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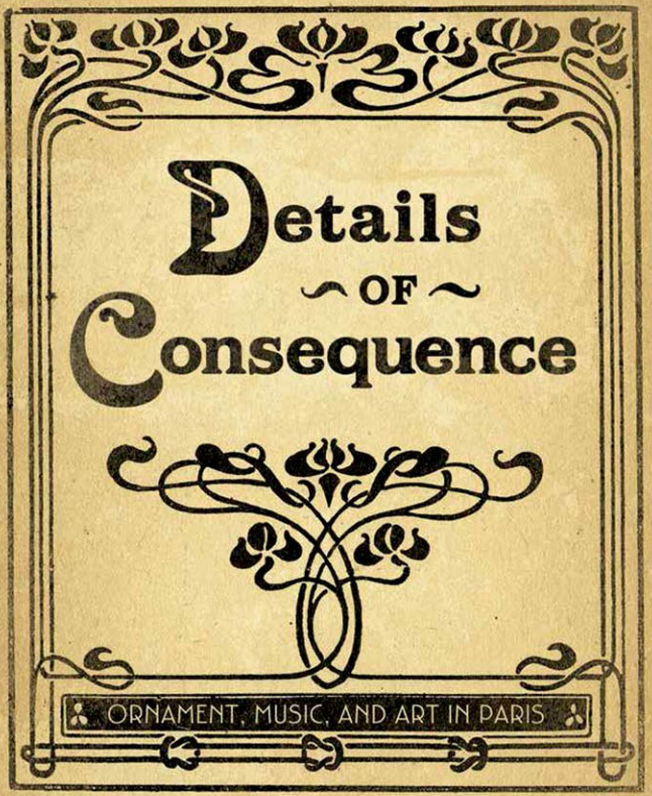

Gurminder Kaur Bhogal

DETAILS OF CONSEQUENCE

AMS Studies in Music

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For Mum, Dad, and Mridul

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DETAILS OF CONSEQUENCE

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INTRODUCTION

ORNAMENT IN MUSIC

In "Noctuelles," a piano piece written by Maurice Ravel in 1905, the composer surrounds his audience in a torrent of softly murmuring notes, which evoke the haphazard flight of nocturnal moths. Short rhythmic values characterize a rising and falling figuration whose ambiguous meter and dissonant harmonies captivate his listener from the outset. A critic of the time, Auguste Mangeot, likened this music to pretty enamelwork and claimed that Ravel sought to create an "envelope, frail, delicate, light, diaphanous, and decorate it with the thousand tones of his palette." For Mangeot, the effect of Ravel's music was spiritually intoxicating, and gave the audience "the sense of inebriation attained by taking opium or hashish."[1]

The feeling of disorientation that Mangeot describes is perhaps not too distant from the auditory experience of a listener today. One might ask where the melody is and what is the meter? Why is the rhythmic pattern of one hand so different to that of the other? A few measures into "Noctuelles" we are at least able to ascertain that the piece is in a major key, but before we have had a chance to ponder other issues the music suddenly dissipates into an evanescent flurry of quickly paced notes. As wisps of ascending flourishes suspend musical continuity a kernel of doubt becomes lodged in the listener's mind: Why does Ravel disrupt the musical process even before he has had a chance to establish stability in the form of a well-defined opening melody or a clearly articulated sense of meter? Why does he create musical rupture through intricate gestures typically restricted to a fleeting appearance at moments of repose or closure? Are these sweeping flourishes merely ornamental or are they the driving force behind this piece? The answers to such questions motivate my study of how avant-garde composers in France subverted musical norms to privilege gestures that evoked the idea of ornament.

1. Auguste Mangeot, "Salles Erard: Société Nationale," *Le Monde Musical* (15 January 1906): 13. The original French is given in chap. 3.

Details of Consequence investigates how and why the notion of ornament rose to the forefront of musical composition and aesthetics at the turn of the twentieth century in Paris. My goal is to lend an element of specificity to a concept and practice that exhibit considerable diversity in the variety of objects and activities to which they have been attached across time and culture. In the Western philosophical tradition, the term "ornament," derived from the Latin *ornamentum*, refers to accessories as wide-ranging as jewelry, art, ceramics, and textiles, which confer a sense of expressive and structural completion in the eye of the beholder. As a verb, the term has been associated with an array of pursuits ranging from embroidery and metalwork to sculpture and architectural design. In these activities, the urge to create abstract patterns and representational motifs through the basic principles of repetition, contrast, and transformation has been understood to satisfy a universal craving for beauty. It is for good reason that the examples I mention here are all visual; by locating ornament at the origins of art, humanists, especially artists and art historians of the twentieth century, tended to see ornamentation as a marker of humanity's primal creative impulse. As a result, the visual has had a propensity to trump later modes of ornament such as literary or musical.

The captivating allure and bewildering presence of abundant, decorative gestures in "Noctuelles" and several other pieces of this era impels me to examine their appearance and function. It is easy for one to lie back and be mesmerized by the beautiful sonorities and lush textures of decorative music. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that for Ravel, Claude Debussy, Gabriel Fauré, Igor Stravinsky, and Erik Satie ornament was the catalyst that fueled musical innovation at certain moments of their careers. As with the painters of this time, ornament was not just part of a pretty surface for these composers. The inner chapters of this book show how ornament was often the motivating agent for musical experiments that sought to subvert the listener's expectations and leave them feeling inebriated and confused, as if indeed having smoked opium or hashish. In uncovering the structural and expressive significance of ornament for early-twentieth-century composers, chapter 3 examines the link between profuse decoration and expressions of virtuosity in piano music by Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel; chapter 4 explores a specific type of ornament, the arabesque, and highlights its allusions to themes of nature, divinity, femininity, and sensuality in ballet music by Ravel; chapter 5 brings into focus the connection between ornament and the practice of Neo-Primitivism in ballet music by Stravinsky; finally, chapter 6 emphasizes the transfigurative nature of ornament in a variety of genres including chamber works by Debussy and Ravel, as well as piano pieces and ballet music by Satie. Why these composers sought to articulate their avant-garde positions through ornamental detail, something that Western philosophers had typecast as subtle and insignificant, is the riddle that stands at the helm of my project.

Not forgetting that the idea of ornament is rooted in the visual arts, one might well wonder how it is defined in the realm of music, especially since I relate this

phenomenon to a variety of compositional styles and genres. Before explaining, however, the definition of musical ornament offered in this introduction attempts to bypass problems of language and terminology inherent to applications of this term. Until recently, some scholars of art and architecture have sought to provide a comprehensive definition with Oleg Grabar, Ernst Gombrich, and James Trilling, going so far as to distinguish between ornament and its closest possible conceptual correlate, decoration.[2] Although their efforts have had considerable bearing on the unique contexts that they examine, these definitions have proved hard to sustain in my investigation of a medium as vastly different as music, and its relationship to the specific culture of fin de siècle Paris. While heeding Jenny Anger's warning—"one defines the decorative at one's peril"—my use of the terms "ornament" and "decoration" are multifaceted yet sharply defined.[3]

In crafting a definition of musical ornament, I look specifically to French writing on the arts in order to grasp the shifting meanings and nuances of the terms *ornement*, *ornementation*, *ornamental*, *décoration*, *décoratif*, and *décorateur* in contemporaneous critical thought. By examining their roles in music criticism of this milieu, my aim is to reciprocate the scrutiny to which scholars of literature and art have subjected these concepts. As a result, I give particular attention to how critics used *ornamental*, *décoration*, *décoratif*, and *arabesque* to accentuate innovative aspects of music, while aligning these qualities with newly emerging visual techniques. My attention to cultural context follows the lead of recent musicologists whose studies on French music have sought to redefine familiar concepts of *sincérité*, *néoclassicisme*, *utilité*, and *perfection* by viewing them from within the discussions in which they are embroiled.[4] With regard to the specific cluster of terms here, I look to the findings of art historians who associate *décoratif* and *décoration* with different methods and genres of painting in highlighting a significant shift that took place during the fin de siècle. This concerned the elevation of the *arts décoratifs*—comprising glasswork, enamels, furniture, interior furnishings, and so forth—to the superior category of the *beaux arts,* including easel painting, etching, and sculpture.[5] Although a variety of artisanal

2. See Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979); and James Trilling, *Ornament: A Modern Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

3. Jenny Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13.

4. See in particular Carlo Caballero, *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept to the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1996); Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); and Steven Huebner, "Ravel's Perfection," in *Ravel Studies*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9–30.

