

**Assertive and Furtive Forms and Processes in Post-war Art Music Off-center:
Berio, Carter, and Others**

Joshua B. Mailman

Society for Music Theory, PostWWI Music Analysis Interest Group
Charlotte, NC, November 2013

ABSTRACT

The names Schoenberg, Babbitt, and Boulez evoke controversy over the listenability of theirs and other intricate modern music. No longer shocking, neither is it popular. Perhaps it's the nuanced differentiation in its flow, an initial opacity that dedicated listeners penetrate through repeating hearings. Yet what enables this overcoming? Have compositional strategies adapted to spur this? How does it relate to compositional intricacy? Can any of this be theorized? Might appropriate analytical approaches for this differentiate styles and style periods since WWII? How might these be addressed through appropriately tailored formalized analyses.

Using gestalt segmentation of works by Boulez, Cage, Xenakis, Ligeti, and Babbitt, Uno and Hübscher (1995) systematically show variance between weightings of duration, pitch, loudness, and vertical density to optimize the match between surface differentiation and compositional structures: weightings varying by style. Hanninen (1996, 2001, 2012) shows segmentation may be carefully optimized by sonic, contextual, and structural criteria. Yet both approaches require score analysis.

For mere listeners, perhaps the distinctive intricacy of such music merely creates novel soundworlds whose differentiation in flow can be attributed to such generic features as instrumentation, tempo, or loudness intensity. Roeder's (1995) approach goes further by proposing the climax chronology of *attribute functions* as an audible trace of differentiation in flow. Yet these attributes are merely the familiar ones (duration, pitch, loudness, and vertical density), which hardly seem particular to the distinctive intricacy of post-war repertoire. Surely there's more surface to scratch.

Considering music of two composers *not* central to debates about the relation of compositional systems to musical aesthetics and reception, Carter and Berio, I suggest a multi-tiered approach, which acknowledges various degrees of clarity vs. nuance as relevant to differentiation in flow, some tiers climbed earlier (more clear) and others later (more nuanced) through listening familiarity, and yet others determined through score reading.