EXPERIENCING DEBUSSY'S SOUND:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

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In

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by

Sora Woo

San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read Experiencing Debussy's Sound: A Phenomenological Approach by Sora Woo, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Music History at San Francisco State University.

Paul Ellison, PhD
Adjunct Faculty

Caitlin Dolan PhD
Former Adjunct Faculty

EXPERIENCING DEBUSSY'S SOUND: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Sora Woo
San Francisco, California
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This paper applies phenomenological concepts regarding music to concrete musical examples, namely the first movement of Debussy's *La mer*. It explores the compositional techniques inherent in his composition that govern how they present themselves to the consciousness of the listener, thereby affecting his or her perception. This phenomenological approach recognizes the experiential features of music and broadens the historically informed methods of analysis in adherence to the definition of music as an experience. The author of this paper adopts the views of the founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, and the renowned researcher in the field, F. Joseph Smith. Of primary importance are the structures of time-consciousness that unify a musical work as a single phenomenon (called akoumenon by Smith), as the listener perceives music sounding in time. The philosophical discussion that constitutes the first half of this paper will be followed by the phenomenological analysis of Debussy's "De l'aube à midi sur la mer," using the procedure introduced in the musicologist Lawrence Ferrara's research.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

Chair, Thesis Committee

5/21/19
Date

PREFACE AND/OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Dean Suzuki, to whom I am indebted for his supervision and guidance over the past few years at San Francisco State University. This thesis would not have been possible without his careful and constructive feedback, as well as his encouragement to consider the composer's concepts behind their musical compositions, wherein lies the art. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Dr. Paul Ellison for his enlightening lectures and seminars on music history ranging from the Medieval to the Romantic period. His passion for the subject and kindness toward students are what I want to emulate in my future career. Finally, I would like to thank Caitlin Dolan, who has enlightened my approach to music by sharing her knowledge and passion for the philosophy of art. I am indebted to her kind and genuine willingness to advise a student outside her department, which has reassured me greatly in the process of my research.

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INTRODUCTION

Claude Debussy's musical works present many intriguing aspects that could be explored philosophically, for they exhort a savoring of individual sounds over the primacy of voice-leading. The nature of his music encourages an analysis of the firsthand perception of each sound and an adoption of a new attitude toward music that is more fitting for what Martina Stratikova describes as the "immediacy of the perceptive presence."[1] This means that theorists and musicologist cannot rely solely on mathematically organized music, proportions, and consonances, as prescribed by historically-informed theory, when discussing works by Debussy. Instead, they find themselves at a need for a new method of analysis that looks at *sound as such* and which brings back the analysis to the sounds themselves. A concrete musical example, namely the first movement of *La Mer,* "De l'aube à midi sur la mer," will be analyzed in this paper in order to illustrate this new attitude and approach to musical experience. In other words, this discussion is not concerned so much with Debussy's music, as it is concerned with introducing a new way of listening, using his composition as an instructive example.

This means that considerations of aesthetic, historical and biographical context, as well as semantic meaning, are temporarily left out in the initial stages of analysis. Only such a bracketing of abstract concepts would result in the presentation of the *noema*, or

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[1] Martina Stratilkova, "Sound or Expression: Dilemmas in the Phenomenological Aesthetics of 20th Century Music," *Ostium* 12, no. 4 (2016): 1.

the perceptual content of the musical being itself, as it presents itself to the listener. This initial stage can be described as an approach guided by *akoumenology*, a term coined by F. Joseph Smith, which concerns sound as it presents itself to us noematically.[2] However, this does not mean that other semantic and syntactic meanings will be completely disregarded. As modeled in Lawrence Ferrara's research, an analysis of the composer's intent and the listener's perception would be near impossible without examining the semantical and ontological meanings of the composition. The traditional method of analysis is not discounted as insignificant, then, but rather broadened to consider the human element of music, that is, the musical experience.

This approach to Debussy's music is also important for its historical context, which is marked with the general attitude of disdain for the emerging significance of psychology in academia.[3] Phenomenology, as a term that encompassed this new attitude, is a resource by which scholars turned in the early twentieth century towards the study of consciousness and firsthand experience from purely empirical studies as the basis for knowledge.[4] While much research has been conducted on phenomenology in the post-

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[2] Iyad Abdelhafeez Mohammad, "Compositional Technique and Phenomenological Categories of Perception in the Passacaglia of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 8," *Musicologica Brunesia* 52, no. 2 (2017): 96.

[3] The first volume of Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* is one of the most significant publications with this view of antipsychologism.

[4] Benjamin Steege, "Antipsychologism in Interwar Musical Thought: Two Ways of Hearing Debussy," *Music and Letters* 98, no. 1 (2017): 74.

War decades, they are founded on divergent views that are not grounded concretely in music. This paper will relate fundamental phenomenological concepts to the compositional techniques inherent in musical material, thus making concrete the relatively abstract theories and relating them to the phenomena of music. It will explore the basic compositional structure of "De l'aube à midi sur la mer," as it presents itself to our consciousness.

A question naturally brought up in such an investigation, but for which current scholarship does not provide answers, is that of how musical works come to constitute meaning in our consciousness. To answer such questions and to bridge the gap between phenomenology and musicology, we must examine the views of Carl Stumpf, a significant figure who first glimpsed the philosophical dimensions in music; his student Edmund Husserl, commonly recognized as the founding father of phenomenology; and lastly, F. Joseph Smith, who paved the way in applying phenomenological concepts to music in his research on *akoumenology*. The perusal of their works, which will constitute the first half of this paper, is essential to elucidate the structures of our consciousness, which present musical compositions as a unified phenomenon (*akoumenon*). Then, this discussion will delve into the specifics of what a phenomenological attitude toward music would look like before conducting such an analysis on Debussy's music. An understanding of the views of the aforementioned scholars will guide us in forming a method of analysis, which will enable us to investigate how music presents itself to us *acoustically* and how we perceive it as *sounding in time*. Subsequent to this philosophical

discussion will be my phenomenological analysis of "De l'aube à midi sur la mer," which will examine the compositional techniques used by Debussy to realize the described effect.[5]

[5] Mohammad, "Compositional Technique," 96.

CHAPTER 1: PHENOMENOLOGY

General Introduction

Phenomenology literally means the study of phenomena, which encompasses all things that appear in our first-hand experiences.[6] It may be interpreted in two ways, either as a disciplinary field in philosophy or as a movement in its history. As a discipline, it must be distinguished from other fields of philosophy for its examination of the conscious experience from a subjective, first person point of view. It differs from ontology, or the study of being, which only examines the qualities and the nature of an object itself. Phenomenology, on the other hand, expands into the representation of that object in the subject's perception. Other disciplines of philosophy, such as epistemology or the study of knowledge, and ethics, the study of right and wrong, can also be related to phenomenology. Without experiencing things as phenomena, we would have no basis on which to acquire and ground new knowledge or make ethical judgments. That is, the new knowledge we acquire is done so consciously firsthand; we cannot claim absolute knowledge but only what we have personally experienced. Similarly, it is our own conscious minds that perceive ethical dilemmas and mentally engage in making choices. Although phenomenology itself may be defined as just one of the diverse branches of

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[6] "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed Dec 16, 2018, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology.

philosophy, it should be interpreted as its foundation without which the pursuit of any philosophical discipline would be difficult. This does not mean that phenomenology cannot be considered as a sub-field on its own, but simply that its theoretical priority should be recognized.

As a historical movement, the tradition of phenomenology was propelled in the first half of the twentieth century, largely by the German philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, who valued it as the foundation for all fields of philosophy.[7] Its rise at the turn of the twentieth century clashed with the contemporaneous trends of psychologism, whose proponents asserted that "what we know about things could be grounded in what we know about the mind that thinks those things."[8] This approach to knowledge treated our experiences from a rather scientific point of view, emphasizing the empirical study of the biology of the mind. Such a method contrasted the views of Husserl, as expressed in his renowned article, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," that appeared in the first edition of *Logos* (1910). Criticizing psychologism as a strict science of experience, Husserl called for a "naturalizing" of consciousness, or a "pure

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[7] "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[8] Steege, "Antipsychologism," 74.

consciousness" that overcame and counteracted empiricism and scientism.[9] Husserl's critique was purely logical in nature, in that:

> It sought to drive a wedge between logical truth and psychological truth, specifically by denying that studying mental processes from an empirical standpoint—that is, either through private introspection or through laboratory experiments—could reveal the basis for the laws of logic.[10]

Phenomenology addressed Husserl's concerns with psychologism by presenting the *essence* of things in a manner that is as intuitive and immediate as the hearing of a musical sound.[11] In phenomenology, our knowledge of things is based not on the empirical study of our mind, but what we intuit (*schauen*) immediately in an uninterrupted way. This immediate intuition is what characterizes the experience of any phenomenon, whether it is visual or ideal in nature, i.e. ethical judgement. Simply put, proponents of psychologism explain facts through internal and subjective states, whereas phenomenologists assert that objective facts can be intuitively perceived.

This reliance on intuition has been crucial to the philosophical traditions of continental Europe throughout the twentieth century, as opposed to the prominence of the

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[9] Edmund Husserl and Quentin Lauer, "Philosophy as a Strict Science," *CrossCurrents* 6, no. 3 (1956): 231.

[10] Steege, "Antipsychologism," 74.

[11] Husserl and Lauer, "Philosophy as a Strict Science," 235

philosophy of the mind in the analytic traditions of Austro-Anglo-American countries.[12] In the tradition of the latter, phenomenology has often been restricted to sensations alone, such as those of seeing and hearing. Such an approach, however, is an unfit reduction of phenomenology, which is more than mere sensation. To the contrary, phenomenology concerns much more, including but not limited to "perception, thought, memory, imagination, [and] emotion."[13] In this line of view, a phenomenon is not just a reception of an abundance of sensory data, but also everything that we live through, imagine, observe, think, or desire. Consequently, objective facts about what we perceive cannot be gained through an examination of the mind alone, as commonly done by psychologists.

Brentano's Intentionality

Despite its anti-psychological tendencies, however, it is still important to keep in mind that phenomenology cannot be completely severed from psychology. It is after all "the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view," and consciousness is something very much internal to man.[14] Then, what could bridge this seemingly divisive gap between our internal consciousness and the perceived phenomena external to us? In other words, how can things reside in our thoughts and

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[12] "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

exist independently outside the mind at the same time? These questions are addressed by Brentano's concept of "intentionality," or the "directedness" of our experience toward things.[15] To quote Brentano's famous saying, intentionality "is what our consciousness is of or about."[16] Husserl expands on this concept by asserting that mental concepts and thoughts are separate from the object's actual meaning and content, an essence which is perceived intuitively. Put simply, it is our firsthand perception and experience of an object that renders its meaning, not the concepts or theories associated with it objectively outside the mind.

Kant's Nouemon-Phenomenon Duality

This perceived content is conditional on both the ontology of the objective qualities of the phenomenon, and psychology, the scientific study of our mind, which enables an understanding of the human mind itself. That is, we cannot be conscious without there being something to be conscious about. Consciousness is always aware *of* something, thereby making it not an entity but a function. In simple terms, there can be no "unconscious" consciousness; such a state is not possible by definition. On the other hand, we cannot truly examine an intended object without also looking inward and examining our consciousness of that object, which only gains meaning and significance (for us) through our firsthand experiences. The study of a phenomenal experience, then,

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[15] "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[16] Ibid.

requires the joint and inseparable integration of psychology and ontology. This applies to all phenomena that we seek to study, including music. A true study of a musical work must not only examine the ontology of compositional techniques, but also its perceived meaning in the consciousness of the composer, performer, and listener. The lack of such a phenomenological approach would be stripping a musical work of its experiential elements that render the work human in nature.

A Historical Prelude to the Phenomenology of Music

From the Middle Ages, music theory has been infused with the "natural attitude," which perceives mathematics as the determinants of empirical fact. This attitude was not reduced to just empirical science, but also reflected in the study of music as physical sound was circumscribed into an intellectual grid and numbered sound became essential to music theory. This "naturalist" attitude was formulated by mathematicians, such as Johannis de Muris and Jacques de Liége, both of whom were proponents of the *Ars nova* in the early fourteenth century, and later spread by theorists, such as Gafforius, in the fifteenth century.[17]

There was also a mathematical basis underlying the Baroque period's theory called *Affektenlehre*, which described music as the "language of the affects."[18] That is, beauty was still heavily associated with what was perceived to be natural, as in the

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[17] Smith, *Experiencing*, 93.

[18] Ibid., 98.

proportions and numbers found in nature. Kant may have attempted to replace the mathematicising of music with esthetics but only with poor relations between philosophy and music, as revealed in Husserl's *Kritik* III. Meanwhile, the rise of the sciences was accompanied by the prominence of acoustics, and Helmholtz became well known for his exploration of the physical qualities or the acoustics of music, as opposed to the experiential sound. Hence, what Husserl called "the mathematization of nature" [19] also happened in music theory, which has often been discussed from a scientific point of view rather than an *experiential* one.

At this point, a curious musicologist may ask the type of questions that venture into the field of phenomenology. Some of these were raised by the renowned phenomenologist, F. Joseph Smith:

> To what extent does this idealized world of numbers (called "sounding numbers" in the renaissance!) actually relate to, aid, or obstruct the musical experience? Does mathematicised consciousness block perception? Or does it merely structure it too rigidly? At this point the musicologist is already a potential phenomenologist, as clearly needs to be stated. To what extent does any cognitive framework aid or block the experience of any sound? In the middle ages sound qualified as musical sound only after being subsumed into the mathematical system. In our age John Cage has effectively demonstrated that any sound can be utilized for musical purposes. To what extent do mental sets help sharpen our intellects for analysis, and in how far do they dull our perceptivity, especially with regard to musical sound?[20]

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[19] Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 23.