5. Gill Perry emphasizes the changing nature of the term decorative: "By 1906 the term had become unstable, and was used *both* as a marker of the work's modernity, and in a more pejorative sense to signify the *ornamentation* of the applied arts." Alastair Wright mentions that *décoratif* denoted "certain kinds of

objects ascended the ranks, their rising status harbored considerable potential for terminological confusion: What does the decorative decorate when it is no longer rendered peripheral and subordinate? The paradox that arises when decoration functions not only independently of structure but as structure itself indicates how terms "can shed their traditional meanings," as described by the literary historian Rae Beth Gordon.[6] Even as this contradiction unsettled those who revered traditional definitions of decoration as an adjunct accessory, it fired the imagination of various avant-garde groups across the arts who sought to undermine normative experiences of artistic form and expression.

My inclination to treat ornament and decoration almost as synonyms is prompted by the unique formation and deployment of these terms in musical thought. Since the Renaissance, at least, a number of theoretical texts, pedagogical treatises, and performance manuals have used these concepts interchangeably, while dictating stringent rules regarding their improvisation. Few scholars of the humanities have sought to include a consideration of music in their studies of ornament even though musical decoration, like its visual and literary counterparts, boasts a long and complicated history going back to the ancient Greeks who spoke of melodic ornament in terms of its allusion to ant-paths or the movement of wriggling caterpillars.[7] A history of musical decoration can be approached on its own terms without recourse to analogy. Much as it would be rewarding to trace such a narrative—or even, to imagine one as viewed entirely from the perspective of decorative practice—this is not a task that I undertake. Instead, the central chapters here highlight new forms

painting. The great decorative schemes of Albert Besnard and Puvis de Chavannes were the most obvious (and literal) examples. The term was also applied to the later easel paintings of Monet, with their extended scale . . . as well as to the small-scale interiors of Vuillard and his Nabis colleagues." Nicholas Watkins also emphasizes the specific nuances of decoration in French criticism: "The very word 'decoration' conjures up conflicting associations. In English, it is often used pejoratively to imply pretty, but essentially undemanding, minor painting. In French, however, the term *décoration* has a much wider range of associations and, in particular, a long history of being used to indicate painting of the grandest scale and ambition. As these contrasting meanings suggest, the topic of decorative painting encompasses the extremes of conservatism and radicalism, the wish to defend, as well as to subvert, the traditional hierarchy among artistic genres." See Gill Perry, "The Decorative, the Expressive, and the Primitive," in *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century,* ed. Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gill Perry (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 53; Alastair Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 132; and Nicholas Watkins, "The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic," in *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890–1930*, ed. Gloria Groom (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 2. With regard to styles of decorative painting oriented around landscape (*paysage décoratif*) see Roger Benjamin, "The Decorative Landscape: Fauvism, and the Arabesque of Observation," *Art Bulletin* 75/2 (1993): 295–316. Equally valuable is Katherine Kuenzli's recent study of painterly decoration and modernist expressions of domesticity in work by the Nabis. See *The Nabis and Intimate Modernism: Painting and the Decorative at the Fin-de-siècle* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2010).

6. Rae Beth Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 4.

7. See Andrew Barker, ed., *Greek Musical Writings*: vol. 1, *The Musician and His Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 109.

of musical ornament as inspired by visual decoration at the turn of the century, while investigating their relationship to earlier varieties of embellishment. Despite the wide historical and cultural gulf that separated medieval and Renaissance theorists from eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century composer-performers, their view of ornament was remarkably homogenous, and prolonged the traditional belief that decoration should remain marginal and subservient to a clearly defined, central structure. Later composers, as this book explains, held an entirely antithetical position on the matter.

Since Plato, who spoke of "the decoration of slow-moving melody with quick instrumental note clusters," short rhythmic values consistently emerge as one of the chief defining components of musical ornament.[8] In some traditions of plainchant, for instance, extemporized decoration drew on various configurations of short values to adorn a preexisting melody of longer values. Even as some of these ornate gestures became formulaic over time, they retained short values as their principal marker of identity because this was a surefire way to distinguish between the central melody—whose longer values tended to fall within the listener's primary realm of perception—and its decoration—whose shorter durations tended to inhabit the auditory periphery. While intricate rhythmic patterns focused attention toward the margins of the aural experience, it was never for long and rarely in a way that allowed the singer and listener to lose track of the principal musical material.

In accordance with Plato, medieval and Renaissance theorists of music urged practitioners to use ornament in moderation to maintain structural balance and formal clarity. Embellishments thus had to be discreet and avoid drawing undue attention to themselves. Furthermore, decoration was sanctioned only when it created passing interest and did not disturb the equilibrium established between central musical events and its own fleeting follies. Just as a visual frame serves to separate the central subject from its surrounding adornment in painting, musicians inferred an equivalent aural boundary that kept musical content apart from—but in close proximity to—its decoration. This is one reason why it is relatively easy to distinguish between ornament and structure in repertoire of the common practice era. Broadly speaking, the notion of decoration that held force between the late-sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries was one that viewed ornament as an accessory, a musical gesture whose characterization by short rhythms and dissonant pitches created variety and contrast for a brief moment at such junctures as cadences and cadenzas. For the musicians of these centuries, embellishments augmented the natural beauty of the melody and diverse functions of the harmony; in keeping with a traditional outlook, decoration was conceived as something that was *added* to the musical process not only to heighten its effectiveness but also to satisfy a certain aesthetic lack.

By the turn of the twentieth century, though, French composers began to manipulate this boundary. Their eager exploration of the limits of ornament made it

8. Ibid., 204.

increasingly difficult to tell where decoration began and where it ended. In this regard, the listener's dilemma with respect to the status of ornamental figuration in "Noctuelles" presents exactly the sort of situation that composers sought to intensify in their questioning of whether there was such a thing as too much ornament. The French artist and engraver Félix Bracquemond captured the perceptual complexity of this scenario with remarkable clarity in his emphasis on the rising status of decorative art: "Where then is the limit between decorative art and art that is not decorative?"[9] Even as musicians might have asked a similar question, the answer, as suggested in their compositions, was far from straightforward. Given their preference for semantic and formal ambiguity, we see that composers sometimes drew on short values for purely decorative reasons while at other times, the same (or similar) figuration came to assume increasing structural responsibilities. The expressive potency of ornament thus makes itself apparent in another conundrum related to the earlier paradox: Can decoration be functional even while retaining its appearance as ornament? The dialectic that ornament enacts between figure and ground is part of the reason why decorative works in art, music, and literature were viewed with such suspicion at the turn of the century; as Bracquemond implied, no one was ever sure to which aesthetic category they belonged.

Although the manipulation of expectations and evocation of ambiguity were certainly at the top of the avant-garde agenda, an abundance of ornament served to heighten perceptual confusion in one more way. In keeping with the ancients who had issued stern warnings against decorative profusion—too much decoration is effeminizing, irrational, seductive, barbaric—a centralization of ornament at the fin de siècle continued to unsettle many audiences given its privileging of previously censored topics. The suspense that directs my narrative—How did ornament finally attain unrestrained freedom?—is accompanied by the realization that despite ornament's authorized claim to independence at the fin de siècle, it did not emerge unscathed. When ornament finally broke the frame to subsume the surface, it brought with it a great deal of baggage, which took the form of derogatory characterizations that had been thrust upon decorative detail throughout its history. At this moment, the true victory of ornament was manifest not so much in its profusion as in its ability to manipulate negative stereotypes to its advantage. Following the lead of artists operating under the aesthetics of Symbolism and Art Nouveau, composers also foregrounded decoration in celebrating the reasons for which ornament had been condemned throughout its history. Thus, in both visual and musical works, there is an interest in exploring themes of femininity, eroticism, exoticism, and mystery through ornamental excess.

