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The Reception of Minimal Music in the Contemporary Pianistic Context

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Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to investigate and outline the reception of minimal music within the contemporary pianistic context. Motivated by a personal affinity for this genre, both as a performer and listener, the central aim is to analyse how minimalist philosophy, along with its techniques, has been appropriated, transformed, and reinterpreted from its inception to the present day. By examining the works of pioneering composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich, alongside contemporary representatives like Nils Frahm or John Adams, the study seeks to uncover the aesthetic principles that underpin minimalism and their influence on the modern piano repertoire. Furthermore, this research will explore the correspondence between minimalism, film music, and popular culture, while also considering the rise of postminimalism and the contributions of a new generation of composers. The discussion presented here is not intended to be exhaustive but aims to complement the broader cultural discourse on minimalism, enhancing its understanding within the field of contemporary music studies.

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I. Introduction

“Music as a Gradual Process. I am interested in perceptible process. I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music.”¹

Due to personal passions and curiosities both for the philosophy of minimalist music and for its interpretation, the main theme of this thesis will follow the chronological and aesthetic journey of this manifesto, from its origins to the present times. Moreover, in order to develop a comprehensive and conclusive perspective, it is essential to reference the full social, political and cultural context in which minimal music emerged and evolved.

What does minimal music genuinely represent? Emerging as a distinctive style in the 1960s, it has served as a revolutionary force in the evolution of contemporary classical music. Defined by simplicity, repetition, and frequently a meditative quality, minimalism presented a compelling counterpoint to the complexities of earlier avant-garde music, thereby attracting the attention of composers, performers, and audiences alike. Over the past decades, minimalism has not only reshaped the soundscape of modern music but has also profoundly influenced the contemporary piano repertoire. This thesis aims to investigate how the minimal music evolved, in which manner it was received in the contemporaneity (preponderantly in the pianistic sphere), and what are the prospects of its prevailing within the actual cultural context.

Thereby, in order to encapsulate all the versatilities of this musical genre, a historic, as well as aesthetic exploration is of utmost importance, in this case the focus being merely on the key composers and pivotal pieces.

Following its natural occurrence, the concept of minimal music shall be analysed in depth, commencing with its backgrounds, origins, simultaneously attributing a plausible definition of term. Furthermore, in discussion should come the fundamental characteristics of this genre, as well as a comprehensive study of its key composers, composers which will be referred as pioneers. After clarifying its adherence as a genre, the aim is to observe its subsequent development, known as postminimalism, with the largest chapter ultimately being dedicated to its reception in the contemporary context. Thus, the work will seek to formulate questions and answers such as: What does minimalist music represent on today's stage? Are there significant differences between this niche and commercial music, and if so, how are they distinguished? Does the performance of these works represent more than a superficial gesture? Does a certain degree of interdisciplinary stem from the fusion of this genre with other artistic domains (such as cinematography), and so the list continues.

1 Alex Ross, *The Rest in Noise. Listening to the 20th Century*, Picador, New York, 2007, p. 377 about Steve Reich.

Naturally, in order to formulate well-grounded conclusions, a variety of methods and methodologies will be employed throughout this thesis. These include the analysis and interpretation of scientific texts or the personal writings of the featured composers, as well as literature based on interviews and articles, offering direct access to composers' perspectives or public reception of their works. Nonetheless, certain inherent limitations do accompany any in-depth research. When constructing particular arguments, attention will be given to whether the existing literature specifically addresses a given issue, and whether critiques alone serves as the primary argument for analysis. Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge a potential artistic limitation at the outset. As minimalist music occupies a niche position, its association with being music devoid of substance, or its perceived creation for the sake of mass commercialising, remains a persistent and enduring prejudice.

Before embarking on an exploration of the background of minimal music, it is essential to acknowledge that opinions concerning this genre are frequently divergent and often reflect subjective interpretations. Nevertheless, for the purposes of an extensive analysis, we shall attempt to present both favorable and critical viewpoints, thereby generating potential topics for a debate.

II. Minimal-music: Contextualisation, Notion, Particularities

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualise the sociopolitical and historic environment, in which the notion of minimal music has been extended to a defined genre. Due to the fact that music and art *per se* are indispensably interconnected to the customs, mentality and development of a community, it is indispensable to analyse an artistic manifest with the inclusion of its backgrounds. Consequently, we propose following a brief analysis of the post-belligerent “New World Order”², in conjunction with the artistic tendencies emerging in that era.

1. The global restructuring after The Second World War

Unarguably, the aftermath of the Second World War emphasised a pivotal period that reshaped the global political, economic, and cultural landscapes. As The United States emerged as the dominant global power, its position as a leader underpinned by both economic prosperity and strategic geopolitical initiatives, offered it an incredible advantage. The global restructuring that ensued during this period not only influenced international relations, but also conducted to profound cultural transformations, which resonated deeply in the arts, including music.

The conclusion of the war in 1945 resulted in an era of extraordinary economic growth in the United States, a period that has been aptly described as the “Golden Age of Capitalism”³. Factually, the expansion of industrial production and the rise of consumerism were integral to the rapid reconstruction of the national economy. While this period reflected a significant increase in infrastructural development, the rise of suburban living, and unprecedented levels of employment, it directly contributed as well to an extensive sense of economic security.⁴

Simultaneously, The United States played a central role in global recovery efforts, leading humanitarian aid initiatives aimed to assist the economic revival of Europe, continent which had been affected after the war. One of the most notable efforts in this regard was the Marshall Plan, an initiative designed to rebuild Europe by providing financial assistance and promoting economic cooperation.⁵ In theory, the Plan did not exhaustively seek to alleviate the economic devastation caused by the war, but also aimed to prevent the spread of the communist regime, further stabilising the United States’ geopolitical influence in a context defined by the expansive Cold War.⁶

2 *Toward a new world order*, 20 July 1998 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War/Toward-a-new-world-order>, consulted on 20.03.2022.

3 Judt Tony, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, Penguin Books, New York, 2005, p. 234.

4 *Ibidem*, p. 246.

5 Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–1952*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 98.

6 *Ibidem*.

In the context of economic growth and Cold War tensions, the cultural and social fabric of the United States began to shift dramatically. The horrors of the war and the prolific threat of nuclear conflict created a palpable sense of anxiety, particularly in the face of rising hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union. “Keeping a vigilant eye on the enemy – by whatever means – is the oldest form of intelligence collection.”⁷

As the race for supremacy was constantly rising, the preservation and extension of own ideological norms became an imperative for both United States of America and Soviet Union. Peace was mostly maintained through justified violence, as it represented *in concreto* a pretext of territorial expansion. While the two “opposing groups or warrior served their respective countries faithfully during those critical years of roller coaster politics”⁸, “the mistrust, tension and constant danger of war”⁹ created an unprecedented hostility between the Soviets and the United States. Their global rivalry had been experienced by a variety of undeveloped countries in a significant way. The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), Nixon’s Vietnamisation and bombing of the neutrally declared Cambodia, the pro-Soviet regime of Afghanistan (1978) or the establishing of American sovereignty in the Caribbean Island of Grenada¹⁰ mark some of the most relevant examples supporting the statement mentioned above.

“The Cold War was a significant historical anomaly for the United States (...) where an estimated 22 million men and women were engaged in a way or another”¹¹, declared a military of Alert Force Operations. Nevertheless, a vast majority of American civilians never experienced the persistent uncertainty of that period. Presumably, the rapid and unforeseen post-war affluence of the USA was also potentiated by its projection as leader and initiator.¹² The idealistic image of prosperity and individual freedom in developing states triggered feelings of hope and trust. Moreover, it is of utmost importance to underline that the Western postulation of democracy conducted to the creation of a vibrant, heterogeneous environment, in which: citizens became individuals and their protection was granted by law, the economic growth determined a more qualitative educational system, abroad travel options were included, the artistic ways of expression were experimental and unlimited. Consequently, this period of uncertainty also generated a collective desire for peace, love, and freedom.

By the 1960s, this desire for a more peaceful and equitable world found expression in the countercultural movements that defined the decade. The civil rights movement, protests against the

7 Chris Adams, *Inside the Cold War. A Cold Warrior’s Reflections*, Air University Press Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1999, p. 63.

8 Ibidem, p. xiii.

9 Jay Speakman, *The Cold War*, Greenhaven Press, San Diego, 2001, p. 22.

10 Rupert Colley, *The Cold War: History in an Hour*, HarperCollins UK, ISBN: 9780007451180, 13.10.2011.
<https://de.scribd.com/book/234810743/The-Cold-War-History-in-an-Hour>

11 Adams, p. vii.

12 Tony, p. 254.

Vietnam War, and the rise of the hippie movement epitomised a shared ambition to emancipate from the constraints of mainstream values.¹³ These movements would later serve as an essential context for the emergence of new forms of artistic expression, most notably in music, where the rigid structures of traditional classical forms were increasingly dismissed in the favor of more liberated and experimental approaches.

2. Art as a Manifestation of Freedom

The end of the Second World War highlighted an alternation of paradigm in Western music. The dominance of European composers and traditions were increasingly stagnating, and with it, the adherence to complex serialist methods that had gained prominence in the early 20th century was fading away. Serialism, associated with figures such as Arnold Schönberg and Anton Webern, defined by atonality and a rigorous application of mathematical structures to composition, did not represent a norm in the compositional techniques anymore.¹⁴ By the late 1950s and early 1960s, composers who had once embraced this intellectualised form of music, progressively intended to find new manners in which to transcend its constraints. In this context, minimalism emerged as a powerful counter-reaction, offering instead a radical simplicity that presented repetition, tonal harmony, and the detachment from superfluous elements. However, this transition was not merely aesthetic but reflected a broader desire for the artistic freedom that permeated the post-war cultural landscape.¹⁵

The rise of the counterculture in the 1960s further accelerated this movement towards artistic experimentation and the rejection of traditional forms. Being characterised by the dismissal of mainstream societal norms and the embracing of alternative lifestyles, this manifesto, in particular the hippie movement, provided the most suitable ground for the emergence of minimalist music. It could also be deduced that the pioneering composers emphasised attraction to the minimalist principles partly because of their simplicity and their ability to create immersive, meditative experiences through the repetition of musical patterns.¹⁶ In many ways, minimalism reflected the broader cultural desires of the 1960s: a move away from complexity and material excess towards a more spiritual and introspective mode of existence¹⁷

¹³ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, Bantam Books, Toronto, 1987, p. 4.

¹⁴ Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2007, p. 368-370.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 370-372.

¹⁶ This aspect will be further analysed Chapter III.

¹⁷ Keith Potter, *Four musical minimalists : La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 6-8.

III. Minimalism. Introduction in the genre

1. Notion and Conceptualisation

A plethora of similarities, a structural determinism, “an organic synthesis of extremely diverse sources and influences”¹⁸ and yet a peculiar terminological dispute in the twentieth century; the strive for a conceptual identity revealed an assiduous process of mass integration, intrinsically opposing the intellectual, even elitist artistic manifests of the ongoing time.

Minimalism borrowed its definition from the visual arts, being concretised in music by Michael Nyman in 1974. Although the term had been utilised in previous contexts, such as the articles of Tom Johnson, it only received its denominative value through Nyman’s mentioning in *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*.¹⁹ Presented as a particular composing style and identified through “an intentionally simplified rhythmic, melodic and harmonic”²⁰ minimal music epitomised in the 60’ and 70’ the analogue of visual art, as well as the adverse reaction to the European and North American Modernism. A transition to a more comprehensive musical display? In effect not even a tangible recognition from the avant-gardists. Minimalism, although intrinsically paving a road of a wide acceptance and accessibility among broad audience, repelled in a certain manner the calculated extravagance of Modernism. The preserved European tradition of Stockhausen’s serial music, or Boulez’s almost violent fragmentation, were by no means inclusive manifests of music. Modernism *per se* projected the same old primordiality of its existence – the exclusivity of art as a higher form of intellectual manifestation. While Europe was rotating around conceptual, symbolical, logical and atonal structures, The Soviet Union remained austere and profound. Galina Ustvol’skaja reflected an expressive, yet bizarre introspection into an archaic language²¹, style which was unfamiliar to the experimental context of The United States of America. Pragmatism and aleatory were the new identifications of American music with the beginning of 50’, and certainly, the “emancipation of sound and a new perception of time”²² emphasised the confirmation of experimentalism. Hence, a complex emergence of soundscapes, were an apparent trivial coalescence of silence, noise and sounds, produces the integrity of a spiritual acousmatic experience.²³

18 Milos Katanic, *The Accordion in Minimal Music*, Master Thesis, Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität, 2017, p. 6.

19 Adriana Smith, *Minimalism: towards a definition*, Dublin Institute of Technology, Conservatory of Music and Drama, 06.03.2009, ARROW@DIT, p. 1-3.

20 Keith Potter, *Minimalism*, in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London, Second Edition, Volume 16, p. 716.

21 <http://ustvol'skaya.org/eng/> consulted on 01.04.2022.

22 Katanic, p. 7.

23 “A sound does not view itself as thought, as ought, as needing another sound for its elucidation, as etc.; it has no time for any consideration – it is occupied with the performance of its characteristics: before it has died away it must have made perfectly exact its frequency, its loudness, its length, its overtone structure, the precise morphology

“What you see is what you see” (Frank Stella)²⁴ – minimalist art prevented its observers from any conventional criteria of interpretation. Symmetry, right angles, serial sequences or prefabricated materials were the elements of minimal sculpture and painting whereas the flamboyant Expressionism was cultivating an excess.²⁵ The introduction of an opposite conceptual approach was an absolute necessity for eliminating the old metaphor of Abstract Expressionism. Sculptors such as Carl Andre, Robert Morris or Richard Serra were the initiators²⁶ of an apparent banal simplification of art (see fig. 2), a reduction of composition and materials – and candidly, a brutal projection of the truth.

Figure 2



Constantin Brâncuși, *Muza adormită (Sleeping Muse)*, originally made out of marble in 1910, Washington DC, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

Figure 1



Carl Andre, *Pyramid* 1959 originally destroyed, reconstruction in 1970, wood; Dallas, Dallas Museum of Arts, General Acquisitions

In fact, the idea of conceptual simplification was not necessarily a cultural reform. Just as Brâncuși's vision innovated the modernist air through the simplicity of his sculptures' biomorphic forms²⁷ (see fig. 1) it can be observed how the decadence of the *Fin de Siècle* ostentatiously cultivated a new manner of expression. An intriguing rebel formula of self-determination and revolt, the initially literal movement of Decadence “revealed a predictable necessity of change – an exploitation of obscenity and amorality in order to surpass the conventional dogmatism.”²⁸ As I stated in one of my previous analysis, In *Bolero*, Ravel undeniably emancipated his eccentric *façon*

of these and itself. Urgent, unique, uniformed about history and theory, beyond the imagination, central to as sphere without surface, its becoming is unimpeded, energetically broadcast. There is no escape for its action. It does not exist as one of a series of discrete steps, but a transmission in all directions from the field's center.” J. Cage, *Silence*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1973, p. 14.

²⁴ Potter, p. 717.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Daniel Marzona, Uta Grosenick, *Minimal Art*, Taschen, Hong-Kong, 2009, p. 6-9.

²⁷ <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/constantin-brancusi-sleeping-muse-i>, consulted on 01.04.2022.

²⁸ Ana-Roamana Salajan Morar, *The Prevalence of Eros and Thanatos in Ravel's Ondine*, Bachelor Thesis, Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität, Linz, 2020, p. 16

d'être in an unorthodox, yet conservative musical approach, subtly abandoning the existent harmonic density in the favour of a belligerent drive of rhythm.²⁹ Whether the rhythmic and melodic repetitiveness or tonal centring of *Bolero* could be considered a dandy manifestation of exoticism or not, one aspect is to be envisaged: the similarity with the upcoming minimal practice is in my view indisputable. A similar approach of a precocious minimalism could be distinguished in Satie's *Musique d'ameublement*. The insertion of an arbitrary repetition of a musical theme/phrase, intentionally for creating a “meaningless”³⁰ music, was *in concreto* a dissemination of ambient music. The prevalence of a horizontally projected musical discourse in the detriment of a complex harmony? The vast occurrence of *trompe l'oeil* in the 19th century did not influence Satie's composing style. By contrary, the composer revealed his unpredictably raw, yet espousing flair. “The gently undulating Gymnopédies belong to a different antique world”³¹, slightly highlighting delicate resonances of a consonant setting. Subtly disclosing the sorrowful character of the piece through indications such as “lent et douloureux”, Satie maintains the rhythmic pulse to exhaustion. Given by the steady bass line and repetitive accompaniment, the modal harmony emphasises a simple and naive melody. Seemingly, the listener could easily transcend into a particular state of melancholy, or even meditation.

Figure 3

Figure 3 shows a musical score for Erik Satie's "Lent et douloureux" (Op. 10, No. 1). The score is for piano and features a steady bass line and a repetitive melody. The tempo is marked "Lent et douloureux" with a quarter note equal to 66 beats. The score is divided into two systems. The first system has five measures, and the second system has five measures. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score is labeled "PIANO." and "pp" (pianissimo). The number 32 is in the right margin.

29 Ibidem, p. 22.

30 Katanic, p. 11.

31 Robert Orledge, *Erik Satie*, 2001, in: <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040105> consulted on 22.04.2022.

32 Erik Satie, 1st Gymnopédie in: Piano Music. Vol. 1, Editions Salabert, Paris, 1974.

“The death to Minimalism is announced periodically, which might be the surest testimonial to its staying in power (...) Yet it is not only recognizable, but visible on all fronts, as the once-subversive style has been tamed by age and acceptance. It has in fact become part of the lingua franca, as mass culture has embraced what was once too easy a target for ridicule”³³, states Edward Strickland his compendium.³⁴ It is notable that the minimalist composers situated in New York – Steve Reich, Philip Glass, La Monte Young, were promoting their innovative minimalist works outside the consecrated musical environments, whereas Terry Riley already belonged to the Californian counterculture of the 1960.³⁵ The artistic downtown communities of the pioneers provided an appropriate climate in terms of transdisciplinarity and freedom of expression, eventually causing a decade later the debut of a musical phenomenon. A variety of European composers was inspired by the atypical reduction of the musical means in the American minimal-music, consequently utilizing analogue techniques in their composition. Among them, the following let a meaningful impact on the European music: Michael Nyman, Gavin Bryars, Louis Andriessen, Arvo Pärt.³⁶ While the American fascination for the repetitive rhythmic/polyrhythmic structures substantiated their unique aesthetic identity, the European expression kept as a priority its harmonic importance – indeed in a more compact and reduced form. As concrete examples we could use Steve Reich’s *Piano Phase* and Simeon ten Holt’s *Canto Ostinato*. Whereas the rhythmic ingenuity through time dilation represents the hypnotic element of *Piano Phase*, in fact to the detriment of a sonorous abundance, *Canto Ostinato* embraces its listeners into an immense, yet fluid harmonic stream. The supposedly banal repetition of quintuplets stabilizes the pulsation for the entire duration of the piece, ultimately enabling to a fragile melody to prevail.³⁷ Despite the fact that both examples present a specific reduction of components, one aspect they have in common: – the extreme length of their duration. Surprisingly, in a majority of minimal compositions, the incorporated reduction is compensated with an extensive length.