[20] Smith, *Experiencing*, 94.

Asking such questions makes it apparent that an integration of phenomenology is needed in any detailed analysis of a musical work, in order to fully describe our musical experience. Certainly, any theorist can stop at analyzing the techniques or the form inherent in the musical material. Proponents of phenomenology, however, would argue that one needs more than facts, theory, or history to truly examine our experience of a work of art.

It was Carl Stumpf who interrupted the scientific trend in the history of music theory with his book *Tonal Psychology.* Put mildly, Stumpf can be deemed a significant figure who made the incipient stages of phenomenology possible. His notion of *tonal fusion* explained the effects of consonances and tonal harmony on man, and soon became renowned among musicologists. [21] Unfortunately, the phenomenological dimension of Stumpf's ideas are rarely discussed among musicologists, and his significant link to his student Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, is likewise omitted in textbooks.[22] It was not until Herbert Spiegelberg's *History of Phenomenology* that the philosophical

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[21] Smith, *Experiencing*, 98.

[22] Husserl even dedicated his book *Logical Investigations* to Carl Stumpf, out of his devotion to Stumpf's way of thinking, such as his tonal psychology.

dimensions of Stumpf's theories on consonances and *Tonverschmelzung*, or the amalgamation of sounds, were revealed.[23]

By *Verschmelzung*, Stumpf meant the fusion of two tones played together, which would sound as a consonant interval to the listener. For example, the interval of a fourth was not comprised of two simultaneous tones, i.e. a C and a F, but were heard as a single, fused entity of a fourth. Stumpf's conception of this, however, was essentially different from the mathematical thinking of his contemporaries, in that he perceived these sounds as not only psychologically but also phenomenologically perceived. That is, the concept of sensation (*Empfindung*) was central to Stumpf's views. The fusion of sound in a consonance was not solely conscious in that we intentionally combined the tones in our minds. Rather, Stumpf believed that tones were *given primordially* to our perception, entering our consciousness as an entity *already* fused.[24] His theories were significant for venturing from the preoccupations of mere acoustical and the literal combination of sounds, and experimenting with the ideas of the *experienced* amalgation.

While a critic may bring up the independently composed lines in Medieval compositions, even these are played or sung together according to the rules of consonances. That is, the highly mathematicised musical compositions did not clash

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[23] Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement* (The Hague: Springer-Science and Business Media, 1965), 53.

[24] Smith, *Experiencing*,115.

against the actual sounding together of sounds; it was just that the constraints of Medieval theory preceded modern psychology at the time. The voice of the tenor, for example, was not so much a fundamental bass as the Baroque theorist Jean-Philippe Rameau argued, nor was it simply the bass of functional harmonies as taught since the nineteenth century. Rather, it constituted the bass of a consonantal "pillar" (*Säule*), which the other supposedly independent voices helped build. Although it may be interpreted as an architectural structure built rigidly on theories of mathematics and proportions, it is still worth nothing that such consonances were the primary preoccupations for composers for their pleasant sound to the ear. No matter how delighted the theorist may be in the proportions in music, it is essentially the auditory perception that serves as the gateway to such mathematical consciousness.

From the vintage point of the status quo, Stumpf stands as an important figure of pre-phenomenology, whose musico-psychological works serve as foundations of the phenomenological method. His work was pre-science, in that it kept science from being devoid of its foundational and philosophical dimension. Rather, Stumpf's theories rely on phenomenology as the most basic layer of both science and the arts, thereby keeping our theorizations as philosophers practical and down to earth, and concretizing the abstract nature of science by relating it to experience.

CHAPTER 2: HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY: STRUCTURES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Stumpf's implication of the philosophical dimension in music was followed by his student Edmund Husserl, who surpassed him in expanding phenomenology as a discipline on its own. With a strong background in mathematics, Husserl was keen on exploring the philosophical aspects of scientific theories.[25] Perhaps his most groundbreaking assertion was that science and mathematics are a set of propositions interconnected by the speaker, who portrayed such connections linguistically in statements.[26] This meant that any analysis of scientific propositions would have to entail an examination of the consciousness of the respective speaker, who "gave voice" to them.[27] Although Husserl obtained his PhD in mathematics and logos in 1883, his interest in the integration of philosophy and psychology is evident in his works, such as *On the Concept of Numbers, Psychological Analyses* (1887) and the *Philosophy of Arithmetic, Psychological and Logical Investigations* (1891).

Fortunately for the musicologists and theorists seeking to bridge the gap between musicology and phenomenology, the numerous references to musical sound in Husserl's works prove useful. Of particular importance are his lectures on the *Phenomenology of*

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[26] "Edmund Husserl," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[27] Ibid.

the Consciousness of Internal Time (1928), which elaborates on musical tones as the paradigm of interval time.[28] Husserl's theories on "passive synthesis" in his *Analyses of Passive Synthesis* also prove significant for their discussion of the combination of perceived objects, including the fusion of musical sounds or proportions, as previously discussed by Stumpf. [29] This paper thoroughly examines Husserl's theories, not to provide a tedious exposé, but to employ and equip the reader with his insights that are essential for any serious study of the phenomenology of music.

Intentionality

Husserl expanded on Brentano's theories on intentionality by proposing what he called *intentional acts* or *experiences*. While Brentano simply focused on distinguishing between mental activity and external objects with his theories on intentionality, Husserl asserted that an experience is always intentional because it is always representative of something. That is, consciousness is not an independent entity but rather, as Lawrence Ferrera states, a function "constituted by the objects to which it points or intends. [It is] always and in every instance, being conscious of something."[30] Unlike Brentano who stated that consciousness is only intentional when occasionally directed towards

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[28] Mohammad, "Compositional Technique," 96.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Lawrence Ferrara, *Philosophy and the Analysis of Music: Bridges to Musical Sound, Form and Reference* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 59

something, Husserl posited that consciousness *was,* in fact, intentionality. It would fail to exist without its function, that is, without there being something to be conscious about.

These concepts are applicable to our musical experiences since sounds are not tangible outcomes, external to consciousness. That is, the sounds perceived cannot be separated from our consciousness, which is directed towards them in the listening experience. This state of directed listening and awareness of sounds by definition needs an object to perceive; likewise, the listening experience would fail to exist without any sounds to be aware of. As evident, the role of our consciousness is crucial to connect the perceived sounds and render them as a unified phenomenon, and not just as a composition governed by abstract theories or techniques. Unfortunately, metaphysical issues of how we perceive and experience sound, which is inherent in the foundation and the very essence of music, are often left unexplored in the traditional forms of music analysis. It is such a gap that illuminates the need for a phenomenological attitude toward the experiential features of music, as revealed in Husserl's theories.

Horizon-Intentionality and Singularity

How is it, then, that the various features of a single musical composition may be perceived as a single and unified phenomenon of sound? An important thing to recognize at this point is that intentional experiences are marked by unity and singularity; they all represent a single object X that is intended by the subject. An understanding of what Husserl calls the "intentional horizon" is crucial at this point. In section 47 of his *Ideas*

(1913), Husserl explains how an experience that a subject undergoes at any given time or what the subject considers to be true of the real world, is just one unique case of a manifold of various "possible worlds," each of which are associated with a future course of possible experiences.[31] These possible experiences are in a way anticipated by the subject and constitute the "intentional horizon" of an experience, which determines the perceived content. For example, a subject upon seeing a chair will expect it to appear in certain ways if he or she observed it from another point of view, while fully aware that it is the same chair. All these possibilities of appearances that could be perceived by the subject form the chair's "intentional horizon."

Nevertheless, the countless possibilities along an object's intentional horizon are marked by singularity. They are all integrated through a shared "sense of identity through time," a sense of belonging to what Husserl calls the "determinable X."[32] According to Husserl:

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[31] "Edmund Husserl," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[32] Ibid.

> Two experiences of a given subject belong to the same determinable X if and only if the subject believes them to represent the same object. Hence, experiences belonging to a determinable X must be accompanied by at least one higher-order belief. This view fits in well with the thesis that intentional experiences automatically give rise to (i.e., motivate) momentary dispositions to make corresponding reflective higher-order judgements, based on something like inner perception, thus constituting a form of implicit or "pre-reflective self-consciousness."[33]

Hidden in the density of Husserl's theories is the relatively simple idea that there are different levels of self-consciousness. While we are aware of something, a higher order of consciousness must be aware of this awareness in a self-reflective manner.[34] Although an in-depth elaboration on this concept is not needed for this paper, understanding the horizontal aspect of intentionality, connected by a higher level of consciousness, is crucial in any phenomenological study. It is, after all, this awareness that renders an experience conscious in the first place, and which gives it a first-person character that is essential to a phenomenological study.

Applied to our present discussion on musical experiences, this allows us to recognize that one person's experience of a musical work is just as representative as

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[33] "Edmund Husserl," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[34] The form of this awareness has been a controversial topic that has been debated since it first arose with Locke's theories of self-consciousness following the steps of Descartes' *conscience*, meaning co-knowledge or sense of consciousness. Is this awareness-of-experience a sort of self-observation, meaning one is doing two things simultaneously? Or is it a higher-order perception or thought of the activities of one's mind (as posited by Husserl whose views are adopted in this paper)? While such a debate is beyond the scope of this present discussion, it is important to note that the scholar's position in these respects would be significant in establishing his or her methodology of study.

another's experience of it, both of which are possibilities are along a musical composition's intentional horizon. This refutes the criticism that one listener's phenomenological experience of a musical work is invalid for being too subjective in nature. One person's experience of a musical work can be just as representative, as that of another person's; they are just engaging in different "appearances" of the composition, which still remains unified despite different responses to it. A phenomenological experience is, after all, experiences "as of" an object, which is not to be confused with the object "as is."[35]

Lastly, Husserl's theories reveal how important it is to recognize the role our higher level of consciousness plays in musical experiences. That is, to truly listen to a piece of music, we must be aware of the way in which we are listening. We have to be aware of the way we are aware of the sounds.

Epoché

It should be familiar to the reader at this point that any phenomenological experience has to be described from a first-person point of view, in order that the respective object is actually how it is experienced or intended by the subject. However, one cannot always discount the possibility that the subject undergoing such an experience is erring on veracity due to hasty presumptions. Even without any errors in judgment, we

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[35] On the contrary, theories and intellectual frameworks seek to describe a musical work "as is."

cannot assume that we are not misrepresenting things in our consciousness through errors in perception. Since we cannot obtain absolute objective knowledge through experience, it is our perception of things that ultimately matters, that is, a perception with all judgments and assumptions excluded. This act of bracketing Husserl calls *epoché*, which comes from the Greek ἐποχή (epokhē) and means suspension.[36]

Epoché, which was introduced in Husserl's1894 essay, "Intentional Objects," and developed more seriously around 1906, is an essential method in phenomenology. This act and attitude of suspending all conceptions, feelings, and thoughts about a perceived object is not only applicable but also essential in musical experiences. No matter how intelligent, musicians cannot claim to have achieved and exhausted all objective knowledge concerning a musical work; the only basis for knowledge is their limited firsthand experience. What they claim to know is not the objective sounds external to them but rather the sounds reformed and reconstituted inside them, that is, the content in their consciousness.[37] On the other hand, bracketing the objective reality will allow them to focus on the way the object presents itself, or what Husserl calls the *noema.* Noemas are defined as experiences "as of" the object, which is not to be confused with the object

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[36] Pascal Doron Salomon, "A Phenomenological Approach to Robert Schumann's Fantasie op 17, 1st Movement" (DMA dissertation, UC Santa Barbara, September 2017), 10.

[37] All other claims to knowledge are not only beyond the scope of this paper but also not possible in a phenomenological approach to music.

"as is."[38] They are not based so much on theoretical concepts, but on *hýle,* the sensual matter that underlies an experience.[39]

Lest the reader be overburdened with the abstract language of the philosophical discussion thus far, it is worth digressing to relate these concepts to the musical concerns of this paper. In an auditory experience, the noema would the content of the musical work as it presents itself to us, the content of which we perceive intuitively through the composition's underlying senses, or *hýle*. Since it is the noematic content of a musical work that is of primary importance in our current discussion, the manner of a composition's production or performance is not considered significant for the present study. This sentiment is expressed in the followings statement by the renowned phenomenologist Don Ihde: "When listening to music an aesthetic attitude is adopted in which the sound itself is divorced from the sound source."[40]

Instead, the listener would be justified in epoché or bracketing the composition from its context, such as the history of the work or the biographical facts of the composer, to simply experience this perceived content.[41] Husserl's concepts of *epoché* or bracketing

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[38] "Edmund Husserl," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[39] "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[40] Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 155.

implies that idiosyncratic biases and preferences, as well as the historical context of a musical work, should be left out in the initial stages of musical analysis. Such an attitude will equip the listener to truly focus on the sounds themselves, thereby allowing the form of music to present its true evolving self. Only such a phenomenological approach to a musical composition will engage the listener with the most basic level of listening,

To concretize this discussion even more, consider the qualities of sound in Debussy's compositions. One does not necessarily need to know the composer's affiliation with Impressionism in order to listen to and appreciate the sound of his music as such. A listener without such knowledge can still experience and perceive Debussy's music as *how* it sounds, as much as a fully informed musicologist, based on its *hýle*. As explained by F. Joseph Smith, "That is why the truly phenomenological attitude is one of *listening*."[42] He continues:

> It is a musical attitude, if indeed listening is important in the musical world. A phenomenologist would not judge the music of, e.g., P. Boulez with categories based on traditional harmony and analysis; neither would he expect late compositions of Stravinsky, e.g. the *Canticum Sacrum* or *The Deluge* to sound like early Stravinsky, certainly not like *Le Sacre du Printemps*. In other words, one does not precategorize anyone's work but lets it be what it *is*. This letting-*be* is the core of the truly phenomenological attitude. The philosophical attitude is basically a musical one.[43]

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[42] Smith, *Experiencing*, 17.