The increasing association of abundant ornament with controversial topics and narratives allowed the most daring decorative compositions of this milieu to be characterized by an overriding sense of structural imbalance. Gone are the graceful

9. See Gordon in *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, 5.

embellishments that decorated melodies for a passing moment or adorned cadences at a brief pause. In their place, Debussy and Ravel invested expressive power in short values by giving them an unusually intriguing profile. By granting elaborate rhythms an inordinate level of textural exposure, they encouraged such patterns to saturate the surface of musical compositions and thus remain conspicuously audible for long periods of time. These composers exaggerated the disruptive streak inherent in elaborate figuration through two interrelated techniques: at some moments, short values manipulate the listener's sense of time by suspending the meter to evoke stasis; at other junctures, their groupings suggest a decrease or increase in tempo. In conjunction with repeating segments of pitch, short values are also involved in the creation of motifs that augment these temporal effects while elevating repetition and subtle transformation as the fundamental processes of ornament.

These techniques are especially apparent in Debussy's and Ravel's creation of a specific type of decorative melody that evokes visual arabesque. In one respect, their arabesques build on the tradition of intricate, rhythmically fluid melodies that permeate the scores of exotic operas by Georges Bizet, Léo Delibes, and Camille Saint-Saëns, to name a few. Despite a surface similarity with the arabesque melodies of these composers, Debussy and Ravel went one step farther in extending the arabesque's placement to nonexotic contexts, and reconfiguring its role so that it functioned as a central component of the musical structure and primary agent of expression. Principally, it was their innovations in rhythm, meter, and texture that enabled these shifts to take place and allowed the arabesque to come into a musical existence of its own. In this guise, their arabesques may have shaped those of Paul Dukas in his ballet, *La Peri* (1911–12), and Albert Roussel in his opéra-ballet, *Padmâvatî* (1913–18), works that continued to prolong the association between arabesque and exotic representation well into the twentieth century.

Debussy's interest to endow ornament with structural and expressive significance may also have prompted Mangeot's perception of his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* as being decorative to the core: "the music has neither rhythm, nor time, nor tonality. . . . What can one put around a tapestry? Nothing but a border. M. Debussy's music supplies such a border. He has made something very discreet and intentionally monotonous, calculated not to offend the eye—I mean the ear. There are a multitude of charming little transient details."[10] Located within the frame, the traditional site of ornament, Debussy's music contains the decorative richness of the interior but not without participating itself as reflected in its cultivation of detail. A similar approach to composition is likely the driving force behind Émile Vuillermoz's description of Ravel: "The goldsmith Ravel will have chiseled into the fine and brilliant metal of French music the most fluid and most incisive arabesques that have

10. See Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, trans. Maire O'Brien and Grace O' Brien (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1973), 132.

ever decorated the sides of an harmonic incense burner."[11] Now working with metal as opposed to enamel, this compelling image of Ravel as artisan brings me back to "Noctuelles" whose opening measures I use as a template on which to start building a definition of musical ornament (see ex. 0.1).

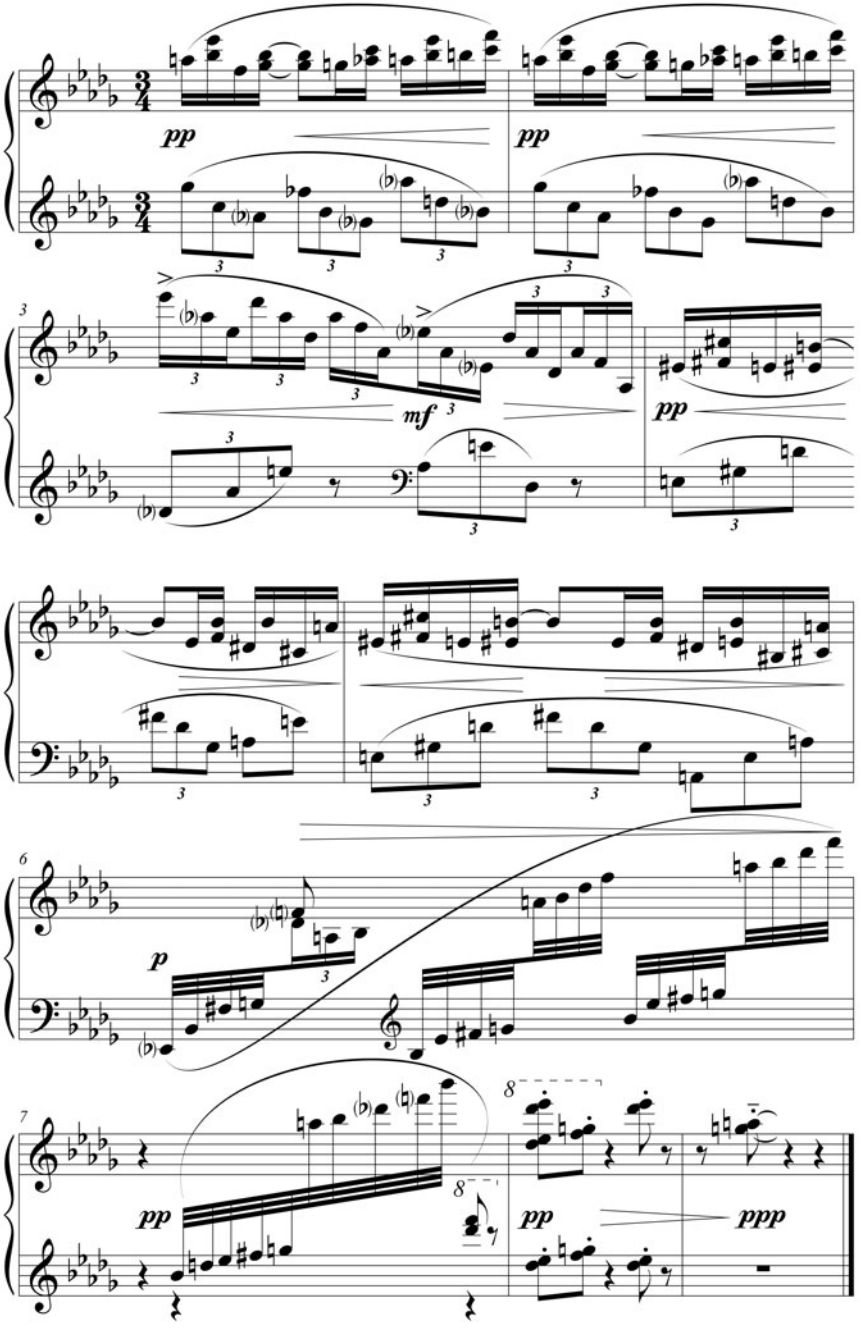
Central to the auditory experience of ornament in this movement are decorative gestures, which are usually intricately rendered by short rhythmic values. What is defined as "short" in one piece, however, may not be the case in another. In "Noctuelles" it is the sixteenths of the right-hand material and the thirty-seconds of the flourishes that generate activity at the lowest levels of the metric hierarchy, ones to which the listener does not usually pay prolonged attention. Most decorative music allows the rhythmic profile of ornate figuration to fluctuate between irregular and regular patterns to convey the effect of a fluid, shifting surface. Here, we see that a duple grouping of sixteenths gives way to triplet sixteenths in m. 3. The rhythmic instability of these types of gestures is usually exacerbated through their placement within an ambiguous metric setting; despite the notated 3/4 meter of "Noctuelles," Ravel contrasts the quarter pulse that underlies the duple sixteenths against the dotted-quarter pulse of the triplet sixteenths in order to project 6/8 in m. 3. Equally characteristic of the decorative style is a placement of complicated figuration against an unstable metric context, which oscillates between states of stability and instability. In such music, detailed rhythmic patterns vie for the listener's attention by overstepping the textural boundary—or to use a visual metaphor, the frame—that restrains them as a result of their increasing and often prolonged rhythmic complexity. That decorative motifs do not shy away from displacing or even usurping the primary melody is evident in "Noctuelles" where the sweeping flourishes in mm. 6–7 go so far as to interrupt the flow of musical material.

