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Memory in Music Analysis: Referential Appeals to Proustian Memory in Dutilleux's *Ainsi la nuit*

ABSTRACT

In conversation with Roger Nichols, Henri Dutilleux described the method of composition that produced his lone string quartet, *Ainsi la nuit:* 'There are small cells which develop bit by bit. This may perhaps show the influence of literature, of Proust and his notions about memory' (Nichols 1994, 89). While Delcambre-Monpoël, Hesketh, Chendler, and others have analyzed the piece rather traditionally, focusing on thematic and motivic details of primarily the quartet's main movements, none has sufficiently examined the compositional fallout of the influence of Proustian memory. Proust's conception of memory consists of both an unconscious and a conscious faculty, *involuntary* and *voluntary* memory, respectively. In order to appeal to these two forms of memory, this analysis will examine the deployment of *implicit* and *explicit* references in *Ainsi la nuit.* Implicit references, which interact with involuntary memory, will be shown to occur 1) as the reiteration of pitch-domain motives that are altered in secondary domains such as timbre, register, or presentation in time and 2) as manipulations of certain inherent properties of some pitch-domain element in order to generate novel pitch motives. Explicit references, which are consciously apprehended by voluntary memory, will present as exact or readily identifiable repetitions that establish referential chords, certain salient motives, regularities of rhythm, and other features that the listener can immediately access upon first impression. I will show that these critical projected references are generated in the Introduction and *Parenthèses* sections, rather than the main movements.

INTRODUCTION[†]

The formal organization of Dutilleux's string quartet, *Ainsi la nuit,* is distinctive. The notes that accompany its original publication describe its structure as 'divided into seven sections linked for the most part by *parentheses*, often very short but important because of the organic role which falls upon them.' Along with the Introduction, the *Parenthèses* frame the main sections; they inhabit a separate but parallel musical realm and while they are too short to emphatically present their own thematic ideas, they provide indispensable connections for the piece as a whole. To boot, the main sections originally constituted a set of six separate *études* rather than a single continuous work, and they express distinct scale systems and timbral techniques, features that produce that which Delcambre-Monpoël (2001, 21) deems 'personnages,' or personas. Yet, the formal

character of the *Parenthèses* — putatively serving a *connective function* between thematically diverse main sections — remains particularly unclear; combined, they account for about two minutes of the Juilliard String Quartet's roughly eighteen-minute recording from 2009, and they are dispersed asymmetrically across the piece.

In this paper, I will attempt to characterize some ways in which these intervening sections engage with musical memory to act as connective insertions between the main thematic movements, giving *Ainsi la nuit* a sense of internal logic and coherence.[1] In distinct but related ways, each of the subsequent *Parenthèses* interacts with certain features of the Introduction to construct novel pitch material. Accordingly, in order to begin to understand the organizational processes involved in the piece, Dutilleux's remarks on the subjects of variation and musical memory will provide a useful precursor to an analysis of elements of the Introduction that are ultimately manipulated in the *Parenthèses*.

PART I. EMPLOYING DUTILLEUX'S THOUGHTS ON VARIATION AND MUSICAL MEMORY.

The process of enacting the unexplored and unexplained in a composer's commentary is by no means new to music analysis. Jack Boss's well-known approach in his 1992 analysis of Schoenberg's song 'Seraphita' constitutes a preeminent model. Boss first attempts to interpret the composer's own analytical thoughts in light of more modern theoretical parlance. Schoenberg's 1932 radio talk on the song is detailed both analytically — with special attention to motivic variation in the piece itself — and theoretically — Schoenberg 'demonstrates three variation kinds with respect to the atonal motive's melodic feature' (Boss 1992, 132). Boss's guided criticism of the analysis ultimately parses a definition of motive, exposes the analytical primacy that Schoenberg ascribes to the ordered pitch interval, and clarifies a set of variation types employed in the piece. All this while supplying his own rigorous analytical observations both within the criticism and in the more detailed analysis to follow. In the course of a skillful critical analysis, Boss provides the music-theoretical community with an exemplar of analysis mediated and inspired by the words of the composer.

