Studio Composition

Form

Foreground vs Background

* We prioritise our perceptions and cannot pay equal attention to more than one element at a given moment.
* This prioritisation is fluid and so you can be pulled from one element to another.
* We can artistically influence this prioritisation.
* In a multi-layered texture, the listener's attention will engage more so on foreground and less so on background.

Foreground

* Complexity: typically, the ear follows complexity - the element with the greatest level of activity attracts most attention.
* Novelty: when we hear familiar and unfamiliar material, the new material requires more attention.
* Loudness/richness: the timbral richness of a trumpet will demand more attention than that of a flute.

Continuity vs Surprise

* Music is a temporal art and as a result we cannot perceive the whole of the piece, it unfolds over time.
* The composer must choose to connect or disconnect one event to the next and create associations forward and backward, and overall balance.
* Musical ideas can unfold as flowing seamlessly or abrupt changes - unity vs. variety
* Consideration to how the piece flows is important to keep the listeners interest and attention.
* In order to have coherence, there must be a balance between unity, novelty, progression, development, and functioning background and foreground.
* A convincing musical form must include stability and novelty.

Musical Elements

* Elements most obvious to the listener:
  * register
  * speed
  * motives
  * timbre

Pace

* The rate at which new information is presented to the listener must be carefully balanced. Too slow, the listener may lose interest, too fast, the listener may not be able to follow the music.
* The pace of the piece will impact the stability of the piece.
* Stability often refers to predictability.
* Predictability must also be balanced. Too predictable and it becomes boring and formulaic, too unpredictable and it may be difficult to understand and follow.

Stability vs Instability

* Instability can bring intensity.
* Surprising successions of ideas depends on the listener's familiarity of the material.

Progression

* Progression gives a sense of direction and evolution.
* Progression can be used for creating expectation and tension.
* Progression here does not refer to chord progression, but to the development of material over time - e.g. harmony becoming more consonant, or an increasing registral spread.
* These progressions give the listener points of reference, which creates expectation.
* Expectation can be met, which serves as a release for the listener, or if not met, it serves as an increase in tension.

Momentum

* Momentum is the tendency of the music to continue in a given direction.
* Rhythm is often used to produce momentum. Changing the rhythm then becomes a punctuating event.

Balance / Equilibrium

* Formal balance
* When and why does a piece of music feel balanced or unbalanced?
  * sense of trajectory - completed?
  * interest maintained throughout?
  * balanced => satisfied listener?
  * satisfied does not necessarily mean pleasant

Principles on Balance

* Greater lengths implies greater contrasts
* Greater contrasts implies greater lengths - more time needed for transitions perhaps?
* Strong contrasts can be provocative - but subsequently contrasting material can be integral.
* Make use of the retrospective.
* Music can ask ‘questions’ - resolution is necessary for a convincing conclusion.
* Sustaining interest over a long time frame requires finding new ways to present and combine material - many varied transitions are necessary.