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Vincenzo Francesco Lai

May 2018

A SYMBOLIST INTERPRETATION OF NARRATIVE TIME IN DEBUSSY'S
SONATA FOR FLUTE, VIOLA, AND HARP

An Essay

Presented to the Faculty of the

Moore School of Music

Katherine G. McGovern College of the Arts

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts in Flute Performance

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Abstract

This essay offers a narrative reading of Debussy's *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp* underpinned by the characteristic symbolist motto that portrays a subject's desire to escape modernity through the artistic evocation of an idealized past. My examination explores those symbolist concepts that inspired this specific interpretation of the Sonata and documents the symbolist influence on Debussy's unique aesthetic vision, with particular regard to the artistic affinity between Debussy and the referential symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898). Since the proposed narrative scheme has many affinities with the theory of the "three machines of time" conceived by the French philosopher and psychiatrist Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) the fundamentals of his theories are briefly summarized and applied to my music analysis, following the example set by the work of Michael L. Klein.

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A Symbolist interpretation of Narrative Time in Debussy's Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp

Symbolism played a central role in the transition of the arts from the Romantic to the modern era, deeply affecting the way in which art was both communicated and received. Claude Debussy (1862-1918), the most influential of symbolist composers, detached himself from the musical tradition of his time and opened new paths for musical expression by using an innovative compositional language that had a lasting influence on the music of the twentieth century. This essay traces the connections between the composer and the symbolist movement to create an analytical framework for a narrative interpretation of Debussy's *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp* that underlines how this piece expresses the characteristic symbolist desire to escape modernity through the artistic evocation of an idealized past.

The first part of this essay introduces the symbolist concepts that inspired this specific interpretation of the Sonata and documents the symbolist influences in Debussy's life and aesthetic sense, with a particular focus on the artistic affinity between Debussy and the referential symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), author of the poem *Afternoon of a Faun*, that inspired the Debussy's work of the same name. Also, an interpretation of the symbology behind Mallarmé's most famous poem will provide insights for the interpretation of the *Sonata*.

The second part of the essay explains how the three movements of Debussy's *Sonata II* can be considered as musical depictions of the different phases of the internal struggle of an agent who, like Debussy and many other individuals experiencing the

advent of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century, refuses the destabilizing present time and searches for solace in memories. In this analysis, the *Pastorale* and the *Interlude* are moments when the agent evokes reminiscences capable of offering a momentary relief from the unsatisfactory present in which he lives. The *Final* is the agent's attempt to find an equilibrium in the present once he has realized that none of the visions from the past he evoked can provide him lasting ease. As this narrative scheme has many affinities with the theory of the "three machines of time," conceived by the French philosopher and psychiatrist Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) that summarizes the processes through which individuals relate to their past, the analysis will refer often to his work and borrow from his studies concepts and terminology.

Through this essay I hope to open a window onto Debussy's symbolist world and to suggest possible interpretive tools that can be useful in appreciating – and perhaps contribute to different interpretations of – other pieces in the output of one of the most important composers of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Symbolism

Debussy's life coincided with the culmination of an evolutionary process of human society that had begun in the Age of Enlightenment. In just two hundred years, men and women went from an almost feudal lifestyle to World War I. As a consequence of these epochal changes, an overwhelming sense of disorientation spread among people who sought refuge in mysticism and religion after centuries where scientific reason seemed the only truth.¹ This sentiment found expression in new artistic movements, the

¹ Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionismo e Simbolismo* (Fiesole: Discanto Edizioni, 1980), 37.

most influential of which were Impressionism and Symbolism.

Symbolism was born as a literary phenomenon. Poets such as the above mentioned Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), and Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), contributed to the affirmation of this movement on the artistic scene. The symbolist artists sought, through art, a way to escape the decadence of their time, most often into an idealized utopian past represented through pastoral symbols.

The earliest symbolists, a group that included Debussy, aimed to evoke an imaginary reality in which artistic beauty could relieve the stress of the modern times. In their vision, the perfect symbol for this parallel world of art was an idealized past, often inspired by the idea of Arcadia. In Debussy's writings, a sense of dissatisfaction towards his time surfaces on multiple occasions, particularly in regards to the musical universe where, in his opinion, the influence of Wagner was progressively dissolving the glorious French musical tradition. Adorno claims that the composer responded to modernity by trying to escape it in the past.² For Klein, Debussy projected the human longing for wholeness onto a lost time rather than onto an object or a person, and many of his compositions seem to have time remembrance as the pillar of the narrative.³ In the narrative interpretation of the *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp* that will follow, this nostalgia of a "lost past" will be a concept of primary importance.

Symbolists evoked their "artistic refuge" from modernity by masterfully assembling numerous stylistic devices to create a language that, clashing with the open

² Michael L. Klein, *Music and the Crises of the Modern Subject* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 74.

³ Klein, 61, 68.

speech of the real world, established a symbolic distance between the conflicting realities. In their poems, metaphors, similitudes, analogies, and allusions are the dominant form of expression. Baudelaire claimed that the correspondences between these figures of speech and the concepts they allude to, are the link between the material world and the ideal artistic world, *le monde spirituel*, that can only be entered by those able to decipher the symbolic constructions. In the proposed analysis of Debussy's Sonata, specific characteristics of Debussy's compositional language allude to the artistic refuge, others represent the modern times.

Inside this purposefully ambiguous language, the semantic meaning of the single terms is lost. Inside the symbolist constructions, words become "speaking words" meant to suggest, to evoke, rather than to describe. In his writings, Baudelaire talks about "sacred words" that, in the hands of the symbolist artist, exercise an evocative power similar to witchcraft.⁴ In the interpretation of the Sonata, the different elements of Debussy's compositional language (harmony, rhythm, motivic structure, dynamics, etc) are interlocked components of larger gestures that are similar to the symbolist figures of speech. The sound of those figures, product of the combination of all the factors involved, evokes emotional states that play a functional role on the delineation of a musical narrative. As the French composer Paul Dukas (1865-1935) once pointed out, in Debussy's music "harmony, rhythm and melody, seem in some way to have vanished in the ether of the symbol."⁵

⁴ Henry Prunier and Theodore Baker, "Musical Symbolism," *The Musical Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (January 1933): 18-28; Jarocinski, 27-9.

⁵ Nigel Simeone, "Debussy and Expression," in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105; Jean Barraqué, *Debussy* (Bourges: Éditions du Seuil, 1962), 180.

Debussy and the Symbolism

Debussy's connections with the symbolist movement have roots in his childhood.⁶ Symbolism was prominent part of his scarce primary education, and deeply forged his aesthetic at the point that Dukas was convinced that the most important influences on Debussy's music came from literature and not from other musicians. Even during his years as a student of the Paris Conservatoire (1872-1884) Debussy assiduously cultivated his symbolist background by frequenting symbolist circles and meeting places, by reading avidly the works of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Baudelaire, artists that the Czech musicologist Stefan Jarocinski describes as the "symbolism saints."⁷ In 1883, two months after *Lutèce*—iconic symbolist journal—published Mallarmé's poem *Apparition*, Debussy composed a musical setting of it, leaving the first direct trace of symbolism influences in his art.⁸ During the two years spent in Italy (1884-1887) as a laureate of the *Prix de Rome*, Debussy received from his friends the most recent literary outputs of the symbolist movement.⁹ In 1887, when Debussy returned to Paris, was often seen at the *Librairie de L'Art Indépendant*, the meeting point of symbolist artists, where he strengthened and expanded his network of relationships and gained the respect of many of the most important symbolist artists, entering the elite of Symbolism (the circle invited to the *Mardis de Mallarmé*) before 1890.¹⁰ Among all the symbolist influences in Debussy's life, the one of Mallarmé, is the most important. The first contacts between Mallarmé and Debussy took place at the *Librairie de l'Art Indépendant*, but it is

⁶ Barraqué, 62; Jarocinski, 14, 106.

⁷ Jarocinski, 95.

⁸ Jarocinski, 98.

⁹ Claude Debussy, *Debussy Letters*, ed. François Lesure and Roger Nichols, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 4-22; Jarocinski, 100.

¹⁰ Jarocinski, 105.

most probably during the evenings at the poet's apartment that the artistic relationship between the two developed.

Time established Mallarmé as a referential figure in the symbolist movement. Jean Moréas, in his famous manifesto of symbolism, cites him along with Paul Verlaine and Theodore de Banville as one of the noble fathers of the symbolist aesthetic. Even if the recognition of Mallarmé's artistic contribution arrived only late in his life, the influence of the poet's works and theories was such that it soon impacted other important artistic movements of the twentieth-century such as surrealism, futurism, and cubism.

In modern times, David J. Code claims that Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of the Faun* is a "compositional equivalent" of Mallarmé's poem and that the composer acquired from the poet the obsessive research for the perfection of the art, but already in 1908, the English musical critic M.T.E. Clarck claimed that Debussy used chords as Mallarmé used words: as symbols and cues for the listener's imagination.¹¹ In Debussy's language, pitches, chords, dynamics, tempo modifications, and articulation markings are part of larger structures that evoke emotional states that can be interpreted from a narrative point of view. Mallarmé similarly organized words in complex structures, inside of which the meaning of the poetic gesture as a whole eclipsed the semantic property of the single terms.¹²

Debussy and Mallarmé agreed on many aesthetic concepts. Both believed that music had an evocative power superior to the spoken word, and that music was the most

¹¹ David J. Code, "Hearing Debussy Reading Mallarmé: Music *après* Wagner in the *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 493, 505; Jarocinski, 65.

¹² Jarocinski, 57.

symbolist of artistic idioms as, naturally, musical signals do not carry semantic meaning.¹³ They were convinced that art had the power to transport the consciousness of the audience to an artistic refuge where it could find relief from modernity. Debussy also shared with the poet the concept of artistic beauty. According to their aesthetic, the allure of a piece of art depended purely on its attractiveness and the definition of a concrete significance was not fundamental to its appreciation. This way the art is stripped from a human dimension, because it is not created to mean something for somebody, but just to exist in a beautiful form. The sublimation of this concept is to be found in the works of Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880).¹⁴ They also had a similar vision of the relationship between the arts and nature. Debussy was aware of the limitations that a non-semantic language had in terms of descriptive possibilities, for this reason, although the unforeseeable power of nature always inspired him, he never had a pictorial approach to nature, and was critical towards Beethoven's 6th Symphony which, in his opinion, attempted a depiction of the natural universe that he considered, again agreeing with Mallarmé, impossible.¹⁵

The poet's reactions to Debussy's *Prelude* to his *Afternoon of a Faun* well exemplifies the two artists' shared idea of the relationship between the arts and nature. Mallarmé was extremely pleased with Debussy's music because *Prelude* "prolonged the emotion of the poem" and "conjured up the scenery more vividly than any color." From these words emerges the poet's appreciation for Debussy's evocative, rather than

¹³ Jeannette Leigh Callet, "The Performative Voice in Mallarmé's Poetic Reverie," *French Forum* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 43; Jarocinski, 118.

¹⁴ Peter Dayan, "On Nature, Music, and Meaning in Debussy's Writing," *19-th Century Music* 28, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 221.

¹⁵ Claude Debussy, *Debussy on Music: The Critical Writings of the Great French Composer*, trans. and ed. Richard Langham Smith (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1977), 20-21; Henry C. Phillips, "The Symbolists and Debussy," *Music & Letters* 13, no. 3 (July 1932): 299; Dayan, 216, 225; Jarocinski, 112, 126.

pictorial, approach to the poem. Debussy declared that the *Prelude* was to render only a “general impression” of the text, confirming that he had no pictorial ambitions.

