Interpreting Discontinuity in the Late Works of Debussy

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1.

Many writers have commented upon formal discontinuity in Debussy's music. Robert Sherlaw Johnson compares this discontinuity to the collage technique of Messiaen (1975:102–03); Robert Orledge describes it as mosaic construction (1982:170); Roy Howat refers to it as a definable system of block construction (1983:23n6); and Robert P. Morgan terms it additive structure (1991:48). Yet these scholars were not the first to take note of disjunction in Debussy's compositional style. Decades earlier, another group of musicians similarly drew attention to Debussy's use of discontinuity. The composers of the Darmstadt avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s seized upon Debussy's works to inspire and legitimize their own formal experiments.[1] Pierre Boulez, Herbert Eimert, Dieter Schnebel, and Karlheinz Stockhausen all acknowledged their debt to Debussy with lectures, articles, recordings, and concerts of his compositions.[2] These composers focused on Debussy's formal innovations in general and championed Debussy's last orchestral work, the ballet *Jeux* (1913), in particular.[3]

The present article draws upon many of the insights of the Darmstadt composers to help isolate those features of Debussy's music that promote discontinuity. By revisiting their commentary and incorporating it, whenever feasible, into analyses of Debussy's works, I hope to achieve two objectives. First, by cultivating an approach that valorizes discontinuity, I aim to flesh out many of the observations and descriptions scholars have made concerning Debussy's compositional style, a small selection of which was cited in the opening paragraph. These writers all point to a conspicuous feature of Debussy's music, one that became more pronounced in his final works. While the Darmstadt composers perhaps overemphasized the role of discontinuity with regard to *Jeux*, Debussy's subsequent compositions are more in line with their commentary. For example, certain *Préludes* (1913) and *Etudes* (1915), the *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1913), and the central movements of the Cello Sonata (1915) and Violin Sonata (1917) pursue formal discontinuity further, which becomes even more noticeable in the smaller scope and sparser textures of these compositions.

Second, by approaching Debussy's late music from the viewpoint of

discontinuity, I hope to offer a counterbalance to much music-theoretical discourse, which tends to present a bias towards unifying structures and continuity in music. Despite the broad acknowledgment of discontinuity in Debussy's works (to which the comments in the opening paragraph testify), it is ultimately treated as a surface feature of the music, belied by an underlying continuity. While intentionally privileging musical discontinuity accentuates the opposite stance, it is a necessary first step in forming a balanced consideration of Debussy's compositions, one that ultimately acknowledges the interplay of discontinuity and continuity in his late style. In cultivating an analytic approach for Debussy's late works, I draw largely upon Stockhausen's 1960 article "Moment Form—New Relations between Durations of Performance and Work and Moment" and its revision in Jonathan D. Kramer's 1978 article "Moment Form in Twentieth Century Music" and 1988 book *The Time of Music*. Stockhausen's moment form presents one of the few theoretical attempts to broach musical discontinuity, both theoretically and aesthetically, and thus provides a productive starting point for a discussion of Debussy's late style.

Following a summary of Stockhausen's ideas, I analyze three late works— "Feuilles mortes" (*Préludes II*), "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" (*Préludes I*), and "Ondine" (*Préludes II*)—in light of his arguments, taking into consideration the increasingly autonomous ideas of these compositions, their non-developmental modes of presentation and, finally, the potential openness in their forms. Familiar formal patterns present in many of Debussy's *Préludes* and *Etudes*, such as ternary design, gradually disappear in the works analyzed in this article. The dissolution of any recognizable formal pattern is complete with "Ondine," which represents one of the most experimental of Debussy's late compositions and offers, in microcosm, many of the traits that the Darmstadt composers found so compelling.

2.

What attracted the Darmstadt composers to *Jeux* was its proliferation of ideas and their unusual presentation. As Eimert states, *Jeux*'s repertoire of twenty-three themes "is considerably larger than in usual formal practice." He notes that these themes:

> are mostly repeated once or twice, then they submerge. The repetitions guarantee comprehensibility in the accepted sense, but incomprehensibility increases in so far as the material repeated is constantly new. These juxtapositions function in a linear, direct, straightforward way. (1961:6)

In subsequent analytical comments, Eimert rejects all traditional formal

categories for *Jeux*, preferring instead terms such as "flowing form," "elastic structure," and "wave form" (1961:9,17). All these descriptions are suggestive in that they reject a hierarchical notion of form, so much so that Eimert himself concludes that "traditional music theory is helpless in [the] face of this work" (1961:20). Similarly, Boulez avoids conventional terminology in his description of *Jeux*:

> One must experience the whole work to have a grasp of its form, which is no longer architected, but *braided*; in other words, there is no distributive hierarchy in the organization of 'sections' (static sections: themes; dynamic sections: developments) but successive distributions in the course of which the various constituent elements take on a greater or lesser functional importance. One can well understand that this sense of form is bound to run up against the listening habits formed by contact with three centuries of 'architectural' music. (1991:155)

As the above quotations indicate, both Eimert and Boulez acknowledge the inadequacy of applying "traditional formal schemes" to *Jeux*, and their attempt to find a new lexicon not only grapples with formal procedures in *Jeux*, but also indicates the direction of their own compositional endeavors. Similarly, Stockhausen's writings of the 1960s describe new musical forms that "are remote from the scheme of the finalistic, dramatic forms" (1963a:198).[4] These writings, though they are intended to provide theoretical frameworks for his compositions, outline the same issues confronting Eimert and Boulez: that is, how to counter inherited notions of form, a legacy that Boulez describes as "three centuries of architectural music." Among the numerous formal procedures Stockhausen codified in the 1950s and 1960s, moment form is perhaps the most radical in that it attempts to distill the tendency toward fragmentation in post-war music into an aesthetic program.[5]

Stockhausen originally conceived of moment form as a way of accommodating listeners. Faced with complaints that his work *Kontakte* (1960) was too long (at 34½ minutes) to sustain the listener's interest, he strove to devise a compositional practice that allowed audiences to exercise control over their hearing of his work (1963a:189). Like the contemplation of a painting or a sculpture, Stockhausen wanted to create a form that granted listeners the freedom to come and go at will, without compromising their experience or the composition itself (1963a:192). This premise led to the creation of moment form, first articulated in "Moment Form—New Relations between Durations of Performance and Work and Moment." In this article, Stockhausen describes a form made up of autonomous musical sections—"moments"—that were to be appreciated as complete and self-con-

tained musical utterances, rather than for their role in a larger composition. To create this possibility, Stockhausen's conception of moment form addresses three main issues: the characteristics of the individual moment, the connections between moments and the principles of moment succession, and the requirement of endlessness.

First, Stockhausen describes the moment "as something individual, independent, and centered in itself, capable of existing on its own" (1963a:199). Moments are created to be dispensable, so that their presence or absence should not effect the identity of the work. Thus their autonomy is crucial: the musical idea has to be completed within the confines of the moment as it cannot rely on surrounding moments—which vary from one performance to another—for its musical coherence or completion. Whatever musical idea is established within the duration of the moment is maintained to its conclusion. Therefore, another defining characteristic of the moment is its internal consistency. As Stockhausen states, a moment is "every formal unit that is recognizable by a personal and unchangeable characteristic" (1963a:200).

Second, the autonomy of moments means that they do not prepare or follow from neighboring moments, and thus connections between them are minimal or non-existent. Moments are musical segments that are equally intensive and equally significant, so that a succession of moments is non-hierarchical and non-teleological. According to Stockhausen's definition, moment forms:

> do not aim toward a climax, do not prepare the listener to expect a climax, and their structures do not contain the usual stages found in the development curve of the whole duration of a normal composition: the introductory, rising, transitional and fading stages. On the contrary, these new forms are immediately intensive, and the main point which is made at once remains present at an equal level to the very conclusion. They do not induce constant waiting for a minimum or a maximum, and the direction of their development cannot be predicted with certainty. *They are forms in a state of always having already commenced, which could go on as they are for an eternity.* (1963a:198–99)

The concluding sentence leads to Stockhausen's final consideration, the requirement of endlessness. With Stockhausen's new conception of musical time, a listener can no longer recognize a necessary beginning, middle, or end to the composition. There is no sense of development, climax, or resolution, but only a succession of equally important ideas. Listeners, therefore, would be unaware of where they were in the course of the composition and, indeed, this disorientation is precisely Stockhausen's aim. By emphasizing the autonomy of the moment rather than any overall flow or conti-

nuity, Stockhausen hopes to obliterate all expectations of time, duration, and form previously established by Western musical tradition:

> This concentration on the present moment—on every present moment—can make a vertical cut, as it were, across horizontal time perception, extending out to a timelessness I call eternity. This is not an eternity that begins at the end of time, but an eternity that is present in every moment. I am speaking about musical forms in which apparently no less is being undertaken than the explosion—yes—even more, the overcoming of the concept of duration. (1963a:199)

