laboratorio dell'immaginario
issn 1826-6118

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POSTLUDI. LO STILE TARDO

a cura di Alessandro Baldacci e Amelia Valtolina

novembre 2018

CAV - Centro Arti Visive
Università degli Studi di Bergamo

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Twentieth-Century Ideologies of "Late Style" in the Reception of Elliott Carter's Music

In music, late style is a term at once innocuous and loaded. It can be casually applied to any piece from near the end of a composer's life, or it can be the subject of book-length studies that dissect the nuances of Theodor W. Adorno's writings. Even its most seemingly anodyne use, however, often evinces a set of expectations about what late style is, how it sounds, and what it means. As the growing number of studies of late style in the twenty-first century reveals, these expectations are as numerous as they are diverse. Faced with such a profusion of meanings, some scholars deliberately avoid the expression, opting instead for seemingly neutral terminology like "final," "later," or "last." Others have critiqued the attempt to theorize late style at all, arguing that the search for universals of late style is inherently ageist or otherwise politically suspect. This tangled web of meanings is a product of the many different ideologies lurking behind the term.

The reception of the music of Elliott Carter provides an excellent opportunity to investigate twentieth-century ideologies of late style in music as they unfolded. Born in 1908, Carter continued composing until the end of his life in 2012, just shy of his 104th birthday. His exceptionally long life was accompanied by substantial speculation about if and when his late style emerged, and as he aged, his age – especially the novelty of an active composer aged 80, 90, 100, and above – increasingly became a topic in and of itself. Two trends are particularly significant.

First, Carter's reception is a revealing example of how deeply the discourses of late style in the twentieth century were tied up with

the similarly loaded discourse of modernism. Beginning around mid-century, Carter's music was regularly described as part of a postwar modernism that traced its origins via Arnold Schoenberg to late Beethoven and to certain meanings associated with late Beethoven, like the alienation of the artist from modern society. In the mid-1970s, critics increasingly began to detect changes in Carter's style and to hear in them the beginnings of his late style. By the early 1980s such pronouncements became widespread. Carter's music was widely understood to be growing less complex and more accessible, developments that seemed to threaten its modernist credentials. This provoked debates about Carter's supposed late style that were just as much debates about the fate of modernism in a world that seemed increasingly post-modern.

Second, the older Carter got, the more his age was discussed. Carter was praised for defying negative expectations of aging like physical and mental decline, reduction of productivity, and estrangement from the present day. While the cultural association of old age with mental and physical decline can be traced to antiquity, recent work on gerontology and the humanities reveals how much of Carter's reception relied on concepts of aging specific to the twentieth century. The celebration of Carter's seeming youthfulness not only ties in to cultural fear of aging, but also represents what in disability studies is referred to as an "overcoming" narrative. Disability studies, however, brings us back to ideologies of modernism. Recent work on disability studies and music has provocatively claimed that both late style and modernism can be understood as disability style(s). Carter troubles such claims. As with postwar conceptions of modernism, discussions of Carter's age emphasized characteristics that distanced his late style from disability, and thus, from a model of modernism as late style as disability style.

This article uses the reception of Elliott Carter's music to examine twentieth-century ideologies of late style. Its goal is not to determine if Carter had a late style, when it may have begun, or what its characteristics were. Nor is its goal to determine whether individual critics were right or wrong in their assessments of Carter's music, or to make any definitive statement about what late style is

or should be. It is based primarily on the journalistic reception of Carter's music as preserved in the Elliott Carter Collection at the Paul Sacher Foundation, which consists mostly of English-language (a fairly even mix of British and American) clippings, and secondarily on the scholarly discourse on Carter during his lifetime, which also tended to be English-language. Some German sources, and fewer French and Italian sources are also included.

As we can see already, lateness is an inexact referent. Is Carter's late music 'late' by virtue of his style, of his age, or of some combination of the two? How can modernism, a movement of artists of all ages, be 'late'? In his work on Richard Wagner and the late nineteenth-century discourse of lateness, Richard Barone identified several different ways of conceptualizing lateness that can help to make sense of this confusion. First, Barone distinguishes between two *types of lateness*. *Individual* or biographical lateness refers to lateness within an artist's own life. This originally meant old age, but gradually expanded to include the final works of composers who died young. *World-historical* lateness refers to lateness within a historical or cultural period. This is what is meant by expressions like "late antiquity." Second, Barone distinguishes between two different understandings of the *effects of lateness*. An *organic* understanding associates lateness with decline leading to death. Such an understanding of *individual* lateness is associated with mental and physical decline that negatively affects the quality of an artist's work and their rate of production. In a late *world-historical* period, overall cultural production is thought to decline in quality until the period eventually ends.

An *organic* understanding of *individual* lateness can be traced to antiquity, but it gained new cachet in the late eighteenth century when the art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann applied it to a *world-historical* type of lateness, and his ideas were then further developed by Hegel. In the early nineteenth century, Goethe proposed an alternative, *metaphysical* understanding of late style, based on his own experience as an octogenarian artist. Goethe argued that old-age bestowed wisdom, perspective, and serenity, enabling the artist to "step away from mere appearance," transcend the mundane, gain greater access to spiritual truth, and more authentically

express their inner subjectivity. Goethe's "'metaphysic' of late style" initially had little impact on mainstream discourse but gradually rose to dominance over in the second half of the nineteenth century (Barone 1995: 38-39).

We can see this distinction between *organic* and the *metaphysical* understandings of lateness in the changing reception of Beethoven's late style. As Kristen M. Knittel has demonstrated, this repertoire was originally dismissed as inferior to Beethoven's earlier work. This was attributed to the negative effects of Beethoven's deafness in his final years, that is, to an *organic* understanding of lateness. Richard Wagner challenged this assessment, "reposition[ing] the late music as the pinnacle of Beethoven's achievement, not by providing musical evidence of its superiority, but by redefining the impact of his physical disorder: once a hindrance, deafness was now seen as the source of Beethoven's power" (Knittel 1998: 68). In Wagner's interpretation, Beethoven's deafness shielded him from the world around him – in other words, from Goethe's "appearance" – enabling him to better hear his own "inner harmonies" and express his subjectivity (ivi: 67). Here, the foundations of a *metaphysical* understanding of lateness in Beethoven's final works entered the discourse. The twentieth-century elevation of late Beethoven is a productive point to jump into the reception of Carter, for it is through the frequent comparison of Carter's string quartets to the late Beethoven quartets that we most clearly see how ideologies of late style and of modernism-*qua*-late style entered the reception of his music.

Carter the ideologies of modernism-*qua*-late style

Carter is frequently referred to as a "late bloomer" (Hofstadter 2008). Despite an interest in modern music dating back to his teenage years in the 1920s, he composed little in high school and college. He only began studying composition after college, first as a graduate student at Harvard and then in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. After returning to the United States in 1935, Carter spent over a decade composing in the Populist style that was widespread at the time. In the late 1940s, Carter composed a series of pieces that moved away from this style, involving greater atonality and uneven

rhythm and meter. These pieces, from the *Cello Sonata* (1948) to the *First String Quartet* (1951), were quickly recognized as the beginning of a new, "mature" phase in Carter's style.[1] Relative to the way most composers' careers are periodized, these pronouncements place Carter's mature style quite late in life. He was 42 years old when he finished the *First String Quartet*. For comparison, Beethoven's mature period is considered to have begun when he was 32, and his late period when he was 43.