This ten-minute-long symphonic poem is the most famous tangible mark that the aesthetic affinity between the poet and the composer left on the history of music, and it is also Debussy’s first great success on the Parisian musical scene. The composer’s original idea was to compose a three-movement piece on Mallarmé’s subject, but he only completed the first one. The interpretation of some of the symbols included in the text of Mallarmé’s *Afternoon of a Faun* offers useful insights for the analysis of Debussy’s *Sonata*.

Jeannette Leigh Callet considers the faun’s flute a symbol of obsessive desire since, according to the myth, the faun half-god Pan made his instrument out of the reeds into which the nymph Syrinx had previously transformed to escape his chase.¹⁶ The faun’s desire represents the symbolist longing to escape modernity into the pastoral world that the nymphs, because of their mysterious and unbreakable connection with nature, embody. In this narrative interpretation of the *Sonata*, the presence of signifiers of pastoralism is a symbol of that idealized past that the agent longs for.

For Callet, the inability of the faun to capture a nymph symbolizes the ultimately utopian nature of this longing for an Arcadian past. At the end of the proposed narrative reading of the *Sonata*, the agent will have to accept the impossibility of evading modernity forever, being consequently forced to find a new equilibrium in the present.

Callet also points out that the nymphs are the bridge between the faun’s unsatisfying present and his idealized past. They are part of the temporal dimension of the

¹⁶ Callet, 49.

present, where the faun experiences the frustration of his desires while being also the object of the pleasant, dreamlike visions from the past that haunt the faun stoking his passions. In the *Sonata*, the contrast of present and past, typical of the decadent symbolist aesthetic, serves as the conflict that Byron Almén defines as a necessary condition to establish a musical narrative.¹⁷ This will be at the core of the interpretation of the *Pastorale* and of the *Interlude*.

Another symbolic element relevant for the analytical interpretation of the piece is the half humanity of the faun that David J. Code interprets the as symbol of the duality between desire and reason. The lower part of the body of the divinity represents the animal instincts, while its human torso stands for reason.¹⁸ A similar contrast between reason and longing characterizes my interpretation of the *Final*.

The natural world in which the tale of the faun takes place also inspired Debussy in the creation of other masterpieces, such as *La Mer* and *Pelleas and Melisande*. For Debussy, art could only poorly evoke the true beauty that resided in nature. He dreamt of a life lived according to the natural rhythm, where the contemplation of natural beauty was of primary importance.¹⁹ Related to nature is one of Debussy's most enigmatic quotes, in which he expresses his wish to be able to "sing his inner landscape."²⁰ By referring to an "inner landscape," Debussy traces a parallelism between the constant transformation of the natural world and the incessant inner turmoil of the human being. The composer represents internal struggles in episodes where contrasting musical ideas

¹⁷ Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 21.

¹⁸ Code, 499-500.

¹⁹ Steven Rings, "Mystères Limpides: Time and Transformation in Debussy's *Des Pas sur la Neige*," *19th-Century Music* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 183, 189.

²⁰ Jarocinski, 112.

symbolize clashing forces. According to the French composer, theorist, and Debussy scholar Jean Barraqué, these forces gain, by virtue of their opposition, a “dramatic function.” Barraqué calls the interactions between these forces “poetic mutations,” and the musical events that lead to a change in the balance of power between them “conductive metamorphoses.”²¹ As mentioned with regards to the symbolic reading of the half humanity of the faun, a similar contrast of forces within a single agent is the core of this interpretation of the *Final* of the *Sonata*. Also, conductive metamorphoses will be the means of connection between the musical moments representing the present and those representing the past.

Now that this aesthetic framework has been established, it is time to move on to the narrative interpretation of the sonata that will demonstrate how these theories find concrete application in Debussy’s compositional language.

The Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp

In the interpretation of the *Sonata*, the past is associated with the moments in which all the elements of Debussy’s musical language (harmony, rhythm, dynamics, phrasing, texture) find a balance that generates a sense of musical ease. In the *Sonata*, the best example of such an ideal “past” is the breakthrough that takes place in the central section of the *Interlude* when, in the proposed interpretation, the agent recalls a particularly pleasant memory. This passage features consonant harmony, symmetrical phrasing, and a correspondence between the meter and the rhythm of the motive. There is no musical tension and we could consequently define the passage as musically stable.

²¹ Barraqué, 153-4.

The sense of stability and positivity that the harmonious interaction of the above cited elements creates, evokes as closely as music can, an agency associated with idealized unconscious pastoral memory inherent in symbolism. For this reason I regard the presence of major mode, consonant chords, agreement of rhythm of the motivic material and the meter, and combined action of the voices in the texture as signifiers of the past. See example 1, page 12.

The passages where the previously mentioned musical elements go out of phase, leading to a sense of instability and tension, are here interpreted as visions of modernity. This sense of unease is clearly exemplified in the nine opening measures of the *Final*. These bars are dissonant as the chromaticism of the flute part contrasts with the diatonic profile of the harp accompaniment and of the viola line. At the same time, the viola motive in F minor and the harp ostinato in an inferred F major oppose one another. In the same passage, the phrasing is not symmetric and there is no coordination between meter and the rhythm of motive 1, played in the flute, that starts on the upbeat and covers 5 quarter notes against a meter of 4. Also, there is no unity of intent between the parts: motive 1 is chromatic, mostly in fluid triple figures; motive 2 in the viola is edgy and features diatonic harmony; and the harp ostinato is in strict sixteenth-notes that have no tonal connection with either of the two other parts, nor does it interact with them. As a result, this passage sounds tense and unstable. See example 2, page 13. The clear contrast between the sound produced by the combination of the signifiers of ease versus the sound produced by the signifiers of unease translates into music the Alménian binary opposition we have mentioned before. The transitions between these antithetical musical contexts and their interactions will suggest the evolution of the narrative.

53 *Rit.* *Poco più animato*

pp Dominant Pedal (s.h.)

Rit. *Poco più animato* Harmony is consonant and stable

pp murmurando V I

56

p dolce marcato V I

59

mf *glissando* *mf*

61

sforzato *f* *subito dolce* *pizz.* *p*

f *subito dolce*

V I

Homorhythmic texture: parts "working together"

Meter and rhythm of the motive coincide

Example 1 - Debussy, Sonata II - Evocation of the past [Interlude, 54-63]²²

²² Claude Debussy, *Sonata pour Flûte, Alto et Harpe* (Paris: Durand et C^{ie}, 1916). (All score examples stem from this source unless otherwise noted.)

Final

1 **Allegro moderato ma risoluto**

pizz.
f *sf* *f*

Allegro moderato ma risoluto Ostinato: F major, rhythmic profile 1

Motive 1: chromatic, rhythmic profile 2; misplaced on the meter; asymmetric phrase of 5 beats (3+2)

4

f *f* *f*

arco (s.l.c.)
molto marcato

Motive 2 : F minor, rhythmic profile 3; aligned with the meter.

Mutates harmony to tritone; reinforces the feeling of repression with strong dissonance.

7

f *f* *f*

D. & F. 9427

Example 2 - Debussy, Sonata II - Signifiers for Present Time [Final, 1-9]

Since this sonata, like many symbolist works, portrays a sense of an unfulfilled longing, the past and the present are mostly conveyed ephemerally and connected by diverse musical thoughts (Barraqué's "conductive metamorphosis.") This connective musical tissue links the extremes, sometimes leaning towards the apparent balance of the musical elements that symbolize the past, sometimes leaning in the opposite direction.

The offered interpretation of this narrative dialect is based on Michael Klein's notions of the intensity of memory, involuntary memory, and cognitive effort.²³ Klein cites the French philosophers Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, two of the most influential intellectuals of the twentieth century, to explain that memories can have different intensities. Some of them are particularly vivid, some are less detailed. Some of them come into focus only after "a cognitive effort," an attempt to put together bits of information that slowly resurface. Others, the brightest, called "involuntary memories," come with no effort as the result of a chain of thoughts started by a sensation. In the suggested narrative of the *Sonata*, the transitions to moments in which the signifiers of ease are predominant are interpreted as cognitive efforts to define a latent memory, the moments where the music moves away from the stability of the past towards unease as a progressive dissolution of recalled memories.

A good example of a musical cognitive effort can be found in bars 8 to 12 of the *Pastorale*, where the repetition of the flourish in the flute line suggests an attempt to bring into focus a memory that finally blossoms in bar 13. The transition from an ambiguous harmonic context to a tonal one, underlines the shift from a cognitive effort to memory. The same bars are a good example of a compositional device inspired by the

²³ Klein, 69-72.

symbolist aesthetic: the repetition of ideas that attempts to clarify a concept without fully expressing it, what Moréas calls “meaningful pleonasm.” See the following example 3.

Cognitive Effort
Transition from ambiguous to tonal harmonic context



12

8

pp

The image shows a musical score for Debussy's Sonata II, Example 3. It consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) below. The top staff begins with a complex, rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes, which is highlighted by a pink rectangular box. This pattern repeats several times. The grand staff below features a piano (*pp*) dynamic and includes a section of music marked with an '8' and a dashed line, indicating an octave shift. The score is annotated with 'Cognitive Effort' and 'Transition from ambiguous to tonal harmonic context' in a pink box above the top staff. The number '12' is written to the left of the first staff, and '8' is written above the grand staff.

Example 3 - Debussy, Sonata II - Example of Cognitive Effort [Pastorale, 12-13]

Bars 102 to 106 of the *Interlude* clearly exemplify the concept of the dissolution of a memory. The musical idea that brightened the middle section of the movement that has been just recalled, slowly dissolves in the return of the opening motive. The following example 4, page 16, highlights the *molto diminuendo*, the *rallentando poco a poco*, and the augmentation that the motive of the memory undergoes. All these elements contribute to create the feeling that the energy of the melody is progressively vanishing and its contours become more and more blurred.

Finally, the sudden blossoming of the B section of the *Pastorale* that you can see in example number 5, page 17, expresses well the concept of instantaneous memory. The shift in the character from melodic to rhythmic is unprepared. The first appearance of the viola gesture surprises the other voices, whose uncoordinated entrances (dissonance in the harp and group of grace notes in the flute) could symbolize the agent's amazement in

discovering memories that he did not know he had. The viola then introduces a long, light-hearted section reminiscent of a folk dance in triple meter. The simplicity and the clarity of this B section contrasts with the mysterious ambiguity of the A area. As a result, this episode sounds particularly bright and defined, characteristics proper of instantaneous memories.

102 *Rall. poco a poco*

Dissolution of the memory; augmentation of the motive, rallentando; molto diminuendo

103 *molto dim.* *piu p* *mettez la sourdine*

piu pp *PPP* *dolce*

106 *pp* *Tempo I° (poco meno)* *sospirato* *p dolce e tristamente*

p dolce e tristamente *p*

15 *Tempo I° (poco meno)* *p*

Example 4 - Debussy, Sonata II - Example of Dissolution of a Memory [Interlude, 102-106]

25

Vif et joyeux

Sudden modulation
unexpected viola motive

ôtez la sourdine

f *accélément rythmé* *sf*

2 **Vif et joyeux**

Surprised reactions

pp

(vibrato)

28

Folk-like motive

mf *p*

f *p*

31

Gracieux

p subito

pp subito

Gracieux

pp *p*

marqué

p

D. & F. 94 27

Example 5 - Debussy, Sonata II - Example of Instantaneous Memory [Final, 1-9]

Overall structure of the *Sonata*, a foreword

An examination of the structure of this work cannot overlook the expectations that come with Debussy's designation of this piece as a sonata. In accordance with the Classical tradition, Debussy's composition features three movements, each respecting the proportions and the characteristics of the typical sonata of the eighteenth-century. The opening *Pastorale* is the most extended and structurally complex movements of the three and it is in dialogue with sonata form. The following *Interlude* features lyrical qualities and an ABA structure, both common choices for the second movements of sonatas during the Classical era. The *Final* is the shortest, most animated and brilliant of the movements, characteristics of conclusive movements of eighteenth-century sonatas. Despite these basic functional affinities, the way in which Debussy shapes the inner structure of each movement does not follow Classical models, and reminiscences of the symbolist aesthetic seem to exert an important influence on their structure overall.