[43] Ibid.

This is the attitude of music that is adopted in the early stages of the musical analysis, presented in part two of this paper. It is still important to remember, however, that this phenomenological approach does not discount the importance of learning the context of musical works or objective facts about their execution. As explained further down this discussion, the ontology of a composition is still significant in contributing to any musical experience, thereby requiring its inclusion in the later stages of any phenomenological analysis.

CHAPTER 3: HUSSERL'S TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS

Stream of Consciousness: Phenomenological Time

One of the most blatant observations of any phenomenological experience is that it takes time for the perceived object or event to unfold objectively outside the mind. This passage of objective time, however, may differ from that sensed by the subject in experiencing the phenomenon. For instance, the time spent on a leisurely activity may feel shorter than the same duration of time spent undergoing an experience that is unpleasant. The perception of time is subjective, according to Husserl, whose views on this topic are presented in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. Husserl calls this sense of subjective time in our consciousness, "phenomenological time," which he asserts is just as important as the objective kind.

This is because our consciousness itself is seamless in nature. In his lectures on time consciousness, Husserl describes consciousness as being temporal *a priori*.[44] Since a person is constantly aware, he or she lives "consciously" in an uninterrupted manner. That is, we are not aware of things in terraced moments with our consciousness coming into play when triggered by separate and distinct events. Rather, it is more like a river in that we are seamlessly aware of the variation of objects or events in our perception; our consciousness is ever-streaming. Husserl describes this temporal nature of consciousness

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[44] Smith, *Experiencing*, 105.

as "the flow of consciousness." The question that cannot be bracketed at this point is the relations between the phenomenological time in our consciousness and the unfolding of phenomena in objective time outside the mind. This calls for an examination of our consciousness of the object itself as it expands over time, as "both are merging into a sort of unity."[45]

A Musical Model

While Husserl recognizes both Brentano's theories on intentionality and Stumpf's notions on tonal psychology,[46] he departs from his former teachers with an emphasis on subjectivity. That is, Husserl conceives of time itself, and not just the unfolding of phenomena, as "phenomenal" (*erscheinend*) or perceived subjectively as it appears in experience.[47] This concept of phenomenological time is especially crucial for music, which is essentially comprised of the prolongation of sounds over time. It is also essential since a musical experience is based on the "flow of consciousness" of the listener engaging with the music. Thankfully for our present discussion, Husserl uses sounds and melodies as a model to explain his theories on our consciousness of time.

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[45] Salomon, "A Phenomenological," 13.

[46] Smith, *Experiencing*, 102.

[47] This differs from Brentano and Stumpf's views, which base our experiences as subjective but still based on objective time.

Husserl's use of the musical model may be due to the relatively passive intuition needed in the experiencing of musical sounds, as opposed to other types of perceptive experiences, i.e. visual. That is, the objects in the visual world are each associated with distinct identities and hence characterized by various mental concepts. Experiences of musical sounds, on the other hand, are more effortless compared to the intuition of visual objects. As F. Joseph Smith described, the experiencing of musical sound is marked by "passivity at work, a deeper layer of experience, a hidden stratum of the same intuitional intentionality."[48] The effortless passivity in perceiving sound is most likely the reason that Husserl preferred music as the model for his theories on intuition.[49] The following sections will elaborate on the various structures of our consciousness of time, using musical tones, melodies, and form as models.

Retention and Memory

Husserl's first example of phenomenal time can be seen in his elaboration on the duration of tones. He asserts in *Speculum Musicae* that musical tones succeed one another in a sequence from an "infinite" past into an open-ended horizon of the future, thus

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[48] Smith, *Experiencing*, 102.

[49] This is one of the reasons that visual metaphors are not adequate tools for describing the phenomenological experience of musical sound. See the corresponding section in Smith's book *Experiencing of Musical Sound* for a greater discussion on the misuse of visual metaphors in phenomenological approaches to music.

reflecting the "intentional horizon" of the perceived sound.[50] The references to the musical "tone" in Husserl's theories hence do not refer to a single tone but rather a sequence that is temporal in nature. Martin Heideigger's edition of Husserl's *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* elucidates on this temporal dimension of musical tones concisely:

> Every tone itself has a temporal extension: with the actual sounding I hear it as now. With its continued sounding, however, it has an ever new now, and the tone actually preceding is changing into something past. Therefore, I hear at any instant only the actual phase of the tone, and the Objectivity of the whole enduring tone is constituted in an act-continuum which in part is memory, in the smallest punctual part is perception, and in a more extensive part expectation.[51]

Revealed in this assertion is the continuum or the "pattern of thrust and trail," in which musical time occurs.[52] As Husserl describes, music becomes "like a comet plummeting through subjective space, leaving a trail of after-echoes, a musical tail (*Zeitschwanz)* that is retained in memory."[53] The comet can be likened to the note heard in the just-now-moment and the tail to the note just heard, remembered, and related-to-

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[50] Smith, *Experiencing*, 17. Recall the "horizon of intentionality" mentioned earlier in this paper.

[51] Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, ed. Martin Heidegger, trans. James Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 43-44.

[52] Smith, *Experiencing*, 101.

[53] Ibid., 102.

the-now moment. A corollary of this is that the subject's perception of a musical tone in the present is never completely in the moment, thereby explaining Husserl's use of the term, "specious present."[54] Rather, our perception of a musical tone is marked simultaneously by the original *impression* of how a note is heard in the (specious) present and the current *retention* of how it was previously heard and remembered. This combination is intuitively perceived, however, meaning that it is constituted and reconstituted without a gap in time. It is therefore conceived by the subject as the same continued note. As expressed in Husserl's *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* quoted above, the objectivity of the note hence becomes transcendent over the succession of the many now-moments.

It should be noted at this point that retention (primary remembrance) and recollection (secondary remembrance) are different. Recollection refers to past objects or events that are intentionally remembered by the subject but are entirely separate from the present. This differs from the retention of things that are intuitively perceived by the subject as the (specious) present. In this respect, memory is not just an accumulation of perceived sensory data but rather an element of awareness, as revealed in its origins *memor esse*, meaning "to be aware of."[55] Musical memory, then, should not be

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[54] Salomon, "A Phenomenological," 13.

[55] Smith, *Experiencing*, 102.

considered as being distinct from our consciousness, but rather as a part of it. It is "a sublevel of consciousness, into which the patterns of perception temporarily vanish until they are recalled or awakened, often passively without any activity of the mind."[56] This elucidates the reasons that time and memory are essential in examining our musical experiences.

Protentions and Expectations

In contrast to the remembrance of the past, the forward thrust of musical time builds a horizon of expectations and possibilities for the listener. Husserl defines protentions as the "immediate anticipations of what will be perceived 'in a moment.'"[57] This type of anticipation is related to what is expected in the very next moment, given the just-now moment that the listener is experiencing. It is different from the kind of anticipation that looks forward to the future, which is unrelated to the listener's current phenomenological experience and requires a detachment from the now-moment and a new frame of mind.[58] As Salomon stated, "Protention and anticipation belong both to the physical future, but only protention belongs to the same phenomenological time (or

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[56] Smith, *Experiencing*, 102.

[57] "Edmund Husserl," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[58] Salomon, "A Phenomenological Approach," 15.

specious present)."[59] As the musical tone unfolds in its forward movement of protention, it leaves a series of tonal shadows (*Abschattungen*) that spread out behind it.[60] This is what connects the note in protention to the specious present, along the continuum that is perceived intuitively by the listener. Husserl's theories on time-consciousness are made lucid in Merleau-Ponty's visual model (see figure 1). Related to our musical discussion, the letters A, B, and C can be likened to musical tones that "leave behind echoes of retention in consciousness."[61]

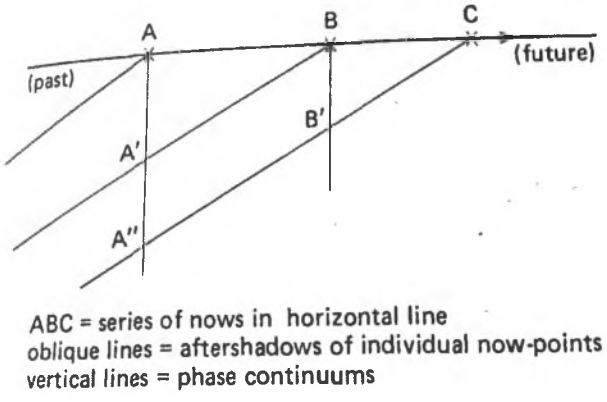

Figure 1 Merleau-Ponty's visual representation of Husserl's theories on time-consciousness[62]

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[59] Salomon, "A Phenomenological Approach," 15.

[60] Smith, *Experiencing*, 101.

[61] Ibid., 233.

[62] Ibid.

The above diagram reveals that music is not limited to objective time that the mind turns towards, but rather that music takes "shape" in phenomenological time that is subjectively perceived.

Melody and Form

In his views on the temporal sequence of sounds, Husserl reveals the influence of Stumpf, for whom musical time was not merely linear as portrayed on scores. The same structures of time-consciousness applied to the duration of single tones in the previous sections can also be related to the discussion on melodies. The "protensive" nature of a melody extends it from the present into the future and consequently leaves a "retensive" trail in the listener's memory.[63] Consequently, musical melodies are constantly (re)constituted "as past, present and future, respectively, so that it looks to the experiencing subject as if time were permanently flowing off.[64] A melody or a musical phrase that appears in consciousness is thus a "serial phenomenon" (*Nacheinander*), which is presented in a sequence unrestricted to objectively linear time.[65]

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[63] Smith, *Experiencing*, 100.

[64] "Edmund Husserl," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

[65] Smith, *Experiencing*, 102-03.

As asserted by Husserl in his elaboration on tonal apprehension (*Auffassung*), this means that the apprehension of a melody is not an instantaneous response automatically triggered by stimuli.[66] Rather, the apprehension of a musical progression is gradual for the listener. This building process can be identified easily in the themes introduced in Classical and Romantic symphonies, which are often comprised of themes that build toward an arch. The unity of such themes is based on our perceptive consciousness rather than the inherently physical unity or categorical form of the musical progression. That is, a series of notes that spans an interval of objective time is still presented as a united single entity to our consciousness.[67]

This kind of understanding is crucial for any analysis of musical forms. The sonata-allegro form, for example, is not a pre-set grid or category to be filled with content, but rather a progressive building of temporal unity in consciousness. It may not be immediately recognizable to the listener, as the shape of the form unfolds and constitutes itself rather slowly. A musical form presents itself as a united succession held together by the present impression, past memory, and future expectation. It relies heavily on memory for the recapitulation of the principal themes and on expectation for its movement forward. It must be conceded that musical tones are in and of themselves

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[66] Smith, *Experiencing*, 106.

[67] Ibid.

acoustical entities, separate and distinct from one another. From a phenomenological approach, however, "they are alive and fluid and appear in immanent time, much like the form that they generate."[68] The sounds pull themselves together in our perception in literal synthesis. Tones and color constitute themselves (Greek word in the middle: *syn-tithontai*) in a continuously becoming process.[69]

Temporal Unity and Passive Synthesis

A curious observer may inquire how the active synthesis of music relates to the cognitive mind. Does this mean that the mind is passive relative to the active and continuous progression of sound? Certainly, it is important to concede that the musical form comes to the listener at an intuitional and sensory level that is more basic than any cognitive activity. However, this does not mean that the listener is affected by the experience merely passively. Although musical sounds are given to our consciousness in a manner that transcends empirical science, they are still "subsumed into the immanence of the subject."[70] That is, there is still a role played by the subject in the reception of these sounds. As F. Joseph Smith stated:

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[68] Smith, *Experiencing*, 106.

[69] Ibid., 108.

[70] Ibid.

> In order that giving can be accomplished a basic receptivity, an ability to perceive and receive, is required [...] Such receptivity is thus a correlative necessity, if data are to be taken into the subject's consciousness as *Gegebenheiten*, as givens. To receive a proffered gift, we extend the hand with the intention of taking the gift. The image of the extended hand, significative of intentionality, connotes the activity required to constitute proper receptivity. Receiving is therefore not mere passivity [...] In order to listen to either spoken language or to musical sound, we have to "lend our ears." Listening is not merely passive reaction; it is its own kind of activity. It has its own kind of intentionality, seen embodied in the sudden erecting of the ears when the dog hears its master's voice. In sound the voice or the music shapes itself and presents itself bodily to us as hearers. It is there *as given*; it is not merely a question of sense data affecting our audial apparatus.[71]

Heidegger expresses the same beliefs in a rather adamant statement: "We do not hear because we have ears; rather we have ears because we can hear."[72] As implied in this statement, there is a certain intentionality in listening that does not render the listener merely passive in their reception of musical sounds. This means that, "the subject constitutes itself in passive synthesis and builds the synthesis in a process that is neither active nor passive in the ordinary sense."[73] Naturally, there is a need to go beyond the consciousness of the subject from a moment to moment basis since the subject would be gradually accomplishing higher levels of synthesis.