In these ways, texturally conspicuous decoration attains a level of structural involvement previously denied on account of ornament's status as a peripheral expression of beauty. The creation of textural upheaval as caused by ornament's aspiration toward overarching formal control is certainly a defining quality of this repertoire. Even so, composers were ultimately drawn to the ambiguity of decorative gestures; that is, ornament's ability to occupy the background—as suggested by its appearance—and the foreground—as a consequence of its actions—often at one and the same time. Jacques Derrida draws attention to the expressive intensity that is inherent to such moments of aural ambiguity:

> I do not know what is essential and what is accessory in a work. And above all I do not know what this thing is, that is neither essential nor accessory, neither proper nor improper, and that Kant calls *parergon*, for example the frame. Where does the frame take place.

11. Émile Vuillermoz, "Le style orchestral de Maurice Ravel," *Maurice Ravel: Numéro Spécial de la Revue Musicale* (1 April 1925): 27: "L'orfèvre Ravel aura ciselé dans le métal fin et brillant de la musique de France les arabesques les plus souples et les plus incisives qui aient jamais orné les flancs d'un brûle-parfums harmonique."

EXAMPLE 0.1 Maurice Ravel, "Noctuelles," mm. 1–9. Copyright © 1995 by Hinrichsen Edition, Peters Edition, Ltd. Used by permission of C. F. Peters corporation. All rights reserved.



> Does it take place. Where does it begin. Where does it end. What is its internal limit. Its external limit. And its surface between the two limits.[12]

Derrida's remark is worth remembering throughout this book. In emphasizing the inextricability of ornament from structure, he captures the hallmark of the French decorative aesthetic with a characteristic critical precision.

REVIVING MUSICAL ORNAMENT

In one respect, it would be entirely feasible to trace the transformation of ornament as it relates to an evolution of musical style; the philosopher of music Vladimir Jankélévitch suggests as much in his perception of the entire phenomenon of music *as ornament*: "It is music in its entirety that is a fioratura, a detour, an exquisite efflorescence of life itself; it is music in its entirety that (like the nightingale's ornaments) constitutes the luxurious, graceful paralipomena of practical existence."[13] Even though such a narrative is somewhat latent in my work, I do not explore ornament in a disciplinary vacuum, a tendency that has been predominant in prior musical scholarship on this subject. Through their focus on issues of performance practice, the foundational studies by Timothy McGee, Robert Donington, and Frederick Neumann have yielded a variety of valuable insights on historical treatises and what musicians may learn from them. Nonetheless, these scholars have refrained from probing the topics of taste, form, and expression that permeate many of these performance-based texts.[14] Why have musicians been so preoccupied with these issues? On what bodies of knowledge were their value systems based? These basic questions yearn for musical ornament to be examined from a wider historical and cultural perspective, which further permits the expressive goals of musicians to merge with those of aesthetes and practitioners of ornament across the arts. Such an approach also allows the prescriptive quality of primary texts to shed light on what was distinctive about the ornamental preoccupation of early twentieth-century composers when compared with the achievements of the past.

While participating alongside scholars who seek to reposition historical documents on musical ornament within a broader context of the humanities, I also aim to alert other disciplines to the philosophical relevance of this rich and vast critical

12. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 63.

13. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 68.

14. See Timothy McGee, *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style According to the Treatises* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Robert Donington, *The Interpretation of Early Music* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974); and Frederick Neumann, *Performance Practices of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Schirmer, 1993).

discourse on music.[15] Ideally, a consideration of one should not exist without knowledge of the other. Although my project does not offer full consideration of the vast quantity of extant treatises and manuals, a general awareness of their intervention with regards to the practice of ornament informs my own investigation at a fundamental level.[16] Caution against decorative excess as a negative manifestation of virtuosity in theoretical writing from the twelfth century on highlights the subversive impulse that prompted the creation of ornamental abundance at the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, striking overlaps between the language used by critics to disparage decorative indulgence in earlier centuries, and that used to praise ornamental novelty during the twentieth, reflects a radical conceptual shift.

My movement away from a purely musical consideration of ornament may be attributed to scholars from across the humanities whose ideas have enriched my own about how ornament can be meaningful.[17] As it stands, what scholars from other disciplines offer is a conception of decoration, which goes beyond the ordinary. For instance, literary critics help us to recognize how ornament is able to restructure narratives through rupture or digression, and how in the process it can suggest different experiences of linguistic sound and temporality; art historians draw our attention to the way ornament is able to reconfigure time and space, thereby allowing us to see—and have our vision manipulated—in new ways. What my study gives back in turn is not only an appreciation of musical decoration as an aspect of style, practice, and thought but also as a way of listening, which relishes the shifting complexity of the music's ornate surface. In this respect, my project also engages with the subfields of music theory and analysis given its interest to safeguard the ornamental extravagance of French music against those analytical approaches that erase decorative exteriors in the search for aesthetic truth. Wye J. Allanbrook captures the biases of these dominant academic tendencies with particular verve: "Alongside Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, a new canon of Three Bs took shape: the Behind, the Beneath, and the Beyond; the truth lay anywhere but on the surface."[18]

15. The work of Georgia Cowart, Elisabeth Le Guin, Bonnie Gordon, Daniel Albright, and Peter Kivy has been especially important in this regard.

16. To mention a few sources post-1600, see the writings of Giulio Caccini, Bénigne de Bacilly, François Couperin, Johann Joachim Quantz, Francesco Geminiani, Giuseppe Tartini, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, and Leopold Mozart.

17. In addition to the work of Rae Beth Gordon, important scholarly contributions include Debra Schafter, *The Order of Ornament, The Structure of Style: Theoretical Foundations of Modern Art and Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David Brett, *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), to name a few.

18. Wye J. Allanbrook, "Theorizing the Comic Surface," in *Music in the Mirror: Reflections on the History of Music Theory and Literature for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Andreas Giger and Thomas J. Mathiesen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 196. More recently, Holly Watkins offers several new angles for

Even as my work draws on a variety of humanistic voices to broaden our understanding of ornament as an expressive agent, I rely on an equally diverse cross-section of music scholarship in an attempt to theorize the notion of decoration. Although few writers specifically address the issue of ornament, this book leans on a range of musicological approaches that deal with intersecting topics of virtuosity, musical exoticism, primitivism, and French modernism.[19] This body of literature has allowed me to cobble together a patchwork of theories, methods, and vocabularies for investigating the cultural significance of decorative practice, while shaping my use of ornament as a lens through which we can view idiosyncrasies of musical style and aesthetics. Taking the example of virtuosity, a reexamination of this concept from the standpoint of ornament allows for a stronger appreciation of the connection between one of its markers (brilliant display) and a principal cause (abundant decoration). This connection enlightens several other issues pertaining to notions of taste and genius, especially when one considers the shared cluster of terms that gravitated around positive and negative characterizations of ornament and virtuosity in aesthetic thought.

This project is also indebted to the work of music theorists. Despite my decision to defend the surface against Robert Fink's belief that "all great music has hidden organic unity, no matter how complex, chaotic, or incomplete the listener's experience of its 'surface,'" my position inadvertently continues to uphold a surface-depth metaphor, what Fink labels as "the single most important metaphor of structuralist musical analysis." While I agree that this hierarchy is far from "the best index of value in contemporary music," I maintain it is essential for the purposes of this study because it was a fetishization of the surface that enabled French musicians to subvert the idea of hierarchy in the first place.[20] Although composers like Debussy and Ravel battled with the boundary for quite some time before they were able to transcend it, these analyses strive toward capturing something of their struggle.[21]

My conception of ornament as a primarily rhythmic phenomenon has received considerable direction through the research of theorists working on issues of rhythm

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understanding notions of surface and depth in *Metaphors of Depth in German Musical Thought: From E. T. A. Hoffmann to Arnold Schoenberg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

19. My project has gained considerably from the recent flurry of studies in French music, history, and culture, which have begun to fill a once-conspicuous void. In particular, the past ten years have witnessed a robust surge in scholarly activity as evident in the range of critical perspectives presented in the work of David Code, Mary Davis, Volker Helbing, Peter Kaminsky, Barbara Kelly, Deborah Mawer, Jann Pasler, Michael Puri, and Marianne Wheeldon (to name a few). New publications edited by Kaminsky, Kelly, Mawer, and Richard Langham Smith have also proved immensely useful given their compilation of contrasting viewpoints that reflect the seriousness with which scholars have begun to reevaluate French music in terms that are culturally viable and analytically rigorous.