Two trends in the reception of Carter's mature style are relevant here. First, it was understood as when Carter began to compose authentically, no longer compromising his artistic vision based on perceived preferences of audiences and performers. Second, it was described as a shift away from the neoclassicism of his earlier music and towards a kind of modernism that blended Schoenbergian Expressionism with American ultra-modernist influences like Ives, Varèse, and Cowell.[2] Especially after the Second String Quartet (1959), he was increasingly linked to the postwar modernism associated with the Darmstadt Summer Courses, post-serialism, and composers like Pierre Boulez. Carter did not attend the Darmstadt courses and was not a serialist, but his music was understood to be similar enough in method and meaning to be part of the same broader modernist movement. (For the purposes of this essay, when I refer to modernism I am referring to this movement).[3]

Carter's association with modernism forms the basis of the debates surrounding his late style. Both of the elements above – authentic subjective expression and certain qualities of Schoenberg's Expressionism like dissonance and inaccessibility – are key components in the dominant narrative of postwar modernism that traces its origins from Schoenberg's Expressionism backwards in history to Beethoven's late style. The writings of Adorno are a well-known source of this narrative, but Adorno's ideas built on existing ideas

1 Influential periodizations include Goldman (1957), Moe (1982), and Schiff (1983).

2 In interviews and writings about his music, Carter encouraged this interpretation. See, for example, Holliger 1991: 8.

3 For a concise overview of this stream of modernism, see Born 1995: 47-56.

about Beethoven's late style, late style more generally, and early twentieth-century modernism. Adorno's interpretation was unique, but maintained certain key elements of mainstream discourse about late style and modernism across the arts, which likely facilitated the wide diffusion of his ideas in music discourse.

The development of the twentieth-century discourse of lateness in the work of writers like Georg Simmel, Havelock Ellis, Erich Neumann, and A. E. Brinkmann has been explored by Gordon McMullan (2007: especially 32-36 and 273-77) and Sam Smiles (2016: 19-28). Building on Goethe's ideas about the effects of lateness, these authors further developed a *metaphysical* understanding of lateness. Subjective expression was a key link to emerging understandings of modernism, especially Expressionism, and the construction of modernism as a kind of late style. This assessment relied on a blending of two *kinds of lateness*. For while late style was usually deployed to describe *individual* artists, modernism-*qua*-late style depended on an understanding of the present day as a late *world-historical* period. Artists who were attuned to the *Zeitgeist* could be said to have the necessary sense of *cultural* decline. Early twentieth-century modernism could thus be understood as a kind of *world-historical* late style. Indeed, many of its forms were either intended or understood to express cultural and societal decay, perhaps most explicitly in the movement known as *decadence*. In mid-century, several writers articulated theories equating modernism with late style via features like subjective expression and abstraction, including Hermann Broch (Broch 1947; see also McMullan 2007: 32-36) and Adorno.

In music discourse, the most influential articulation of modernism-*qua*-late style was in the writings of Adorno, and therefore this article will focus on Adorno's work as an exemplar of broader ideas about the relationship of late style and modernism. Adorno's ideas about late style in music are presented primarily in his writings on Beethoven, the most influential being "Late Style in Beethoven" ("Spätstil Beethovens") of 1937 and "Alienated Masterpiece: The *Missa Solemnis*" ("Verfremdetes Hauptwerk. Zur *Missa Solemnis*") of 1959. Adorno's analysis of Beethoven's late style hinges on a tension between the artist's subjectivity that they seek to express and

the objective musical materials that are their means of expression. Adorno argues that Beethoven achieved a unity of these two elements in his middle period. This unity expresses an optimistic worldview in which the bourgeois individual (the artist) and bourgeois society (the musical materials) are fully compatible. In Beethoven's late style, this unity breaks down. Bourgeois society has become oppressive and no longer compatible with the freedom of the bourgeois individual. This alienation of the individual from society results in the fracturing of the individual's subjectivity and is expressed musically in the ways that the tension between subjective expression and objective musical materials are made apparent. This includes features like long and unexpected pauses that disrupt the flow of the music, and the ways conventions are either broken down, as in the use of shocking dissonances, or are exaggerated to such an extreme that they are revealed to be artificial, as in obsessive repetition of the most basic tonal progression: Dominant to Tonic.

In between his two major articles on Beethoven's late style, Adorno published the book *Philosophy of New Music* (*Philosophie der neuen Musik*) in 1949. In it, Adorno divides musical modernism into two camps: good Schoenbergian Expressionism and bad Stravinskian neoclassicism. Adorno's analysis of Schoenbergian modernism is based on his analysis of Beethoven's late style (Adorno 1958: 114-15 and 94 n29; see also Subotnik 1976: 245; Williams A. 1997: 22). Schoenberg's modernism picks up late Beethoven's expression of the alienation of the bourgeois individual from society in the ways the music lays bare the irreconcilability of subjective expression and objective musical materials. For Schoenberg, however, the specific methods of Beethoven are no longer sufficient. Most notably, Schoenberg advances Beethoven's use of dissonance to the point of atonality (Adorno 1958: 40-41). The result of this alienation is a modernist idiom that is deliberately difficult to understand, eschews popular appeal, and challenges traditional methods for organizing musical materials.

Adorno's ideas about modernism became incredibly influential in postwar modernism through the Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music (Paddison 1993: 265; Danuser 2011: 209).

Adorno lectured at Darmstadt in the late 1940s and 1950s, and his *Philosophy of New Music* was widely read by Darmstadt students and those interested in their music.[4] Adorno's ideas were indirectly, but more broadly circulated in Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus*, published in German in 1947 and in English in 1948. As Adorno's ideas dispersed in the discourse, some of their nuance was lost, but the main points endured. Already by the mid-1950s, Adorno had become jaded with integral serialism, but his later ambivalent writings did little to dispel the influence of his earlier lectures, the *Philosophy of New Music*, or *Doktor Faustus*.

Carter's mid-century stylistic shift happened roughly concurrently with the development of postwar modernism around the Darmstadt summer courses. As critics became more familiar with Carter's new style and with the modernism coming out of Darmstadt, they detected certain similarities between them, defined by those qualities of modernism-*qua*-late style like difficulty, eschewal of popular appeal, and the dissolution of traditional ways of organizing musical materials (for Schoenberg, pitch and harmony; for Carter, rhythm and meter). This trend accelerated in the late 1950s as Carter became more systematic in his treatment of pitch and intervals and his technique of "metric modulation" and as post-serialism developed freer and more complicated manipulations of its material.[5] It reached a peak in the reception of Carter's Third String Quartet (1971 These comparisons are especially noteworthy because the Third Quartet was also frequently compared to Beethoven's late quartets, underscoring the connection between Beethoven's late style and postwar modernism.

In a review for the *New York Times*, Harold Schonberg compared Carter's Third Quartet to late Beethoven, citing its "difficulty for its own sake" and its "uncompromising ruggedness and deliberate unloveliness." Statements like "Carter is very much his own man" highlight Carter's authentic subjective expression. Schonberg suggested

4 Adorno was not the only influential figure at Darmstadt advancing this opinion. On this broader context, see Borio and Danuser 1997: 163.