[†] An earlier version of this paper was given at the 46th annual meeting of the Music Theory Society of New York State in Geneva, NY, under the title 'The Connective Role of the *Parenthèses* in Dutilleux's *Ainsi la Nuit*' (2017). I owe much gratitude to the following people: Henry Klumpenhouwer, for his guidance throughout the analytical process; friends and colleagues at the Eastman School of Music who absorbed and critiqued various iterations of this talk; and Kenneth Fuchs, for first introducing me to the music of Henri Dutilleux several years ago.

[1] Indeed, Dutilleux expressed a compositional emphasis on producing coherent musical structures: 'For myself, in all humility I will say that one of the principal aims in writing music is to search for a certain coherence, an equilibrium that does not deny fantasy, a kind of pleasure which could also be that of game-playing, of a taste for risks, which is also very important' (Glayman 2003, 103).

While thorough composer commentary on a specific opus can supply a wealth of data from which a theory-driven analysis may be crafted, Dutilleux provides no such concrete analytical reflection on his quartet. Rather, we are left to interpret Dutilleux's compositional *philosophy*, which he lays bare in multiple interviews that touch on *Ainsi la nuit*, namely with Claude Glayman and Roger Nichols. Here, we will concentrate on Dutilleux's approach to musical development. In conversation with Roger Nichols, Dutilleux waxes poietic in describing the method of composition — termed *croissance progressive* — that produced many of his works: 'there are small cells which develop bit by bit' (Nichols 1994, 89). His variation technique in particular calls to mind that of Schoenberg: 'variation must allow the *unvaried*, the *repeated*, to be *recognized in the varied*' (Heneghan 2016) — Dutilleux roots his own model of variation in perception as well, and moreover he accounts for the aurally *un*-recognizable:

> The phenomenon of memory attaches itself to [a] scrap of the formula or to what is left of it after its subtle metamorphoses. This is how I personally conceive of the idea of variation and it's something I have always worked on in my more recent scores…but to be able to see that one element refers to a particular other one requires deep analysis, which is what gives the language its strength (Glayman 2003, 52).

Dutilleux further argues that repetition and variation are not always immediately apparent, but should aim to embody some aspect of the original musical formula that motivates subsequent iterations. Such connections draw disparate sections of *Ainsi la nuit* together, particularly in the intervening *Parenthèses*:

> [Memory is] a notion applicable to most of my other music. I [am] alluding to prefigurations, variations, everything to do with this idea. You can sense it very clearly in the sections called 'Parenthèses'. These parentheses are like reservoirs of what is about to happen or what has just happened, or even of what is going to happen much later in the work. I've often described them as 'beacons,' that's to say reference points which sink gradually into the listener's unconscious and later on become crucial in their appreciation of the work (ibid., 77).

Thus, instead of specific thematic pillars that establish formal boundaries and aid the listener, a progressive development of musical cells, with varying degrees of detectability, directs musical motion and unifies the work.