Though separated by four decades, Stockhausen's definition of moment form can shed light upon certain works Debussy composed immediately before and during the First World War. Many of the *Préludes* and *Etudes*, for example, present successions of self-contained and non-developmental musical ideas that often bear little resemblance to traditional forms. Displaying characteristics of what Stockhausen would later term "moment form," certain passages within these works do not aim toward a climax or resolution but proceed linearly, with no one musical idea hierarchically more significant than another. These ideas may never recur during the course of the composition, and they more often contrast with, rather than connect to, surrounding musical sections. The following analyses focus on discontinuous features in three Debussy *Préludes* in an attempt to illuminate one of the most conspicuous and oft-noted features of Debussy's late style. The analysis of "Feuilles mortes" draws upon Stockhausen's discussion of the characteristics of individual moments; the analysis of "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" focuses on his ideas of moment succession; and the analysis of "Ondine" considers both of these features and their implications for open form. Each prelude occupies a different position within the continuity-discontinuity spectrum, moving from "Feuilles mortes," where an unusual sequence of ideas in the central section sits between two otherwise cohesive outer sections, to "Ondine," where discontinuity affects the entire composition.
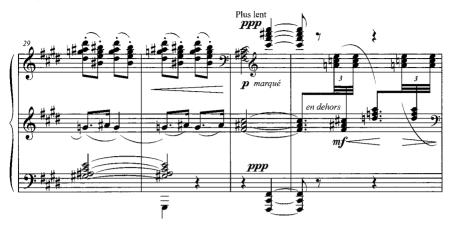
3.

At first glance, "Feuilles mortes" appears problematic when considered in terms of moment-form aesthetics, in that the prelude clearly presents a ternary design: the double barlines of m. 18 mark the end of the A section; the direction *Un peu plus allant* signals the start of the B section, which continues to m. 40; and the return of the opening material, to be played *dans le sentiment du début*, comes at m. 41. Furthermore, embedded within the

ABA' form of the prelude, a smaller ABA' structure operates in the opening section, with a truncated repetition of the opening theme recurring in mm. 15–18 to close the section. While the outer sections of "Feuilles mortes" are at odds with Stockhausen's predilection for an apparently random succession of moments, the central section (mm. 19–40) presents a sequence of ideas that is more striking. The four themes in this section of "Feuilles mortes" embody, to different degrees, the same sort of principles that Stockhausen outlines for individual moments. Their varying levels of harmonic and melodic stasis lead to contrasting perceptions of autonomy and, by extension, discontinuity.[6]
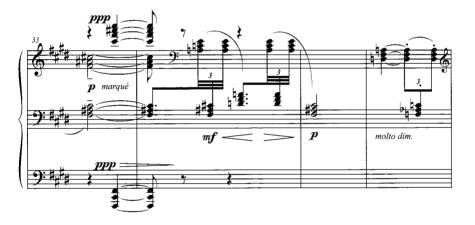
All the themes in the central section of "Feuilles mortes" are harmonically static: they are superimposed over a bass pedal or feature an ostinato, or both in combination. Compounding this literal harmonic stasis, many of these themes feature whole-tone or octatonic sonorities, which lack the harmonic functionality and forward impetus of common-practice tonality. Above the bass ostinato of the first idea (section 1, mm. 19–24), for example, the harmonies comprise the complete even whole-tone collection 6–35 [0,2,4,6,8,10], which underpins the entire section. In other sections, non-functional collections are superimposed one above the other. In the following passage (section 2, mm. 25–30), the lower staff presents a portion of octatonic collection I (4–27 [8,10,1,4]) for the duration of the section, while the melody and descant ostinato of the upper staves present the complete octatonic collection III (8–28 [0,1,3,4,6,7,9,10]). Another octatonic counterpoint occurs in the final idea of the central section (section 4, mm. 37–40), with the half notes in the inner voices presenting octatonic collection III (6–30 [0,3,4,6,9,10]), and the melodic line and bass pedal in the outer voices presenting octatonic collection II (5–32 [0,3,5,8,9]).[7]

While all of the themes exhibit harmonic stasis, their melodic content often undermines their potential for self-containment. The first idea of the central section exhibits the least musical autonomy in that it features a rising whole-tone scale, a process that leads to the higher register of section 2 (mm. 25–30). More conspicuously, the independence of this section is undermined by the bass ostinato, which derives from the chromatic arabesque of the immediately preceding measures (mm. 17–18, which itself is a repetition of mm. 4–5). Measures 17–20 provide a smooth transition into the central section of the prelude by first introducing the rhythm of the ostinato (m. 17), then its pitches (m. 18), and finally its register (mm. 19–20). Therefore, the material of mm. 19–24 spills out of its formal boundaries in two directions: the ostinato arises out of the preceding measures, while the rising melodic line flows toward the next section.