Avo Somer, in his study of Debussy's sonatas, points out how the composer's flexible approach to phrasing and harmony produces a sense of general ambiguity, a sentiment inherent in Symbolism.²⁴ Also, Debussy's predilection for asymmetrical periods and phrases that Somer describes, seems to echo Moréas' call for the irregular subdivision of the verse in symbolist poetry. This lack of clear harmonic and phraseological references, along with Debussy's further manipulation of the formal structure, undermines the necessary foundations for an analytical approach to the piece based on the tools used to interpret works of the Classical style. Such a reading of the work would result in a series of deformations of eighteenth-century models that would

²⁴ Avo Somer, "Musical Syntax in the Sonatas of Debussy: Phrase Structure and Formal Function," *Music Theory Spectrum* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 81.

not tell much about the narrative of the narrative of the piece.

In the *Pastorale*, this extremely flexible approach to phrasing and formal requirements is particularly evident when we contrast Debussy's structure with the traditional sonata form usually employed in the opening movements of Classical sonatas. Although some elements of the *Pastorale* loosely adhere to the conventional model, the movement presents a such series of divergences that is not possible to frame them within a sonata structure *tout-court*.

Despite the fact that the first twelve bars feature some of the most important motives and gestures of the movement, because of their brevity and their ambiguous harmonic profile, none of them possess the qualities normally associated with the primary theme of a sonata. This opening section is then classifiable as an extended introductory area.

As a cadence in F major concludes the introduction and finally establishes a clear tonal context, it would be legitimate to expect the primary theme in the following bars. Surprisingly, the first thematic idea to follow this introduction, which occurs in bars 13-17, does not have the characteristics normally associated with a P either: the juxtaposition of contrasting rhythmical layers undermine the thematic idea's metrical incisiveness, and its harmonic profile does not confirm the F major key, going instead into the D mode.

Regardless of the weakness of the primary theme, in accordance with sonata principles, a transitional area follows in bars 18 to 24. Despite the promising start, the material in these measures does not fulfill the habitual energy gain due to two main reasons: first, there is an abrupt interruption of the accumulation process in bar 20 (*ritardando*), and second, the *animando* that follows is absorbed in its turn by the

progressive expansion of the meter to 9/8, effectively neutralizing the natural rhythmic impulse of the 7/8.

What we could identify as a medial caesura, an IAC in C major placed on the upbeat of the third beat of bar 24 (the weakest spot possible for a bar of three beats), sounds transitory, and the confirmation of the tonality that happens in the following caesura fill is abruptly eclipsed by the viola entrance in bar 26, which completely upsets the harmonic scheme one might find in a typical sonata by abruptly modulating to A-flat major. There is no real secondary theme. Instead, we have a prolonged episode in a distant key that does not return in the recapitulation.

The recapitulation area starts with elements of the introduction, including elements of “P” and of “TR” but somehow does not sound like a return. It does not have any tonal goal towards the tonic, and its conclusion is not an arrival point. Rather, it is a dissolutive process of the musical material based on what Mark McFarland calls “splinterdness,” the peculiarly Debussyian return of snippets of material already presented in the previous sections.²⁵

Alternative structural interpretations are possible, including one that seems to fit a more structured sonata exposition in the space between bars 1 and 26, delineated by a double bar [intro 1-3 | P 4-6 | TR 6-12 | S 13-17 | Coda 18-25]. The problem is that this interpretation would be forced from the analytical standpoint (incongruent tonal plan/themes, very weak P, inefficient TR leading into... tonic, an extremely powerful coda) and does not sound convincing to the ear either. The weakest aspect of this second interpretation would be labeling as a Coda the most powerful passage of the first section,

²⁵ Mark McFarland, “Debussy: The Origins of a Method,” *Journal of Music Theory* 48, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 396.

and as P a soliloquy that does not really affirm any tonic. One supporting aspect of this interpretation would be the fact that the primary theme, the secondary theme, and the coda would appear in the right order in a hypothetical recapitulation included between bar 48 and 68.

Cadences do not help to clarify the situation. The harmonic rhythm seems to escape both structural interpretations and, if used as criteria to establish the form, produces highly improbable results [such as the section 9-12 where P is in tonic and there is no S in dominant, and C major is reached only in 24].

As disorienting as it may be from a scholastic point of view, this ambiguous structure in dialogue with sonata form is in fact functional to the narrative interpretation of the movement as a series of independent visions that is proposed later in this essay. Jean Barraqué claims that in Debussy's music, form cannot be considered as a predictable succession of events and that, from *La Mer* on, Debussy is less and less concerned with structural constraints and instead produces music that is able to sustain itself and move forward without the support of a pre-defined formal skeleton.²⁶ Simon Trezise agrees with this idea and recognizes that the secret of Debussy's self-standing works is his mastery of gestural transformation, and claims that it is on these aspects that the analyst should focus in order to get a true sense of Debussy's works.²⁷ Somer himself, despite his remarkable effort to frame Debussy's sonatas within the traditional sonata form structure, opens to a hermeneutic approach of Debussy's music.²⁸ For all these reasons, I will interpret the *Pastorale* according to a simpler ABA model where the motives will be

²⁶ Jean Barraqué, "La Mer de Debussy, ou la Naissance des Formes Ouvertes," *Analyse Musicale* 12 (1988): 15.

²⁷ Trezise, 248.

²⁸ Somer, 75.

free of “sonata duties” and where the narrative will be determined by their interaction, fragmentation, and transformation rather than by formal expectations.

Overall structure of the *Sonata*, the Deleuzian model

According to Debussy’s claim that a piece of music has to be considered in its totality in order to appreciate its meaning, this interpretation of the *Sonata* includes the *Pastorale*, the *Interlude*, and the *Final* in a single narrative flow.²⁹ The alternation of moments of musical ease and unease in the piece determines an overall narrative trajectory that coincides with the model that Gilles Deleuze uses to summarize the processes through which human beings judge their past experiences, an archetypal scheme that Michael Klein cites in relation to the music of Debussy and employs in the narrative interpretation of his music.³⁰

The three components of this interpretation are as follows: 1) reminiscence as the moment where a memory is recalled, 2) eternity as a utopian attempt to keep it alive in the present, and 3) regret as the moment in which the individual looks back to the past in longing. The first and the second movement of the sonata perfectly fulfill the functions of memory and eternity, the third proposes the variant of acceptance instead of regret.

²⁹ Caroline Potter, “Debussy and the Nature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 138.

³⁰ Klein, 72.

Deleuze	Debussy
Reminiscence [Memory]	<i>Pastorale</i>
Lost and Regained [Eternity]	<i>Interlude</i>
Death [Regret]	<i>Final</i> [Acceptance]

Table 1: Gilles Deleuze's "three machines of time regained" related to Debussy Sonata II

Multiple phases are nested within each of these Deleuzian steps, and determine the ABA' form shared by the three movements. In the *Pastorale* and in the *Interlude*, the A section is an articulated cognitive effort while the B section features the musical characteristics that I have previously associated with the utopian past. In addition to playing a role in the larger structure of the movements, the A sections nest smaller Deleuzian models of recall/memory that enrich the agent's path to the acceptance of modernity. In the A' sections the recalled memories progressively dissolve, proving to the agent that the solace that the past can provide is volatile and that he will have to find a compromise with the present.

As mentioned, it is in the *Final* that the narrative trajectory diverges from Deleuze's model. The A section is the first failed attempt of the agent to adapt to the present and culminates in tense frustration. The B section is the last illusion that convinces the agent that he must compromise with living in the present time. The A' section portrays the agent finally accepting modernity.

The timeline on the next page synthesizes the narrative of the piece and outlines the function of the movements and their inner subdivisions within the general narrative trajectory of the piece. An analysis of each movement will follow.

Sonata II for Flute, Viola, and Harp: Deleuzian Functions of the Movements

Reminiscence	Eternity	Regret (Acceptance)
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Prelude	25	48	53	82	44	68	
A: Cognitive Effort Memory Vision from Present Dissolution	B: Instantaneous Folk-like memory	A: Dissolution Eternity Final Dissolution	A: Cognitive Effort; Memory 1; Dissolution.	B: Cognitive Effort Memory Eternity	A: Dissolution Eternity Dissolution	A: Conflict Mediation Frustration Dissolution	B: Cognitive Effort Memory Apparent balance Dissolution
						A: Acceptance Reminiscence Final Acceptance	

Timeline 1 - Debussy, Sonata II - General Timeline

Pastorale

In this opening movement the present and the past reach out to the agent in the form of dreamlike visions. The choice of *Pastorale* for the title, along with instrumentation that features timbres traditionally associated with myth, attributes an Arcadian connotation to the past recalled in this movement.³¹ After savoring these moments of suspended consciousness in the A and B sections, the agent will return to reality in the A' area as a result of the progressive dissolution of the memories that he will try to contrast with scarce results. This attempt to extend the influence of the memories beyond their natural ephemeral existence defines for the *Pastorale* a “reminiscence/failed eternity” Deleuzian trajectory. In the general narrative, the *Pastorale* corresponds to the reminiscence machine, the phase where the individual recalls pleasant memories from the past that are destined to dissolve.

The A section features: a first cognitive effort [bars 1-13], a first memory [13-18], a vision from the present [18-21], and a first dissolution of the visions [21-25]. In the section included in bars 1-13, contrasting episodes follow one another in a stream of thought that finally recalls the agent's first memory. Debussy renounces the usual compositional devices and achieves a continuity of discourse through the association of ideas. There is no developmental process of the motives involved, no thematic derivation, no rhythmic affinity between the ideas, no tonal harmonic motion to lead the process, yet every motive shares something with the preceding one, and all of them move towards a progressive clarification of the harmonic and metrical context. This process climaxes with the memory. Example 6, page 24, highlights the different episodes and how Debussy

³¹ Code, 531.

connects them.

The first and the second episodes, completely different in character, are connected by the elision of their last and first note, respectively. *Motive 1*, which correspond to the first episode and is presented by flute and harp, is an elegant, arc-shaped, extended gesture characterized by rhythmic instability. In the harp part, two distinct elements come to life from the generative G-flat on the bass: a pedal in progressively smaller values that increases the musical tension and provides momentum, and an elegant ascending line that merges in the flute line. The G-flat is a symptomatic pitch that will find its full exploitation only in the *Interlude*. The flute completes the arc without providing any metrical reference before starting the repetition of an irregular figure, whose last note, an E, serves as contact point with the viola soliloquy, bars 4-6, labeled as *motive 2*, that coincides with the second episode. Though it is in the *piano* dynamic and played with a mute, *motive 2* is set in the most projecting range of the instrument and accompanied by the indication *pénétrant* (“piercing”). The combination of these factors makes this melody sound intense yet distant in space and/or time to the ear of the listener or, using Paul Dukas’ words, “in a distant sonic perspective.”³²

The second and third episodes are connected by a single shared gesture. The flute repeats in diminution the conclusive gesture of the solo viola launching an episode where meter and motive agree, and the color is brighter because of the rhythmic energy and the prevalence of major intervals in the melodic line. The stability of this passage is volatile. The appearance of chromatic material and the omission of downbeats in the next bar determine another shift in the color that culminates in a dissonant chord that Debussy

³² Simeone, 103.

marks arpeggiated. The chord is not assertive of any tonality or mode and it seems like the first nine bars were not sufficient to find the tonal dimension of the piece. Then the bass motion, with a simplicity and a clarity unknown to the piece until that moment [*gesture 1*], breaks the suspension and defines a [I⁶ | V⁴⁶ | I] motion that offers to the listener the first tonal relief of the piece: an F major cadence.

