

THE SPIRITUALISTE CONNECTION: STYLISTIC AFFINITY AND STRUCTURAL HOMOLOGY BETWEEN BERGSON AND DEBUSSY

Jane Ellen Harrison
Dr. Erol Ücer Center for Advanced Studies in Music (MIAM)
Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ)
Jane.harrison39@gmail.com

Abstract: This article proposes some reasons for the striking similarity many authors have found between Claude Debussy's music and Henri Bergson's philosophical writings, by situating them in the spiritualiste movement. With the aid of Bourdieu's field theory, Bergson's and Debussy's leading positions as spiritualistes are shown to be homologous. Eschewing institutional and political power and instead focusing on creative works that emphasized individual freedom, the philosopher and the composer took relatively autonomous positions with high symbolic capital in their fields. The alignment of their positions may explain the stylistic, substantive, and functional connections others have perceived in their works.

Keywords: Spiritualiste, Debussy, Bergson, Bourdieu, Homology.

A CONEXÃO ESPIRITUALISTA: AFINIDADE ESTILÍSTICA E HOMOLOGIA ESTRUTURAL ENTRE BERGSON E DEBUSSY

Resumo: Este artigo propõe algumas razões para a impressionante similaridade encontrada por vários autores entre a música de Claude Debussy e os escritos filosóficos de Henri Bergson ao situá-los no movimento espiritualista. Com o auxílio da teoria do campo de Bourdieu, as posições dominantes de Bergson e Debussy como espiritualistas são expostas como homólogas. Evitando abordar o poder institucional e político e, ao invés disso, focando sobre as obras criativas que enfatizavam a liberdade individual, o filósofo e o compositor assumiram posições relativamente autônomas com alto capital simbólico nos seus campos. O alinhamento das suas posições

podem explicar as conexões estilísticas, substantivas e funcionais percebidas nas suas obras.

Palavras-chave: Espiritualismo, Debussy, Bergson, Bourdieu, Homologia.

Introduction

Let's begin with what was for me a pivotal moment. I had been investigating the phenomenon of "*debussisme*", the name French music critics used to label a community of adorers and imitators of Debussy's music that they perceived to have sprung up soon after the premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1902 (Harrison 2011). In accordance with these writers, I had seen that indeed, dozens of composers were to varying degrees employing sounds and formal techniques reminiscent of Debussy. But, I disagreed with critics such as Pierre Lalo (1906) who wrote that this creative phenomenon was best understood as mindless imitation of Debussy. I thought that this shared set of techniques was being used to depict, celebrate, and stimulate the interior life of the unconscious or instinctive mind, as French intellectuals envisioned it =around 1900 (Harrison 2011, 98-156). To me, the form and character of subtle, unpredictable, intertwining textural streams in unconventional, processual forms that this *debussyste* music so often took bore an intriguing similarity to Henri Bergson's descriptions of the *durée pure*, the finely detailed and spontaneous complexes of mental activity that he claimed constituted pre-conscious thought. I was not the first music scholar to sense a connection between Debussy and Bergson: such remarks have been made by Vladimir Jankélévitch, Jann Pasler, and Daniel Shanahan, who have used Bergson's prose as an interpretive lens for this music. What none of these scholars have yet addressed in a satisfying way is the how and why of these connections. How had this

uncanny similarity between Debussy's music and Bergson's philosophical writings occurred, given that being born only three years apart, neither one could serve as a predecessor to the other? Furthermore, there is no evidence that they had a personal relationship or knew much about each other's work.

My pivotal scholarly moment occurred one afternoon when I found some clues in Pierre Bourdieu's essay, "The field of cultural production: or, the economic world reversed". In the midst of treating his main subject, 19th-century French literature, Bourdieu formed the outline of a web connecting Debussy, Mallarmé, and Bergson. I say "outline of a web" because the connections were faint. In one long aside on the need to examine Mallarmé's positions and dispositions, Bourdieu mentions Fauré and Debussy, connecting all three figures to contemporaneous trends of mysticism, irrationalism, nostalgia of certain audiences for "lost grandeur", and a struggle against Naturalism, scientism, and positivism. Here he also mentions the philosophers Fouillée, Lachelier, and Boutroux, the teacher of Bergson (Bourdieu 1994, 57). A short while later, Bourdieu validates Bouglé's labeling of Bergson as a "representative of the 'spiritualist initiative'" (Bourdieu 1994, 59). Keeping with his idea that relationships among professional positions is dynamic, Bourdieu does not draw strong lines between these figures, yet the suggestion of a relationship between Bergson and Debussy is there, within the context of Mallarmé's professional autonomy, and the key word seemed to be "spiritualism". That word will be a focal point of this article.

The lack of attention given to spiritualism in contemporary philosophical scholarship may relate to the bad name that "spiritualism" has acquired in the English-speaking world, as the label for the religious movement centered in the U.S. that occurred at roughly the same time. Its mediums and astrologers eventually acquired a negative reputation as con artists and delusional

necromancers. The *spiritualisme* Bourdieu refers to was an intellectual movement in opposition to the dominance in late 19th-century Europe of the natural sciences, nascent scientific method, and mechanistic or atomistic theories that many people believed could account for all aspects of human life (Knight 1986). In French, the word *spiritualisme* derives from “*esprit*”, which since the 17th century referred to the human faculties of reasoning and imagination as well as to the supernatural. Bergson, for example, opposed Herbert Spencer and his contention that all phenomena could be explained by a universal law of evolution (Gallagher 1970, 17). French and English-language primary sources starting around 1900 are pervaded by references to Bergson as a leader of this intellectual movement. As an American academic summarized it in 1915, in opposition to the “radical empiricists” within philosophy

Bergson erects the free and enduring movement discoverable in our inner life into the metaphysical substrate of all being...For Bergson found that in proportion as the mind devotes itself to practical thinking, submitting to the limitations of matter and of space and to the laws of logic, it becomes incapable of grasping reality—metaphysically impotent. (North American Review, 1915)

To distinguish this intellectual movement in France from American popular spiritualism, I use the French term *spiritualisme* in this article¹.