20. Robert Fink, "Going Flat: Post-Hierarchical Music Theory and the Musical Surface," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102–3.

21. Once again, Allanbrook's words echo in my ears: "Theorizing the surface hardly seems necessary unless one has emerged from a period in which it has been ignored or condemned." See "Theorizing the Comic Surface," 198.

and meter from perspectives as wide-ranging as music cognition, perception, historiography, and analysis. This field of study began to be revitalized during the 1980s when a number of scholars started to redefine notions of rhythm and meter in their quest to elevate the status of these parameters to the level of those that addressed aspects of harmony and musical form. Given the diverse standpoints from which they approached this task, scholars often proposed vastly different definitions. Nevertheless, they remained united in their belief that rhythm and meter could contribute to the musical experience in ways that the listener might acknowledge as expressive and meaningful.

From a purely analytical standpoint, the work of Harald Krebs has proved the most fruitful for the analysis of French music. Krebs's focus on aspects of rhythmic grouping, and how these groups interact to articulate different qualities of meter, is important in two respects: it illuminates French notions of rhythm as a composite of irregular and regular patterns, and meter as multilayered and ever-changing. Although Krebs develops his theory of metrical consonance and dissonance in relation to the music of Robert Schumann, his attention to how pulses relate to one another both within and across different levels of the metric hierarchy is useful for understanding how French composers manipulated shifting rhythmic groupings against fluid metric contexts, which projected states of instability and ambiguity.[22] It is important to bear in mind the different constraints that musical contexts place on the analytical apparatus; while Schumann's dissonances are often approached through consonant structures to which they resolve, this is not the case in music by Debussy and Ravel. Their interests to disorient the listener from the outset meant that acts of metric deviation were usually independent of—and rarely measured against—expressions of metrical consonance. Moreover, when metric stability is attained in their music it is often for a short duration or otherwise riddled with dissonance in order to compromise the very notion of consonance. It is unstable metric structures such as these—congruent on some levels while simultaneously noncongruent on others—that shaped prevailing descriptions of French music as fluctuating and unstable.

Of course, Krebs's theory is vastly more complex and subtle than I suggest here. I extract only the most valuable aspects of his methodology as warranted by the music under consideration; in carrying over a minimum of technical language, I seek also to reduce the risk of narrative density. By adapting the work of Krebs to a

22. Harald Krebs defines metrical consonance as aligned interpretive layers whose cardinalities are factors of each other. He identifies two types of metrical dissonance: *grouping dissonance* occurs when nonaligned layers have different cardinalities and are not factors of each other (such as when three-layers conflict against two-layers); *displacement dissonance* occurs when two or more layers of the same cardinality are nonaligned to create syncopation (such as when the initiation of a four-layer is delayed by a quarter pulse). Krebs differentiates further between dissonance created through superposition (direct dissonance) and through juxtaposition (indirect dissonance). See Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

French musical context, I combine his influential ideas with recent insights offered by Richard Cohn, Justin London, and Jonathan Kramer. Cohn's notion of double hemiolas is essential to understanding those episodes of extreme metric instability where pulses conflict against one another not only across one but two metric levels at the same time. The strength of London's empirical evidence with regards to the psychology of perception lends credibility to parts of my analysis where I ask the reader to consider the salience of lower metric levels in their projection of irregularity. In combination with Kramer, the breadth of London's examples—and the variety of interpretive options that they offer—provides a range of tools with which to analyze a repertoire that excludes itself from a canon of music whose craftsmanship is assessed according to principles of "well-formedness."[23] Their approach to analyzing twentieth-century music is of particular value given my tendency to view states of irregularity and instability, not as aberrations that reflect compositional weakness but as expressive components of rhythm and meter.

Finally, I add Candace Brower's research on memory.[24] Her cognitive evidence as to how listeners constantly revise what they hear in making sense of the musical process captures our auditory behavior in response to this repertoire with considerable sensitivity. London, Kramer, and Brower all argue that the slightest of musical changes can have the greatest of impacts. This relationship thus holds forth in a body of music whose repetitive, seemingly unchanging quality stays true to Paul Gauguin's characterization of ornamental work: "Always the same thing, and yet never the same thing."[25]

Gauguin's remark points out one more way in which music theorists guide my exploration of music-visual correlations. Much attention has been given to the close working relationship that existed between artists and musicians at the fin de siècle. Prompted by the writings of practitioners and those of their critics, scholars of art and music have attempted to explore visual–music synesthesia through attention to aspects of technique—as a concept shifted from one medium to another—and language—as decorators and critics searched for new terms with which to describe the innovations that occurred as a result of disciplinary crossover. These endeavors, as several musicologists and art historians have complained, are somewhat prone to the construction of simple and vague parallels.[26] In contrast, I do not question the

23. See Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

24. See Candace Brower, "Memory and the Perception of Rhythm," *Music Theory Spectrum* 15/1 (Spring 1993): 19–35.

25. Paul Gauguin, *Gauguin's Intimate Journals*, trans. Van Wyck Brooks (New York: Dover, 1997), 37.

26. See Walter Frisch, "Music and Jugendstil," *Critical Inquiry* 17/1 (Autumn 1990): 138–61; and Frisch, *German Modernism: Music and the Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Also see Reinhold Brinkmann, "On the Problem of Establishing 'Jugendstil' as a Category in the History of Music—with a Negative Plea," *Miscellanea Musicologica* 13 (1984): 19–47. More recently, the art historian Anne Leonard "points up the ineluctable *differences* between painting and music" by moving away from "discussions of . . . the fin de siècle interrelation of painting and music [which] revolve around some kind of

validity of the need to compare one medium with another. That creative figures made frequent comparisons between the arts (much as we still do now) suggests that intermedia correspondences are not just physiologically and psychologically palpable; they are also, to some extent, conceptually feasible. At first glance, the outcome of art–music parallels might seem to be the product of superficial alignments. But a deeper investigation of the creative impulse that seeks to connect distinct phenomena reveals the important role played by human instincts in bringing about their pairing.

In exploring new ways to approach the study of visual–musical relationships, I take my cue from a well-known critic of the time, Camille Mauclair. For him, fusion between the arts was reflected not through the pursuit of equivalence (a fusion of results, as he called it) but through a "fusion of principles," as facilitated through "interior suggestion," an observation whose Wagnerian roots are unmistakable.[27] Mauclair's emphasis on the psychological interior is significant since this is where ornament was believed to make its strongest impact. Scholars of ancient and medieval culture have emphasized the cognitive importance of ornament in view of its ability to attract and divert attention away from the central subject to a realm of fantasy where the intermingling of memory and associative play results in ideas that further enhance the meaning of the main structure.[28] In addition, a mutual convergence around the decorative allowed early-twentieth-century artists and musicians to achieve the impossible: a sense of rhythm and dynamism in the visual arts, and the evocation of stasis and suspension of temporal progression in music. These aesthetic ideals were not only antithetical to the inherent character of each medium; they also went some way toward rendering—conceptually, at least—music as art and art as music.

For example, in Pierre Bonnard's lithographs for Claude Terrasse's piano primer *Le petit solfège illustré* (1893), wavy arabesques are transformed from abstract lines into anthropomorphized note-heads, the open mouths of singers, locks of hair, and silhouettes of bodies. Bonnard's playful depictions enliven Terrasse's dry explanation of the rudiments of music theory while equating visual contour with imaginary sound to convey that "music [is] in the air."[29] Figure 0.1 shows Bonnard's amusing explanation of rhythmic subdivision through the transformation of weightier, older women and their billowing white gowns into petite, younger women in their tight

formal unity between the two arts (synesthesia, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or what have you)." See "Picturing Listening in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Art Bulletin* 89/2 (June 2007): 266.

27. Camille Mauclair, "La Peinture Musicienne et la Fusion des Arts," *La Revue Bleue* (6 September 1902): 299: "la génération actuelle a cherché à opérer la fusion par suggestion intérieure. . . . Le problème de la fusion des arts devrait donc logiquement se réduire non à une fusion de résultats, mais à une fusion de principes."

