Interpreting "strong moments" in Debussy's "La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune"

Marianne Wheeldon

I

In his 1960 article "Moment-form: New Relations between Durations of Performance and Work and Moment," Karlheinz Stockhausen describes a type of composition where "no dramatic form—with exposition, intensification, development, climax of finality—is apparent, but rather one where each moment is a central point, connected with others, that can exist alone."[1] The autonomy of the moment, as presented in Stockhausen's description of moment form, creates compositions in which discontinuity is a prevailing characteristic. Each moment introduces and completes a musical idea before moving to the next, which is similarly self-contained. As a result, moments do not prepare or follow from neighboring moments, but succeed one another with little sense of progression or causality between them. As Stockhausen states:

> ...a given moment is not merely regarded as the consequence of the previous one and the prelude to the coming one, but as something individual, independent and centered in itself, capable of existing on its own.[2]

By focusing on the individual moment, Stockhausen aims to obliterate the tradition that divides musical time into a set of expectations and their fulfillment, a tradition that results in "the

---

[1] Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Moment-form: New Relations between Durations of Performance and Work and Moment," *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik*, vol. 1 (Cologne: DuMont, 1963): 190. My translation.

[2] Stockhausen, "Moment-form": 199. Translated in Seppo Heikinheimo, *The Electronic Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen*, translated by Brad Absetz (Helsinki: Acta Musicologia Fennica, 1972): 120.

development curve...of a normal composition."[3] There was to be no sense of progression in a moment-form composition, but instead a series of equally valued interruptions that proceed in a non-developmental and non-climactic fashion.[4]

Although Stockhausen's writings often use moment form to describe the permutational forms of the post-war avant-garde, his theoretical ideas can be successfully transferred to Debussy's highly sectionalized late works, composed immediately before and during the First World War. Debussy's "Ondine" (*Préludes* II) and "Pour les sonorités opposées" (*Études* II), for example, present sequences of self-contained and non-developmental musical ideas whose overall designs bear little resemblance to traditional forms and greater resemblance to moment form. These musical ideas do not aim toward a climax or resolution, but proceed with no one statement hierarchically more significant than another. Like moment form, musical ideas are completed within the boundaries of the section and their individual characteristics more often juxtapose, rather than connect, with surrounding sections. In some of Debussy's late compositions, a listener experiences the succession of musical ideas in a manner similar to a succession of Stockhausen's moments. Whether the order of musical statements is prescribed or chosen at random is unimportant, for the result is the same for the listener: a composition that is highly fragmented and non-teleological. In this sense, Stockhausen's moment-form compositions and certain late works of Debussy are similar to the extent that both demand new modes of listening. To align Debussy's late works with Stockhausen's moment form may seem anachronistic, yet the connection between these composers is supported by Stockhausen's acknowledgment of Debussy's

---

[3] Stockhausen, "Moment-form": 198-199. Translated in Heikinheimo, *The Electronic Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen*: 20.

[4] For more on moment form, see Heikinheimo, *The Electronic Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen*; Jonathan D. Kramer, "Moment Form in Twentieth Century Music," *Musical Quarterly* 64/2 (1978): 177-195; and Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer, 1988).

influence on his conception of musical form.[5] Moreover, although Stockhausen's moment form article appears for the first time in 1960, he codified practices that, as Jonathan D. Kramer observes, had been prevalent for many decades:

> [Stockhausen's] polemical stance may sound as if he is proposing an original musical form, but he is in fact providing a rational framework with which to deal with a species of musical time that had been practiced for some forty years.[6]

Some of Debussy's late compositions, however, pose greater interpretive questions in that they present isolated moments within forms that otherwise have little to do with moment form. As its title suggests, "La sérénade interrompue" (*Préludes* I) presents an example in which contrasting musical passages interrupt the progression of the serenade on three separate occasions (mm. 46-49, 80-84, 87-89). With each interruption there is a sudden and brief change of key signature, texture, articulation, and dynamic, so that the onset of new material is unexpected, as is its subsequent abandonment a few measures later. These interpolations do not impinge upon the surrounding musical discourse, as the music simply picks up at the point where it left off. Indeed, mm. 80-84 and 87-89 of "La sérénade interrompue" attest to the independence and autonomy of these interpolations by quoting fragments from a different composition, Debussy's "Iberia" from *Images* for orchestra.

Another example occurs in "Voiles" (*Préludes* I), which presents six measures in the "black-key" pentatonic mode (mm. 42-47) in a composition that otherwise is exclusively whole-tone. A change in

---

[5] See Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Von Webern zu Debussy (Bemerkungen zur statistischen Form)," *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik*, vol. 1 (Cologne: DuMont, 1963): 75-85. This article discusses Debussy's *Jeux* (1913) in relation to Stockhausen's statistical forms, an important precursor to his codification of moment forms. Debussy's late works influenced many composers, most notably those of the Darmstadt School in the 1950's and 60's. For more on Debussy's influence on composers after 1950, see Claudia Maurer Zenck, "Debussy: Prophet and Seducer," *Cahiers Debussy* (*nouvelle série*) 6 (1982): 16-21.

[6] Kramer, "Moment Form in Twentieth Century Music": 193. Kramer traces the genesis of moment form to Debussy, Stravinsky, Webern, Varèse, and Messiaen.

key signature, tempo, dynamic, and texture compounds this brief excursion into new harmonic territory. Despite certain voice-leading connections—such as prominent common tones and an invariant bass pedal—Arnold Whittall concludes "there is little evidence of any attempt to *integrate* the two elements," that is, whole-tone and pentatonic elements.[7] And it is precisely this lack of integration that leads to a comparison with Stockhausen's description of the individual moment, where an autonomous musical passage is detached from its immediate surroundings. Similarly, "La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune" (*Préludes* II)—the focus of the following analysis—could be described as incorporating disruptive and self-contained moments in a form that is otherwise continuous. The following discussion aligns Stockhausen's concept of the "strong moment" with three unusual sections of "La terrasse" and invokes Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody and Carolyn Abbate's reformulation of musical narrative to help interpret the ensuing discontinuity.

II

"La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune" is highly sectionalized, yet, contrary to the tenets of moment form, most of its sections prepare and flow into the following sections. These progressive sections, however, are interrupted on three occasions by passages that recall Stockhausen's description of the individual moment:

> When certain characteristics remain constant for a while—in musical terms, when sounds occupy a particular region, a certain register, or stay within a particular dynamic, or maintain a certain average speed—then a moment is going on: these constant characteristics determine the moment.[8]

---

[7] Arnold Whittall, "Tonality and the Whole-Tone Scale in the Music of Debussy," *Music Review* 36 (1975): 262.