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[71] Smith, *Experiencing*, 106.

[72] Ibid., 111.

[73] Ibid.

This means that musical sounds that persist from moment to moment are synthetically still one and that tonal duration cannot be analyzed as a mere series of sounds (just as reality cannot be interpreted as a stream of facts or events). Hence, the role of the music analyst is not like that of a scientist, who would be inspecting each note. Rather, it consists of examining the interplay of tones in the simultaneity of time (*Gleichzeitigheit)*. That is, the entry of each tone should not be analyzed as disparate parts, isolated in time from the others. Rather, all their diverse entries constitute a single continuous temporality as additional audial impressions are gradually added, thereby realizing the form of the musical work. As Smith stated:

> Time-consciousness is thus the primordial place (*Urstäte*) for the constitution of musical identity and unity, as well as the source of the connective forms of coexistence and succession of objects in consciousness. Time-consciousness is, in fact, the origin of what we know as "form," for in it entities shape themselves in passive synthesis for consciousness.[74]

Certainly, the form of a musical work is objective and lies heavily on the ontology of the composition itself, i.e. the organizational structure of a sonata form. As F. John Smith states, however, it is also "constituted in passive synthesis at the pre-analytical stage in the perceptive consciousness of the performer and of the listener."[75] Even in works of larger forms, of which subjects can only perceive parts at a time, their consciousness is what makes it possible to integrate these various parts together into a collective form.

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[74] Smith, *Experiencing*, 112.

[75] Ibid., 113.

That is, musical sounds become united in form, as seemingly individual notes share the same time in the "synthetic unity of the sound process."

Passive Synthesis and the Middle Voice

As the preceding section elucidates, sounds come together on their own in temporal unity, which is self-complete and independent of the subject's conscious activity. In other words, they actively come together in synthesis outside the cognitive mind that actively analyzes the musical form. Sound is not any more passive than how our perception is mere receptivity of senses, and they have their own intentionality that serves as the basis for our mental activity. Husserl describes their synthesis in this way, that music:

> "builds itself" (*sich bauen*) in consciousness, a thing "produces itself" (*sich herstellen*), "fulfills itself" (*sich erfüllen*), "achieves itself" (*sich herstellen*), and "constitutes itself primordially" (*sich ursprünglich konstituieren*).[76]

Husserl's heavy reliance on the reflexive forms of the verb is evident when exploring his theories on passive synthesis. The reasons for Husserl's diction is perhaps best provided by F. Joseph Smith: "Passivity is self-action, and the 'passivity' of the musical experience is a shaping up of the music itself, as it presents *itself* to consciousness."[77] The difficulty with which Husserl attempted to distinguish between the active and passive

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[76] Smith, *Experiencing*, 66.

[77] Ibid., 108.

voice reveals the struggles of using language to explain phenomenological concepts. English only distinguishes between activity and passivity, or between analysis and synthesis, and leaves nothing to mediate between these two rigid extremes.

The Greek origins of the word *phenomena* reflect this middle voice better than the reflexive verb forms in English. For example, *phaino* in Greek means to show or demonstrate, but *phainomai,* used in the middle form, means to show oneself or appear. This means that *phenomena* encompass all things that are in the middle ground by *self-*appearance, which precede the cognitive analysis by the active mind. This is also the case when experiencing musical sounds. When music presents itself in the middle ground, they appear in phenomenal time (*erscheinende Zeit*) and becomes phenomenal in content (in the presenting of its *noema*).[78] The subject, in a kind of passive intentionality, is assimilated to the sound and acquires knowledge about the musical material through his or her perception, while sounds gradually *pull themselves together* (*sich zusammerschliessen*) at the same time. The passive and the active come together as the mind gets "assimilated" to the world of objects, so that passivity is "likened" to things (*homoiómata*).[79] This mediation between the soul's passivity (*pathémata*) and things-to-be-done (*prágmata*) means that the two are not separate entities that have to be related.

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[78] Edmund Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, *Husserliana* XI, edited by Margot Fleischer (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 126.

[79] Ibid.

As Aristotle describes, there is instead "a passive assimilation" of the soul into the world of things.[80]

In the present discussion conducted in English, a reader may be left searching for a "middle voice" that is more fitting for the subtleties that need to be addressed. This would very much resemble the use of the middle voice in Greek, which considers no "relation" between the subject and the object. This lack may be especially evident in the second part of this paper that immediately follows this section, as I analyze the first movement of Debussy's La Mer, as it is phenomenological experienced.[81] The objective of my analysis is not so much as to incite any new insights about Debussy's work but to use it as an example, in order to speak of this middle ground between conscious mental activity and the mere receptivity of sounds. Following a phenomenological attitude, I will not speak solely of the subject or the musical composition, but rather discuss both from an intersubjective point of view. Much like Husserl's works, my discussion of the self-presentation of the sounds in "De l'aube" will naturally be heavily reliant on reflexive verbs.

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[80] Husserl, *Analysen,* 102.

[81] In case a reader is concerned that my phenomenological analysis may not be accurate or representative of another subject's experience, recall my earlier discussion of epoché, an attitude that brackets out personal and contextual distractions from the perception of sound as such. Also, it is possible for a subject's phenomenological experience to share common traits with that of another, according to Husserl. For more information on this topic, explore Husserl's theories on "intersubjectivity."

CHAPTER 4: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MUSIC

Purpose

In case the reader is still skeptical of the phenomenological approach to music, as opposed to the historical one that has characterized much of the scholarship to the present, this chapter serves specifically to address those doubts. A partial explanation of the significance of a phenomenological approach may be attributed to the need to transition from over-specialization toward an interdisciplinary synthesis of knowledge. As Heinrich Hüschen elaborates in his paper, "Past and Present Concepts of the Nature and Limits of Music," a thorough study of musicology cannot be accomplished without a philosophical dimension.[82] As illustrated in the preceding philosophical section, an exploration of phenomenology is insightful for the field of musicology, just as a musical model itself is an essential model for understanding phenomenological concepts.

This is because music is a priori marked with a human presence. It serves as a gateway between the "the *historical being there* of the composer and the equally historical *being here* of the analyst."[83] In other words, the intent of the composer in their historical context becomes connected through the symbolic language of music to the listener, whose mode of orientation affects the perceived musical work. Consequently, a

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[82] Smith, *Experiencing*, 15.

[83] Ferrara, "Phenomenology," 357.

phenomenological analysis must consider the roles of the composer, performer, and the listener, in order to give due credit to the human element in music. Ferrara summarized this aptly when he stated:

> Phenomenology presumes that *what* one hears is affected by *how* one hears. The analyst's modes of orientation to a work must be considered and articulated. One can close or open many potential meanings of a work given a particular mode of orientation. A distinctive phenomenological tactic is that, rather than manipulate a work through a formal grid of analytical questions or positions, one responds to questions posed by the work. The interpreter discovers that, in the traditional sense of the terms 'subject' and 'object,' *he* is *now object*; the music, as *subject,* questions the analyst. [84]

In this line of thought, the scholarship of musicology must not deal with abstract matters alone. As implied in Husserl's phenomenology, the "being" of the music presupposes the being there of the listener's consciousness.[85] A serious study of musicology must aim to unfold the basic essence of music as a "being," not to be purely ontological in nature and to result in an analysis of the music alone, but rather to connect the musical work to the numerous people who collectively contribute to its "becoming" or "happening" as a phenomenon. As F. Joseph Smith states, a thorough investigation of the objectivity of music is:

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[84] Ferrara, "Phenomenology," 356.

[85] "Phenomenology," *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

> A serious and concrete going *within* the musical phenomenon, not beyond it to some ideology or abstract world apart from this one. It is not unlike what G. Marcel calls 'inwardness' as the new transcendence. But this inwardness is not introspection or introversion. It is a concrete entering within the phenomenon of music, in this case, so that the phenomenon be allowed to speak for itself, to reveal itself to us, *as it is*, i.e. phenomenologically, rather than as we categorize it.[86]

An objective study of music requires more than a study of music history or a harmonic analysis of the music. As traditionally defined, history is a reiteration of facts, which relies heavily on methodology and the conventional division of time divided into the past, present, and future. Philosophers through Augustine, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, however, have questioned these established traditions. For something to *be* or happen in time, it does not necessarily have to happen according to a strict trichotomy of the past, present and future.[87] This understanding is crucial for our experience of musical compositions, which is based on a gradual synthesis of sounds in phenomenological time. Musical form, from a phenomenological stance, "is not static but ek-static, i.e. it is a continual *becoming*, in which the modalities of present, past, and future are brought together not spatially only but as the emergence (ek-sistence) of the musical phenomenon."[88] Naturally, the lines between phenomenology and ontology, "the

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[86] Smith, *Experiencing*, 15.

[87] See earlier discussion of Husserl's Time-Consciousness

[88] Smith, *Experiencing*, 16.

study of beings or their being—what is,"[89] will be blurred, as the subject changes from the person to the music, the intended object in the listener's consciousness. A phenomenological analysis, then, not only entails a closer examination of the ontology of music, but also imputes a greater significance to the listening of sound for analytical purposes.

In this line of view, the dichotomy between phenomenology and ontology are blurred. That is, the theories and concepts associated with a composition cannot be completely separated from the person who experiences them. The premise reflected in this integration is that musical work cannot be examined as a phenomenon without analyzing the ontology of its musical being. This also means that a phenomenological analysis should not be a presentation of the subjective experience of the listener, but an attempt to let reality (or the noema of the musical being) represent itself. Consequently, I attempt to overcome this dichotomy in my analysis. An ontological dimension would naturally be added in my later stages of music analysis - not in an abstract, metaphysical way, but inherently as a part of a phenomenological approach to music.

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[89] "Phenomenology." *Stanford Encyclopedia.*

Aims and Methods

Numerous works have been written on phenomenology in the fields of philosophy and aesthetics, especially as a method for art criticism,[90] but there have been few attempts to integrate music and phenomenology aside from a couple works. Even these works, however, only describe the usefulness of phenomenology as a tool and provide a few examples of actually doing the analysis. Hence, this discussion which has been philosophical in nature thus far will now proceed to an application of phenomenological concepts to Debussy's, "De l'aube à midi sur la mer." The aim of such an analysis is not to diminish traditional practices, but to simply broaden the application of music theory to include philosophical interpretations, which are often left out in music theory. That is, this paper adopts Stumpf's attitude of working with music as a science as done with tonal music prior to the twentieth century, while following Husserl's method and application of phenomenological concepts to music.[91] That is, this paper will attempt to retain the practicality of Stumpf while remaining Hussserlian in character, which seems to be the "common ground" for anyone who recognizes the significance of the integration of the theoretical and experiential features of the musical sound.

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[90] Ferrara, "Phenomenology," 358.

[91] It is no secret that Stumpf, with his background in music as both as an art and as a science, perceived Husserl's works as pure philosophical speculation, just as Husserl interpreted his student Heidegger's works as being superfluously metaphysical.

The procedure for my analysis follows the steps taken by Lawrence Ferrara, who is among the few scholars to apply phenomenological concepts to musical examples in his analysis of Edgard Varése's *Poéme électronique* in the article, "Phenomenology as a Tool." Guided by the inherent principles of phenomenology, my analysis starts by simply listening to the piece and then listening more intentionally for specifics. This means that in my initial stages of listening, I will omit the semantical and ontological meanings of the work, as syntactics are more fundamental in nature to musical form. Instead, at this stage I will just listen to sound as such, as I bracket any formal training. This stage of my analysis is not unlike Roman Ingarden's syntactical approach to a literary work, as a "pure series of sounds":

> In hearing words as unalloyed phonemes, one attempts to bracket out the semantic (or referential) meanings that usually mark the process of listening to or reading ordinary language. The unadulterated "word sounds" may give the literary critic a sense of the flowing quality or perhaps the jagged texture of a text that would not be so evident without such a hearing.[92]

The next step in my analysis reports the semantical and ontological meanings of the work, as intended by Debussy, which present themselves after many layers of careful listening. My approach thus far is generally reflective of the steps taken by Ferrara in his analysis of *Poéme électronique*, although it does not break down the listening experience

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[92] Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderline of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, trans. George Grabowicz (Evanston, 1973), 34-61; in Ferrara, "Phenomenology," 359.

into as many steps as Ferrara's. Rather, my analysis will summarize Ferrara's twelve steps, as outlined by Juyoung Lee and Katria Mcferran in their study:[93]

1. Open listening
2. Syntactical meanings: Fundamental level
3. Semantic meanings: Referential level
4. Ontological meanings: Composer's intention

Although each of these steps will be take us into a deeper layer of Debussy's "De l'aube à midi sur la mer midi sur la mer," it is important to keep in mind that they are not completely severed from one another. Rather, all syntactical, semantical, and ontological meanings contribute to the gestalt of the work, which provides a space for sounds to be heard as they are.

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[93] Juyoung Lee and Katria Mcferran, "Applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to Video Data in Music Therapy," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 12, no. 4 (2014): 368.