The third and fourth episodes, presenting again completely opposing characteristics, do share one unifying trait: the key of F major. The fourth episode is a pedal section of the harp and the viola [9-11] that contains many elements open to symbolic interpretation. The topical appearance of a horn call, though it is only a distant echo (*pp* in the harp), is enough to evoke the presence of a horn playing in what Carolyn Abbate calls the “not-here,” an undefined alternative action plan from where “spectral sounds” can appear in the musical flow and acquire even more power because of their disembodiment.³³ In this case the “not-here” is the past. This ghostly horn evokes the splendor of the Arcadian past, and because of the conventional association of the instrument with the topic of “the hunt,” it connects the past and the natural world. Additionally, the pedal in the viola could be topically reminiscent of a bagpipe drone, element that strongly reinforces the pastoral aura of the moment.³⁴

The fourth and fifth episode share the last note, to which the flute ascends in a culminating flourish that starts in bar 12 and adds rhythmic and harmonic instability. Some chromatic color embellishes this virtuosic passage that features irregular figurations on a diminished 7th harmony. The melodic motion finally finds a resting point

³³ Carolyn Abbate, “Debussy’s Phantom Sounds,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10, no.1 (March 1998): 69, 70.

³⁴ Klein, 106.

on a B-flat (the shared note between the two areas) in a suspension that mirrors similar literary devices that Anne Holmes finds peculiar to Verlaine's poetry.³⁵ Carlyne Potter has recognized this "flute arabesque" as a powerful symbol for the "Egyptian shepherd" that Debussy describes in his writings as a model of freedom and harmony for man and nature.³⁶ See example 6, page 29.

As mentioned, it is possible to follow the advancement of the agent's cognitive effort by tracking the progressive clarification of the metric and harmonic context. Considering the characteristics of the meter in episodes 1, 2, and 3, the motion from indefinite to clear is evident. In the first episode, since the articulation and the irregular rhythmic figures blurs the perception of the measure's inner beats, it is very difficult to recognize the 9/8 meter. In the second episode, a triple meter is clearly perceivable from the outset and is easy to maintain as a reference because the beats are easily discernible. In the third episode the meter is clear: the eighth-note subdivision is dictated by the flute melody while the accompaniment clearly defines the beats.

In these same episodes, the harmonic development follows a similar trajectory from ambiguous harmony to tonality. The first episode features a series of pitches that do not belong to any clearly defined tonal space. The second episode includes a smaller set of pitches, and except for the A-flat, they all belong to the C major scale, the dominant of F major. The melody of the third episode features the diatonic pitches of F major (with the addition of the colorful E-flat) and cadences on a clear F major chord.

³⁵ Anne Holmes, "Verlaine's Creation of 'Suspense' in Romances Sans Paroles," *The Modern Language Review* 104, no. 2 (April 2009): 399.

³⁶ Potter, 147.

Pastorale

1 Lento, dolce rubato
 FlûTE *p m/retardement* Elision
 ALTO *(surtitas)* Elision
 HARPE Lento, dolce rubato *p* *ab* *p* *dis et*

4 En nottanti
 FlûTE *pizz* *pl. p* Cell in common
 ALTO *p* En nottanti
 HARPE *p* En nottanti

8 En retentant, au Mouvt
 FlûTE *stl.* *p autret* Tonality connection
 ALTO *p* En retentant, au Mouvt
 HARPE *pp* *pp*

12 *pp*
 FlûTE *pp* Flute arabesque "tunes" with the opening chord sonority
 ALTO *pp*
 HARPE *pp*

Example 6 – Debussy, Sonata II – Connection of the Motives in the cognitive effort of the Pastorale [1-12]

The apparent disorder of this cognitive effort recalls a concept that Debussy expressed in one of his letters explaining how he intended to use the choir in *Le Diable dans le Beffroi*, an opera based on a novel by Edgar Allan Poe that he never completed. Debussy claimed that he wished to compose something incoherent in appearance, but fundamentally ordered, in which every voice was independent while producing an impression of unity.³⁷ In this passage, Debussy clearly succeeded. Although every episode sounds independent, they all contribute to the process of defining the first memory of the piece, represented by the extended tonal passage starting in bar 13.

From the narrative point of view, the apparent incoherence of this opening suggests that the narrative flow of this movement starts autonomously without any input from the agent, similar to a daytime vision or a dream where consciousness is suspended and the mind is free to wander. This sensation is not uncommon to the listener of Debussy's music. Paul Dukas apparently experienced something alike, claiming that Debussy's music seemed to him to be happening "in a dream."³⁸

After the cognitive effort, in bars 13-17 the memory finally hatches and takes the form of a consonant, metrically stable, melodically charming section in triple meter where the three voices cooperate to create a sense of cradling ease [*Motive 3*]. Here it is possible to find here what Robert Hatten calls plenitude: fulfillment signified by rich and sonorous texture.³⁹ Infinite image-centric associations are possible with this memory. A lullaby and the gentle motion of the waves are the first two that came up to the writer. This section features some of the recurrent peculiarities of Debussy's counterpoint that

³⁷ Jarocinski, 120.

³⁸ Simeone, 105.

³⁹ Robert Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 43-4.

Peter Delone describes in one of his studies, including the combination of two related but texturally and rhythmically independent voices (harp and viola), and the presence of melodic ostinatos with no real tonal function that are used to create momentum.⁴⁰

Additionally, as in other cases that Delone describes, the melody (here in the flute) seems only to serve as a unifying thread for the more important background motions, which are responsible for the creation of the dominant feeling of the passage.⁴¹

In bars 18-20 a rhythmical section [*motive 4*] supplants the memory. The spell of the previous area is broken, but it was to be expected, for as Klein points out, the “past can reach to us, but it cannot stay.”⁴² The 7/8 meter in combination with the inner subdivision of the phrasing and the articulation markings, reflects the irregular inner organization of the verse as well as the complexity of symbolist poetry as described by Moréas in his manifesto of Symbolism.

	BAR 18	BAR 19	BAR 20
FLUTE	2 + 2 + 3	2 + 2 + 3	3 + 2 + 2
VIOLA	3 + 2 + 2	5 + 2	3 + 3 + 1
HARP (RH)	5 + 2	3 + 2 + 2	3 + 2 + 2
HARP (LH)	3 + 2 + 2	3 + 2 + 2	3 + 2 + 2

Table 2: Debussy, Sonata II – Discrepancies in the subdivisions of the parts in the Motive 4, Pastorale [Bars 18-20]

⁴⁰ Peter Delone, “Claude Debussy, Contrapuntiste Malgré Lui,” *College Music Symposium* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 51-2.

⁴¹ Delone, 58.

⁴² Klein, 81.

From a time perspective, this section represents an abrupt return to modernity and unease. Since the master signifier for this movement is that the events are taking place in an unconscious vision or a dream, it is possible to claim that *motive 4* represents the present reaching to the agent through a new and different vision. At this moment we are experiencing a narrative phenomenon that Steven Rings calls “temporal polyphony,” the contemporaneous existence of multiple time plans within a single narration.⁴³ Here the temporal polyphony includes the past, the present unconscious, and the present conscious. Memory and conscious reach to the agent, who is wandering in the unconscious through visions. This vision of the present does not need a cognitive effort. It is direct and sharply vivid, repressive in the way in which it cuts through the atmosphere of the preceding memory. Rings calls these kinds of explosions of thought that intrude on the narrative “instantaneous hearings.”⁴⁴ Although the rhythmical discrepancies are still present in the counterpoint of the voices for the next two bars [21-22], the return of a regular meter [8/8] partially absorbs the momentum. The successive change to a 9/8 meter [23-25], in addition to the *molto ritenuto* and the *diminuendo*, dissolves this second vision.

Simon Trezise describes this procedure of normalizing the tempo after a particularly unstable section as characteristic of Debussy.⁴⁵ Anne Holmes notices a corresponding feature in the poetry of Paul Verlaine, pointing that the transition from asymmetric to symmetric subdivisions of the verse represents in the poet’s work the

⁴³ Rings, 202.

⁴⁴ Rings, 202.

⁴⁵ Simon Trezise, “Debussy’s ‘Rhythmicised Time’,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2003), 234-5.

dissolution of visions taking place in the imaginary, as well as the return to reality.⁴⁶ The dissolution of this second vision concludes the A section of the *Pastorale*. The following timeline summarizes its narrative trajectory.

Pastorale - A Section

		Cadence in F Major		Suspension on Bb Fermata		Cadence in C Major				
		3	6	9	12	13	18	21	24	25
Motive 1	Motive 2	glimpse of tonality (F Major)	Evocative Pedal (ghost horn call)	Egyptian Shepherd Arabesque	Polyphonic section in triple meter (Motive 3)	Energetic 7/8 section (Motive 4)	Dialogic exchange flute/viola	Harp Coda		
Cognitive Effort					Memory		Vision from the Present	Dissolution of the Vision		
Metric and harmonic ambiguity	Clarification of the meter: Pitches of C major + Ab; Transitional function	Meter and tonality are clear.	Confirms sonority of F major.	Creates suspension and introduces memory.	"Lullaby" Regular Meter; general sense of consonance; cooperation of voices.	Sudden shift in the character; minor sonority; irregular meter.	Retranstion towards a regular meter; modulation to C major; bitter-sweet feeling.			

Timeline 2: Debussy, Sonata II – Pastorale A section [Bars 1-25]

In bar 26 the viola plays without mute for the first time in the piece and introduces the B section of the movement. Debussy indicates that this new section should be lively, joyful, and clearly rhythmed. The extended viola statement incorporates all these indication and features the characteristics of a spontaneous and rhetorical gesture that introduces the extended episode reminiscent of folk dances [26-47] that we have mentioned earlier as an example of involuntary memory.

⁴⁶ Holmes, 397.

For Klein, the appearance of new motives mark a time shift.⁴⁷ This section, based on the motivic material of the viola line, features steady tonal harmony and a prolonged coincidence of metric and motivic profiles. The sum of these characteristics, together with the light triple meter and the simple and unelaborated profile of the melody, produces a sound that has the characteristic of ease associated with the past. Unfortunately, in this B area, the pitch G-flat, by cracking the general consonance of the passage and creating unsolved musical tension, works as a signal, or a “symptom” in Klein’s words, that reminds the agent that relief in the imaginary dimension of his memories is possible, but is only momentary. This symptomatic function of the G-flat will have narrative implications in the following two movements of the sonata.

The A’ section starting in measure 47 represents the dissolution of the visions and the return to reality. Once more the viola is the “bridge instrument” and fills the caesura space of two bars before the flute entrance in bar 50. The flute plays a portion of **motive 2**. The viola accompanies with a bi-chord that fluctuates between dissonance and consonance, contributing to the dissolution of the sense of tonality that had been prevalent in the middle section. In bar 52, the harp blurs the sense of pulse by playing an irregular number of figurations (fifteen in a bar) starting on the upbeat, and together with the metrical reference this dissolves the sense of earthly and physical mundanity of the middle section. The set of pitches is tonally ambiguous: Debussy juxtaposes a major chord [C], a minor chord [A], and an augmented one [A-flat], creating again suspension and mystery. This conductive metamorphosis dissolves the ease of the memory acting contemporarily on every aspect of the musical tissue: the motive is shortened, the meter

⁴⁷ Klein, 75.

blurred, and the consonant harmony moves towards an undefined sonority.