My primary argument in this article is that the main substance of the resonances between Debussy’s and Bergson’s texts are not primarily textual (not a matter of texts’ influence or inspiration over

1 Although distinctive, this philosophical *spiritualisme* circulating among European and American academics did overlap with spiritualist religion. Bergson’s sister married an occultist and magician, and Debussy maintained a relationship with occultist Edmond Bailly and his circle during the 1890s.

other texts or of ideas being traded among texts) but sociological. By “text” I mean any bounded result of creative activity that has survived in a fixed form, including musical scores, books, letters, interviews, and recorded memories. The links between these texts result from the relatedness of Debussy’s and Bergson’s socio-professional positions at a particular moment in history. Drawing from other sociologically-oriented studies on these fields in *fin-de-siècle* France, I aim to show how the fields of philosophy and music composition can be understood to have aligned in certain ways. The theoretical framework for these claims rests on Bourdieu’s particular notions of “field”, homology between fields, and the principle of autonomous hierarchization of the field. *Spiritualisme* will thus be revealed as a social phenomenon: group of people who participated in a shared discourse, a way of understanding the nature of reality, an affinity for individual and professional autonomy, and a generally similar position within the wider French socio-political structures. Bergson’s and Debussy’s roles as leading French *spiritualiste* figures will also come to light as one potential explanation for the congruencies of style and content their contemporaries and recent scholars have perceived between them. The main goal of this article is to delineate a social-structural web, leaving little space for musical analysis. Yet, concrete musical details will necessarily receive some attention, because musical creativity is of course central to composers’ professional activity.

The Limits and Possibilities in the Textual Connections

Before turning to Bourdieu, we will review any extant textual sources in which Debussy spoke of Bergson, or vice versa. Debussy was completely silent concerning Henri Bergson, aside from a joke in a letter from a family friend that shows Debussy’s awareness of

Bergson's reputation as a *spiritualiste* (Lockspeiser 1978, 198). This joke, however, gives us no idea of what Debussy knew of Bergson's writings or what he thought of them. On the other side, Bergson never wrote about Debussy's music, even though he enjoyed using musical metaphors to explain his ideas. When asked in 1910 by a journalist about the seeming affinity between his philosophy and some "modern art" movements, we do find a few relevant remarks. In response he first mentioned the Symbolists, with whom other journalists had already connected Bergson, but he was careful to phrase his answer to protect the autonomy and originality of his thought. He then turned to consider Debussy, again using a certain strategy to enact a simultaneous movement towards and away:

"I was also told," M. Bergson continued, "how much the music of M. Debussy and his school is a music of durée, due to the employment of continuous melody which accompanies and expresses the unique and uninterrupted current of the dramatic emotion. I have, incidentally, an instinctive predilection for the work of M. Debussy."² (Bergson 1910/1972, 843)

As with the Symbolists, Bergson admitted a relationship but mitigated its potency by leaving the observation of it to unstated others, a likely reference to the publications of some of his students who were interested in connecting Debussy and Bergson, especially Vincent Biétrix (1909). While Bergson believed in some connections among himself, literary Symbolists, and Debussy, this attribution is hardly substantial evidence for a case of influence. Examining their cultural products and discourse, we cannot find any strong textual evidence, that smoking gun of the musicology world, that Bergson

2 On m'a aussi signalé, poursuit M. Bergson, combien la musique de M. Debussy et de son école est une musique de durée, par l'emploi de la mélodie continue qui accompagne et exprime le courant unique et ininterrompu de l'émotion dramatique. J'ai d'ailleurs une prédilection instinctive pour l'oeuvre de M. Debussy.

and Debussy directly influenced each other. The situation is analogous to that observed by Alexander Carpenter between Freud and Schoenberg, who lived in the same neighborhood in Vienna but managed to ignore each other (Carpenter 2010).

Some Concepts from Bourdieu

Although French composers and philosophers working during this period were on the whole more similar than they were different, many of them were articulating their professional identity in terms of their distinctions from others. Such discourse pulls us into the orbit of Bourdieu's notion of professional fields. Over the course of several books, Bourdieu advocated a methodology for treating work, workers, and the products of working based on his notion of a dynamic field in time (Bourdieu 1979, 1990, 1993, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Professional fields exist because individuals and groups of individuals take up positions therein, agreeing to collude and compete in what Bourdieu describes as a kind of social game with high stakes. Vigilance against nominalism is at the heart of his approach, as these fields consist of a configuration within one job category of relations oriented towards certain types of power and capital (economic, social/political, cultural/institutional or symbolic), not the people and the products taken in isolation from each other (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96-100)³. I will thus be concerned with the exterior, social life of intellectuals and their cultural products, but this emphasis on relational content should not be interpreted as a devaluation of the unique richness and nuanced complexity of the lives of these

3 In this sense, Bourdieu can claim that fields consist of objective facts. They consist of positions whose meanings are the relationships to the other positions in that field and other fields. The "true nature" or individual essence of a certain person or a certain work can remain hidden in Bourdieu's system, because it is explicitly sociological, concerned with constructed relationships (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97).

individuals, their work, or the reception of their work. Each professional field is constantly changing, and each one can be constituted by the researcher as the sum of a unique set of positions, relatively independent of other fields. Therefore, though there might be similarities between the fields of music and philosophy, their structures cannot be confused as mirror images.

Across his oeuvre Bourdieu provides a wealth of strategies and important considerations for re-constructing a field; here we will mention just a few of the points most relevant to the fields under our immediate consideration. Firstly, a person enters a field by taking a clear position in it or by clearly affecting others' pre-existing positions, most obviously by gaining a certain job or position within an institution. For a modern composer or any other worker tending towards freelance activity without permanent institutional affiliation, the point of successful entrance into the field might be difficult to determine. Bourdieu categorizes such occupations as "fields of cultural production", and they are characterized by fluidity of boundaries, positions, and relationships among positions (Bourdieu 1993, 43). As a result, fields whose workers produce culture, which includes all of the arts and literature, offer great possibility as well as risk. Due to the typical ambiguity of these fields in relation to the larger social structure, energetic struggles over the nature of the field and the way in which its products are evaluated are frequent. In the absence of decisive economic and political value of cultural works, cultural producers have the ability to declare evaluative criteria in ways that enhance their own prestige. Music scholars can immediately recognize in this description the bitter wars of words over the nature of music between rival groups that have been a mainstay of European and Eurogenetic (Reigle 2014, 234) musical culture since the late 16th century.