[8] Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Moment-forming and *Momente*," *Stockhausen on Music: Lectures and Interviews*, Robin Maconie, ed. (London: Marion Boyars, 1989): 63.

Measures 10-12, 25-27, and 28-31 of "La terrasse" correspond to the "constant characteristics" of the moment in this definition since they maintain a consistent texture, reiterate a single motive, and repeat a single harmonic progression (Example 1a-c). These measures correspond not only to Stockhausen's general concept of the moment but also specifically to his definition of strong moments:

> At one extreme there are moments which give nothing and take nothing: they are neutral examples of extreme self-containment. At the other extreme there are moments which take a great deal from their immediate environment, and give a great deal....The strongest moment is the moment which takes the least and gives the least, and the weakest moment is the one you hardly recognize for itself because it has so much in common with what has happened before and what is to follow.[9]

Each of the three strong moments in "La terrasse" is immediately distinguished from its "environment" by a change of key signature, each moment occurring in a key distant from the F♯ major tonic of the prelude. The "constant characteristics" of the moments halt the progression of the surrounding sections by introducing new musical material. This material is markedly different in character from the music of the preceding sections and never reappears in subsequent sections, thereby "taking and giving" little to the prelude as a whole. The moments disrupt the continuous, if somewhat tenuous, tonal thread of the prelude, its prevailing character, and thus function as parentheses or digressions from the musical argument.

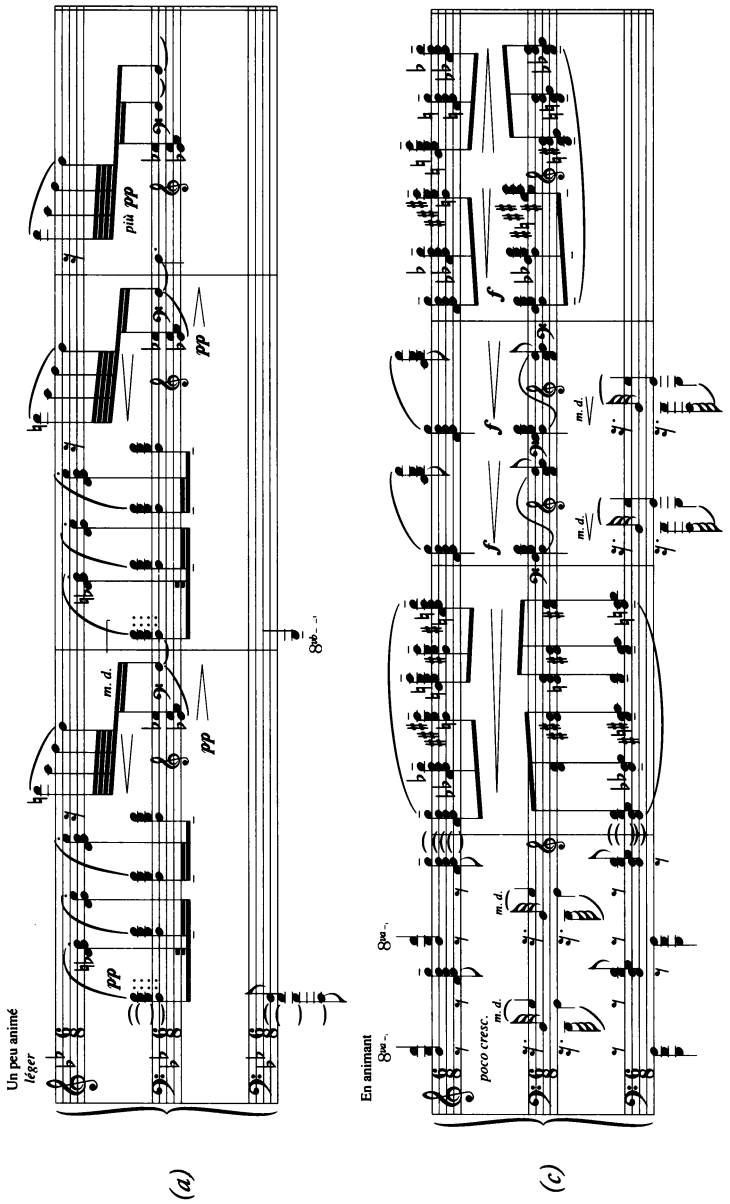
An analysis that seeks continuity between these sections would ignore the impact of these unusual measures. As Pieter van den Toorn notes in connection with Stravinsky's music:

> ...juxtaposition itself affords an invaluable clue as to analytic method. For, confronted with the kind of "discontinuity" it imposes...why burden ourselves with analytic-theoretical schemes of "continuity" or "coherence" which, if not entirely inapplicable, cannot be the most advantageous (the most compelling or instructive) since they ignore this most telling and conspicuous feature? Why not

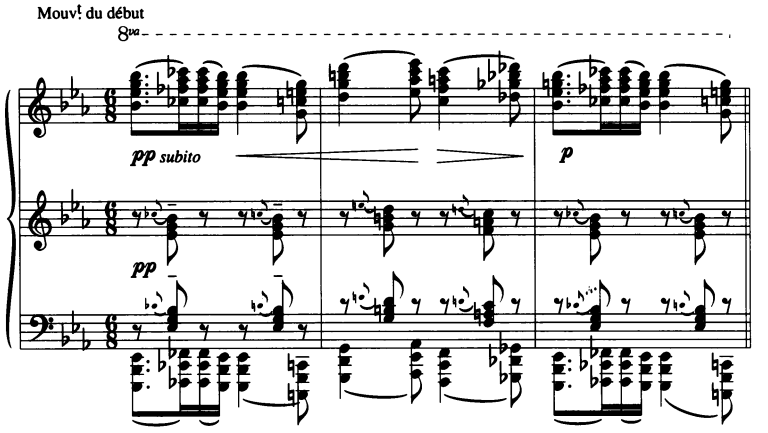
---

[9] Stockhausen, "Moment-forming": 70.

Example 1 a, c. "La terrasse...", moment 1 (mm. 10-12) and moment 3 (mm. 28-31).