The conceptual differences should obscure the fact that the set of wholes inherent in the works has provided the music genre with a remarkable phenotypic unity.³⁸ As a result, a plethora of terms can be found in special literature, suggesting various significations. In the following

33 Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993, p. 9.

34 As a side note, although this argument might appear to be contradictory, especially to the main research topic of this thesis, the reception of minimal music cannot be taken for granted in a constantly developing cultural context. Moreover, as it is to be seen in the future chapters, in particular in Chapter V, the problematic of whether minimal music still exists on the present stage is more complex than expected.

35 Potter, p. 717

36 Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music. La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, Kahn & Averill, London, 1988, p. 11-12.

37 Chris Ingalls, *Erik Hall Creates Minimalist Compositions with Warm Beauty on Canto Ostinato*, 6 March 2023, <https://www.popmatters.com/erik-hall-canto-ostinato-review>, consulted on 18.08.2024.

38 Fabian R. Lovisa, *minimal-music, Entwicklung – Komponisten – Werke*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, 1996, p. 11.

paragraphs elements which appear to be basic components – or the most-commonly accepted characteristics of minimal music as a genre shall be summarised.

2. The Characteristics of minimal-music

a) repetitive music

One must probably assume that the conception of this prolonged sound extension, played over and over above sections, has not much to do with psychology, nor with hidden longings for unfiltered aesthetics. It is in fact more related to the positivist orientation towards models and serial formulas, number chains or sets of theories, as they have gained a central importance and far-reaching preparation with the development of the digital age. If emotions play a role as well, then it is simply the joy of a limited approach, a rhythmic cell or a broken chord. As an example, it can be observed how the same material suffers quasi self-regulating, yet hardly noticeable changes through consistent operations. Out of them, following can be mentioned: a limited usage of permutations, a possible entanglement or overlaying of tonal structures³⁹, some subtle temporal rhythmic disproportions of patterns.

Despite this, it cannot be denied that the repetitiveness did not represent a new element in musical creation, but only got a higher rank as a defining component for a certain style. The repetition *per se* was already found in the beginnings of the European polyphony during the Renaissance. Moreover, it emphasised the “most eloquent expression in the so-called syntactic style of structural imitation”.⁴⁰ Without making too many deviations from the topic, we can highlight that the structural imitation served as a necessary technique in order to establish cohesion and unity in those compositions. It entailed the mimicking of a musical pattern with another, whether with accurate precision or slight alternations (such as intervallic, rhythmic, canon), eventually significantly enhancing the overall texture and counterpoint of the music.⁴¹

‘Over and over again’ a considerable effort is made to invent new patterns, progressively distorting mirror reflexes or intricately nested ornaments. Everything is solely done to deceive and veil the monotony of the constant self-circling uniformity, to exhibit it indistinguishable, argues Dibelius in his writings.⁴² However, the repetition represents more than apparent monotony. Besides the acoustic impact on the listener’s psyche, an aspect which will be detailed later, the cellular multiplication of motives and their gradual progression strives for continuity.

39 Ulrich Dibelius, *Moderne Musik II. 1965-1985*, Serie Musik Piper-Schott, München, 1988, p. 174-175.

40 Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music. La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, Kahn & Averill, London, 1988, p. 13.

41 Mark Gotham, *16th-Century Contrapuntal Style*, 2023, <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/openmusictheory/chapter/16th-century-contrapuntal-style/>, consulted on 22.02.2024.

42 Dibelius, p. 179.

By reproducing everything that is repeatable, ranging from brief melodies to extensive chord progressions, composers like Reich and Glass reconstructed intricate structural patterns, leading to an uninterrupted musical process.⁴³

Certainly, the repetitive patterns can undergo evolution from their initial structure. Techniques like augmentation and diminution can contribute to the creation of a mosaic. Equally crucial is the robust sense of pulse that imparts energy to the music, providing a sensation akin to an engine in motion. Nonetheless, the straightforward melodic loops, when layered simultaneously with others, arguably give rise to a polyphonic musical texture.⁴⁴ It is not uncommon for the meter of a pattern to change⁴⁵ or for the beat to align sequentially with each subsequent note of the pattern. In such cases, the musical patterns seem to be altered or modified, giving the impression of a continuous change of progressions.

Additional crucial elements contributing to a sense of continuity include maintaining a steady tempo, even during changes in time signature, and constructing tensions throughout the entire piece.

Figure 4



In figure 4, it is evident that both hands perform distinct musical lines in varying time signatures. The left hand maintains the pulse with its concrete patterns, while the right hand revolves around its melody.

b) meditative music

The debate surrounding whether the primary characteristic of minimal music was intentionally aimed to proving its meditative component as a predefined ideal, or if it emerged quasi-unconsciously from within itself, is ongoing and complex.

⁴³ Mertens, p. 16-17.

⁴⁴ Omar Khokher, *GOSE Composition Guide. Minimalist Music*, MTRS & Omar Kokher, 2003, www.mtrs.co.uk

⁴⁵ Walter Salmer, *Der musikalische Satz: ein Handbuch zum Lernen und Lehren*, Helbling, Innsbruck, 1987, p. 245.

⁴⁶ Philip Glass, *The Complete Piano Etudes*, Chester Music Limited, London, 2014, p. 34.

On one hand, proponents such as Potter, Strickland and Ross argue that minimal music composers deliberately crafted their works with the intention of fostering a meditative experience for the listener. They suggest that composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and Terry Riley were deeply influenced by Eastern philosophies and practices such as meditation and mindfulness. Therefore, these composers intentionally structured their compositions to induce states of relaxation and introspection. The terminology ‘meditative music’ takes on polemical dimensions in some contributions that exclusively focus on the effect of minimal music and often ruthlessly extract it from overall concepts.⁴⁷ A terminology revolving centrally around the poles of ‘trance, addiction, or narcosis’ reveals a somewhat closed and overly simplistic approach towards these music genres. Moreover, the inherent flaw in this approach becomes evident. By attempting to categorise the multifaceted expressions of minimal music solely under the label of ‘meditative music, the definition fails to acknowledge the full spectrum of its effects. Instead, it oversimplifies the music’s impact, reducing it to a mere instrument of psychological influence.⁴⁸

But what actually makes minimal music susceptible of being meditative? Several components may be relevant. The time factor undoubtedly plays a significant role, whereas the extreme length of minimalist pieces, with their seemingly endless sustaining tones and overtones, contributes to this effect. Despite the apparent ‘nothingness’ happening, there does a subtle, gradual development exist. For instance, Philip Glass while strictly adhering to the rules of minimalist composition techniques, manages to arrange the repetitive patters in a way in which it eventually leads to a culmination. In his case, harmony is the element which represents the essential key. In contrast, Reich chooses phasing to infuse his repetitive music with a meditative quality, diverging from the harmonic principle. The ‘cloud of sound’⁴⁹ that emerges from *Piano Phase* is distinctly devoid of spiritual intentions or a classical focus on harmonic structures. As a support to this idea, Wim Mertens argues that minimal music neither seeks expressiveness nor adheres to the pursuit of reaching a conclusion at the end of a piece. According to him, classical music tends to be teleological or goal-oriented, with each musical event leading towards a specific conclusion or synthesis. The composition is perceived as a cohesive musical product characterised by an organic unity. Its underlying dynamic and dramatic structure create a sense of directionality, assuming a linear memory in the listener and compelling them to follow a linear musical progression, this requiring a serious and focused approach to listening, mostly dominated by memory. By contrast, the repetitive music of American composers can be described as non-narrative and a-theological. These compositions discard harmonic schemes of tension and relaxation, as well as classical forms

47 Relevant examples to sustain this argument can be found in Strickland’s *Minimalism: Origins*, p. 186-190 or Ross’s *The Rest Is Noise*, p. 447-450.

48 Lovisa, *minimal-music*, p. 12-13.

49 Christian Schrei, *Minimal*, Diploma Thesis, Institut für Informations-Design der FH Joanneum, Graz, 2005
<https://www.nook.at/minimal/en/meditative-effect/>, consulted on 25.02.2024

and their associated narrative structures. Instead, they demonstrate non-directed evolution, liberating the listener from the confines of a predetermined musical trajectory. Having outlined these points, Mertens concludes that the repetitive music represents the culmination of an anti-dialectic movement that has influenced European avant-garde music since Arnold Schönberg, reaching its peak with John Cage.⁵⁰ Besides this, Tom Johnson also explores the concept of repetition as being a fundamental element in minimal music, emphasising its role in creating a hypnotic and meditative atmosphere. He delves into the simplicity of the musical materials used in minimal music, highlighting how composers often strip away unnecessary complexities in order to focus on essential acoustic elements. Additionally, in *What is Minimalism really about* (1977)⁵¹ Johnson discusses the importance of the listener's perception and engagement, suggesting that this genre invites listeners to actively participate in the unfolding of the musical experience. Overall, his essay provides valuable insights into the nature and aesthetics of minimal music beyond the interpretations offered by other critics.

On the other hand, some critics such as Ulrich Dibelius argue that the meditative qualities of minimal music emerged organically as a result of the compositional techniques and aesthetic principles employed by these composers. The repetitive patterns, gradual permutations or sustained tones inherent in this genre might have organically and unconsciously led to a meditative atmosphere. As Dibelius argues in his writings, the psychedelic quality inherent in regularity can be seen as stemming from “a self-inflicted intoxication of civilised humans”.⁵² The abundant diversity of imagination and the richness of natural forms in his arguments led to the confined regularity of the humans' cognitive processes, their behaviours and their industrial productions methods. The sterile uniformity of the mass production became the outcome, as the absolute adherence to norms gradually developed to a self-imposed guiding principle of their existence. This phenomenon unfolded to such a pervasive extent, that human consciousness found itself increasingly inclined to perceive this ‘trimmed-down’ second nature as the genuine reality.⁵³

The argument is undoubtedly sustained by the pioneers' excursions to exotic countries (such as Reich's trip to Ghana or Riley's and Glass's journeys to India), with the predefined purpose of broadening their musical horizons. The search for something new, more primal and raw, is inextricably linked to the quest for a new spiritual dimension, evident in the subsequent signature of their works. A possible unconscious dimension of spiritual awareness marked their music with an intrinsic ‘meditative’ characteristic, reflecting the influence of their experiences of their journeys and profoundly impacting their search for new sensory and musical perceptions. Moreover, as

50 Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, p. 17-18.

51 Tom Johnson, *What Is Minimalism Really About?*, June 13, 1977 <https://editions75.com/tvonm/articles/1977/what-is-minimalism-really-about.html>, consulted on 25.02.2024

52 Dibelius, p. 59.

53 Ibidem, p. 176.

human brains function by rhythmic pulsations for processing diverse streams, musical pulsations directly influence human affectivity. “At the core of rhythm is the beat, and since beats are cyclic”⁵⁴, it might be deducted that minimal music emerged as a form of music in various cultural contexts of human civilization, to accompany diverse formal contexts, such as burials, memorials, and sacrifices.⁵⁵ However, discussions about its impact can only be conducted on an empirical level, as musical perceptions are indeed subjective manifestations.

In some respects, the term ‘minimal music’ contradicts the concept of ‘meditative music’. Aforementioned proponents of the term acknowledge its psychological effects on listeners, and even labels like ‘trance music’ recognize its significant influence. Consequently, viewing ‘minimal music’ solely through its aesthetic impact could be misleading. Minimalist works, such as Terry Riley’s all-night concerts, challenge the literal notion of ‘minimal’. Unlike the focus on effect, the concept of ‘minimal music’ derives from formal, analytical considerations of the works and concepts, limitation being a central element, evident in various aspects (like the strictly limited combinable sets from *In C*). Although the principle of limitation has evolved within minimalist practice, as seen in the works of younger composers and in pieces by Steve Reich and Philip Glass,⁵⁶ it remained integral to minimal music’s development. Hence, minimal music has evolved, gaining habitual value and journalistic recognition, particularly within its cultural contexts. Nonetheless, nowadays the terminology is used with a broader connotation, proving that the prevalence of extensive⁵⁷ ‘minimal’ characteristics of a piece includes it in the genre.

c) tonal music

The prevalence of tonality, respectively the reliance on clear tonal centres or key and repetitive harmonic structures, represents an essential characteristic of minimal music. In the detriment of versatile contemporary music styles that exploit atonality or complex serial techniques, minimal music preserves a steady binding to tonal harmony, sustaining its predetermined clarity. Perhaps it is also one of the factors because of which this genre is perceived as being more accessible and appealing to a broad audience. However, the aspect of ‘tonality’ should not be understood *ad literam*, but as ‘chordally oriented’ tendency of minimal music. As a matter of fact, one of the defining features of minimal music is its use of static or slowly changing harmonies that reinforce the ‘primary control’ of the pieces.⁵⁸ As examples, following pieces could be given: from Philip Glass’s early works *Music in Fifths* relies on repetitive harmonic progressions that establish a

54 Per Aage Brandt, *The Rhythmic Mind – Nine Minimal Notes on the Cognitive Semiotics of Music and Meaning in The Music of Meaning*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Unabridged Edition, 2019, p. 46-58.

55 Ibidem, p. 58.

56 Discussed in chapter III.3.

57 Lovisa, p. 14-15.

58 Jonathan W. Bernhard, *Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality in Recent American Music*, in: *American Music*, Vol. 21, no. 1, Spring, 2003, p. 114.

clear tonal centre; Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* is composed of 11 chords, each repeated numerous times before transitioning to the next⁵⁹, creating a coherent and extensive tonal framework;

Terry Riley's *In C* paves throughout its development the tonal centering.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the limited usage of harmonic materials, though combined with prolonged tensions-resolutions and smooth transitions, in my perception creates at last the impression of continuity and unaltered soundscapes.

d) acoustic art

The term Ac' Art originates from minimal music in the realm of fine art, created in analogy to Op' Art (abbreviation for Optical Art⁶¹), a movement that gained significant importance in the mid-1960s. While Op' Art involved optical illusions, line overlays, perspective tricks, and flicker effects to make viewers aware of the interplay between form and space, Acoustic Art preserved a similar connotation, introducing the listeners into a musical endeavor which altered the perception of time. Presumably, the connection between minimal music and Op' Art is evident exactly in the precision and repetition of geometric elements in both art sectors. Moreover, there is also a similarity in the psychological effects of both forms, such as the auditory experiences from La Monte Young's sounds and the visual vibrations from Wilding's work. Hence, the temporal parallel in the development of minimal music and Op' Art suggests a close relationship between the two art concepts, with New York being a common focal point.⁶²

While the analogy between the terminology and concepts of minimal music and Op' Art is compelling, it is essential to note that they share only specific characteristics, which may not be sufficient for a full association. In fact, it frequently occurs that sudden and abrupt transitions of patterns/directions in later minimal music compositions essentially oppose the apparent calm, repetitive characteristics of Op' Art.⁶³

59 Mertens, p. 63.

60 To be seen Chapter III.3.1.

61 Pioneering artists like Josef Albers, Victor Vasarely, Bridget Riley, François Morellet, and Americans such as Kelly, Stella, Liberman, Louis, and Noland were central to this movement.

62 Lovisa, p. 17-18.

63 Ibidem, p. 19.

3. The Pioneers of minimal-music

This subchapter aims to briefly portray the most significant composers who developed minimal-music as a genre, and to analyse some of their notable works. The following pages are essential for understanding how, where, and why this artistic phenomenon occurred, phenomenon which has in fact largely spread onto the current cultural stage.

1. Terry Riley

The first central figure to present an incursion into the origins of minimal-music is illustrated by Terry Riley. An apparent predetermined nature of musical idiosyncratic rhythms made Riley's Indian raga singing to appear "not as a willful departure, but as a deepening of hidden views of his own sound ideas."⁶⁴ With *In C*, an extensive diversification of playing around the note C, constructed with fifty-three variably different, yet extremely simple figurative models⁶⁵, Riley initiated the essential principle of minimal-music: the temporal emerging of a reduced minimal material through constant repetition.

Born on June 24, 1935 in Colfax, California, Terry Riley was the son of a railroad worker of Irish descent and a mother of Italian ancestry. "When Italians got together, it often happened that everyone who could do anything musically did something. I remember that I liked to sing and I liked to listen to songs on the radio",⁶⁶ stated Riley in one of the interviews about his childhood. Radio played a significant role in young Riley's life, serving as his primary source of exposure to music. While his musical education initially started with the violin, he transitioned to the piano at the age of eight. His focus on improvisational techniques was central to his musical development, as he predominantly played by ear. Reflecting on his approach, Riley admitted that he was somewhat lazy⁶⁷ to learn music from traditional sheet music, reason why he extensively listened to the radio, television not being available at that time.

Terry Riley's early musical journey was shaped by his limited exposure to classical music, as he was exclusively aware of the popular music of the time. Despite this, he harbored a profound interest in music from a young age, becoming the first musician in his family. His curiosity extended to all instruments, consequently finding inspiration from various educators (particularly those teaching piano and choir). A pivotal moment came when the conductor of his high school choir introduced him to a selection of CDs, expanding his musical horizons.

⁶⁴ Dibelius, *Moderne Musik*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ Ibidem

⁶⁶ Lovisa, *Minimal Music*, p. 45.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 46.

Growing up in an isolated region devoid of contemporary musical influences, Riley's primary connection to the outside world was the noise of passing trains⁶⁸. Could we deduce that this exposure perhaps served as an unconscious wellspring of inspiration? That the background noise created a fundamental layer for compositional explorations (ex. Electronic music)?

Upon entering San Francisco Conservatory at the age of 20, the young student harbored aspirations of becoming a concert pianist, envisioning himself performing works by Beethoven, Bach, and other composers. The stimulant atmosphere at the Conservatory fueled his creative spirit, while being surrounded by peers engaged in composing their own music. Despite his initial lack of exposure to classical music, Riley's journey exemplifies the transformative power of passion and determination in pursuing one's musical aspirations.