5 For a concise introduction to many of Carter's compositional techniques, see Melis (1994).

that "Carter has taken the Beethoven approach," by which he meant that Carter was writing for a future audience;[6] in their time, the late Beethoven quartets were "too difficult […] but today everybody plays the late Beethoven quartets." (Schonberg 1973) Schonberg's sentiments were echoed by other critics. Hugo Cole's review for the *Guardian* also focused on the quartet's authentic subjectivity, placing Carter's works in a tradition "since the time of Beethoven's last work," in which "the string quartet has been a medium through which composers have expressed their most intimate and subtle thoughts" (Cole, 1973).

Desmond Shaw-Taylor's review of the Third Quartet for the *London Times* exemplified how tropes from the prevailing discourse of modernism-*qua*-late style also permeated Carter's reception even when Carter was not explicitly linked to late Beethoven. In addition to describing the quartet as "difficult and taxing," "complex," and "particularly tough in its opening and closing pages," Shaw-Taylor explained Carter's technique as the disassembly of "traditional notions of group unity," furthering the breaking down of traditional organizing principles of music (Shawe-Taylor 1975).

These sorts of associations continued to appear in Carter's reception throughout his life, even after some critics in the late 1970s began debating whether Carter was moving in a different direction. In a 1977 *New York Times* article, John Rockwell described Carter's music since the late 1940s as "inwardly concerned." In addition to subjectivity, he also highlighted its difficulty and future orientation:

> Mr. Carter's mature music […] is not the sort of thing that is ever likely to please the symphony subscriber, at least as that beast is currently defined. In fact, it will be most interesting to see how the years treat Mr. Carter's reputation. Perhaps the difficulties of his music will recede into familiarity. Perhaps it will always remain a delight for the connoisseur (Rockwell 1977).

Complexity and breakdown of traditional organizing principles, es-

6 The idea that Carter was composing for a future audience was supported by some of Carter's statements in interviews. See, for example Edwards and Carter 1971: 36.

pecially rhythm and meter, also remained recurring critical tropes, as in Howard Reich's 1981 review of *Night Fantasies* (1980) in the *Chicago Tribune* (Reich 1981: 8). In a 100th birthday tribute, Leon Botstein highlighted Carter's lifelong connection to expressionism and modernism-*qua*-late style: "Throughout all these years Carter appears to have sustained the modernist project that came into being in his youth" (Botstein 2008: 153).

Likely because of the *mythos* surrounding them, the late Beethoven quartets returned especially prominently in the reception of Carter's Fourth String Quartet (1986). In a 1987 review, David Murray approvingly cited an un-named concert attendee on the work's difficulty: "This is really 'late-Beethoven' Carter, with rewards to be fathomed over many more hearings" (Murray, n.d.). In the first of two reviews of different performances for the *New Yorker*, Andrew Porter highlighted the quartet's use of elements Adorno famously dwelt on in Beethoven's late quartets: "rests, pauses, breaks, silences" (Porter 1986: 116). In the second performance, the Carter quartet was paired with Beethoven Op. 130, inviting direct comparisons: "Opus 130 proved to be a well-chosen companion piece. One tended to listen to it in light still lingering from the Carter quartet – to hear polyrhythms, independence of characterization in the four instruments, abruptness that did not conceal continuity of discourse, transfigurations of metrical time" (Porter 1987).

Carter's late style and the anxieties of late modernism

Beginning in the mid-1970s, some critics began to detect changes in Carter's style that seemed to represent a development away from modernism-*qua*-late style. As Carter aged (he turned 70 in 1978), it became increasingly common to assume that these changes represented the emergence of his late style. Carter's music, however, seemed to be developing in the opposite direction than late style was supposed to go: Rather than becoming even more fractured, alienated, and difficult – that is, becoming even more modernist – it was becoming less difficult and more accessible. The anxieties this provoked took different forms in journalism and scholarship. Reviews in journalistic sources generally sought to protect Carter's status as a modernist by first discussing what made the new work or works more accessible and then downplaying or relativizing these elements. In academic sources, however, a substantial debate developed about modernism and postmodernism in Carter's late style.

These debates were outgrowths of broader conversations about the state of modernism. The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed a flurry of intellectual debate over the ascendance (or not) of postmodernism, and music critics confronted parallel shifts in music. Alternatives to modernism like minimalism and neo-Romanticism continued to gain audience, critical, and institutional support, and many of the leading figures of postwar musical modernism were slowing their pace of composition, retiring, or dying (see Danuser 2011: 203; Griffiths 1995a: 59). For some, Carter's longevity and increasing rate of production made him the last bastion of modernist composition, so suggestions he was becoming less modernist were especially anxiety provoking.

The potential stakes in this debate were legion. In the teleological narrative of modernism-*qua*-late style, any reduction of modernist qualities is a regression. As Edward W. Said notes on Adorno and lateness, "lateness includes the idea that one cannot really go beyond lateness." One can go deeper into lateness or one can regress backwards out of it (Said 2002: 200). According to Adorno, true art unflinchingly expressed truths about society, and modernism's qualities like difficulty and fragmentation were essential to its status as art. Accessibility risked commodification by the culture industry and complicity in a flawed social system.

Other political interpretations were also possible. In the 1950s, modernism became a privileged representative art form of the Western bloc in the Cold War. Modernism was thought to demonstrate the freedom of the West: artistic freedom (as opposed to the censorship in the Eastern bloc), as well as the supposed freedom of the art itself from ideological content (as opposed to the supposed subordination of all art in the Eastern bloc to propagandistic purposes). In the latter case, modernist music was understood to be only about the rational, quasi-scientific development of musical materials (Shr-

effler 2005). A regression from modernism-*qua*-late style thus could also be understood as a waning commitment to principles like freedom and to the social order that upheld them.

Broader concerns about postmodernism were likely at play as well. Modernism was tied to scientistic discourses that emphasized the possibility of scientifically verifiable, objective "truth." Postmodernism, on the other hand, was often portrayed as relativizing "truth" based on the perspective of the individual. A defense of musical modernism may have been, in part, a defense of the idea of "truth" as universal and objective. On a more sinister note, modernism was also deeply tied to established power holders in Western society. It was, overwhelmingly, a movement of heterosexual, white, cis-gendered men (like Carter). Among its other interventions, postmodernism called for the political empowerment of those modernism left out, like women, people of color, and queer and trans folks. (Disability is an interesting case we will return to below.) Although never explicitly stated in Carter's reception, anxieties about the end of modernism may also have involved anxieties about changing power dynamics in society.

Journalistic critics frequently expressed these anxieties in reviews that first discuss Carter's greater accessibility and then reassure readers that this in no way negates his modernism. An early example is Bayan Northcott's 1976 review of *A Mirror on Which to Dwell* (1975). Like many later critics, Northcott assumes that accessibility will be understood as Carter "compromising" his modernist aesthetic, and so he shields Carter from such accusations by comparing this new, 'late' style to two canonic modernist composers:

> [Carter] seems to have compromised still further, risking accessible, even 'obvious' musical imagery'. […] I say 'risking' because, as with the late 'tonal' music of Schoenberg and the last works of Bartok, Carter's new approachability here could easily be misinterpreted as a softening up instead of what it surely is: not only a recension of qualities temporarily neglected, perhaps, during an earlier period of growth, but also an attempt to provide the listener with an intermediate musical stepping stone to that earlier period's more arduous achievements (Northcott 1976).