Yet each theme in this portion of the prelude cannot be characterized

Example 1. "Feuilles mortes," mm. 29–36.

similarly. After the very smooth entrance into the central section of "Feuilles mortes," successive themes display greater levels of autonomy, culminating with the unusual and striking idea of section 3, mm. 31–36 (ex. 1). Section 3 stands apart from the preceding two sections in several ways: the introduction of a new and irregular rhythmic figure interrupts the constant eighth-note pulse; a change of tempo to *Plus lent* arrests the momentum of *Un peu plus allant*; an F♯ bass pedal replaces the persistent G♯ bass pedal; and section 3 presents a sparser texture, one that covers the registral extremes of the keyboard. Despite some voice-leading connections (the A♯ and C♯ of the lower staves in mm. 29–30 provide common tones to the F♯ major triad of m. 31), the material of section 3 owes far less to its preceding measures than the other themes of the central section. Moreover, the circularity or stasis of

the melodic figure contrasts with the processive nature of the melodies in sections 1 and 4, which move toward the higher register of the next section. Instead, the circularity of the musical statement in section 3 (mm. 31–32) is realized by its immediate repetition (mm. 33–34) and has the potential to repeat endlessly. Indeed, the greater melodic circularity of section 3 justifies the need for an added measure (m. 36)—a transposition and rhythmic augmentation of the initial triplet figure—one that is necessary in order to break away from the inherent autonomy of this idea and move towards the next musical statement.

Of the four themes in the central section of "Feuilles mortes," section 3 comes closest to Stockhausen's description of the individual moment in its harmonic and melodic stasis. Thus, the central section presents themes of increasing autonomy, culminating with the singular utterance of section 3. From this point forward, the level of self-containment decreases: section 4 reiterates the G♯ bass pedal of sections 1 and 2; the rhythm of the melody derives from the triplet figure of section 3; and the melodic contour sacrifices its potential circularity to effect a smooth exit from the central section to the reprise of the opening material (m. 41). While "Feuilles mortes" as a whole cannot be called a moment-form work, analyzing the four discrete ideas of the central section in this light helps to identify precisely those elements that contribute to their musical discontinuity and those that do not.

Despite their conventional organization, many other *Préludes* and *Etudes* contain passages that display characteristics of a moment-form aesthetic. Like "Feuilles mortes," "Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses" (*Préludes I*) and "Pour les arpèges composés" (*Etudes*) are both ternary forms, with central sections that share characteristics with Stockhausen's moment form. These central sections are more substantial and more fragmented than that of "Feuilles mortes," so that the rapid succession of new musical ideas stands out from the greater continuity of the outer sections. The outer sections of "Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses," for example, emphasize a single idea and texture, whereas the middle section (mm. 24–100) consists of eight distinct statements with eight corresponding shifts of mood and tempo. Similarly, "Pour les arpèges composés" has a prevailing musical idea and texture for the outer sections, while the middle section (mm. 25–45) fluctuates between different tempi, textures, and dynamics.

The contrasting compositional procedures between outer and central sections demarcate not only ternary divisions but also allude to residues of their traditional functions—namely, those of contrast and kineticism.[8] Yet even though the central sections of "Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses" and "Pour les arpèges composés" may be analogous to the more dynamic central section of ternary forms, the static ideas are antithetical to the goal-

oriented progressions or dynamic shape of these forms. The rapid juxtapositions of tempo and character that occur during the succession of individual ideas are not conducive to building momentum, substantiated by the fact that both compositions (and "Feuilles mortes" discussed above) do not build to a climax. Significantly, these compositions feature not only the superficial characteristics of moment succession, but also their larger formal ramifications, as the succession of moments is inseparable from Stockhausen's repudiation of climax-oriented forms. In other words, as Kramer summarizes, "the flattening out of climaxes" and "the elimination of the dramatic curve" are "prime prerequisite[s] for moment time" (1988:202).

While many of Debussy's ternary compositions invoke moment succession in their central sections, the reverse—a continuous middle section framed by discontinuous outer sections—is less common. "Pour les quartes" (*Etudes*) is one such exception. It opens with nine distinct ideas, all distinguished by individual tempo and performance indications, and many demarcated with double barlines. This juxtaposition of material, however, ceases in mm. 49–64, where more continuous compositional procedures assume control: there is repetition of a single motive and cumulative reiterations of the performance indication *poco a poco accelerando e crescendo*, resulting in a climax at m. 61. Similarly, the central section of "Pour les sonorités opposées" (*Etudes*) abandons the succession of new and contrasting ideas in m. 38 in order to gather together the necessary momentum and dynamics for the climax of m. 50. By reverting to more continuous modes of musical succession in these central sections, Debussy implicitly acknowledges that the discontinuities of his compositional style prove antithetical to the creation of musical climax.

4.

"Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" (*Préludes I*), although loosely organized along ternary principles, comes closer to Stockhausen's principles of moment succession than works such as "Feuilles mortes." Both preludes feature repetition, but whereas all the repetitions of "Feuilles mortes" underscore its ternary design—delineating both the close of the A section and the beginning of the reprise—many of the repetitions of "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" seem more random. Figure 1 outlines the ternary divisions, musical ideas, and their return in "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest."

