authority in the French musical world during the decade after *Pelléas* as conductors, teachers, and government officials (Table 3.2).

Between 1909 and 1917 several composers began to write *debussyste* music while still students at the Paris Conservatoire: Darius Milhaud, Paul Paray, Lili Boulanger, Arthur Honegger, Germaine Tailleferre, and Georges Migot. Many of them met in Georges Caussade’s counterpoint class and formed social groups with each other. By this period, *debussysme* had at the very least become acceptable at the Conservatoire; this situation was radically different from the hostile reception the audacities of Debussy and Ravel had received there during the 1880s and 1890s. Albert Roussel recalled that soon

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\(^{73}\) See especially Calvocoressi’s reviews under the heading “Aux Concerts” in *Comoedia illustré* (Feb. 4, 1909): 128; (Feb. 10, 1911): 305-306; and (Apr. 1, 1911): 408.

\(^{74}\) Labussière, *Raymond Bonheur*, 117-118.

\(^{75}\) Koechlin even once referred to the Société musicale indépendante as the “Société de l’art debussyste.” In Duchesneau, *L’avant-garde musicale*, 44.
after the premiere of Pelléas in 1902. “on the desks of the Conservatoire as well as those of the Schola Cantorum, the harmonies of Pelléas replaced those of Tristan.”76 If Roussel’s comment is accurate, Tailleferre and Paray may have found themselves amid enthusiasm for Pelléas as soon as they entered the Conservatoire in 1904. Vincent d’Indy expressed public support for Pelléas in his review of it in 1902. His student Paul Le Flem affirmed that when he began courses at the Schola Cantorum in 1904, Pelléas was the most potent work “in the air” at the school, and d’Indy did not discourage the students’ enthusiasm for it.77 Roussel, Le Flem, and Guy de Lioncourt all composed debussyste pieces while at the Schola. It should be noted that d’Indy also taught orchestration at the Conservatoire, and that Migot and Honegger were among his students: d’Indy may have been one of the pedagogues most responsible for creating an atmosphere of tolerance for debussysme at Parisian music schools.

When debussysme gained broad respect among composers and critics, and the approval of increasingly larger audiences in Paris after 1910, it continued to serve as an inspiration for young composers aiming to write avant-garde music, such as Arthur Honegger. Honegger had studied composition privately in his native Switzerland before enrolling at the Paris Conservatoire in 1911. Once there, he came under the influence of his new classmates, such as Milhaud, and soon composed his first debussyste pieces, including Trois poèmes de Paul Fort (1916), Prélude pour Algavaine et Sélysette (1916) and his first string quartet (1917). Because his teachers in Switzerland had exposed him

77 Paul Le Flem, “Anecdotes: Debussy et la Schola Cantorum, souvenirs de Paul Le Flem,” Musique et instruments (Nov. 17, 1977): 35. Le Flem stated that he would often bring debussyste compositions to d’Indy during lessons, and his teacher noted Debussy’s influence but never reproached him for it.
mostly to the Germanic masters, Honegger was delighted to discover the vastly different music of the _debussyste_ trend that was in full bloom when he arrived in Paris at the age of nineteen. The music of Debussy and Fauré, he stated, “made a very useful counterbalance, in my aesthetics and my feeling, to the classics and to Wagner.”

According to Rogers’s categories, later adopters require only a brief transitional period to absorb and beginning to use a new concept or technology because they are surrounded by earlier adopters whose trial periods serve vicariously as their own. This was indeed the case for Milhaud, who progressed rapidly through the phase in which he had not yet gained command of the _debussyste_ vocabulary. His first contact with _debussysme_ was the spark that ignited his interest in composition, when in 1905 he studied Debussy’s string quartet with his violin teacher in Aix-en-Provence. Milhaud immediately bought a copy of _Pelléas et Mélisande_ and began to study composition treatises.

While the repetitive, block chords in the piano part and the flat and clumsy delivery of the text in his earliest _debussyste_ work, “Désespoir” (1909, shown in Ex. 3.3), were a rather obtuse realization of subtle _debussyste_ techniques, by 1912 Milhaud had composed a string quartet that was highly evocative of Debussy’s work in the same genre. This rate of progress was much quicker than that of Debussy, Koechlin, Caplet, or Schmitt, because the experimentation required to create _debussyste_ techniques had already been accomplished by the time Milhaud had begun to compose.

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79 Rogers, _Diffusion of Innovations_, 258.

During the 1910s, early adopters such as Koechlin, Caplet, and Debussy explored the limits of the fragmentation, fluidity, and delicacy that characterized *debussyste* techniques. In their scores from this period, they created textures pervaded with unpredictable gestures, increased metric ambiguity, and rhythmically nuanced vocal melody. For young composers who adopted *debussysme* after it had become a normative practice at their schools, it was a foundation, not a set of avant-garde techniques. They probably would have acquired it as a kind of native language, a point of departure. After producing some high-*debussyste* compositions in which they mastered the techniques created by the innovators, the adventurous composers in this later group began to push past the limits of *debussyste* expression. During the 1910s they added techniques that lent a more extroverted tone: their practice, including greater dynamic contrast and more tuneful melodies, prefigured the *style dépouillé*, while still including *debussyste* elements. Milhaud, Boulanger, and Honegger also used repetitive, regular rhythms in place of the metric ambiguity that characterized the mature works of the early adopters and turned away from poetic performance indications. Examples of such hybrid *debussyste* compositions include Milhaud’s *Printemps I* (1915), Honegger’s “Nature morte” (1915),
and Boulanger’s “Le retour” (1912). In Lili Boulanger’s *D’un jardin clair* (1914) indications are few and succinct, such as *fluide* or *bien chanté*, and there are frequent and drastic changes in dynamic level. While syncopation frequently engenders metric ambiguity, rhythms are generally repetitive, and the texture lacks the fluidity typical of *debussyste* scores of the previous decade. Yet several *debussyste* elements are also present. Widely-spaced, extended sonorities and unorthodox voice-leading are frequent, and the piece ends with a *debussyste* reminiscence coda where the texture gradually thins out before coming to an unresolved stop.

Around 1910, *debussysme* migrated further into the popular streams of Parisian musical life: major concert stages, conservative salons, the bourgeois home, and elite music schools. Composers spanning multiple generations and holding a variety of different positions in their professional community were writing *debussyste* music at the same time. Some of them produced works appropriate for amateur performance, others continued to write with virtuosic musicians in mind, and still others were anxious to see what lay beyond the *debussyste* frontier. At its birth in the late nineteenth-century, *debussysme* was a rebellious practice that only the most adventurous composers dared to explore, but by 1915 it was a set of signs that had both an elite and an increasingly mainstream connotation, and both kinds of compositions found eager publishers. This association with a wide audience had attracted conservative composers to *debussyste* techniques, but it also began to repel composers who wanted to remain part of the avant-garde.
1911-1930: Stasis and Decline

In 1916 Jean Cocteau attended a performance of Erik Satie’s *Trois morceaux en forme de poire*, and set to work promoting the composer as the leader of a new musical school. By 1918 articles about the group of young composers who had submitted to Satie’s tutelage began to appear in the musical press, including Cocteau’s *Le coq et l’arlequin*, which was a detailed manifesto for Satie’s circle. According to Satie and Cocteau, the premiere of their ballet *Parade* in 1917 had inaugurated the *style dépouillé*, a new sound and a new aesthetic in French music.  

In *Le coq et l’arlequin*, Cocteau defined the aesthetic of the *style dépouillé* with compelling rhetoric, instructing composers to forsake the masked Harlequin who brooded in the night, a reference to the Romanticism of Debussy and Wagner, for the multicolored rooster who sang in the day, Satie. Cocteau cleverly took the critique Debussy had used to separate himself from prevailing German Romantic norms and turned it on Debussy himself. The music of these older composers was misty and excessively expressive, Cocteau claimed; to be cured of it one had to look for inspiration in the pleasing melodies of the café and the circus, and to strive for a simplicity that would cause their music to be immediately accessible to their audience.

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82 Ibid., 59-65.
For Cocteau the most prominent feature of this new sound was its rhythm, which he clamed Satie had “cleared out, freed, stripped down.” Satie described this style dépouillé as follows:

The “new spirit” teaches that one should be led towards emotive simplicity, towards firmness of expression—being displayed in the lucid affirmation of sonorities and rhythms (of a precise design, accentuated—everything being humble and of a spirit of renunciation). I speak here of music. We have no more need to call ourselves ”artists”—leaving that glistening designation to hairdressers and pedicurists.

Satie envisioned music with unambiguous emotional signification, and to that end he called for music whose structure was also simple and overt, emphasized rather than hidden by the content. Throughout this passage he used words that define his idea of direct expression: simplicity, firmness, lucid, precise, accentuated, humble. Like Cocteau, Satie focused on rhythm as the distinctive feature of the style dépouillé, disparaged the idea of the composer as communicator of lofty philosophical truths, and criticized the post-war debussystes as out of fashion.

Cocteau and Satie desired an utter discontinuance of the debussyste idiom in the wake of Parade, and the scholars who have written about this period in France generally follow their leads, designating the end of debussyste practice in around 1917. This

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83 “Satie déblaie, il dégage, il dépouille le rythme.” Ibid., 61.
85 Ibid., 38-39.
86 See Nancy Perloff, Art and the Everyday, 1-17; Roger Nichols, The Harlequin Years, 18-39; Deirdre Donnellon “French Music Since Berlioz,” 1-13; Robert Orledge, “Satie and Les Six”, in French Music Since Berlioz, 223-248; Christian Goubault, “Impressionisme,” in Vocabulaire de la musique à l’aube du XXe siècle, (Paris: Minerve, 2000), 78-80. Nichols and Perloff provide a more nuanced view of the situation than Orledge, Donnellon and Goubault, perhaps because their studies are monographs on the subject whereas the others are much shorter essays or encyclopedic entries.
notion is sometimes made explicit in these scholars’ works, but is more often implied in narratives of French music during the 1920s by a narrow focus on the practitioners of the *style dépouillé* to such an extent that music in any other idiom is eclipsed. My research reveals that despite the fervor with which some pronounced its death, *debussysme* remained popular throughout the war and the early 1920s, and that its decline occurred gradually after this point rather than suddenly, as Cocteau and some members of Les six asserted after the war.\(^7\) *Debussysme* had reached a plateau in 1911: as Table 3.1 shows, the consistent stream of new adopters that had persisted for fifteen years ceased in this year, after which just a handful of composers would sporadically venture into *debussysme*. 1910 was also a zenith in terms of production of new *debussyste* works: thirty-six compositions (understood as movements) were begun in this year, a number that would not be matched. By 1911 nearly all the older composers who desired to try out *debussysme* had already done so, and the set of techniques had also become less attractive to young composers. However, more than two-thirds of the composers who had already adopted *debussysme* continued to utilize the idiom after 1911, many of them clinging to it well into the 1920s. World War I slowed the productivity of some composers who took part in the war effort, such as Ladmirault, Caplet, Lili Boulanger, and Paray, yet several *debussyste* compositions were composed during every year of the war. The *debussyste* trend would not stagnate until 1926, when production plummeted and remained low.

Other scholars are correct in designating Satie and his *Nouveaux jeunes* as prominent figures in the avant-garde musical scene in Paris in the late 1910s and 1920s,\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Nichols argues that the success of *Parade* was vital to Cocteau’s artistic career, something he was well aware of, and that this caused him to play a game of musical politics surrounding the premiere of Satie’s ballet. Nichols, *The Harlequin Years*, 37-38.
and during the war some composers did refuse or cast off debussysme entirely and embrace the style dépouillé in its place. Two of the youngest composers of Les Nouveaux Jeunes, George Auric and Francis Poulenc, avoided debussysme in even their earliest compositions and were outspoken in their belief that it was an outmoded extension of Romanticism that artists needed to abandon. Milhaud heeded Cocteau’s admonitions against debussysme, attempting a stripped down approach as early as in 1913 in Agamemnon and leaving debussysme behind completely by 1917. Milhaud leaned towards greater simplicity than the older debussystes from his earliest works, even those influenced by Debussy; his migration into Satie’s camp is therefore not surprising.

Milhaud’s transition from debussysme to the style dépouillé can be charted in his first four string quartets, written over the period of 1912-1918. The composer admitted the strong influence of Debussy on his first quartet, but in the second quartet of 1915 Milhaud employed angular melodies, harsh dissonance, and repetition of large formal sections. The third quartet retained this biting dissonance, but because of its purpose as a lament for the death of one of Milhaud’s friends, the composer returned to debussyste techniques and the subdued, delicate atmosphere that they created. The fourth quartet, from 1918, embodies the style dépouillé in its brevity, the tuneful melodies of the first movement, and the repetitiveness and metrically clear rhythms of the second movement. The only movement that could be considered remotely debussyste is the third, in which Milhaud retains the debussyste fondness for surprising harmonies due to unorthodox voice leading.