At the outset, we must examine the boundaries for membership in the field of “music composition” in Paris around 1900. Who counted as a member of the field of work called “composer” (as opposed to a pedagogue)? For Bourdieu this claim can be evaluated by bearing in mind that, “There is no other criterion of membership of a field than the objective fact of producing effects within it” (Bourdieu 1993, 42). Anyone desiring a position as composer at this time in France needed to at least have one composition performed by one of the prestigious Parisian performing institutions, winning a major honor such as the Prix de Rome, or becoming a persistent subject in the French musical press. Composers typically desired affiliation with musical institutions (performing venues, schools, administrative entities, powerful publications) that were for the most part directly connected to the government. What about someone who as a newcomer to the field had not yet achieved such honors, positions, or elite premiers? We can also search a different kind of “effect”, wherein other people who already hold clear positions in the field grant a measure of symbolic capital to a newcomer simply by paying attention to him or her as distinctive from the rest at a basic level. Through positive or negative discourse, a person implicates another person as necessary to consider, someone who has to be dealt with and cannot be ignored (Bourdieu 1993, 58). For that reason, Pierre Lalo’s vociferous attacks on Ravel as an imitator of Debussy starting around 1905 are a sign that Ravel had truly taken a legitimate position in the field of French music composition. Serious critics could not ignore Ravel, even though he had failed as a composition student and had produced no dramatic vocal works by that date!

The hierarchy of positions within an occupational field is a significant issue, because it has a preponderant influence on how much of the different kinds of capital the positions could bring to whoever holds them. Despite their importance, the principles of hierarchization are arbitrary; that is, the hierarchy can be determined

at a certain moment in the history of the field according to various criteria. In many fields prestige is a matter of quantitative measures such as salary amount, sales figures, or website views. Based on certain criteria, specific people holding specific positions come to be regarded as the most prestigious, admired, powerful members of their fields. These prestige positions then act as poles that generate the hierarchy of large numbers of other positions based on proximity or distance from these poles. The poles act as magnets for prestige and capital, a positive pull that usually relates diametrically to an opposite pole. Very often, the powerful poles in financially lucrative fields align with political and economic power (Bourdieu's "field of power"), so that generally, the more money someone makes, the higher up they are in the hierarchy of positions. Conversely, Bourdieu notes that fields of cultural production have greater possibility of orienting towards the field of power in various ways, even simultaneously:

It would be found that one of the most significant properties of the field of cultural production, explaining its extreme dispersion and the conflicts between rival principles of legitimacy, is the extreme permeability of its frontiers and, consequently, the extreme diversity of the 'posts' it offers, which defy any unilinear hierarchization. (Bourdieu 1993, 43).

For example, during Debussy's lifetime, other French composers like Alfred Bruneau had strong relationships with political elites and cultural institutions. The positions of Erik Satie and Ravel, on the other hand, were markedly independent of such ties, especially before World War I. We also find examples of French composers garnering the respect of their peers based on institutional power and the prestige of their works at the same time, such as Gabriel Fauré. In French music history, poles understood as masterful individuals defined by sets of binary oppositions have played an especially strong role in organizing the hierarchy of positions: struggles over the true

nature of music that involved sizeable constellations of people were frequently articulated as one major composer against another, such as Lullistes—Ramistes, Gluckistes—Piccinistes, or Debussy—Ravel. To an outsider these debates might have seemed like splitting hairs, yet if we realize that many of the people in these debates were competing for a limited number of positions in their musical sub-fields, the hair splitting becomes meaningful and even necessary, much as mere split seconds decide the finishing order of a competitive sprint.

The hierarchy of a field tends to relate strongly to other fields, especially the hierarchy of the field of power, which Bourdieu calls the “heteronomous” principle of hierarchization. However, in cultural production autonomous hierarchical organizations can also arise. That is, some composers, while they may have to take up some form of institutional position or pedagogical work to earn money, are more fundamentally concerned with the symbolic capital that comes with creating works that other composers hold in high esteem, based on criteria relatively free from political and economic forces (Bourdieu 1979, 253-256). Bourdieu calls such an organization autonomous, meaning resistance towards the poles of the field of economic and political power (Bourdieu 1979, 40; Bourdieu 1993, 39). “Art for art’s sake” or any claim that some music possess only formal meaning exemplify autonomous discourses in Eurogenetic music history. As Pasler notes, after the Franco-Prussian War music producers were under special threat of dominance and pressure from the new Republican government, which sought to use music as a tool for creating national strength and public unity (Pasler 2009, xii). In that climate, the heteronomous pole in the music composition field was quite strong; going against it would be difficult, but by the same token very rewarding in symbolic capital.

The final term to touch on is homology, which in Bourdieu’s scholarship extends flexibly to various sorts of alignments of positions

in different fields. Seeming to conceptualize the various professional fields as overlapping in imagined three-dimensional space according to the alignment of analogous poles or sources of power and capital, Bourdieu labeled positions that were structurally similar homologous positions. He gave special emphasis to homologues by virtue of matching relationship to poles of power, for example noting that cultural producers often feel solidarity with the lower socio-economic classes, because they both tend to be in economically weak positions (Bourdieu 1993, 44). In another place he comments on the homology between radicalized college students and professors keen to attack science and authority in France during the tumultuous 1960s (Bourdieu 1992, xxv).

Before setting out to explore the homologies between the positions of Debussy and Bergson, it is pertinent to observe the structural similarities and differences of their respective fields. The most significant difference is that for the last several centuries, philosophers have had more possibility to move closer to the pole of political power than art music composers. Philosophy departments existed and still exist at the elite and politically powerful *Grandes écoles* while music education has always been confined to the conservatory system. A total of 43 philosophers, including Bergson, have been elected to chairs at the Académie Française; music's generally weak position in French intellectual life is signaled by its distinction as the only branch of the arts to have never held a single chair. Several French philosophers such as Voltaire and Renan wielded influence in political affairs, but the same cannot be said for composers.