The prelude opens with a sequence of seven discrete musical statements (A–G) before the first repetitions occur (shown in fig. 1 with shading). The placement of repeated sections hints at the prelude's ternary form: the var-

Figure 1. Formal outline of "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest."

A mm. 1-6	B mm. 7-9	C mm. 10-14	D mm. 15-18	E mm. 19-20	F mm. 21-25
G+ trans. mm. 26-34	C mm. 35-37	H m. 38	C mm. 39-41	H+ trans. mm. 42-46	F' mm. 47-53
A' mm. 54-58	B' mm. 59-62	I mm. 63-68	C' mm. 69-71		

ied repetition of A, B, and C in sequence provides the remnants of a reca-
pitulation, while the return of C, F, and H differentiates the central section
from the series of new ideas that characterizes the opening section. Despite
the presence of repetition, the opening and central sections of "Ce qu'a vu
le vent d'Ouest" call to mind something along the lines of Stockhausen's
moment succession. Although in his writings Stockhausen excludes repeti-
tion in moment form, it occurs in his compositions, even in *Kontakte*, the
work that he used to illustrate moment form in his 1960 article. Kramer
acknowledges this obvious contradiction and reworks Stockhausen's views
on repetition in moment time:

> The return of earlier material is not antithetical to the concept of mo-
> ment time. Although Stockhausen forbids return in his articles, it can be
> found in *Kontakte* and even more overtly in other works of his. There is
> no reason why a previous moment cannot return, provided such return is
> not prepared by a structural upbeat, which would render the return a
> recapitulatory goal of the previous section, thereby destroying its self-con-
> tainment. If no moment ever returned, the requirement of constant new-
> ness would in itself imply a kind of progression, because the listener could
> expect that the next moment would always differ from all previous mo-
> ments. Yet progression is impossible in pure moment time. (1988:207–
> 08)

Of the repeated sections in "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest," A', B', and C'
could be defined as a "recapitulatory goal," and therefore antithetical to
moment time. Although this return "is not prepared by a structural up-
beat," the repetition of the opening three ideas of the prelude invariably
produces the perception of reprise and, consequently, intimations of clo-
sure. Thus, the unexpected nature of moment succession is lost due to a
recognizable formal pattern, albeit a fragmented version of that pattern.
The repetition of C, F, and H, however, does not arouse similar expecta-

tions. Instead, these sections are transplanted into entirely new musical contexts, and their recurrence does not invoke any discernible design. Moreover, the repetition of C, F, and H occurs after a sequence of seven new ideas, after which the listener is perhaps inured to the "constant newness" of the musical discourse. Thus the return of previously-heard material in the central section of the prelude breaks the pattern of "constant newness" by unexpectedly jumbling together old and new passages.

From this perspective, the repetition of C, F, and H in the central section of "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" is less conventional in its effect than the varied repetitions of A, B, and C toward the end of the prelude. Although the formal plan of figure 1 shows that ternary design is still latent in "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest," it is perhaps not the most significant aspect of its form: the prelude presents a succession of autonomous musical ideas whose many surface discontinuities prefigure a moment-form aesthetic. Yet the presence of a reprise, however veiled, undermines these similarities, even though procedures akin to those found in moment form occupy the majority of the prelude. Unlike "Feuilles mortes," which emphasizes ternary design through several musical parameters, "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" presents a more delicate balance between a radically discontinuous style and residues of traditional forms.

This delicate balance can be seen most readily in the larger treatment of the prelude's ternary design. In "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" there is practically no discernible division between its opening and central sections. Consequently, the reprise or recapitulation is the only marker that remains to identify the prelude's tripartite form. Moreover, because the reprise is postponed until the final measures, if ternary design is recognized at all, it can only be recognized retrospectively. Repetition to close the work therefore becomes less of a return—by occurring closer and closer to the end of the composition, the significance of the reprise wanes. As Parks summarizes, "[t]he pronounced asymmetry of its truncated reprise and the absence of a readily identifiable B section obscure its ternary roots" (1989:221).

Truncated reprises are common in Debussy's late works, where "recapitulations" are often tacked on in the final measures to close the work, with the result that the reprise is disproportionately small with respect to the entire composition. This is the case with the final eighteen measures of "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest," but more extreme examples occur in other works, such as the reprise of the first three beats of "Soupir" (*Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*)—a composition otherwise devoid of repetition—and the reprise or Epilogue in *Jeux*, which occupies the final nine measures of a 709-measure composition. Indeed, few of Debussy's late works totally eschew the outline and procedures of ternary forms. Although many do not

aim toward a climax or follow a "developmental curve," most of the late works employ repetition of previous musical material to close the composition. Repetition may be brief ("Soupir"), transformed ("La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune," *Préludes II*), fragmented ("Pour les quartes," *Etudes*), or drawn from sections other than the opening ("Pour les sonorités opposées," *Etudes*). Nevertheless, repetition—however veiled—is still employed as a compositional device to signal closure.