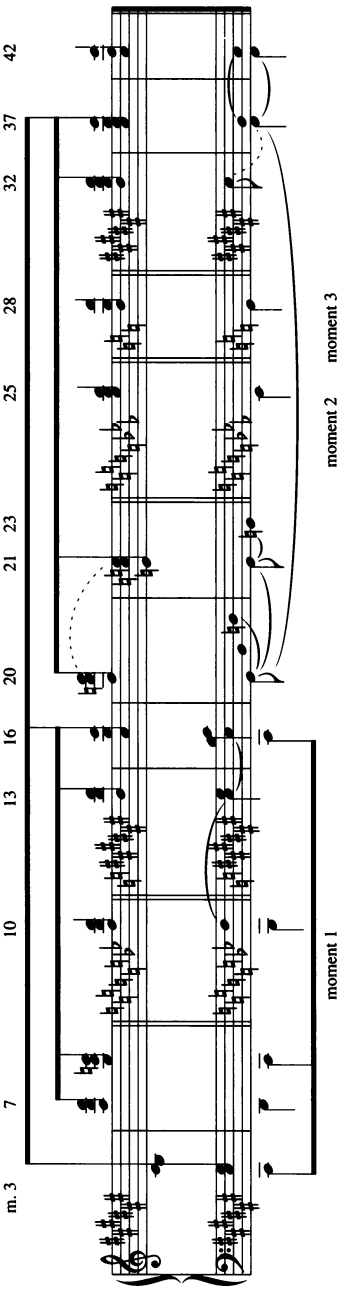
Example 1b. "La terrasse...", moment 2 (mm. 25-27).



accept abrupt "block" juxtaposition and the referential implications, and proceed accordingly?[10]

Following van den Toorn's prescription, Example 2 offers an interpretation of the relationship, or non-relationship, between the progressive sections and the interpolated strong moments of "La terrasse." The linear analysis indicates the sections of the prelude with single barlines and the moments with double barlines, and identifies the predominant harmony within each section. Each harmony notated in Example 2 is emphasized on the musical surface by strong metrical placement, duration, repetition, and is either the starting-point or end-point of the section. Omitting the moments highlights a tenuous F♯ major background to the prelude. The large-scale harmonic motion moves from the C♯ dominant seventh of the opening to the final statement of the tonic, with intermittent presentations of submediant, supertonic and leading-tone harmonies. Each chord of the tonal background, however, is stripped of its tonal implications by the non-tonal foreground. The

[10] Pieter van den Toorn, "Some Characteristics of Stravinsky's Diatonic Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 14/1 (1975): 126.



Example 2. Linear analysis of "La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune."

prominence of the C♯ dominant seventh in the opening of the prelude does not set up an expectation of resolution to its tonic, but becomes a harmonic point of reference in the maneuvers of the musical surface. For example, although embedded within a succession of a parallel dominant seventh chords, the C♯ dominant seventh in mm. 3-5 acquires significance because of strong metrical placement, repetition, and the support of the C♯ bass pedal. This sonority, therefore, is pivotal due to its salience in the musical foreground rather than by its relation to the tonal background of the prelude.

According to Robert P. Morgan, such divergences between background and foreground are symptomatic in the rise of musical modernism at the turn of the century. Morgan outlines a foreground-background dialectic in musical composition, which was once balanced and co-dependent, but, at the turn of the twentieth century, increasingly favored the foreground. Thus, the rise of musical modernism is often contingent upon the increasing importance of the musical foreground at the expense of the structural background:

> Since the background represents what is essentially fixed and unchanging, while the foreground contains what is unique, individual, and characteristic in a composition, it is not surprising that an age of such marked individualism should produce a radical shift in the foreground-background dialectic, tilting the balance heavily toward the surface.[11]

In the case of "La terrasse," the tonal implications of the background are weakened by a shift of focus to the non-tonal foreground. Though the chords of the tonal background are emphasized, the emphasis is effected by non-tonal means. Yet the fact that "La terrasse" has a key signature—and opens and closes with dominant and tonic emphasis, respectively—suggests that

> [d]espite the often exotic surface peculiarities, the music maintains at least a latent reference to the standardized grammar of Western tonality. The triad still represents the sole harmonic norm, no matter how rarely a pure triad may appear,

---

[11] Robert P. Morgan, "Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism," *Critical Inquiry* 10/3 (1984): 451-452.

and the traditional tonic-to-dominant progression still retains its key-defining function, though it may now appear more by implication than by actual statement.[12]

The opening dominant and closing tonic harmonies of "La terrasse" still define F♯ major but, as Morgan states, "more by implication than actual statement," as there is no further reference to dominant and tonic harmony in the intervening measures. Instead, the harmonies of the tonal background—with their prominent metrical placement at the opening or close of each section of "La terrasse"—can be seen as referential harmonies, which provide a local focus for the "often exotic surface peculiarities" of the musical foreground. The harmonic and linear motion of "La terrasse" either circles a referential harmony or gravitates toward the next referential harmony. By gathering together these referential harmonies—and omitting, for the time being, the interpolated moments—the tenuous tonal background comes into play.

III

Omitting the moments from the analysis also reveals a long-range linear organization within the prelude. As shown in Example 2, mm. 1-19 establish and prolong a C♯ dominant seventh while the upper voice introduces a linear descent, F♯3-E3-D♯3-C♯3. The first moment (mm. 10-12) does not participate in either the harmonic prolongation or the linear descent. The linear descent begins again at m. 20 and extends over the remainder of the prelude, but the harmonic support changes, so that now the movement of the bass line converges towards the final tonic: the incomplete upper and lower neighbors in the bass (G♯ in m. 20 and E♯ in m. 32, respectively) are "resolved" by the closing statement of the F♯ tonic. Once again the moments (mm. 25-27 and 28-31) play no part in this progression although, interestingly, they interrupt the linear descent between E3 and D♯3 at the same point

[12] *Ibid.*: 452.

as before. Both the linear and harmonic motion indicate a point of repetition beginning at m. 20: the first statement of the linear descent and the prolongation of the C♯ dominant seventh form the first section, while the repetition of the linear descent and the harmonic convergence towards the final tonic form the second section. Isolating the moments within "La terrasse" from the considerations of the linear analysis throws these large-scale descents into relief.

As noted above, the moments do not occur arbitrarily within the prelude—Example 2 shows that they interrupt the linear descent at the same point in each case. Furthermore, the outer voices of moments 1 and 3 maintain a degree of connection to the linear progression of the surrounding sections. The first and third moments, for example, present D♮ in the descant, a chromatic neighbor to the subsequent D♯ of the linear descent. Similarly, the bass line of moment 3 presents G♮, a chromatic neighbor to the G♯ of measure 21. Finally, moment 1 is linked to its surrounding sections by a constant tenor line, the E♯ of the prolonged C♯ dominant seventh changing enharmonically to F for the brief excursion to B♭ major. Only moment 2 stands apart from the surrounding sections of the prelude with a higher level of linear displacement.