In other ways, however, music and philosophy shared characteristics. Since the 17th century, French intellectuals have repeatedly designated music as secondary to the other arts, as a kind

of derivative of literature (Cewart 1981). This marginality was compounded with a worry among French composers that their field had been overrun by foreign—especially German—influence in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War (Digéon 1959). The traditional prestige of philosophy was also under threat of marginalization in the late 19th century, as recent school reforms, shifts in academic life, and the invasive dominance of medical and natural science discourse had dislodged it from its crowning position among the intellectual fields (Pudal 2011, Kennaway 2012). Bergson and Debussy would both lay claim to positions in their fields as leaders whose ideas could rectify these structural weaknesses. Finally, we must note the emphasis on mental creativity and its precise expression and communication in texts in the nature of the work of modern philosophy and music composition. Both fields offered positions with high symbolic capital, and because of the aura of belief surrounding the creative abilities of both types of worker, composers and philosophers could appropriate their own products with apparent seamlessness to their identities (Bourdieu 1993, 34). As a result of their specialization in producing complicated texts, both philosophy and music require a high level of education, creative ability, and a certain self-awareness, all of which furthermore implicate a lifestyle with a great deal of leisure time and isolation. These similarities already point towards many possible homologies involving *spiritualiste* ideology between the two professional fields.

Debussy's *Spiritualiste* Autonomy

Claude Debussy exemplifies a pole of autonomous hierarchization within the composer field in early 20th-century France, as he moved from outsider in the 1880s and 1890s to a reputation as a celebrated composer of innovated masterworks by 1906. To enter his

field he did capitalize on some institutional links, such as winning the Prix de Rome in 1884. Opera had been the most prestigious genre in France since the era of Louis XIV; we can see the instant upsurge in the attention of the press to Debussy starting in 1902, with the first reviews of *Pelléas*, as clear evidence of how important completing the opera was to his career (Trilling 1983, 221). At the same time, Debussy was distinguished among his peers because, besides a minor advisory post at the Conservatoire in 1909, he did not take any institutional positions. He instead focused on creating cultural products to the point that he hardly took any private composition students and eschewed steady work as a music critic, lowering his potential income (Herlin 2011). Since his student days Debussy's anti-institutional discourse caused him trouble with authority figures, such as the displeasure of the committee at the French Institute as they received his compositions from the Prix de Rome villa. Maurice Emmanuel, who was a few years behind Debussy at the Conservatoire, remembered his reputation there as an "eccentric" and "worrisome propagator"⁴. *Pelléas* eventually became a classic piece at the Opéra-Comique, but Debussy composed his opera without the support of older composer mentors, agreements with performance venues, or publishers for the score (Grayson 1981). While Debussy was composing in the French genre most allied with political and economic interests in the 1890s, he harbored suspicions of the opera genre, desiring a markedly innovative and personalized final product (Emmanuel 1927, 34-36)

-
- 4 Maurice Emmanuel remembers Debussy entering his classroom and astounding the students with wild improvisations at the piano. At one point he reported that Debussy shouted at them, "*Etés-vous incapables d'entendre des accords sans réclamer leur état civil et leur feuille de route? D'où viennent ils? Où vont ils? Avez-vous besoin de le savoir? Écoutez: ça suffit! Si vous n'y entendez goutte, allez dire à M. le Directeur que je gâche vos oreilles!*" "Are you incapable of hearing sounds without demanding their civil status or their travel papers? Where did they come from? Where are they going? Do you need to know? Just listen, that is sufficient! If you don't hear anything, run and tell the director that I am ruining your ears!" (Emmanuel 1927, 39).

and worrying about its reception in the Republican-dominated public sphere (Grayson 1981, 76). As will be discussed later, after achieving success, Debussy sought to maintain a reputation for unwavering creativity and innovation until his death in 1918.

By contrast, Debussy's peer Gustave Charpentier followed a more conventional path to professional power and success. Unlike Debussy, Charpentier attached himself after graduation to his network based around the Paris Conservatoire, especially the devoted relationship he maintained with his composition teacher Jules Massenet (Branger 2013). Following Massenet's lead, Charpentier focused his creative energy on opera according to the 19th-century French conventions. He also supported the ruling government's Republican ideal of universal education with the founding of the Conservatoire Populaire Mini Pinson and received multiple awards, forms of official sanction of his value to the French state. In contrast to Debussy's continued emphasis on the creative activity of composing music, Charpentier composed less and less after the success of *Louise*; after World War I his professional life consisted mostly of leadership roles in institutions for mass musical education.

By 1901, Debussy had constructed a controversial anti-establishment discourse that provided a specific interpretive frame for his music and his personality. Throughout his published music criticism and interview responses he defined the best kind of music through a dichotomy between natural versus conventional, freedom versus limitation. A good composer, he maintained, must be sensitive to the interior movements that exterior stimuli provoke in him, especially the trees, flowers, winds, sunsets, and waters of natural life (Potter 2003). One must express or represent those interior sentiments, guarding vigilantly against the conventional structures of thought that society emits, which could so easily pollute and distort one's pure memories and reactions. Debussy gave this pollution of the

individual inner sanctum a variety of epithets such as “books,” “rules,” “musical writing,” “formulas,” “scientific instruments,” “extreme complication,” “useless clamoring,” “thematic or symphonic development,” and “domestication.” His stigmatization of the term “métier,” as a composer constrained by his occupation, is especially telling (Debussy 1909/1971, 281). This idealization of his profession remained consistent over the course of his career. Debussy also refrained from warmly praising any other composers and attacked many of the canonical masters while still a newcomer to the field (Donnellon 2003, 43). With this discourse, Debussy created and claimed a new kind of position in the field of French composition around 1900, rejecting the typical route to success of hitching one’s star to powerful educational or performance institutions, or to another composer who already commanded respect in the field.