Now, Dutilleux qualifies the memory motivation by specifically referring to Marcel Proust: 'This may perhaps show the influence of literature, of Proust and his notions about memory' (Nichols 1994, 89). But, how exactly does a literary model of memory interact with music analysis? To explore the link, we must first examine Proust's notion of memory. In his extensive novel, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust exhibits his model of memory as a dichotomy between active and passive recollection. Proust defines *voluntary memory* as the 'memory of the intellect' (2003, vol. I, 59).[2] *Voluntary memory* fails to capture truths about the past, instead creating abstract representations of the perception of events. It involves willful attention to certain details while other elements are expunged from recollection. For our purposes, the most important feature of voluntary memory is the active attentiveness of the subject. It is thus an active, conscious recollection in which the subject scours the reserves of the mind, thinking back to a specific experience or piece of knowledge. On the other hand, Proust's *involuntary memory* is a process by which flashes of memory burst from unconscious associations formed often in the senses. Consider the following example:
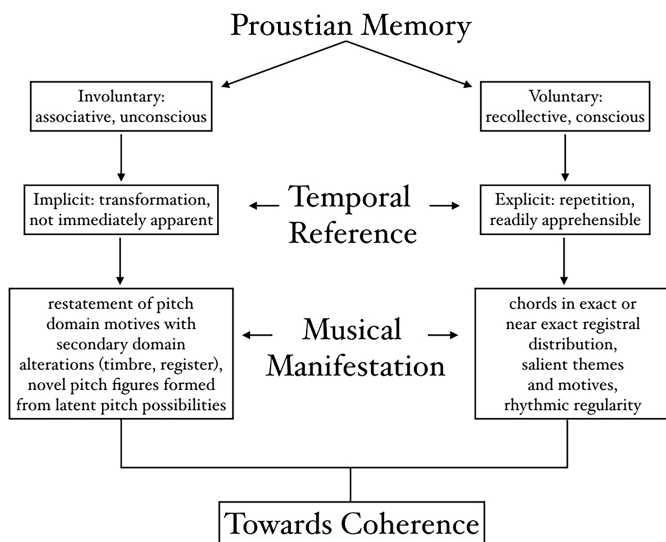
> On my way home I perceived, I suddenly recalled the impression, concealed from me until then, of which, without letting me distinguish or recognise it, the cold and almost sooty smell of the trellised pavilion had reminded me. It was that of my uncle Adolphe's little sitting-room at Combray… (ibid., vol. II, 91).

The narrator goes on to describe in remarkable detail the exact room, having been inundated with a rush of memory by the sensation of a fragrance that was powerful enough in its unconscious association to evoke the details of the memory to which he had not attended consciously. Conjured recollections of this type occur numerous times over the course of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, including, most famously, the *madeleine* episode (ibid., vol. I, 58–65). At its core, *involuntary memory* is intuitive, passive, and evocative, and, as Samuel Beckett puts it in his essay *Proust*, '[can] in its brightness [reveal] what the mock reality of experience never can and never will reveal — the real.'[3]

A complicated piece of masterly music, taking the ideas of Proust as inspiration, provides some immediately conspicuous musical trinkets that pique the interest of the conscious ear, while simultaneously expressing features that are taken in passively, purportedly conveying musical unity to the listener. To

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[2] Proust's invocation of *intellect* here, in light of Acheson's (1978) explanation of the author's boyhood fixation on Schopenhauerian philosophy, is likely a reference to the German philosopher's distinction between *Intellekt* and *Intuition*. In Schopenhauer's view, *Intellekt* is associated with the faculty of reason, capable only of manipulating abstract concepts pertaining to that which is pre-conceived, bound to Space, Time, and Causality. While it is able to construct statements of logic grounded in abstract premises, *Intellekt* has no capacity to consult the true Nature of things (Schopenhauer 2007, 215–6 and 507–8). Nattiez (1989) draws further connection to *À la recherche du temps perdu*: 'Schopenhauer makes a clear distinction between intuition and the intellect. It is through the former that we have immediate access to the essence of things. The latter constructs an idea of the world through the rational intermediate of concepts and science… We can already see what Proust owes to this general scheme. Swann, when he listens to the Sonata, constantly has the intuition that it contains a mysterious essence, but he only seeks to understand it through the medium of the rational intellect' (80).

[3] 'Strictly speaking, we can only remember what has been registered by our extreme inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which Habit does not possess the key… From this deep source Proust hoisted his world… no purpose can be served by withholding the name of the diver. Proust calls him 'involuntary memory.' The memory that is not memory, but the application of a concordance to the Old Testament of the individual, he calls 'voluntary memory.' This is the uniform memory of intelligence; and it can be relied on to reproduce for our gratified inspection those impressions of the past that were consciously and intelligently formed. It has no interest in the mysterious elements of inattention that colours our most commonplace experiences… Involuntary memory is explosive, 'an immediate, total and delicious deflagration.' It restores not merely the past object, but the Lazarus that it charmed and tortured, not merely the Lazarus and the object, but more because less, more because it abstracts the useful, the opportune, the accidental, because in its flame it has consumed Habit and all its works, and in its brightness revealed what the mock reality of experience never can and never will reveal — the real' (Beckett 1970, 18–21).