The linear connections between moments 1 and 3 and their neighboring sections seem to contradict one of the basic tenets of moment form, that of the autonomous nature of the individual moment. Stockhausen's statements concerning the extent to which moments are related to their surroundings changed between 1960 and 1984. In his 1960 article "Moment-form," Stockhausen provides his strongest statement, describing a given moment as "something individual, independent, and centered in itself, capable of existing alone." A year later, in an article titled "Erfindung und Entdeckung," Stockhausen recedes from the absolute autonomy of the moment described in his 1960 article by adding a disclaimer:

[E]very moment is something personal and centered; something that can exist on its own, which as something individual, always can be related to its surroundings and to the entire work.[13]

By 1970, the idea of the strong versus the weak moment appears, where the connections between the individual moment and its surroundings are calibrated from a minimum for the strong moment to a maximum for the weak moment (quoted on p. 179). Stockhausen reiterates this view in 1984 with reference to his opera *Samstag aus Licht:*

...there *can* be moments which have no common elements, or as few common elements as possible, and there are other moments which have a lot in common. Moment-forming simply means that there is also the extreme of no common material, and that every given moment has a certain degree of material that has been used before, and of material that is going to be used next. And I say "certain degree." And I choose these degrees very carefully from moment to moment, between zero and maximum. So the maximum means there is a moment which is so full of other influences of the past and the future that it is hard to identify this moment. It is a real transition, then: somewhere between definite moments.[14]

One wonders how individual and independent a weak moment can be if it is "so full of other influences of the past and the future?" Theoretically, the weak moment has little to offer—by Stockhausen's own admission it is hard to identify within a musical context. The strong moment, on the other hand, emphasizes discontinuity and incongruence: musical connections may hold it within the compositional framework, but surface disjunctions must overwhelm these connections for the moment to remain strong. Whereas the weak moment is perhaps less unique theoretically, the inclusion of weaker moments does not necessarily negate moment

---

[13] Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Erfindung und Entdeckung," *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik*, vol. 1 (Cologne: DuMont, 1963): 222. Translated in Heikinheimo, *The Electronic Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen*: 123.

[14] Karlheinz Stockhausen and Jerome Kohl, "Stockhausen on Opera," *Perspectives of New Music* 23/2 (1985): 25.

form,[15] but merely allows for differing degrees of connection between the successive moments of moment form. Moreover, admitting the possibility of connection between moments does not inevitably lead to notions of musical causality or consequentiality. In the case of "La terrasse," moments 1 and 3 possess linear connections to their surroundings, yet these do not imply an inevitable progression between moments, nor do they negate the moments' idiosyncratic placement and character within the prelude. The visual disjunctions of the musical score alone—with double barlines, changes of key signatures, and new performance directions—clearly signal the presence of something new within the prelude. Combined with shifts in musical content, character, and tempo, the discontinuities of moments 1 and 3 clearly outweigh their linear continuities. The focus, then, in the discussion below, is not on the subtle connections of the weaker moment, but on the surface disjunctions of the strong moment that still predominate.

Continuing van den Toorn's prescription for musical analysis—to "accept abrupt block juxtaposition and the referential implications, and proceed accordingly"—the following analyses interpret the discontinuous moments of "La terrasse" from different viewpoints. The linear analysis of Example 2 demonstrated that the three strong moments in "La terrasse" can be omitted from the analysis without affecting the overall harmonic or linear motion of the prelude. This raises questions of the moments' musical purpose in "La terrasse." How are they to be interpreted? Both the discontinuities of the individual moment and the continuities of their surroundings may be elucidated by recent theories of parody and narrative, which I shall invoke in interpreting the strong moments of "La terrasse."

IV

Debussy's distaste for traditional forms is well-known and well-documented in his critical writings. In reviews and articles

[15] Jonathan D. Kramer believes that the description of the weak moment, given in the final sentences of the above quote, "contradict[s] utterly the nature of moment form." In *The Time of Music*: 429, footnote 24.

spanning the years 1901 to 1913, Debussy consistently attacks composers who rely upon "the old formulae" in contemporary composition. In an article of 1912, Debussy asserts that:

> ...if boundless freedom is characteristic of our times, our blind acceptance of all kinds of formulae marks a laxity, an indifference that almost amounts to a scorn for art.[16]

And again in 1913, Debussy condemns the continued use and popularity of traditional forms in music:

> One architect would never dream of reproaching another for having used the same kind of stone as himself. Nonetheless, would he not be shocked to find formal similarities in the work of a colleague? It is evidently not the case with music, where a composer can copy the forms of some classical work without turning a hair. He's even to be congratulated for it! (Respect for tradition manifests itself in some very strange ways.)[17]

Of the prevailing forms in music, Debussy's attacks on the symphony are particularly vociferous—as early as 1901, he declared "the uselessness of the symphony since Beethoven."[18] Debussy's tirade against "the classical system-makers"[19] became a common theme in his writings, especially in the years 1913 to 1918. The "impossible form of the symphony," for example, was variously described as "formulaic," "mechanical," "tortuous," "a pompous web of mediocrity," and "a commonplace invention, as stupid as it is famous."[20] Again Debussy questions:

> ...is it not because this preoccupation with the form of the symphony, common to all our contemporary musicians, inhibits the free flow of ideas?[21]

---

[16] Claude Debussy, *Debussy On Music,* ed. François Lesure, translated by Richard Langham Smith (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977): 264.

[17] *Ibid.:* 284.

[18] *Ibid.:* 15.

[19] *Ibid.:* 301.

[20] *Ibid.:* 264-325.

[21] *Ibid.:* 127.

Instead, Debussy's critical writings show a predilection for elasticity of form; that is, a freedom from pre-existing forms. Thus, compositions by Mussourgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Albeniz, and Richard Strauss are all favorably reviewed in this respect. In an article on Mussourgsky's "The Nursery," Debussy writes:

> ...he is quite unique, and will be renowned for an art that suffers from no stultifying rules or artificialities....There is no question of any such thing as "form," or at least, any forms there are have such complexity that they are impossible to relate to the accepted forms—the "official" ones.[22]

In light of the above views, it seems paradoxical that Debussy appropriates certain elements from traditional forms in "La terrasse." For example, the placement and character of moment 1 is comparable to that of a contrasting second theme, while moment 3 evokes the traditional highpoint of a development section with a *fortissimo* climax placed at approximately the two-thirds point of the prelude, after which the first repetitions of "La terrasse" occur in a quasi-recapitulation. Perhaps because of the conventions being parodied, moments 1 and 3 are also more overtly tonal, with these brief passages establishing a local tonic. Although a V-I progression in the tonic key operates in the background of "La terrasse," moments 1 and 3 present the only V-I harmonic progressions of the musical foreground. In moment 1, the B♭ major tonic is preceded by its own dominant in measure 10, while in moment 3, the climactic G^7 sonority is preceded by its dominant seventh in measure 29. Significantly, it is not only the placement and character of a secondary theme and developmental climax that are being parodied, but perhaps also residues of their tonal conventions.