Apart of his studies, Riley also embarked on his musical journey by immersing himself in the non-conservative world of underground music, financing his studies through being a Ragtime-Pianist in bars. Unsurprisingly, the restrictive environment of classical norms soon altered his dreams of becoming a concert pianist, in favor of aspiring for composing a music which has not been yet explored. Although his early compositions, predominantly the trio for violin, clarinet and piano, bore traces of the impressionistic styles of Debussy and Ravel,⁶⁹ Riley's fascination for the avant-garde compositions of Schönberg led him to apply the principles of serialistic music in his own works. His experimenting culminated in the composition *Spectra* (for six Instruments), which earned Riley the prestigious *Nicola di Lorenzo Prize*.⁷⁰ Conceptually similar to Stockhausen's *Zeitmaße*, *Spectra* was built on contrasting tempi in order to create intricate rhythmic layers. While the serialistic technique was utilised in the opening and closing sections of the piece, the main body featured alternating "waves of rhythmic unison and disintegration".⁷¹ The idea of "indeterminacy" represented a predominant element in Riley's compositions, allowing the performers to make interpretative choices. This approach not only added diversity to the apparent contrasting patterns, but also created the perception of spontaneity and unpredictability in the music, *In C* being one of the most relevant examples to sustain this argument.

In the early 1960s, Terry Riley's career took a memorable turn when he started collaborating with choreographer Anna Halprin, an experience that ignited his passion for choreography and music, as well as working with dancers. Concurrently, he became a member of La Monte Young's „Theatre of Eternal Music“, where Young's innovative approach to music served as a unique source of inspiration for his future development. Moreover, the Masters diploma from Berkeley opened

68 Stephane Lelong, *Nouvelle musique*, Editions Balland, Paris, 1996, p. 318-319.

69 Lovisa, *Minimal Music*, p. 46-47.

70 *ibidem*

71 Ed Chang, *Zeitmasse*, November 2015, <https://stockhausenspace.blogspot.com/2015/11/zeitmasze.html>, consulted on 20.03.24.

well doors to opportunities in Europe. The genuine enthusiasm ensued when Riley, while relocating to France, stopped shortly in Spain. Being captivated by the rich tapestry of the diverse cultures coexisting harmoniously, Riley accommodated in various European metropolises, earning a living though performance.⁷² After initially joining an improvising ensemble in Paris, where Riley demonstrated his pianistic skills and recited poems, the young artist expanded his creative endeavors through the introduction of “All-Night-Concerts” to its Scandinavian audience. The constant performing from 10 pm to 4 am was in the detriment of a composing output, however, Riley diligently documented his ideas for future exploration.⁷³

The assassination of Kennedy in 1964 profoundly altered Terry Riley’s trajectory, compelling him to return to San Francisco due to the circumstances. However, it was within this context that Riley composed one of his signature works. Arguably, the first piece to truly introduce Minimalism as a genre is *In C*, a masterpiece of aleatoric interpretations that might induce a trance-like effect on its listeners.

Figure 5



72 “Je passai d’abord par L’Espagne, avec ma femme et ma fille de trois ans. Je voulais absorber toute la culture européenne. Je n’étais pas seulement venu pour la musique européenne, que le connaissais déjà, mais aussi pour les différentes cultures. C’est à cette époque que j’ai eu mes premiers contacts avec la musique orientale, beaucoup de chaines de radio espagnoles diffusant de la musique marocaine. Ce que j’ai jamais dans le jazz, je le retrouvais dans cette musique”, Lelong, *Nouvelle musique*, p. 320.

73 ibidem

74 Robert Carl, *Terry Riley’s In C*, 14 January 2010, <https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/terry-rileys-in-c/>, consulted on 20.03.2024.

“*In C* was revolutionary! Besides the fact that San Francisco grouped all the major American poets together, I had an extraordinary audience. It was an ideological and revolutionary success of those times”, Riley states in one of his interviews.⁷⁵ Not only did it represent an unprecedented success, but *In C* exemplifies Riley’s characteristic ‘pulse-piece’ style, evoking a surging flow of sound. Initially being realised at the San Francisco Tape Music Center, this work gained significant acclaim, particularly during a performance at the *Pro Musica Nova* concerts in Bremen in 1980, where it was hailed “as the most influential composition by an American since 1960”.⁷⁶ Unsurprisingly, *In C* preserves its captivating effect even 16 years after its debut.

Being composed for an unlimited number of instruments⁷⁷, the piece is comprised of 55 different patterns played over a pulsating C octave. Both the meter and the foundational structure are established via the ostinato in C, which eventually serves as a root-cell to all developing individual motifs. Despite the patterns’ equal importance, the mentioned ostinato in C plays a prominent role due to its structural significance. By utilising the concept of tape loops in each repeating a pattern, Riley incorporates live repetition through the involving of multiple musicians, hence contributing to the piece’s unique acoustic structure. Improvisation plays a distinct importance, with performers given freedom in timing – speed – motif repetitions – transitions. Riley himself emphasised the improvisational nature of the piece, viewing it as a collaborative process to determine the final outcome. The predefined patterns vary in length and tonality, however maintaining general similarities. While conventional elements are present, such as Ionian, dominant, and subdominant relationships, Riley presents them unconventionally, opting for a fluid succession of timbres rather than a “cadenza-like structure”.⁷⁸ This deviation from traditional rhythmic concepts results in a composition that challenges conventional listening experiences, evoking a rhythmic structure that transcends perceivable rhythms.

While the uniformity of the flow is redeemed throughout the constant tempo and equally steady dynamic, the temporal plane of the composition is determined by the rhythmic overlays and cross-stands. Moreover, not only aimed the composer to immerse his listeners in a distinctive auditory experience but also ventured into redefining the perception of time. Due to its aleatory nature, *In C* could vary in duration from twenty minutes to well over an hour. Consequently, it could be asserted that such a successive variation of the overall sound is hardly perceptible in terms of a conventional listening experience. The aggregation of the individual beats emphasises the impression of a composition that, while being rhythmically structured, is no longer rhythmically discernible. The novel perspective of his composition aims to provide a multi-dimensional approach

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 321-322.

⁷⁶ Lovisa, *Minimal music*, p. 53.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, “the more, the merrier”, p. 54.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 55.

of tonal, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic lines, creating opportunities for distinguished interpretations. *In C* “denies the existence of boredom” and provides its audience “to lose themselves in the music”.⁷⁹

In 1970 Terry Riley met Pandit Pran Nath in San Francisco, becoming his disciple. His ambition of starting a new career, as well as becoming a professional Raga singer, led the 35 year old musician to traveling to India, where he studied classical Hindustani music. “In the late 60s, when I was composing pieces such as *A Rainbow in Curved Air*, I increasingly felt the need to make my music more transparent, perhaps more musical and simpler. It was during this time that I met Pandit Pran Nath and began studying classical Indian singing with him. The techniques of this ancient tradition, which achieve profound effects with relatively simple means, fit perfectly into my new concept. This was a significant step towards creating a transparent music of sketch-like clarity. My goal was to achieve an effect of complete relaxation, beauty, and intensity simultaneously. I heard this in Pran Nath’s music. It seems to emerge effortlessly. However, when you study with him, you realize how much effort is required to achieve such simplicity (...) He also was the one who advised me not to fully abandon my musical tradition, but to develop in parallel two different forms of music”,⁸⁰ states Riley in one of his interviews.

The introduction to raga is pertinent here, given its significance for both Riley’s musical concept and his personal development. While the raga system does not define the typical minimalist style associated with Riley, the foundational ideas of both musical traditions are interconnected. The importance of the Indian musical system for many minimalistic composers is undeniable, even if its principles primarily reduce to a theoretical foundation. In the course of this chapter examples of this statement shall be given in regard to other composers.

Similar to La Monte Young⁸¹, Riley initially perceives Western Music as a subset of world music that eventually derived from the Classical Indian tradition, although developing into “a branch so strong that it stands on its own”.⁸² Hence, given this belief, Riley underscores the necessity of returning to the roots, fact which justifies his later efforts to integrate homogenously both musical worlds.

Riley perceived the Western focus on equal-tempered scales limiting compared to the richness of the Indian music system, illustrating this by referencing twelve-tone music. “The ideas

79 Justin Davidson, *A Stoner’s Revolt*, New York, Magazine, no.14 (16 April 2009), <https://nymag.com/arts/classicaldance/classical/reviews/56138/>

80 Lelong, *Nouvelle musique*, p. 322-323.

81 It is essential to mention that La Monte Young was also a pioneering American composer and musician known for his contributions to minimalism or his innovative use of sustained tones and intonation. His influential works and installations (ex. *The Dream House*) have profoundly impacted contemporary music and experimental sound art. However, due to the main research topic of this thesis – the reception of minimal music on the pianistic repertoire – and Young’s brief exploration on works for solo piano, a detailed analysis of his style would have not been relevant to the subject.

82 Lovisa, *Minimal music*, p. 48

of twelve-tone music clearly indicate how the equal-tempered system has collapsed. To continue using equal temperament, composers had to move towards Serialism because they only had twelve tones available. This palette is very limited, with only twelve ‘stuck notes’, as Pandit Pran Nath calls them, tones that cannot be altered, like those on the piano. What interests me, and I know it interests La Monte Young too, is tuning. Classical Indian music offers a vast palette of colours in its frequency relationships. When examined closely, it reveals many new expressions, feelings, and colours absent in Western music”.⁸³ As being expected, Riley modified the equal temperament of notes in his work, although not primarily in his core minimalist pieces. To him, the scale steps derived from overtones seem more natural and richer than the ones from equal tuning system based on a mathematical ratio. “For each step of the scale, there is more than one possibility in interval relationships, and from these countless relationships arose the great system of ragas”, argues Riley. Additionally, the mentioned tones are being perceived as better harmonised, and the intervals clearer and more distinct. The preference for electronic instruments in Riley’s works is undoubtedly due to their easier tunability, which eventually makes its listeners more “aware of a finer, subtler stream of tones”.⁸⁴

A relevant example for Riley’s ideology, as well as the cross-cultured influences which persisted in his compositions or the appurtenance to the minimalism genre, is *Persian Surgery Dervishes*. Not only does the work involve a reproducing of the taught Indian Raga, but also enables the composer to create a unique fusion style of improvisation techniques and the usage of electronic instruments. Composed in 1971, at the beginning of his Eastern cultural explorations, *Persian Surgery Dervishes* is a notable keyboard composition, which was performed live in two concerts in Los Angeles and Paris. This piece is not only characterised by its extended duration and minimalist style, emphasising Riley’s signature use of repetitive patterns and modal improvisation, but also marked by the composer’s recurrent motive A-F-A flat-B flat- F.⁸⁵ *Persian Surgery Dervishes* reflects Riley’s in depth connection with non-Western musical traditions, particularly his study of Raga music, which denotes the work’s intricate rhythmic structures and meditative

83 Lovisa, p. 49.

84 However, mastering the new system, like the European composers involves a process directly parallel to the minimalist thinking. Riley describes the daily study routine: “Raga practice starts early in the morning. Pandit Pran Nath would rise around 4 or 5 a.m. every morning and start immediately by tuning the tamboura. We would then sing long-held tones in the lowest register for three or four hours. We practiced the same raga, starting with *Dhairab*, one of the six main ragas, which serves as a seed raga for many others. Before starting to sing compositions or practice scales, we spent two or three hours practicing the long tones. By then, the sun had risen, and the day began. We usually went through several morning ragas before finishing the morning practice. After a small breakfast, we continued practicing – noon ragas, late afternoon ragas, evening ragas. It is similar to a religious retreat where people meditate all day. While practicing raga, you begin to observe how the mind works and how to control through concentration. You engage with the real elements of your own being, making it both a mental and musical exercise.” Lovisa, p. 49.

85 Mertens, *American Music*, p. 44.

atmosphere. The work is distinguishable due to hypnotic attribute, traversing the developing effect of the sustained, evolving sound.

Other relevant works of Riley's minimal-music compositions are his *Keyboard Studies*. Composed in the late 1960s, these etudes present repetitive structures and patterns, emphasising gradual alterations in a meditative style. Being known for their usage of simplified motives, complex layering,⁸⁶ and open-ended performance instructions, these pieces allow the performers an unlimited interpretational spontaneity and flexibility.

Terry Riley was undoubtedly an innovator and perpetuator of a avant-garde music. However, when being asked about his belongingness to *The New Age Music*, he gave an insightful response. "The music of Webern and Schönberg gained prominence during a time marked by intense global anxiety, coinciding with the First World War. This period also saw the emergence of psychotherapy and explorations into the subconsciousness. The influence of their music was highly significant in the early part of the century. Fortunately, few composers have strayed far from their roots. Following the Second World War, by the late 1950s, there was a strong desire for freedom. We sought hope, spiritual depth, and thus, minimalism emerged within this context. Unfortunately, labels such as 'New Age' emerged, which often turned profound ideas into marketing strategies, merely to sell records. In the post-Berlin Wall era and the collapse of the Soviet Empire, new ideas and concepts emerged, challenging the theories that dominated since WWII. However, it is unfortunate that the New Age label has led people to believe that simply buying a CD can lead to a spiritual enlightenment (...)"⁸⁷

Comprehensively, the legacy of Terry Riley is still being present in the contemporary artistic sphere. Not only does the minimal style of his composing influence further generations of young performers, but his cultural ideology also generates a collective sentiment of awareness and self-determination. "Music, in its abstract form, serves as a unique language comparable to prayer or meditation. It enables communication with others and with the higher aspects of oneself. I am deeply committed to creating work that goes beyond mere logical dialogue. For instance, Bach dedicated much of his work to God and the higher part of his being."⁸⁸

86 Richard Andrew Lee, *The Interaction of Linear and Vertical Time in Minimalist and Postminimalist Piano Music: a dissertation in performance*, Faculty of Missouri, Kansas City, 2010, p. 30.

87 Lelong, *Nouvelle musique*, p. 325.

88 Ibidem, p. 327.

2. Philip Glass

Steve Reich and Philip Glass share a profoundly interconnected history. Reich performed with the *Philip Glass Ensemble* from 1968 to 1970, while Glass contributed to the premiere of Reich's *Four Organs* in 1970 at the Guggenheim Museum. This close collaboration, especially prior to Glass establishing his own distinctive style in 1966, indicates that Reich's influence on Glass was significant.⁸⁹ Among the pioneers of minimal music, Philip Glass stands out as being the most celebrated one. He adeptly transformed a niche musical genre, initially embraced by a small number of enthusiasts, into a mass movement that interconnected the profound division between classical and pop music. His compositions resonated with the audiences (regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds), emerging them into a hypnotic vortex of repetitive patterns. This widespread appeal extended to prestigious venues, such as The Metropolitan Opera and Carnegie Hall, as well as rock temples and music halls throughout Europe.⁹⁰

Philip Glass was born on January 31, 1937, in Baltimore, Maryland. One of the earliest exposures to a variety of music came from his father, Ben Glass, who owned a radio reparation business and sold alongside records. "My father owned a music store. He would bring me the unsold records, which I listened to, such as Schubert's sonatas, Beethoven's string quartets, and Shostakovich's symphonies. The musicians in the family were uncles or cousins, not my parents. Most of them played pop music",⁹¹ quotes Glass in one of his interviews. "I remember having very precise memories with the Schubert's sonatas which my parents used to listen at home." At the young age of six, Philip Glass started playing the violin, eight years later commencing its studies of flute at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. This varied exposure led Glass to pursue music studies, ultimately attending the University of Chicago⁹² and later, at the age of 19, moving to New York to study at the Juilliard School with teachers like William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. He also studied with Darius Milhaud during the Aspen Music Festival.⁹³ During this period, Glass composed numerous works, including string quartets and orchestral pieces. However, Glass's

89 Lovisa, p. 87.

90 Dibelius, *Moderne Musik*, p. 187.

91 Lelong, p. 162.

92 "Then I moved to Chicago. No longer at the Peabody Conservatory, I stopped taking flute lessons and began piano lessons with a friend, Marcus Raskin, an ex-Juilliard student. Marcus, who now works at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington—a left-of-center think tank—had been a prodigy pianist at Juilliard before shifting to law studies in Chicago. It was through him that I realized there was a contemporary form of concert music. I remember him playing the Alban Berg Sonata (...) The school in Chicago had an excellent music library, allowing me to study contemporary music through scores, as there were no teachers, performers, or recordings available in 1952 or 1953. Dial Records had some recordings of Webern's Bagatelles and Berg's Lyric Suite, representing the twelve-ton school. Marcus must have explained some of these principles to me because my initial compositions began to reflect these influences." Richard Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass. Essays. Interviews. Criticism*, Berkely, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999, p. 17-18.

93 Mertens, p. 67.

preoccupation with composition began much earlier. His sudden curiosity for creating music emerged at the age of 15. “I loved almost everything. I was drawn to classical music, but I also knew jazz and pop. In the 1940s, when I was a kid, the music scene was really very different from what it is today. There were no bands and I only discovered music by starting to play it. I played in my first orchestra at the age of 10. Then, I did stage music in high school, and I didn't start composing seriously until university.”⁹⁴

A pivotal moment in Philip Glass's artistic development occurred during his studies in Paris with Nadia Boulanger (1964-1966)⁹⁵ after receiving the Fulbright Scholarship, and the eventual collaboration with the Indian sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar.⁹⁶ Despite the extensive classical training, Glass considered that his early compositions reflected too much influence from his teachers.⁹⁷ This realisation led him to a profound exploration of non-Western and non-traditional music, particularly Indian music, where he discovered complex rhythmic structures which he would further use in his compositions, by creating simple melodic figures and alternating harmonic progressions that captivate the audience's attention over an extended duration.⁹⁸

Glass departed from Paris in 1966, spending eight months in Asia and India before returning to New York. His compositions from 1967 to 1968 applied several innovative ideas, among these being an extension of the Indian *tal*, a rhythmic cycle with a fixed number of beats that repeats only after an extended period. He entirely abandoned harmony as well, focusing in its detriment on monophonic solo music with a steady pulse. In an effort to transform the traditional concert experience, Glass wrote scores that incorporated visual shapes and required performers to move throughout the performance space according to the score. *Strung Out* (1967) exemplifies the

94 Lelong, p. 163.

95 “The composers I studied with Boulanger are the people I still think about the most – Bach and Mozart.” Kostenlanetz, *Writings*, p. 109.

96 „There were several notable moments in my journey, with one of the most significant being my encounter with Ravi Shankar in Paris in 1965. This meeting profoundly reshaped my perception of music. I must also acknowledge the invaluable guidance of my teachers: Darius Milhaud, whom I deeply admired, and Nadia Boulanger, who exerted a tremendous influence on me. Darius Milhaud had a close association with Cocteau, and the aesthetic and cultural ethos of French music from the 1920s and 30s left a lasting impression on me during my formative years. French culture held a particular fascination for me. Nadia Boulanger herself had studied under Gabriel Fauré. I sought her out in Paris at the age of 25 because, at that time, there was no one of her caliber at the New York Conservatory. However, she was an exceptionally demanding instructor who believed that I needed to rebuild my musical education from the ground up. Under her tutelage, I began anew. My days were rigorously structured, starting at dawn and ending at dusk, filled with private lessons, small group sessions, and classroom instruction. It was probably the best musical formation I could have gotten. Not only did I learn a steady technique, but also the discipline.” Lelong, p. 163-164.