28. See, for example, Mary Carruthers *The Craft of Thought: Mediation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Joy Connolly, *The State of Speech: Rhetoric and Political Thought in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

29. Leonard, "Picturing Listening in the Late Nineteenth Century," 279.

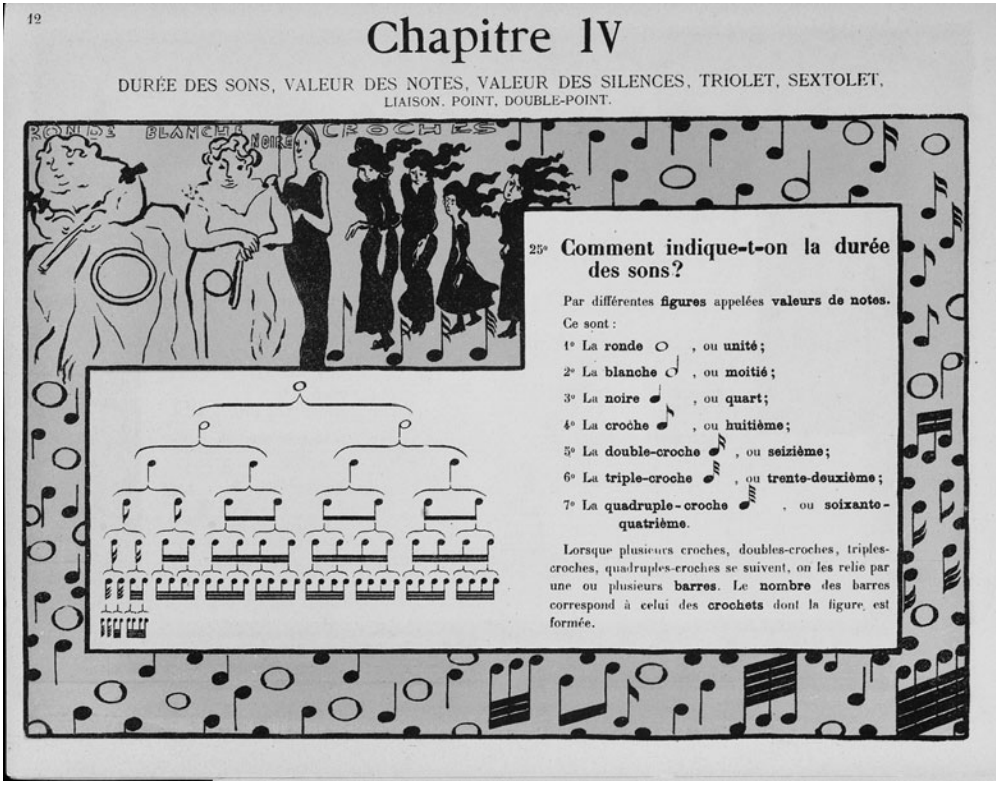

FIGURE 0.1 Pierre Bonnard, chap. 4 from *Le petit solfège illustré.* (Photograph ©2012 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.)

black dresses. A seemingly casual symmetry between the dividing tufts of black hair in the top left corner—from one tuft for eighths, two for sixteenths, three for thirty-seconds, and four for sixty-fourths—and the rhythmic values themselves on the far bottom right invokes a literal correspondence between the distinct spaces of line and rhythm, one that is highly suggestive not only in terms of their individual narratives but also with respect to the parallel accumulation of decorative designs. The ambiguity between figure and ground throughout Terrasse's book has the remarkable ability to convey that *music is ornament* as abstract lines form images that compel us to imagine different facets of musical sound, while their unraveling falls back to reveal the constituent undulating contour. Bonnard turns art into music and in so doing opens up the possibility for music (notation) to be conceived as art. An awareness of the ways in which art and music tried to approximate the intrinsic properties of the other through the practice of ornament makes it possible to imagine how the achievements of one realm might have spurred on the innovations of the other, each one pushing the other toward—and sometimes beyond—its defining limits.

To this end, my motivation gains considerable impetus from another source, which targets the difficulties that musicologists have had in justifying art–music correspondences. In Richard Langham Smith's review of Michel Fleury's *L'Impressionnisme et la musique*, he concludes, "Fleury's [book] will serve us well for some time, at least until some other discipline, perhaps psychology, comes up with something which can more precisely explain why we draw associations between harmonies and timbres, colours and smells."[30] Smith's instincts could not have been sharper. They reinforce Mauclair's overarching claim that the eternal laws governing art, poetry, and music—laws that allow these forms to share mysterious correlations with one another—speak directly to our rational faculties ("la conscience").[31] At the same time, Smith's remarks anticipate the recent research of the music theorist Lawrence Zbikowski in the field of music cognition. Zbikowski's work elucidates Mauclair's observation—and achieves exactly what Smith hopes for—through techniques of cross-domain mapping, which allow us "to structure our understanding of one domain . . . in terms of another."[32] Particularly valuable is Zbikowski's claim that a scrutiny of our linguistic habits can reveal a great deal about how we perceive and make sense of creative phenomena.

Zbikowski's ideas clarify why it was possible for composers to effectively translate the visual phenomenon of ornament into a specific set of musical gestures. Especially important is Zbikowski's discussion of how metaphors work, which sheds light on why painters were eager to talk about harmony and temporality with regards to a tableau, and why musicians perceived arabesque lines and decorative designs in their compositions. My inclination to draw on theories of cognition when examining metaphors provides another angle from which to analyze the keywords that permeate historical criticism and current scholarship on French music: ornamental, decorative, arabesque. At a fundamental level, this approach helps us understand how a basic process of visual ornamentation such as repetition can also operate within the sonic domain. For example, we will see how repeating visual patterns—a defining feature of fin de siècle decorative art, as well as visual ornamentation in general—can be approximated through the recurrence of unchanging (or slowly transforming) melodic and rhythmic motifs in French decorative music. Going one step farther, an awareness of cognitive mappings between visual and musical fields can help explain why the intricacies of visual ornament find an aural correlate in the form of a rhythmically complex motif of short values; or why an undulating arabesque line in the visual domain corresponds to a melody whose pitches are or-

30. Richard Langham Smith, "See, Hear," *Musical Times* (October 1997): 29.

31. Mauclair, "La Peinture Musicienne et la Fusion des Arts," 299: "Un tableau ne doit pas amalgamer poésie et musique; mais il doit . . . faire sentir qu'il y a en lui un peu des lois éternelles, et qu'entre les lois qui l'ont créé et celles d'un beau poème et d'une belle symphonie, une identité mystérieuse existe. . . . C'est une opération qui ne peut se faire que dans la conscience."

32. Lawrence Zbikowski, *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

ganized into ascending and descending patterns of irregular rhythmic groupings. Zbikowski's formation of Conceptual Integration Networks (CINs) also proves useful in view of their ability to bring visual and musical domains into proximity through associations that inform such prevalent metaphors as arabesque melody or circular form.

As defined in relation to fin de siècle repertoire, the topic of musical ornament demands that I adopt a somewhat multipronged approach. Theories of rhythm and meter allow me to address how ornament is characterized and how it functions, while research in music cognition enables me to gauge the expressive impact of ornament's appearances and diverse roles. Overall, my strategy reflects a search for interpretive tools and systems of analysis, which highlight—rather than normalize or subjugate—those musical traits that come together to evoke a notion of decoration in French music: formal fluidity, metric ambiguity, rhythmic intricacy, and textural imbalance.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Details of Consequence is organized into six chapters, the last four of which take musical compositions as their centerpieces. Chapters 1 and 2 prepare the musical analyses of subsequent chapters by focusing on the philosophical discourse in which the idea of ornament was engaged at the turn of the century. The goal here is to clarify what ornament meant to visual and musical *décorateurs*, while making some headway toward explaining its aesthetic appeal. I seek to broaden arguments made by scholars in other disciplines, often through the inclusion of new primary sources or by an alternative reading of familiar ones, mainly by situating their remarks on ornament against those that concern music. Later chapters insert music firmly into this dialogue through a series of detailed examinations, which explore the different manifestations of ornament in relation to specific musical genres.