Such rhetorical strategies continued throughout Carter's life. In 2008, Anthony Tommasini applied them to describe Carter's development over the previous 20 years:

> Though Mr. Carter's challenging modernist works have also divided audiences over the years, *Interventions* [2007] […] exemplifies a shift that has taken place in Mr. Carter's music during the last two decades or so. His formidably complex compositions from the 1960s and '70s took an almost defiant delight in building up multiple layers of simultaneous, boldly contrasting materials. But starting in the late 1980s – perhaps because he had mellowed, more likely because he had found a way to distill his musical thinking into its essence (Tommasini 2008).

Here, Tommasini reassures readers that what might seem like a lessening of Carter's modernism is, in fact, an intensification and refinement of it.

Refinement, which might also be called clarity, was one of two related and frequently cited features of Carter's supposed new accessibility. John von Rhein, for example, described Carter's *Adagio tenebroso* (1994) as "one of Carter's most directly appealing late scores," and, as performed by the Chicago Symphony, "a model of clarity and purposefulness." (von Rhein 1996) Clarity usually meant a reduced texture. In a discussion of Carter's Oboe Concerto (1988) and *Penthode* for orchestra (1985), Misha Donat generalized: "[Carter's] late works have shown a slight, but perceptible change: without in any way compromising his artistic vision, his textures have become simpler, and there has been a tendency to throw greater emphasis on a single melodic line, and to have it unfold slowly against an ever-changing background" (Donat 1998). Andrew Clements expressed similar views in his review of the *Allegro scorrevole* (1993): "The late Carter style is more transparent, less rhythmically and harmonically complex than before; the arguments are more sharply delineated." He was nevertheless quick to note that "the result may be very different from the imposing orchestral piece that established Carter's reputation in the fifties and sixties, but no less masterly" (Clements 1997b).

The other frequently cited feature was lyricism. This was closely tied

to Carter's return to writing for voice. After *Emblems* for chorus in 1947, Carter had written only instrumental music until *A Mirror on Which to Dwell* in 1976. Not only the return to vocal writing, but also the way Carter wrote for the voice took many critics by surprise. As Peter Heyworth wrote in the *London Observer* in 1979: "Carter […] has for the first time emerged at the age of 70 with a far-ranging and wholly individual vocal idiom. […] Carter's newfound preoccupation with words […] is matched by the flowering of a new lyrical dimension in his music." Heyworth was nevertheless concerned to assure readers that "this lyricism betokens no relaxation. Beneath it lies the elaborate, closely woven coherences that distinguish all his music" (Heyworth 1979). This trend also endured to the end Carter's life. Reviewing one of Carter's final works, the *Thee Explorations* (2010), Allan Koznin commented: "Usually it is hard to say exactly how or where Mr. Carter has rounded the edges of what was once a forbidding style, but here it is clear: the vocal line, though chromatic, is supple and shapely, and responsive to [T. S.] Eliot's involved, introspective text" (Koznin 2011).
This perceived lyricism was also detected in Carter's new instrumental music. Andrew Clark wrote that the Clarinet Concerto (1996) "finds [Carter] less intellectually intimidating, less musically labyrinthine than before – and much more lyrically charged." (Clark 1998) Reflecting on Carter's broader stylistic development, Tom Sutcliffe wrote of a 1991 concert of Carter's orchestral music:

> Middle period Carter offers disjunct harmonic foundations and atonal melodies, and there's no help at all in the infinitely variable musical pulse. […] The three other Carter works, however, were all recent pieces, with far more containable shifts in harmonic sequence and a clearer commitment to expressive melodic continuity (Sutcliffe 1991).

Here again, critics made certain to note that this lyricism did not represent an abandonment of modernism. As Peter Laki noted in the program notes for the world premiere of the *Allegro scorrevole*, "critics have found a new 'serene lyricism' in some of his more recent work, and while the polyrhythms are not quite as complicated as before, the oppositions are still there" (Laki 1997: 29).

Another potentially regressive change in Carter's style in the early 1980s was the systemization of his treatment of a number of musical elements (Wierzbicki 2011: 43-44). Where previously, critics had considered it a mark of Carter's originality and the modernist quality of his music that he developed new organizing principles for each new work, they now, in the words of Bayan Northcott, "sense[d] that, having defined a series of novel concepts and techniques in the works of his middle years, Carter in his mid-70s is […] more concerned to explore their varied possibilities with the utmost spontaneity" (Northcott 1983).
As many critics noted, this systematization contributed to Carter's increasing rate of production. Rather than being portrayed as a threat to his modernist seriousness, however, it was usually presented as a well-deserved result of Carter's work developing his musical language in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Gavin Thomas, for example, declared that while "Carter's earlier work sometimes gives the impression of a composer grappling with enormous and almost insoluble imaginative and intellectual problems, […] the Violin Concerto [1990] is the wonderful music of an assured master" (Thomas 1991). Andrew Clements explained why "it was not until [Carter] was nearly 80 that the new works began to appear more quickly," by citing an interview with Carter:

> When I was younger, I did a great many things in my compositions that were not necessary, and gradually I developed the vocabulary that I wanted and that I enjoyed using […]. All these pieces of the last five or 10 years use a very similar harmonic structure whereas before that, I had the idea that each piece would have to have a different one, but when I listened to the results, it didn't seem to make all that much difference.

Clements then ties this development to clarity and, ultimately, accessibility: "Certainly the sound of his music is clearer and less complex than it used to be, and the teeming, many-layered textures of works from the 1960s and seventies such as the Third String Quartet and the Concerto for Orchestra have been replaced by simpler, more easily graspable ideas" (Clements 1997a).

In the late 1980s, growing consensus that these changes represented Carter's late style initiated scholarly debate about Carter's late style and its relationship to modernism (that is, modernism-*qua*-late style) and postmodernism. In 1988, David Schiff – who had established himself as a leading expert on Carter's music by writing the first monograph on Carter, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, in 1983 – proposed that many of these changes could be explained as a classicizing tendency in Carter's modernism. Provocatively, he claimed that Carter's recent music was "modern and classical at the same time." (Schiff 1988: 6) In a follow up article in 1989, he clarified this was "a post-modern classicism […] classicism which has absorbed modernism, not an anti-modern restoration" (Schiff 1989: 119). Schiff's claims attracted attention because he hit on two key concepts against which modernism-*qua*-late style was defined: its old rival, neoclassicism, and the new threat of post-modernism. Those arguing against Schiff contended that Carter's recent music still conformed to modernism-*qua*-late style.

Central to this debate were concepts that might be grouped under the terms *fragmentation* and *unity*. In his 1989 article, Schiff used Roland Barthes's *S/Z* to explore this distinction, but critiqued Barthes, claiming that Barthes failed to fully explain how fragmented modernist texts manage to exist as unified works of art. Schiff argued that "Carter's music […] demonstrates the interconnection of plurality and order," in the way it seemed to reference classical techniques to create unity out of the fragmentation caused by its modernist elements (ibidem). In the case of form, for example, Schiff saw this classicism in the *Triple Duo* (1982), with "the four classical movement types, but with the first three movements splintered and scrambled" or in *Penthode* with "that most classic of classical forms, the aria da capo" (Schiff 1988: 3, 6). In the revised second edition of *The Music of Elliott Carter* in 1998, Schiff included these ideas in his discussions of Carter's works from the 1980s, and even expanded the concept to include the Second String Quartet of 1959 (Schiff, 1998: 53).