Debussy’s aesthetics of nature bears clear parallels to the *spiritualiste* faction in philosophy. To start with, the tone in each case is polemical, with explicit statements made about which people and ideas are being opposed. In both discourses, professional position is made into a self-reflexive issue, as the individual who has tapped into his fertile instinct must battle with the entrenched and inflexible conventions of the establishment to do meaningful work. The binary opposition is in both cases anchored in the concept of the instinct, which connects to the older notion of *esprit* and the more modern medical theory of the unconscious as the mysterious yet tangibly felt essence of human mental creativity (Harrison 2011, 120-126).

In the case of Bergson, the connection to *spiritualisme* is more obvious, since one of the traditional purviews of philosophy is the mind. In the case of French composers, the subject of musical inspiration had become an important topic in the burgeoning industries of music journalism and historical scholarship during the

19th century. In Debussy's discourse and musical texts, we also observe a crisis of poesis similar to the one experienced a bit earlier by the Symbolists, who came to suspect the codes and forms received from French Romantic poetry as unable to guarantee true expression or its communication to other people. Their discourse also questioned the possibility of inspiration untainted by societal conditioning (Potter 1990, Huebner 2007), which Silvermann (1989) construes as related to an elite sub-culture of interiority among artists in response to the anonymizing tendencies of modern urban life in Europe. The influence of the Symbolists on Debussy's aesthetics and musical techniques has been stated so often that it does not need repeating here. What is most pertinent is that one of Debussy's solutions to this crisis was to emphasize individual subjectivity, introspection, and the poetic freedom to invent whichever forms were necessary for effective expression. Based on those points he not only made the case to others for the value of his creative products, he also came into alignment with *spiritualiste* philosophers. Debussy's vision of natural processes in and outside of the human body as the supreme arbiter of the value of musical products could furthermore serve as a principle of autonomous hierarchization, because it was in theory a mechanism that circumvented social intervention of all types.

The visibility he achieved with the premiere season of *Pelléas* helped to push Debussy into a dominant, autonomous position, against the heteronomous direction of economic and political power, as large numbers of young composers, music critics, and other intellectuals responded to Debussy's discourse of artistic autonomy by participating in its circulation. They looked towards Debussy as a kind of prophet figure who could lead French music to new cultural resonance at home and prestige abroad (cf. Inghelbrecht 1953, 160-161, Ravel 1913/1990, 366-368). This youthful following was a prime example of Debussy making effects in his field, and the emergence of his following was effectively the creation of a pole at his position. One

such group of followers was the Apaches, a collective of composers and other artists who came together at the premieres of *Pelléas*, with the initial aim of studying the score of *Pelléas* and Debussy's aesthetic ideas. In addition to Debussy, the Apaches were also interested in other potential agents that as outsiders to the French musical mainstream could change the governing ideologies and power structures of their fields, such as esoteric Symbolist aesthetics and the music of the Russian nationalists (Pasler 2007). As reviewed in Harrison (2011), several other relatively young composers outside of the Apaches circle also affiliated publically with Debussy, such as Paul Le Flem, Maurice Emmanuel, Raymond Bonheur, Jean Huré, and Charles Koechlin.

Socio-Structural Homologies between Debussy and Bergson

In a like manner, Bergson's affinity to a spontaneous, unique individual instinct drew a large following in the philosophy field and was conducive to his relative professional autonomy. Pudal (2011) has asserted that Bergson was drawn to alternatives to the Third Republican government's preferences for rationalism, empiricism, and "*scientisme*" after their successful partitioning of church and state. *Scientisme* was thus aligned with the French field of political and economic power. Born in 1859, Bergson's education took place in a thick materialist environment; he first accepted but then took an opposing position to materialism, articulating a weakness in the theory that all human behavior and experience could be explained in terms of chain reactions of the movement of tiny particles. That weakness was time, which he claimed the recent materialists and philosophers since Kant had grown accustomed to conceptualizing

erroneously in terms of space (as in a clock pendulum tracking time by moving between two spatial points), and moments in time as static moments placed side-by-side (Bergson 1889, 169-182). Out of this argument grew Bergson's complex notion of the *durée pure* (pure duration), the intuitive experience of time that anyone can experience upon introspective observation of her/his own mental states. These states were, in his view, constantly changing, with the past lingering into the present moment, the present calling memories out of a kind of substrate. Bergson emphasized the spontaneous, ever-new character of the duration of thought, and its status "not as a thing that changes, but the changing itself" (Gallagher 1970, 19). While conventions of language and logic were necessary for facilitating social interaction and communication, these conventions could not be equated with the true reality of human thought, nor could they properly explain it. Thus there is, as with Debussy's frequent attacks on conventional, rationalistic formula imposed on the mental act of music composition, a strong and sustained current of anti-rationalism in Bergson's philosophical texts. Both men took up a public struggle against the dominant personalities within their fields in the late 19th century, whom they identified with empty rationalism.

The anonymous American author cited above, who in 1915 delineated Bergson's ideological position as opposite to that of the "radical empiricists", supports Pudal's version of historical events. In 1914, politician and historian Gabriel Hanotaux summarized Bergson's influence similarly, finding that, "He alone could oppose materialist determinism with such a strong and straightforward refutation" and agreeing with Bergson that concrete experience of the "*durée vivante*" provided the ultimate guarantee of the liberty of human consciousness from the conventions of language and academia (Hanotaux 1914). With the loss of the prestige of Spencer's and other evolutionists' theories in France after 1905, Bergson's *spiritualisme* rose to a dominant position; yet, before this point, when still writing his

first two books between 1889-1898, he faced an uphill fight for the validity of his ideas. These early 20th-century authors make it clear that an autonomous reversal of power away from the pole of political and economic power had occurred with Bergson at the lead, and that Bergson had come to be identified with the individual's mental autonomy from societal control.