accommodate and incorporate Proust's ideas about memory, a music-analytical approach must consider the piece unfolding in time with a network of different *types* of references. A schematic of the approach taken here is provided as Example 1. The first level of the table shows the designations of voluntary and involuntary memory, which here exist as motivating factors in the distribution of allusions within the piece, in turn imposing a classification of technical musical references that call upon either form of memory. These references, generally conceived in terms of a temporal experience, I deem either *explicit* or *implicit*. Explicit references are recognizably repeated and require a certain threshold of apprehension such that they may appeal to consciousness, to voluntary memory. They present as musical manifestations of exact or readily identifiable repetitions that the listener can immediately access at first impression. Implicit references evoke a sense of relatedness without directly exposing their connectedness, making diverse aspects of a piece remain part of one unified sound by appealing to the unconscious faculty of involuntary memory. They occur in the music in two forms: first, as the restatement of pitch domain motives that are altered in secondary domains such as timbre, register, or rhythm; and second, as the manipulation of certain latent possibilities within some pitch domain element to generate novel pitch motives. This classification of references allows for features of musical structures to express either explicit or implicit connections; their role in appealing to Proustian memory is to instill the music with logical connectivity. In Part II of this paper, I intend to examine the progressive development of various motives that originate in the Introduction, in order to demonstrate the role of explicit and implicit references specifically in the *Parenthèses*.

Ex. 1. A schematic of an analytical approach to *Ainsi la nuit* that considers the influence of Proustian memory.

PART II. THE MANIPULATION OF REPRESENTATIVE CELLS FROM THE INTRODUCTION IN THE *PARENTHÈSES*

In order to study referentiality in *Ainsi la nuit*, we'll now consider a subset of the collection of cells projected from the Introduction. The first of these cells is the so-called 'pivot chord' of Example 2 that opens *Ainsi la nuit*. The chord belongs to the set type (012578). In Dutilleux's words, a pivot chord is an 'entirely obvious [musical element that] returns in a striking fashion a long time after it was heard for the first time' (Glayman 2003, 52). Not only does it often preserve register at its various points of return, but certain intervallic distributions between instruments are more or less consistent, and aspects of the rhythmic manifestation remain essentially unaltered.[4] Thus, the pivot chord functions primarily as an *explicit* emissary of recognizable material for the listener.

Ex. 2. The so-called 'pivot chord' that inaugurates *Ainsi la nuit*.

The pivot chord expresses a set of important patterns of inclusion that may be deployed for explicit restatement, or in order to produce implicit connections to fundamentally novel pitch-scale structures. Subsets of particular interest are summarized below. We can derive the pivot chord set class from two T_7-related (026) trichords. Here, the registral ordering strongly articulates this mapping under T_7. The pivot chord also contains an octatonic generator, (0167). In fact, its set class is a minimal perturbation from an octatonic hexachord, (013679). Another pivot chord subset, (0257), appears in the three higher instruments. The instrumental double-stop pairings (Violin 2 and Cello on perfect fifths; Violin 1 and Viola on major seconds) also segment into (0167) and (0257) tetrachords, respectively, with unison doublings of G and D. As Hanson (1960) points out, the (0257) tetrachord is formed by projections of the perfect fifth and thus a subset of the diatonic collection. Combining the disposition of intervals in the abstract ([012578] is richest in ic5's), the orientation in pitch space of the pivot chord (there are three perfect fifths in pitch-space, as well as two [026] trichords at T_7), and the instrumentation (there are two double-stop perfect fifths), the interval of the perfect fifth is accorded special significance at the outset. So too is the major second: there are two double-stop major seconds in the instrumental distribution, the (026) trichord is an I_{10}-combinatorial generator of the whole-tone scale, and Hanson describes 'the obvious affinity between the perfect fifth and the major second,

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[4] Perhaps most pertinent to the analysis of referentiality in *Ainsi la nuit* is the pivot chord's distribution in pitch space, which is explicitly retained in full or in part in many future instances and gives some support to Anderson's (2010) assertion that Dutilleux's fascination with 'the notion of

espace in French contemporary music' (457) blossomed around the same time as the string quartet.

since the projection of one perfect fifth upon another always produces the concomitant interval of the major second' (1960, 32). The above set-classes figure prominently throughout the work and this analysis, in large part advancing the notion that the pivot chord provokes explicit and implicit development of these very subsets.