Schiff was one of the leading Carter experts of the time, and so his idea filtered into the broader critical reception. In a 1995 review of

the song cycle *Of Challenge and of Love* (1994), for example, Gavin Thomas wrote that "there's no dilution of the essential complexity of the language, but the familiar hallmarks of the Carter style are expressed with an absolute purity and transparency which one might almost call classical." He continued: "The first song, the erotically charged 'High on our tower', shows Carter's late-style, classicised leanings at their most explicit" (Thomas, 1995; 285). Schiff's thesis may even have inspired other critics to connect Carter's music to other earlier styles, like Nicholas Williams, who claimed that Carter's Violin Concerto represented "nothing less than a re-evaluation of the procedures and possibilities of the romantic Mendelssohnian form" (Williams 1991).

Schiff's claims immediately attracted criticism, including from Carter himself. When asked in a 1989 interview, Carter responded: "I don't agree with Schiff. […] None of this has anything to do with classicism; if anything, it's closer to Barthes's definition of open music" (Restagno 1989: 90-91). In numerous other interviews and statements, Carter reaffirmed his commitment to "modernism" and skepticism about postmodernism and related musical movements, like neo-romanticism and minimalism. In a 1984 interview, for example, Carter referenced Adorno to criticize neo-romantic trends in music and compared such music to "the reactionary music imposed by Hitler […] or by the Soviet Composers Union during Stalin's time" (Meyer and Shreffler 2008, 252-253). In a 2006 tribute to the pianist, critic, and scholar Charles Rosen, Carter cited Rosen as saying, "viewed from the perspective of musical history, the so-called modernist movement is being carried on in a way that makes 'neoromanticism' and repetitive music [minimalism] seem like a step backward." Carter then added that this opinion "seems a very reasonable point of view to me" (Meyer and Shreffler 2008, 340).

One of the most vociferous defenders of Carter's modernism-*qua*-late style against post-modern classicism was Arnold Whittall, his most forceful statement coming in a 1997 article titled "Modernist Aesthetics, Modernist Music" (see also Whittall 1992: 339-340, and 1997b). Whittal critiqued Schiff for "the absence […] of any theoretically grounded concept of tonal classicism." Drawing

on an explicitly Adornian model of modernism-*qua*-late style, Whittall argued that Schiff misunderstood fragmentation in modernist art. Fragmentation in modernist artworks does not mean they lack unity. Rather, they are unified, autonomous works of art that do "not conceal" the fragmentation of their materials (Whittall 1997a: 157).[7] He then turned to one of Schiff's main examples of classicism in late Carter, *Penthode*. In this piece, Whittall "hear[d] a strong degree of resistance to 'classicism.'" As evidence, he pointed to the way that modernist and supposedly classicist elements in the piece "remain[...] powerfully and productively at odds" (ivi: 160-61). Carter's late music lacked "genuinely classic music's most powerful structural quality": unity. It was thus better understood as "a modernist dialogue between tendencies to continuity and discontinuity," than as "a dialogue between modernism and classicism" (ivi: 168). Whittal concluded, like the critics in journalistic sources we have seen above, that the changes in Carter's late music that Schiff perceived as classicism were, in fact, a refinement of Carter's modernist technique, "bring[ing] converging and diverging tendencies into an ever more subtly interactive relation" (ivi: 179).

Another opponent of Schiff's thesis was Antony Bye. In a 1994 journal article, Bye considered how atonal strategies to organize pitch and interval relate to the motivic and harmonic organization of classical tonal music at the surface and structural levels. He conceded that certain surface features of Carter's recent music may suggest a "post-modern dialogue with 'classicism,'" but argued that "there is scarcely any sense of 'classical' resolution." According to Bye, Carter sought to create a sense of unity without the "classical virtues of statement, repetition, variation, development and so forth." The "classicism" Schiff identifies is thus "only skin deep" (Bye 1994: 3, 5). There may also be implicit critique of Schiff in a number of academic texts on Carter from the time that go out of their way to emphasize Carter's modernism. In 1990, right after Schiff's claim began stoking up controversy, Jonathan Bernard unambiguously claimed

7 Max Noubel would later argue that Carter's late music is incompatible with Adorno's model of modernism, and instead considers it as a continuation of Stravinsky's "constructivist" modernist techniques (Noubel 2000: 59-60).

that "Today, of course, [Carter] is known as one of modernism's most uncompromising advocates" (Bernard 1990: 346).

Schiff had some defenders as well. Bye's article, for example, attracted a response from Guy Capuzzo who challenged Bye's generalizations about how classicism might translate from a tonal to an atonal context (Capuzzo 1998). As this debate continued throughout the 1990s, little progress was made towards a resolution, and Capuzzo's response to Bye suggests a reason: neither side agreed on what they meant by classical or modernist. While there was a robust discourse on modernism in music with certain common themes (like fragmentation), the differences between Schiff's interpretation of Barthes and Whittall's interpretation of Adorno left them talking past each other. Meanwhile, neither Capuzzo nor Bye cite any theories of classicism (like Charles Rosen's) and instead draw on their own sense of what classicism means.

These debates were limited to English-language discourse. Among German scholars, Carter's modernism was unchallenged. In an article too early to be responding to Schiff but engaged in German-language debates about postmodernism and music, Hermann Danuser explored lyricism as part of Carter's "late style impulse." For Danuser, Carter's goal in his late style remains the further development of a "modernist musical language." Similarly, all the texts Carter choose to set express "the self-reflective poetics of modernism" (Danuser 1990: 203). Shortly thereafter, Wolfgang Gratzer claimed that Carter is a "typical representative of modernism," whose music belongs to "the corpus […] of musical works […] that stand in opposition to the dominant trends in the age of postmodernism" (Gratzer 1994: 113).

Meanwhile, an alternative interpretation of Carter's relationship to modernism and lateness slowly gained wider acceptance. This narrative compared Carter to Bach and positioned Carter not as a post-modernist or lapsed-modernist, but as a *late* modernist. An early expression of this viewpoint came from violinist Matthew Raimondi:

> Elliott Carter is, in a sense, a figure like Bach. Each comes at the end of a long period of music-making when a particular style has run the gam-

> ut of its possibilities. Just as Bach pursued the violin's possibilities to the end so that there was nothing further in that style to be done, Carter does the same with the four instruments of the quartet. The Fourth [String] Quartet comes at the end of a long period of what we have been calling modern music for decades. […] When you get through the Fourth Quartet having just done the first three, you have the feeling that there is not that much more that can be added. That's why I think of it as a kind of summing-up of the period (Sand 1991: 530).

This viewpoint was later expressed by Paul Griffiths in his 1995 book *Modern Music and After*:

> The condition of music since the early 1970s, with the decline of modernism as a progressive force, may perversely have stimulated a composer for whom the modernist achievement was something to be celebrated rather than joined. […] For Carter, coming of age at a time when the great modernist advances of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Ives were recent history, the great need seems to have been one of clarification and triumphal commemoration: one could compare his historical position with Bach's, as a master of order […] after a period of wholesale musical revolution (Griffiths 1995a: 59).