97 Lovisa, p. 88; Glass's initial compositions encompassed string quartets, orchestral essays, and wind sextets, which demonstrated the influences of his teachers and composers such as Aaron Copland.

98 Although Glass never associated his compositional style with minimal music, it can be deducted that it aligns closely with the fundamental characteristics of the genre. Subjectively, Glass's compositions, while seeming simplistic, possess an essential quality: they intrinsically build structural tension that resonates with the audience's suspense. From my personal experience, performing Glass's piano pieces always necessitated a dynamic interpretation, keeping me highly alert as a performer. Moreover, the subtle yet specific changes in dynamics demand my heightened level of attentiveness.

mentioned concepts, by featuring an amplified violin and a fixed sound source and allowing the performer to move without altering the audience's perception of volume. Subsequent works included *Head On* (for violin, cello, and piano, 1967), *In Again Out Again* (for two pianos, 1968), *Music in the Shape of a Square* (for two flutes, 1968), the simplistic *How Now* (for piano solo)⁹⁹ or *600 Lines*.¹⁰⁰ It could be indirectly stated that the previously mentioned compositions represented the composer's introduction in the genre of minimal music, despite not being perceived more than 'practice pieces' for a novel music style.

Besides being the crucial years for Glass's development of compositional signature, the mid 1960s offered the composer the possibility of performing. The *Philip Glass Ensemble*¹⁰¹ which he formed as a manner of expressing his experimental music of the time being – the incipient of his minimalism – gained international recognition, starting to perform in New York's gallery scenes and continuing to various artistic institutions.

The young artist's path to success was indeed challenging. While Glass continuously refined his compositional style, simultaneously remaining determined to perform, the lack of public interest as well as financial resources prevented him from achieving his desire exposure. In fact, his genuine sympathy from the audience occurred years later, after the premiere of his so-called opera *Einstein on the Beach*.¹⁰² The question whether the resulting piece could indeed be described as an opera remains debatable, even as it brought an enormous success with it. For the incredible five-hour length of *Einstein on the Beach* (1975), Glass collaborated with the theatrical visionary Robert Wilson.¹⁰³ An apparent petit, yet crucial step which ultimately conducted to the integration of stage and optics in the composer's work. Featuring an ensemble of singers, actors, two choirs and an orchestra of saxophones, flutes, bass clarinet, organ/keyboard and electronics, the work dismissed the traditional libretto of plot or arias. In effect, the work includes two protagonists, namely Einstein

99 Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, p. 41.

100 "Works such as *How Now* or *600 Lines* were, in effect, practice pieces for the new ensemble to develop those skills. These included, besides stamina and sustained concentration, the ability to play continuously in a relaxed, easy and joyful manner. I am very pleased to note that the Alter Ego ensemble has accomplished all these." https://philipglass.com/compositions/how_now/, consulted on 01.05.24.

101 Similar to Steve Reich

102 „Though the concert was beautifully played and very rewarding for Dorothy, Jon, and myself, the fact of the matter was that there were only six (six!) people in the audience—one being my mother, Ida Glass herself. I don't believe that she, unlike my dad, had any ear for music, but she could count, and the number of heads that made up the extremely small audience must have seemed a disaster. It had been an afternoon concert, and since Ida had never planned on spending the night in New York, I accompanied her back to Penn Station. The only comment she made was that my hair was too long. It would be over eight years before Ida came back to New York, in November 1976, when *Einstein on the Beach* was at the Metropolitan Opera. This time there was an audience of almost four thousand people—all the seats plus standing room were sold. She sat with Bob Wilson's father in a box. I gather that they were both mystified, but at least it must have seemed real to her. I always wondered what she thought of such a great change of fortune in such a short time. From that moment on, she took my occupation very seriously, and she was concerned that I was handling the business part of it properly. By then, she knew I was always going to be a musician, but now her concern shifted over to the likelihood that supporting my family would always be a struggle." Philip Glass, *Words Without Music: a Memoir*, Liveright Publishing Company, New York, 2015, p. 181.

103 Dibelius, p. 188.

playing the violin and the audience itself, dancers and actors representing schizophrenic alter egos of Einstein.¹⁰⁴ As a replacement to a narrative development, it served as an inclusive support for various associative relationships, from the Theory of Relativity to nightmares about the nuclear holocaust,¹⁰⁵ from childhood train games to violin soli, from a dystopian world judgment to flying spaceship. These elements were uninterruptedly highlighted by a musical hum, ranging from meticulously calculated sound bands to soothing and long-lasting mimetic tableaux.¹⁰⁶ This musical approach established a coordinated modular system which was composed of evolving sound layers and scenic mosaics, centered around the main character. In this composition, the harmony frequently involved a brief sequence of chords employed as repeating modules, with additive rhythm techniques altering their proportions and tonal duration in continually evolving patterns. Although these sequences were mainly or entirely composed of triads, they seldom resembled conventional harmonic progressions. This effect was achieved through an unconventional use of chromaticism and an abandoning of traditional principles of voice leading.¹⁰⁷ In effect, the usage of composed triads and repetitive minor thirds could be considered a prime example for Glass's signature, *Metamorphosis* being a relevant work regarding the topic.

Composed in 1988, the five-part suite *Metamorphosis* is distinguished by its repetitive patterns and gradual variations, elements which are emblematic for Glass's signature style. Each piece within the suite utilises a series of repeating chord progressions, with subtle, almost imperceptible alterations which produce a mesmerising, meditative effect. It is essential to be mentioned that at the end of 80s Philip Glass was mainly working in film and theater, in particular as a collaborator with Wilson, fact which undoubtedly influenced his solo compositions. *Metamorphosis* embodied the motifs of alternation and transformation, exploiting the principle of evolving repetition. The first movement is predominantly composed of oscillating minor thirds beneath a straightforward and continuously repeated melody. While the inherent simplicity of the pieces requires the performer to deeply immerse himself in the music, for the listener, this creates a sense of escape, owing to the passive and ethereal quality of the composition. The second movement continues in this style, offering a variation of the initial melody. As the piece unfolds, the melody gradually transforms into something entirely distinct from its original form. It is only upon the return of the original melody that the listener becomes aware of how far they have wandered. From a critical perspective, the significance of the works is of utmost importance, emphasising its impact on Glass's career and its reception within the minimal music community. Although the suite

104 Mertens, p. 81.

105 As depicted in the book *On the Beach* by Nevil Shutte.

106 Dibelius, p. 189.

107 Jonathan W. Bernard, *Tonal Traditions in Art Music since 1960*, in: *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholas, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1998, p. 556-557.

maintains a simplistic harmonic language, its emotional depth and constructional complexity granted its place as a staple in the contemporary pianistic repertoire.¹⁰⁸

Another exemplary collection of Glass's minimal music works for piano solo is the *Piano Etudes*; a set of twenty pieces composed between 1991 and 2012. Not only aim these etudes to develop the pianistic technique while also expanding the expressive potential of the genre, but they also explore a plethora of textures, rhythms and harmonies, each presenting unique technical challenges, emphasising the composer's characteristic style of repetitive patterns with gradual variations. The variety of pieces reflects Philip Glass's evolution as a composer and instrumentalist, offering a rich tapestry of both contemplative and dynamic sounds.¹⁰⁹

Although these etudes exhibit certain similarities in their construction, each one stands as an independent piece with its unique structure and atmospheric quality. Various elements of Glass's compositional style are revealed in each piece. From an empirical perspective, as a performer of several pieces of Philip Glass myself, following aspects, which I will illustrate by some relevant examples, I find to predominantly emerge: the pyramidal structure (mostly as an A-B-A, with B representing the climax, either dynamically or through the density of the tones), polyrhythmic patterns (consistently 2 against 3), subtle yet gradual changes in dynamics, a primal ostinato (usually played by the left hand), a hidden polyphonic layering (whereas the climaxes are often marked by the addition of a third layer), and a concealed melody in the upper voice (occasionally within the chords).

Figure 6



In this example it can be observed how the ostinato arpeggio in the left hand is completed by the same harmonic chords in the right hand. A diffident melody might be conducted by the descant of the triads.

108 Robert Maycock, *Glass. A Portrait*, Sanctuary Publishing, London, 2002, p. 28-29.

"There is no harmony as such, and the lines are just lines, without forming into the ebb and flow of a melody. They repeat, then they extend. They go through cycles of expansion and contraction. They may turn upside-down. If there are several lines, they may go through cycles of different lengths simultaneously and the piece will then run until all the cycles end at the same time. How to listen? Accept what you are hearing and let it lead you its own way. You can follow the expansion of phrases if you like. You can switch attention from one part to another, you can observe when cycles begin and end or you can absorb the cumulative effect. Do not expect the same subjective emotion that comes from listening to conventionally expressive music. There are no climaxes and no low points. Instead, it reveals two unexpected expressive qualities, which emerge after you have been listening for a while. However fast it moves, it develops a massive calm and certainty. And however abrasive and in-your-face the sound, it seems to have a character of quiet inner joyousness."

109 Maycock, p. 43-35.

110 Philip Glass, *The Complete Piano Etudes*, etude nr. 18, p. 92.

Figure 7



The Etude nr 16 presents a composed time signature (3+4), whereas the left hand plays a dynamic ostinato of a quasi 'broken' second inversion triad. The right hand follows the ostinato rule, emphasising its leitmotif as an Auftakt to the upper voice (ex. bar 2, 6, 16).

Figure 8



Shortly, a third layer is added as a harmonic support. While the music gets progressively more dense, it can be observed how the this stage of development highlights a homogeneous alignment of voicing, horizontal as well as vertical. Indirectly it could be deduced how tension of the piece increases, creating a path for the emerging of climax.

Figure 9



The middle part of the *Etude* (the B part), represents the culmination itself. The right hand borrows the ostinato of the incipient left hand, adding a dose of steadiness through its chord repetition. The base plays an equally important role, maintaining the initial division (3+4). Moreover, the usage of lower register conducts to the natural reinforcement of climax, to the powerful and only *forte* of the entire piece. Another aspect to be observed is the subtle change of tempo (*piu mosso*). Although apparently insignificant, it definitely helps creating tension. The suspense releases with the reemerging of A (section 11). Slight variations of the beginning restore the initial atmosphere, keeping the flow of the piece.

111 Philip Glass, Etudes, nr. 16, p. 80.

112 Ibidem.

113 Ibidem, p. 81.

The film industry afforded Philip Glass significant recognition and financial opportunities. This interdisciplinary approach not only reflects his versatility in transcending traditional conservative music boundaries but also allowed him to present his music to a global audience, providing widespread reception and praise.

The starting point of this collaboration transpired in 1977, when Glass received an invitation from the director Godfrey Reggio to score the *Qatsi Trilogy*, beginning with *Koyaanisqatsi*. Initially this offer was declined, the composer asserting that he does not compose film music. However, upon immersing himself in the film set, witnessing the pristine natural transitions of the cadres and being captivated by Reggio's philosophical approach, Glass reconsidered, eventually demonstrating his mastery by complementing the visual sequences with the hypnotic repetitive patterns. The emotional resonance of the audiovisual experience was so profound that it paved the way for the creation of the trilogy's subsequent parts, each echoing the success of its predecessor (*Powaqqatsi* in 1998 and *Nagoyaqatsi* in 2002).¹¹⁴ Supposedly it is worth being mentioned that the intention of trilogy sparked in Glass a spiritual dimension, the composer exploring this theme in other of his works.¹¹⁵

The tremendous success of the first film led Glass to further explore the creations of cinematic music, collaborating with directors such as Martin Scorsese or Stephen Daldry. As an example, the evocative soundtrack for *The Hours* (2002) earned him the *BAFTA Award for Best Film Music* and nominations for *Academy Award for best Original Score*, the *Golden Globe Award for the Best Original Score* and the *Grammy for the Best Soundtrack*.¹¹⁶

Philip Glass has steadfastly adhered to his artistic vision despite his critics. After his initial opera, he seemed to have established his particular musical language, which critics might argue that it stagnated musical evolution, a trait shared with certain popular music genres. Nonetheless, Glass's prolific creations refute any notion of creative stagnation. Not only did he blend his art with

114 Glass, *Words Without Music*, p. 263 – 264;

“During our work on the film, I often met with Godfrey to hear directly from him how his ideas were developing. He has described this process as a dialogue between us and has credited it that way in the films we have done together: *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Powaqqatsi*, *Anima Mundi*, *Naqoyqatsi*, and, most recently, *Visitors*. The truth is clear and simple. Godfrey would talk to me about his ideas for the films and about the context of the films themselves, and I would listen. Godfrey's views were powerful and, though they are generally known now, were unique at the time of their conception (...) You're going to be showing this film in big movie theaters. The history of film is also the history of theater, and the history of theater comes from the cathedrals. That's where theater began, with the mystery plays. Let's go back to the idea that when you go into the theater, you're entering a huge temple, and the instrument you would hear in there would be an organ. Maybe it's no coincidence that when theaters were built for silent movies, organs were installed and ready to be played.”

115 Lelong, p. 171. “The trilogy also carries a spiritual dimension, where symbolic elements emphasize a deeper cultural significance. The mirror, for instance, represents a passage into another world. Similarly, the rose symbolizes beauty, method, and transcendence. It highlights the necessity of determination, vision, and appreciation of beauty for true nobility.”

116 <https://www.metopera.org/discover/education/educator-guides/the-hours/scoring-the-hours/>, consulted on 03.05.24

business practices, ensuring wide dissemination of his music, but in 1971, he founded his own record label to release his early recordings, in 1982 signing an exclusive contract with CBS, broadening his audience. This strategic approach is evident in his management of publication rights, often retaining them or assigning them to his ensemble for a fee, showcasing his business savoir-faire. The composer's mainstream sympathy included as well publications in advertisements (such as those for Cutty Sark Scotch).¹¹⁷ Since *Einstein on the Beach*, he has been seen as a “crossover phenomenon” transcending genre boundaries to reach a wide audience, similar to Steve Reich's occasional success. Moreover, his influential way of composing extended to rock and popular music, inspiring artists such as Brian Eno or David Bowie. Despite not always achieving successful collaborations (ex. *Songs from Liquid Days* with Suzanne Vega), a vast majority of them were welcomed with positive acclamation, underlying Glass's versatility.¹¹⁸

Additionally, the multitude of his operas have found a great accomplishment in the European stages, illustrating the paradoxical situation in which an American art movement garners a most significant acclaim abroad.¹¹⁹

The legacy of minimal music that Philip Glass has imparted worldwide is immense. Through his genuinely spiritual approach and distinctive compositional style, he remains one of the most prolific figures in both the contemporary “cultivated” and mainstream musical landscapes, emphasising the long-lasting appeal of his music.

117 Lovisa, p. 103.

118 Ibidem, p. 102-106.

119 Ibidem, p. 104.

3. Steve Reich

Despite not being the first composer to embrace the idea of music which could continuously reproduce itself, Steve Reich pursued this concept with a remarkable consistency and innovation, breaking away from traditional antagonisms.¹²⁰ The ‘forefather generation’ of minimal music, epitomised by Riley and Reich, pioneered a novel musical lexicon characterised by repetition, gradual mutation and a focus on process rather than traditional harmonic progression. Reich’s notable discovery and utilisation of tape loop technology, inspired by Riley’s experiments, marked a significant milestone in his career. This innovation conducted to a further development of Reich’s signature phase-shifting technique, where identical patterns played at slightly varying speeds generate intricate, evolving textures.¹²¹ A relevant example to this aspect, namely *Piano Phase*, shall be analysed in the upcoming paragraphs.

Born on 3rd of October 1936 in New York, Stephen Michael Reich’s childhood was distinguished by a multicultural upbringing between New York and California. Although his father pursued a career in law and was not connected to the music industry, his mother was a singer on Broadway and songwriter.¹²² Under her influence, Steve Reich began piano lessons at the age of six, starting point in which he developed a deep interest in jazz, a genre that profoundly shaped his musical sensibilities. Subsequently, he transitioned to percussion, studying under Roland Kohloff, the principal timpanist of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. This tutelage further refined his rhythmic precision and technical prowess.

Reich pursued his academic studies at Cornell University from 1953 to 1957, where he majored in music with a particular emphasis on philosophy, culminating in a BA degree with honours at the age of 19. His academic focus was notably influenced by the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein. This philosophical foundation, together with his varied musical experiences, significantly contributed to the development of his innovative compositional style.¹²³ During this period, he faced the challenging decision to pursue a career as a composer. His philosophical orientation, being influenced by neo-positivist ideas, would later shape the aesthetic foundation of minimalism in his work.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Dibelius, p. 177.

¹²¹ Lovisa, p. 61.

¹²² Shortly after his birth, his parents’ marriage ended, leading to an arrangement for divided custody, with six months spent with each parent. His mother relocated to Los Angeles, necessitating biannual cross-country train journeys from the age of two until he commenced school at five. Accompanied by his governess, Virginia Mitchell, these four-day trips, which included a transfer in Chicago, left a lasting impression on him. This profound impact is reflected in *Different Trains*, the most autobiographical of his works.

Steve Reich, *Writings on Music. 1965-200*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 7 (Introduction).

¹²³ Lovisa, p. 62.

¹²⁴ „try to establish a relationship between the terse linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the deceptively

After spending two years studying privately in New York with pianist Hall Overton, a contemporary composer known for his theoretical and compositional work in the jazz scene,¹²⁵ Steve Reich's established a profound connection with the jazz scene. This aspect played a crucial role in his musical development, particularly during his formative years, his interactions with jazz "legends" such as John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and Charlie Parker significantly determining his musical ideals and compositional techniques. Reich notably compared Coltrane's impact to that of Johann Sebastian Bach, underscoring Coltrane's standard-setting musicianship. Moreover, Coltrane's ability to execute extensive improvisations over minimal harmonic changes deeply impressed Reich, leading him to integrate this concept into his own compositions, such as *Drumming*.¹²⁶ A secondary inspiration source was given by Reich's admiration for drummer Kenny Clarke, a musician who left a lasting imprint on Reich's composing style. Being renowned for his innovative drumming techniques, Clarke revolutionised modern jazz by accentuating rhythms on the cymbal and bass drum, creating a continuous and fluid style of play. Reich adopted from the previously mentioned drummer sense of rhythmic fluidity, striving to achieve a similar lightness and flow in his compositions.¹²⁷

Foreseeable, the education of Steve Reich did not end with his private studies, the young musician further expanding his musical horizons by completing a composition study at the Juilliard School, under the mentorship of Vincent Persichetti and William Bergsma. After finishing in 1961, Reich extended the previous study field at Mills College, under the tutelage of Darius Milhaud and Luciano Berio, pursuing a MA degree. Despite his immersion in classical training, Reich perceived a discrepancy between his personal musical inclinations and the avant garde compositional ideals (such as Berio's¹²⁸). In the detriment of 'tradition', he found resonance with the rhythmic complexities and harmonic innovations of jazz, a genre that seemed more aligned with his musical instincts. Furthermore, regardless of his engaging with twelve-tone music during his academic

simple minimalist music of Steve Reich might at first seem a little ambitious, if not downright misguided. Yet a synoptic survey of the two men's work reveals a series of formal and conceptual correlations that is often quite striking. I hasten to add that my comparisons apply mostly to those of Reich's compositions where melodic and harmonic ideas are phased and developed over the ground of a constant pulse."