Over the course of *Ainsi la nuit*, the pivot chord undergoes obvious explicit repetition in numerous places. Figure 1 collates several such restatements. The chord repeats twice only seconds after the initial pivot chord, rearticulated in the Introduction to further establish the aural significance of the unit; moreover, it is repurposed at near-inversion and timbrally masked to close the Introduction. Another easily distinguishable occurrence comes at the lead-in to *Litanies*, closing *Parenthèse 2*. Here, the chord is slightly altered, with octave doublings resulting in a (01267) pentachord; however, the *sforzandissimo* articulation, and the distribution of major second and perfect fifth double-stops makes this recurrence indisputably audible. The thematic content of *Litanies* subsequently depends upon this implementation of the pivot chord, as evidenced by as many as a dozen variant recurrences in the main section as well as its realization of the implicit octatonic potentialities of the original cell. Yet a third explicit recurrence of the pivot chord comes in *Parenthèse 4*; in this instance, the slightly-altered pivot chord is surely recognizable, but it now heralds the arrival of the diatonic collection, through implicit manipulation of the pivot chord's (0257) subset. And a final, exact reprise of the pivot chord shepherds the quartet to a close: in the final section, *Temps Suspendu*, the pivot chord returns in its original intervallic distribution. We note the synoptic rhetoric of the final section: initiated by explicit material from the Introduction, *Temps Suspendu* rehashes many of the scale systems and much of the thematic content of the previous main sections. While the exact repetition of the pivot chord in at least four significant moments across the quartet is emblematic of the notion of explicit reference, this germinal cell likewise expresses implicit referential power, by the subsequent development of subsets of the pivot chord to yield novel pitch collections and distinct thematic material.

Fig. 1. Explicit instantiations of the pivot chord across *Ainsi la nuit*.

From the Introduction, we now single out a second cell of interest, shown at the bottom of Figure 2. Ascending then descending, this 'arch contour' constitutes a palindromic progression of simultaneities. It is itself an instance of the referential composing-out of pivot chord elements; certain pitch details — namely the (016) subset — are implicitly reinforced, while contour and rhythm are manipulated to produce novel material. Hesketh (2010) examines the progression's octatonic implications (468–70). The progression begins with a (0167) tetrachord, followed by members of (0137), before returning symmetrically to the original (0167) at rehearsal B. Let's set apart the D4 pedal tone — it is explicitly retained across the entire progression (and in fact throughout almost the entire Introduction): ignoring this pedal D, except for the central sonority, a member of (026), the remaining sonorities are all (016) trichords. We might then choose to derive a complete sequence of (016) trichords by excising the (016) subset of the central (0137) tetrachords, for the purpose of examining the role of (016) in this progression. The network in Figure 2 provides the result, with chords labeled 1,2,3, and 4 based on their pitch content. The extracted trichords are provided along with arrows labeling transpositions and inversions. The trichordal progression from Chords 1 to 3 constitutes a T_3 followed by an I_4 yielding I_1 and interlocks with a retrograde version of that progression, from Chord 2 to 4 (I_4 with T_9, also yielding I_1). The chord progression is highly structured: an overlapping pair of such three-chord T/I-networks is deployed and then hastily stated in retrograde after converging upon Chord 4. Here, the symmetrical center of the arch, which is also the point of aggregate completion, is amplified in the score by a *crescendo* to *forte* dynamics before an instant drop to *piano* and a switch from *arco* to *pizzicato*.

Fig. 2. The arch contour from the Introduction, examined from the perspective of an extracted (016) T/I-network.