88 Perloff, Art and the Everyday, 14.
Many of the other debussystes would also fall under the style dépouillé’s spell of simplicity, but for them this was a slow process that typically involved producing several works that were a mix of the techniques of debussysme and the style dépouillé in a way that mirrored their gradual transition from Romantic idioms into debussysme many years before. Ravel was one of the only composers to have practiced debussysme and disengaged from it before the end of World War I; ironically, the Satie-Cocteau group branded Ravel along with Debussy as an outdated Romantic.\(^89\) Roger Nichols has noted a marked turn away from Debussy’s idiom in Ravel’s scores starting in 1911; this is a good approximation, but Ravel drifted away from debussyste techniques over a period of ten years rather than dropping them all at once.\(^90\) This process began as early as 1904, when Ravel composed the Mélodies populaires grecques, which contained repetitive forms, periodic phrasing, and subservient piano parts that played a secondary role to tuneful melodies, all traits that were at odds with debussysme. Although Ravel remained a devoted admirer of Debussy throughout his life, the works he composed between 1904 and 1914 are a mixture of extroverted, repetitious elements and debussyste techniques. The Piano Trio (1914) displays greater dynamic contrast, short sections of repetitive rhythm, and curved, lyrical melodies; but Ravel reverts to debussyste fluidity, incompleteness, and emphasis on delicate effects in several places. The first movement consists of an alternation of dramatic, lyrical sections and reflective debussyste sections, the first of which begins at m. 35. In Le tombeau de Couperin from 1917, however,

\(^{89}\) See, for example, Milhaud’s refusal of Ravel as discussed in Kelly, *Tradition and Style*, 8.

\(^{90}\) Orledge’s complicates this question of when Ravel and Debussy diverged stylistically by framing it in terms of Ravel’s imitation of Debussy. The two composers’ styles were similar, however, because both drew from the same pool of debussyste techniques. As a result, it is more useful to ask when debussyste techniques became a minority in Ravel’s scores than to ask when he stopped sounding like Debussy.
Ravel’s music betrayed little similarity to the *debussyste* idiom: its simple forms consist of blocks of smaller song forms, robust rhythms, tuneful melodies, and an utter lack of the pictorial-fused piano textures that Ravel himself had largely invented. For the rest of his career, he would only turn to *debussyste* techniques one more time, in the first movement of the Violin Sonata in 1921.

Even some of Les Six, who were held up in the press as banner examples of the changes sweeping French music, hesitated to completely abandon *debussyste* techniques. Honegger and Tailleferre continued to write *debussyste* music after the premiere of *Parade*, and had already detached themselves from Satie’s circle in 1918 because they admired the ballet but did not identify with the iconoclastic perspective of Milhaud, Poulenc, and Auric.91 Both Honegger and Tailleferre wrote pieces which exemplified the *style dépouillé*, especially when working in collaboration under the banner of Les six, but in many works written immediately after the war they struck a middle ground between the two practices. Tailleferre’s *Images*, written in 1918, showed the influence of Koechlin: widely-spaced dissonant chords, bitonality, and sparse textures. Honegger had been a latecomer to *debussysme*; after Cocteau demanded the end of *debussysme* in 1917, Honegger composed several additional *debussyste* works, finally moving away from the practice after composing *Pâques à New York* in 1920.

Tailleferre’s and Honegger’s willingness to write in the *debussyste* idiom after it became controversial reveals that after World War I serious artists did not have to abandon *debussyste* techniques to earn the respect of their colleagues. Instead, the musical community in Paris, construed broadly, was still receptive to the *debussyste*

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91 Perloff astutely describes this subtlety in the adoption of an anti-*debussyste* style even among the members of Les six in *Art and the Everyday*, 2-17.
sound. The concert-going public greeted *debussyste* works enthusiastically: Debussy’s works remained popular at Parisian concerts during the 1920s, and Ibert’s *debussyste* orchestral works found such favor with mainstream audiences during the same period that they catapulted him to international fame. Ibert did not adopt *debussysme* until the 1920s, but he mastered it quickly. In the 1921 opera *Persée et Andromède* the composer captured *debussyste* orchestration techniques along with *Pelléas*-inspired vocal writing and harmonic practice. The composer explored more daring harmony and texture in *La verdure dorée* (1923). “Comme j’allais” contains biting dissonant chords engendered by pervasive bitonality, a technique largely developed by Koechlin in his *debussyste* experimentation of the early 1900s. In the opening of “Cette grande chambre” Ibert took the *debussyste* ideal of fragmentation and gestural texture to an extreme, alternating diverse gestures in the piano with solo statements by the voice in the nuanced manner of *Pelléas* as shown in Example 3.4.

**Example 3.4. Ibert, “Cette grande chambre,” mm. 1-4**

![Example 3.4. Ibert, “Cette grande chambre,” mm. 1-4](image)

Many of the composers who had adopted *debussysme* around 1900 not only continued to use *debussyste* techniques during and after World War I, but produced some

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of the most brilliant and integrated examples of it. In 1917 Schmitt finished *Ombres*, an expansive apotheosis of *debussyste* innovations for piano that had been pioneered by Ravel. Multiple *debussyste* textural types are layered in the three movements, and unorthodox voice leading and thick dissonances are pushed to an extreme without becoming harsh, due to auspicious spacing choices. Coalescing introductions and incomplete endings frame all three movements, and *J’entends dans le lointain*... finishes with a lengthy reminiscence coda.93 Koechlin created several *debussyste* songs for his *Shéhérazade I* and II (1914-16 and 1922-23), reveling in quiet delicacy, widely spaced quartal/quintal harmonies, slow tempos, and parlando vocal melodies. Caplet’s songs from after the war, such as *Hymne à la naissance du matin* (1920) display his continued use of several *debussyste* techniques: complex streaming textures, finely ornamented instrumental parts, endlessly new material, and vocal lines that are at once dynamic and supple.

Such high-*debussyste* pieces also retained the esteem of the serious composers who programmed the Société nationale concerts. Schmitt’s *Rêves* was premiered there in 1920, Caplet’s *Le vieux coffret* in 1918 and *Cinq ballades francaises* in 1921, and Ibert presented his *Chansons de Vildrac* before the society in 1924. Four of the Jammes songs *Bonheur* had composed between 1895 and 1897 were performed at the Société nationale in 1918. The society revisited Debussy’s works frequently throughout the 1920s, and they also periodically gave performances of Ravel’s *debussyste* pieces.94

93 A “reminiscence coda” is a coda in which fragments from earlier in the piece return—without undergoing development—in a weakened state as though they are caught in an echo chamber and gradually lose energy. This distinctive element which is prevalent in *debussyste* scores is discussed in chapter 1.

94 See the complete list of all Société nationale programs in the first appendix to Michel Duchesneau, *L’Avant-garde musicale.*

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Older composers’ reticence to abandon debussysme might have been due to their age, but they also had a lingering attachment to the debussysme because they had been profoundly affected by their participation in the atmosphere of artistic urgency engendered by Pelléas. Conversely, composers who adopted debussysme after 1908 learned of it in an atmosphere of greater receptivity. As well as the fact that the older debussystes had simply written debussyste music for much longer than the younger ones, the perceived significance of debussyste techniques for their development as artists and the positive emotions they associated with them would have made disengagement more difficult.

Several of the debussystes who had taken part in the Pelléas experience lamented the shift towards the style dépouillé in French music after the war. Paul Ladmirault took a post at the Nantes Conservatoire in 1920, but in 1922 he had an opportunity to return to Paris, and while there he attended several concerts. What he heard disappointed him. He wrote to his wife that he had hoped to encounter some inspiring new music in Paris, but that he was finding very little. On March 4th he was preoccupied with his distaste for Roussel’s Second Symphony, which he described in a way that identified it with the style dépouillé:

There are immense descriptive qualities, sumptuous orchestration, all of it at the service of rather antipathetic themes, poor and grating on the nerves, combined with perpetual dissonance that are sometimes lazy, that can even become aggressive and exasperating. It’s all very Sacre du printemps!...It is an art of savages, Bolshevists, maniacs, of the possessed!  

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95 All of these letters by Ladmirault can be found at the Bibliotheque nationale de France—Département de musique on microfilm VM-BOB 20832.

96 “Il y a d’immenses qualités descriptive, une orchestration somptueuse, tout cela au service de thèmes assez antipathétiques, grimaçants et pauvres, combinés avec des dissonances perpétuelles, parfois paresseuses, peuvent agressives et exaspérantes. C’est très à Sacre du printemps! C’est un art de sauvages, de bolchevistes, de forcenés, de démoniaques!” Paul Ladmirault to his wife, March 5, 1922, ibid.
Even though Ladmirault had begun to adopt elements of the *style dépouillé* before the war in works such as “Gnomes,” he was disconcerted by the lack of emotional nuance, the level of dissonance, and the driving energy of Roussel’s score. In a letter written two days later, Ladmirault contrasted the unrelenting dissonance of Roussel’s symphony with the harmonic practices of Debussy and Ravel who mixed consonance with dissonance sonorities to create “rays of light amidst a kind of dissonant haze.”

Ladmirault remarked in another letter to his wife that he had only taken pleasure in going to hear pieces that he already knew, all of them *debussyste*: a performance of some of Ravel’s early compositions (he did not name them specifically), Aubert’s *La forêt bleue*, which took his mind joyfully back to attending performances of *Pelléas* during its premiere season, and Debussy’s *Petite suite*.

While he encouraged young composers to search for their own innovations, Koechlin was so disgusted with the “modernists” who rejected Debussy that he wrote a biography about the composer in 1927 to set the record straight. In his opinion, Stravinsky and the composers around Cocteau had made the *style dépouillé* into a dogma, and their worship of construction and “furniture music” had led them into vulgarity.

Bonheur also expressed his difficulty in adapting to postwar musical trends. He reminisced about Debussy’s music in a portrait of his friend from 1920, concluding that it was

> the most subtle expression of the sensibility and the dream of an era when one still had the taste and the leisure and an awareness of the inner life, of

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97 “Des rayons de lumière au milieu des dissonances toujours un peu brumeuses.” Paul Ladmirault to his wife, March 6, 1922, ibid.
98 Koechlin, *Debussy*, 91-94.
99 Ibid.
which those who experienced it cannot remember it without being filled with an incurable nostalgia.

Bonheur associated Debussy’s “nuanced” and “evocative” music with the simpler times of pre-war France, and he missed the interior focus of the artistic movements of that earlier period. In his comments, Bonheur strongly implied that after the war music turned away from the qualities he found in debussysme and had never adjusted to the change.

After 1917 debussysme continued to be a viable set of compositional choices, but the emergence of the style dépouillé as its avant-garde rival did cause a re-conceptualization of its significative possibilities. In some pieces written after this year, composers selectively deployed debussysme in weak or subordinate areas of the formal structure, thus relegating it to the realm of “feminine” music. This behavior manifested itself in three ways. In works with a narrative structure composers often utilized debussysme only at moments of uncertainty, such as in Ladmirault’s film score, La brière. Ladmirault translated happiness, anger, or excitement on the screen into a sound remarkably similar to the style dépouillé. Debussyste music was used to signify a feeling of uncertainty among the characters, the entrance of a mysterious character, or in moments of narrative uncertainty such as the transitional music between two scenes. Henri Rabaud used a series of slow, consonant chords separated by thirds in scenes titled “Perplexité” and “Mélancolie” in Le miracle des loups, a film score from 1924. His usage harkens back to the subdued and sad atmosphere that early adopter debussystes preferred. In early film scores, which had to supply emotional content unambiguously due to the lack of sound on the film reel, debussyste harmony and fluid texture represented exoticism, uncertainty, sadness, and mystery.

100 Bonheur, “Souvenirs et impressions d’un compagnon de jeunesse,” La jeunesse de Claude Debussy, 8.
Tailleferre used *debussyste* harmony and rhythm for a similar narrative purpose in the ballet score *Le marchand des oiseaux*: when a character notated as “mysterious” enters, the music progresses from one extended harmony to another, and the chords are spaced rather erratically throughout the measures; the music communicates the uncertainty the other characters feel around the stranger. After a glissando the music reaches stability and the *style dépouillé*, as the harmony consists purely of unadorned tonic and dominant chords in C major, the rhythmic patterns now lock into the meter, and a cheerful, diatonic melody commences. The music indicates that the hesitation towards the stranger has passed, and he is allowed to begin his dance number. Tailleferre also turned to a *debussyste* sound in the transitional passages that close many of *Le marchand*’s dance scenes.

Some composers contained *debussyste* music in their post-war instrumental compositions by restricting it to slow movements. All four movements of Tailleferre’s first Violin Sonata (1921) manifest a *debussyste* influence, but it is by far the strongest in the slow third movement, marked *assez lent*, and the slow, wispy middle section of the fourth movement. The extroverted energy of the *style dépouillé* dominates that first movement, which she designated as fast according to the conventions of the sonata genre. In Emmanuel’s Sonatine no. 3 for piano (1920) the slow and soft second movement is saturated with *debussyste* elements. As shown in Example 3.5, gestures pervade the stratified texture, which is often stretched across three staves, and the material is varied rather than repetitious. The first movement makes sparing use of *debussyste* techniques, and the last and quickest movement—marked *vivace* and residing mostly at a *forte* dynamic level—is *debussyste* only in terms of some of its harmonies. The influence of
the style dépouillé is evident in the sections firmly grounded in a diatonic, major-minor tonality, its homogeneity of rhythm, and its clear homophonic texture.