Such vestigial structures recall Barbara Herrnstein Smith's concept of "cultural lag" in modern poetry. In *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, Smith notes that in periods of stylistic transition, poets often resort to convention in order to solve the "closural problems" posed by the emerging style—only now these conventional endings are ineffective in their new contexts (1968:229). Likewise, Debussy's musical conclusions often evince a similar ambivalence. Although many of his forms may be interpreted as precursors to the moment forms of the 1950s and 1960s, they nevertheless equivocate in the final measures by reverting to a fleeting quasi-recapitulatory gesture at the last moment. ("Ondine," the subject of the following analysis, is a notable exception.) In Smith's terms, the recapitulation would represent a "cultural lag," a convention at odds with the new style of the prelude as a whole. If Debussy is unwilling or unable to completely eliminate residues of traditional forms in his compositions, he attenuates them to such a degree that their significance in his compositions becomes minimal. In compositions such as "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest," the brief reprise is overwhelmed by the preceding discontinuities of the prelude.

5.

"Ondine," from the second book of *Préludes*, contains fifteen distinct sections in its seventy-four measures. Only three of these sections are subject to repetition, so that the prelude proceeds with a seemingly constant succession of new musical statements. Like Stockhausen's individual moments, many of Debussy's ideas can be described as autonomous. Most of the sections that make up "Ondine," for example, are harmonically static, with bass pedal-points underpinning large sections of the music. Moreover, this harmonic stasis is often compounded by a corresponding thematic or motivic circularity, which ensures that there is also little sense of melodic teleology. As in "Feuilles mortes," a melody or motive is deemed circular if its implication for repetition—indeed, endless repetition—outweighs its connections to the following melodic idea. The end of a circular melody therefore is the same as, or approximate to, its beginning, so that the point of completion dovetails with the point of departure. An example of a circular melody in

"Ondine" occurs in mm. 16–17, which returns to its point of departure and possesses the potential to circle endlessly (ex. 2). Indeed, the connection to its own beginning far outweighs its connection to the following musical idea, which presents a break in the voice leading.

In some sections, this circularity is realized by repetition of all or part of the melody. In "Ondine," the figure of m. 11 returns in m. 12 and is then fragmented for further repetition in m. 13. The reiterations of the following two measures fully exploit this motive's inherent circularity (ex. 3). Melodic circularity focuses attention on what happens within the section, and consequently attenuates its progress to the next. "Ondine" proceeds with localized flourishes of melodic detail—a succession of self-contained arabesques, rather than one continuous motion. The circularity intrinsic to many of "Ondine"'s melodies, when combined with harmonic stasis, creates self-contained, moment-like statements.
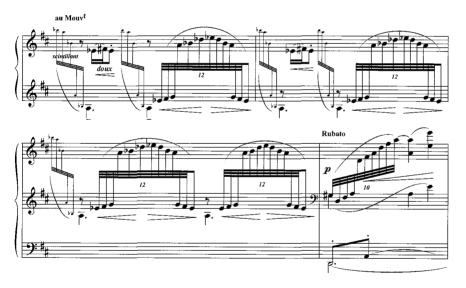
The sheer number of musical ideas in the opening of "Ondine" and the absence of any recognizable formal pattern may even imply openness in "Ondine"'s form. Michael L. Friedmann suggests this view when he writes that "some of the sectional juxtapositions . . . suggest the flexible and moveable linkages of post-World War II European music" (1982:22). This flexibility can perhaps be seen most readily in the treatment of repetition within the prelude, on both local and large scales. Sections 4 (mm. 16–17) and 5 (mm. 18–19), for example, return as sections 10 (mm. 38–39) and 11 (mm. 40–41), altered only by transposition up a semitone. The superimposition of these themes over an E♭ bass pedal (as opposed to the preceding D bass pedal) is sufficient to link them to their new surroundings. Similarly, sections 2 (mm. 11–13), 8 (mm. 28–29), and 14 (mm. 62–64) repeat the same musical idea, and the relocation of this passage into entirely new surroundings—here, with no transposition—is a more tangible example of the "flexible and moveable linkages" to which Friedmann refers.

This potential mobility can apply to many of "Ondine"'s sections, especially those bridged by invariant pedal-points. Contrasting passages are often combined into larger groups by sustained bass notes, with D and E♭ pedal-points, for example, grouping together mm. 14–19 and 32–41 respectively. The superimposition of contrasting and autonomous entities over a single pedal is a simple way of connecting ideas that may otherwise be unrelated. This approach to grouping further reinforces the suggestion of openness in "Ondine," for if the only audible means of connection between adjacent sections is their common pedal point, then these sections possess the potential to be reordered. For example, sections 9 (mm. 32–37), 10 (mm. 38–39), and 11 (mm. 40–41)—bound together by an E♭ bass pedal—still will be linked by that pedal regardless of their internal ordering. Similarly,

Example 2. "Ondine," mm. 15–17.