In an intellectual climate favoring scientific empiricism as the proper foundation for the epistemology of all of the human body including the mind (Kennaway 2012), Bergson's turn to *spiritualisme* was fortuitous in another way. As he argued that the true nature of thought lay beyond mechanistic theories and medical experiments, he also safeguarded philosophy's classic introspective method and metaphysical perspective, which also happened to be Bergson's own working method; in "Introduction to Metaphysics" Bergson places these two methods in direct opposition (Bergson 1903). Thus, as in Debussy, we see a threefold iteration of autonomy in Bergson's textual content, discourse, and position in his professional field. Bergson also looked to nature in his "*données immédiates de la conscience humaine*" for validation of his theories. To be sure, Bergson had more socio-political power and less autonomy than Debussy, especially after 1910. This distinction of degree of autonomy is illustrated by Debussy's disinterest in making statements of any kind about Bergson, whereas Bergson made limited moves to sanction Debussy's work, as discussed previously. Yet, the path, direction of movement, and eventual powerful positions they gained in their respective professional fields were all homologues.

While at the height of their careers starting around 1905, more homologies can be found between Debussy and Bergson. After publication or performance of their first major works between 1889 and 1902, the two were quickly appropriated by "the establishment",

as their positions truly became poles that attracted others seeking positions that offered similar symbolic capital and relative autonomy. The names of Bergson and Debussy proliferated in the press, as a search of their names in Gallica periodicals indicates: entries for Debussy in French literature and arts periodicals sharply increased in 1901, and starting in 1906 his name proliferated outside of music and Paris, in provincial journals and social science fields.⁵ According to a Gallica search for his name, Bergson became increasingly more interesting to the French press with each of his book publications, until around 1905 he was generally accepted as an authority on human psychology. By 1912 Debussy and Bergson were being used in the press as household names.

Starting in 1909 some authors even began to explicitly formulate ideological and formal similarities between Bergson and Debussy, whose names had acquired such capital and cache that music critics and philosophers with an interest in musical aesthetics could use sophisticated discussions about them as a springboard for gaining their own professional power and success. Most of them, such as Biérix (1909), Bazaillas (1910), Laloy (1914), Petit (1925), and Marcel (1925), did so through a stance of alliance, identifying the Debussy—Bergson—autonomous pole as sharing a *spiritualiste* perspective on the human mind and ascribing to that position. Biérix, for example, proclaimed that Debussy's music originated "in the very facts of consciousness" as described by Bergson. Although it was less common, others including Parès (1902) and Cor and Berys (1912) placed themselves in opposition to this pole and therefore gravitated towards the conventional—institutional—heteronomous pole. By suggesting hierarchical logics for or against *spiritualisme* that could be

5 This search was made at www.gallica.bnf.fr, which holds a large number of digitized periodicals, by inputting only the last name, since first names were frequently omitted in French publications at this time. The search results were then sorted through, to remove the results that came up for other people with the same last name.

applied to the works of contemporaneous composers, these writers, none of whom were composers, made claims for symbolic capital by relating their own cultural products and discourses to distinctive positions within the composers' field.

Even as they accepted the honors, renown, and increased capital that came to them after 1908, Debussy and Bergson maintained that their creative work was a highly specialized activity of greater significance than other official positions or popular renown. Upon reading Hanotaux's observations about his popularity with the general public, Bergson immediately penned a letter published in *Le figaro* the next day, protesting that "I have never made the shadow of a concession to the 'general public'; my teaching is addressed to specialists" (Bergson 1914). Debussy reacted repeatedly against the claims proliferating in the press after 1905 that he had accrued a sizable school of imitators and admirers (cf. Debussy's comments in a 1911 interview in Debussy 1971, 296). After World War I, Debussy and Bergson, who had truly become dominant in their fields, both became targets of attack for younger professionals hoping to shake up hierarchy of the field in their favor. Durkheim, for example, felt the need to distance himself from Bergson (Pudal 2011, 765) and the dismissal of Debussy by Erik Satie and members of the Les Six group as overly sentimental have been well-documented in the musicological literature (Perloff 1991, 1-17).

Stylistic Homologies at the *Spiritualiste* Pole

Within this framework, the correspondences of style and content that other scholars have previously noticed between Debussy and Bergson take on a decidedly sociological as well as aesthetic dimension. As other scholars have already noted, Bergson's

description of the temporal quality of the *durée pure* do show remarkable overlap with Debussian time: the metric heterogeneity and consistent thwarting of hyper-meter structures in many of the piano preludes (Shanahan 2011), a strikingly subjective, immobilized sense of time in the ostinato of “Des pas sur la neige” (Rings 2008), and a playful sense of time in *Jeux* (Pasler 1982). Pasler finds a particular wave shape that subtly persists and unifies the many motives of *Jeux*, recalling Bergson’s contention that the past persists in the spontaneous present. This observation as well as her comment that development of material seems to take place outside of the score seem related to the notion of memory substrate and activation that Bergson treated extensively in *Matière et mémoire* (1896), a *spiritualiste* reaction to Ribot’s materialist account of memory in *Les maladies du mémoire* (1881). Debussy’s tendency to bring back shadows of previous material in a final, markedly slow and quiet coda section (see the ends of *Prélude A l’après-midi* and *Nuages*) suggests the mental sensation of time slackening as one struggles to keep hold of fading memories, consistent with Bergson’s belief that the rhythm of the *durée pure* could change according to the amount of tension in the nervous system (Harrison 2011, 131; Bergson 1896, 342).