Example 3.5. Emmanuel, Sonatine no. 3, mvt. II, mm. 39-45

Some composers also relegated debussyste material to a subordinate position within a composition by placing it within a middle section of a single movement and flanking it on either side with material in the style dépouillé. Examples of this phenomenon include “Les créoles” from Ibert’s Les Rencontres and the toccata movement of Honegger’s Toccate et variations. “Les créoles” begins with the boisterous sound of a repetitive melody that forms biting dissonances with the regular accompaniment pattern in the left hand. After a noticeable drop in volume and tempo the patterned rhythms of the first section dissolve into debussyste harmonic idiosyncrasies and fragmented gestures that float in metric ambiguity. Regularity gradually returns after several measures and the robust A section returns to replace the debussyste material.
The practice of beginning and ending a piece in the *style dépouillé* but then slipping into *debussysme* in a contrasting middle section may have been common among composers writing in the 1920s because, as Roger Nichols suggests, their compositional formation was in *debussysme*, “so that when their style was stripped down there was nothing left worth listening to.”\(^{101}\) The new aesthetic emphasized simplicity in all musical parameters, and composers who tried to remain faithful to it may soon have run out of ideas. At such a point, many of them may have solved the problem by filling in the middle of the piece with *debussysme*. Jean Roger-Ducasse certainly seemed to have suffered this dilemma in *Arabesques* (1917), which begins with the polytonal dissonances and strongly metric rhythms, but more concordant *debussyste* harmonies and flexible rhythm creep into the score on the third page, and they soon take over the texture.

The peculiar balkanization of *debussysme* in the 1920s suggests that Satie and his circle achieved some success in branding it as weak, effeminate, and hazy. In their scores written after the war some composers seemed to consider the *debussyste* sound appropriate only for slow, quiet sections of a piece, or for the expression of uncertain, transitional moments. In the same pieces, material of an aggressive character was delegated to the strong moments in a composition: the outer movements or sections, and the significant and stable moments between transitions. The two very different sounding practices relate to each other as a gendered binary in these compositions, where *debussysme* expresses feminine weakness, abnormality, and subjectivity, and the

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\(^{101}\) Nichols, *The Harlequin Years*, 216.
masculine style dépouillé stands for strength, normality, and objectivity. For instance, a transition would be a feminine structural component because it acts as a bridge that the listener passes through to reach a significant moment, making it passive and in need of normalization. Placing debussyste material in the middle of a piece in ternary form was also a method of containing it to feminine areas, because the A section functions as a necessary return to normality after the aberrance of the B section.

Many critics, even those who supported Debussy, had labeled debussysme as effeminate since its inception in the 1890s. Satie, Cocteau, and the vocal younger composers who associated with them continued the gendered argument of earlier detractors of Debussy such as Camille Bellaigue and Raphaël Cor, wherein the debussyste sound was judged as inappropriate for the French artistic genius due to its weak and decadent character. These post-war writers used this image of decadent, weak debussysme as an earlier trend to which they could contrast the clarity, vitality, and expressive concision of the style dépouillé. In Le coq et l’arlequin Cocteau stated the difference between the styles of Debussy and Satie in explicitly gendered as well as anti-Romantic language: “while Debussy spread his feminine grace…Satie continued along his little path of classicism.” Satie, in an article from 1923, juxtaposed the “firmness of expression” of the new musical spirit with the decoration and false luxury of the music of Debussy’s “post-admirers,” and in the same article referred to Debussy’s style as

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102 Susan McClary describes this gendered binary, which was an often tacit yet stable construct underlying music throughout the common practice era and persisted in the twentieth century. Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 8-11.
103 See pages 123-125 and 255-256 of this dissertation.
104 Jean Cocteau, Le coq et l’arlequin, 59.
Younger composers, such as Milhaud and Auric, gave essentially identical descriptions of *debussysme* in their published writings. This gendered discourse seems to have gained some influence among the *debussystes* during the 1920s: they began to display a similarly gendered understanding of the *debussysme* in their compositions by relegating it to subordinate positions in the form or the overarching drama. Perhaps these composers felt pressure to keep up with avant-garde trends, but wanted at the same time to keep writing *debussyste* music; containment along the gendered boundaries set out in this discourse might have been their solution to this problem.

Despite the social and economic pressures French composers faced after World War I, a vast majority of composers who had previously adopted *debussysme* continued to utilize it throughout the 1920s, and they continued to find publishers and concert directors who were interested in it. Signs that *debussyste* practice had entered a period of stasis instead of growth were evident in 1911, but the decline of *debussysme* would occur quite slowly, over the next twenty years. Many of the *debussystes* never moved on to different styles, but stopped composing *debussyste* works because they left full-time composition for more stable and lucrative musical positions as conductors and as teachers at prestigious music institutions. The persistence of *debussyste* techniques in the post-war atmosphere, when a vocal portion of iconoclastic composers and elitist critics sought to remove the practice of *debussysme* from French musical life, suggests that a sizeable group of French composers were quite attached to these techniques.

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107 This list includes Paray, Le Flem, Koechlin, Grovlez, Emmanuel, and Ladmirault.
Conclusion

Approaching a compositional trend as the diffusion of an innovation through social channels can help scholars of cultural history to avoid ambiguous explanations for why a certain artistic notion became popular. The sociological concept, as described by Rogers, pinpoints what might at first seem like a mysterious response to an unidentified Zeitgeist as a community’s affirmation of a strong solution to a pressing problem.

Debussysme was a solution to the problem of German influence in France, and it fulfilled the desire many French composers felt for a radically new kind of music at the turn of the twentieth century. An examination of the social component of debussysme also highlights the importance of generation as a factor which shaped the trend. Composers tended to conform to the way their generation viewed debussysme at a particular time, despite the emphasis on individualism in French musical discourse early in the twentieth century.\(^\text{108}\) Furthermore, a composer’s age often determined his or her approach to debussysme: younger composers were generally more eager to proceed from adoption of the techniques and into their own innovation, while older composers hesitated to push the boundaries of the debussyste categories. At the two points when substantial groups of young composers entered the movement at once—around 1895 and around 1915—significant evolution of debussyste practice occurred, as discussed earlier.

Many of Rogers’s observations about strategies for adopting new technologies are useful in understanding the unfolding of the debussyste phenomenon, which suggests that this sociological model is a promising tool for music research. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that artists are rarely forced to adopt a new technique. A farmer might

\(^{108}\) About the lofty position accorded to individualism and sincerity in France around the turn of the century see Caballero, Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics, 12-27.
eventually need to adopt a useful new technology or be run out of business, but such pressing economic necessity is rarely at play in elite artistic circles. The urgency to adopt \textit{debussysme} was not primarily an economic one, but rather social and artistic, as composers decided what adoption or rejection of \textit{debussyste} techniques would mean for their social positions and their artistic identities.\footnote{Many composers, such as Saint-Saëns, Hahn, and Fauré, never adopted \textit{debussysme} and yet continued to succeed professionally and economically.} Composers who mixed \textit{debussyste} surface-level techniques with Romantic structural norms would do so for artistic satisfaction and because it was a low economic risk. These hybrid idioms would, however, divorce \textit{debussyste} techniques from their radical aesthetic roots, creating strife between the composers who created the techniques and many of the early adopters. The musical, social, and economic results of the pop \textit{debussyste} enterprise are the subject of the following chapter.
Chapter 4: The Novel Sensations of Pop Debussysme

During the 1890s debussyste composition was limited to a few young, iconoclastic composers, but the impact of Pelléas et Mélisande in 1902 helped to propel debussyste techniques to greater popularity. By 1907, the debussyste practice was shared among sixteen composers who were still mostly young, personally acquainted with each other, and interested in creating avant-garde art. Yet around 1910 the phenomenon of debussysme broadened to include participation by more composers, with varying ages, peer groups, target audiences, social connections, and levels of commitment to musical innovation. This expanded pool of debussyste adopters included Ernest Moret, René Lenormand, Henri Woollett, Gabriel Dupont, and Louis Aubert, who were known not for modernist experimentation but for their pleasing mélodies and solo piano pieces that relied on nineteenth-century musical conventions. Their works were intended for the enjoyment of amateur purchasers of sheet music, not for the concert stages of the composers’ societies. None of these composers frequented the musical communities that the avant-garde debussystes favored, such as the salon of Mme. Saint-Marceaux or Les Apaches.

Their adoption of Debussy’s idiom was correspondingly conservative: debussyste effects gilded songs and piano music that consisted fundamentally of conservative structural concepts, including schematic melodies and simple, rounded forms. There was no specialized term for this divergence of compositional practice: “impressionism” and
“debussysme” were used loosely in the early twentieth century to refer to any music that sounded like Debussy, regardless of the quality an author attributed to it. I have chosen the label of “pop debussysme” for this hybrid kind of debussysme, which emerged around 1908, following one of the definitions Simon Frith provides for “popular culture:”

In this commercial context, “popular culture” is both a quantitative and qualitative concept; it refers to audience size—to be popular a record film must sell or be viewed in relatively large numbers (relative to the sales and viewing figures for high cultural or elite goods); it also refers to the quality of these consumers and viewers, to their attitudes towards the uses of cultural goods – to be “popular” a record or film or fiction must be consumed in certain ways (ways clearly differentiated from those in which cultural elites consume their goods).110

“Pop debussysme” conforms to the quantitative aspect of Frith’s definition: it was marketed to a large audience and became lucrative as debussyste salon compositions found eager consumers and publishers into the 1920s. The way in which this phenomenon was marketed also indicates that its consumers had a substantially different understanding of the purpose of debussyste techniques. In “pop debussysme” what had been signs of contemplative art became vehicles of pleasure; the earliest debussystes understood pop debussysme as utterly foreign to their elite aims. In this chapter, I will characterize this hybrid debussyste idiom, situate it within a social and economic context, and describe its shift away from aesthetic ideas that were fundamental to the creators and early adopters of debussysme.

Social and Musical Characteristics of Pop Debussysme

René Lenormand, Henri Woollett, and Ernest Moret were all older, established composers by the beginning of the twentieth century. They had already spent decades composing in the languages that they had learned as students. All three preferred somewhat chromatic yet tonally clear harmony, restrained vocal lyricism, and simple forms. These composers held established places in the French musical world, respected among their colleagues in the web of music institutions and supported financially by steady publication of their scores.

Lenormand was born in 1846: he was therefore the only debussyste adopter who was older than Debussy. Lenormand’s compositional formation had been in German Romantic masterworks, and he continued to compose in a Romantic idiom throughout the nineteenth century. The pervasive polyphony and the frequent doubling of vocal lines in the songs of Les fleurs du mal (1896) exemplify Lenormand’s compositional language before his shift into debussysme in 1904. Woollett remembered Lenormand as a mélodiste of “classical origin,” and he was therefore surprised when his friend became interested in modernist techniques.\(^{111}\) Lenormand was a curious case in that he attempted to straddle two musical spheres that were very different in terms of generation and taste. He made active attempts to enter the world of the debussystes by drawing inspiration from their scores and by befriending Koechlin, and he defended their youthful experiments against the attacks of his peers.\(^{112}\) At the same time, he was also respected by his older peers as a composer of works with “solid construction,” a reliable music

\(^{111}\) Henri Woollett, Un mélodiste français: René Lenormand (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1930), 57.
\(^{112}\) Ibid., 126.
journalist, and a founding member of the Société nationale de musique. Koechlin drew attention to Lenormand’s unusual role, commenting that Lenormand was the only “musicien agé” who truly understood the younger composers.

Lenormand’s friend Woollett was known during his lifetime primarily for his efforts as a music historian and teacher. He was a composition teacher at Le Havre Conservatoire, where he taught André Caplet. Caplet would eventually serve as an important conduit by which Woollett learned about Debussy’s music and the new compositions being written by Caplet’s debussyste peers. By 1924 Woollett had become strongly supportive of debussysme: in his Histoire de la musique he included a detailed and enthusiastic section about Debussy and the debussystes. Before manifesting an interest in debussysme, Woollett was attracted to nationalist art, drawing inspiration from the French clavecinists and Breton folk song in Le jardin de France. He also composed salon music in a style influenced by his teacher Massenet, such as the song “Des harpes dans le soir” (1906). In 1910 Woollett wrote his first debussyste composition, Au jardin du souvenir. This song combines a pleasant, conventional A section and a strikingly debussyste B section that reveals Woollett’s intensive study of Pelléas et Mélisande in the highly nuanced rhythm and narrow range of the vocal part.

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113 C.E. Curinier, in Dictionnaire national des contemporains (1906), stated that shortly after taking up residence in Paris in 1868, he “soon made himself known in the musical world with a series of pieces that were remarkable in their qualities of expression, originality, and solid construction. He is most well-known for his songs [lieder].” C.E. Curinier, ed. Dictionnaire national des contemporains, vol. 5 (Paris: Office général d’édition, 1906), 65. The editor claimed that the book included all members of the Institut, Parlément, and professionals in a variety of fields who had “made themselves known,” and he chose to include Moret as well as Lenormand. The publication’s exclusion of all of the composers who had adopted debussysme by the time of its publication—even Debussy—is a clear indication of how socially distant Moret and Lenormand were from many of the younger and more rebellious debussyste adopters.

114 Woollett, Un mélodiste français, 58.


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stratified orchestral texture, chains of seventh chords, and abundant use of the whole tone scale.