Bach's lateness in these descriptions is *world-historical* lateness, but instead of the *organic*, decline narrative that inspired the ideology of modernism-*qua*-late style, we see an optimistic *metaphysical* understanding that translates Goethe's, Simmel's, and Ellis's ideas about *individual* lateness to a *world-historical* (or cultural) period (Smiles 2016: 22, McMullan 2007: 32). Moving into the twenty-first century, Carter reception has largely adopted this strategy. Whittall and John Link have both begun discussing Carter's late music as an example of "late modernism" (Link 2012; Whittall, 2012).

The ideologies and expectations of old-age style

The increased speculation about Carter's late style beginning in the mid-1970s was also provoked by expectations about the effects of aging on creative output. Especially after Carter turned 80 in 1988, his age played an ever-greater role in the reception of his music,

gradually replacing modernism as the primary concern in Carter's journalistic reception. From morbid speculation about Carter's inevitable death, to increasingly florid celebrations of his youthfulness, this reception reveals twentieth-century ideologies of aging and disability behind the label late style.

Some of Carter's reception reflected a twentieth-century update of the *metaphysical* understanding of the *effects of lateness* specifically tied to old age that originated with Goethe, including qualities like transcendence, serenity, wisdom, and mastery. These largely positive ideas about late style as old-age style received a boost from psychologist Hugo Munsterberg in his 1983 book *The Crown of Life*. Munsterberg presents a celebratory interpretation of the work of older artists, grouped by the advanced age they reached (Munsterberg 1983).[8] In a 1987 article on "old-age art" in the *New York Times*, John Russell used Carter's *Night Fantasies* as an example for a Munsterbergian view that the "late work of major creative artists is often unprecedented, problematic, and, above all, fearless" (Russell 1987). Nicholas Williams even used language reminiscent of Munsterberg's title to emphasize these qualities in Carter's *Allegro scorrevole*: "For Carter, a long life has culminated in a *crowning* period in which the hard-won yet influential techniques forged during his middle years have fertilized the creation of a corpus of music unique in our time" (Williams 1997: 13).

Most critics, however, marveled at how little Carter's music seemed to reflect his age. Here, a different twentieth-century ideology of old age and aging is at play, one that adapts an *organic* understanding of lateness as physical and mental decline. Observations that twentieth-century society idolized youth and was doubly gerontophobic – fearing both aging and the aged – are commonplace (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 2015: 7-8). Two specific manifestations of this are relevant here: first, an understanding of retirement and aging that separated the elderly from the rest of society, and second, the belief that older artists became less productive and that their work expressed a

8 Although it is beyond the scope of this article, one of Munsterberg's major contributions was to bring Jungian psychoanalysis into late style discourse (McMullan 2007: 260-65).

bitterness about their separation from the rest of society. Carter's reception explicitly drew on these expectations and marveled at how Carter defied them.

The idea that the elderly are cut off from the rest of society was a development of the second half of the twentieth century. Before WWII, pension plans usually began after an individual had reached the average lifespan. Most people worked until they died or were too infirm to continue. There was no general concept of retirement as a life stage. After the war, retirement ages sank and life expectancy increased. As the ranks of retired people grew, the question emerged of what their role in society should be. In their study of aging and music composition, Linda and Michael Hutcheon explain that much of the late twentieth-century discourse about retirement fit two dominant models, both of which involved separation from society. In the "disengagement" model, "older individuals were to relinquish their usual social roles and 'disengage.'" This was considered "appropriate to the accommodation of declining health, energy, or capability." "Activity theory," on the other hand, "suggested that older people take on new roles as they surrender old ones, remaining active and socially engaged." These activities, which include "education, volunteerism, or recreation," however, are separate from their pre-retirement lives and constitute a kind of gradual disengagement as age renders less activity possible (ivi: 7-8).

Alongside this discourse of aging and retirement, a discourse about aging and the arts developed, less concerned with the *metaphysical* effects of aging on late style (as Munsterberg had been) and more with the *organic*.[9] An important early contribution was Harvey Lehman's *Age and Achievement* in 1953, which, as the Hutcheons summarize, "argued (often from numerical data) that the last years of a creative artist's life – across the arts – are the least productive and the least innovative" (ivi: 8). In his chapter on music, Lehman constructed graphs that showed composers' productivity declining in old age across multiple genres, including grand opera, symphonies,

9 There was some overlap. Broch consistently refers to late style as "the style of old age," even as he argues that it "often blossom[s] before its season […] or unfold[s] of itself even before the approach of age or death" (Broch 1947: 10).

and cantatas. Although he allowed for continued composition in old age, he concludes: "It seems likely that […] the peak for quality of musical composition appears at earlier age levels than does the peak for quantity of composition." In the end, however, both quality and quantity decline (Lehman 1953: 68).

Relying on a qualitative methodology, Kenneth Clark came to similar conclusions in his highly influential 1970 essay "The Artist Grows Old." Clark argued that writers face a "loss of creative power" as they age, but that some visual artists manage to achieve an "old-age style" of great artistic value. Clark took a decidedly pessimistic view not just of the effects of aging on the body, but also of the separation of the elderly from the rest of society on the psyche: "Old artists are solitary; like all old people they are bored and irritated by the company of their fellow bipeds and yet find their isolation depressing" (Clark 1970: 81, 90). This is evident in their work: "Those who have retained their creative powers into old age take a very poor view of human life, and develop as their only defense a kind of transcendental pessimism" (ivi: 79). Although Clark doesn't engage examples from music, this kind of thinking can be seen in the discussion of Stravinsky's late style in the reminiscences of his widow and Robert Craft: "Like other artists in their eighties who continue to create […] Stravinsky's sense of isolation increased, the ferocity of his impatience grew, and his *saeva indignatio* [savage indignation] kindled more quickly" (Stravinsky and Craft 1978: 486, Straus 2011: 87).

The idea that aging is a kind of disability runs through this entire discourse, and recent work on music and disability studies provides a useful framework to understand how this effected Carter's reception.[10] This is especially evident in the emphatic celebration of Carter's youthfulness, vitality, optimism, and productivity. Carter defied expectations about the disabling and isolating effects of aging on the artist, suggesting what disability studies has identified as the "overcoming narrative," in which "the music is achieved in spite of the disability" (Straus 2011: 16).

The twentieth century saw the rise of new ideologies about disability that gave rise to the overcoming narrative. A "medical model" of dis-

10 On aging's position in disability studies, see Woodward (2015).

ability replaced religious conceptions (Straus 2016: 531). As Joseph Straus writes, "a narrative of overcoming disability emerges in the wake of the medical model, with its emphasis on remediation and cure. This becomes the predominant framework for understanding disability: it is something to be eliminated or normalized". When the overcoming narrative is "applied to the lives of composers with disabilities, [the composers are] celebrated for what they achieve in spite of disability". The composer's disability is rendered "irrelevant" to their work, and one would never know that a blind composer was blind or that a deaf composer was deaf (Strauss 2011: 16).