CHAPTER 5: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DEBUSSY'S "DE L'AUBE À MIDI SUR LA MER"

Open Listening

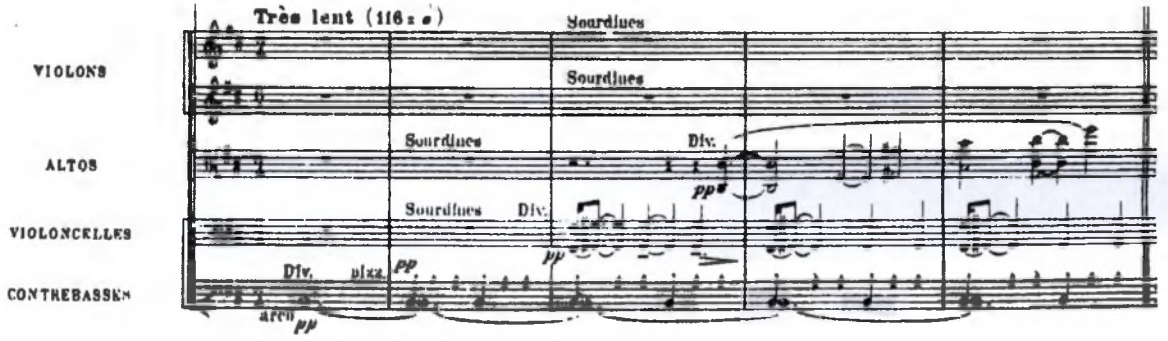
At this most basic and foundational level of analysis, "De l'aube à midi sur la mer" sounds as if it is always moving but static at the same time. It often repeats but constantly develops, never repeating any series of notes the same way. Tempo and tonality are up in the air, much like the vague impressions left by the strings from the beginning of the movement. Because taking such a large orchestral work and savoring each sound would be too expansive for the scope of this paper, only the introduction (m. 1-30) will be analyzed at this fundamental level. In an attitude of epoché, I will bracket any referential or metaphorical meaning until later stages of analysis.

Syntactical Meanings: Fundamental Level

A syntactical analysis examines sound as such while bracketing all information extraneous to the sound itself. It was often difficult to bracket out semantics completely because of the obvious meanings, or the elements of nature, to which the recurring motives refer. Still, I attempt to focus on the sounds themselves, at least those of the introduction, before delving into various musical dimensions of the movement at the semantical level.

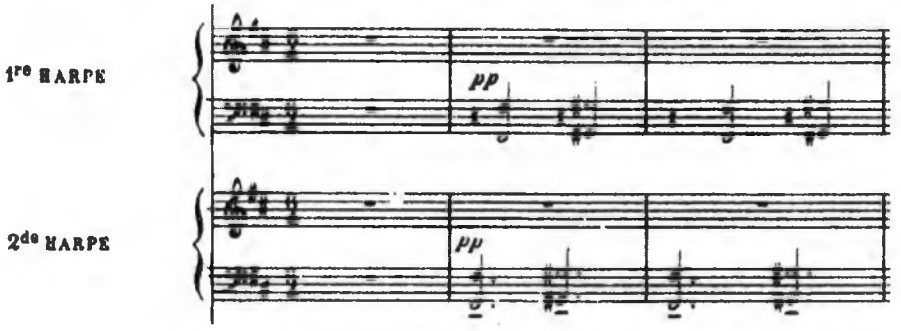
The introduction (mm.1-30) begins with a long pedal on B in the bass.

Example 1 Pedal on B in the bass (mm. 1-5)



A series of notes shared by the harps (mm. 2-5) comes in against this background of the lower strings, but they are not synchronized in time; one is just slightly ahead of another.

Example 2 Entrance of the harps (mm. 1-3)



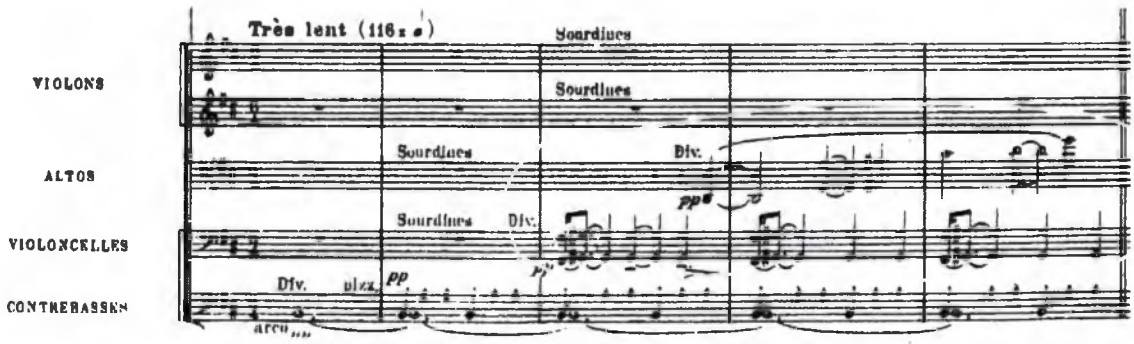
The harps with their soft timbre are only faintly heard in the midst of the strings and percussion, namely the timpani, which is enhancing the B of the lower strings. Consequently, the harps appear to us only in the fringe of our perception. A more active synthesis is used to place the harps in the foreground of our perception, then, than that which is needed for the relatively more cohesive strings and percussion.

This demonstrates how the noematic content of the musical work, i.e. instrumentation, influences the variations in our perception. It becomes clear in hindsight

that our perception in the listening experience is a noematic act that is continuously developing, much like our stream of consciousness. In this movement, as well as in the rest of *La Mer*, which is mostly comprised of instruments of soft timbre, the focal area of our perception often expands to a larger fringe area. That is, the focus on details compels an attentive attitude, a greater degree of the intention of our mind, and constant variations between passive and active synthesis.[94]

Soon after the harps make their faint entrance, the middle strings play an ascending pentatonic scale, mysteriously emerging from the depth of the pedal in the bass (m. 3).

Example 3 Pentatonic scale of the strings emerging from pedal on B

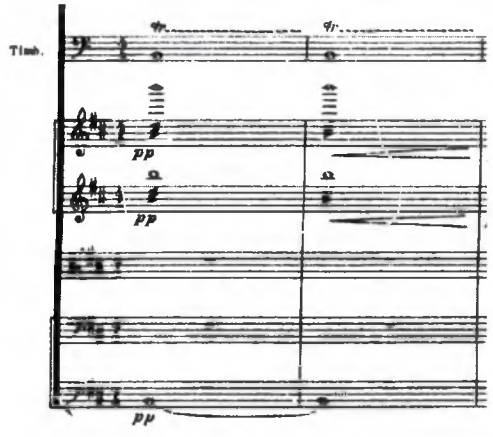


The pulse of this scale played by the violin and the viola is difficult to discern and feels rather off-beat. They are almost on beat but not quite together, much like the preceding entrance of the harps, which is very much retained in our memory. This rising figure

[94] See the section on intentionality discussed in part 1 of this paper.

played by the middle strings reaches B, the same note that has been held in the bass since the beginning, and then turns into a tremolo (m. 6).

Example 4 Tremolo in Strings (mm. 6-7)



At this point, the difference in playing technique stands out even more to the listener because of the congruous pitch elements.[95] Unlike the strings' entrance which made pitch elements (of the pentatonic scale) the focus of our attention, now it is the playing technique that becomes the subject of our intentionality. While the technique has changed, we are still able to discern that they are the same instruments, thereby affirming Husserl's theories on the intentional horizon (as applied to instrumentation).

Soon after the initiation of the tremolo, the oboe introduces a brief motive or a turning figure (mm. 6-9) that is heard often throughout the rest of the movement.

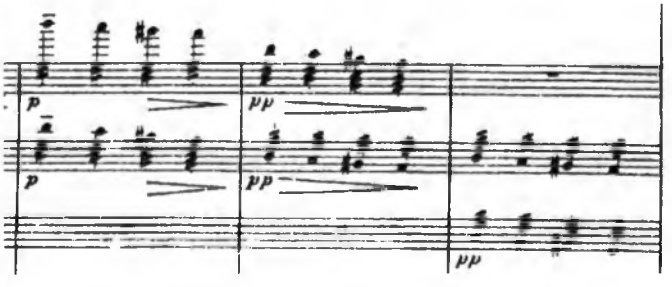
[95] This is with the assumption that when all other things are constant, what is different or new stands out even more.

Example 5 Oboe's motif (mm. 6-9)

It is the first time that the oboe presents itself to the listener's perception. At this point, the motivic and timbral elements become the dimensions of music that we focus on, primarily for the fact that they are new. It becomes clear only a few measures into the piece that the horizon of our intention itself can stretch to render more than one musical dimension (i.e. rhythm, pitch elements, timbre), simultaneously as the center of our intended mind.

As the short motif reaches its end, the strings start descending (m. 8) using some of the same pitch elements (of the pentatonic scale) introduced by the harps, violas, and cellos in the beginning of the movement.

Example 6 Strings' descent (mm. 8-10)



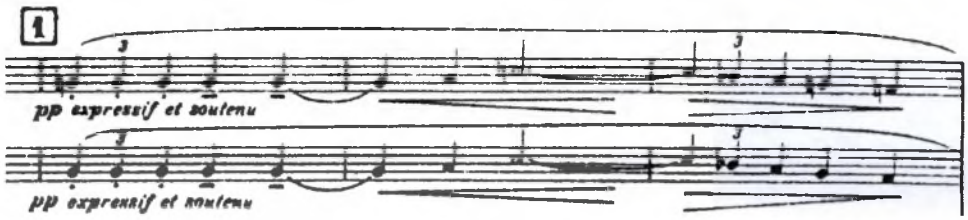
What is noteworthy at this point is that while the pitch elements descend from B-A-G-sharp-F-sharp, the strings also descend in register. The violins start the descending figure, and the viola enters a couple measures later (m. 10) as the first violin in the highest

register drops out, thereby starting a pattern which leaves only the cello and the bass in the concluding measures (mm. 12-16) of the first section of the movement. This descent in register is significant for it enhances the descent in pitch that the listener picks up on, even if they cannot identify the specific notes that are played. Simply put, it presents a descent in two musical dimensions simultaneously, which engage with and enhance each other.

What is also noteworthy in this descent in the strings (mm. 8-16) is the avoidance of the E. Instead, the listener is presented with a constant repetition of the notes B, A, G-sharp, and F-sharp. This lack of resolution to E makes the descent seem endless. The listener's longing for a resolution, or a sense of closure, is constantly perpetuated and left hanging, thereby stretching or elongating our sense of phenomenological time. The four-note scale also is reminiscent of the same pitch class used by the harps, violas, and cellos at the onset of the movement (mm. 2-5), which has been retained and recollected in our memory. While the scale does not descend to E, it constantly returns to B, the same note that has been held as a bass pedal from the very beginning. This means that through all the variations in instrumentation, motives, and registers, the protentive trails of the note B have been extended up to this point. This elongation of a single note also enhances the sense of time being elongated, and contributes to the absence of a steady pulse that has been felt from the beginning.

In the middle of the descent played by the strings, a rather melancholy motive is introduced to us by the cornets and the trumpets (mm. 12-15).

Example 7 Cornets and Trumpet's introduction of new motif (mm. 12-15)



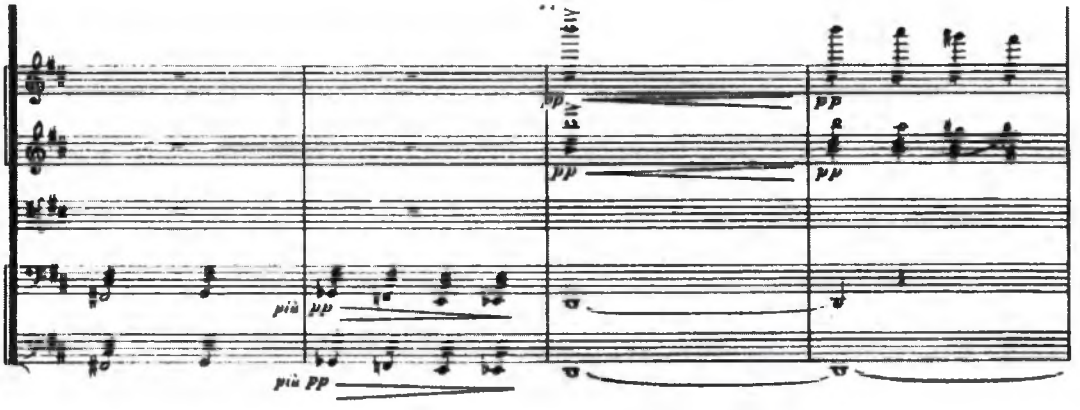
This motif holds our focal attention because it is new in (pitch) material. Much like before, a steady pulse is difficult to perceive because of the triplets and the syncopation that weakens the beat. The melancholy motive repeats a single note (of C), and crescendos and decrescendos to and from the highest note, as if alluding to or reaching for something at the climax (i.e. the peak in terms of both pitch and dynamics). This motif by the cornets and the trumpets does not sound like the same key as the bass, which is almost indiscernible. In fact, we are presented with a mismatch in various elements. The bass is still playing the pentatonic scale retained in our memory since the beginning of the piece, which blurs the tonality in and of itself, but the woodwinds' motif in a completely different key (mm. 12-17) further enhances the blurred tonality. The triplets and the syncopation in the motif also clash rhythmically against the steady tremolos of the strings, which weakens the rhythmical accents typically placed on the downbeat.

All of this enhances what we have been presented with since the very beginning of the piece: a rather fluid and fluctuating ebb of rhythm, pitch elements/tonal center, and timbre. The listener is presented with the sense of mystery or vaguenesss provoked by the summoning call of the motif, as we are left wanting for stability, resolutions, and a firm

foundation, i.e. a steady meter or key. That is, we find ourselves waiting for the protentions of sounds moving forward to be fulfilled, in multiple musical dimensions.