Chapter 1 explores the idea of ornament in music by way of a short historical sketch. I highlight correspondences between ancient and modern viewpoints concerning the usefulness/uselessness of ornament, before pulling Debussy's thoughts on decoration into the primary arena of philosophical debate as outlined in relation to the writings of Paul Radiot, Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Auguste Racinet, and Mauclair, among others. An investigation of the reasons behind their mixed reactions to the rising status of decorative art leads me to examine the work of Eugène Grasset whose reception underscores the nationalistic currents that accompanied and enabled its ascent.

Grasset's swaying, vegetal motifs establish the backdrop for chapter 2, which dwells on the most prevalent ornament of this milieu: the arabesque. Drawing on the writings of art and music critics, I chart this ornament's success in visual and musical spheres, giving particular attention to its increasing expressive status as

well as its ability to carry musical qualities into the visual field—as reflected in the work of Édouard Vuillard and Henri Matisse—and visual traits into the musical—as conveyed in music by Debussy. A chief goal of this chapter is to introduce the notion of arabesque in music and explain why Debussy conceived of this ornament as a type of melody characterized by short, irregular rhythms and ambiguous, shifting meters. The broad definition outlined here is one that subsequent chapters will refine in their investigation of how melodic arabesques come to shape musical contexts.

Having established the arabesque as one of several markers of the decorative in music, chapter 3 expands the scope of our discussion by highlighting the sheer variety of decorative languages that coalesced to define French piano music at this time. My examination of Gabriel Fauré's third *Barcarolle*, Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau," and Ravel's "Noctuelles" and "Ondine" traces a narrative that follows a gradual erosion of the structural frame by an abundance of ornament. I consider how the empowerment of decorative gestures urged some critics to attack the excessive quantity of musical decoration as obscuring aspects of musical form, and others to embrace musical allusions to visual techniques in relation to which these works were heard to redefine the notion of virtuosity. This chapter highlights the willingness of composers to advance a style of modern, French pianism where decoration is often inseparable from melody, and ornament indistinguishable from structure.

The alignment of pianistic decoration with themes of nature and femininity indicates the expressive capacity of ornament while leading us toward the arabesque. As explored in chapter 4, the association of this meandering motif with distinct topics is especially prominent in Ravel's composition for the Ballets Russes, *Daphnis et Chloé*. In relation to established musical models in plainchant and Russian opera, I examine Debussy's formulation of the arabesque and clarify what he meant by this term while highlighting his paradoxical perception of this ornament as absolute—in keeping with German Romantic ideals—but also referential—as guided by prevailing visual practices. Similarities between Debussy's melodic writing and that of Ravel reveal how both composers endowed the arabesque with structural importance and expressive significance. I analyze several varieties of arabesque from *Daphnis* by showing that this ornament had a precise musical identity, which depended on aspects of rhythm and meter for its characterization.

Staying with the Ballets Russes and a consideration of ornament's potential for evocation and narration, chapter 5 prolongs a study of musical decoration in the domain of ballet by considering the work of a temporary Parisian resident, the Russian émigré Igor Stravinsky. This chapter examines how Stravinsky and his collaborator, the designer Nicholas Roerich allowed notions of decoration as prehistoric to shape their vision of pagan Russia. An analysis of Roerich's techniques of ornamentation in his costumes illuminates Stravinsky's approach to melodic decoration in "Spring Rounds" the fourth movement of *Le Sacre du Printemps.* Further corroboration of the composer's interest to decorate is seen in his creation of arabesque

melodies in the Introduction, and his use of such visually inspired processes as repetition, juxtaposition, and superimposition in the second movement, "Augurs of Spring." These techniques articulate a conception of musical design that enacts the basic principles of Neo-Primitive decorative art.

The alternative mode of ornamentation that *Le Sacre* offered was timely in that it intersected with a growing interest among the postwar avant-garde to flee the veiled atmospheres and opulent flourishes of fin de siècle art and music. Chapter 6 casts doubt on the modernist rejection of decoration by arguing that ornament was transformed and not eliminated in artistic work created around World War I. While highlighting the cultural preference for a geometric style as experienced in *Le Sacre* and as seen in Cubist art, I also examine a related aesthetic shift in the realm of music where we hear uncluttered textures, simple melodies, straightforward rhythms, and unambiguous meters as characteristic of the pervasive *style dépouillé*. Contrary to prevailing definitions of this phrase, chamber pieces by Debussy and Ravel show that their notion of *dépouillement* did not involve the erasure of ornament but the reinvention of it. I interpret as an especially radical transformation Satie's emphasis on qualities of regularity and repetition in his wartime ballet, *Parade*. Together with Ravel, his techniques align musical decoration with technological process to suggest the mechanization of ornament, a topic further explored in relation to the work of Satie's colleague, Francis Picabia.

Here, I must make a few clarifications. The first takes heed of a tendency that becomes strong once we start paying attention to details; Anger warns, "one must beware of projecting the decorative everywhere."[33] It is hard not to fall under the spell of Stéphane Mallarmé's maxim: "Decoration! Everything is in that word."[34] And yet, one must remember that not every forward-looking composer living and working in Paris during those years was committed to musical experiments with ornament, whether esteemed figures such as Saint-Saëns and Vincent d'Indy, or the younger but no less inventive Jean Roger-Ducasse and Déodat de Séverac. This is not to imply that these composers were unaware of the expressive capabilities of ornament; the Interlude from Part 1 of *Au Jardin de Marguerite* (1901–5) by Roger-Ducasse juxtaposes and superimposes irregularly grouped short values to evoke a decorative effect, although the metric nature of his music, and clear development of motifs and melodies to create a sense of formal cohesion, ultimately subjugates ornament to meter, form, and harmony. While Saint-Saëns cultivated a similar approach in such works as *La Princesse Jaune* (1872) and the *Suite algérienne* (1880), the composer's conservative stance is especially noticeable in his critical prose. At a time when the fervor for decoration was at its height, Saint-Saëns wrote an article on Charles Gounod in 1897 that revealed his admiration for restraint in the ap-

33. See Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art*, 198.

34. Mallarmé made this statement in an article on Parisian fashion written in 1874 for *La Dernière Mode*. See Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Mallarmé in Prose* (New York: New Directions, 2001), 80.

plication of ornament: "The search for expressiveness was always his [Gounod's] objective: that is why there are so few notes in his music, which is free of any parasitical arabesques and of any ornament to tickle the ear; every note of it sings."[35] Although Saint-Saëns's equation of expressiveness with an explicit lack of ornament might have been considered démodé or outdated within certain avant-garde circles, his opinions nevertheless indicate the multiple ways in which ornament was theorized and practiced in Paris at this time.

An additional clarification concerns the challenges that confront a project such as this given the relative scarcity of evidence pertaining to composers' statements on ornament. To my knowledge, Ravel made little use of the term arabesque. He drew on it to describe the opening motif of his piano piece, "Oiseaux Tristes" (*Miroirs*).[36] Ravel also mentioned his drawing of arabesques on the title page of his manuscript for *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in a letter.[37] Stravinsky sprinkled a few remarks on musical decoration in his *Sketches* for *Le Sacre*, while Fauré and Satie were reticent on the subject. Although these composers might not have wanted to engage in a discussion of the decorative as it pertained to their work, their critics thought otherwise. Stravinsky aside, each of these French composers had their music aligned with diverse traditions of decorative painting: critics frequently compared Debussy's music with the Impressionist canvases of J. A. McNeill Whistler and Claude Monet; some of Fauré's pieces reminded his listeners of eighteenth-century decorative landscapes by Antoine Watteau; and Satie's emphasis on clearly defined melodies and textural clarity was heard to parallel Cubist principles. Less well known, but equally important, is the pervasive association of Ravel's musical style with the work of Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard. In this regard, Jean Cocteau's assessment of the composer is particularly perceptive: "Ravel has, so to speak, refined the art of the great Impressionist masters of music, just as Vuillard and Bonnard, to whom he is related, have complicated, simplified, solidified the style of the great Impressionists of whom Monet remains the emblem."[38]

From this group of musicians, Debussy emerges as the most vocal, and it is for this reason that I treat him as a spokesperson for musical ornament even though his comments appear somewhat sparse when compared with the relatively copious re-

35. Camille Saint-Saëns, *On Music and Musicians*, trans. Roger Nichols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 121.