Just as the pivot chord saw numerous instantiations across the *Parenthèses*, I intend to show that there exists an intra-opus network of explicitly related arch contour structures that are reinforced in the *same* framing sections. In its first reiteration, excerpted in Figure 3 from later in the Introduction, the order of pitches in the arch contour is rotated and the sonorities are made into linear melodic statements. This written-out *accelerando* figure features the trichordal subsets of the same Chords 1 through 4 on the ascent, re-ordered such that Chord 1 comes last, before reflecting downwards in a more muddled contrapuntal manner. *Parenthèse 1* launches with a similar linear version of the arch contour, preceded by an explicit restatement of the pitches of the pivot chord, in its original registral orientation,

now as a *pizzicato* linear figure that implicitly obscures the reference. In what follows, the written-out *accelerando* involves the imbrication of the two arch figures from the Introduction, each constructed on transpositions and inversions of the (016) trichord. Starting at the sixteenth notes, the first twelve pitches are identical to the ascending portion of the arch contour progression, overlapping at the second distinct trichord with the pitches from the Introduction's written-out *accelerando*, in essence converting the abstract implicit relationship of the two trichordal progressions into an explicit statement of connectedness.
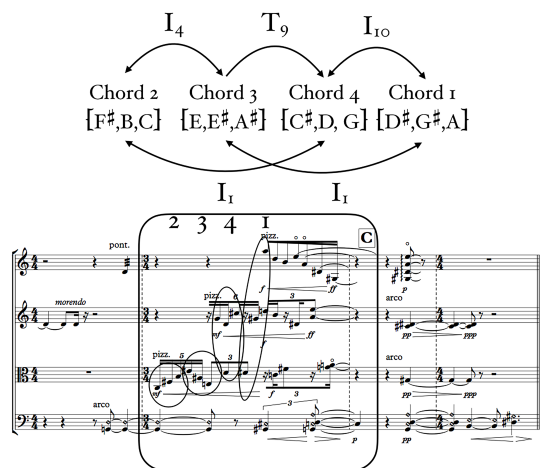

Fig. 3. The altered transformational network derived from linear statements of (016) in the written-out *accelerando* figure of the Introduction.

In the middle of *Parenthèse 2*, a newly transformed version of the arch contour arrives, displayed in the score excerpt in Figure 4. Six straight verticalities in the sextuplets each represent a (016) sonority; although the transformations that relate them are newly devised, the arch contour and palindromic construction mark the passage as explicitly related to others like it. While these sonorities occur, they produce distinct larger sets that emphasize ic's 3, 4, and 5, particularly significant in the coming *Litanies*. The instrumentally-defined sets that they combine to produce represent members of set classes (013579), (013478), and (01248). Additionally, since there are three simultaneous sextuplets, they state more than a single aggregate; in fact, in this instance the pitches that are repeated, {G,G#,A,C#,D,E}, represent an implicit reference to the pivot chord set class, specifically an I_9 of the original.

The palindromic transformational network is shown beneath the score in Figure 4. Chords are labeled H through M, based on their pitch content. A reduced version of this arch contour suggests an aspect of symmetry beyond the gestural arch: a large-scale T_8-T_5-T_8 network can be produced by abbreviating the entire sextuplet to one large arch, ascending from Chord H through I to K, and then descending to M. Also notable, as Figure 5 displays, is an almost identical ordering of the trichords that made up the (016) network in the Introduction, embedded within these sextuplets. Chords 1, 2, 3, and 4 from the Introduction correspond to Chords I, J, M, and L respectively in *Parenthèse 2*. There are a few alterations to the ordering and makeup (G# in Chord I replaces E in Chord 1, and the final two chords switch order positions), but the explicit network relationships are apparent and the pitch content is certainly indebted to the Introduction.
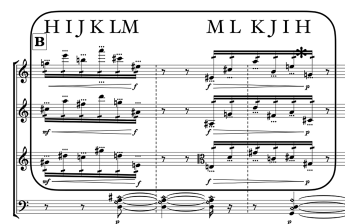