As this summoning motif ends, the string tremolos do finally present the long-awaited E in the cellos and bass (m. 16), but pass right through it to arrive on a whole note lower on a D.

Example 8 Strings' descent (mm. 15-18)



Once the cellos and the strings reach D, the upper strings start the descent over again, thereby perpetuating the lack of closure, a landing on B. This is fitting for the melancholy motif (mm. 12-15) we heard earlier, since there would be nothing to summon or allude to if all our expectations were met. Instead, we hear the change in the bass pedal to the D and a return of both the woodwinds' turning figure (mm. 17-18) and the strings' descending tremolo from the highest register (m. 17). This marks a return to what is familiar against the background of what is unfamiliar, i.e. the shift in bass pedal to D. The tremolos descend into the low registers of this new and unfamiliar pedal, thereby making

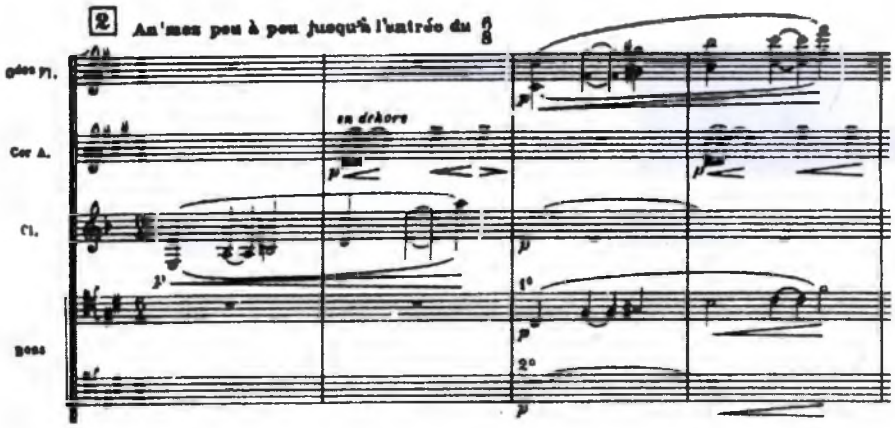
the music seem darker and more mysterious. Now it is not just the strings in the high registers descending, but the bass itself

From the depth of this mystery ascends a figure played by the clarinet (mm. 23-24), which consists of some of the same pitch elements and the rhythmic pattern retained in our memory since the beginning of the movement (see examples below).

Example 9 Clarinets' motif (mm. 23-24)	Example 10 Strings' entrance in introduction (pickup to mm. 3-4)
	

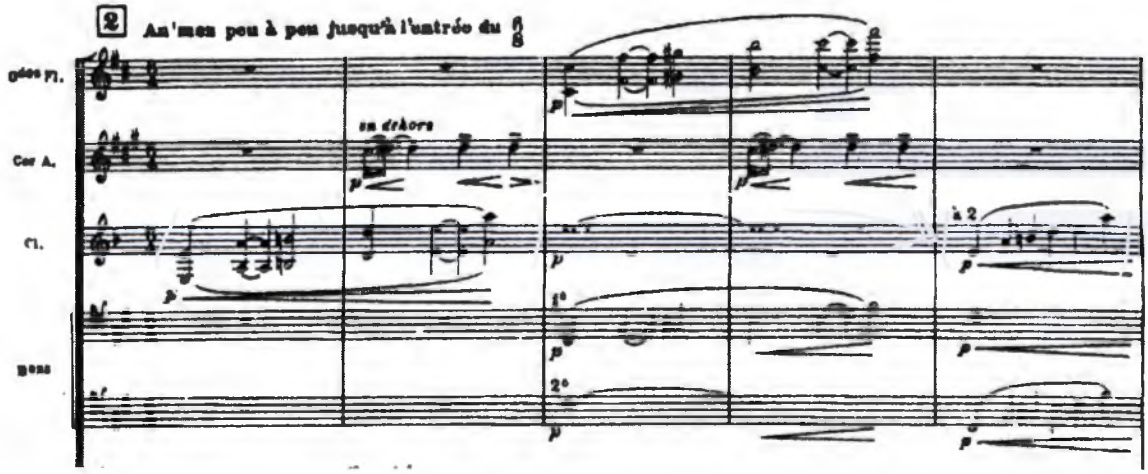
The notes played by the clarinet extend forward in their protentive trails when the flute (mm. 25-26) immediately imitates the same motive, which shares the exact rhythmic pattern. In fact, the flute presents some of the notes that are missing in the E major/minor scale played by the clarinets, namely F-sharp, G-sharp, and C-sharp.

Example 11 Clarinets' motif (mm. 23-24), which the flutes imitate (mm. 25-26)



In this case, the motives played by the two instruments connect as a part of the same moment, or the specious present, and present themselves to our consciousness as a united melodic phrase. The change in instrumentation in the continuation of this phrase makes timbre the focal point, thereby revealing how the intentional horizon of a phrase can extend to include not motivic, but also timbral elements. The higher and more airy quality of the flute relative to the clarinet further enhances the ascending shape of the now united melody. As the motive crescendos repeatedly, it also ascends simultaneously in others musical dimensions, i.e. pitch, dynamics, registers, and timbre. The clarinet is then immediately followed by the flute's retention of notes, that are now played strictly in quarter notes (measure 27).

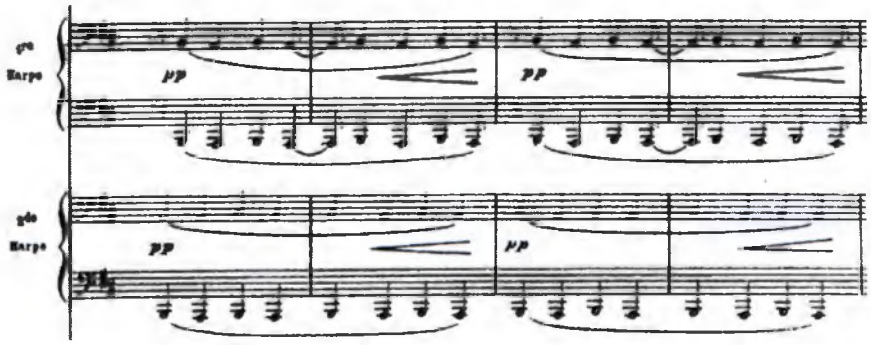
Example 12 Clarinets' retention of notes but in a different rhythmic pattern (mm. 23-27)



As revealed by the arrows in the above figure, the same melody is extended by various means within just a few measures: first by the continuation of rhythmic pattern, and then by the retention of the same notes. The change from half notes and syncopation (mm. 23-24) to strict quarter notes (m. 27) stands out more due to the use of the same pitch, thereby making rhythm our focal center. As a result, our phenomenological sense of time seems faster, despite the constant use of the 6/4 time signature.

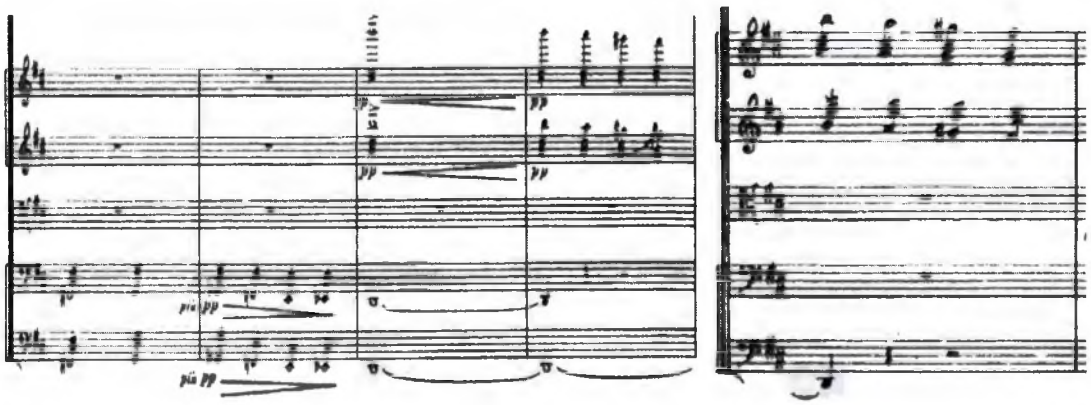
Concurrently with the dialogue between the clarinet and the flute, the harps present themselves with only two notes, B and A (mm. 23-26).

Example 13 First and second harp (mm. 23-26)



The first harp immediately plays the same notes as the second harp, but its timing is delayed by an eighth rest. This results in an asynchronization of rhythm despite the protention of pitch between the two instruments. In fact, the repeated interval of the second (from A to B) recalls the familiar bass pedal on B. Hence, we now hear how the change of the bass pedal to D in measure 17-18 was short-lived.

Example 14 Change in bass pedal to D in the strings (mm. 17-18)



As the primacy of our intentionality returns to B, the A in the harps is pushed to the fringe of our perception and relegated to the subordinate role of the neighbor note, despite its repetition that is as constant as B. What we end up hearing is not a constant

repetition of the notes themselves, but more so the motion itself, which gently ebbs up and down from what is familiar (the long-held B). It is the melodic shape that has now become our focal center. And it is from this gentle flowing motion of the harps' sound, that we hear the woodwinds emerge, ascend, and exchange in dialogue in the higher register.

Despite the melodic protention of sounds being fulfilled, our expectations are thwarted in terms of rhythm. When all instruments join in and present themselves at the same time (mm. 28-30), we are presented with a fullness of sound in both texture and dynamics (i.e. crescendo). Hence, although the music is still relatively soft in terms of dynamics, timbre, and metrical accents, what we hear in mm. 23-30 is the most intense or climatic part of the piece thus far. From the quiet mystery that has persevered since the beginning of the movement, the tension has been built for us to expect the beginning of something new, and we long for something in the distant past or future, as summoned by the melancholy calls we have heard. As evident, the phenomenological analysis of sounds at their most basic (syntactical) level supports the same conclusion that is reached from the more conventional and theoretical analysis of "De l'aube" – that the introduction ends and that a new section starts in measure 31.

Semantical Meanings: Referential Level

Motives and Pitch Elements

After several hearings, it becomes apparent that there is no sense of unification or coherence in motivic development. Instead, we hear several motives that are presented to us in constantly evolving variations. In fact, *La mer* presents much more motivic diversity than the development of a cyclic motif. The figure below features just some of the motives in the introduction that show diversity in rhythm, duration, and timbre.

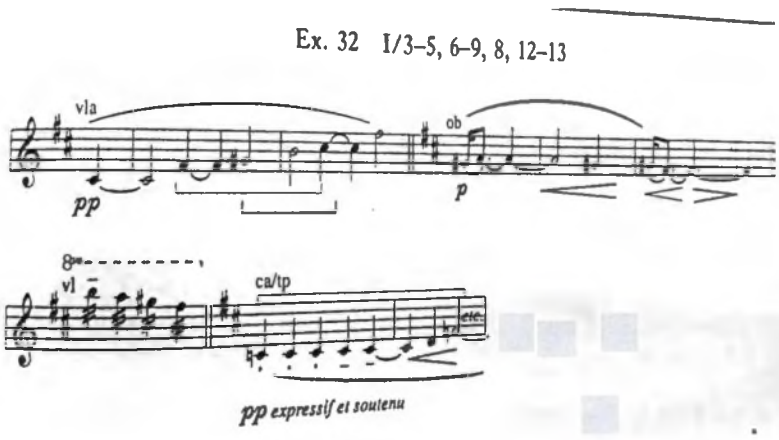


Figure 2 Diversity of Motives[96]

[96] Simon Trezise, *Debussy, La Mer* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 83.

Despite their disparity, there is also a sense of familiarity, as these motives share a cell of notes spanning between F-sharp and B. In fact, these same pitch elements are retained from the introduction and recycled throughout the entire movement (see figure below).

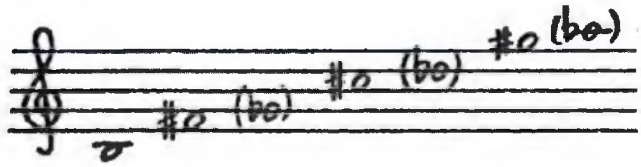


Figure 3 Use of fifths in the introduction[97]

In the midst of this motivic variety is a motif that is also cycled throughout the movement, one that is first presented by the trumpet and the English horn in measures 12-17 of the introduction (see example below).

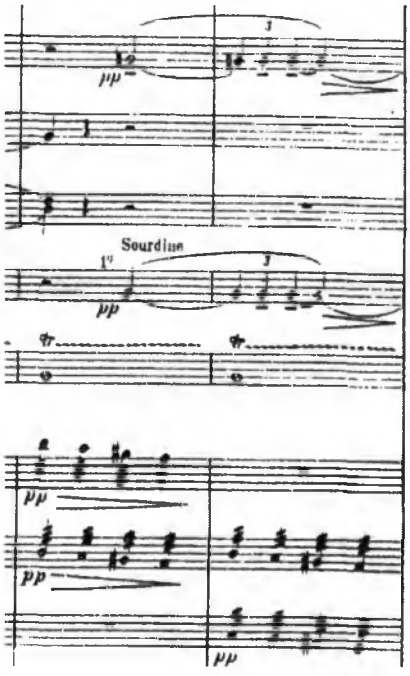
Example 15 First three measures of the first cyclic motif (mm. 12-17)

This cyclic motif is presented throughout the movement (mm. 112-114, 132-134), but they do not attain a dominant presence, as typically expected of main themes. That is, they sound more like a part of the action around them rather than the subject. For

[97] Rolf, M. "Debussy's 'La Mer': A Critical Analysis in the Light of Early Sketches and Editions" (PhD Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1976), 166.