36. See Émile Vuillermoz, "L'œuvre de Maurice Ravel," *Maurice Ravel par quelques-uns de ses familiers* (Paris: Editions du Tambourinaire, 1939), 34. Ravel's piano student Vlado Perlemuter also recalled his teacher's attention to "the arabesque of the sad bird" at the opening of "Oiseaux Tristes" in Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel According to Ravel*, trans. Frances Tanner (London: Kahn and Averill, 2005), 21.

37. See Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 204.

38. Jean Cocteau, "Ravel et nous," *La Revue Musicale* (December 1938): 204: "Ravel a, pour ainsi dire, raffiné l'art des grands maîtres impressionnistes de la musique, de même que Vuillard et Bonnard, auxquels il s'apparente, ont compliqué, simplifié, affermi le style des grands impressionnistes dont Monet demeure l'emblème."

marks of contemporary painters such as Maurice Denis or even Matisse. More importantly, the danger of giving prominence to Debussy implies the inadvertent placement of other composers, particularly Ravel, in his shadow, something that Cocteau was at pains to avoid given his emphasis on Ravel's *refinement* of Impressionist music. Since it is quality rather than quantity that is at stake, Debussy's self-proclaimed adoration for the arabesque, coupled with his alleged "hatred of superfluous development, or useless ornament," gains critical weight when considered in proximity to Fauré's belief that "in piano music one cannot use padding," and Ravel's conviction that "the work of art appears only on mature conception where no detail has been left to chance."[39] Although ornament may have secured a lavish appearance in the music of these composers, it rarely succumbed to the level of profligate luxury.

We might speculate on several reasons as to why these composers refrained from theorizing their use of ornament. Perhaps their collective reserve might have had something to do with the introverted personalities of Fauré, Ravel, and Satie, who preferred to stay out of the limelight and tended to mull over their compositional difficulties in private letters to trusted individuals rather than in widely published articles and critical reviews; it was inevitable, nonetheless, for aspects of their aesthetic viewpoints to have been revealed in the latter. An equally plausible explanation might be that these composers did not possess an adequate language and vocabulary for describing their decorative work at the moment that they were involved in its creation. To musicians, such terms as decoration, ornament, or embellishment are inextricably tied to the stylized extemporizations of earlier centuries. As a result, these concepts may have proved inadequate to the task of capturing the unique flavor of their own, twentieth-century renditions. This may be why Debussy and several critics of music resorted to using metaphors or concepts related to painting, a tendency that might have appealed especially to composers given their efforts to translate a primarily visual set of techniques into the aural domain.

The belief that musical works should speak for themselves—or through the critical language of their audiences—might not have been to the advantage of these musicians. Even as this position undoubtedly maintains late-Romantic notions of music as an unobtainable ideal to which the nontemporal arts should aspire, it inevitably limits our understanding of how composers wanted us to hear their music. Musicians rarely took an initiative equivalent to that of the *Jugendstil* architect August Endell and the painter Paul Signac who wanted to teach spectators how to see art by drawing their attention to matters of perception; or Edgar Degas and Fernand Khnopff who literally showed the public what they might have looked like when

39. See Roger Nichols, *Debussy Remembered* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 31; Marguerite Long, *At the Piano with Fauré*, trans. Olive Senior-Ellis (London: Kahn and Averill, 1996), 75; and Maurice Ravel, "Contemporary Music," in *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, ed. Arbie Orenstein (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2003), 46.

absorbed in the act of listening (thereby providing a model for emulation).[40] If Gauguin could speak of the "listening eye" why didn't musicians—for all their love and simulation of art—make mention of the "watchful ear"?[41] The closest we might get to historical commentary that instructs listeners on how to hear music is a cryptic remark made by Georges Jean-Aubry imploring audiences to listen "to music a little more with the ears, with sensitivity, not sentimentality, but with intellectual sensuousness."[42] A shade less mysterious is Cocteau's quip in *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* (1918). Here, his description of Debussy's blurred rhythms as creating "a kind of vague mood suitable for short-sighted ears" successfully opposes Debussy's hazy soundscapes from Satie's crystal clear textures through the use of a rather striking mixed metaphor.[43] Looking farther afield, it seems that the topic of listening is latent in primary reviews that speak to the initial bewildering effect of decorative pieces on audiences.[44] Still, hearing music appeared to be taken for granted in a way that viewing art was not, and it is ultimately toward this inequality that I direct my focus when examining musical details and considering the extent to which they defined experiences of musical time and form. Where the words of composers fail, their music succeeds.

40. On Endell see David Morgan, "The Idea of Abstraction in German Theories of the Ornament from Kant to Kandinsky," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 50/3 (Summer 1992): 231–42. Also see Paul Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au Néo-Impressionnisme* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Blanche, 1899). Leonard examines depictions of listening in the work of Degas, Khnopff, and others in "Picturing Listening."

41. Paul Gauguin, *The Writings of a Savage*, ed. Daniel Guérin, trans. Eleanor Levieux (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 144.

42. Georges Jean-Aubry, *French Music of Today*, trans. Edwin Evans (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1919), 34. This phrase is equally mystifying in its original French: "écoutait un peu plus la musique avec les oreilles, la sensibilité (non pas la sentimentalité), mais avec la sensualité intellectuelle." See "La Musique de Clavier Actuelle," in *La Musique française d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Perrin, 1916), 38.

43. Jean Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'Arlequin: Notes Autour de la Musique* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2009), 59: "De nouveau, la pédale fond le rythme, crée une sorte de climat flou, propice aux oreilles myopes."

44. Mathis Lussy's *Le Rythme Musical* (1911) is one of the few treatises to examine the psychological experience of rhythm and meter at that time. However, Lussy's argument is tied to music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in such a way that his observations do not yield much with respect to contemporaneous French repertoire.

CHAPTER ONE

ORNAMENT AND EXPRESSION IN MUSIC AND THE VISUAL ARTS

"The principle of 'ornament' . . . is the foundation of all kinds of art," claimed the French composer Claude Debussy in a concert review from 1901.[1] Like much of his critical output, Debussy's review is witty, facetious, insightful, and far from straightforward. Even as he brings our attention to the variety of music performed at this event—including works by J. S. Bach, Saint-Saëns, Schubert, and Wagner—he does so through an unusually strong emphasis on the notion of ornament. Several questions arise: How seriously should we take Debussy's belief with respect to the universality of ornament given that he makes no effort to explain what ornament is, only what it is not: "The word 'ornament' here has nothing to do with the definitions assigned to it in musical treatises"? And why does his preoccupation with the decorative figure of the arabesque ultimately cast his review in the form of a nostalgic lament for the music of a lost era: "I must add that this ornamental conception has now completely disappeared: we have succeeded in domesticating music—at last!"?[2]

This chapter explores how it is possible for a phenomenon as ubiquitous as ornament to be implicated in a range of discussions about music and the visual arts at the turn of the century, and often in ways that are highly contradictory. For example, even as Debussy perceives ornament as foundational with regard to "all kinds of art," it is intriguing that he thinks of decoration as being "natural" at the same time that it is "artificial," and abstract, even as it "fills [the audience's] imaginations with images." Despite the preponderance of ornament, as Debussy sees it, he reveals a characteristic snobbishness in his association of Bach's ornamental style with "a nobility . . . it forces its listeners to respect if not adore." Where the presence of ornament elevates the stature of Bach's compositions, its relative absence in

1. Claude Debussy, "Musique: Vendredi Saint," *La Revue Blanche*, (1 May 1901): 67: "ce principe de 'l'ornement' qui est la base de tous les modes d'art."

2. Ibid., 67: "(Le mot 'ornement' n'a rien à voir ici avec la signification qu'on lui donne dans les grammaires musicales)"; 68: "Je dois ajouter que cette conception ornementale a complètement disparu; on a réussi à domestiquer la musique. . . . Enfin!"