Going beyond analogies between Bergson’s descriptions and Debussy’s sounds, Raphaël Cor contended that the qualities of diffuse imagery and detailed descriptions in Bergson’s writing style were “shimmering nuances analogous to *irisations* [term referring to material that shows the colors of the human iris] of thoughts, that perhaps call for a comparison with the *debussyste* art” (Cor 1912, 11). Though he is often dismissed as a conservative archrival of Debussy, Cor’s contention of a broad stylistic kinship between the forms of Debussy’s and Bergson’s texts is suggestive. We can also broaden our perspective on *spiritualiste* musical style to consider the many similar compositions by other French composers who gravitated Debussy’s position in the field to varying degrees. These include Apaches

members (Ravel, Caplet, Inghelbrecht, Sévéric, Ladmirault), Maurice Emmanuel, Charles Koechlin, and Paul Le Flem, who for several years after 1902 were particularly committed to such techniques.⁶ Figures such as Gabriel Grovlez, Louis Aubert and older composers such as Ernest Moret and Henri Woollett displayed their affinity for these techniques a bit later in time and only in select compositions (Harrison 2011). We might also consider young music intellectuals who rallied to the *debussyste* cause in the press, such as Jean Huré, Émile Vuillermoz, and Louis Laloy, as part of this movement. If we admit these additional music composers and writers into this discussion of *spiritualiste* music, we arrive at the possibility that the *debussyste* set of techniques and the discourse being produced in reference to those techniques not only helped French music professionals to express a certain way of life but also afforded its users a means to signal their identification with the Debussy—autonomous—*spiritualiste* pole of their field.

A particularly concrete example of the Bergson-Debussy homology manifesting in musical sounds and discourse comes from the compositions and writings of Paul Le Flem. Upon moving from Bretagne to Paris in 1899, Le Flem enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire and also began regular attendance at Henri Bergson's public lectures (Le Flem 1967). In 1902 he quit the Conservatoire with disgust, discouraged by his teachers' suppression of the Breton folk music he treasured and wanted to use in his music. Yet, in 1902 Le Flem encountered Debussy's compositions for the first time during the *Pelléas* premiers. Reminiscing later in his life, Le Flem claimed that in contrast to the environment at the Conservatoire, after hearing *Pelléas*

6 Representative *spiritualiste/debussyste* compositions for these individuals are as follows: Ravel, *Oiseaux tristes* (1905); André Caplet, *Paroles à l'absent* (1909); Desiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, *Automne: Esquisses symphoniques* (1906); Déodat de Sévéric, *En Langédoc* (1904); Ladmirault, *Vers l'église, dans le soir* (1909); Maurice Emmanuel, *Musiques* (1908); Charles Koechlin, "Améthyste" from op. 35 songs (1909); Paul Le Flem, *Par landes* (1907).

he felt like himself (*"Je me suis senti moi-même"*; Bernard-Krauss 1993, 14). He recalled the premier season of Debussy's opera as a seminal moment in his development, as he took part in a charge led by Debussy and shared among many young composers to challenge the musical establishment consisting of their teachers and the "old masters" they were instructed to follow. Themes of rebellion against the stifling rules of academic institutions, the importance of finding one's individual essence, and Debussy as renovator of French music recur in Le Flem's writings and radio transcripts.⁷ Le Flem took both Bergson and Debussy as models for his professional goal of composing music based on his unique, personal, interior states. While Bergson and Debussy may not have actively pursued a relationship with each other, Le Flem acted as a third person who perceived the two as related according to their professional life style and the nature of their creative products.

Between 1902 and 1912, Le Flem composed pieces that contain many techniques primarily associated with Debussy and which resonate strongly with *spiritualiste* style and ideas. Consider, for example, *Par landes*, written for piano solo in 1907 and shown in part in Example 1. With innovative harmonies (called *trouvailles* or *recherches harmoniques* by French critics), egregious infractions against classical voice leading, and unpredictable metric heterogeneity, Le Flem puts individual freedom of expression above socialized conventions. This temporal play, along with persistent

7 Consider, for instance, the tone and language of this characteristic quotation from Le Flem: "*Certains jeunes compositeurs, las des ronronnantes formules que de vénérables maîtres essayaient de leur imposer comme articles de vérité, avaient trouvé dans la féerie debussyste une esthétique, une direction, et même une syntaxe leur permettant de se renouveler, de se libérer d'habitudes surannées et de prescriptions à court de souffle*." "Some young composers, tired of the droning formulas that venerable masters were trying to impose on them as articles of truth, had found in the magic of debussysme an aesthetic, a direction, and even a syntax that allowed them their self-renewal and their liberation from outmoded habits and winded instructions". In "*Dans le souvenir de Debussy*", undated, unpublished radio transcript at the Fonds Paul Le Flem, Médiathèque Mahler, Paris, France.

motivic shapes, reminiscence coda, and formal process in which figures continually recombine in new ways echo Bergson's characterizations of the *durée pure*. In the overwhelmingly soft dynamics, detailed figures, and performance indications calling for nuanced and delicate sounds, Le Flem perhaps touched on the broad stylistic unity of Debussy and Bergson noted by Cor.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for piano, likely from a score by Maurice Ravel. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system begins with the tempo marking *mais un peu plus rapide* and features a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system includes markings for *pp* (pianissimo), *f (avec passion)* (forte with passion), and *M.G.* (Moderato). The third system features *ff* (fortissimo) dynamics and *M.G.* markings. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and phrasing slurs, illustrating the nuanced and delicate sounds mentioned in the text.

The image displays a musical score for Paul Le Flem's piece 'Par landes' (1907), measures 42-59. The score is written for piano and bass. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'M.G.' (Moderato Grazioso) and the dynamics are 'mf'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano) and 'pp' (pianissimo). Performance instructions include 'P(plus calme et un peu plus lent)' and 'retenu'. The score concludes with the instruction 'Au Mouvement (assez lent)' and 'pp M.G. (jointain et bien fondu)'. The bass line features a steady accompaniment of chords, while the treble line has a more melodic and expressive character.

Example 1. Paul Le Flem, *Par landes* (1907), mm. 42-59

© Editions Henry Lemoine, 27 boulevard Beaumarchais 75004 Paris

Conclusion

Interestingly, it is Debussy and not Bergson whose works have stood the test of time into the modern era, even though during their lifetimes Bergson was more influential. This has been the case even

though their *spiritualiste* perspectives, which Bergson rightly recognized as a kind of metaphysics, generally fell out of favor in the intellectual climate after World War II. Discovering why Bergson came to be regarded as a minor figure in philosophy while Debussy has continued to occupy a major position in Eurogenetic musical culture would require still more research forays into the relational fields of positions within philosophy, music, and the field of power. The perennial characterization of music as non-representational in the scheme of European thought often leads to the socio-economic marginalization of musicians during their lifetimes. At the same time, this quality of ambivalent signification lends a certain flexibility to the meaning of musical products and the identities of producers that perhaps makes them more adaptive to the changing conditions of professional fields.