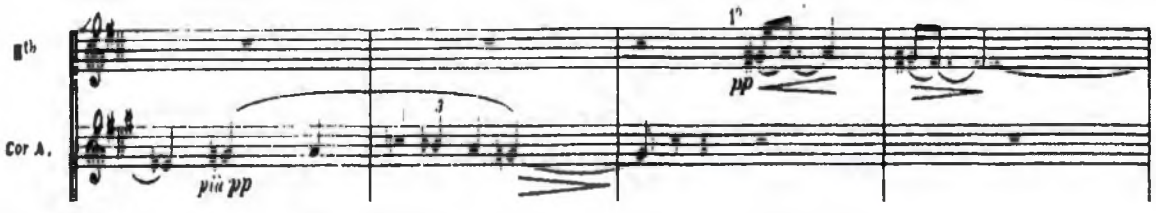
instance, before the cyclic motif makes its full entrance (measure 12), it slowly creeps in (measure 9) following a motif x by the oboe. It is also only faintly outlined over the string's tremolo, which persists throughout the presentation of the entire motif.

Example 16 The first cyclic motif's false entrance over the strings' tremolo (m. 9)



Neither is it developed in any way after its full entrance, but instead is immediately followed by a repetition of motif x by the oboe, which bookends the entire cyclic motif.

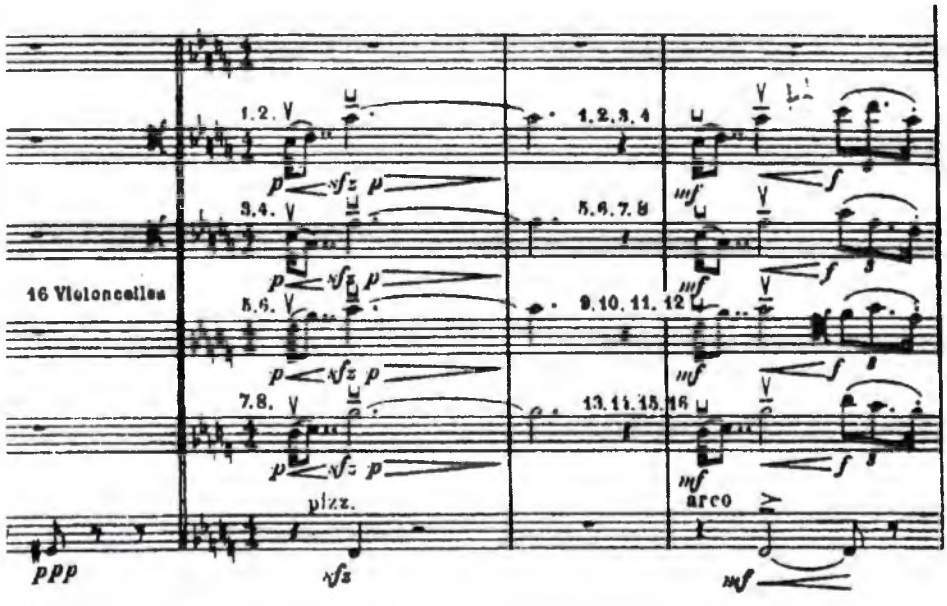
Example 17 The cyclic motif followed immediately by motif x (mm. 15-18)



The listener at this point experiences a narrowing of the focal center and a widening of the fringe areas of our intentionality, as we become attentive to a wider range of motivic action in a more detailed but "less focused" manner. In simple terms, there is no central melody or theme on which to focus our intended mind. Our intentionality is divided over various motivic action, which demands greater attention to detail, albeit in a more dispersed manner.

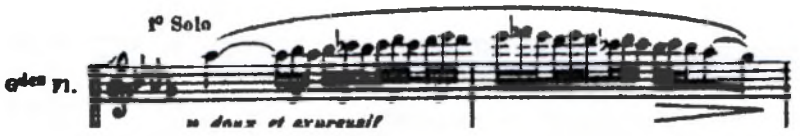
This is not to say there is no sense of familiarity in the movement for us to retain. The cyclic motif mentioned above recurs a couple more times in the movement, albeit intruding on other motivic elements and creating "motivic dissonance" each time. The second principal section is essentially two variations on a motif by the cellos (mm. 86-88), which have only played accompanying roles previously

Example 18 The cellos' motif that starts the second principal section (mm. 86-88)



The arabesque motif (mm. 47-48) pervades throughout the movement as well (see following figure):

Example 19 The arabesque motif (mm. 47-48)



Lastly, what also enhances the constancy among the diverse motivic variations is the recurring use of a couple of major seconds separated by a minor third. These sets of notes, or any three-note subset of them, are ordered in various ways, thereby making them cellular throughout the movement.

As evident, the motives in "De l' aube à midi sur la mer," are not dependent so much on development, as is typically defined, but on our musical memory or awareness of what we are hearing. By constantly alluding to what is familiar (i.e. pitch material and recycled motivic and rhythmic elements) while simultaneously presenting new motives and endless variations, the composition leaves the impression of movement that is both familiar and new. That is, our consciousness and the composition engage with each other in a constant and endless stream of retentions and protentive trails to be fulfilled. What we hear is never in the moment but seamlessly integrated to both the past and the future, thereby blurring the strict trichotomy of time into the past, present, and future. As revealed in our listening, our synthesis of the music comes to imitate the fluidity of the sounds themselves, just as the irregular meters and rhythm in "De l'aube" reflects our

phenomenological sense of time. The fact that the diversity of these motives is still presented to our consciousness as a unified phenomenon supports Husserl's assertions on time-consciousness discussed in part one of this paper.

Tonality

Tonality in the piece is indecisive, imprecise, and inconstant. Debussy's tonicity is lacking in clear functionality and clouded by many means. Certainly, this lack of functional clarity is not blatant in one's early stages of listening. What is immediately perceptible, however, is the fluidity at which the music moves, a sensation which I argue is essentially tied to tonicity. The following table provides a glimpse of the instability and inconstancy of the tonal center throughout the movement.

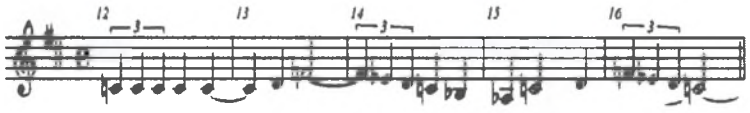
Table 1. Tonal organization of "De l'aube à midi sur la mer"

Introduction	Part One	Part Two	(Transition)	Coda
mm. 1-30	mm. 31-84	mm. 85-132	mm. 123-132	mm. 133-end
B	D-flat	B-flat	V of D-flat	D-flat

These tonal centers cannot be analyzed by traditional harmonic succession or function alone but must also be done so by their placement of emphasis in our perception. What is noteworthy about the fluctuating tonicity is not only their varying lengths or duration, but also the changing technique with which the tonic makes itself present. The following are just a few factors that influence our perception of the tonicity of "De l'aube." The

trumpet's "call of the sea," for example, consists of notes that could belong to two scales, namely a C Aeolian or an A-flat Acoustic scale.

Example 20 Trumpet's "Call of the Sea" in the Introduction (mm. 12-17)[98]



This motive lacks the G or the G-flat, which would identify it as either of the two scales, respectively. However, it does circle around the note C, on which it starts and ends. It is more likely a C Aeolian, based on this emphasis alone, but it is not this key that is the most present in our perception. Instead, what is most immediate to us is its dissonance with the emphasized B in the bass. The sustained bass pedal, in this example and many others throughout the piece, endures longer in our perception for both quantitative (it is sustained) and qualitative reasons (it is low in the bass). That is, the mystery of the motive's key is not as immediate to us as its clash with the relatively more dominant tone in the bass that has been retained in our memory. Such tonally ambiguous passages present cases in which the intentional horizon of the tonal center expands to include temporary and ever-changing alternatives. Put simply, the definition of tonicity itself is

[98]David Marcus, "Inconstant Tonality" (PhD Dissertation, University of Georgia, 2009), 79.

stretched, as the tone that is most clearly perceptible to us ends up becoming the tonal center in our synthesis of the musical sounds.

The musicologist Daniel Harrison refers to this as "position asserting," as opposed to "position finding":

> One of the hallmarks of chromatic music was the discovery that the sensations of harmonic tonality could be separated from the sounding entities that traditionally produced them…Key centers can be created that are independent of the tonal structures that traditionally attend them. The importance that this technique has for chromatic music, as well as for most pitch-centered music of the twentieth century, cannot be overstated.
>
> In chromatic music, if the listener cannot find Tonic, *Tonic often finds the listener.* This process is essentially the inverse of position finding; *instead of using intervals to find tonic, a tonic is given* and its intervals are thereby defined.[99]

While Harrison was not a phenomenologist, he implies the important role our perception plays in our identification of tonicity. From this standpoint, we cannot listen for the tonic, which bears the role of presenting itself to us. The functions of harmonies become blurred in chromatic music with the existence of multiple tonicities, even when one is more dominant than another. Listening to "De l'aube," we are left without a tonal foundation on which to "ground" our musical experience, just as there have been no centric meter and melody on which to base our sense of familiarity. In my ontological

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[99] Daniel Harrison, *Harmonic Function in Chromatic Music, a Renewed Dualist Theory and an Account of Its Precedents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 75–76.

analysis that follows, I will explore the metaphorical meanings of the discussed sense of fluidity in "De l'aube," which is appropriate for a movement of a work, entitled *The Sea.*

Ontological Meaning: Composer's Intention

Although an ontological analysis may seem overly conceptual and superfluous to musical syntax, it is still necessary in the discussion of a musical work. When sounds are used by a composer to contribute to the gestalt of a composition, a context is need in which to place the sounds. That is, the ontological world of the composer, in which the composition is set, allows sounds to matter as sounds. To take Heidegger's metaphor of an ancient Greek temple as an example, the sounds that form the syntax of a musical structure may be compared to the stones that comprise a temple.[100] The stones, if left alone on the street, may be deemed insignificant and kicked out of the way. When they present themselves as a part of a carefully constructed architecture, however, we appreciate them more as essential parts of an overall structure. Their "stoniness," or syntactical meanings of sounds as discussed earlier in this paper, becomes significant as a result of its context.

The reverse is also true. As Heidegger asserted, the ontological world is limited and finite in that the values and outlooks of a historical period can change over time. However, works of art allow a composer's lived knowledge and experience to be

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[100] Martin Heidegger, "On the Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row 1971), 41.

grounded and preserved in sounds for future listeners to perceive intuitively. The relationship between the syntax, semantics, and the ontology of a musical work are thus circular, each supporting and inevitably tied to one another.

The Sea

Applied to our present discussion on "De l'aube," we must consider sounds in the context in which Debussy crafted them. It cannot be coincidental that the first edition of *La mer* was published with a reproduction of Katsushika Hokusai's print, "The hollow of the wave off Kanagawa," a print which also hung in Debussy's room (see following figure).[101]

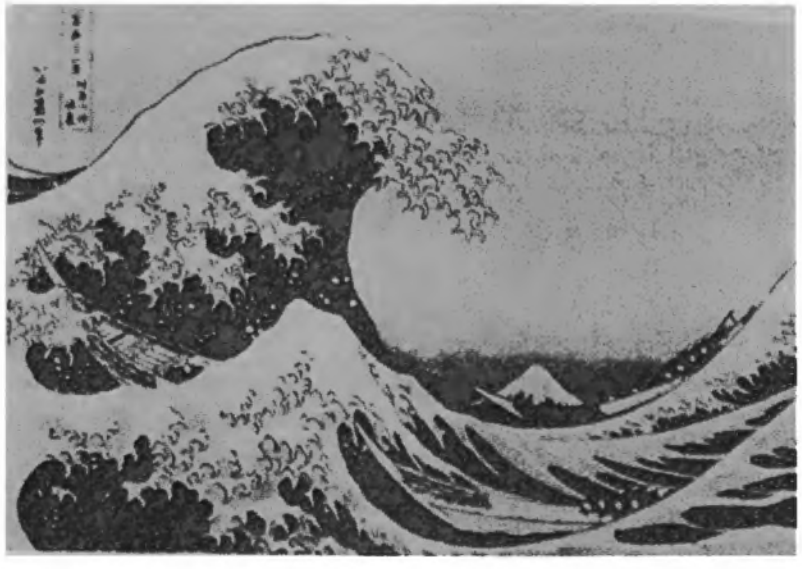

Figure 4 "The hollow of the wave off Kanagawa" from Katsushika Hokusai's *Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, c. 1820-29[102]

[101] Ray Howat, *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 178.

[102] Ibid., 179.

Another popular print popular at the time of the publication of *La mer* was Ando Hiroshige's "The whirlpools at Awa," which adopts whirlpools as its motive.[103] It is unclear whether Debussy knew of this print at the time of his composition, but his love for Japanese art is well known. Hence, Debussy's fascination of the sea must be considered in the ontological analysis of *La mer*.

The titles of the movements of *La Mer*, subtitled "Three symphonic sketches," also provide suggestions for their ontological meanings. "From Dawn to Midday on the Sea," the first movement discussed in this paper, portrays the subtle changes in atmosphere and lighting on sea that accompany the passing of the morning. Listening to "Play of Waves," the second movement, conjures up images of rocking waves and shifting currents. The last movement of "Dialog of the Wind and the Sea" provokes the most ominous and suspenseful feelings within the listener, thereby portraying the dangers associated with a stormy sea.