The final member of this group of older composers of pop debussyste music was Ernest Moret, who was born in 1871 and studied composition in the 1890s at the Paris Conservatoire under Massenet. The contrast between Moret and Ravel is noteworthy: the two composers were close in age and matured as composers around 1895, yet Ravel would embrace debussysme immediately, whereas Moret would wait to do so until 1908, at the age of thirty-seven. By 1908 Moret was an established composer of salon music. Moret differs from Lenormand and Woollett in that we have no documentary evidence of close relationships between Moret and other debussystes. Moret might thus be a rare type of debussyste adopter who took part in the musical but not the social dimension of debussysme. He did frequent Madeleine Lemaire’s salon, a prestigious and serious gathering that included Proust and Saint-Saëns, and there he probably came into contact with D. E. Inghelbrecht, although nothing is known of their relationship.\textsuperscript{117} The darling composer of this salon was the popular mélodiste Reynaldo Hahn. Before turning to debussysme, Moret composed songs similar to those by Hahn: clear diatonic harmony accented by gentle chromatic inflection, restrained vocal lyricism, and the delicate simplicity of the nineteenth-century chanson.\textsuperscript{118} In 1905 at one of Lemaire’s soirées musicales, Moret premiered his L’île heureuse, an acclaimed melodrama strongly indebted to Massenet in its texture, harmony, and dramatic expression.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{117} Chimènes, Mécènes, 344-347.
\textsuperscript{118} Tunley, Salons, 60-62.
\textsuperscript{119} Chimènes, Mécènes, 349.
For mysterious reasons, Moret attempted to use a few debussyste concepts in 1908, in “Chanson au bord de l'eau” and “La nuit heureuse” from Nouvelles mélodies sur des poésies de Tristan Klingsor. In this incomplete adoption of debussysme, Moret displayed a preference for the surface-level rather than the structural. The two experimental songs contain scintillating piano parts that betray the influence of Ravel's textural innovations for the piano. The figuration of the A section of “Chanson au bord de l'eau” consists of brusque scalar gestures in the Lydian mode transposed by thirds. The precise indication that accompanies this figure, très clair avec beaucoup de pédales et très glissé (very clear and gliding along with much pedaling) suggests the debussyste search for distinctive musical ambience. A transposition of this gesture into the whole tone scale, a favorite debussyste sonority, appears briefly on the final page.

In “La nuit heureuse” (Ex. 4.1) the gesture in the piano is more virtuosic and expansive, built upon a quickly arpeggiated added-sixth-chord on the tonic followed by a whole-tone figure that races up and down the keyboard in imitation of a fountain. As shown in Example 4.1, the lengthy introductory indication crosses into absurdity as Moret asks from the pianist a sound both “lively and calm,” and “aquatic and aerial.” The passionate tone of the indication suggests that the composer was enthusiastic about his first experimentation with the debussyste sound, and the detail of the description suggests that he hoped the piano figuration would convey a new kind of sensation to his consumers.
Example 4.1. Moret, “La nuit heureuse,” mm. 1-2
The text of the indication reads: “Tout en même temps mouvementé et calme, confus, léger et clair, dans un tourbillonnement vertigineux aquatique et aérien, avec des poussées de jet d’eau voulant s’élever vers le ciel pour retomber aussitôt.”

Yet, the structure of both “Chanson au bord de l’eau” and “La nuit heureuse” is fundamentally conservative. Although the A material of both songs makes use of *debussyste* church modes, the whole tone scale, and pictorial-fused textures, the music is still pleasantly repetitive and affirms both the notated meter and the tonic key. Rather than creating music of constant novelty and subtle motivic transformation, Moret fashions clear and easily comprehensible ABA forms that utilize exact return of material and in which familiar Wagnerian chromaticism and overt lyricism in the B sections offer respite from the *debussyste* A sections.\(^{120}\) Moret decorated the surface of the songs with

\(^{120}\) While some composers contained *debussyste* material in middle sections of compositions they wrote after World War I, perhaps in response to pressure to distance themselves from the style as discussed in Chapter 3, Moret draws attention to *debussyste* harmony and texture by making it the first and last things a listener hears. The reversed practice suggests that the composer was confident that the innovative sounds would be well-received by consumers and his publisher. By shifting in the same composition from *debussyste* techniques to a Wagnerian style, which several earlier *debussystes* considered antithetical to
Debussyste figures but contained the innovations within the nineteenth-century formal conventions of salon music.

Example 4.2. Lenormand, “Ma barque,” mm. 1-6, melodic schemata indicated

Lenormand’s “Ma barque,” published in 1914, likewise drew on Debussyste techniques for decoration rather than structure and organization. The song (Ex. 4.2) features pentatonic sections, juxtaposed dissonant sonorities, spots of parlando vocal writing, and even a full measure of parallel voice leading. In spite of the surface novelties, Lenormand, like Moret, maintained a strong sense of the notated d minor

their expression, Moret indicated that he was either uncommitted to Debussyste aesthetics or unaware of the aesthetics that had informed the Debussyste techniques he was borrowing.
tonality, and cast these techniques into an unsophisticated ABA form. *Debussysme* was confined to the piano part, whereas the vocal part, with its restrained lyricism, could have been taken from a song by Massenet or Hahn. Although intriguingly pentatonic, the melodic line stays away from tonally misleading chromaticism, and repeated motives link the melodic phrases. The A section, for instance, contains three phrases, all two measures long, and they are linked motivically, a conventional melodic technique that avant-garde *debussystes* tended to avoid. Though some of Lenormand’s harmonic progressions might have been disconcerting to a listener, the melody is organized according to conventional aesthetic principles, and the narrow vocal range and lack of melismas would have made it easy for an amateur to perform.

Pop *debussyste* music provided amateur musicians the opportunity to play and sing compositions that showcased exciting modernist techniques without the technical difficulty that often came along with *debussyste* techniques; while early adopter *debussystes* targeted the concert stage, these late pieces were meant for the privacy of home. Woollett’s *Calme en mer*, written in 1923 for piano, suggests the influence of Debussy’s *Pagodes*, with its streaming gamelan texture, pentatonicism, and abundance of parallel fourths and fifths, but it lacks the sparkling virtuosity of Debussy’s score. Instances of similar figuration are shown in Example 4.3. Short, repetitive figures, uncomplicated rhythms, the lack of Debussy’s frequent octave doubling of melodies, and gestures that allow the hand to spend several measures in one position make Woollett’s piece easier to perform, while providing an amateur player with the thrill of a gamelan under his or her fingers.
While ninth chords and curious dissonances are frequent in *Calme en mer*, Woollett approached the larger harmonic structure pedantically, maintaining diatonic tonality and signifying modulation with explicit dominant-tonic motion. He laid out the material in short sections, recalling the sectional form of *Pagodes*, but placed these sections within a larger sonata form, a form that many of the more committed *debussystes* had rejected as a hindrance of the composer’s creativity. Two theme groups are presented on the first page and they return in the recapitulation; the first theme, consisting of parallel fourths in a dotted rhythm, is subjected to extensive motivic development. The final measures of the development provide the dramatic high point: a fortissimo dynamic marking and Wagnerian chromaticism create a feeling of triumphant soaring, which leads to a marked arrival of the final key, E major. The clearly demarcated signposts of sonata form guide the performer and listener along a familiar dramatic arc, as the sound of bells and gongs fills their imaginations.

**Example 4.3. Comparison of Similar Figuration in Woollett’s *Calme en mer* (1923) and Debussy’s *Pagodes***
Another pop *debussyste* composition for piano that would have been relatively easy to perform and comprehend is Lenormand’s *Six pièces brèves*, created in 1925. The composer eschewed repetition and included chains of parallel intervals, modal scales, pentatonicism, and melodic arabesques. Yet these compositions would still have appealed to amateurs with conservative tastes: in each of the pieces the opening material returns at the end and a single tonality clearly underscores the harmony. The majority of the material, like in *Calme en mer*, keeps the players’ hands in the same area of the keyboard for long periods of time, and the texture is always clearly separated into one part for each hand, making it more immediately comprehensible and therefore easier to learn than the sprawling textures and registral leaps common in the piano scores of Ravel, Schmitt, and Koechlin.

Gabriel Dupont and Louis Aubert were somewhat different from their pop *debussyste* colleagues in that they were younger and could count many of the *debussystes* as peers, unlike Lenormand, Woollett, and Moret. Yet they shared the latter group’s commitment to salon genres and opera—mainstream genres that their Conservatoire training had emphasized and where there was the most money to be made. Because they adopted *debussysme* in their youth, the maintenance of a certain reputation and audience was not at issue; they instead had to negotiate their interest in the techniques with a desire to garner the favor of the large audiences necessary to make their operas profitable enterprises.
Dupont garnered immediate success with his first opera, *La Cabrera*, which won him $10,000 in an opera competition held in Milan in 1903.\(^{121}\) During his short life he would focus his efforts on the stage, producing three additional operas that were all well-received by the time of his death in 1914. The composer also left two sets of solo piano pieces that exemplify the pop *debussyste* manner. *Les heures dolentes*, composed and published in 1905, is an expansive, melancholy collection that contains four pieces which showcase the *debussyste* harmonic and textural predilections, as well as a marked influence from Debussy. *Du soleil au jardin* is reminiscent of one of Debussy’s most popular piano pieces, *Jardins sous la pluie*, with its pictorial-fused, flowing texture; in it Dupont even utilized a few incomplete transitions in the *debussyste* manner. Because of the constant presence of periodic, shapely melodies, returning sections, and metric regularity, the sound of the piece remains relatively conventional in comparison to high *debussyste* works.\(^{122}\) *Le médecin* consists of an A section that is saturated with *debussyste* added-note sonorities and modalism, and a whole-tone B section. In it Dupont offered a simple version of orchestral and streaming textures that engender a low level of difficulty. *Nuit blanche*—*hallucination* and *La chanson du vent* are the other two pop *debussyste* pieces in *Les heures dolentes*. Maurice Dumesnil recalled that *Les heures dolentes* was “widely played at the time,” and Eduard Colonne presented four of the movements in an orchestral version on one of his Sunday concerts that targeted a large


\(^{122}\) Ricardo Viñes claimed that *Jardins sous la pluie* was Debussy’s most popular piano piece among amateur musicians. See Gubisch, “Le journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes,” 231.
audience.\textsuperscript{123} \textit{La maison dans les dunes}, another lengthy piano composition by Dupont where a \textit{debussyste} surface was set into conventional formal techniques, appeared in 1910.

Lenormand, Moret, Woollett, and Dupont consistently favored \textit{debussyste} techniques that mainly affected the surface-level of musical content over those techniques that addressed structure. In none of these examples of pop \textit{debussyste} composition did the four composers adopt one of the most radical \textit{debussyste} innovations: the eschewal of repetitive musical material and motivic development. In pop \textit{debussyste} songs the composers brought in melodic and rhythmic \textit{debussyste} elements, but only to a degree: they left intact conventional ideas of melodic organization and metrical clarity. Pop \textit{debussyste} melodies approached the \textit{Pelléas} manner in their narrow range and independence from the supporting material, yet they remained formally accessible: tuneful and organized into motivically related phrases. In the same way, pop \textit{debussyste} compositions contained interesting rhythmic details such as unusual subdivisions and hemiola, yet the composers maintained a strong sense of the notated meter and favored repeated rhythmic patterns.

The unorthodoxy of \textit{debussysme} was often decried by French critics during the 1890s and 1910s, with Debussy and Ravel regularly singled out as especially offensive. Such critics were reacting in part to the perceptual difficulty caused by several \textit{debussyste} techniques, including unorthodox voice leading, metrical ambiguity, idiomatic form, a

\textsuperscript{123} Including \textit{Nuit blanche—hallucinations}, \textit{La mort qui rôde}, and \textit{Les enfants qui jouent dans le jardin}. I have been unable to determine the 4th piece from \textit{Les heures dolentes} that Dupont orchestrated for the Colonne concert. Only one of these, \textit{Nuit blanche—hallucinations}, has a strongly \textit{debussyste} sound.
predilection for incompleteness, and non-schematic melody. Pop *debussyste* music relied heavily on just one of these techniques, the surprising aural sensations of *debussyste* harmonic movement, but typically kept their distance from the others. The resulting product was a score at once intriguing and comfortable. Their selective adoption of *debussyste* techniques allowed composers to avoid any negative attention from powerful critics, provide a fashionable product to sheet music consumers, and indulge their own interest in new sounds and techniques. The composers themselves were perhaps also uncomfortable with perceptual unorthodoxy. Because the contents of their scores and the marketing strategies used to sell them (discussed below) strongly suggest that they targeted an amateur public with conservative tastes, the practice of Dupont, Lenormand, Moret, and Woollett suggests that *debussyste* rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, and local organizational ideas had gained considerable currency by 1910. The pop *debussyste* practice also indicates, however, that conservative salons and amateur musicians remained wary of *debussyste* techniques that caused music to break with nineteenth-century paradigms.

Pop *debussyste* scores are characterized by a disintegrated language: *debussyste* techniques are isolated from each other and deployed conspicuously in the musical texture. This usage differed from the practice of many earlier adopters of *debussysme* who sought to infuse their compositions with *debussyste* aesthetic values and to play a role in the continued evolution of the techniques. The composers in the pop *debussyste* group were also less committed to *debussyste* practice. Dupont, Lenormand, Woollett, Aubert, and Moret were all incomplete adopters: that is, they used *debussyste* techniques

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124 See chapter 1.
in only some of their compositions or even in only some of the movements of a larger composition. Conversely, Ravel, Séverac, and Debussy all went through significant periods of time when most of their works were composed in a pervasively debussyste idiom. In addition to their caution in transgressing structural conventions, the late adopters’ intermittent engagement with debussyste techniques might have been symptomatic of the difficulty with which some composers had in mastering techniques that were so different from what they had learned and grown accustomed to. Perhaps instead of absorption and development, pop debussyste composers approached the adoption of debussysme as a process of isolation and replication.