From my use of the term "parody," it will be apparent that its conventional meaning has been somewhat redefined. In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon expands the standard definition of parody beyond "ridiculing imitation" to encompass the varied uses of parody she observes in twentieth-century art-forms. The ridiculing or mocking aspect of parody remains, but is now only

---

[22] *Ibid.*: 20.

one of a range of possible ethos spanning "respectful admiration to biting ridicule." In light of his critical writings, Debussy's inclusion of two recognizable elements of traditional form in "La terrasse" seems to belong at the midpoint of the two extremes, perhaps as an ironic nod to formal conventions. According to Hutcheon, irony—or specifically "ironic inversion"—is characteristic of all parody. Although parody must include some form of imitation, either of a previous work or set of conventions, it must be an imitation that emphasizes difference over similarity:

> While the act and form of parody are those of incorporation, its function is one of separation and contrast. Unlike imitation, quotation, or even allusion, parody requires that critical distance.[23]

In "La terrasse," this "critical distance" occurs between the conventions parodied and their reinterpretation within the prelude. The components of contrasting secondary theme and developmental climax, in the context of the sonata-allegro, would be integral to the work's coherence and dynamism. Yet, as stated earlier, both moments 1 and 3 are interpolations that do not impact the overall harmonic or linear logic of the prelude. In both cases, moments 1 and 3 recall landmarks of traditional forms, yet are rendered impotent as their influence does not extend beyond the confines of the moment. The placement and contrasting character of the first moment, for example, is comparable to sonata form's contrasting secondary theme, but further correlations are impossible as the prelude never again refers to the musical material of moment 1. Similarly, moment 3 evokes the traditional highpoint of a development section but, despite its brief impact, the significance of the climax is minimal as it does not represent a culmination of the preceding musical material. Debussy's inclusion of two recognizable components of traditional form, and his subsequent treatment of them, perhaps offers a critical commentary: what was once vital and integral to the processes of traditional forms is now detached, autonomous, and even incidental in the processes of "La terrasse."

---

[23] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (London: Methuen, 1985): 34.

Moreover, the parodied second theme and developmental climax of "La terrasse" create the semblance of a traditional dynamic design: moment 1 presents the only contrasting episode of the opening twenty-four measures, while the climax of moment 3 provides the only occasion in the prelude where the dynamic rises above *piano.* Thus moments 1 and 3 offer the only points of contrast and climax in a composition otherwise characterized by a single prevailing character and a flat musical landscape. The inclusion of "strong" moments in "La terrasse," therefore, not only invokes the aesthetics of the individual moment, but also retains the characteristic landmarks and the dynamic design of traditional forms. This presents, at different levels, examples of ironic inversion. First, as discussed above, Debussy inverts the significance of the conventions being parodied by limiting their influence to the confines of the moment. Second, although moments 1 and 3 superimpose a dynamic design upon "La terrasse," the impact of this dynamism is superficial due, once again, to its containment within the narrow boundaries of each moment. And third, the incorporation of these recognizable signals of traditional forms are, ironically, the sole cause of discontinuity in the otherwise continuous progressions of "La terrasse." In short, Debussy's treatment of the contrasting secondary theme and climax is perhaps a critique of these conventions: by parodying them, he inverts their functions to those of interpolations and attenuates their significance. Thus, the ironic inversion of these formal components perhaps presents a subtle and reflexive commentary on traditional forms in music—one that mirrors Debussy's explicit commentary in his critical writings.

V

But what of the musical interpretation of moment 2? As mentioned above, moment 2 possesses a slightly higher level of linear displacement than moments 1 and 3. Whereas the predominant harmonies of moments 1 and 3 connect to the predominant harmonies of the surrounding sections, this is not the

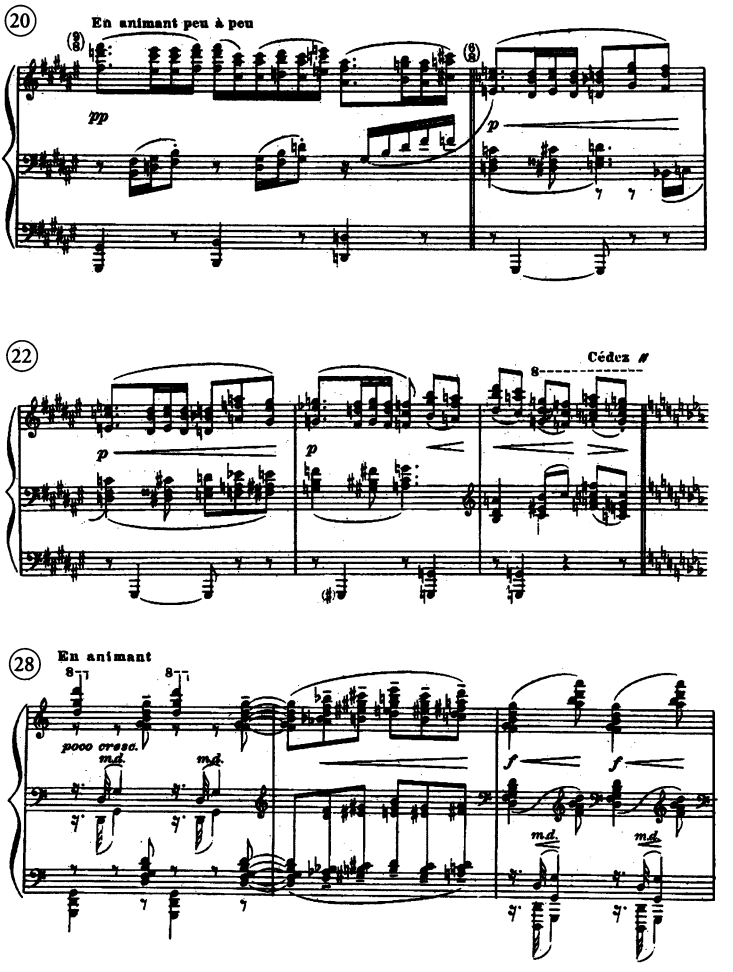
case with moment 2, which presents a break in the linear analysis. Other musical effects compound this break. The prelude, thus far, has gradually gained momentum from the *Lent* of the opening measures with the musical directions *un peu animé* (m. 10), *au Mouvt.* (m. 13), *en animant peu à peu* (m. 20), and finally *en animant* (m. 28) for the climax of moment 3. Moment 2 halts this gradual acceleration just as it is reaching its goal with a return to the *Lent* of the opening measures. Occurring immediately before the climax, moment 2 disrupts the flow of the prelude, dissipates completely the momentum gathered up to this point and deflates any sense of culmination when the climax of moment 3 begins. The continuity of the music surrounding moment 2 further suggests that this moment is to be interpreted as a disruption: the "clear connection across" what William Rothstein calls the "parenthetical gap" signals the presence of an interpolation.[24]