Robert Cowan, *Reich And Wittgenstein: Notes towards a synthesis*, in Cambridge University Press, 04.02.2010, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298200022270/>, consulted on 05.05.2024

125 Overton provided musical arrangements for Thelonious Monk, including Monk's iconic Town Hall concert in 1959. Subsequently, Overton commenced teaching positions at the Juilliard School in 1960 and at the New School in 1962; Lovisa, p. 62.

126 Steve Reich, *Writings*, p. 9.

127 Ibidem, p. 161.

128 „There was one way to write music back then. No harmony in the normal sense of the word, no melody in the normal sense of the word, no tapping your foot to a rhythm. So my interests were diametrically opposed to what I was getting at music school." Nicholas Wroe, *A life in Music: Steve Reich*, 27 June 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/jun/27/steve-reich-life-in-music>, consulted on 05.05.2024.

period, Reich ultimately inclined towards a harmonic consistency and minimalist ethos, uncovering a more authentic expression of his musical identity through these approaches.¹²⁹

From 1965 onwards, Steve Reich and fellow minimalist Philip Glass began exploring the possibilities of new compositional techniques, often mutually influencing and acknowledging themselves. After firstly intersecting in New York, at the Julliard School of Music, both composers were integral parts of the vibrant downtown music scene, a fertile ground for experimentation and collaboration.¹³⁰ Their initial encounters took place through shared performances and concerts, during which they discovered a mutual appreciation for each other's innovative compositional approaches.¹³¹ Having recently completed his studies at Mills College and inspired by his experiments with tape loops and phase shifting, Steve Reich found a kindred spirit in Philip Glass, who recently returned from studying under Nadia Boulanger. Although their backgrounds evidently differed, Glass also discovering the Indian music during his excursions, the two composers shared a commitment to exploring repetitive structures and harmonic simplicity, in effect the minimalist genre *per se*.

Steve Reich's experimentation with phase shifting started with tape loops, particularly in his piece *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), where he used two tape recorders playing identical loops slightly out of synchronisation. This mechanical imperfection led to the discovery of phasing, where patterns gradually shifted out of and back into phase, creating evolving textures.¹³² Reich and Art Murphy later applied this concept to live performance in *Piano Phase* (1967), where two pianists play the same pattern but at slightly different tempos, causing a similar phasing effect.¹³³

Piano Phase is in fact not only a representative composition for 'shifting patterns', but a revolutionary work from an idealistic approach. "Per abstracto", Steve Reich states the hypothesis that music itself is an "impersonal, unedited process, rather than an expressive, handcrafted metaphor".¹³⁴ "In concreto", once a musical pattern is placed into motion, no further external contribution is needed. As listeners actively participate into discovering the gradual developments in the music, the psycho-acoustic perceptions are unlimited and unique. By engaging with the process, each music piece unravels both the physical laws within and the psychological aspects due

129 Lovisa, p. 63-64.

130 Dibelius, p. 178.

131 Reich, *Writings*, p. 16.

132 "Constant repetition through tape loops produces just such a rhythmic intensification. The idea of using repetition partially grew out of working with tape loops since 1963, but mainly through helping Terry Riley put together the first performance, of his *In C*, where many different repeating patterns were combined simultaneously. My problem was them to find some new way of working with repetition as a musical technique (...) I discovered that the most interesting music of all was made by simply lining the loops in unison, and letting them slowly shift out of phase with each other. It was a seamless, uninterrupted musical process." *ibidem* p. 20.

133 Dibelius, p. 179.

134 Paul Epstein, *Pattern Structure and Process in Steve Reich's Piano Phase*, in: *The Musical Quarterly*, Volume 72, Issue 4, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 494.

to their interaction. While few compositions of Steve Reich expose a genuine unedited processes, such as *Piano Phase*, many require some external interference to cease them.¹³⁵

Figure 10

piano phase
for two pianos
or two marimbas*

steve reich

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 72$
Repeat each bar approximately number of times written.

*This piece may be played an octave lower than written, when played on marimbas.
a.v.s. = accelerando very slightly.

The first pattern in *Piano Phase* (Bar 1) consists of two interlocking repetitive patterns, one with three notes and another one with two. Essentially, these figures do not exhaustively create a melodic line, but also provide a harmonic contrast. While the first player repeats this pattern throughout the whole section (in the given figure 10), the second player emerges in unisono, gradually increasing the tempo, and eventually restoring the initial unisono. This phasing process cycles through twelve phases before repeating in reverse, with phases such as 1 and 11, or 2 and 10, being identical. The unisono phases and phase 6 serve as formal markers, with phase 6 occurring just one time.¹³⁶ In effect the piece is composed of simple patterns that transition from

¹³⁵ Reich, *Writings*, p. 10 “Even when all the cards are on the table and everyone hears what is gradually happening in a musical process, there are still enough mysteries to satisfy all.”

¹³⁶ Epstein, p. 495.

unisono through gradual tempo changes, in the end returning back to unisono. It is structured into three sections (B, E, A) distinguished by alterations in the patterns or their duration. Upon completion of the phasing process, a new section commences. Initially, Reich conceived the piece for a pianist accompanied by a tape recording, doubting the feasibility of humans achieving the precise shifting structures. However, the experiment exceeded expectations when Reich performed it himself, and despite not reaching the machine's exactness, it provided immense satisfaction, as he became deeply engrossed in listening while playing. No improvisation is required, as the performance's psychological dimension necessitates active listening and meticulous control.¹³⁷

The so-called “phase-shifting method”, which enabled a continuous change within repetitive structures, became the signature of Reich's compositional style. While being crucial for maintaining interest over extended duration, the phase-shifting method was comprised of simple, minimalistic elements. Another example of innovative works that further developed these ideals is epitomised by *Drumming* (1970-1971). “In the context of my own music, *Drumming* is the final expansion and refinement of the phasing process, as well as the first use of four new techniques: the process of gradually substituting beats for rests (or rests for beats); the gradual changing of timbre while rhythm and pitch remain constant; the simultaneous combination of instruments of different timbre; and the use of the human voice to become part of the musical ensemble by imitating the exact sound of the instruments”,¹³⁸ states Reich in his Writings. *Drumming* marks the longest work of the composer, lasting between 55-75 min and being performed continuously, without break: the first part features tuned bongo drums; the second, marimbas with women's voices; the third, glockenspiels with whistling and piccolo; and the fourth combines all instruments and voices. The incipient of the piece emerges with two drummers building a rhythmic pattern, gradually substituting drumbeats for rests. The subsequent parts are joined by new instruments doubling the existing patterns, transitioning smoothly while changing timbres, whereas in the final section, all elements combine for a dense sound layer. Moreover, the women's voices do not spell specific words, but emulate instrumental sounds, which lead to increasing and decreasing patterns that merge with the instruments. Simultaneously, the piece preserves its original key throughout its development, providing a variety of rhythmic patterns and permutations in timbre.¹³⁹

It is of utmost importance to mention the fact, that similar to Riley's or Glass's influential excursions, Steve Reich benefited from a short trip to Africa in order to achieve his unique composing style. Not only did the visit to Ghana demonstrate his ideal of acoustic “richness over electronic sounds”¹⁴⁰ but the study of West-African drumming with masters themselves emphasised

¹³⁷ Reich, *Writings*, p. 22-26.

¹³⁸ Ibidem, p. 64.

¹³⁹ Steve Reich about *Drumming*, <https://stevereich.com/composition/drumming/>, consulted on 01.06.24.

¹⁴⁰ Lovisa, p. 79.

the complexity of African rhythmic patterns, which significantly influenced his work. This experience, along with subsequent studies of Balinese gamelan, influenced *Drumming*, piece which implemented the use of a single rhythmic pattern undergoing changes in phase, pitch, and timbre throughout.¹⁴¹

All aspects considered, Reich's minimalist approach is yet to be distinguished by his meticulous crafting of repetitive patterns to outwit monotony, creating a dynamic and engaging musical experience. His further compositions often reflected the non-Western traditions, particularly the previously mentioned West-African drumming and Balinese gamelan. These are evident in his structural thinking rather than in direct sound imitation, leading to compositions that intend to blend Western minimalism with non-Western principles.¹⁴²

From 1973 forth, Steve Reich has been composing various works for increasingly larger ensembles, corresponding to the expansion of his own group, although this ensemble already existed during the creation of *Drumming*. By the time he composed *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974-1976) and *Music for a Large Ensemble* (1979), the number of performers had grown significantly. Moreover, from the original eighteen musicians who premiered *Music for 18 Musicians*, twelve to thirteen were still involved in performances by 1978.

Not only does *Music for 18 Musicians* captivate its listeners due to its rhythmic, pulsating nature, but while its basic structure derives from earlier pieces, its instrumentation, harmony, and structural elements are innovative.¹⁴³ The ensemble includes violin, cello, clarinet, four female voices, four pianos, three marimbas, two xylophones, and a vibraphone, highlighting the work's ample sound. Through the emphasis on a harmonic diversity, Steve Reich himself stated that the first five minutes have more harmonic movement than any previous work of his.¹⁴⁴ Visibly, this harmonic abundance equals the amplitude of the instrumentation. Rhythmically, the piece features contrasting elements: the constant pulse of pianos and keyboards versus the breath-driven patterns of the voices and wind instruments (the so-called "Breath Patterns"). *Music for 18 Musicians* is based on a cycle of eleven chords that appear at the beginning and ending, all instrumental and vocal sounds deriving from these predetermined chords. The progression through the piece is guided by the length of 'breath patterns', with each harmony held for two breath patterns and gradually transitioning to new tones. Upon returning to the starting point, two pianos and two marimbas maintain the basic chord for about five minutes, allowing new elements to develop. This leads to an immediate shift to the second chord, repeating the process without following a strict arch form (ABCDCBA) or gradual exchange of rests and beats.¹⁴⁵ Reich's technique of transferring pulse

141 Mertens, p. 56-59.

142 Dibelius, p. 180-181.

143 Lovisa, p. 78.

144 Reich, p. 87.

145 Ibidem, p. 89.

models into new harmonic sections sustains the impression of consistency amid change, adhering to his method of phased patterns or canons. He describes the relationship between sections as being familial, with shared yet unique characteristics, all the harmonies from the first section lasting only two “breath lengths”, but becoming eventually the foundation for an extended development. This structural aspect is associated by Reich with the historical expansion of individual tones in the cantus firmus, calling the opening eleven-chord cycle a “pulsing cantus” for the entire piece.¹⁴⁶

A novel aspect of *Music for 18 Musicians* is the relationship between harmonies and melodies, whereas a melodic pattern shall repeat over changing harmonic bases, creating shifting pinpoints and further entanglement. This continuous melody over alternating harmonic rhythms enhances the sense of constancy within change, maintaining the original pulsation.¹⁴⁷

Unquestionably, *Music for 18 Musicians* exemplifies the evolution of minimalist music into a sophisticated art form, combining mechanical precision with human performance nuances. Reich’s ceaseless innovation within this substructure has made a significant impact on contemporary music, illustrating the potential for profound expression through minimal means. Although Steve Reich himself did not relate his style with minimal music¹⁴⁸, his transition into the realm of minimalist music is rooted in his interactions with other pioneers of the genre, as well as his own personal and professional experiences. His involvement in the first performance of Terry Riley’s memorable *In C* unites him to the original group of composers who laid the foundation for minimal music. Undoubtedly, these interactions and collaborations significantly influenced Reich’s early explorations and his subsequent contributions to the genre.

Reich’s later compositions reflect his uninterrupted evolution and experimentation. His mid-1980s orchestral works for the St. Louis and San Francisco symphonies, along with a guitar sextet for Pat Metheny, highlight his composing versatility. Works like *Different Trains* (1988), the multimedia project *The Cave* (1993), and *City Life* (1995) further demonstrate his commitment to integrating new elements and expanding his musical palette. Despite being influenced by jazz, Reich focused more on its structural and harmonic aspects rather than improvisation (such as jazz-like harmonies like evenths, ninths, and elevenths).¹⁴⁹

As a conclusion it could be stated that Steve Reich’s works embodied the minimalist quintessence, while transcending it. Through the incorporation of diverse techniques and influences, his compositions have significantly impacted the contemporary music sphere.

146 Lovisa, p. 79 -80.

147 “Music for 18 takes the harmonic aspect of that piece and expands it into completely new territory”, *From New York to Vermont: Conversation with Steve Reich and Rebecca Y. Kim*, <https://stevereich.com/from-new-york-to-vermont-conversation-with-steve-reich-rebecca-y-kim/>, consulted on 02.06.24.

148 “There is an interview that was done with Michael Nyman shortly after the piece was completed. In it, he asked whether I was interested in doing minimal music, and I said, “No, I’m not.” I’m interested in doing what genuinely interests me and that keep changing.” ibidem.

149 Dibelius, p. 182-186.

4. Arvo Pärt

With the purpose of an extrapolation, as well as for highlighting certain fundamental differences between the East and West cultures, we consider it stimulating to include Arvo Pärt among the pioneers, needless to specify, with the appropriate distinctions. As being mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the social, political and cultural context has played an essential role in the development of minimal music, plus its popularisation was largely driven by a collective desire. Despite Arvo Pärt's philosophy being centred at the opposite pole of this manifesto, we wonder if his music could translate as a result of an intrinsic ideal, which is similar to the Western one, namely a desire for purification through meditation and trance, albeit influenced by the spiritual (religious) customs of Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries. It is self-evident that Orthodoxy continues to resonate in these geographical areas as a dogma, and the perpetuation of this belief has been naturally transmitted, even in an indirect manner, from generation to generation.

Born on September 11, 1935, Arvo Pärt in Paide, Estonia, Arvo Pärt pursued his studies at the conservatory in Tallinn, where he completed his education in 1963. From 1958 to 1967, Pärt worked as a sound director at Estonian Radio, during which time he also composed film music. As the composer noted, "There are no issues with film music; it does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Composers' Association. The film itself acts as a filter, and a composer cannot effect any significant change. The music becomes inseparable from the film, akin to sausage being made, losing its individuality."¹⁵⁰

A crucial point of his personal, as well as artistic path, represented the marriage with his Jewish wife, Eleonora in 1972, and their official emigration from the Soviet Union to Israel in 1980, state in which minimal music had not yet gained recognition. His journey continued to Vienna until 1982, where Pärt ceased in obtaining the Austrian citizenship through his Western publisher, Sika. However, after receiving financial support from the German Academic Exchange Service, Pärt relocated to West Berlin two years later, where his compositional practice was initially influenced by his radio work and encounters with contemporary avant-garde techniques, which he adapted to his style.¹⁵¹ During an extended creative "hiatus", Pärt immersed himself in the study of medieval, French, and Franco-Flemish polyphony from the 14th to 16th centuries, drawing inspiration from composers such as Machaut, Ockeghem, and Josquin des Prez.¹⁵²

Notably, Pärt's creative process was accentuated by his deliberate periods of self-imposed reflection and preparation.¹⁵³ Hence, the body of his work could be divided into three distinct

¹⁵⁰ Lovisa, p. 193.

¹⁵¹ Wolfgang Sander, *Die Leere zwischen den Tönen*, in: FAZ, 26.05.1987.

¹⁵² Lovisa, p. 194.

¹⁵³ "Before I can begin composing, I must undergo extensive preparation. This can sometimes last up to five years, but once this groundwork is complete, new works flow in rapid succession." Paul Hillier, Arvo Pärt. Oxford Studies of

phases. In a first instance, his debuting composing years were rooted in serialism, eventually reaching their culmination with *Credo* (1968), a work inspired by Bach's rhetorical style.¹⁵⁴ Pärt's preoccupation with serialistic music emerged already in his student years, the first orchestral piece which he composed, namely *Nekrolog* (1959)¹⁵⁵, becoming the first Estonian work to use such techniques, fact that indubitably ignited controversy within the confines of Soviet artistic doctrine. As a result, Pärt was subjected to censorship, consequently *Credo* being banned due to its overtly religious text. In order to avoid further predictable restrictions, the young composer chose the encoded title *Summa* for some of his compositions, avoiding direct religious references. It is worth being emphasised that phrases such as "resist with love" were considered subversive by Soviet authorities, as well as the use of Latin further contradicting the regime's aesthetic values. However, his early career saw recognition with works like *Our Garden* (1959), a piece for children's choir and orchestra, and the oratorio *Step of the Wave* (1961), which earned first prize in Moscow.¹⁵⁶

In a second instance, the decade 1968-1976 marked a transitional period for Arvo Pärt, especially with his *Third Symphony*, composition which was inspired by early European polyphony. Despite the fact that this stage of his artistic path generated works, to which Pärt referred to as "melodious music," it did not resolve the internal artistic and existential dilemmas he faced.¹⁵⁷

The third and most mature phase of his artistic development (from 1976 onwards) was accentuated by the development of the "Tintinnabuli style", an original approach which merged simple triad forms and evolving patterns. Presumably, the Gregorian chant encountered in a Catholic church in Tallinn, became the main and most profound influence on Pärt's style.¹⁵⁸ As the composer stated, "this music resonates deeply within me; it transcends the boundaries of music and enters a realm of spirituality. This understanding was essential for me; in this music, I found what I had been searching for all along."¹⁵⁹ In fact, Pärt's view of music has been deeply intertwined with his spiritual convictions. Moreover, the concept of perceiving himself as a conduit for uncovering sounds that already exist, represents central element to his artistic philosophy, reflecting his belief that the true essence of music is inherently present, waiting to be revealed. "Just as every sculpture is already contained within the stone, so too is music present around us, independent of the composer. The sculptor merely frees the form from the stone, and likewise, music exists in its own essence. God is the source of its existence, and I merely uncover it."¹⁶⁰

Composers, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Vol. 30, No. 2 (Summer 1999), p. 184-185.

154 *Credo* was composed for piano, mixed choir, and orchestra. The work's orchestration included strings and woodwinds, providing a rich harmonic backdrop for the powerful choral and piano elements. The composition centers on a text from the Gospel of Matthew, making it a deeply religious piece. Hillier, p. 85.

155 *Ibidem*, p. 30.

156 Lovisa, p. 194.

157 Hillier, p. 65.

158 Lovisa, p. 195.

159 <https://thesublimeblog.org/2019/07/29/spirit-songs-the-sublime-music-of-arvo-part/>, consulted on 22.09.2024.