Fig. 4. The T/I-network drawn from the sextuplet figures in the middle of *Parenthèse 2*, a member of the family of arch contours projecting from the Introduction.
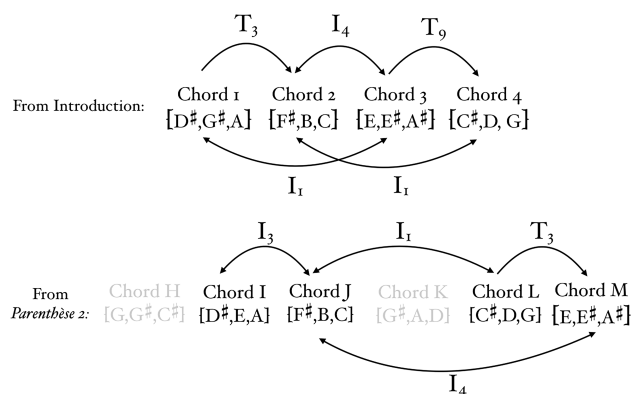

Fig. 5. (016) trichords from the Introduction embedded in the arch contour of *Parenthèse 2*.

The final *Parenthèse* recalls the network of arch contours once more at its outset (see Figure 6). A seven-chord arch contour here embeds both (016) and (026) subsets. The last two sonorities of the progression are I_{10}-related (026) trichords on account of pitch doublings, which may suggest that this version of the arch contour more forcefully proffers (026), rather than (016) as with the earlier versions. An analysis of the (026) subsets is thus provided as Figure 6. Chords are labeled N, O, P, or Q, based on their pitch content. The first half of the progression is an essentially unchanged chunk from the Introduction: the tetrachords N, O, and P map onto those of Chords 2, 3, and 4. We might imagine that the effect of such an explicit pitch reference would be perceived reminiscence, while implicit transformation yields more unconscious emphasis on (026). Up until Chord Q, the (026) interpretation holds, but this central (0167) sonority necessitates a fuzzy transformation to be incorporated into a network based on (026). The result is that a near transpo-

sition (T_{2*}) and near inversion (I_{9*}) combine to return to the initial Chord N.[5] Indeed, the palindromic nature of the progression is retained, and the oscillation between {F#, G#, C} and {A#, D, E} figures prominently at the end of the arch, where the pitch doubling has resolved the (026)/(016) confusion. This palindrome is explicitly repurposed from its presentation here as the opening of the following section, *Constellations*.

Fig. 6. The T/I-network derived from the arch contour at the beginning of *Parenthèse 4*, which asserts (026) more prominently.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted in this analysis to show one possible interpretation of the role of Proustian memory in the compositional structure of *Ainsi la nuit*. As a means of bridging the gap between large swaths of music, the connective role of the *Parenthèses* is primarily a referential one. The various pitch and gestural references I have articulated, which have here been interpreted as appeals to Proustian memory, provide links between otherwise thematically diverse main sections — binding what originally were conceived of as distinct pieces of music into a single, coherent work. In this interpretation, the references espoused by musical cells in the *Parenthèses* are dependent upon a model of memory that allows for the *recognition* of explicit repetition as well as the *intuition* of coherent connectedness in *Ainsi la nuit*. In the realm of music analysis, diverse accounts of the scope of analytical inquiry may be espoused. I hope to have projected a broad and inclusive approach to the study of a single piece, incorporating literature, perception, and technical analysis in an argument for the immanent structure of *Ainsi la nuit*. While this is by no means a catch-all theoretical method, I aim here to offer a reading of several important musical cells in the string quartet, one that simultaneously engages with compositional history, the writings of an important literary figure, and the twentieth-century music-philosophical turn toward the listener.

KEYWORDS

Post-tonal Music, Music Analysis and Interpretation, Contemporary Music, Musical Perception, Analytical Theory.

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[5] 'Near transposition' and 'fuzzy transformation' are terms drawn from Straus (2003): 'there will be instances where two sets are not related by traditional, crisp transposition but are still related by transposition to some significant degree. I will say that the relationship between such sets is *highly transposition-like*. The connections created by such fuzzy transpositions may serve to link harmonies that would be judged as incomparable by traditional, crisp atonal set theory' (318).

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