The repetition of the flute soliloquy with the employment of the A-natural, the finalis of the Aeolian mode, a scale historically associated with the pastoral, can be interpreted as a first timid attempt to eternity. In the dissolution of the specific memory, the agent holds onto the feeling that the reminiscence has generated and tries to savor it as long as possible. In bar 57 this attempt produces a return of *motive 3*, but the reappearance of *motive 4*, with the viola in the lead role in measure 63, determines once more the abrupt dissolution of the peaceful atmosphere that *motive 3* evokes. Nonetheless, also the repressive musical idea in irregular meter quickly dissolves. Long notes in the flute part substitute the energetic viola trills that accompanied the first appearance of *motive 4*. Debussy scores these tones on weak beats, writing slurs that neutralize the natural metrical impulse and absorb the energy gain of the rapid figures of the viola, as well as slow the rhythmical momentum generated by the 7/8 meter. In bar 65 the harp joins the flute in draining energy from the passage by playing the descending line that introduced the pedal section before [*Gesture 1*]. The way in which the passage fades out marks the dissolution of this attempt to eternity. The details of the memories seem to vanish by the moment from the agent's mind.

Bars 66-69, by referring back to measures 9-12, continue the dissolution of eternity. Although they are not dissonant or metrically disordered per-se, the fact that these measures return after the reappearance of *motives 3* and *4* (in the original A section they preceded these motives) suggests a reversion of narrative time, as if the agent was moving backwards in the train of thought that brought him to the memory in first place. The pedal point featuring the horn calls still serves a transitional purpose, only this time

in the opposite direction. In bar 70 the dissolving process intensifies. The juxtaposition of two distinct diminished harmonies (F7° and, enharmonic B°) creates a sense of great instability and hesitancy. The augmented 4th played in the viola part, if enharmonically interpreted as a diminished 5th, represents the shadow of the spectral horns heard before, a signal that, now barely recognizable, has unfortunately lost its evocative power. The bar sounds deeply decadent: the charm of the memory is broken and the agent is going back to a miserable reality. The progressively thinner texture of bar 71, certifies the agent's acceptance of this unfortunate trajectory.⁴⁸

The return to wakefulness culminates in bars 72-73 with the mysterious material of the opening *motive 1*. The most noticeable difference from its previous appearance is that in bar 73 the harp fills the meditative silence originally present in bar 2 with an arc-shaped figure based upon an undefined (E-flat and E-natural) E°7 harmony that prevents any further divagation and propels the music forward. The familiar *gesture 1*, played in the harp on the last beat of 73 and now ending on a tense half step instead of a reassuring whole tone, in conjunction with the minor triad in the flute part that substitutes the major one played in bar 2, opens evident cracks in the rapidly dissolving reality of the unconscious.

In 74, the three instruments join efforts to try to recall once more a pastoral reality by playing the evocative bar 1, but their awareness that the charm is broken seems evident as the motive appears in an anxious high register. The absence of the ascending 3rd motion to the last note of the bar in the harp part, makes the arc sound like a sigh rather than something suspended. Debussy asks for *poco stretto*, adding to the rising

⁴⁸ Klein, 92.

tension of the passage. The dissolution continues with the elision of the material of bars 1 and 15, as if the details of the vision were becoming more and more confused. Debussy selects from bar 15 the gesture that includes an open 5th ascending to the pastoral pitch A [*motive 3*]. This last mention of the spectral horn, even if played four times, is incapable of reviving the vision.

In 78, *motive 3* appears in a slower tempo [*più lento*] and in parallel motion in the flute and the viola parts, finally getting to its natural resting point on C. Meanwhile, the harp proposes *gesture 1* again, which in context sounds like an extended sigh. Both of these elements signify the agent's acceptance of the end of the visionary relief. The return of *gesture 2*, the one that lead to the first cadence of the piece in major mode, concludes the bar with a quote of measure 8. The bittersweet sonority of bar 78 is reminiscent of one who finally wakes up after having fought to keep a beautiful dream alive and is sad to see it go, but at the same time is still permeated by the pleasant feelings it has generated during its ephemeral existence/non-existence.

Bar 79 seems to be the last one where the aura of the vision is still present. The bass line plays once more the descending motive of gesture 1, now in augmentation that bring this idiomatic line to its final dissolution. The flute sighs (*p* and *<*) gesture 2 while the viola is already set on a hesitant (upbeat) dominant (C) pedal. On the downbeat of 80, the imperfect and plagal sounding motion, which for Klein is signifier of acceptance, starts an unsatisfactory "tonic lock" ($I > I^{46}$) that fails to affirm F major, more because of its weaknesses (no V present, no modal in the final arpeggiation in bar 82) than because of the weak 6>7 motion in the flute.⁴⁹ The final cadential motion produces a chord that

⁴⁹ Klein, 59.

renounces again the modal and features a suspended, unresolved 7th (flute) instead. This leaves the musical discourse open and creates a connection with the second movement. Anne Holmes would find a correspondence between this open cadence and Verlaine's practice of concluding his poems with an open ending to create suspension.⁵⁰ Klein would recognize in this poor cadence an attempt to escape time, an understandable sentiment considering the trajectory of the movement that brought the agent back from reverie to the unease of the present.⁵¹ The following timeline synthesizes the narrative of the A' section.

Pastorale - A' Section

47	54	56	63	66	72	74	78
Motive 2 with Ab	Motive 2 with A	Return of Motive 3	Return of motive 4	Return of Horn Calls + Shepherd + decadent bar [measure 70]	Motive 1	Extreme Recall Motive 1	Motive 3 and Final Dissolution
Dissolution of the Memory					Eternity		
Less clear harmony and meter. Dissolution starts.	Substitution of Ab with A, stokes the memory of the atmosphere of the Lullaby.	Reproposes the duality between the "Lullaby" and the vision of the present. The memories of both visions are dissolving, so are imperfectly recalled.	The direction of the evocation now moves backwards. From present to mysterious evocative mist.	Motive ! imperfectly recalled the first time (shortened). The extreme recall of flute and viola together seems an attempt to keep the rapidly dissolving memory alive.	Snippets of the Lullaby appear: They are progressively shorter and suggest that even the "Lullaby" is dissolving.		

Timeline 3 - Debussy, Sonata II – Pastorale, A' Section

⁵⁰ Holmes, 393.

⁵¹ Klein, 112.

Interlude

Debussy composes the *Interlude* in the same episodic style as the *Pastorale*. Nonetheless, the sections are more extended and the narrative time follows a more logical path, as if in this second step of the Deleuzian process the agent's conscious mind was more influential in determining the narrative trajectory. The narrative is not unfolding anymore in the agent's unconscious at this point. The movement is dominated by the symptomatic pitch G-flat that was repeated with increasing intensity in the opening moments of the *Pastorale* and disturbed the flow of the B section in the same movement. In the interlude its symptomatic nature is fully exploited.

The G-flat as a pitch has a powerful symbolic meaning and it recurs elsewhere in Debussy's works as a signifier. As the F-sharp major key in the Romantic aesthetic is the key associated with the sublime, the enharmonic appearance of its tonic in the gloomy context of C minor is a veiled symbolic evocation of a disappeared past.⁵² The G-flat transforms the minor tonic triad into a diminished harmony. Symbolically this can be interpreted as the musical rendering of the fact that being aware of the existence of a lost sublime (probably acquired in the *Pastorale*) makes enduring the present even more difficult for the agent.

For Klein, distant keys signify spatial separation.⁵³ The distance between C minor and F-sharp major, if not covered using enharmonic or chromatic modulation, is among the largest in the cycle of fifths. Symbolically then, G-flat expresses how far the sublime is from the present time. Nonetheless, enharmonically, G-flat and F-sharp are separated only by the conventions of academic musical language that calls them differently. In this

⁵² Klein, 31, 85.

⁵³ Klein, 81.

liminality between ease and unease, the longing for sublime ease is stronger than ever as the agent can feel that it is close, yet hidden in the unconscious.

The narrative trajectory of this movement involves two different cognitive efforts. The first one takes place in the A section and leads to a memory that, despite its brightness and extended proportions, dissolves the same way as those in the *Pastorale*. The second attempt at a memory, which coincides with the B section, produces a vision powerful enough to definitively change both the aura of the movement and the way in which the G-flat is perceived by the ear of the listener. The A' section concludes the movement with an attempt to eternity based on the memory of the B section and a final dissolution of the same reminiscence.

The movement opens with a meditative melody played by the flute over a pedal in the viola [*motive 1* – Bar 1-4]. The G-flat is both the highest and the lowest pitch of the line. When it appears at the peak of the line in syncopation, it generates a deep sense of unease that is accentuated in bar 4 by the descending gesture over a diminished 5th that lands on a C. Like in the first movement, diminished sonorities symbolize decadence. The combination of texture and melodic profile suggests that the agent is experiencing an oppressive emptiness, a feeling associated with the present.

On the pickup to bar 5, the harp starts an eighth-note walking bass that adds rhythmic momentum. The pedal is now in the flute part, the viola joins the harp in motion [6-7] and then proposes *motive 1* again. The chords in the harp [F minor, E-flat major, A-flat major] shed new light on the melody, which sounds more positive now, but the G-flat has infiltrated the harmony and undermines the attempt towards ease that the viola line offers. Klein has noticed a similar “infection” of the harmony by the G-flat in Brahms’

clarinet sonata and attributes to it a powerful symbolic meaning.⁵⁴

The flute picks up *motive I* in elision with the viola. Code recognizes that elisions hold the power to shift planes in Debussy's music; Klein claims that these kind of entrances *in stretto* are symptomatic of urgency.⁵⁵ Both interpretations apply to this passage as the momentum increases and a shift happens. The return of the G-flat in a prominent position [flute, 12-13] and the syncopation in lower register of the harp indicate that something is moving, that a cognitive effort has started - probably unchained by the insistent recurrence of the G-flat as a symptom of unease. As Klein claims, a symptom is worsened by repetition.⁵⁶ The very low register in which the unease is now boiling could symbolically represent that this cognitive effort is coming from a very deep layer of the subconscious of the agent.

In the following section [14-22], the cognitive effort deepens. Although the G-flat has disappeared, its aura hovers over the piece and serves as the master signifier—Klein's words to designate the element that provides context for a poetic text—in this passage.⁵⁷ Anxiety is generated by a “phantom-contrast” tritone interval (C-natural – G-flat) which includes the ghost of the symptom (G-flat) and by the rhythmic motion of these bars. More *stretto* entrances of *motive I* between viola and harp increase the sense of urgency, as if a revelation was getting closer through the pleonasm of the motive. In the viola part [bar 18], well hidden in the rhythmical continuum of the pedal, a melodic line appears. It is based on a modal pitch set and represents a small breakthrough, a symbolic, imperceptible signal that ease lies, once again, in the past symbolized by the modal

⁵⁴ Klein, 27.

⁵⁵ Code, 518; Klein, 29.

⁵⁶ Klein, 12.

⁵⁷ Klein, 18.

sonority. In the following bars, the G-flat aura starts to dissolve. The flute suspension on the E-flat in bar 20 represents a pivotal point. After that climax, the first G that appears is natural and, in the blink of an eye, now apparently cured of the symptom, the piece cadences in A-flat major and starts a new section.

From the narrative time point of view, this opening section represents an intense cognitive effort that in the end produces a result: the agent has successfully transitioned to ease. In the new section the parts cooperate, the harmony is consonant, and alignment meter/rhythm is solid.

Starting in bar 22 the three instruments gather around a rhythmical and positive second motive [*motive 2* harp 22-23], simple in the harmony and in the melodic profile, again representative of a middle-low style. The viola is the first to join the harp in bar 24, where it moves from dissonance to consonance, “tuning in with the memory.” The harp indulges for the first time in the piece in a virtuoso pick up [25] that brings in the flute as well. In bars 26-30 the instruments work harmoniously together and even if the resulting harmony is not classifiable in a scholastic language (11th? Double harmony?), the sound is bright and produces full ease.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the grace notes and the runs in the harp part signify that something has still to be revealed and that the cognitive effort is still in progress.