References

Bergson, Henri. "Introduction to Metaphysics." Reprinted in *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*, edited by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mularkey, 274-284. New York: Continuum, 2002.

_____. *Mélanges*. Edited by André Robinet. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972.

_____. "Une lettre de M. Bergson." *Le Figaro* Feb. 28, 1914: 1.

_____. *Matière et mémoire: essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit*. Paris: Alcan, 1896.

_____. *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience humaine*. Paris: Alcan, 1889.

Bernard-Krauß, Geneviève. *Hundert Jahre französische Musikgeschichte in Leben und Werk Paul Le Flems*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Translated by Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

_____. *Homo Academicus*. Translated by Peter Collier. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

_____. *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les éditions du minuit, 1979.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc Wacquant. *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Branger, Jean-Christophe. "Charpentier, élève de Massenet: sous l'influence et le regard du prophète. In *Gustave Charpentier et son temps*, edited by Michela Niccolai and Jean-Christophe Branger, 33-70. Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2013.

Caillard, Francis, José de Bérays, and Raphaël Cor ed. *Le Cas Debussy*. Paris: Bibliothèque du Temps présent, 1910.

Carpenter, Alexander. "Schoenberg's Vienna, Freud's Vienna: Re-examining the Connections between the Monodrama *Erwartung* and the Early History of Psychoanalysis," *Musical Quarterly* 2010(1): 141-166.

Cor, Raphaël. *Essais sur la sensibilité contemporaine: Nietzsche, de M. Bergson à M.*

Bazaillas, M. Claude Debussy. Paris: Lux Ardens, 1912.

Cowart, Georgia. *The Origins of Modern Musical Criticism: French and Italian Music, 1600-1750*. Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1981.

Debussy, Claude. *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*. Edited by François Lesure. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

Digéon, Claude. *La crise allemande dans la pensée française, 1870-1914*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959.

Donnellon, Deidre. "Debussy as Musician and Critic." In *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, edited by Simon Trezise, 43-58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Emmanuel, Maurice. *Pelléas et Mélisande de Debussy*. Paris: Mellottée, 1927.

Fulcher, Jane. *French Cultural Politics and Music: from the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Gallagher, Idella. *Morality in Evolution: The Moral Philosophy of Henri Bergson*. New York: Springer, 1970.

Gonin, Philippe. *Vie et oeuvre de Paul Le Flem (1881-1984)*. Paris: Septentrion, 2001.

Grayson, David. "The Genesis of Debussy's Pelléas et Mélisande." Ph.D. diss, Harvard University, 1983.

Hanotaux, Gabriel. "Les philosophes et la mode." *Le figaro* Feb. 27, 1914: 1.

Harrison, Jane E. "Fashionable Innovation: *Debussysme* in Early 20th-Century France. Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2011.

Herlin, Denis. "An Artist High and Low: or Debussy and Money." In *Rethinking Debussy*, edited by Elliot Antokoletz and Marianne Wheeldon, translated by Victor Giroud, 149-202. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Inghelbrecht, Germaine and D.E. Inghelbrecht. *Claude Debussy*. Paris: Costard, 1953.

Huebner, Steven. *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Kennaway, James. *Bad Vibrations: The History of Music as a Cause of Disease*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2012.

Knight, David. *The Age of Science: The Scientific World-view in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

Lalo, Pierre. "La musique." *Le temps* (Jan. 30, 1906).

Le Flem, Paul. "Propos impromptu de Paul Le Flem." *Le courrier musical de France* 18 (1967): 70-74.

_____. "Dans le souvenir de Debussy." Undated radio transcript. Located at the Fonds Paul Le Flem, Médiathèque Mahler, Paris.

Lockspeiser, Edward. *Debussy: His Life and Mind, 2nd ed.*, 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Gabriel Marcel, "Bergsonisme et musique," *La revue musicale* (Mar. 1, 1925): 219-229.

Pasler, Jann. *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2009.

_____. "A Sociology of the Apaches: 'Sacred Battalion' for Pelléas." In *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, Contexts, Legacies*, edited by Barbara Kelly and Kerry Murphy, 149-166. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007.

_____. "Debussy, Jeux: Playing with Time and Form." *19th-Century Music* 6, no 1 (Summer 1982): 60-75.

Perloff, Nancy. *Art and the Everyday: Popular Entertainment and the Circle of Erik Satie*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

Petit, Raymond. "L'identité des formes du langage sonore et de la pensée." *La revue musicale* (Feb. 1, 1925): 152-156.

Potter, Caroline. "Debussy and Nature." In *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, edited by Simon Trezise, 137-151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Potter, Laurence M. *The Crisis of French Symbolism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990.

Pudal, Romain. "Enjeux et usages du pragmatisme en France (1880-1920): Approche sociologique et historique d'une acculturation philosophique." *Revue française de sociologie* 52(4) (2011): 747-775.

Ravel, Maurice. *A Ravel Reader*. Edited and translated by Arbie Orenstein. New York: Dover, 1990.

Rings, Steven. "Mystères limpides: time and transformation in Debussy's 'Des pas sur la neige...'" *19th-Century Music* 32(2) (2008): 178-209.

Reigle, Robert. "Reconsidering the Idea of Timbre: A Brief History and New Proposals." In *Musicult'14 Music and Cultural Studies Conference Proceedings*, 233-243. Istanbul: Dakam, 2014.

"Review of *William James and Henry Bergson* by Horace Meyer Kallen." *The North American Review* 201 no. 710 (1915): 94-97.

Shanahan, Daniel. "Debussy's Forms of Deception: Toward a Theory of Implication, Tension, and Attraction in the Préludes." Ph.D. diss, Trinity College, Dublin, 2011.

Silvermann, Debora. *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989.

Trilling, Johannes. *Untersuchungen zur Rezeption Claude Debussys in der zeitgenössischen Musikkritik*. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1983.