**Pop Debussysme in Pedagogical Sources**

In 1911 Lenormand published his *Étude sur l’harmonie moderne*, which explicitly suggested this incomplete adoption process. In the book, Lenormand sought to “extract some of the most typical harmonic examples we have met with in the works of modern authors,” including consecutive parallel fifths, altered ninth chords, and unresolved appoggiaturas. The text comprises dissected examples of published scores, compositional exercises in which modernist techniques were pedantically imitated, and lists of rules for the usage of these techniques. In the preface Lenormand described his particular interest in the debussystes, referring to a school of composers with Debussy as their chief. He drew upon the music of both revolutionary and more conservative debussystes, and he excerpted Debussy’s scores more than anyone else’s. He believed

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126 The composition from which he drew most frequently was Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which Lenormand had studied with Charles Koechlin in 1903 and 1904.
that music must progress unceasingly, and that *debussyste* harmony was an important evolutionary stage. The *Étude* was meant as a first step on the way to “the didactic work which might build up a new musical system.”¹²⁷ Lenormand’s treatise likely strengthened the pop *debussyste* phenomenon, because it provided other composers with a quick overview of *debussyste* harmonic techniques that they could deploy selectively in their compositions, as Lenormand himself had done.

Several aspects of Lenormand’s harmonic treatise also suggest that *debussyste* harmony had become widespread in France by 1911. The wide variety of composers shown to be using unorthodox voice-leading techniques, which included Moret and Woollett, demonstrates that Debussy’s influence in harmony extended well beyond young radicals like Ravel and Caplet. Lenormand claimed that *debussyste* harmonic ideas, which had once been an elite expression, had even spread into the realm of amateur composition in a vulgarized form: he described the “widespread idea in the world of amateurs” that composers were free to write whatever harmonies they wanted without proper technical knowledge.¹²⁸ The intended audience for Lenormand’s treatise was also broad: it was published as a series in *Le monde musical*, a journal for the informed public who attended the major concert series.

Like Lenormand, Woollett sensed the growing popularity of radically new techniques around 1910 and desired to systematize this new musical language. He envisioned his *Pièces d’étude pour piano sur les mesures et les tonalités dit d’exception*,

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¹²⁷ Lenormand addressed the issue of the generational boundary his book crossed, because its embrace of modernist harmony might have seemed like irreverence towards earlier styles. He attempted to pacify anyone who might have been surprised by his association with these techniques with a promise that he had not forgotten the “masters of the past,” nor was he disavowing any of his earlier compositions. See Lenormand, *Study of Modern Harmony*, xi.

¹²⁸ Ibid., ix.
published in 1910, as a way to expose children’s ears to scales and meters from throughout history and the world. This exposure at a young age was necessary, he claimed, because it would allow the musicians of tomorrow to execute and understand contemporary French compositional languages, in which these “exceptional” usages were so pervasive.\textsuperscript{129} The “young debussyste school” received special mention as having developed the sonorous possibilities of the whole tone scale.\textsuperscript{130} Several compositions in Woollett’s collection introduce the child to the debussyste sound-world, but at a relatively low level of technical difficulty. Cloches lointaines, dedicated to debussyste Schmitt, includes unresolved ninth chords, widely spaced sonorities, fragments in place of conventional phrase structure, and a whole-tone sonority in place of the dominant at the final cadence (see Example 4.4). The musical material of Angoisse dans la nuit, dedicated to debussyste Caplet, is derived from a scale of Woollett’s own creation that combines a whole tone collection and two church modes. The frequent use of tied notes engenders some metrical ambiguity and the level of dissonance increases throughout the piece.

The final composition, Crépuscule, written by pianist and composer Lucien Wurmser, is an apotheosis of the pop debussyste language. Wurmser made liberal use of extended harmonies such as the progression $E^9-F^9-F#^9-G^9-c^7-f^9$ in mm. 8-9 (see Ex. 4.5), but combined them with a chromatic and schematic melody in the soprano voice. Crépuscule also demonstrates a mixture of moments of metric ambiguity and predictable rhythmic patterns. The final section, marked calme, Wurmser juxtaposed standard

\textsuperscript{129} Woollett, \textit{Pièces d’étude pour piano sur les mesures et les tonalités dit d’exception} (Paris: Leduc, 1910), 1.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 3. Woollett was apologetic about having mentioned the debussystes, “who were so decried by some,” at this point in the introduction. His tone betrayed his anticipation that a significant portion of the amateur consumers who would be interested in the book of etudes might belong in the segment of the French musical world that still perceived these composers as unruly iconoclasts.
debussyste techniques in disparate ranges of the keyboard: a whole-tone version of the opening figure and a bell-like series of parallel fifths.

Example 4.4. Woollett, *Cloches du soir*, mm. 47-55

Example 4.5. Wurmsen, *Crépuscule*, mm. 1-11
Woollett’s piano method book offers further evidence of how far Debussy’s influence had spread into mainstream musical culture by 1910: from avant-garde concert music to mainstream salon music to piano method books. *Debussyste* techniques had become so common among composers that even children learning to play the piano would not be able to avoid them. Woollett explained his hope in the preface: if children’s ears were exposed to a variety of musical possibilities, as adults they would be open to music from any time period and any place on the globe.\(^{131}\) His conception resonated with the debussyste aesthetic ideal that composers should not be constrained by rules or tradition; Woollett’s manual thus passed along not only the sound of *debussysme* to French youth, but also this fragment of *debussyste* aesthetics.

**The Marketing of Debussyste Sounds**

Moret, Lenormand, and Dupont shared a common publishing house, Heugel, which specialized in sheet music for amateurs and opera-lovers. Heugel also published the twice-monthly music and theater magazine *Le ménestrel* for this market, an ingenious way to bring its newest scores to the audience’s attention. The journal maintained a sharp focus on conservative composers who continued to write in nineteenth-century idioms, on mainstream performance venues, and on amateur music making in the home. In her article “*Pelléas* and Power,” Jann Pasler classifies *Le ménestrel* as a publication for the “conservative, anti-Wagnerian (musical public).”\(^{132}\) In contrast to other music journals which Pasler labels according to class, ideology, or the catering to music specialists

\(^{131}\) Ibid.

\(^{132}\) Jann Pasler, “*Pelléas* and Power: Forces behind the Reception of Debussy’s Opera,” *19th-Century Music* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 348.
(composers, or music historians), the descriptors she provides for Le ménestrel suggest a large audience made up of non-specialists in music. Mixed in with biographical articles on venerated composers, reviews of operas and the Sunday concerts, and articles on musical instruction for children, were advertisements for Heugel publications. The critics who wrote the magazine’s reviews emphasized opera premieres by Heugel’s composers.

The magazine was originally linked to Parisian salon culture: in the 1830s when it was founded, Le ménestrel sent out correspondents to give glowing reports on the music of Heugel composers performed at the most fashionable salons.\textsuperscript{133} Although this element no longer appeared in the magazine after 1890, it was still in tune with the lingering nineteenth-century tastes, intimate genres, and amateur abilities of the conservative salons.\textsuperscript{134} Le ménestrel virtually ignored the artistic avant-garde, and it had full faith in the instruction of the Conservatoire; for example, it continued to laud Charpentier’s Louise into the 1920s, although the work had generated only fleeting interest among musical elites at its premiere in 1901.\textsuperscript{135}

Because Le ménestrel was so finely attuned to the tastes of conservative musical amateurs and salon culture, it provides an excellent window into this population’s understanding of and feelings towards debussysme. Particularly useful is the score subscription, because it reveals what kind of music Heugel, a seasoned publishing house, judged would be well-received by a wide audience. Composers whom the editor favored for the subscription included Hahn, Fauré, Massenet, Moret, and Lenormand. This list

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\textsuperscript{133} Tunley, \textit{Salons}, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{134} Around 1900 essentially all Parisian composers were attending salons, and they were primarily distinguished by repertory and attitudes towards music (e.g. whether or not it was appropriate to carry on discussion during performances). See Chimènes, \textit{Mécènes}, 32-39, 175.
\end{flushright}
suggests that the magazine catered to *mélomane* musical amateurs and the conservative salons in which these composers were known to take part. Heugel’s short descriptions of the piano pieces and songs that were included in the subscription also show how novel *debussyste* sounds needed to be presented to this audience so that they would be accepted as beautiful music.

Moret seems to have been especially successful at writing pop *debussyste* compositions that were popular with middle-class musical amateurs. In 1908 and 1913 some of his pop *debussyste* songs were included in *Le ménestrel’s* subscription.¹³⁶ The editor would frequently excerpt songs from a larger composition for the subscription to entice the readers to purchase the entire work from his publishing house. On October 17, 1908 Heugel showcased Moret’s Klingsor songs, selecting the less daring of the two *debussyste* selections, “Chanson au bord de l’eau,” for inclusion. Heugel described the *debussyste* gesture of the A section as an “ingenious discovery” that conveyed “the noise of paddles in the water, with their light clapping.”¹³⁷ The innovations of the *debussyste* piano part, unlike anything Moret had previously composed, were validated because they derived from the work’s pictorial quality.

In 1913 *Le ménestrel* published two songs from Moret’s *L’île d’émail, songes d’exil*. Heugel’s introductory comments about the work conveyed his assumption that the songs would be well-received by amateur performers and audiences:

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¹³⁶ Several of Lenormand’s songs appeared in the *Le ménestrel*, but all of his *debussysme* works were excluded from it, which suggests that Heugel had a narrow idea of the innovations he could market to his readers, and that Lenormand’s brand of pop *debussysme* did not fit. The same was true of Dupont’s compositions where *debussyste* and conventional techniques mixed. Although *Les heures dolentes* and *La maison dans les dunes* contained *debussyste* movements, none of these were included in the magazine’s score subscription. Many of them were perhaps too technically demanding, and in others Dupont may have over-indulged in unusual and dissonant harmony.

The song cycles of Ernest Moret are always very anticipated and sought after by delicate amateurs who anticipate their appearance. This new set of music, that he calls *The Enameled Island*, will have, we are certain, all the success of the previous works by this young master.\footnote{“Les recueils d’Ernest Moret sont toujours très attendus, très recherchés des amateurs délicats qui en guettent l’apparition. Cette nouvelle plaquette musicale, qu’il intitule *L’île d’émail*, aura, nous en sommes certainly, tout le succès des œuvres précédentes du jeune maître.” Unsigned insert, *Le ménestrel* (Sept. 6, 1913): 283. Curinier noted Moret’s success with salon audiences in 1906 in remarkably similar terms: “The works of this composer, of an art simultaneously skillful and spontaneous, have always obtained a favorable reception among the choice public to which they are addressed.” See Curinier, *Dictionnaire*, 70.}

Heugel acknowledged the accusation of effeminacy that was often leveled against the *debussyste* sound, yet stripped it of its derogatory meaning, because amateurs who delighted in delicate music were his target demographic. His comments also exploited the real relationship between the delicate *debussyste* sound and the intimate atmosphere of the avant-garde salons that had stimulated *debussyste* experimentation, as well as the link between innovative *debussyste* techniques and conventional markers of exoticism.

For *L’île d’émail* Moret set six poems by diverse authors that explore broadly the theme of escape. *Debussyste* techniques abound in all of the songs, and the performance direction for “Fleurs du ciel gris” is a perfect description of the *debussyste* sound: “very connected, monotone and as though suspended in a vague atmosphere.” Pictorial-fused piano textures returned in these songs, especially in “Dans le kiosque rose” (see Ex. 4.6), and soft dynamic levels dominate. While Moret’s melodies in *L’île d’émail* retained gentle French lyricism and a sense of purposeful shaping, phrases sometimes display a narrow vocal register and the repetition of a single pitch, and the vocal part obtains independence from the piano part in places.
“Fleurs du ciel gris,” shown in Example 4.7, contains particularly clear examples of this development in Moret’s approach to vocal melody. Sharp, unprepared dissonances are not uncommon in the score. Moret made pervasive use of long chains of ninth and seventh chords: the harmonic progression of “Dans le kiosque rose” contains twelve extended harmonies in a row in which the B major tonic is entirely absent. At several moments in L’île d’email, tonality is ambiguous due to tonal uncertainty in the vocal part and the lack of consonant triads that might serve as a tonic. In his earlier songs Moret
maintained tonal clarity at least in the vocal line even when it was lacking in the piano part; in these songs he pushed his engagement with debussysme further, and the indefinite and vaporous musical material he arrived at fits perfectly with the underlying themes in the poetry of daydreaming and escape to an unreal land.

In L’île d’émail, by integrating relatively innovative debussyste elements with repetitive material cast into simple sectional forms, clear phrase structure, and schematically organized melodies, Moret succeeded in composing songs that were not too far removed from the Romantic sounds of the conservative salons, yet still offered exciting moments and novel colors. The two songs from the set featured in Le Ménestrel’s score subscription, “Au fil de l’eau” and “Les oiseaux,” exemplify this musical alloy. Although the piano parts of both songs are striking in sound, they are also highly repetitive: the strophic “Les oiseaux” comprises exact repeats of musical material organized into periodic, four-measure phrases, and a short-long rhythmic motive pervades the entire song. While Moret structured “Au fil de l’eau” as a more complex, through-composed form, the undulating motive of thirds that opens the song undergoes extensive development, a technique that engenders comfortable repetition yet was at odds with high-debussyste practice. Moret seems to have known how to provide the population that tended to purchase Heugel’s sheet music with daring musical material mixed with just the right amount of familiarity.

In his description of “Les oiseaux,” Heugel called the birds in the poem “the pretext for this musician-poet of these dreams tinted with exoticism, where his rare
emotion is put to such good use.”