When in bar 30 the harp disappears abruptly (*étouffez* = “stifle”), flute and viola, now transported by the energy of the middle-style, launch into a rhythmical short episode (*motive 3*) that, in the flute part, assumes the improvisatory characteristics typical of untrained folk playing (diatonic, fluid scalar passages). When the harp comes back in bar

⁵⁸ Anti-academism is part of the symbolist aesthetic. Moréas describes Symbolism as an “enemy of teaching.”

32, plays symptomatic chords (minor against general major + a false octave relationship D-natural / D-sharp in the last beat of the bar) signaling again that something has not yet been uncovered. The shared enthusiasm of the flute and viola screens the listener from perceiving this messages as a threat to the euphoric ease.

The return of the symptomatic G-flat in bar 35 [harp and viola] causes an immediate drop in the energy level. The *animando poco a poco* based on cells from *motive 2* tries to assimilate the G-flat once and for all [bar 40, in the flute] but the attempt is not completely successful and, despite its prolonged persistence, the ephemeral ease of the previous section starts to dissolve. Fragmentation and loss of unity of intent between the voices characterize the section between bars 44-53. The return of *motive 1* and of the characteristic syncopated expressive climax on G-flat in the viola, this time played twice, marks the return of the agent to the anguished present from whence he had momentarily escaped and the culmination of the dissolution of the first memory of the *Interlude*. The arpeggiated chords that accompany the repetition of the pedal completely dissolve the feeling of metrical flow and the piece reaches a suspension. In bar 51, the flute starts a reflective passage. Instability (irregular figuration dictated by the [3 + 5] phrasing, chromatic pitch set), frames this new cognitive effort based on repetition. The agent does not know where to go from here and falls into silence.

Symbolically, the rhetoric general fermata that precedes the downbeat of 54 is a very powerful moment. In symbolist aesthetic silence is the expression of the inadequacy of the language to express the artist's idea.⁵⁹ In this case it can be interpreted as the inadequacy of *motive 2* to resolve the symptom and provide ease to the agent. *Motive 2*

⁵⁹ Phillips, 309; Barraqué, 152.

is, in fact, a symbol itself. Having arisen after much cognitive effort, it represents the failure of the conscious (represented by the cognitive effort) in solving the unease created by the subconscious (G-flat). The silence represents a breaking point, the shift that characterizes Mallarmé’s theory of transposition, the equivalent of the dash that in his poem *Soupir* (set in music by Debussy) separates different narrative plans.⁶⁰ The following timeline synthesizes the narrative trajectory of the movement so far.

Interlude - A section

C minor		Ab major		C major		Ab major		C minor		
1	18	22	30	38	41	46			54	
Motive 1	Hidden Motive	Motive 2	Motive 3	Motive 4	Cells from Motive 1 and 2	Motive 1 + Flute Cadenza (cadenza based on diminished 5th interval)				
Cognitive Effort		Memory			Dissolution					
Progressive, based on the interaction of motive 1 with a C pedal.		Evocative motive in the viola part. Leads to a flute cadence in Ab major.	A first memory in dotted rhythm is followed by a second exalted one in virtuosic style. An episode featuring cells from Motive 2 precedes the beginning of the dissolution.			Ritardando and diminuendo create the dissolution effect.		The return of the opening theme sounds resigned. The fermata, symbolically signifies the agent’s incapability to find a way out of the gloomy present.		

Timeline 4 - Debussy, Sonata II – Interlude, A Section

A deeper memory suddenly rises from the emptiness of silence. From nothingness, the harp speaks again, *murmurando*. The Italian word means “to whisper,” but is often used to describe the distant sound of the water flowing in creeks. Nature is there again, hidden in a word that evokes it without exposing it, opening the path to an

⁶⁰ Dayan, 218; Callet, 51.

ease that the conscious could not provide. The polyharmony (G-flat major harp / B major flute and viola) represents the dissolution of the veil of the symbolic that prevented the agent from seeing the G-flat as the F-sharp it really is, as the sublime it recalls. Nobody would suspect that these far distant keys are at work simultaneously without seeing the score, and that proves that it is not necessary to know how beauty happens—as Debussy claimed many times—nor it is necessary to understand how ease happens to enjoy it.

The G-flat, now transfigured in F-sharp, appears as a pedal in the flute and the viola. Its persistence is now full of excited expectation, and has lost every ominous aura. The *ostinato 1* in the harp part combines with a motive of harmonics played in the bass line (*motive 5*). These two elements together serve to increase the momentum.

Symbolically, the fact that the harmonics are scored in the harp's low register but sound high in their acoustic realization can be interpreted as the subconscious finally resounding on the surface of the conscious.

In bar 60, this prolonged cognitive effort opens on the brightest and most intense memory of the whole piece. The transition from out-of-focus to focus that signifies the formation of the memory happens here in the realm of timbre, where the evocative harmonics of the harp transform into full sounds. With the brilliant glissando in the harp that breaks the ebullient stasis, the agent suddenly finds the path to real ease. This coincides with a general shift towards the high registers of the three voices, which again can represent the emergence of the subconscious. The G-flat / F-sharp is now functional in both keys, now an element of conjunction and ease instead of a symptom of unease. These kinds of enharmonic breakthroughs have also been identified elsewhere in

Debussy's music.⁶¹

In bar 61 a joyful *motive 6* appears in the flute and the viola. The indication *sfogato* under the two voices has a symbolic meaning. In simple musical terms it refers to the loudness required from the voices, but the Italian verb *sfogare* literally translates to “release,” or to “free” something that has been *repressed* for a long time - in this case the symptom. The two instruments play *motive 6* homorhythmically over *ostinato 1* and *motive 5* in the harp. A few bars later [65], the flute plays portions of *motive 2* and these four elements beautifully come together in a communion that Klein would recognize as the full formation of the memory in the mind of the agent.⁶²

In bar 67 something that Klein has described as the “locomotive topic” in Debussy's cello sonata appears in the viola, then in the flute, and finally in the harp part. Klein claims that, in Debussy's time, this characteristic rhythm together with the indication *animare* onomatopoeically signifies the ideal of a train slowly departing from the city to the countryside.⁶³ The rhythmic cells happening in the parts that do not carry forward the topic sound like mechanical noises connected somehow to the machinery in motion. Their apparent disorder is, according to the symbolist aesthetic, carefully ordered to result in a more effective evocation of the train. Escaping city by train was a concept that the symbolists also exploited in their poetry. Paul Verlaine dedicated the images he saw from a train window while traveling to the Flemish countryside to his cycle of poems *Paysage Belges*.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Klein, 78.

⁶² Klein, 81.

⁶³ Klein, 86.

⁶⁴ Holmes, 392.

On the downbeat of bar 75, the return of *motive 6* coincides with a moment of ecstatic suspension. The indication *tempo rubato* has a deeply symbolic meaning: “stolen time,” or time that the human being takes to enjoy the beauty of the nature. Here is yet another latent reference to nature, which is not clearly mentioned, but is inferred by the travel that has been symbolically completed. The flute reaches again the peak of the sublime high F-sharp. The indication *dolce* can again be read symbolically to indicate both the way to play the note and the sweetness of the moment of the memory. The inversion of the locomotive topic, now proposed in augmentation in the harp’s bass clef could, signify the inversion of its function, the desire of the agent not to go back, to slow down now that the destination, the full ease, has been reached. In Deleuzian terms, this attempt represents a moment of eternity where the agent tries to extend the influence of this beautiful memory beyond the limits of its natural duration. See the next timeline for the summary of the narrative of this B section.

Interlude - B Section

B major/Cb major

54	60	67	74	80
Motive 5 + Pedal on the F#	Motive 6	Locomotive Topic	Motive 6	
Cognitive Effort	Memory			Eternity
<p>The symptomatic Gb pitch is transfigured to F#. The pitch sounds now bright and has lost its ominous aura.</p> <p>Transition from out of focus to focus happens in the timbre: the harp shifts from harmonics to full sound when the memory is fully recalled.</p>	<p>Brilliant homorhythmic theme in the flute and viola lines. Suggests unity of intent.</p> <p>The balance and the brightness of this passage are unmatched in the whole piece..</p>	<p>Characteristic rhythm + indication "animando" to evoke the sound of an accelerating train.</p> <p>For symbolist artists, traveling by train from the city to the countryside represented a mean of escaping modernity.</p>	<p>Moment of suspended beauty (Tempo rubato). First attempt to extend the power of the memory over time</p>	

Timeline 5 - Debussy, Sonata II – Interlude, B Section

In bar 76 the dissolution of the memory begins through a reversion of narrative events. The flute holds to *motive 6*, although now it is shortened, placed lower in the register, and no longer has the support of a dominant harmony. The harp returns to *ostinato 1* and to *motive 5*, the elements that had introduced this ease section in the first place. The viola plays a variant of the ostinato that slowly absorbs its energy by blurring its rhythmic consistency through the repetition of its notes. Rings recognizes in the dissolution of ostinatos the dissolution of a layer of time.⁶⁵ In our case the memory progressively returns to the shadows of the mind leaving space for the present to return. The *ritardando poco a poco* of bar 80 leads to the disappearance of the harp transitional material and leaves the flute and the viola exchanging snippets of the locomotive topic.

In bar 85, a motion reminiscent of the ostinato, featuring comfortable major sonorities and the *dolce* indication that originally appeared in concomitance with the brief moment of eternity, accompanies the return of *motive 1*. The master signifier has changed: *motive 1* now resounds in the bright aura of the instantaneous memory, and the G-flat is now a joyful echo of the F-sharp rather than the symptom it was in the very beginning. When the flute and viola join the harp in unison for the last G-flat of the syncopation, they stress the familiar half-step motion conventionally connected with the topic of the sigh. The combination of these elements as a whole produces a regretful sonorous result: for as nice the reminiscence may be, it is still something that is gone. It was gone once, and now it is gone again.

Starting in bar 90, the flute and the viola stay together in unison on the same rhythmical cell that closed *motive 1*, but each repetition takes them farther from the

⁶⁵ Rings, 195.

memory they are trying to preserve. The viola gives up first while the flute gives a last attempt at the figure, concluding on a diminished fifth interval that seems to verify the return of unease. But then, the harp works its magic. Both Klein and Berlioz attribute “magic” evocative powers to the harp, especially when it plays in the so called “bardic style”⁶⁶ and when it performs harmonics.⁶⁷ The fact that this particular style of playing (wide-range arpeggios) accompanies the motive of the memory, suggests that its return is an evocation of the original appearance, that is, a “memory of a memory.” It is interesting to notice how the motive’s register does not extend beyond the one defined by the harp’s arpeggios, somehow suggesting that the summoning of the glorious original vision is only possible as a result of the symbolic power of the harp and within the limits it establishes. This textural choice creates what Klein describes as that “oceanic feeling” both around the agent and around the motive. This is the feeling that the music is everywhere around us, and this “embrace” produces a feeling reminiscent of the wholeness of the subconscious connected to the maternal womb.⁶⁸

The dynamic range of the passage, softer than its original appearance; the register, which is lower than the original by an octave; and the instrumentation that no longer features the combined action of the flute and viola to carry on the motive, all support the interpretation of the passage as an echo of the previous memory. Furthermore, this passage is longer than the original, twelve measures instead of eight, a stretch that seems to encourage the interpretation of this second presentation of the memory as an attempt to

⁶⁶ In the medieval era, bards were storytellers who accompanied their performances with the sound of a stringed instrument, often a harp or a lute. The predilection of this historical figures for the harp led to the association of the instrument with the narration and the evocation of the past.