The omission of moment 2 in Example 3 demonstrates that the surrounding music dovetails harmony, tempo, register, and texture. The G♯ bass pedal of mm. 20-23 is flattened in mm. 23-24 in preparation for the G♮ bass pedal of moment 3 (m. 28). Indeed, the sharps of the F♯ major key signature are flattened in mm. 23-24, anticipating the change of key signature at m. 28 as well as m. 25. In mm. 23-24 only D♯ remains unaltered, which the downbeat of m. 28 "resolves" by the prominent D♮ in the descant voice. The omission of moment 2, therefore, would allow both the gathering momentum of the prelude to reach its climax uninterrupted and the potential continuity of harmony and voice-leading between m. 24 and m. 28 to be realized. Moreover, the omission of moment 2 would provide a symmetry in the large-scale linear progression of

---

[24] William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1989): 93. Similarities abound between Rothstein's "parentheses" and the interpolated strong moments of "La terrasse": they are both recognized by a change of harmonic color, texture, and dynamic (p. 88); this contrast temporarily "interrupts the continuity of the musical discourse" (p. 88); although the change may be rather abrupt musically, "the voice-leading at the entrance of the passage may be quite smooth" (p. 91); and in cases where there is no prototype to recognize the parenthesis as an expansion, "a clear connection across a parenthetical gap" discloses its presence (p. 92).

Example 3. Moment 2 (mm. 25-27) omitted.



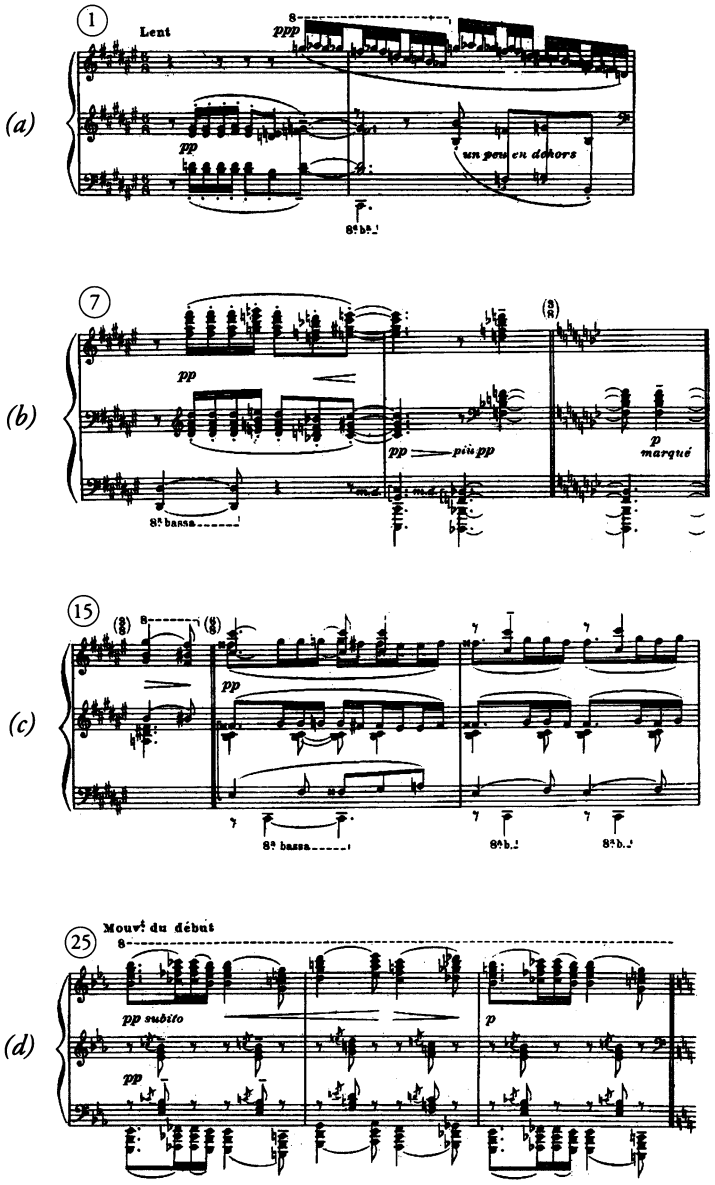
"La terrasse." As mentioned above, moments 1 and 3 present contrasting episodes that interrupt the F♯-E-D♯-C♯ linear descents at the same point with a D♮ chromatic inflection. Moments 1 and 3 are then followed by the same musical material—mm. 32-33 repeat with textural variations the musical material of mm. 13-14, which both restore the D♯ of the linear descent. If moments 1 and 3 depart momentarily from the large-scale linear progression of the prelude with similar chromatic inflections, then moment 2—with its higher level of linear disjunction from the surrounding music and idiosyncratic placement in the prelude—is perhaps one step further removed.

Despite the greater contrapuntal independence of moment 2 from its immediate context, it recalls the opening measures of the prelude, most obviously with the tempo indication *Mouvt. du début* which returns the prelude to the *Lent* of the opening. This reference to the opening tempo coincides with a reference to the opening theme. But the thematic variant presented in moment 2 is clearly influenced by other variants of the opening theme presented thus far in the prelude. The contour of the original motive of measure 1 (Example 4a) combines with the chordal texture and parallel motion of the motive at measure 7 (Example 4b) and the rhythm of the motive at measure 16 (Example 4c). The motivic material of moment 2 (Example 4d) does not simply represent a return to the original motive but rather represents an amalgam of all its past appearances. Furthermore, moment 2 adds a new textural element with a consistent four-octave spacing between the outer voices. The wide spacing, parallel motion, and *subito pianissimo* dynamic suddenly create a new musical effect that is hushed, other-worldly, and, most of all, unexpected.