160 Rhys Tranter, *On words, music, and expression*, 13 October 2017, <https://rhystranter.com/2017/10/13/arvo-part-quotes/>, consulted on 22.09.2024.

Likewise, Pärt often described his compositions as exhibiting “tense calm”, with the term “Tintinnabuli style” referencing the medieval “Tintinnabuli (bell-like) approach”. Even though Arvo Pärt’s comments have been reserved and partly cryptic, they frequently highlight the themes of “quiet” and “beauty.” As he expresses: “Tintinnabuli style represents a realm I occasionally traverse in search of solutions for my life, my music, and my work. In difficult moments, I perceive that extraneous elements hold no significance; they confuse me. I must seek the essence: what is singular, and how do I access it? In this simplicity lies perfection; all that is superfluous fades away. This is akin to the Tintinnabuli style, where I find solitude in silence.”¹⁶¹

While Pärt’s statements reveal a profound spiritual foundation, his minimalist approach resonates with the works of contemporaries, like Steve Reich’s. However, his distinct style shapes these minimalist constraints, manifesting more from an intimate inner life than from a purely rational compositional methodology.¹⁶² Both Pärt’s and minimalist composers’ works share a commonality in their meditative qualities, resulting in an immersive listening experience. The simplicity of Pärt’s scores contrasts sharply with the richness of their musical expression, exhibiting a remarkable stylistic unity. His music, infused with elements of Russian mysticism and monastic humility¹⁶³ often features sacred vocal pieces transcribed for instrumental ensembles. Furthermore, the ascetic constraints within his material are complemented by subtle variations in stable rhythmic or melodic patterns, as the bell-like voices, central to the “Tintinnabuli style”, pervade his compositions, employing only three tones of a triad across extended passages. Above a fixed fundamental tone, the voices explore their ranges in octaves while remaining within a limited tonal palette.¹⁶⁴

Although the “Tintinnabuli style” does not adhere strictly to tonal principles, it allows for the emergence of dissonances that may evolve into a melodic aggregation. The characterisation of Pärt’s works as embodying “tense calm” is also applicable to many minimalist compositions. Despite seeming anachronistic when juxtaposed with contemporary minimal music, the similarities of Pärt’s compositional techniques with those found in the American minimalist tradition, prove a remarkable point that answers our initial question – minimalism evolved simultaneously in opposite poles and expressing a distinct philosophy, but utilising analogue elements.

One of Arvo Pärt’s remarkable works, as well as an exemplary example of the composer’s association with the minimalist genre, is represented by *Für Alina*, a piece for piano solo composed

¹⁶¹ Hiller, p. 87.

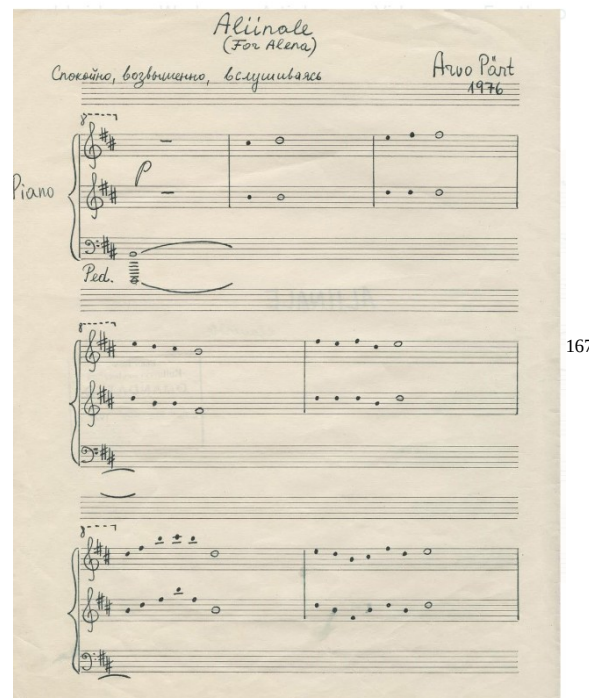
¹⁶² Rade Zivanovic, Arvo Pärt’s *Fratres* and his Tintinnabuli Technique, University of Adger, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Music, 2012, p. 11-16.

¹⁶³ Estonian World, *Sounds emanating love – the story of Arvo Pärt*, 11 September 2023, <https://estonianworld.com/culture/sounds-emanating-love-story-arvo-part/>, consulted on 23.09.2024.

¹⁶⁴ Elena Tokun, *Arvo Pärt: The new strict style of tintinnabuli*, <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part-the-new-strict-style-of-tintinnabuli/> on 23.09.2024.

in 1976. Primarily, this composition exemplifies Pärt's unique "Tintinnabuli" style, style which could briefly be defined by its simplicity and spiritual depth. While its denomination resonates with Beethoven's *Für Elise*, a possible eulogy to Beethoven cannot be addressed with certainty. Moreover, Pärt's composition is specifically dedicated to the eighteen-year-old daughter of a family friend. The context surrounding this dedication reveals the emotional narrative in which after a parental breakup, and the daughter accompanied her father to England. Thereby, Pärt's piece emerged as a gesture of consolation for the girl's mother, who was grieving the absence of her child.¹⁶⁵ The introspective nature of *Für Alina* captures the intense feelings associated with youth and the bittersweet experience of departure. In addition, the music conjures a vivid image of a young person venturing out into the world, highlighting the universal themes of love, loss, and the passage of time. This emotional depth adds another layer of meaning to the work, aligning it with Pärt's overarching artistic philosophy.¹⁶⁶

Figure 11



As to be seen in figure 11, Arvo Pärt's *Für Alina* exemplifies a "naked minimalism"¹⁶⁸, eschewing predefined time structures and embracing a fluid, introspective quality, the tempo marking "calm, elevated, listening within," encouraging a reflective interpretation of the music. The main construction of the piece is governed by aeolian mode in B, creating a serene yet evocative atmosphere. Musically, it could be argued that *Für Alina* presents a pyramidal structure of tones, with each bar ascending from one to eight notes and afterwards descending, reflecting a calculated

165 <https://www.last.fm/music/Arvo+P%C3%A4rt/Alina/+wiki>, consulted on 22.09.2024.

166 Brian Gillikin, *The Complete Beauty of Arvo Pärt's "Für Alina"*, 2014, <https://www.curatormagazine.com/brian-gillikin/the-complete-beauty-of-arvo-parts-fur-alina>, consulted on 22.09.2024.

167 Arvo Pärt, *Für Alina*, Universal Edition, AG, Wien.

168 Gillikin, *The Complete Beauty of Arvo Pärt's "Für Alina"*.

development. Nonetheless, this unique approach requires the performer to cultivate a refined touch and precise key control, as the technical demands are more nuanced than they may initially appear. In addition, the interference of voices necessitates an audible acuity, inquiring the pianist to maintain clarity and expressiveness throughout the piece.

Another relevant example to sustain his adherence to minimalist music could be the organ piece *Pari Intervallo* (1976), in which Pärt employed parallel voices, which resonated with minimalist motifs. Yet, the composition diverges significantly from the works of Philip Glass, focusing on two voices that develop thematic motifs through gradual movement. The work derives its strength from a concentrated exploration of essential elements, with each note carrying considerable weight, reflecting a meticulous examination of its necessity within the overall framework.¹⁶⁹

A thorough analysis of various works from Arvo Pärt's pieces, particularly those from his later compositional period, might reveal an increasingly clearer articulation of minimalist characteristics, elements which are essential for the realisation of his unique style. Notable examples include *Variations Für Anna Maria* for piano solo and *Fratres*, both of which embody the nuanced exploration of minimalist aesthetics. Nevertheless, it is crucial to assert that Pärt's music can only be partially associated with the broader minimalist movement, as it portrays a distinctive spiritual dimension. This unique attribute differentiates his work, indicating that while he may exhibit some parallels with minima music pioneers, his compositions ultimately present various differences from the conventional stylistic categorization. Briefly speaking, Pärt's musical approach reflects the sacred essence inherent in Eastern European spirituality, an element that pervades his minimalist style, reflecting a perspective that is simultaneously simple and complex.

169 Lovisa, p. 199.

IV. Postminimalism. The establishing of a new identity

While one might argue that minimalism, as per its origins, continued to strive unaltered in the ensuing decades, a rigorous contextualization of the division between minimalism and postminimalism is of cultural importance. Although both subsequent styles encapsulate similar structural components, such as the characteristics of repetition, gradual transformation and meditation, the first distinguishable characteristic appears in their historical context and evolution. Whilst minimalism originated in the 1960s and 1970s as a manifesto against the complexity and emotional intensity of avant-garde and serialist music, postminimalism emerged as a response to minimalism in the mid to late 20th century, predominantly in the 1980s and 1990s, creating an expansion of the minimalist pioneering. In fact, it was originally associated with John Adam's artistic debut and his own identification as a "post-minimalist"¹⁷⁰. Consequently, it can be deduced how the evolution of contemporary music has seen the emergence of numerous styles, each reacting to or building upon its predecessors, aspect which is relevant as well for the main research topic of the thesis.

As being previously detailed, minimalism occurred in an epoch dominated by highly complex structural musical movements, such as serialism composition. Artists such as Steve Reich, Philip Glass or Terry Riley aimed to detach from the complexity and sober aspect of these musical styles, favouring simplicity, clarity, and boldness in their works. Minimalism became recognisable by its use of repetitive patterns, omnipresent pulse, and tonal harmonies, eventually generating a hypnotic or meditative atmosphere. Therefore, it was perceived as a counterpoint to the intellectualism of the avant-garde, creating an alternative and more accessible approach to music. Its soundscapes were emphasised by transparent structures in the detriment of the dense, dissonant textures from previous era. The ideal of minimalism originated in a profound desire for reductionism—removing the unnecessary complexities in order to concentrate on the essential elements of music. Compositions frequently were built on extended repetition, presenting subtle variations over time. This aspect allowed listeners to perceive gradual shifts in rhythm, harmony, and texture. Not only was the slow evolution of musical material crucial to minimalism, emphasising the significance of the process in the musical works, but is also played a role in creating immersive soundscapes. Works such as Steve Reich's *Piano Phase* and Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* exemplify this approach, where the repetition of brief motifs enlarges to an abundant sonority.¹⁷¹

In opposition, postminimalism emerged as a succeeding natural extension of the minimalist aesthetic. Composers like John Adams or Michael Torke, while being inspired from the minimalist

¹⁷⁰ Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, Phaidon, London, 1996, p.170.

¹⁷¹ Smith, *Minimalism: towards a definition*, p. 5-7.

pioneers, intended to permeate their works with a vaster emotional depth, structural complexity, and a broader sphere of influences. Although postminimalism preserved the key elements of minimalism, such as repetition and a steady pulse, it attached layers of expressive ramifications and richness to the musical language.

Thereby a fundamental distinction between minimalism and postminimalism resides in their respective approaches to emotional expression and narrative development. Minimalism, with its emphasis on reduction, often elicits a sense of detachment or meditative tranquillity. The focus is primarily on the act of listening itself rather than on the emotional journey conveyed by the music.¹⁷² This characteristic can be viewed as both a strength and a limitation, while minimalist works create an intriguing sonic landscape, they have occasionally faced criticism for their perceived lack of emotional depth and complexity.¹⁷³ In contrast, postminimalist composers present a greater desire to incorporate emotional expression and narrative progression into their compositions. Works like John Adams's *Hallelujah Junction* and *Harmonielehre* exemplify this evolution, seamlessly blending minimalist techniques with romantic, expansive gestures that amplify the emotional resonance of the music.¹⁷⁴

Another key difference between the two styles lies in their approach to harmonic and rhythmic complexity. While minimalism intrinsically tended to favour consonant harmonies and predictable rhythmic structures, lending it a meditative, tranquil quality, its harmonic lingua was predominantly tonal or modal, fostering a sense of openness and stability. Contrastingly, postminimalism embraced a more abundant harmonic diversity, as well as dissonance and rhythmic irregularity. As a consequence, this expansion allowed the composers to venture into a broader spiritual and aesthetic spectrum, highlighting the expressive potential of their works.¹⁷⁵ The previously mentioned composition *Harmonielehre* represents a suitable example for this statement. As being an homage to Arnold Schönberg's music theory manual (1911), Adams expressed the piece as "a declaration of faith in the power of tonality during a period when he was unsure about its future" and referred to it as "a unique, singular experiment in merging *Fin de siècle* chromatic harmony with the rhythmic and formal techniques of minimalism".¹⁷⁶

172 Jonathan W. Bernard, *Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality in Recent American Music*, in *American Music*: Vol. 21, no. 1, Spring, 2003, p. 115-117.

173 Ibidem, p. 113.

174 "The harmonic language of my earlier works, like *Phrygian Gates* and *Shaker Loops* was stable and comfortably settled in distinct tonal regions. This was characteristic of the Minimalist style. I achieved variety in the design my carefully working up to the big moment of a key change. In *Phrygian Gates*, the modulations were dictated by a precompositional design, just as an architect might sketch out all the floor plans in advance of the start of construction." John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction. Composing an American Life*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 2008, p. 107.

175 Bernard, *Minimalism, Postminimalism*, p. 117-118.

176 John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, p. 130.

Essential to be mentioned is the fact that minimalism's primary concern was often the gradual unfolding of musical processes over time, where subtle changes in texture, rhythm, or harmony gave the music a sense of continuous evolution. The focus was on how these changes occurred, rather than on dramatic shifts in material. This process-driven approach was reflected in the clear structural simplicity, typical for minimalist compositions. On the other hand, postminimalism, while still rooted in process, dedicated greater attention to the structural complexity and development, postminimalist works often containing intrinsic forms, with layers of repetition and variation purposely woven together in order to create a richer, more sonorous soundscape. As a result, the novel music retained the clarity and accessibility of minimalism but portrayed both an enhanced depth and narrative progression.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, it can be easily observed how postminimalism was marked by its eclecticism and openness to influences, influences originating from a wide range of genres and traditions. While minimalism was more focused and somewhat insular, reducing mostly on classical forms and a limited set of external influences (such as non-Western music or jazz)¹⁷⁸, postminimalism encapsulated a broader stylistic palette. Composers such as Adams and Torke have enriched their compositions with a plethora of elements from jazz, rock, world music, and even pop, assembling a hybrid style that transcended the conventional boundaries.¹⁷⁹ This type of openness did not only expand the ideal of postminimalist music, but also transformed it into a more adaptable and relevant genre to contemporary audiences, merging the niche between classical concert traditions and pop culture.

As a brief summary of the introductory paragraphs, it can be concluded that the cultural contexts of minimalism and postminimalism highlight their differences. On one hand, early minimalism was often viewed as countercultural manifest, rejecting the intellectualism of the avant-garde in the favour of a more accessible, populist aesthetic. It resonated with the audience, which was seeking a direct, immediate connection with music. Postminimalism, however, emerged in a time span when the boundaries between art and culture were increasingly blurred, reflecting a postmodern openness to genre and style, where distinctions between classical, popular, and experimental music were less rigid. Substantially, while minimalism and postminimalism present certain similar structural and aesthetic traits, they embody distinct compositional techniques and ideals.

¹⁷⁷ Bernard, *Minimalism, Postminimalism*, p. 117.

¹⁷⁸ "The European avant-garde did nothing for Glass. He later called it a wasteland, dominated by these maniacs, these

creeps, who were trying to make everyone write this crazy creepy music. Instead, he was drawn to the usual array of non-Western musics, and in particular to Indian music." Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, p. 378.

¹⁷⁹ Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 178-183.

1. The resurgence of the past in the creation of a novel paraphrasing

Was postminimalism, in essence, a distinct style or an attempt to revive the preserved classical dogma? A reinterpretation of both minimalist and Baroque genres, infused with a touch of jazz, within the context of cultural modernity?

One might formally argue that postminimalist composers have indeed proven a distinctive tendency to revisit and reimagine the structures of classical and baroque music, paraphrasing these traditional forms in order to compose works that create a melange between the historical the contemporary epoch.¹⁸⁰ Through the engagement of the past and usage of its forms into modern compositional techniques, postminimalist artists developed a genuine dialogue between these eras, combining the rigorousness and refinement of classical structures with the emotionally expressive, often repetitive characteristics of minimalism. Of utmost importance is to be mentioned that this tendency highlighted a distinct egress from the modernist ethos that dominated much of early 20th-century music, which, per a contrario, frequently embraced an anti-historical attitude, focusing in lieu on denouncing the past in the favour of establishing new paths of musical innovation.¹⁸¹

As an answer to the opening question of the subchapter, it might come as relevant the following affirmation: the postminimalist fusion of tradition and innovation revealed how contemporary music may traverse the past and present, opening new avenues of expression. Composers such as John Adams and Michael Torke incorporated traditional forms like the fugue, canon, and variation, blending them with minimalist techniques such as repetition, gradual transformation, and a steady pulse.¹⁸² Suitable examples to sustain this argument are John Adams's *Shaker Loops* (1978) and *Harmonielehre* (1985). *Harmonielehre*, in particular, boldly utilises the late-romantic tonality while incorporating minimalist processes. Adams himself described the work as a "one-of-a-kind essay in the wedding of fin-de-siècle chromatic harmony with the rhythmic and formal procedures of minimalism."¹⁸³ The structure of the piece evokes symphonic forms that share audible similarities to the ones of Mahler and Wagner, however it intersects them with minimalist techniques, such as ostinato patterns and harmonic stasis. This integration of old and new results in the refreshing and zestful reinterpretation of a symphonic form.

A secondary work which could as well exemplify the postminimalist approach of paraphrasing classical forms is Michael Torke's *Adjustable Wrench* (1987). The piece inserts baroque counterpoint by employing repetition and rhythmic pulsations, with Torke crafting a

¹⁸⁰ Robert Fink, *(Post-)minimalisms 1970-2000: the search for a new mainstream*, in: *The Cambridge History of 20th Century Music*, Anthony Pople, Nicholas Cook, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 540-542.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 544.

¹⁸² Lovisa, p. 118-120.

¹⁸³ Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, p. 102-104.

complex soundscape that nods to the past without being constrained by it. It embodies postminimalist tradition while seamlessly blending contemporary sensibilities.¹⁸⁴

Despite the fact that the reworking of baroque elements is a self-evident and undeniable argument, the theories on this subject also come with their own set of interpretations. In order to clarify the matter, we propose a brief analysis of the views of the major scholars who have studied the issues surrounding 20th-century music.

