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Transcribing and Completing *The Art of Fugue*: The Case of Berio's *Contrapunctus XIX*

Because of its lack of specific instrumentation and its incompleteness, Bach's *The Art of Fugue* has provided especially fertile ground for composers interested in the transcription of pre-existing music and in the completion of unfinished works. One such composer was Luciano Berio (1925-2003), who throughout his career transcribed pieces by a variety of authors, ranging from Monteverdi to Brahms, and composed completions of such notable works as Puccini's *Turandot*. In 2000, on occasion of the 250th anniversary of Bach's death, Berio received a commission from the Teatro Lirico Sperimentale of Spoleto, Italy, to lead a project of transcription of *The Art of Fugue* for chamber orchestra. In this project, several notable composers, such as Louis Andriessen, Aldo Clementi, Luis De Pablo, Fabio Vacchi, and Berio himself, each transcribed a *contrapunctus* from *The Art of Fugue*. The project was completed in 2001 and received its premiere in Spoleto that year. Given Berio's interest in unfinished works, his contribution to the project not surprisingly resulted in a transcription of an incomplete *contrapunctus*, which Berio finished by means of a short and rather enigmatic coda.

In this paper, I will provide an analysis of the compositional strategies that Berio adopted in this hitherto neglected work. To do so, I will read Berio's approach to Bach's unfinished *contrapunctus* against the long-standing tradition of transcriptions of *The Art of Fugue*. In addition, I will place Berio's *Contrapunctus XIX* in the context of his aesthetics of transcription and completion, as articulated in his writings and as practiced in works like his ending of Puccini's *Turandot*, also from 2001, which is as enigmatic and understated as the completion of Bach's *contrapunctus*.