The disjunction of moment 2 from the prelude as a whole would, for Carolyn Abbate, "work to unfold the question of musical narration." For Abbate, narrative in music is "a rare and peculiar act, a unique moment of performing narration within a surrounding music."[25] The conventional understanding of narrative as a succession of musical events or musical plot is

[25] Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 19.

Example 4. Variants of the opening motive.



disregarded because of its universal application, which, Abbate believes, renders it useless as an analytical or interpretive tool:

> One problem involved in this conventional reading of music as plot...is what might be considered its promiscuity: the entirety of any musical work, given this orientation to narrative as event-structure, can be read as narrative—which suggests an impoverishment of the interpretive strategy....We might well shun any method that enables us to reach the conclusion that every piece at every moment is *narrative*: such a method will not bring delight.[26]

To avoid every sequence of musical events being labeled narrative, Abbate limits narrative in music to those "moments of enunciation [that] are set apart, and in many cases disrupt the flux of the piece around them."[27] The specificity of this definition means that narrative in music is no longer a widespread phenomenon:

> In my own interpretations,...I will interpret music as *narrating* only rarely. [Music] is not narrative, but it possesses moments of narration, moments that can be identified by their bizarre and disruptive events. Such moments seem like voices from elsewhere, speaking (singing) in a fashion we recognize precisely because it is idiosyncratic....A musical voice sounds unlike the music that constitutes its encircling milieu...it is defined not by what it narrates, but rather by its audible flight from the continuum that embeds it.[28]

A succession of musical events therefore is no longer termed narrative. Instead, events that disrupt this succession have the potential to be described as "moments of narration." With this definition, Abbate's concept of musical narrative moves closer to the idea of a narrating voice in literature, which stands apart from the progression of the plot in order to comment upon it, and whose perspective is timeless because of the omniscience of the narrating voice. Drawing from later works on narrative theory, such as Gérard Genette's criterion of distance in the narrating voice,[29] and Paul Ricoeur's criterion of past tense to establish the narrating

---

[26] *Ibid.*: 28.

[27] *Ibid.*: 251.

[28] *Ibid.*: 29.

[29] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, translated by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980): 25. Quoted in Abbate, *Unsung Voices*: 26.

voice,[30] Abbate further defines her prescriptions for narration in music. First, narrative in music must be a disruptive and non-congruent element in the music's progress; second, the points of narration must create a sense of detachment and distance from the surrounding music; and third, narration must create a sense of the past. These criteria are taken directly from their literary parallels: the narrating voice in literature interrupts the unfolding of the plot, and as the narrator has survived beyond the end of the tale in order to retell it, the detachment and past tense of the narrating voice are immanent.

Many of Abbate's descriptions of narrative in music recall the strong moments of "La terrasse." Phrases such as "moments of enunciation that are set apart" and "such moments seem like voices from elsewhere"—to quote just two examples from the above citations—seem to describe the prelude's unusual interpolations. The contiguity between Abbate's instances of narration and Stockhausen's strong moments is due to similarities in their defining characteristics, as both are recognized by discontinuity. Disjunction, in Abbate's terms, "work[s] to unfold the question of musical narration," while disjunction signals the start of a new moment, especially if the moment is strong. Moreover, timelessness and stasis are common to both: timelessness is inherent in the narrating voice, which disrupts the unfolding of the plot with information from another time or perspective, while musical stasis is featured in the autonomy of the moments, which disrupt the continuity of the surrounding music. The only discrepancy between Abbate's "instances of narration" and Stockhausen's "strong moments" concerns their surrounding contexts. For Abbate, there is an "unfolding of the story," whereas any unfolding or progression is antithetical to moment form. But the extension of Stockhausen's description of "strong" moments to non-moment-form compositions—the theoretical liberty taken here—more closely aligns the respective contexts. The progression of the plot, which continues despite narrative disruptions, aligns with the linear

[30] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Quoted in Abbate, *Unsung Voices*: 52-53.

continuity that works around the musical stasis of the interpolations. Both contexts now combine progressive and static sections, with progressive sections that predominate and static sections that occur only rarely.

With this similarity to Abbate's definition of narrative, could any of the strong moments of "La terrasse" be interpreted as moments of narration? Following Abbate's prescriptions for musical narrative, all the moments of "La terrasse" are disruptive and non-congruent in their musical setting. Each departs from the "music that constitutes its encircling milieu" to present new material, in new key areas, with contrasting shifts of mood and tempo. Abbate's requirement of musical detachment and distance, however, perhaps applies only to moment 2: the extraordinarily wide spacing of the texture and the *subito pianissimo* dynamic withdraw from the prevailing character of the prelude to create a hushed and other-worldly effect. Moments 1 and 3, on the other hand, do not create a comparable sense of musical distance. In their parody of traditional formal elements, their musical effect is more forthright and direct than the surrounding music. Moments 1 and 3 are louder, their articulation more assertive, and rhythmically they are more active and accented. Their inclusion in the prelude provides a dramatic contrast—almost a respite—to the prevailing character of the prelude. And returning to Abbate's final prescription for musical narration, only moment 2 suggests the crucial sense of "pastness" necessary for the omniscient voice of the narrator: the amalgamation and reinterpretation of the original motive and its subsequent variants in moment 2 imply that, to use Abbate's phrase, "all the past is immanent."[31] The reinterpretation of the original motive in moment 2 not only invokes the "pastness" necessary for musical narration, but it *is* the narration: it presents the only instance in the prelude thus far, where previous musical events are recalled and synthesized. Moment 2 thus presents an important central episode in "La terrasse"—it recedes from the musical present of the prelude to retell past musical events from another perspective and to present a singular moment of reflection.