Heugel prepared his readers for the unconventional qualities of Moret’s Debussyste song by resorting to the poem’s imagery, just as he had in the case of “Chanson au bord de l’eau.” In the earlier case, the editor explained unusual sounds as a pictorial sound effect. For L’île d’émail, he framed such sounds as appropriately strange because they were a representation of an exotic locale: the comment likely addressed the pervasive dissonance and spots of bizarre, parallel voice leading (co-modulation) in the piano (see Ex. 4.8), which were unusually daring for Moret.

Example 4.8. Moret, “Les oiseaux,” mm. 22-26

Heugel would include one more pop Debussyste song by Moret in the score subscription of Le ménestrel, and the editor again provided a picturesque pretext for the song’s unorthodoxies. “Les fileuses” appeared in the 1914 subscription, and the pictorial-fused texture, unconventional harmonic progressions and ungraceful melody were

139 “Sont le pretexte pour le musicien-poete de ces rêveries teintées d’exotisme où sa rare emotion trouve si bien à s’employer.” Unsigned insert, Le ménestrel (Oct. 18, 1913): 331.
described as evoking the romantic mystery heard in the songs of Schumann and Schubert, and the action of a spinning wheel. Because on multiple occasions between 1908 and 1914 Heugel felt it necessary to provide a poetic rationale for the novelties in some of Moret’s songs, readers of *Le Ménestrel*, members of the middle class who enjoyed going to the opera and the major concert series were perhaps not yet ready to accept *debussyste* music as pleasing and substantial in its own right. Then again, the magazine had given readers little reason to think positively of the innovative *debussyste* sound, because it consistently reviewed *debussyste* compositions negatively until after World War I. In a review of the Société nationale concert at which Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* for orchestra was premiered in 1899, the author singled out Ravel’s composition as the single unsuccessful piece on the program, “whose curious orchestration could not save it.” Arthur Pougin condemned Schmitt’s *Psaume XLVII* in harsh terms as unorganized sound after its 1907 premiere, even though the piece retains several conventions of vocal sacred music.

The same critic had also offered one of the most negative reviews of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in *Le ménestrel* in 1902, branding the composer a “musical anarchist” whose transgression of the rules of music at every turn was unacceptable. Pougin belittled Debussy and all of the young composers of his “new musical school” as immature snobs whose claim that they would write innovative and meaningful music would never amount to anything. In the *Pelléas* review, Pougin essentially instructed the readers of *Le ménestrel* to ignore frivolous *debussyste* music, as did other writers for the magazine.

ménestrel’s personnel tried to convince readers that debussysme was not only bad music, but also a mere fad that was beneath its cultivated readers. The position was useful for Heugel on a practical level, because the company did not generally publish any of the composers associated with debussysme, but personal biases also seem to have influenced the stance against the innovative composers. Jacques Heugel, who had taken over from his father Henri as editor in 1916, belittled all modern artistic trends in a 1921 article on the grounds that the artists were losing their true sense of purpose. Included in what he considered an unfortunate trend of innovation was the “exquisite Debussy.”143 Even though Debussy had become conventional in many circles, the editor at the helm of Heugel still responded to him as, at best, a passing curiosity.

The institution’s view of Debussy had changed little in two decades; it thus seems remarkable that Heugel would go against his strong personal opinions and include any pieces influenced by debussysme in the score subscription, which effectively guided the tastes and consumption patterns of Le ménestrel’s readership. Moret’s Klingsor and L’île d’émail songs were the first pieces with a marked debussyste influence by any composer included in the subscription, which suggests that Moret’s unique stylistic hybrid contained enough conventional elements to convince Heugel that it would be economically profitable to direct readers to pop debussyste songs. Moret was one of Heugel’s heavyweight composers, as shown by the prominence given to him in the advertisements in the magazine and the editor’s decision to place his compositions in the subscription frequently. That a composer who had already achieved such success in this market would turn to debussyste techniques in 1908, and that Heugel would encourage

his subscribers to buy these compositions, indicates the significant influence of the Debussyste trend on French musical culture by this point in time.

**Pop Debussysme and Exoticism**

Several of the compositions that have been reviewed in this chapter bring together Debussyste musical material and exotic content, made explicit by the texts of songs or the titles of instrumental works. Woollett’s *Calme en mer* for piano was part of a set titled *Impressions de voyage*, Lenormand’s “Ma barque” was a setting of an ancient Chinese poem, and *L’île d’email* portrayed the fantasy of escape to distant lands. (These composers did not always connect Debussysme with exoticism: Moret and Lenormand also utilized Debussyste techniques to set texts that concerned French culture, and Woollett employed them in “absolute” music such as his Fifth Violin Sonata.) The innovators and earlier adopters also wrote Debussyste compositions with exotic titles or texts, such as Debussy’s *Pagodes*, Ravel’s *Shéhérazade*, and Caplet’s *Paroles à l’absente*. For debussystes of all types, exotic themes may have been a useful pretext that helped them to conceive of music that broke free from the conventions of their own culture. Sindhumathi Revuluri identifies musical exoticism in fin-de-siècle France as musical constructions that were realized within the possibilities of French musical languages yet are meant to exhibit aberrance. Transcribers of non-Western music often created these constructions, including parallel fifths, hemiola, and jarring metrical shifts, as they grappled with foreign sounds in their own musical vocabulary. Some of these gestures were assimilated into the modernist musical language, losing their exotic
identity.\textsuperscript{144} Annegret Fauser has explained some of Debussy’s innovations as a result of such exploration of a distant culture as innovation within one’s own culture.\textsuperscript{145} Pagodes is a hallmark example of this kind of assimilation, because it was not stylized primitivism, but instead a transformation of gamelan melody and texture into virtuosic music that manifested Debussy’s own artistic values.\textsuperscript{146}

Thus, exoticism might have been a pretext for innovation that stimulated the imagination of a composer searching for new paradigms. For relatively unadventurous composers like Moret, Lenormand, and Woollett, the transition into debussysme was a sizeable leap, and this might explain why exotic themes are more common in the subset of pop debussyste scores than in the entire population of debussyste scores. Louis Aubert, for example, created his most thoroughly debussyste material in Six poèmes arabes. In addition to overtly exotic elements, the songs contain vocal melodies in the manner of Pelléas, streaming texture, and soft normative dynamic levels. Aubert also eschewed repetitive form in Six poèmes arabes—a rare decision for him.

Another possible reason for the stronger correlation between debussysme and exoticism in the pop debussyste subset is that exotic subjects would have been an especially convenient way to present innovative material to a listener or peer with conservative musical tastes. An aberrant subject could be used as an excuse for shocking sounds, as was the case in Henri Heugel’s description of Moret’s L’île d’émail. Another example of this strategy can be found in Woollett’s description of Henri Rabaud in his

\textsuperscript{144} Sindhumathi Revuluri, “On Anxiety and Absorption: Musical Encounters with the Exotique in Fin-de-Siècle France” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2007), 113-17.
\textsuperscript{145} Annegret Fauser, Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 200.
\textsuperscript{146} Ralph Locke also describes Pagodes as Debussy’s harmonious blend of absorbed exotic elements and his personal idiom, rather than overt portrayals of an Other, a kind of exoticism which Debussy disdained. See Locke, Musical Exoticism, 29, 217, and 234-236.
Woollett explained that his peer, who had established a reputation as a conservative composer, avoided the potential scandal his use of debussyste harmonies might have caused because he wisely deployed them in exotic pieces. As a result “the greatest boldness of ‘pointillist’ harmonies is only a way of spicing up music of delicious rhythm and orientalism in good taste.” Woollett himself also composed several pop debussyste compositions with exotic subjects. As another older, established composer making a surprising foray into debussysme, he might also have felt more comfortable experimenting under the shield of an exotic theme.

Pop Debussysme’s Aesthetic of Sensation

The phenomenon of pop debussysme might seem analogous to middlebrow art or kitsch as these terms have been defined by Clement Greenberg or Virginia Woolf: sifting through avant-garde artworks originally conceived with little concern for the marketplace in order to sell their innovations to middle-class audiences who wanted the cachet of high art. It is tempting to interpret the pop debussyste phenomenon in this manner as a kind of conspicuous consumption, wherein middle-class consumers became enamored with the debussyste sound because they saw it as a means of upward social mobility. We do not, however, have direct evidence that composers understood the market value of debussyste


148 Such approaches to the consumption of art have been offered by Pierre Bourdieu, Colin Campbell, and of course Anton Veblen in his landmark description of “conspicuous consumerism.” John Storey, in a review of these theorists’ ideas, notes that viewing consumption of cultural products as a way to show class distinction can be problematic because it assumes that all people are concerned with showing this distinction and do it in the same way. As I have noted about pop debussysme, it is possible for a consumer’s notion of art to relate to class, but we cannot assume this interpretation in the absence of evidence for it. See John Storey, Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life (London: Arnold, 1999), 36-47.
techniques in these coldly calculating terms, nor that consumers desired to use their pop debussyste scores for social gain. Moret, for example, had already established himself in the privileged Lemaire salon before his scores begin to show a debussyste influence, and by 1908 Debussy’s music was no longer associated with elitist tastes.\footnote{I hypothesize that subscribers to \textit{Le ménestrel} were mostly interested in making music at home, alone or with close family and friends, due to the inclusion of articles in the magazine on music in the home, such as those on music instruction for children.}

In fact, \textit{Le ménestrel} had moved away from associating music with social class by 1900. The correspondents who reported on salon activity for the magazine during the mid-nineteenth century typically noted the important socialites who were in attendance; but as the reporting focus shifted from the salons to public concert series, this type of information was dropped from the review columns. This change was logical given the different social environment of the mainstream concerts versus the private salon: between 1900 and 1925 \textit{Le ménestrel}’s correspondents focused on the Sunday and Conservatoire concert series, which were meant to be reasonably priced, in large venues, and open to a wide public. In columns devoted to these concerts, writers stopped their earlier practice of naming elite members in the audience. As a result, there is no indication that subscribers to \textit{Le ménestrel} came primarily from a particular class, were preoccupied with upward social mobility, or were directed by the creators of the publication to make associations between certain kinds of music and class.

Evidence suggests that instead of marketing debussysme as a sign of the upper class, the conservative critics and publishers who influenced the consumer group with similar tastes marketed debussysme as valuable because it created novel and powerful sensations. Heugel’s descriptions of debussyste harmony in Moret’s songs and Woollett’s
reading of Rabaud’s usage of debussyste techniques are compatible with this notion: for both writers, debussysme—primarily debussyste harmonic techniques—could spice up a composer’s otherwise conventional vocabulary, especially if the composer sought to evoke exotic cultures.

The assigning of pop debussysme to a middlebrow construction of art is also troublesome because there is evidence that several of the composers who developed the hybrid practice were interested in the artistic value of debussyste techniques; that is, they were not studying them for financial profit alone. Lenormand and Woollett were excited about debussyste techniques to the extent that they cultivated relationships with younger composers outside of their peer group in order to learn about it. Although nothing is known of Moret’s motivations for taking part in debussysme, it is notable that Moret did not seem to have a compelling economic reason to do so. Henri and Jacques Heugel, Moret’s publishers, were leery of innovation: they would not likely have urged Moret to expand his vocabulary to include modernist techniques. Even after Moret adopted some of the debussyste elements, purely conventional salon pieces still constituted the bulk of his output, and Le ménestrel’s score subscription contained more of the conventional pieces by Moret than those in the pop debussyste vein. A more compelling explanation than the middlebrow art notion for the rise of the pop debussyste hybrid is that composers and consumers were intrigued at about the same time by the sensational qualities of the debussyste sound. The notions of delicacy and music for pleasure were already a part of salon music culture: understood as a new kind of exciting sensation, debussysme found a place within this world.
The demand for the novel *debussyste* sound among purchasers of sheet music does not seem to have been cultivated by the “opinion leaders” (Rogers’s term for the most influential people in a social group) of this consumer group: at least one anti-modernist publisher, Heugel, who targeted this population and the chief composers associated with it, such as Reynaldo Hahn and Saint-Saëns, remained hostile to *debussysme* even as audiences warmed to it. Instead, composers who had already adopted *debussysme* before 1908 and publishers such as Durand and Hartmann who promoted their music had already done much of the work of popularizing the unique aural sensations *debussyste* practice offered.\(^\text{150}\) The vast majority of the pervasively *debussyste* compositions in Appendix A were published immediately or soon after their completion, which indicates that despite the iconoclasm of *debussysme*, some publishers considered its merits worth the risk as early as 1890. The statistic might be regarded instead as a testament to the relative indulgence of early twentieth-century French publishing houses, but even editors who supported innovative music were still selective about which compositions they released to the public.

A case in point is that of Charles Koechlin, who throughout his lifetime struggled to find publishers for his compositions, which were often idiosyncratic and unwieldy. In 1916 Koechlin, who was encouraged by the enthusiasm of younger composers for his scores, sent his Violin Sonata to Durand for consideration. In the letter that accompanied the manuscript, he noted that Milhaud had recently performed the piece, and that it

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\(^{150}\) Durand ran his own musical salon, at which *debussystes* including Debussy, Caplet, Schmitt, Aubert, and Roger-Ducasse sometimes premiered new works. In 1913 the publisher also put on a series of public concerts titled *Concerts consacrés à la musique française moderne*, at which several works by the same group of composers that had already achieved some favor with audiences and the press were performed together. See Durand et fils, *Concerts consacrés*. 