In *Repetition and the Power of Modern Music*, Robert Fink presents postminimalism as being defined by its own ability to recycle historical forms while balancing the formal control with emotional depth. Hence, the previously mentioned composers Torke and Adams incorporate classical structures, infusing them with hypnotic, repetitive qualities, thus blending old and new in a paradoxical way. In fact, the act of paraphrasing classical and baroque forms serves two key purposes in postminimalism: it honours the clarity and emotional resonance of traditions while also innovating them through the juxtapose of modern techniques. In contrast to the early 20th-century modernists who sought to break from tradition, postminimalists engage with it, creating music that feels both familiar and avant-garde.¹⁸⁵

As an addition to this theory, Keith Potter emphasises in his essay about postminimalism how the movement's hallmark lies in its self-awareness and historical reflection. As an example, David Lang revisits the past with irony and creativity, using classical structures – such as the baroque passacaglia – to push the musical boundaries. Lang's *The Little Match Girl Passion* (2007) reinterprets the Passion form with minimalist techniques, transforming it into a modern and emotionally resonant work that acknowledges its historical roots.¹⁸⁶

In contrast, early 20th-century modernism, exemplified by composers like Schönberg, Stravinsky, and Boulez, often sought to differentiate from tradition. Schönberg's twelve-tone system and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* rejected classical forms through radical rhythmic and harmonic innovation. Postminimalism, however, did not aim to annul tradition but to adapt it for contemporary usage, being generally more interested in reworking historical forms than rejecting them outright, thus allowing for a continuity with the past. As it might be evident, this statement stands in a stark contrast to Boulez's declaration that composers not embracing the serial method are "useless"¹⁸⁷.

184 Michael Torke, *Adjustable Wrench*, 1987, <https://www.michaeltorke.com/adjustable-wrench>, consulted on 10. 08. 2024.

185 Fink, *(Post-)minimalisms 1970-2000: the search for a new mainstream*, p. 543-544.

186 Keith Potter, *Four musical minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 15-17.

187 Pierre Boulez, *Notes of an apprenticeship*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1968, p. 20.

At last, Alex Ross reinforces the argument that postminimalist composers factually aim to combine classical forms with minimalist repetition, eventually granting their music a both intellectually rigorous and emotionally accessibility.¹⁸⁸

In conclusion, postminimalism's interaction with classical and baroque forms exemplifies how contemporary composers can utilise historical traditions to create innovation. Through the reinterpretation of traditional structures combined with minimalist techniques, composers such as Adams, Torke, and Lang achieve a balance between honouring historical influences and introducing modern expressiveness. This approach fosters a dynamic dialogue with the past, rather than a rejection of it.

2. A delicate niche between an artistic manifesto and mass consumption

As previously discussed, the resurgence of baroque and classical traditions has taken on a new dimension through postminimalism. However, this raises the question of whether postminimalism remains an artistic manifesto or represents just a justifiable effort to extend a niche genre to a wider audience. A definitive response is elusive, as postminimalism encompasses a broad spectrum of compositions that blend elements of innovation with historical influence. From a more general perspective, it can be observed how early minimalist pioneers have developed their original styles, with some of their minimalist works aligning rather to postminimalist aesthetics. This directly generates a further problematic: should a composer be confined to the labels of minimalist or postminimalist genre solely based on the period in which they debuted, respectively on the style in which consecrated their works? For instance, may it be realistic to categorise Glass's *The Hours* as a pure minimalism, or Jeroen van Veen's *Piano Etudes* as examples of accurately experimental postminimalism? A valid answer is rather no. The constant changing social-political context, as well as a suggestible cultural world directly conducted to a fluid artistic expression. As a secular statement, this categorisation should exclusively be based on concrete examples.

Undoubtedly, the emergence of postminimalism marked a pivotal point in the contemporary music, where the avant-garde tradition intertwined with a broader, more accessible aesthetic. Unlike minimalism, which often gravitated towards abstraction and formalism, postminimalism found itself in a delicate balance – remaining grounded in experimentalism while incorporating elements that appealed to wider audiences. This amalgam of high art and popular charm defined much of the postminimalist repertoire, where minimalist pioneers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich have managed to straddle the line between artistic integrity and mass consumption. By embracing a

¹⁸⁸ Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, p. 391-393.

lyrical content, familiar and simple harmonic structures, and rhythmic exuberance, postminimalism has carved out a unique niche that has resonated with both discerning art circles and mainstream audiences.¹⁸⁹

2.1 Philip Glass and Film Music: The Bridge Between Minimalism and Mainstream Cinema

Besides representing a central figure in the minimalist genre, it can be stated that Philip Glass emerges as one of the most quintessential figures of postminimalism, particularly through his significant contributions to film music. His body of work illustrated how the minimalist aesthetic, once largely relegated to avant-garde contexts, could effectively transition into the realm of mainstream cinema. Notable examples of this crossover include his scores for *The Hours* (2002) and *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982). In *The Hours*, Glass meticulously crafted a score that resonated with the film's sensory nuances, exerting his signature minimalist techniques, such as repetition and gradual variation. While firmly rooted in a minimalist framework, the music possesses a lyrical and accessible quality, enabling it to enhance the emotional depth of the narrative without overshadowing it. The outcome is a score that appeals to a diverse audience, effectively bridging the division between high art and popular culture.¹⁹⁰

Conversely, *Koyaanisqatsi* showcased Glass's more experimental tendencies while simultaneously highlighting his capacity to engage wider audiences through film. This wordless, non-narrative film relies heavily on Glass's score to propel its visual storytelling. The repetitive structures and pulsating rhythms forge an immersive sonic paysage that resonates with both critics and the general public alike. The success of *Koyaanisqatsi* illustrates how minimalist techniques, when applied within the context of mass media, can transcend their traditionally perceived esotericism and connect with a broader cultural consciousness.¹⁹¹

2.2 Steve Reich's *Different Trains*: Emotional Accessibility and Artistic Depth

Steve Reich's *Different Trains* (1988) exemplifies the intricate balance postminimalism strikes between artistic manifesto and mass appeal. This three-movement composition for string quartet and tape juxtaposed the experience of train journeys in the United States during Reich's childhood with the harrowing realities of train travel in Europe during the Holocaust. By

189 Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 166-168.

190 John L. Walters, *Philip Glass's music for The Hours transforms everyday events into powerful drama*, 23 February 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/feb/28/artsfeatures5>, consulted on 10.08.2024.

191 Philip Glass, *Koyaanisqatsi*, Dunvagen Music Publishers, 1982, <https://philipglass.com/films/koyaanisqatsi/>, consulted on 10.08.2024.

intertwining recorded speech, sound effects, and live instrumentation, Reich crafted a compelling narrative that has resonated with both art audiences and the general public.

What distinguishes *Different Trains* is its emotional accessibility. While Reich employs minimalist techniques – most notably repetition and phasing – these are anchored within a profoundly human story. The incorporation of recorded voices, including testimonies from Holocaust survivors, imbues the piece with a weighty emotional resonance that transcends its formal structures.¹⁹² Furthermore, this emotional depth facilitates a connection with a broader audience, including those who might not typically engage with minimalist or avant-garde music. The accessible, repetitive nature of the composition invites listeners into its narrative world, while the underlying complexity offers layers of meaning for more discerning audiences. The success of *Different Trains* evidently underscored postminimalism's capacity to reach beyond the boundaries of high art. It presented an emotional immediacy that stood in contrast to the more detached and formalist qualities characteristic of earlier minimalism and modernist compositions. In this manner, Reich created a work that is not only artistically significant but also adept at engaging with broader social and historical themes, rendering it relevant to both art critics and the general public.¹⁹³

2.3 Postminimalism vs. Modernism: Accessibility without Compromise

Modernism's refusal to communicate directly with its audience often isolated it from broader public appeal, relegating it to a niche of intellectual elitism,¹⁹⁴ notes Alex Ross in his book.

Postminimalism, by contrast, did not reject complexity, but it presented it in a more approachable form. The use of repetitive structures, familiar harmonies, and rhythmic dynamism ensured that postminimalist works remain engaging and relatable. This accessibility, however, did not come at the cost of artistic depth. As demonstrated by Glass and Reich, postminimalist composers have found ways to maintain the rigor of formal experimentation while appealing to a wider audience. For example, John Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986) combined the minimalist repetition and rhythmic drive with a sense of excitement and drama that has made it palatable to both highbrow and mainstream listeners. The piece, which has become a staple in concert halls, exemplifies how postminimalism can create works that resonate across diverse cultural spheres. Adams himself has noted, "I've never seen it as a betrayal of art to engage a broad audience; if anything, it's part of the art's evolution."¹⁹⁵

192 Musicologist Robert Schwarz writes that "Reich uses the repetitive structures of minimalism to amplify, rather than obscure, the emotional impact of the work", p. 57.

193 Potter, p. 207-210.

194 Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, p. 391-395.

195 Adams, p. 123.

3. Interdisciplinarity and synaesthesia

Postminimalism, while unarguably being centred in the principles of minimalism, transcended its musical boundaries by embracing a more expansive, interdisciplinary approach that merged diverse art forms into a unified, multisensory experience. The fusion of music, visual arts, dance and cinematography has represented in essence postminimalism's alienation from its minimalist origins. Composers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass have been at the forefront of this manifesto, collaborating with artists from various disciplines in order to create works that evoked synaesthetic experiences, whereas music was not playing a singular role. Nonetheless, these collaborations did not only push the boundaries of creative expression but stimulated an exchange that allowed postminimalism to traverse multiple artistic realms.

Figure 12



Drumming performance (1998)
photographed by Herman
Sorgeloos and Anne Van Aerschot

One of the most exponential examples of interdisciplinary collaboration within postminimalism is the association of composer Steve Reich and Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. Their collaboration on *Drumming* reveals how postminimalist artists could integrate the realms of music and dance with the purpose of creating a fully immersive sensory experience. Being originally composed in 1970 for a percussion ensemble, *Drumming* has been epitomising the minimalist ethos through its gradual rhythmic shifts and textural evolution.¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, De Keersmaeker's 1998 choreography for the piece has exemplified the seamless interaction between music and movement, with the dancers physically manifesting the rhythmic patterns of the percussion ensemble. Furthermore, the choreographic precision and spatial dynamics

196 www.rosas.be/en/publications/848-drumming-photo-book, consulted on 12.08.2024

197 Lovisa. p.76

mirrored the evolving rhythms in the musical composition, de facto generating an experience where the music became corporeal through movement. De Keersmaeker's minimalist approach to choreography accompanied Reich's work, as well as embodied a shared focus on geometric clarity and repetition.¹⁹⁸ Unquestionably, this collaboration diffused the line between the auditory and the visual, transforming the music into a tangible experience. The repetitive structures and subtle variations in Reich's score were reflected in the dancers' movements, creating a visual extension of the sonic material. This synthesis of dance and music presented postminimalism's fundamental objective of transcending traditional artistic skills, by engaging audiences through an interdisciplinary communication.

Philip Glass's collaboration with avant-garde stage director Robert Wilson in *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) offers as well a striking example of an interdisciplinary approach, aspect characteristic for postminimalism. This revolutionary work not only redefined conventional operatic forms, but also combined the minimalist music with highly elaborated visual elements, including an abstract choreography and innovative lighting.¹⁹⁹ However, Wilson's visual contributions played an indispensable role to the work's effect per ensemble, complementing Glass's cyclical structures. In addition, the opera's non-narrative framework, a key feature of postminimalism²⁰⁰, invited the audience to engage with music and visual elements as an integrated unification. Wilson's deliberate, measured staging reflected the hypnotic characteristic of Glass's composition, with the stark lighting and minimalist stage design enhancing the gradual transformations within the score. As expected, these visual components interacted seamlessly with the music, creating a dynamic sensory landscape.²⁰¹ It can be stated, that in *Einstein on the Beach*, the boundaries between music and visual art dissolved, forming a unitary, multisensory experience. Glass's repetitive motifs served as a foundation for Wilson's visual narrative, while the abstract imagery intensified the audience's immersion in the soundscape. As it is well known that the robustness of opera is situated in its ability to create a continuous, immersive experience where multiple arts coalesce into a flow of sensory experiences, this criterion highlights the appurtenance of postminimalism to interdisciplinary arts even more.

Taking into consideration all previously mentioned arguments, could postminimalism receive the statutory role of interdisciplinary generator? Regardless of the synesthetic "trials" which took place as cultural practices in the precursory epochs, postminimalism appeared as a time of experimentalism and artistic interference. It often sought to induce synesthetic experiences, where different sensory domains both interconnected and enhance one another. The integration of visual elements, lighting, and staging in postminimalist compositions did not represent an additional

198 Reich, *Writings*, p. 215

199 Mertens, p. 81

200 Potter, p. 324-327

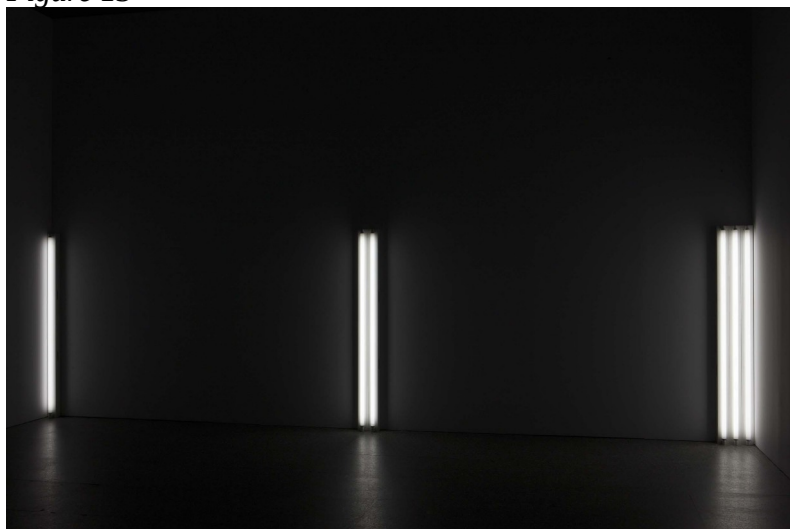
201 Dibelius, p. 188-189

element, but a fundamental characteristic of the works. These multisensory architectures created in concreto holistic artistic experiences, fading the lines between auditory and visual arts.

Steve Reich's *The Cave* (1993), a multimedia opera co-created with video artist Beryl Korot, exemplified the dynamic interplay of sound and visuals. The rhythmic pacing of the video corresponded to Reich's musical pulse, creating an intricate synchronicity that was liable to the audience's perception of both the music and visuals. Nonetheless, the work was not merely a composition set to imagery, but a deliberate melange of visual and auditory media, designed to create a unified sensory encounter.²⁰²

Postminimalism's interdisciplinary nature extended beyond music, reflecting greater developments in the visual and performing arts. Minimalism in visual art, with its emphasis on geometric forms, repetition, and materials, found expression in the works of Donald Judd and Dan Flavin. These artists prioritised simplicity and spatial interaction, which resonated with minimalism's musical principles. Postminimalist visual artists, however, pushed these boundaries by introducing performance and narrative into their works, creating more interactive and experiential pieces.²⁰³

Figure 13



204

The Nominal Three (To William of Ockham)
of Dan Favin (1963); Museo Reina Sofia

This interdisciplinary preference was also embraced in the industry of dance and film. Lucinda Childs, the choreographer who collaborated with Glass on *Einstein on the Beach*, developed a minimalist choreography that mirrored the repetitive patterns of postminimalist music, relocating from narrative in favour of an abstract, pattern-based movement.²⁰⁵ In film, Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), with a score by Glass, embodied a postminimalist aesthetic,

²⁰² Potter, p.152.

²⁰³ Strickland, *Origins*, p. 270-281.

²⁰⁴ <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/nominal-three-william-ockham>, consulted on 19.08.2024

²⁰⁵ Theresa Guerreiro, *Lucinda Childs/Philip Glass, Dance review*, 10 March 2022

https://www.culturewhisper.com/r/dance/lucinda_childs_philip_glass_dance_sadlers_wells/16726,
consulted on 20.08.2024.

combining time-lapse cinematography and Glass's minimalist score to create an immersive, non-narrative experience that highlights the synesthetic potential of postminimalism.²⁰⁶

Figure 14



207

Lucinda Childs' *Dance*,
New York, Joyce Theater, 19 Oct 2021
Photo by Sally Cohn

To conclude the foregoing pages, it can be affirmed that postminimalism's interdisciplinary collaborations and its emphasis on multisensory experiences served to redefine the traditional artistic boundaries. By integrating music with visual art, dance, and film, pioneers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass create works that transcended singular sensory domains, thereby reshaping the landscape of contemporary music and performance. These interdisciplinary efforts not only expanded the core of contemporary art, but also recalibrated the relationship between music and other artistic disciplines.

²⁰⁶ Lovisa, p. 91-93.

²⁰⁷ <https://dancetabs.com/2021/10/lucinda-childs-dance-new-york/>, consulted on 20.08.2024.

V. The reception of minimalism in the pianistic contemporary repertoire

“Making music remains, after all, a way to make an alternate reality, a constructed world where everything is in its place.”²⁰⁸

Following a thorough analysis of the trajectory of minimalism, from its inception to its evolution into postminimalism, we now arrive at the core of this study—namely, the pivotal chapter that seeks to address the central research question: Has the tradition of minimal music been preserved within the current socio-cultural framework? If the answer is affirmative, to what extent have the characteristic techniques of this artistic movement been adopted, transformed, or reinterpreted within the contemporary pianistic repertoire? Furthermore, we must question whether we are witnessing a minimalist reinterpretation in the present day or, conversely, a continuation of the postminimalist tradition, as shaped by prior developments. In this sense, are we facing a new form of postminimalism, or rather a hybridization of both trends?

Considering the diversity of artists currently engaged with minimalism, a spectrum that leans toward individualistic heterogeneity, arriving at a definitive conclusion is not straightforward. Moreover, the body of scholarly literature that critically engages with minimalist music tends to conclude at the early 20th century, coinciding with the end of the postminimalist era. Consequently, this study must allow for a subjective, even speculative, perspective due to the notable absence of rigorous scientific inquiry on the current state of minimalism in music. While the arguments presented will strive to be grounded and supported by relevant examples, it remains possible that the reader may find them insufficiently substantiated. Before offering a succinct introduction, it is important to underscore that the forthcoming discussion will concentrate on several key aspects, which will ultimately converge to form a comprehensive perspective aimed at addressing the research questions. The primary points of analysis are as follows: key composers, techniques and aesthetic principles, renowned pianists and their interpretation of minimalist pieces, experimentalism, challenges and criticism, influence on the contemporary composers and their compositional prospects.

²⁰⁸ <https://maxrichtermusic.com/pages/info> consulted on 01.09.2024.

1. Introduction

By briefly summarizing the precedent chapters, it would be deduced that minimalism, originating in the 1960s and pioneered by composers such as Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and Terry Riley, dramatically influenced the landscape its precursors. Notably in the pianistic music, minimalist principles – characterised by repetition, a gradual process, and tonal clarity – offered an alienation from the virtuoso prone, dense textures of earlier 20th-century styles. In which manner the mentioned minimalist techniques have been adopted, transformed, and received in modern piano repertoire, bridging the gap between pianistic tradition and modern approaches to soundscapes, shall be analysed as it follows.