⁶⁷ Hector Berlioz, *Grand Traité d’Instrumentation et d’Orchestration Modernes* (Paris: Henry Lemoine & C^{te} Editeurs, 1855), 81; Klein, 88.

⁶⁸ Klein, 47.

extend, as much as possible, its influence on the present.

All the elements of Debussy's symbolic work together create a second level of past, clearly separated from the first. The climax of this section [bar 99] coincides with the highest dynamic level and with the peak of the long arc-shaped melody that progressively dissolves the memory of the memory.

In bar 104, the flute, once again solo, plays an ascending figure that resembles a tonal reversion of the sigh that closed *motive 1* . The dynamic level *più p* and the indication for the mute in the viola encourage the interpretation of this last section as a long, bittersweet (*dolce* indication as well) extinction of the aura of this moment of eternity. In bar 107, flute and viola retake *motive 1* and Debussy's words say much about the character he wants for this last apparition of the melody. If "sweet" and "sadly" are translations for *dolce* and *tristamente*, the word *sospiroso* is not to be found in any Italian dictionary as it does not exist. Nonetheless, its significance is clear: Debussy wants these last gestures to sound like sighs, those *soupirs* that are an integral part of the symbolist quest for the *Azure*, the unachievable artistic communion between words and sentiments.⁶⁹ The emotional climax of this last section comes in bar 110, where the instruments are again together and produce an ambiguous [7+ , 9-] chord centered around the G-flat pitch.

The last six bars [111-116] sound like a coda of a coda. The indications *sempre pp*, *più piano*, and *perdendosi* ["getting lost"] set these last echoes even further from the moment of eternity. The energy and the light that the memory casted have completely dissolved, and now the agent is back to a static and empty time frame. One last time, the

⁶⁹ Philips, 299.

viola (syncopated rhythm) and the flute (closing gesture) evoke a portion of *motive 1*, then the harp produces a harmonic succession from which it is possible to infer a V | I⁴⁶ | I motion in F minor.

The very last chord is a simple unison, another open ending even less assertive than the chord that concluded the *Pastorale*. This non-chord symbolically sums up the function of the *Interlude*, which is to expose the conflict involving present and past, not to find a solution to it. The empty unison is striking for what it does not do rather for what it does: it does not point in any direction, it does not express a judgement, and it basically leaves the agent with no indication on how to move forward. The inability of the *Interlude* to indicate a new way makes it clear that lingering in a beautiful past is not the solution, and that the agent must live beyond the past that otherwise, as Klein claims, can become a prison.⁷⁰ It is true that the moments of exalted ease that the agent experienced in this movement were extremely powerful and sounded much more *alive* than the present narrative time, but it is now clear that they cannot offer eternal relief from the present to the agent. The next timeline schematizes the process of eternity and dissolution of the A' section.

⁷⁰ Klein, 84.

Interlude - Section A'

Modulates to Ab major	B major? Cb Major	C minor
80	85	95
107	112	
Gb pitch Infiltrates the "Locomotive Topic."	Motive 1 with major harmony; Sigh gestures involving Gb.	Motive 6 + Bardic Style
		Motive 1
		Coda based on the closing gesture of Motive 1
Dissolution	Eternity	Final Dissolution
Dissolution moment of eternity	The Gb has lost its ominous color and now it sounds as a reminiscent longing for the F#.	The memory is back, evoked by the symbolic power of harp.
		Motive 1 with the indications "tristamente" and "sospirato". Represents the agent's longing for the vanished memory.

Timeline 6 - Debussy, Sonata II – Interlude, A' Section

Final

Callet claims that the final statement of the theme in *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* represents the half-god's sad return to reality.⁷¹ In the *Sonata*, the last movement represents the same unfortunate transition for the agent. The frenetic pace at which the meter moves is the master signifier of the *Final*. It prevents the creation of what Klein calls a "signifying chain of events," or a logical sense that can be made from the fragmented set of elements that constitute the generative material of the movement. This lack of logic in the unfoldment of the narrative produces an increasing sense of unease that represents the agent's inner conflict between his awareness of the necessity to adapt to modernity — acquired as a consequence of the disappointing experiences of the previous movements — and his instincts that still push him to escape the present in favor

⁷¹ Callet, 50.

of the past.

In this movement the concept of modernity is expressed by a distinctive musical signifier: a rhythmic profile that consists of the flow of sixteenth-notes that characterize the majority of the movement and constantly impose their relentless pace over the music. This signifier appears at first in the form of a pedal of 1-5, [bars 1-8], mechanical and ruthless in dictating a tempo that has no regard for anyone it leaves behind, obsessive in its inelegant (no pre-dominant area), essential, and efficient affirmation of the tonality. In this time frame, the topical connection between the nature-evoking open fifth and the lost time that this narrative associates with it is lost, symbolically buried by the normalization of its most prominent signifier in a repeated pedal. Furthermore, at this pace, the emptiness of the fifth can turn from triumphant to desperate (3+ or 3-) in the blink of an eye because of the incessant repetition that multiplies the effect of the harmony. This structural ambiguity reminiscent of the symbolist aesthetic is one of the tools that Debussy uses throughout the movement to characterize this return to the present as unease.

The chromatic/modal *motive 1* that is first exposed in the flute part and is characterized by a fluid rhythmic shape symbolizes the difficulties that the agent and other individuals encounter in adapting to this accelerated rhythm of life. *Motive 1* manifests as the agent's instinct to refuse this return to reality. The character of the square *motive 2* (first exposed by the viola) harshly contrasts *motive 1* and even seems to exert a seemingly repressive force upon it. *Motive 2* represents the element of reason that pushes the agent to integrate with modernity. This instinct/reason conflict recalls the phenomenon that the philosopher Michail Michajlovič Bachtin (quoted by Klein)

describes as “double voiced discourse,” a multiplicity of voices that influence one another.⁷² The agent is pulled between “duty,” or the “role” and the expectations that society has for him/her (the conscious), and the freedom from those impositions (the unconscious). The musical example number 7 at page 55, shows the appearance of these fundamental motivic materials in the first seven measures of the *Final*.

The A section of this movement is the agent’s first failed attempt to adapt to modernity that leads him to a state of frustration. The B section is the last memory of the piece whose dissolution confirms once more that the agent will not find lasting relief in the past. In the A’ section is where the balance between instinct and reason is finally found.

As previously mentioned, the *Final* opens with the diatonic, relentless rhythmical motion in the harp (*ostinato 1* – “*time signifier*”) - a sixteenth-note flow that stays in the background for the majority of the movement, featuring some melodic variation and making the scansion of time perceptible at all moments. Viola interjections happen on the downbeats of the bars, helping to reinforce the steadiness of this skeleton. In this context, the flute’s *motive 1* clashes immediately with the viola’s *motive 2* [6-9]. The disproportionate length between *motive 1* and *motive 2* makes the viola’s answer sound excessive in denying *motive 1* its freedom of expression. *Motive 2* is in the key of F minor and contrasts both with the F major of the *ostinato* and with the chromatic set of pitches of *motive 1*. This creates a poly-tonal context that increases the tension of this beginning.

⁷² Klein, 135.

Final

1 **Allegro moderato ma risoluto**

pizz.
f *sf* *f*

Allegro moderato ma risoluto Ostinato: F major, rhythmic profile 1

4

f *sf* *f* *arco* (s.l.c.)
molto marcato

Motive 1: chromatic, rhythmic profile 2; misplaced on the meter; asymmetric phrase of 5 beats (3+2)

Motive 2: F minor, rhythmic profile 3; aligned with the meter.

Mutates harmony to tritone; reinforces the feeling of repression with strong dissonance.

7

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Example 7 – Debussy, Sonata II – Motivic Material of the Final [1-9]

In its second appearance, *motive I* is extended [10-13]. The flute line, always unstable, reaches higher and introduces more chromatic motion, verifying once more that the repression of a symptom worsens it. The viola line now engages the extended *motive I* in a dialogue [13-15], the primary goal of which is the integration of the rebellious flute line into the time flow. This search for textural unity is a constant in Debussy's music and in this case would represent an important step towards the solution of the agent's conflict.⁷³ Unfortunately, in this case the result is not satisfactory.

In bar 16, the chromatic modulation to A major repeats the strategy—abruptly moving from an undefined or minor harmonic context to a major one—that was previously successful in finding ease. The flute proposes a figure that in slow motion could recall a horn call (and includes the Aeolian pitch A), but again the fast tempo prevents it from sounding as such. Despite the modulation, the textural unity essential in establishing the feeling of complete ease is still out of reach. The same figure happens in the flute and in the viola but out of synchronization [flute 18, viola 19]; in bar 20, four rhythmic profiles happen at the same time, moving the narrative even farther away from a satisfying balance. In bar 22, having failed in its unconvincing attempt to move to the major key, the piece falls back to the original poly-tonal harmonic context. In these first twenty-two bars, the flow of the sixteenth-notes never stops, preventing the development or the integration of the many signals (gestures and motives) that appear in the opening section. The harmonic profile, in constant evolution, contributes to the chaotic atmosphere of the *Final*. The oceanic feeling that we mentioned above as a signifier of ease is here deformed. It overwhelms rather than embraces the agent, and creates unease.

⁷³ Klein, 80.

In the section constituting bars 22-31, Debussy insists on the same concepts. Harp and viola share *ostinato 1* while the flute attempts somehow to fit into the rhythmic context by featuring different variations of cells from *motive 1*. Results are unsatisfactory for many reasons: 1) switching the generative third to major still produces a strong dissonance with the bass (22, E/D), 2) repetition of the rhythmic cells does not influence the ostinato [25], and 3) inverting the motion of the gesture [26] or using harmonic experiments [29] to try to fit the general harmony are unproductive solutions that force the flute to quickly discard the idea [bar 31 copies 29]. Additionally, the pace of the movement increases as sixteenth-note triplets substitute the regular duple subdivision. The drop in thickness of the texture in bar 32 is very effective as it shows how much time flows by (or is “lost,” from a modern time perspective) if the agent does nothing to jump on the train of time.

In bar 33 the indication *agitato* makes clear that the elusive nature of the equilibrium of the voices is starting to generate anxiety and frustration in the agent. The harp expands the range of the “time signifier” and combines it with an ominous bass line that marks the beat with a series of pitches that outline A-flat minor. In bars 35-41, while the flute plays *motive 2* in progressive exasperation [39-41 higher register + final sigh], the cooperation between viola and harp seems to vacillate [opposite motion, duple VS triple] before it finds a new balance in bars 41 and 42. The brisk call/response between the two instruments on stark eighth-note gestures is repeated three times [43, 45, 47], and marks the end of the A section. Timeline 7 summarizes the narrative progress of the first action space of the *Final*.

Final - Section A

Poly-Tonality Ostinato (F major) Motive 1 (undefined) Motive 2 (F minor)	A major	Poly-Tonality G minor (?) Motive 1 (undefined)	Poly-tonality F minor / ambiguous
1	10	16	22
33			
Ostinato [1-4] Motive 1 [5] Motive 2 [6-9]	Motive 1; Confrontation Flute / Viola.	Motive 1 in major; Clash of rhythmic layers.	Transformations of Motive 1 to adapt to the ostinato. Unsuccessful. Duple/triple opposition persists.
Ostinato pace increases; Agitato indication; Motive 2 at the flute; Repressive gestures harp/viola.			
Conflict	Mediation	Frustration	
[1-4] Harp establishes the ostinato, signifier for the fast time flow of modernity.	Modulation to A major not effective because of the excessive rhythmic complexity.	Repetition of head of the Motive 1 [25]; Reversion of its shape [26]; Modal modulation [29-31].	Many attempts of the agent to adapt to modern times' pace have failed by now.
[5] The flute plays Motive 1, signifier for agent's instincts.			
[6] The viola plays Motive 2, signifier for agent's realism.			