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conformed to “modern trends.” Debussysme had gained great popularity by 1916 and the rigorous, tuneful sound of the style dépouillé, which Koechlin drew upon in the second and fourth movement, had picked up momentum. Durand, however, rejected Koechlin’s sonata because he did not believe its “very odd [très spéciale] formal plan” would be viable in the market, and in later letters the composer could not convince Durand to change this judgment.\footnote{The exchange between Koechlin and Durand can be found in Koechlin, \textit{Correspondance, Selections} (Paris: Editions Richard-Masse, 1982), 28-31.} On the other hand, Durand had been willing to publish Debussy’s \textit{Arabesques} for piano and his string quartet, and Aubert’s somewhat debussyste \textit{Rimes tendres}, even though he did not believe they would make him much money.\footnote{When Louis Aubert showed Durand his \textit{Rimes tendres} in 1899 the publisher noticed Debussy’s influence on the songs and remarked that Debussy’s \textit{Arabesques} and his string quartet had not sold well, yet he still agreed to peruse Aubert’s songs and quickly published them. See Marcel Landowski and Guy Morançon, \textit{Louis Aubert: musicien français} (Paris: Durand, 1967), 25.} In these dealings, Durand seems to have negotiated between economic success and the desire to promote new art, and a major influence on his decision seems to have been the composer’s approach to form: it is notable that \textit{Arabesques} and \textit{Rimes tendres} do not contain any of the disturbing formal challenges to nineteenth-century structures that bothered Durand in Koechlin’s violin sonata.

As these compositions entered the market and they began to appear on concert programs and in salons, the taste for debussyste aural sensations spread. The rising popularity of Debussy’s compositions was essential to this process. The success of \textit{Pelléas et Mélisande} transformed the concertgoing public’s perception of Debussy from an esoteric curiosity into a beloved national composer. By 1908 \textit{Pelléas, Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune} and other compositions by Debussy were performed regularly on major concert stages, and such repetition would have habituated broad audiences to
his innovative techniques and created in them a taste for the sensuous pleasure that they offered. The migration of Debussy’s and Ravel’s scores to the Sunday concert series (Colonne, Pasdeloup, etc) was perhaps the most significant shift that brought the debussyste sound to the attention of large audiences. Because the institutions that influenced audience tastes and created market demands were intertwined, once some of them embraced a certain trend, they would all have to follow, or risk losing a position in this lucrative institutional web. Le ménestrel, for instance, was committed to covering the Sunday concert series, and generally reviewed their programs favorably. As a result, the tastes the journal affirmed to its readers were to an extent determined by the pieces the directors of these concerts chose for their programs. When after Debussy’s death his music started to appear frequently on the Concerts Colonne, suddenly more progressive critics such as Gaston Carraud had to be recruited to cover these events for Le ménestrel in a positive tone, even though more conservative critics in the same magazine continued to send the opposite message that debussysme was merely a shallow fad. At a certain point, even conservative institutions like Le ménestrel had to go with the rising tide of the popularity of the debussyste sound.

As a result of the increased visibility and prestige of Debussy, critics and audiences increasingly viewed Debussy’s compositions as French masterworks. As reviewed in the previous chapter, the affirmation of debussysme at music schools at the same time caused the debussyste language to spread, and its prestige grew as several of the debussystes gained positions of authority. Pop debussyste compositions allowed amateurs contact with the fashionable and voluptuous debussyste world in pieces that
maintained a relatively low level of technical and interpretive difficulty, in contrast to the
virtuosic piano pieces of Ravel or the demanding songs of Maurice Delage.

The construal of debussysme as interesting sensation by conservative critics in Le
ménestrel was not a new phenomenon: when Debussy’s music began to receive more
attention after 1902, many critics who championed Debussy found descriptions of the
peculiar feelings his music evoked in them useful as they searched for an explanation for
why his compositions were so captivating. The premiere of Pelléas forced many critics
who had never commented on Debussy before into a confrontation with his music, and
many of them relied on the sensation construct, with particular attention to harmony.
André Hallays’s review is characteristic of this kind of critical response. He described the
score as “impressionistic” because Debussy used novel harmonies to capture the fugitive
colorations of the world. Hallays marveled at the seductive delicacy of the opera: “It is
quivering and subtle grace, it is the elegance of a style that is at once the most precious
and supple.”153 Samuel Rousseau, an established composer of opera who was older than
Debussy, was baffled by the novelty of Pelléas in his review in L’éclair, yet in his mixed
report he paid several compliments to the exquisite quality of the music. The audacious
harmonies were unacceptable, of that this reviewer was sure, but he could not resist the
strong effect that overwhelmed him as these harmonies entered his ears.154 Both of these
reviews appeared in publications that were mainstream in the sense that they addressed a
wide rather than a specialized readership. Although some critics perceived the weighty
goals underpinning Debussy’s techniques, many of them understood his style as a

collection of techniques that emphasized novel sounds and scorned formal techniques, and judged it positively if they enjoyed his expanded vocabulary or negatively if they were offended by what it lacked. Thus, by 1902 opinion leaders in the mainstream press had already begun to explain Debussy’s music, which was typically the metonymic representative of debussysme in the French press, in terms of imprecise, sensational experiences.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, other debussyste innovators and early adopters garnered attention; when these compositions were reviewed, critics continued to depend on descriptions of the interesting sensations of the debussyste sound, often making no substantial comments about structure or aesthetics. Although detractors tended to describe debussyste scores in similar terms—as music that consisted of nothing but sensations or the captured emotions of the characters—the effect was construed as liberated by some reviewers and shallow by others. Chalupt raved about a performance of Bonheur’s “O grand vent” in 1910, which he experienced as “an impalpable work, deliciously nuanced, that utterly ravished me.”155 Another critic cast the debussyste qualities of Le Flem’s symphony, which was premiered in 1907 at the Société nationale, in a negative light: “it also seemed vague, without a solid sense of line, colored by debussyste reminiscences, a kind of study of interesting timbres, but hardly moving.”156 This critic heard only interesting novelties in the second movement of the symphony, and

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155 René Chalupt, “Le mois musicien,” La phalange (June 20, 1910. Quoted in Labussière, Raymond Bonheur, 118.
because it had failed to meet his expectations for emotionally moving music, he
ultimately deemed the work vacuous.

When *Le ménestrel’s* concert reviewers warmed to Debussy in 1908, it was in the
sensuous delights of his music that they located the meaning and value of the *debussyste*
sound. One reviewer, J. Jemain, seemed to battle opposing forces within himself in
reviews of Debussy’s orchestral works from November 1908. He described the “curious
pages, captivating in spots” and “orchestration fertile in new effects” of *La mer*, but
wrote off these exciting aspects of the work as an empty display of the composer’s
cleverness (*jeu d’esprit*). Just one week later the critic began a review of Debussy’s
*Nocturnes* with similar descriptions about the powerful effects of the music, but this time
he concluded in a state of defeat, as Debussy’s decadent techniques vanquished him:

>The *Nocturnes* of M. Debussy, already performed on earlier concerts,
were received sympathetically by a portion of the audience. *Nuages*,
*Fêtes*, *Sirènes* are curious pieces, shimmering, with coloristic
instrumentation, of an infinitely seductive impressionism, defiant of all
analysis, which one cannot help but enjoy even as one does not know why;
dreamy visions, a music of dust and trimmed down themes, hesitant
architecture that disappears in the fog…The author perhaps only affects
our nerves, exciting us or even irritating us without moving us; but the
result is there, undeniable; at the end he still charms us. The potion that he
pours down our throats is magical: it is without a doubt poisonous, but
how its taste is exquisite!\(^\text{157}\)

Jemain had probably heard Debussy’s *Nocturnes* several times by 1908, and although the
composition continued to defy his expectations about how good music was to be

\(^{157}\) “Les *Nocturnes* de M. Debussy, déjà entendus ailleurs, ont reçu d’une partie de l’auditoire un accueil
sympathique. *Nuages*, *Fêtes*, *Sirènes*, sont des pièces curieuses, chatoyantes, à l’instrumentation colorée,
d’un impressionnisme infiniment séduisant, défiant toute analyse, que l’on ne peut se défendre d’aimer,
encore qu’on se demande pourquoi, visions de rêve, poussière de musique aux thèmes menus, architecture
indécis s’estompant dans la brume…L’auteur n’agit que sur nos nerfs peut-être et nous excite, nous irrite
même sans nous émouvoir; mais le résultat est là, indéniable, il finit même par nous charmer. Le philtre
qu’il nous verse est magique: c’est sans doute un poison, mais combien son goût est exquis!...” J. Jemain,
constructed, he had come to begrudgingly appreciate the powerful sensations Debussy conjured in him.

When conservative reviewers, such as Jemain, were forced to confront Debussy’s music after he gained a consistent presence on the Sunday concerts, they were taken by the sensuous qualities of the music and began to market the *debussyste* sound in terms of novel sensation. At the same time, such reviewers proved to be completely unaware or uninterested in the deeper aesthetic significance of *debussyste* techniques as a cooperative portrayal of the movement of thought, or their correspondence to contemporaneous philosophy and literary aesthetics.\(^\text{158}\) Conservative members of the press could not reconcile *debussyste* structural concepts with the nineteenth-century masterworks that they held up as standards of good music, but they could still appreciate the more accessible surface features these techniques engendered. Their reviews helped to circulate the notion among mainstream music consumers that *debussymse* was all about the pleasure of a peculiar experience, even though Debussy disliked this imprecise language used to describe his music.\(^\text{159}\)

Some of the composers writing pop *debussyste* music even indicated that they understood *debussysme* as primarily useful for the surface-level effects that it created. In the introduction to the *Etude sur l’harmonie moderne*, Lenormand understood the impetus behind the harmonies of the “modern school” in 1911 to be a striving towards freedom from older systems, “without having any other guide save the intuition of a new

\(^\text{158}\) Some other critics did notice these aesthetic issues: see chapter 2, pp. 119-122 and 127-129.

\(^\text{159}\) Debussy wrote to Durand about the orchestral *Images*, “J’essaie de faire ‘autre chose’ – en quelque sorte, des réalités – ce que les imbéciles appellent ‘impressionisme’, terme aussi mal employé que possible…” Debussy to Durand, March 1908, in *Lettres de Claude Debussy à son éditeur*, 58. Similarly, René Dumesnil recalled that Debussy hated being called an impressionist because it implied that his music was a blurry mess, even as he strove for clarity. See *Debussy Remembered*, 160.
idea of beauty.” Woollett similarly described the “ultra-modern” debussystes in his Histoire de la musique as composers who “repudiated the old rules for harmonic progression and saw in sonorities nothing more than a method of coloration.” The two statements both emphasized the novel sound and unbounded compositional freedom of the debussystes over precise compositional strategies or aesthetic goals. At a later point in the work Woollett described La mer as a steady stream of rustling sounds and sensuous pleasures, and Debussy’s Nocturnes as “music more taken by the picturesque…and the description of sensations.”

Both Lenormand and Woollett also divided the population of debussystes into multiple categories in their books, based on the extent to which each composer adopted Debussy’s ideas. According to their descriptions of the pop debussyste category (neither of them gives the phenomenon a specific name) they both implied that their own music would be included within it. Even though a large number of composers came under the influence of debussyste innovations, Woollett stated that the “true disciples of Claude Debussy” who “accepted all of the techniques” were very few, and included, Ravel, Caplet, and Roger-Ducasse. The second kind of debussystes “assimilated the harmonic material while retaining a predilection for weighty constructions and solid, logical developments,” and seemed to include Paul Le Flem and other former students of d’Indy. The third category corresponds most clearly to the pop debussystes: “others were not completely able to reject their old style, which was enriched by novel combinations

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160 Lenormand, Study of Modern Harmony, ix.
162 Ibid., 397-399.
without renouncing traditional concepts." Woollett provided no specific examples of composers in the last category, but his descriptions of Rabaud’s and Lenormand’s adoption of debussyste harmony in the same book suggests that he would have positioned them there. Given his understanding of debussysme as a collection of special effects, as discussed earlier, Woollett might have also placed himself in the third category.

Lenormand likewise distinguished debussyste composers of the “first rank,” who employed all the modernist harmonic techniques that he had catalogued in unified material, and others who “complicating the harmony simply with the pleasure of the grammarian, class themselves rather among the theorists than among the creators, which nevertheless assures them an important place.” The author of a theoretical treatise on modernist harmony, Lenormand falls into the theorist category within his own classification of the debussystes. Both Woollett and Lenormand described a category of debussyste who selectively engaged with innovative techniques to complicate the musical surface, yet neither author attached negative value to the practice. They judged pop debussysme and a more rigorous engagement with debussysme as valid options, which is logical because they themselves had chosen it. Their understanding of the different kinds of debussyste expression was informed by their own positions within the movement.

When debussyste techniques migrated into the pop debussyste idiom, they were largely divorced from their aesthetic roots. Because it did not follow paradigms of rhythmic, melodic, phrase, or large-scale formal paradigms, debussyste music would have been more difficult for an early twentieth-century French listener to understand than a

164 Lenormand, Study of Modern Harmony, ix.
It was, however, by just these organizational and conceptual innovations that *debussyste* innovators and early adopters realized the aesthetic aim of representing human thought. As discussed in chapter 2, the radical structural concepts of *debussysme* created music that embodied the fleeting, irrational qualities of unconscious or pre-conscious thought as it had been described by contemporaneous philosophers such as Bergson and Ribot. The collection of *debussyste* techniques produced material that seemed to develop idiosyncratically rather than according to conventional ideas. By pouring isolated *debussyste* sensations into regular forms that relied on repetition and standardized procedures, pop *debussystes* returned to the rational thought models detested by the composers who had conceived these sensations. They also kept their distance from the *debussyste* aesthetic by continuing to write music with primarily ideal signification: the beautiful content of the music was still located in pleasing melodies and the overall effect. This project differed from the kind of signification the *debussystes* favored, in which a listener was confronted with idiosyncratic structures formed by the accumulation of small details.