Example 3. "Ondine," mm. 11–14.

sections 3 (mm. 14–15), 4 (mm. 16–17), and 5 (mm. 18–19), which are joined by a bass D pedal, could occur in any potential order since the D pedal would remain to hold these sections together. In this last instance, the potential mobility of these components is realized, to a certain degree, by the repetition of mm. 16–17 at mm. 26–27, which transfers this material to a new position and a new musical context within the group.

As was the case with "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest," the repetition in

Figure 2. Network of repetitions in "Ondine."

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1-10	11-13	14-15	16-17	18-19	20-25	26-27	28-31	32-27	38-39	40-43	44-53	54-61	62-64	65-74
prog.	static	static	static	static	prog.	static	static	static	static	static	prog.	prog.	static	static

"Ondine" may represent a concession to more traditional musical forms. Yet none of the repetitions in "Ondine" could be described as a "recapitulatory goal": the traces of ternary form that persist in other late works are entirely absent here. "Ondine"'s form, however, adds another wrinkle, for although the repetition of musical ideas does not conform to any recognizable formal scheme, there is nevertheless a periodicity in the return of previous sections. Figure 2 diagrams the fifteen sections of "Ondine" with arcs placed above them to link the repetitions that occur throughout the prelude. As shown in figure 2, there is an interlocking pattern of repetition. The imbricating arcs show that the placement of previously-heard material is not arbitrary, but highly regulated, especially in the opening forty measures of the prelude. This periodic pattern of repetition would seem to contradict the arbitrariness of moment succession necessary for an open form. Again, Kramer draws on Stockhausen's compositions to reconcile the seeming disparity:

> Compositions ordered by chance do not generally contain surprises. Similarly, if every new section is unexpected, the impact of surprise is lost. But carefully ordered pieces can work with the surprise of placing an old moment in the midst of new moments . . . . The truly arbitrary is actually less surprising than the artificially arbitrary. (1988:208)

In light of Kramer's statements, the sections of "Ondine" are perhaps "carefully ordered" to appear "artificially arbitrary." The reiteration of ideas at certain points throughout the prelude seems calculated to avoid any one from appearing too often and to avoid any resemblance to recognizable formal patterns. Moreover, "placing an old moment in the midst of new moments" prevents the succession of ideas in "Ondine" from becoming predictable. In other words, if each section always had to be new, then the listener would be able to infer that the next one will also be new, and any

inference of this sort would be antithetical to the potential openness of the form. Though figure 2 shows this openness to be artificially contrived, the effect is nonetheless a seemingly stream-of-consciousness succession of musical statements.

Figure 2 also demonstrates that the construction of Debussy's musical ideas is integral to this pattern of repetition. Not all of "Ondine"'s sections are autonomous. Those sections labeled as progressive move to a different point harmonically and melodically by the end of the section, and do not exhibit the potential to circle back for repetition. Their melodic and harmonic motion mean that their placement within "Ondine" is not open, as they rely on the following section for the musical logic of their internal progressions. On the other hand, the static or autonomous sections of "Ondine" are easily relocated. As figure 2 shows, only the static sections are repeated: their relative autonomy allows them to be easily transplanted into new surroundings.

If Debussy achieves a measure of formal freedom in the opening of "Ondine," this freedom is counterbalanced by a change in compositional style towards the end of the prelude. Debussy turns to the use of a motive to interconnect the more substantial musical ideas of sections 9 (mm. 32–37), 12 (mm. 44–53), and 13 (mm. 54–61). The motive stated in mm. 30–31, for example, is repeated in mm. 42–43 and then recast within the different tonalities, rhythms, and textures of sections 9, 12, and 13. The motive—in its unifying function—is prevalent in the later sections of the prelude and specifically in those sections excluded from the network of repetitions in figure 2. If the evenly-paced and alternating repetitions connect the contrasting sections of the opening forty measures of "Ondine," then the unifying force of the motive interconnects the remaining sections. In this sense, "Ondine" is not totally or absolutely discontinuous, as such links and transitions should not exist. This noticeable change of compositional style may occur in response to the rapid succession of ideas that characterizes the opening of the prelude. Implicitly acknowledging that the discontinuity of "Ondine"'s opening is not conducive to ending a work, Debussy resorts to more conventional compositional procedures to close the prelude. This gambit represents another example of "cultural lag." While avoiding the repetition of a recapitulation, Debussy avails himself of another type of repetition—here, motivic repetition—to help rein in "Ondine"'s succession of new ideas. As Smith observes, "the structural forces of continuation" need to be "arrested or overcome" for an ending to be effective (1968:210). Debussy's change of compositional procedure, therefore, can be interpreted as his need to assuage the musical forces of continuation established at the beginning of the composition.