This describes much of Carter's reception. Only rarely did critics detect hints of his age in his music, as Rick Jones did in Carter's *Adagio tenebroso*: "Towards the end, the piece, like an old man, gathers itself for a few bars of frantic climax before subsiding into a conclusion" (Jones 1995). Instead, most critics rendered Carter's age irrelevant by emphasizing how he flouted the expected negative physical and mental effects of aging. One would never know that he was old, as he and his music seem so youthful. As Andrew Clark noted in the *Financial Times*, "Carter's late style […] means music of extraordinary energy, intellectual ferocity and, yes, youthfulness" (Clark 1999).

In retrospect, claims of Carter's youthfulness began relatively early in his life. In a 70th birthday tribute, Bayan Northcott claimed that "physically [Carter] could easily be mistaken for 10 or 15 years younger" (Northcott 1978: 4). In another review, Northcott quoted "one of the most substantial of our younger composers," who responded to the *Triple Duo* by "amazedly" asking: "When is he going to start composing like an *old* man?" (Northcott 1983) Approaching Carter's 80th birthday, Peter Heyworth mused: "At a time of life when most composers have put their feet up […] Elliott Carter (80 next December) is surging ahead with even greater confidence and energy than he showed in middle age," (Heyworth, 1988) and an Italian newspaper ran the headline: "Applause in Turin for Elliott Carter, a young composer of 80 years" (Pasi 1989). Luca Sabbatini praised Carter for "at 84 years old, […] continuing to put to paper a music of incomparable youthfulness and freshness" (Sabbatini 1992). When Carter was 87, Andrew Porter wrote that Carter was

"composing with the vigor and alertness of a youth still discovering new, marvelous possibilities of musical expressions" (Porter 1995).

Even when critics conceded that Carter was showing signs of age, they emphasized that he did not seem nearly as old as he actually was. In 1995, Paul Griffiths admitted that "Elliott Carter is perhaps beginning to show certain physical signs of age, but signs that might be associated with a man entering his seventies rather than one who will soon be 87" (Griffiths 1995b). When Carter was 90, David Murray quipped that Carter, "who looks like a cherubic 60-year old, is working at his first opera," which also drew attention to Carter's continued productivity (Murray, n.d.). As Carter approached his centennial, Christian Carey noted that "although he now walks with a cane, Carter's demeanor is enthusiastic, energetic even; you would never guess that he is ninety-seven years old" (Carey 2006: 16).

Related to Carter's youthfulness were celebrations of his productivity and work ethic. Shortly before his 80th birthday, his publisher's newsletter boasted: "Elliott Carter is not a man who takes it easy. At seventy-eight, he maintains a schedule that would tax many a younger composer" ("Carter's Fourth Quartet" 1987: 2). Twenty years later, Jeremy Eichler effused:

> It's Elliott Carter on the phone from New York, and he's being interrupted again. The 99-year-old distinguished American composer has agreed to a brief interview, but in truth, he really just wants to work. He has entered an improbably, sublimely late phase of his career, and he has been writing music with blinding speed. Work after work flies off his desk. You can't turn a corner in the classical music world without bumping into another Carter world premiere. And now, smack in the middle of it all, he has to deal with a worldwide centenary celebration. Who knew that turning 100 could be such a drag on one's schedule? (Eichler 2008)

Such pronouncements of youthfulness and productivity are markedly different than "disengagement," let alone an artist only able to express bitterness over their isolation from the world.

Even when critics did admit that Carter's music betrayed some effects of aging, it was folded into a larger narrative of overcoming.

Many critics noted, for example, that certain changes in Carter's style were related to age, including the shortening of works, reduction of complexity, and use of compositional techniques developed earlier in his career. Rather than presenting these as shortcomings, critics tended to gracefully excuse them as strategies that enabled Carter to overcome other effects of old age. As Andrew Clark wrote in a review of Carter's *Conversations*:

> Growing old has had a benign effect on Elliott Carter. Once renowned for his fierce intellect and formidably complex style, the 102-year-old American composer has spent his later years learning the value of understatement. Over the past decade, each successive work has become shorter and more simple. But as *Conversations*, his new seven-minute work for Aldeburgh, proves, short does not mean soft (Clark 2011).

Similar to their strategies for dealing with Carter's increasing accessibility in relation to his status and a modernist, Carter's critics usually emphasized that these changes were only partially motivated by practical, age-related concerns, and attempted to also represent them the continued development of his style and interests, independent of the effects of aging. In a *Newsweek* article in anticipation of his centennial, Anna Kuchment strikes this balance, interweaving quotes from Carter:

> Carter says his more recent style reflects his age. "As time has gone on, I've become more impatient," he says. He has fears of leaving a work unfinished, so he has turned to writing shorter pieces with fewer instruments. Physically, writing is also more exhausting: "When I write an orchestra piece, there's this huge piece of paper, and in order to write the flute on top, I have to stand up; to write the double bass at the bottom I have to sit down." Still another factor is that he simply grew tired of his older style. "Each of my pieces is an adventure," he says. "And I thought, 'Complicated pieces, I've done that; now I'm going to do something else'" (Kuchment 2008).

Here we see the same elements being justified as in the debates about modernism in the 1980s: simplification, shorter works, greater

accessibility, and the continued use of established techniques rather than developing completely new ones.

This overlap suggests a connection between the ideology of late style as old-age style, and the ideology of modernism-*qua*-late style. In his work on disability studies, Joseph Straus argues that both late style and modernism can be understood as disability style(s). There is substantial overlap in the specific features of each style that he uses to make this argument, allowing us to extrapolate late style as disability style as modernism (or vice versa).

In his article on "Disability and 'Late Style,'" Straus examines the music of four older composers who experienced a disabling health event. All of the events he discusses can happen at any time in life, but are generally associated with and more likely to occur in old age, like Stravinsky and stroke.[11] He then explores how representative pieces of these composers' late styles can be heard to express some element of their disability, like stuttering and difficulty speaking after Stravinsky's stroke (Straus 2008: 6, 15-17). In another article, Straus similarly relates modernism and disability, arguing that "modernist music, in a departure from the normalizing, curative impulse of an earlier period, ultimately claims disability and thus embodies disability aesthetics". Here, he focuses on types of disability and how they might be represented in music (Straus 2016: 532).

Straus tabulates features of late style and modernism that can be understood as expressions of the experience of disability. Correspondences abound. Late style is "fragmentary;" modernism is "fractured" and "fragmented." Late style is "personal" and "reflective;" modernism emphasizes "subjectivity." Late style is "introspective," "alienated," "introverted," "detached," "estranged," and "isolated;" modernism is about "withdrawal," "hermeticism," and "inwardness." Late style is "juxtaposed" and "unintegrated;" modernism features "layered textures." Late style is "simple," "spare," and "stripped down;" modernism uses "simplification" (Straus 2008: 12, and 2016: 533-35).

11 Catastrophic health issues are almost entirely absent from Carter's reception, although Carter did have them (see Schiff 1998: 267-8). A rare example is Northcott (1995).