Timeline 7 - Debussy, Sonata II – Final, A Section.

In the moments where the motion/time slows down (44, 46, with smooth slurred bass), an idea unexpectedly materializes (*lointain*, “far”) in the flute line, marking the beginning of the B section. A signal from the viola responds promptly, repressing this gesture and unchaining the return of the harsh eighth-note structure. However, now that the idea has surfaced it develops further into a motive (*motive 3*) in the D mode, which sounds like an anomaly in the context.

After the first two progressively longer statements that work as cognitive efforts, *motive 3* fully hatches in bars 50-53 and is repeated again an octave higher in 54-57. Around this melodic line and its clear modal connotations, the music suddenly aggregates. The viola follows along contrapuntally while the harp takes over the march pattern, dissolving the ostinato and installing a regular phraseological rhythm. Rings associates the dissolution of an ostinato with the disintegration of a temporal plan. He also connects the establishment of a different rhythmic pattern with a new time frame.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Rings, 195.

In this case, both interpretations seem to apply. With the dissolution of the ostinato and the establishment of the march as the new metrical reference, the music is entering a different time plan.

In this new context, a fourth motive (*motive 4*) is derived from the contrapuntal line of the viola. This line is first shared by the flute [58-63] and then carried on by the viola alone. Glimpses of unity of intent between the voices are visible, but the insistent dissonances in the bass line of the chordal harp accompaniment, their excessive and unnatural repetitiveness, and the lack of a clear harmonic goal still keep the music suspended. Nonetheless, if before the agent was completely lost in the incessant flow of time, now he seems to have a direction. This orientation is once more towards the past, symbolized by the modal sound of the passage.

This unity of intent persists and, in bars 64-67, the section reaches a climax. Harp and viola contrapuntally coordinate around the rhythmic profile of *motive 4*, while the flute produces a series of exalted signals culminating on the symbolic pitch A. The sudden reappearance of the G-flat in the viola part [68] is an unexpected blow that nullifies the momentum of this modal episode and starts another dissolutive process. Disconnected fragments of *motives 3* and *4* appear in the parts in *rallentando*, leading to a counter-modulation and to the disappearance of a musical idea that required a considerable cognitive effort to build and that seemed to be the breakthrough to ease. It now appears as the umpteenth ephemeral illusion.

Final - B Section

D mode					Modulation to Gb Major
44	50	57	64	69	73 75
Generative cells of Motive 3	Motive 3	Motive 4 combines action of Flute and Viola; Harp prevents full balance with dissonant harmony.	Celebratory Gestures of Harp and Flute. [68] Gb pedal	Cells from motives 3 and 4 in diminuendo and rallentando.	Motive 4
Cognitive Effort	Memory	Apparent Balance		Dissolution	
Motive 3 slowly gets in to focus creating a connection with past because of its modal profile. The agent responds to the failure to adapt to present time with another attempt to find solace in the past. Motive 4 takes shape from the contrapuntal accompaniment of motive 3.		Viola and Flute agree on motive 4	Celebratory dialogic section between flute and viola. In bar 68 the return of the Gb pitch (in the viola) starts the dissolution of the precarious balance.	Diminuendo and the rallentando signify dissolution.	

Timeline 8 - Debussy, Sonata II – Final, B Section.

The dissolution of this illusion has the merit to push the agent to the search for a balance, an ease “of compromise” in the present time rather than in the past [bar 76-85]. The section is in tempo *rubato* and provides reflection time to the agent whose thought is oriented finally towards a realistic (rather than utopian) synthesis of the situation.

In the A’ section, the timbral transformation of the principal motives of the movement and their combination can be narratively interpreted as an attempt to find a balance between instinct and reason. Debussy uses the timbre/motive association that he has built so far as a narrative device. At this point of the narrative, the sound of the flute embodies the rebellious spirit of the agent because it is the timbre that Debussy more often associated with *motive 1*. In the A’ section the flute accompanies the repressive motive 2 with smooth melodic gestures [78-81], and even plays it with melodic connotations [88-91]. The instrument’s new role symbolically represents a mediation between instinct (the timbre) and reason (the motive). The appearance of motive 1 in the

viola [85-87] has the same symbolic meaning. The timbre that had strongly repressed motive 1, now embraces it. In this case the motive represents “instinct” and the timbre represents “reason.” Furthermore, narrative implications can be found in the association between the sweet timbre of the harp and *motive 2* [78-79]. The musical idea acquires a different character here, less repressive and intransigent.

As a result of the symbolic significance of their timbre, the dialogic exchange between the viola and the flute that starts in measure 92 and leads to a modulation to F major in bar 98, is also relevant. Both voices progressively synchronize their motion and finally play homorhythmically in bars 96 and 97 before celebrating their agreement in measure 98-99 through a series of gestures that joyfully accompany the harp’s performance of motive 4.

Also, the combination of motives that Debussy proposes in this section has symbolic relevance. The elision of the reminiscences of *motives 2* and *3* [bar 81-82], the coexistence of cells from *motives 1* and *3* in 82-85, and the fusion of *motive 4* with the ostinato rhythm [90-91] are symbolic steps to reconcile the concept of reality (present, motives from actions space 1) and the imaginary (past, motives from actions space 2). The fact that this pivotal section towards ease is forged on the acknowledgement of the symptom of unease (*motive 1*) and on the idea of living with the symptom of the past in the present (combination of *motive 2* and *3*) reinforces once more Klein’s theory that repressing, ignoring, or transforming the symptom is no solution.⁷⁵

The dialogue between flute and viola continues to escalate [93-97] towards a new modulation, to F major, in bar 98, where the repetition of a second *celebratory gesture*

⁷⁵ Klein, 19.

(2) becomes the focus of the exchange and accompanies the return of *motive 4* in the harp. In bar 95, rhythmic cells reminiscent of *motive 2* of the *Interlude* appear, symbolically starting a “closure of the circle” that will find its culmination with the return of the theme of the *Pastorale*. In measure 109, the roles are inverted: harp plays a third **celebratory gesture** (3) while flute and viola take charge of *motive 4*. All the parts are now definitely working together and ease is possible and closer than ever before in the *Final*.

In the euphoric passage that follows [102-109], *motive 4* in the viola is contrapuntally supported by flute and harp. Another **celebratory gesture** (4) appears in the bass of the harp as well as in the flute, with its progressively more intense arabesques in bars 104 to 106. In 109, Debussy connects the return of *motive 1* of the *Pastorale* to the present (3rd and 4th beat of bar 112, motive 1 of the *Final*) suggesting, through the merging of these two symbols, that a balance between the past and modernity (represented by the first and last movement, respectively) has finally been found. The generative pitch of the arc gesture of *motive 1* and the pedal note in the viola is now an A, the last reminiscence of the Aeolian that symbolically reinforces this last evocation of the *Pastorale*. The sustained note on the bass key of the harp agrees with the 9/8 meter. The symptom has vanished, or has been accepted, and the agent is able to move forward.

The repeated incipits of *motive 1* in the last portion of the *Final* [112-120] sound joyful (symbolically, the second symptom is now also accepted), and gesture 1 from the *Pastorale*, that features the plagal motion that Klein associates with acceptance, surfaces again, first in the harp [113-114], and then in a conjunct motion of flute and the viola [116-117]. In the meantime, the ostinato, and its symbolic implications, has dissolved.

The harmony of this closing section revolves around the mode of D before the scalar ascent of the flute that leads to a PAC in F major, the first key Debussy confirmed in the piece.

Final - Section A'

Gb major		F major		
76	92	97	109	112
Inverted association timbre/motive; Motives Fusion; Motive 2 in Harp; Motive 4 in Viola.	Dialogue Flute/Viola on Motive 1 Cells; Dotted Cells Motive 2 Interlude.	Motive 4 in Harp; Cooperation of flute and viola in "Celebratory Gestures."	Motive 1 Pastorale.	Motive 1 of the Final elided with Motive 1 Pastorale; Thematic gesture of plagal cadence from Pastorale returns and is repeated multiple times; Closes in F major.
Acceptance			Reminiscence	Final Acceptance
The combination of motives from A section and B section + inversion of the motive/timbre association = attempt to balance instinct and reason.		This found purpose is celebrated with a series of jubilant gestures. .	Reappearance of the motive 1 from the Pastorale; the generative note of the motive is an A not anymore the symptomatic Gb.	Elision between Motive 1 of the Pastorale and motive 1; Strong final cadence.

Timeline 9 - Debussy, Sonata II – Final, A' Section.

Conclusion

Martha Hyde, cited by Klein, claims that a “deeper engagement with the past can show a way in the future.” The *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp* seems to portray through music the agent’s profound quest into the symbolist idealized past for the keys that might help him face present *and* future.⁷⁶ At the end of the inner examination process that this piece represents, the agent seems to understand that neither the rural utopia of the visions of the *Pastorale* and of the *Interlude*, nor the “urban insanity” of the *Final* provide the solution to confront the complex present; a mediation between his desire to escape modernity and the realist admission of its actual impracticability is necessary. It is in the first two movements of the *Sonata* where the agent experiences the brightest moments of ease in the artistic refuge of the past. Nonetheless, Debussy concludes both of them with open cadences that follow dissolutive processes, a compositional choice that suggests that these pleasant moments are not a lasting or definitive solution to the agent’s dissatisfaction with the present. Once the memories that the motives recall have vanished, the unison that concludes the *Interlude* conveys a sense of emptiness that portrays the agent’s inability to move forward in his quest for a durable ease. The last movement, regardless of its particularly conflictual nature, offers a strong and bright conclusion in the form of the satisfying F major final cadence. The agent reaches the stability he was longing for only when he accepts the utopian nature of his visions and actively works to balance reality with his desires.

The fact that in the *Final* — the space that rounds up the narrative — the progressive dissolution of the ostinato (a symbol of the oppressive pace of modernity)

⁷⁶ Klein, 146.

starts when a motive connected with the past (*motive 4*) integrates the sixteenth-note motion and changes its symbolic meaning by transforming a line that once had only a purely rhythmical purpose into material that now has melodic relevance, is a first symbolic step that suggests the agent's attempt to reconcile the opposing impulses he feels. Furthermore, the way in which Debussy merges motives that represented ease and unease in the A' section of the *Final*, and the way in which he changes the association between timbres and motives reinforces such a narrative reading. Deleuze claims that humans are machines whose only freedom is to appreciate time. If we accept this idea, the memories of the agent are the distinctive marks that differentiate humanity from the mechanical apparatus that dictates the pace of modernity. Since *motive 4* is the musical equivalent of a memory's fragment, it becomes, in the Deleuzian context of this narrative, a "symbol of a symbol" able to represent the agent's humanity. A symbolic interpretation of these elements leads me to conclude that only by maintaining his humanity is the agent capable of facing the oppressive machine-like modernity.

In the definition of this narrative trajectory, the Symbolist aesthetic that this essay connects with Debussy is of the greatest importance. The desire to escape an oppressive modernity was a characteristic trait of Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé's imaginary — a trait shared by Debussy, who used it as a source of inspiration for his music. Debussy conveyed this ideal through an innovative musical language that presents structural analogies to the systems of "symbols of symbols" that his illustrious poet colleagues used to express their artistic ideals. This language was the perfect vehicle for Debussy's sublime musical creations, an impressive output of which the *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* is one of the finest examples. This innovative musical idiom would be

influential for generations of composers to come and granted the French composer a prestigious place in the pantheon of Western classical music and of symbolist art.

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