Yet the motivic repetitions of sections 9, 12, and 13 do not, in them-selves, intimate closure. In addition to this increased motivic unity, Debussy attaches a closing gesture to signal the work's end, which, like *Jeux*'s nine-bar reprise, seems indicative of "cultural lag." Section 15 (mm. 65–74), which introduces new material, reiterates an arpeggiated flourish many times in the course of the final ten measures. While closing gestures necessarily make use of repetition to affirm a sense of ending, the insistence of "Ondine"'s final gesture perhaps belies the fact that it inherently has little to do with concluding or, indeed, the prelude as a whole. In other words, its reiteration perhaps overcompensates for its structural ineffectiveness. For Stockhausen, ending a moment form was of little consequence—as he states, moment forms simply stop. But for "Ondine," composed in 1913, merely stopping was not an option and ending was apparently problematic. Hence, Debussy's impulse towards convention to help solve the prelude's closural problems. Moreover the presence of two types of cultural lag seems to acknowledge—ironically—those compositional features of "Ondine" that suggest formal openness. The autonomy of the musical ideas and their "seemingly arbi-trary" placement within the prelude contributes to an appearance of open-ness, an openness from which Debussy needs to retreat in order to create the illusion of closure.

Composed immediately after *Jeux*, "Ondine" marks one of Debussy's most extreme essays in formal discontinuity. Even the few gestures toward con-vention—such as motivic unity and the arpeggiated flourishes that close the prelude—fail to bring the work to a satisfactory conclusion. Conse-quently, "Ondine" appears to distill the most striking qualities of Debussy's late style into a single work and, at the same time, brings to the fore the very features that the Darmstadt composers would latch onto forty years later. While "Ondine" is exceptional in the level of its fragmentation, some of Debussy's other compositions may also exhibit—either partially or fully—characteristics of moment form. The analyses of "Feuilles mortes" and "Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest" illustrate the different ways in which Stockhausen's notions of discontinuity can add further depth and nuance to often-voiced descriptions of Debussy's fragmented style.

Although Debussy's late works predate Stockhausen's theory of mo-ment form, the latter may be understood as having codified formal prac-tices that had been prevalent for many decades. As Kramer observes, mo-ment form simply provides "a rational framework within which to deal with a species of musical time that had been practiced for some forty years" (1978:193). From this point of view, both Stockhausen's moment form and many of Debussy's late compositions embody a similar tendency—that is,

the compositional desire to break up the continuous and hierarchic logic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music. And while Stockhausen's attempts to theorize this tendency go far beyond Debussy's musical endeavors, they may serve nonetheless as a point of departure for discussing Debussy's late works: one that takes discontinuity as its starting point, and thus one that accommodates the juxtapositions and fragmentation of his late style.

Notes

1. For more on Debussy's influence on composers after 1950, see Claudia Maurer Zenck (1982) and John McGinness (1998).

2. Debussy's music was used to create a musical heritage to which the Darmstadt composers could lay claim, and one that would bolster their particular musical endeavors. While one can be critical of their motives, their musical observations were often astute. See Eimert (1961), Schnebel (1964), Stockhausen (1963a, 1963b).

3. As McGinness (1998:52–54) has pointed out, considering *Jeux* as a piece of absolute music already transforms it: by suppressing its relation to Nijinsky's ballet, the Darmstadt composers were able to argue for structural affinities between their work and Debussy's, despite the cultural gulf that separated them.

4. English translations of these quotes are from Heikinheimo (1972:120,175).

5. These formal procedures include: *punktuelle Form* (pointillistic form), *gruppen Form* (group form), *statistische Form* (statistical form), *variable Form* (variable form), *vieldeutige Form* (multivalent form), as well as *momentform* (moment form). For descriptions of these forms, see Heikinheimo (1972:94–114).

6. Richard Parks also draws attention to these measures in "Feuilles mortes": "the string of new themes from m. 21 to m. 40 [does not] resemble any conventional pattern (though it is a common one for Debussy); indeed, the apparently random distribution appears calculated to defy prediction and convey a sense of improvisational spontaneity" (1989:79).

7. For octatonic classifications pertaining to the music of Debussy, see Forte (1991:126).

8. Kramer makes a similar point with reference to the first movement of Stravinsky's *Sonata for Two Pianos* (1943–44): "The development section is also a series of moments (of lesser duration so that the increased rate of succession of static moments functions analogously to the increased harmonic rhythm of the classical sonata's development)" (Kramer 1978:188).

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