Thinking about late style as disability style as modernism demonstrates how similar features interpreted through different ideologies of late style led to different evaluations of the music. While critics concerned with postwar modernism expressed anxiety that Carter's music seemed to be growing simpler and less innovative, critics implicitly biased by society's gerontophobia celebrated Carter's music with an overcoming narrative. On this latter point, we might end with observations made by the Hutcheons and Straus about how ideologies of aging and disability have been changing since the 1990s. The Hutcheons point to a new theory of "gerotranscendence," or "positive aging," and Straus sees "the decline of cultural modernism" and the rise of "a postmodern cultural world" as making possible a new "social model of disability" as identity (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 2015: 8; Straus 2016: 531). Although it exceeds the scope of this article, Carter's reception could be productively analyzed as an early example of either of these phenomena.

Late-late-style

If, as critics of late style discourse often note, only artists who are considered geniuses are ascribed late styles, then Carter falls into an even smaller and less-theorized category of artists who have been ascribed a post-late style, or in Carter's case, a "late-late style" (Smiles 2016: 22). The existence of such terminology is symptomatic of twentieth ideologies of late-style. As late style became ever more theorized, the need emerged for a way to describe artists who seem to have had a late style, but for whom this was not their final style.

In the second edition of *The Music of Elliott Carter* from 1998, David Schiff proposes that the Fifth String Quartet (1995) "may be said to mark the beginning of Carter's late late style" (Schiff 1998: 92). Schiff does not define the style, but instead lists features of it in his discussion of different "late-late" works. The late-late style seems to be a continuation of the features he previously identified as classicism. In the Quartet, for example, Carter "strips his music down to its essentials" (ibidem). The Quintet for Piano and Strings (1998)

has "like the Fifth Quartet […] the quality of mature retrospection" (ivi: 127). In the Clarinet Concerto, "the two slow movements with their extraordinarily simple material and severe restriction in range and poignant expression are perhaps most indicative of Carter's late manner" (ivi: 272).

Schiff's concept has gained some traction in Carter's reception. Jeremey Eichler picked it up to describe Carter's *In the Distances of Sleep* (2006) and Flute Concerto (2008). Of the later, he noted: "Carter [has] entered what has been called his 'late, late' period of composition, a time of occasional mellowing, softening of edges, and thinning out of orchestral textures. Some have even heard a certain Mozartean lightness and transparency" (Eichler 2010). Other critics have made similar observations without Schiff's terminology, like Robert Hilferty of *Gramophone* who used "'very late' period" to describe Carter's output since his 90th birthday (Hilferty 2008). Carter scholars reference the term, usually not as a style category, but as a convenient shorthand for the time period in Carter's life (see, for example, Jenkins 2010; Capuzzo 2012).

Before the concept of late-late or post-late style emerged, it was generally taken for granted that late style designated an artist's final stylistic period. This held true across theoretical perspectives. As we have seen, for Adorno there is nothing beyond lateness, only regression out of it. Or as Linda and Michael Hutcheon note, "early style is something artists are said to grow out of […] but with age comes late style, and *that* one does *not* grow out of, but rather dies into" (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 2016: 55). In retrospect, as late style became increasingly defined by stylistic features thought to carry special meanings, it seems inevitable that examples would be found of artists who seemed to reach late style well before their final style. Here, we see an effect of the Hutcheons' observation that as medical advances extend life spans, the "aging population is itself aging," leading to the distinction between what they call old age and "old old age." The former being "that new period in later life in which older people remain independent, active, and capable," and the latter being that "of increasing dependency" and "'the irreversible exclusion of normal life, thus the end of normal life'" (Hutcheon

and Hutcheon 2015: 5). It seems possible that this new perspective on aging has affected the discourse on late style. Literary scholar Anslem Haverkamp, for example, used the term "old-age style" (*Altersstil*) to distinguish Hölderlin's poetry after his institutionalization for schizophrenia from Hölderlin's "late style" (*Spätstil*) before his institutionalization (Haverkamp 1991: 7-9). Haverkamp's "old-age style" has been taken up in English-language musicology as "post-late style" (see Spitzer 2006: 227). Meanwhile, Barbara Kelley has argued that Maurice Ravel had two late styles: "the first […] motivated by a major world event, and exacerbated by personal loss, that of his mother; the other by actual illness, and physical and artistic decline" (Kelly 2016: 158-9).

Such theorization of post-late, late-late, or first and second late styles, however, may also threaten the privileged status that late style obtained through its association with finality. Both the Hutcheons and Christopher Dingle use what could be described as Messiaen's late-late style (those works after his opera *Saint Françoise d'Assise*)[12] to argue against generalized theorization of late style. The Hutcheons argue that such theorization is inherently ageist and that scholars should instead examine every artist's output in isolation through their individual experience of aging (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 2016: 54, 58-59). Dingle, meanwhile, sees the way that first Messiaen's opera and then his later work *Éclairs sur l'Au-Delà* were understood as his a *summa* (a late work that would summarize his entire creative output and be his defining legacy)[13] as evidence that "the notion of late style too often relies on the conceit of posterity that an artist's output has reached its final possible manifestation when he or she dies" (Dingle 2013: 317). This claim – that late style exists only as a construction of reception – is widely shared among scholars who study the topic (for example, McMullan, 2007; 5). Like late-late style,

12 Messiaen composed the opera believing it would be his final work and briefly retired after completing it.

13 The idea of the *summa* is common in the discourse of late style but does not play a significant role in Carter's reception. Exceptions include Whittall (2008), and Capuzzo (2012: 1). A foundational text on the concept in music is Einstein and Smith (1937).

Dingle's urge to eschew the label late style entirely seems to be symptomatic of how ideologically overloaded the term is becoming.

Conclusion

Elliott Carter lived to within weeks of his 104th birthday, but sustained speculation about his late style began in the late 1970s. Thus, for roughly the last third of his life, Carter's music was interpreted through the lens of twentieth-century ideologies of late style. Carter entered this period closely associated with the postwar modernist movement, but critics perceived his late style to be developing in a different direction. This stirred up deep anxieties about the fate of modernism at a time when the world seemed to be increasingly post-modern, revealing connections between ideologies of late style and of modernism. Meanwhile, as Carter aged, critics increasingly presented Carter as heroically overcoming the disabling experience of aging and thus eschewing expectations of aging as isolation from society. This trend reveals the connections between twentieth-century ideologies of late style and of aging, old age, and disability.

As Hermann Danuser noted in his article on 1990 Carter's late style, and as others joked as Carter lived longer and longer, any discussion of Carter's late style during his life remained speculative (Barenboim, n.d.). Since his death, Carter has entered into the realm of historical reevaluation. As John Link notes:

> There's an old quip that if you're a composer, the first five years after you die are the worst. Whether or not that's true, a composer's posthumous reputation does sometimes veer off surprisingly from its earlier course. In some cases, a giant is laid low; in others, interest skyrockets. […] Now that the fifth anniversary of Elliott Carter's passing is upon us (he died on Nov 5, 2012), there's been no push to rename the exit signs at Symphony Hall, but neither has there been universal canonization (Link 2018).

The purpose of this essay is not to argue for Carter's canonization, nor to re-label the exits at Boston's Symphony Hall with signs "This way in case of Carter." Rather, I have argued that Carter's reception

during his life is fertile ground to watch twentieth-century ideologies of late style unfold in real time. Now, as Carter passes Link's five year mark, his continuing reception may well prove fertile ground for future scholars to study twenty-first-century ideologies of late style.[14]

14 Some examples of productive twenty first century work on Carter's late style include Weirzbicki (2011), Link (2012), and Meyer (2017).

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