It is important to remember, however, that *La mer* should not be interpreted as a literal portrait of the sea with a program or a story. Symbolist poets, whom Debussy associated with, believed that art should not illustrate plain meaning but rather evoke and

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[103] Howat, *Debussy*, 178.

hint at deeper feelings, commonly through the medium of a metaphor.[104] These principles were most likely shared by Debussy, for whom emotions and musical structure were not separate. Such views are expressed in Debussy's review of Paul Dukas' 1901 *Piano Concerto*, in which he wrote: "You could say that the emotions themselves are a structural force, for the piece evokes a beauty comparable to the most perfect lines found in architecture."[105] In this line of view, emotions serve as a sort of structural blocks that not only organize *La mer*, but provoke aural images of the sea to the listener.

The Golden Ratio

This is not to say that there is no formal theoretical framework which organize the sounds of *La mer*. An aspect to Hokusai's print that must not be overlooked at this point is its use of the golden ratio, which has been regarded as the ratio most pleasing to the eye throughout history. Put simply, two quantities are in golden ratio when the ratio of the larger part to the smaller part is congruous to the ratio of their sum to the larger part, which comes out to be approximately 1.618 (see following figure).

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[104] Jorge Variego, "Claude Debussy – Color, Shapes, and Proportions in La Mer and Other Works," *Jorge Variego*, accessed on April 2019, http://jorgevariego.com/?p=696.

[105] Howat, *Debussy,* 173.

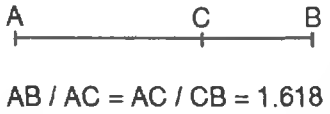

Figure 5 The Golden Ratio in a line[106]

This ratio is heavily associated with the Fibonacci sequence, which begins with 0 and 1, and has each subsequent number equaling the sum of the previous two. Taking any number in this sequence and dividing it by the previous number approximates 1.618. Spiral shapes that reveal the Fibonacci sequence, such as the tide in Hokusai's print, are approximate examples of the golden ratio, which can be found in both nature and man-made creations.

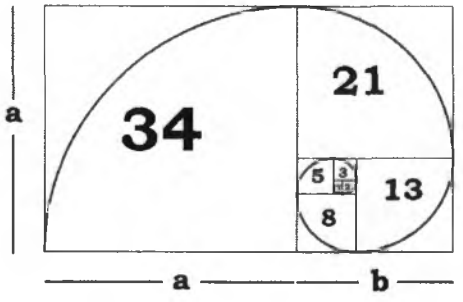

Figure 6 Spiral that reveals the use of Fibonacci Sequence, or an approximate use of the Golden Ratio[107]

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[106] Steven Bradley, "Golden Section Proportions," *Vanseo Design*, Accessed April 20, 2019, https://vanseodesign.com/web-design/golden-section-proportions/.

[107] Elaine J. Hom, "What is the Golden Ratio?" *Live* Science, Accessed April 25, 2019, https://www.livescience.com/37704-phi-golden-ratio.html.

The golden ratio, however, is more than just a ratio of numbers. It has the unique power to integrate disparate parts of a whole so that they contribute to the harmony of the greater whole, while preserving their own identity.

To avoid the risk of digression, the harmonious capacity of the golden section must be related to the present discussion on Debussy's "De l'aube." In his book *Debussy in Proportion*, Roy Howat asserts that Debussy intentionally used the golden section to organize all movements of *La mer*, intentions which are reflected in Hokusai's print on the cover. The criticism that Debussy was unaware of such sophisticated musical structure disregards his meticulous attention to proportions, which is revealed in the reasons he cited for restoring previously cut passages to another composition, *En blanc et noir*.[108] The fact that Debussy's early works reveal no proportional systems provides even greater assurance that such schemes in his more mature works are not coincidental. This is further supported by the fact that the earlier manuscripts of *La mer* does not reveal GS coherence, as the final score does.[109] Such observations refute the claim that Debussy unconsciously used the GS based on a natural bent for proportions. That Debussy's proportional intuition failed to manifest in his earlier manuscript, and then suddenly became effective in the final 1909 edition, reveals inconstant logic. Rather, the

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[108] Howat, *Debussy*, 9.

[109] The original 1905 manuscript of *La mer* is available at Eastman School of Music's Sibley Library. The 1909 manuscript is the latest edition sanctioned by Debussy and used for the present discussion.

progression toward greater GS accuracy in the later manuscripts of *La mer* clearly portrays Debussy's intentions.

It is important to note at this point that Debussy's use of such structural regulations (consciously or not) is not incompatible with his distaste for musical *formulaes*. While the use of this French word necessitates a conventional and prescribed method, as Howat noted:

> GS is a natural principle, like the harmonic series, whose physical existence antedates mankind. As such it would hardly be disregarded by Debussy, were he aware of it. When he wrote, more than once, about his musical "search for a world of sensations and forms in constant renewal", his aim was evidently to free music from rigidly stereotyped forms. At the same time his concern for proportional balance *within his formal freedom* is well documented in his own writings.[110]

Unfortunately, the objections raised to the use of GS in *La mer* often dichotomizes proportional intuition and intentional design. If such precise schemes are based purely on some proportional instinct, then the possibility of such instinct is supported (at least on the part of the composer). On the other hand, if such instinct fails to exist, then GS coherence in *La mer* must have been intentionally designed. But instinct and design are not necessarily detached for Debussy. The present discussion is based on the same assumption that Howat makes:

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[110] Howat, *Debussy*, 9. Original emphasis added.

> Any conscious compositional techniques, proportional or otherwise, would have been used for ensuring maximum accuracy in the music's instinctive effect – and that they would be rejected unless the musical results felt instinctively correct to him. That is to say, if Debussy designed such schemes consciously, the implication must be that he also believed in a corresponding proportional instinct.[111]

This view is particularly significant for phenomenological discussions, such as this one, which explores intuitive perception and consciousness. While the present discussion has been biased toward the intuition of the listener, as opposed to that of the composer, it is still important to note that musical events in Debussy's music are not illogical. The musical events that seem fluid, instinctive, and intuitive do not hinder their co-existence with the more formal structure, and vice versa. As a result, the GS that is found in *La mer* concretely grounds the musical structure to the sea, whereas its fluidity perceived by the listener likens it to the sea intuitively. It's important to note that *La mer*'s formal organizational framework does not hinder the phenomenological experience of the listener, for whom aural images of the sea are conjured.

Dream-like Consciousness

In addition to Hokusai's painting, there is another artwork that elucidates our ontological understanding of *La mer*. Kenneth Clark, in his study of the Romantic painter Joseph Mallord William Turner, emphasized Turner's preoccupation with visions and

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[111] Howat, *Debussy*, 9.

dreams, terms which were commonly associated with paintings, such as *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat Off a Harbour's Mouth* (see figure below).[112]

Figure 7 Snow Storm: Steam-Boat Off a Harbour's Mouth[113]

Interpreting dreams as an expression of our deepest, hidden intuitions and memories, Lockspeiser asserted that such qualities of dreams are apparent in Turner's paintings.[114] That is, they portray multiple foci and a melting of form, which stir feelings of instability and blurred perceptions often experienced in a dream-like state.

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[112] Edward Lockspeiser, "Debussy's concept of the dream," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 89, no. 1 (1962): 49.

[113] "J.M.W. Turner: Painting Set Free de Young Museum," *Artsy*, accessed April 10, 2019, https://www.artsy.net/artwork/jmw-turner-snow-storm-steam-boat-off-a-harbours-mouth-1.

[114] Lockspeiser, "Debussy's," 49.

In his lecture "Debussy's concept of the dream," he recognized Debussy's affinity and idolization of J.M.W. Turner, and presented the parallel dream images between the two artists' works. A noteworthy instance in the lecture is when he played recorded excerpts from *La mer*, and read the following quote from Kenneth Clark's article on Turner:

> This dream-like condition reveals itself the repeated appearance of certain motifs which are known to be part of the furniture of the unconscious… one of these is the vortex or whirlpool, which became more and more the underlying rhythm of [Turner's] designs…[115]

As revealed in the above statement, the aesthetic parallels between Debussy and Turner cannot be purely coincidental, especially given Debussy's knowledge of Turner's works. As Lockspeiser asserted, Debussy's compositions explore the "remoter corners of dream consciousness, where emotions tell their truths unstifled by intellectual prejudice or inhibition."[116] This point of view is very much aligned with the aforementioned quote by Debussy himself, on feelings being the "building blocks" for musical structure.

But just how do Debussy's musical techniques, which are apparent on the surface level, play a role in the deeper level of consciousness or dormant intuition? In his book *The Hidden Order of Art*, Anton Ehrenzweig touches on the "complexity of relationships in the various arts between subconscious inspiration and conscious techniques." [117] This

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[115] Howat, *Debussy,* 178.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

is a perspective applicable to our present discussion, as we have previously examined the techniques in his compositions and now explore the relatively deeper expression of consciousness. Ehrenzweig's main argument is that art breaks up the continuities of surface details:

> In order to exploit more hidden levels of cohesion; and that when the more hidden relationships, through development, become the obvious surface techniques, their fecundity dies (or to use Debussy's term, they become *formules*).[118]

In alignment with Ehrenzweig's thesis, Debussy's disinclination towards *formules*, or the reliance on conventional and formal compositional techniques, is well documented in journal entries and letters. Rather, his use of techniques, such as the motivic variations, are innovative in that they are not just surface interruptions. They establish cohesions by contributing to the overall unity and fluidity of the piece at a deeper level, which also characterizes our stream of consciousness.

As Ehrenzweig asserts, artistic creations in general oscillates between consciously constructed phrases and ones that are formed of more "intuitive receptiveness to new inspiration."[119] He posits that our waking consciousness alternates between these two states, in a rhythm that may be essential to defining our experience of time.[120] Although

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[118] Anton Ehrenzweig. *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967): 219-20.

[119] Howat, *Debussy,* 181.

[120] Ehrenzweig, *Hidden*, 180.

he does not relates these theories to music, they do invite a more in-depth exploration. It is difficult to decipher, for example, how the sensitive listener might have been affected by the psychological rhythm found in Debussy's music, that is, "the subtler larger-scale rhythms and alternations of types of structures," [121] which could have affected their sense of phenomenological time. This is a feature of Debussys "De l'aube," which has been left unexplored in this discussion.

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[121] Howat, *Debussy,* 181.

CONCLUSION

Another aspect to Debussy's music which has not been examined thoroughly in this paper is that of its mathematical structure. Whether Debussy used such a structure consciously (or it presented itself in music unintentionally) deviates from the main question posited by the present discussion. Rather, what is of greater importance is the impact of such a structure on the listening experience. That is, does the GS in "De l'aube à midi sur la mer" influence our perception in any way? To what extent does this intellectual structure enhance or confine our intuitive perception? While the assumption in this paper thus far is that it has no bearing on the listening, such questions still reveal the need for musical analysis to expand beyond theory into the listener's intuitive receptiveness of musical structure, which undoubtedly shapes their musical experience.

This paper may also be met with criticism from philosophers of the analytic tradition, who have often criticized the firsthand approach of phenomenology as being incompatible with the objective third person point of view.[122] As explained in the first half of this paper, however, scientific disciplines in turn presuppose human activity from a first-person perspective. This is what John Searle describes as the "Phenomenological Illusion," which states that "what is not phenomenologically present is not real, and that what is phenomenologically present is in fact an adequate description of how things

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[122] Luke Mastin, "Phenomenology," *Basics of Philosophy*, accessed March 27, 2019, https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_phenomenology.html.

really are."[123] Simply put, all things must be experienced firsthand to bear meaning, and the subjective experience does not contaminate the accuracy behind an interpretation. This is the same attitude that has been adopted throughout this paper and also by the majority of phenomenologists. Applied to this discussion, the phenomenological experience of *La mer* may differ for each listener, each of whom may still correctly interpret it as the sea. The ontological analysis of the composition, which integrates Debussy's intentions with the actual sounds of his music, only enhances this view.

In short, the present discussion is more likely to raise questions than to provide a thorough answer concerning phenomenology. However, the purpose of this paper is specific and practical: that an application of a phenomenological approach to Debussy's *La mer* has suggested some ways of thinking about our musical and listening experience. This research has revealed an interplay of retentions and protentions, both fulfilled and unfulfilled. Listening to "De l'aube" has also been instrumental in illustrating the different phenomenological categories of perception, such as the narrowing or the broadening of focus or intentionality, as well as the shifts in the focus-fringe ratio. It has also portrayed changes in our regional shifts of focus (i.e. change in instrumentation or timbre) simultaneously with the continuation of another musical dimension (i.e. use of the same motive), thereby expanding the intentional horizon of a musical phrase.

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[123] Mastin, "Phenomenology."

Lastly, this paper has also demonstrated how these various perceptional categories explored in the syntactical and semantical analysis do not contrast the ontological meaning of *De l'aube*. That is, its perceived inconstancy and imprecision serve well as a metaphoric fit for the sea, as well as the stream of consciousness of the listener involved in the musical experience. As evident, the metaphorical meanings of a musical work are not just conceptual in nature but grounded deeply in the composition itself, thereby integrating analysis and the musical experience as a single entity. This organic bond suggests that "'the correctness' of an analysis cannot be measured against the work,"[124] as this leaves out the person who experiences the artwork. This is a view that often contradicts the conventional practice of music theory and analysis. Consequently, phenomenology has significant implications for how music should be analyzed and taught. As Van Manen states, "It encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives."[125]

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[124] Ferrara, "Phenomenology," 373.

[125] Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 8.

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