---

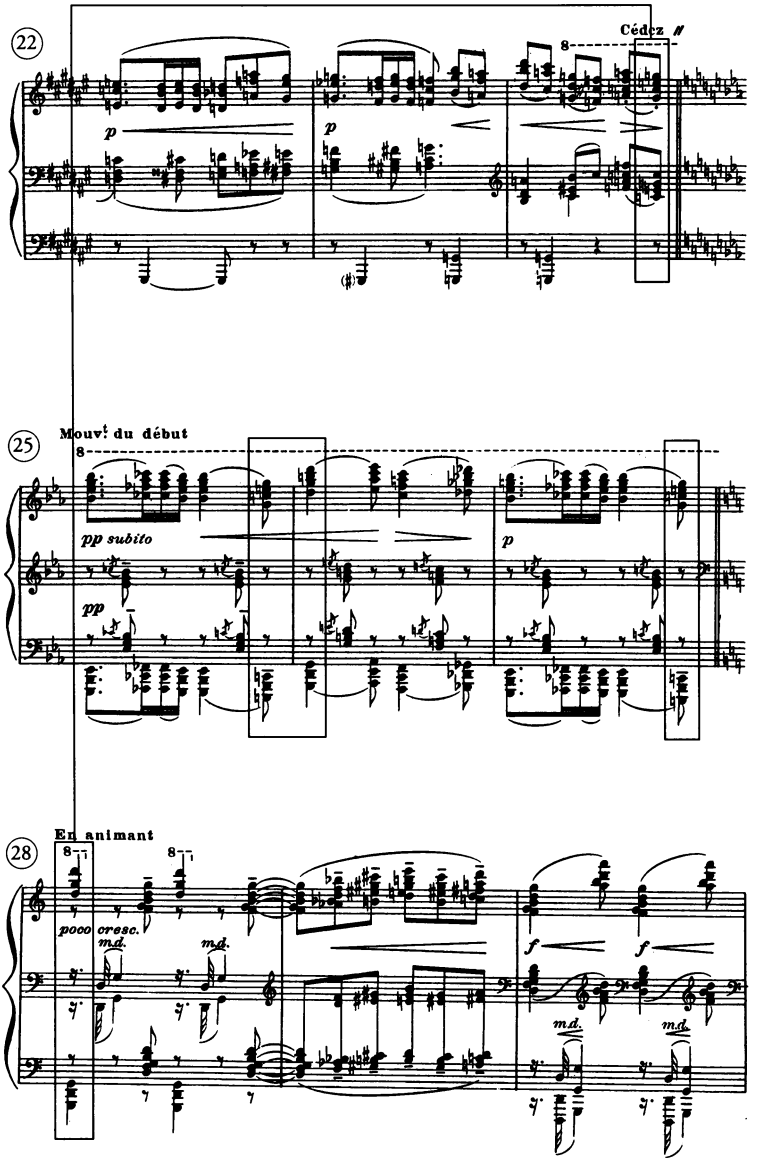
[31] Abbate, *Unsung Voices*: 54.

VI

Although the moments depart from the prevailing musical discourse of the prelude, they do so with differing degrees of musical intensity. If the progressive sections of "La terrasse" establish a mode of discourse, then moment 1—and moment 3 to an even higher degree—increase the tempo, dynamic, and rhythmic articulation of that discourse. Moment 2 also represents a departure, though perhaps in an alternate direction. Moment 2 is emphasized by negative accentuation—it draws attention to itself by its withdrawal from the musical proceedings—as opposed to moment 3, which is marked by the increased dynamics and assertive articulation of positive accentuation. Moments 2 and 3, therefore, represent the extremes of musical intensity, made explicit by their appearing consecutively in almost surreal juxtaposition: the central reflective episode of moment 2 conjoins with the parodic, bombastic climax of moment 3.

These musical extremes are made even more apparent by holding several characteristics between moments 2 and 3 in common: the opening rhythms (the *acciaccaturas* of m. 26 are renotated as thirty-second notes in m. 28), the registral extremes, the rapid skips between registers, the chordal texture, and parallel motion of moment 2 prevail in the climax of moment 3 (Example 5). Moreover, the point at which moment 2 closes and proceeds to moment 3 recalls the hypothetical connection between m. 24 and m. 28, discussed above with reference to Example 3. Moment 2, therefore, connects to moment 3 with the same harmonic gesture as m. 24 would have, had moment 2 been omitted. Or, conversely, moment 2 cuts off at precisely the point it interrupted, so that the prelude can continue as before with, of course, one crucial distinction: the potential culminative power of the climax has been averted. By the time moment 3 regains the previous momentum, the build-up of energy has dissipated and the full power of the climax is left unrealized. The significance of moment 2, therefore, is not just limited to a first instance of reflection in "La terrasse," but it is also the way that the potential dynamic design of the prelude comes undone. If moments 1 and 3 create the semblance

Example 5. Recurring harmonic gesture, mm. 24-28.



of a dramatic curve in "La terrasse," then the strategic placement of moment 2 thwarts this potential dynamism. Coupling moments 2 and 3 together provides the means by which the power of the climax is localized and the parody of moment 3 achieved.

Like moments 1 and 3, moment 2 also exemplifies the complex dualism of discontinuity and continuity that Stockhausen's later concept of strong and weak moments allows. Removing moment 2 from the prelude has little effect on the musical logic and large-scale organization of its surroundings, which attests to moment 2's autonomy and status as an interpolation. Yet, as mentioned above, moment 2 links to moment 3 with similar textural, timbral, and rhythmic gestures. Admitting the presence of these connections, however, does not inevitably lead to notions of progression or teleology between the moments: the mood and tempo of one moment does not infiltrate the other. The juxtaposition, therefore, of moments 2 and 3 within a brief duration does not deny their autonomy and singularity, but perhaps throws it further into relief. The withdrawal of moment 2 and the climax of moment 3 would prevail wherever they were placed, yet their immediate juxtaposition enhances their individual characteristics. Whatever the climax loses in culminative effect by its pairing with moment 2, it gains by the stark juxtapositions of dynamic and articulation between the moments. Alternately, the withdrawal and stasis of moment 2 is enhanced by its placement amidst the building momentum for the climax of moment 3.

Acknowledging the three "strong moments" in "La terrasse" and removing them—at certain points—from the considerations of the analysis, highlights both the continuity of the surroundings and the differing levels of musical discontinuity and intensity of the individual moments. Viewing these works as possessing moments or even "strong" moments acknowledges their discontinuities and opens novel avenues for interpretation, such as the strategies of parody and narrative advanced here. Hutcheon refers to parody's potential for discontinuity when she describes its "disruptive and destabilizing" effect,[32] while, for Abbate, disruption and

[32] Hutcheon, *Parody*: 101.

incongruence signal potential moments for musical narration. In either case, the interpolations become the most striking events in "La terrasse." In particular, moment 2 distances itself from the flow of the musical discourse and thus seems to exist in its own unique space outside that of the work. Herein lies, perhaps, the prelude's greatest irony: the key to its interpretation lies not in the music that predominates and determines its general character, but in the apparently superfluous moments that negate and stand apart from their surroundings.