The difference between *debussysme* and pop *debussysme* is further denoted by the different types of poetry used in songs. Pop *debussyste* songs were never settings of avant-garde poets: the composers’ relatively conservative literary tastes matched their musical predilections. The symbolists, so significant to the earlier *debussystes*, are absent from the pool of these pop *debussyste* songs, save Albert Samain, who Moret chose for

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165 In her detailed description of French musical life under the Third Republic, Jann Pasler argues that the influential French Republican conception of music as public utility “saw comprehending and appreciating the beauty of its form and the harmony of its proportions as a prerequisite to feeling its beneficial effects.” Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 26. She also notes (p. 86) that education policy makers believed that engaging in musical activity strengthened the reasoning faculty of French children.
some of his pop debussyste songs. Conspicuously absent from this population of songs are the poems of Verlaine, the poet who most strongly inspired debussyste music in the trend’s earliest phase. Lenormand composed his daring material to ancient texts by Chinese poets and the poetry of his son René-Henri Lenormand, who mostly wrote for the theater. He has fallen into utter obscurity today, as have A. Renaud, E. Beaufils, and A. Suarez, three additional poets whose works were set to pop debussyste music. Perhaps even more significant, the pop debussyste composers were not keeping up with the progression of avant-garde in poetry. In 1912 Milhaud turned to Paul Claudel’s poems and in the following year Lili Boulanger began her Clarières dans le ciel, settings of Francis Jammes. At the same time Debussy and Ravel had risen to the challenge of Mallarmé. Meanwhile, Moret and Lenormand were setting colorful, exotic texts by Tristan Klingsor and simplistic love poetry.

It is difficult to determine when debussyste techniques were divorced from their aesthetic roots, because so few of the composers wrote about what these techniques meant to them. In lieu of such information, the best indicator might be the point at which composers began setting decidedly non-symbolist poetry to debussyste music, which occurred soon after the premiere of Pelléas. In 1903 and 1904 Dupont in “Sur un vieux banc” and Lenormand in “Intimité” created the first debussyste settings of simplistic love poetry.

Pop debussystes’ statements about Pelléas et Mélisande reveal the striking aesthetic distance between their understanding of debussyste techniques, and the conceptions of Debussy and the other early adopters. Henri Rabaud, who dabbled in debussysme, exchanged several letters with Max d’Ollone in 1902, in which he staunchly
defended *Pelléas* against d’Ollone’s criticisms.\(^{166}\) Although Rabaud was clearly passionate about the opera, his descriptions of it lack any of the symbolist and philosophical elements that the early adopters and some critics perceived in it. Rabaud instead focused on the general qualities of beauty and novelty that he heard in the music, but was unable to further articulate its powerful effects. While Debussy intended his music for an elite audience and Paul Le Flem recalled the feelings of exclusivity and iconoclasm generated during the premiere season, Rabaud noted happily in one of his letters to d’Ollone that his neighbors and people he passed in the street were singing parts of *Pelléas*: “What a success!” he concluded.\(^ {167}\)

In 1909 Gabriel Dupont issued a response to a survey on Wagner’s influence that Louis Laloy conducted in *La grande revue*:

> A return to Wagner’s influence? Yes, in as much as a movement of grandeur, pride, and will. And also in terms of technique…We only need to guard against that detrimental ‘spirit of heaviness,’ of that colossal and unwieldy character of certain conceptions. We have been submerged in that spirit for too long. And that is why the adorable, dreamy atmosphere that we have inhaled in *Pelléas* seemed to us so beneficial and pleasing. Personally, I dream of an art more simply and generally human, of a dramatic art which might take a swim again in the wide popular stream; in symphonic music, an art rich and sumptuous enough that it can do away with the classical form, and yet strong enough to conquer the masses.\(^ {168}\)

\(^{166}\) D’Ollone includes several of these letters at the end of his biography on Rabaud, to show that contrary to common opinion, Rabaud had loved *Pelléas* from the beginning. D’Ollone, Henri Rabaud, 23-28. 

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 26.

Dupont viewed *Pelléas* as a source for a reinvigoration of mainstream French dramatic and concert music, and he wanted to combine its influence with that of Wagner. These opinions were in strong contrast to those of the early adopters, who claimed to reject any trace of Wagner from their music. Like Rabaud, Dupont used neutral, vague adjectives to describe *Pelléas* instead of the much more precise and contentious language of composers more committed to *debussyste* practice such as Koechlin, Ravel, and Inghelbrecht. In their comments about the seminal *debussyste* composition, Rabaud and Dupont betrayed their separation from the movements of other disciplines that had influenced early *debussyste* aesthetics. Rather than a radical call to new musical paradigms, both composers saw in *Pelléas* a new brand of mainstream French music.

Rabaud’s and Dupont’s comments about *Pelléas* as well as the appearance of the earliest pop *debussyste* songs soon after the premiere season of Debussy’s opera suggest that quite early in *debussysme*’s history the elite art and pop subcultures within it had formed and were co-existing. Composers who attended the same event in musical history, the premiere season of *Pelléas*, interpreted the significance of the opera in sharply different ways. The early presence of the pop *debussyste* phenomenon complicated *debussysme* might help to explain the pervasive confusion about the term in the press: critics were confronted at the same time with the emergence of both forms of *debussysme*, and they attempted to use the same term to describe two phenomena that were related but quite different from each other.
Conclusion: Elite Debussystes’ Response to Pop Debussysme

Innovator and early adopter debussystes were also aware of the existence of pop debussysme, but they judged it quite differently. For these earlier, more committed debussystes the phenomenon provoked a problem: artists with very distinct identities had begun to borrow their techniques, and they were disseminating their incomplete version of debussysme to a wide public in published compositions. After 1902 members of the French musical press, such as Pierre Lalo and Henri Gauthier-Villars (Willy), began to use the term “debussyste” loosely, applying it to composers who in comparison to a Caplet or a Séverac, showed a lack of understanding of the aesthetic goals that the techniques had originally served.

The diversification and loss of control of the phenomenon that they had created would cause an identity crisis for some of the early debussystes. Writing in 1927, Koechlin recalled that in addition to the debussystes he considered true artists, there were also the “épigone-amateurs, a dreadful sort: far below the true debussystes, their science was limited to stringing together (and simply because it was in fashion) consonances or dominant ninths in parallel. A basic, simplistic, merely copied sort of imitation—absurd…to [Debussy] these compositions were odious, they were caricatures of his music.”169 Like Lenormand and Woollett, Koechlin divided the debussystes into two groups, but unlike them he was harshly critical of the composers who he perceived as practicing facile imitation of Debussy’s sound, simply because it was popular to do so.

169 “Il y eut des épigones-amateurs, espèce redoutable: très au-dessous des vrais debussystes, toute leur science se bornait à enchaîner parallèlement (et ‘simplement parce que ce fut l’usage’) des accords parfaits ou des neuvièmes de dominante. Imitation primaire, simpliste, factice—absurde…Elles lui étaient odieuses, les caricatures de sa musique.” Koechlin, Debussy, 84.
Debussy had more reason than any of the other composers who had created the *debussysme* to take issue with incomplete, pop *debussyste* music, because it was his name that the press used with such imprecision as a descriptor, and because he was frequently designated the leader of a school of composers with whom he had no personal contact. Debussy told Maggie Teyte in 1908 that he was frustrated with the *debussystes*, who had caused him to find his own musical language boring because others imitated it in such uninspiring ways.\(^{170}\) Nonetheless, the composer did not react negatively to all of the other composers whose personal idioms resembled his own, and who were called *debussystes* by the press: he retained great respect for Caplet and Bonheur, and he responded positively to Séverac after the younger composer sent him some of his compositions.\(^{171}\) Instead, he seemed to take issue specifically with the pop *debussyste* phenomenon. For instance, with friends in the privacy of Debussy’s own home, he reportedly made fun of Aubert, who combined salon and *debussyste* elements in his music.\(^{172}\)

Lenormand sent Debussy a copy of his *Etude sur l’harmonie moderne*, but Debussy was not pleased with the book’s approach to the score excerpts contained in it, despite Lenormand’s open admiration for Debussy’s music. In his letter of reply, Debussy lamented the vulgarization of specialized techniques: “Think of the inexperienced hands that will finger through your study without any precaution and who will only use it to create beautiful butterflies already somewhat crumpled by your

\(^{170}\) Nichols ed., *Debussy Remembered*, 90.

\(^{171}\) Debussy discussed Séverac’s music in a letter to Louis Laloy, Aug. 28, 1905, in Debussy, *Correspondance*, 203.

\(^{172}\) Nichols, *Harlequin Years*, 22.
Debussy provided a definition of the pop debussyste practice in this comment. Idiomatic techniques that he and a few other composers had developed to expand artistic expression were becoming mere curiosities, damaged by having been captured and pinned down.

Koechlin’s and Debussy’s descriptions and criticisms of certain members of the debussyste phenomenon are significant because they are yet more evidence of the existence of the pop debussyste brand of incomplete adoption. Not only did composers such as Lenormand, Woollett, Moret, Aubert, and Dupont compose works in the idiom, but members of the press, and debussystes that fell both within and outside of the pop phenomenon recognized the diversification of the debussysme into dedicated and selective adopters. Debussy’s and Koechlin’s reactions also suggest that they were aware that debussyste techniques had been taken out of their aesthetic context in pop debussyste compositions. Both of them evoked the idea of vulgarization in their description of the debussystes that they detested; Debussy’s metaphor of crumpled butterflies is especially evocative of this divorce of technique from aesthetic purpose.

Another way to frame the strong reactions of some composers to the emergence of pop debussysme is that the innovator and early adopter debussystes had sought to separate their music from the idea of the public utility of art. Jann Pasler describes this concept, which was held by many French cultural leaders and politicians, that works of art should benefit the maximum number of people possible, because it was thought to be a primary catalyst for the flourishing of French society culture under the fledgling Third

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173 “Pensez aux mains inexpertes qui manieront votre étude sans précaution et ne s’en serviront que pour achever tous ces beaux papillons déjà un peu froissés par l’analyse!” Quoted in Woollett, Un mélodiste français, 58.
Republic. Pasler also notes that Debussy and Ravel abhorred the idea of music for the masses, and were instead interested in “inner experience.” We might label the *debussyste* project of translating the mind as private utility, because they did not reject the idea of utility altogether, but instead believed that music’s ability to change people existed in its powerful psychological manipulation of an individual. The early adopter *debussystes* believed that not just any kind of music could dive so deeply into the human psyche: it had to truly mimic individual human thought, which, following contemporaneous philosophers, they understood as pre-conscious thought liberated from any constraints.

According to Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of art consumption, we might regard these earlier *debussystes* as elitist in the sense that they believed their music was special and that true art was created by the few geniuses who managed to sever the influences of society and mass culture upon their thinking. When some of them saw the techniques that they had been so expensive socially to obtain and that had been intended for the achievement of precise aesthetic goals dropped into scores meant for public use and to fulfill conventional ideas of beauty, they sensed that an artistic crime had been perpetrated against them. Although Bourdieu’s theories must be taken with skepticism because of his own class biases, his notion of aesthetic intolerance among cultural elites is applicable to this clash within *debussysme* that the existence of the divergent pop *debussysme* created. Bourdieu believed that this kind of perceived clash between true and mass art was for elites “the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be

174 Ibid., 89 and 92. See also 498-536 for a discussion of Debussy and symbolism that is consistent with the ideas in Chapter 1.
The clash could be “terribly violent” because “at stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness.”  For the *debussystes*, some of whom did consider their shared musical practice a representation of the true essence of human thought, its mutilation might have seemed like a frustrating distortion of the message they hoped to convey about authentic living.

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176 Ibid.
Bibliography


Lexique musicale, Unpublished and undated manuscript. Located at the Fonds Paul Le Flem, Médiathèque Mahler, Paris.


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Appendix A. Complete Sample of Debussyste Compositions

*All of the songs or movements in a composition were counted as debussyste unless they were individually named.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Number of Debussyste Mvts.</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Scoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Cinq proses...Gaspard de la nuit, “Le soir sur l’eau,” “La petite qui est morte”</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bonheur</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
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<td>?</td>
<td><em>Soires d’automne et de mélancolie, I, II, III, IV</em></td>
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<td>Bonheur</td>
<td>piano</td>
</tr>
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<td>?</td>
<td><em>Esquisse symphonique</em></td>
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<td><em>Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire, “Harmonie du soir,” “Le jet d’eau,” “Recueillement”</em></td>
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<td>Debussy</td>
<td>voice, pf</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td><em>Suite bergamasque, Clair de lune</em></td>
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<td>Debussy</td>
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<td><em>Le son du cor</em></td>
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<td>opera</td>
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<td><em>Pour le piano, I and II</em></td>
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<td><em>Huit Poésies de Francis Jammes, “La maison serait pleine de roses,” “Le village à midi,” “La vallée,” “C’est aujourd’hui,” “Quand verrai-je les îles”</em></td>
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<td>Dukas</td>
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<td>“Chanson d’automne”</td>
<td>Caplet</td>
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<td>Danse des Devadaises</td>
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**Total:** 559
Appendix B. Florent Schmitt, *Sur un petit vieux cimetièrè*
Au mouvement.

57

PPP comme un écho lointain
(sans attaque)

61

PPP

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Au mouvement.