Nevertheless, it can be observed how in the recent decades, contemporary pianists and composers have increasingly embraced minimalist aesthetics, incorporating them into a vast array of styles that range from the intimate and introspective, as an example the music of Ludovico Einaudi, to the cinematic and expansive, such as Max Richter's. Minimalist piano works, while maintaining a connection with traditional keyboard technique, have indirectly redefined the role of the piano in modern concert repertoire. Thus, this chapter will examine a group of composers and compositions that have contributed to this ongoing transformation, as well as the aesthetic principles and technical innovations that individualise minimalist piano music. Moreover, it should consider as well how minimalist piano works are perceived in the broader context of contemporary classical music. While some critics argue that the genre's repetitive structures limit its emotional depth, others celebrate the hypnotic and metamorphical qualities inherent in these works. Through an exploration of notable composers such as Max Richter, Ludovico Einaudi, and Nils Frahm, the chapter will demonstrate how minimalist techniques have evolved in modern piano music and how they continue to influence composers today.

2. Key Composers and Works in minimalistic piano repertoire

Given the significant expansion of the minimalist music repertoire in recent decades, a critical question arises regarding which composers continue to maintain relevance in today's cultural landscape. Furthermore, considering the cultural divide outlined in Chapters II and III. 3, it must also be explored whether European minimalism persists, particularly in light of its apparent resonance in the United States. If it does, this inquiry seeks to examine the characteristics that both align with and diverge from those of American "traditional" minimalism.

According to its relevance in the actual cultural context, as well as due to a personal preference, the first key figure who secured its place in the actual musical scene is the pioneer Philip Glass. His compositions, particularly *Metamorphosis* (1988) and *Glassworks* (1982), occupy an essential position in the contemporary piano repertoire. Unarguably, these works are emblematic of his minimalist aesthetic, characterised by the extensive use of repetitive motifs and gradually evolving patterns. In *Metamorphosis*, a collection of five piano pieces, Glass minimises harmonic progression, instead foregrounding rhythmic and melodic transformations as the principal means of structural development.²⁰⁹ This creates a meditative, almost trance-like experience for both interpreter and listener. *Glassworks*, while similarly rooted in minimalism, also demonstrates Glass's ability to fuse accessibility with the formal discipline inherent in minimalist music. It features more lyrical and melodic elements, contributing to its wide appeal among both classical and broader audiences.²¹⁰ The composition's balance between structural rigor and emotive expressiveness has stabled its place as one of Glass's most popular works. The composers' influence on the contemporary piano practice is profound, as his compositions have become essential for concert pianists²¹¹ and students alike. His music marks a transformative moment in piano composition, shifting towards a process-driven approach where repetition and pattern assume central roles in the articulation of musical ideas.

Rhythmic Precision and Endurance in *Piano Phase* (1967) were the challenges which all the pianists had to overcome while performing the piece. Although he has been primarily known for his ensemble works, pioneer Steve Reich maintained his importance in the contemporaneity. This composition for two pianos introduced the concept of phasing, where two pianists begin by playing the same repetitive pattern, with one performer gradually increasing tempo, causing the parts to shift out of sync.²¹² This results in intricate, evolving rhythmic interactions that test the performers' mastery of timing and precision. Moreover, *Piano Phase* has been widely regarded as a seminal minimalist work, particularly due to the technical demands it places on the performer. It requires both an extraordinary rhythmic precision and sustained concentration, as the subtle shifts in phase generate a complex, almost hypnotic auditory experience. For the pianist, this piece is not only a technical exercise but also a test of endurance, as maintaining the repetitive patterns demands continuous focus. Reich's contribution to contemporary piano music is thus defined by his rigorous exploration of process-driven compositions, wherein rhythmic evolution takes precedence over conventional melodic or harmonic development.²¹³

209 Maycock, p. 29.

210 Erin Lyndal Martin, *Celebrating The 30th Anniversary Of Glassworks By Philip Glass*, 30 April 2012, <https://thequietus.com/opinion-and-essays/anniversary/philip-glass-glassworks/>, consulted on 08.09.2024.

211 As examples, well renowned pianists such as Yuja Wang, Víkingur Ólafsson or Khatia Buniatishvili can be named.

212 Epstein, p. 495-496.

213 Potter, p. 248.

Although Terry Riley is most renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to minimalism, particularly with *In C* (1964), his later piano works, such as *The Heaven Ladder* (1994), reveal a more melodic and tonal interpretation of the minimalist idiom. In contrast to composers like Steve Reich and Philip Glass, whose minimalist techniques are often driven by rhythmic structures and process-based composition, Riley's piano music embraces a more traditional harmonic language while retaining the repetitive patterns characteristic of minimalism.²¹⁴ *The Heaven Ladder* integrates a minimalist skeleton with improvisational elements, offering a fluidity and flexibility, which is not typically found in the works of his contemporaries. The composition is structured around cyclical motifs, but Riley's emphasis on melody and tonality introduces an accessible jazz and lyrical dimension to the music. This fusion of minimalist techniques with more unconventional harmonic approaches has contributed to the popularity of Riley's piano works, particularly among performers seeking to navigate between minimalist aesthetics and traditional classical music or even jazz.²¹⁵ Riley's approach in *The Heaven Ladder* underscores the genre's adaptability, demonstrating that minimalism can transcend its stereotypical association with stark, process-oriented compositions. His blending of minimalist repetition with melodic and tonal development extends the expressive potential of the genre, enriching the contemporary piano repertoire with greater emotional nuance and complexity.

John Adams marks a pivotal departure from the strict minimalist pioneers of Glass, Reich, and Riley, moving towards a postminimalist manifesto that embroidered minimalist techniques with a broader array of musical influences. His piano work *Phrygian Gates* (1977) exemplifies this evolution, where minimalist repetition is interwoven with more traditional harmonic progressions, creating a composition that is both structurally complex and accessible. *Phrygian Gates* is characterized by shifting modal harmonies, with the piano cycling through various key areas in a manner reflective of minimalist processes. However, Adams enhances these minimalist foundations with dramatic intensity and quite virtuoso passages, introducing a level of dynamism and emotional depth that distinguishes his work from that of earlier minimalists.²¹⁶ This synthesis of minimalist repetition and harmonic modulation exemplifies a postminimalist approach, expanding the expressive possibilities of the genre. Adams' innovative style in *Phrygian Gates* has significantly broadened the appeal of minimalist piano music, attracting professional concert pianists.²¹⁷ His postminimalism demonstrates how minimalist principles of repetition and gradual transformation can be integrated with diverse musical elements, enriching the compositional palette. This approach

²¹⁴ Potter, p. 148.

²¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 125-126.

²¹⁶ www.piano.blog/article-john-adams-phrygian-gates/, consulted on 08.09.2024.

²¹⁷ Such as Gloria Cheng and Ralph van Raat.

has paved the way for a new generation of composers to view minimalism not as a rigid style but as a flexible framework that accommodates a wide range of creative ideas.²¹⁸

A composer and musicologist that was not previously mentioned, Michael Nyman represents one of the most significant figures in the reception and evolution of minimalism within the contemporary pianistic repertoire. Known for his unique blend of minimalist techniques with a more rhythmic, harmonically complex approach, Nyman's contributions have both shaped and expanded the understanding of minimalism in piano music. His works, such as *The Piano* soundtrack (1993) and *Water Dances* (1984), embody the minimalist desire while also pushing its boundaries, incorporating elements of modernism and cinematic expression that distinguish his music from the more rigid forms of early minimalism.²¹⁹ The composer's engagement with minimalism can be traced back to his early collaborations with filmmakers like Peter Greenaway, for whom he composed several scores. In these collaborations, Nyman's minimalist techniques found a natural extension in visual media, allowing him to explore how repetitive structures could create narrative tension and emotional depth.²²⁰ His *Water Dances*, originally composed for a ballet, demonstrates this approach well. While the piece is based on repetitive motifs and cyclical structures typical of minimalism, the composer introduces rhythmic complexity and dramatic harmonic shifts that lend the music a sense of urgency and propulsion. This evolution from strict minimalism to a more emotionally dynamic style has been critical in shaping how minimalism is perceived within contemporary piano music. One of his notorious compilation of works, *The Piano* soundtrack, epitomises this development as well. The piece combines minimalist repetition with thriving, lyrical melodies that are far removed from the austere forms of early minimalism. Furthermore, the main theme, *The Heart Asks Pleasure First*, is constructed from repetitive motifs, yet its harmonic richness and emotive power bring it closer to traditional film scoring than to the experimentalism of composers like Philip Glass or Steve Reich.²²¹ Nyman's place in the contemporary pianistic repertoire is particularly representative for the manner in which his music interconnects the gap between minimalism and more popular forms of composition. His integration of minimalist techniques into film scores, for instance, has not only popularised the genre but also expanded the expectations for what minimalist piano music can achieve.

Undoubtedly, the influence of minimalist pioneers and postminimalist composers, such as Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and John Adams, is prominently reflected in the works of numerous contemporary European composers, who have adopted and further developed minimalist techniques in their piano compositions. The German-British composer Max Richter, for instance, appears as a significant proponent of what could be described as "cinematic minimalism". In works

218 Lovisa, p. 127-129.

219 Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music. Cage and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, preface p. 15-18.

220 Lovisa, p.138.

221 Nyman, p. 133-134.

like *Sleep* (2015), Richter adeptly infused the minimalist repetition with vivid, nostalgic textures.²²² His reception of minimalist structures has garnered widespread acclaim for its emotional resonance and accessibility, often eliciting comparisons to film music due to its evocative, narrative quality.²²³

Similarly to Richter, the Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi has attained considerable popularity through his piano works influenced by minimalism, including *Nuvole Bianche* (2003) and *Divenire* (2006). While Einaudi adheres to minimalist principles such as repetition and simplicity, he infuses his compositions with direct, lyrical melodies, rendering them highly accessible to a broad audience. As expected, this aspect has sparked critical debate regarding the demarcation between genuine minimalist music and popular music.²²⁴ Nevertheless, his impact on contemporary piano repertoire remains enormous.

Yann Tiersen, the esteemed French composer and musician, is particularly renowned for his evocative minimalist piano compositions, which have significantly influenced contemporary music. His work, especially the soundtrack for *Amélie* (2001), exemplifies his creativity to merge simple, repetitive motifs, while obtaining a profound emotional depth. Tiersen's minimalist style frequently exhibited a delicate interconnection between melody and harmony, engendering a sense of nostalgia and intimacy.²²⁵ Tiersen's pieces, such as *Comptine d'un autre été: L'après-midi* and *La Valse d'Amélie*, demonstrate his distinctive application of minimalist techniques, rendering sparse yet haunting melodies underpinned by subtle harmonic progressions. His piano compositions often evoke a cinematic quality, drawing on his background in film scoring to create sensible soundscapes.²²⁶ It can be easily stated that the accessibility and lyrical beauty inherent in Tiersen's compositions have broadened the appeal of minimalist music, transcending traditional classical boundaries to the laic audience, including amateur pianists or students. His capacity to imbue everyday emotions into his music fosters a profound connection with listeners, rendering his works resonant across diverse contexts, from film to concert performance. As being a vital figure in the revival of minimalist aesthetics, Tiersen and its legacy continues to inspire contemporary composers and pianists alike, encouraging exploration of the profound emotional potential embedded in simplicity and repetition.²²⁷

222 Delphine Vincent, *Max Richter: History, Memory and Nostalgia*, ed. 2024, <https://www.luigiboccherini.org/2023/01/20/max-richter-history-memory-and-nostalgia/>, consulted on 10.09.2024.

223 Alex Ross, *De Minimis Max Richter's doleful arpeggios, and Cassandra Miller's piercing lament*, 17 April 2023 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/04/17/max-richter-music-review>, consulted on 10.09.2024.

224 Claire Jackson, *Ludovico Einaudi: why does the musical phenomenon still struggle to find acceptance in the classical music world?* 19 March 2024, <https://www.classical-music.com/features/artists/einaudi-why-does-the-musical-phenomenon-still-struggle-to-find-acceptance-in-the-classical-music-world>, consulted on 10.09.2024.

225 Mar Carmona, *Media and Music: The Music of "Amélie" and How Yann Tiersen's Score Reflects Innocence and Curiosity Through the Lens of European Romanticism*, 21 May 2022, <https://www.afterglowatx.com/blog/2022/5/21/media-and-music-the-music-of-amelie-and-how-yann-tiersens-score-reflects-innocence-and-curiosity-through-the-lens-of-european-romanticism>, consulted on 10.09.2024.

226 John Lewis, *Yann Tiersen review – a devastatingly effective way with a melody*, *The Guardian*, 9 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/may/09/yann-tiersen-review-barbican-london>, consulted on 10.09.2024.

227 Christopher Wheeldon, *The Influentials: Classic and Dance*, 03 May 2006, <https://nymag.com/news/features/influentials/16903/>, consulted on 10.09.2024.

With a bit of reluctance²²⁸, we dare to include Nils Frahm as well in the group of young representative contemporary composers who have expanded minimalist techniques into new territories, mixing acoustic piano with electronic music in pieces such as *Says* (2013). Frahm's hybrid approach to minimalism, combining repetitive piano patterns with ambient electronic soundscapes, has garnered a significant following, connecting interference between classical, minimalist, and electronic music. This aspect shall be discussed in detail in Chapter V.5.

The roster of contemporary composers who have perpetuated the minimalist tradition is extensive. However, we will focus on those who are most pertinent to the realm of solo piano composition, taking into account both the popularity of their works and their originality. Additionally, we wish to revisit the inquiry posed at the outset of this subchapter: Are there discernible differences in the reception of minimalist music between American and European contexts? Thus far, we find the arguments regarding this distinction to be somewhat unsubstantiated. The similarities between the two spheres are considerable, while the differences appear minimal. From a subjective standpoint, one might argue that American music exhibits a greater degree of structural cohesion, with emotional resonance manifesting almost instinctively. Conversely, the emotional dimension within the European context assumes a critical role from the outset, often seeking a more pronounced harmonic interplay. The rhythmic simplicity and the absence of phasing likely serve as key characteristics that differentiate the European aesthetic from its American counterpart. Nevertheless, we aim to engage with this research question in greater depth at the conclusion of this chapter, after having explored additional relevant factors.

3. Techniques and aesthetic principles

As to be expected, the aesthetic of minimal music, particularly in the domain of contemporary piano compositions, has been redefined by a series of compositional techniques and principles that differentiated it from traditional Occidental classical music. Minimalism's defining, as in its origins, has featured four main elements: repetition, phasing, extended tonality, and rhythmic complexity. These techniques did not merely serve as stylistic flourishes but rather constituted the foundation upon which minimalism's aesthetic context was constructed. In the circumstances of the contemporary pianistic repertoire, these principles have indeed received, but also reinterpreted, expanded, and recontextualised by various composers. From the plethora of artists who embraced and expanded the forementioned elements, we allow ourselves to enumerate Nils Frahm, Chris Cerrone, Hans Otte, and Terry Riley, and to use some relevant compositions of

²²⁸ It is worth being mentioned that Nils Frahm does not associate his composing style with minimal music, but rather with a unique ambient and modern genre. Despite that, numerous of his piano works are based on repetitive patterns, a centred tonality and intrinsic layering. As examples, pieces such as *Re* (2012) or *Hammers* (2013) are relevant for supporting this argument.

their works as examples. Through the detailed analysis *Hammers* by Nils Frahm, *Hoyt-Schermerhorn* by Chris Cerrone, *The Book of Sounds* by Hans Otte, and *Keyboard Studies* by Terry Riley this essay will elucidate the various compositional and aesthetic strategies employed in the minimalist idiom, thus illuminating its role in shaping contemporary piano music. Not only are these examples pertinent, but also represent a personal affinity as being an interpreter myself.

One of the fundamental techniques in minimal music is repetition, which serves as the structural foundation of numerous minimalist compositions. Nils Frahm's *Hammers* exemplifies this principle, utilising repetitive rhythmic and harmonic motifs for creating a sense of both stasis and perpetuum mobile. Frahm's repetitive figures, emphasised by constant reiteration, engage the listener in a meditative experience, encouraging a genuine absorption into the evolving audible texture. In *Hammers*, Frahm uses ostinatos as essential structures for his melodic development. These patterns are not entirely static, but transform subtly over time, gradually introducing variation through slight shifts in dynamics, articulation, and tempo. Repetition in Frahm's work is not an end in itself but a medium for inducing a psychological state of trance. The listener's attention becomes acutely focused on the minute alterations within the repetitive framework. This technique, which harkens back to earlier minimalist composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich, serves to highlight the beauty in repetition as a compositional tool that generates both predictability and surprise. Hence, this kind of "gradualist unfolding" is a core feature of minimalism, one that seeks to "expand perception over time by foregrounding structural processes."²²⁹

Figure 15

HAMMERS

230

Allegro con fuoco ♩ = 136

229 Richard Cohn, *Minimalism and Structural Listening* in: *Journal of Music Theory*, vol. 36, no. 1, Yale University, 1992, p. 21-39.

230 Nils Frahm, SHEETS, Faber Music, 2013 <https://www.boosey.com/shop/ucat/Nils-Frahm-SHEETS-Digital-Downloads/>, consulted on 15.09.2024.

Phasing, a second irreplaceable element of minimalist music, involves the gradual desynchronisation of repeated patterns that generate complex rhythmic interference. Christopher Cerrone's *Hoyt-Schermerhorn* (2013) beautifully exercised phasing and layering, both elements which essentially gave the aesthetic identity to the piece. Presumably being inspired from Steve Reich's early works, such as *Piano Phase*, Cerrone's composition for piano and live electronics explores the phasing technique through the layering of rhythmic figures that slowly diverge from one another. Moreover, the piece juxtaposes acoustic piano lines with synthesized electronic textures²³¹, which, through gradual phase shifts, move in and out of sync. The initial unity between the two voices slowly dissolves, creating a fluid, evolving relationship between the piano and electronic elements. This evolution stimulates the listener's sense of time and rhythm, as the hearing is drawn into the micro-variations produced by the phasing technique. In this context, phasing serves as both a technical and aesthetic principle, whereby Cerrone invites the listener to experience the gradual dissociation and recombination of rhythmic layers. In addition, Cerrone's usage of phasing can also be seen as a metaphor for the relationship between technology and acoustic sound, where the digital precision of electronic textures interacts with the natural expressiveness of the piano. As it is suggested, "the interaction between different temporal planes in minimalist music serves to create an ongoing dialogue between stasis and change, between the mechanical and the human".²³² In this sense, *Hoyt-Schermerhorn* stands as a possible reinterpretation of Reich's phasing techniques, one that integrates modern technologies, slow tempi and steady rhythms for creating a sensible, nostalgic soundscape.

Figure 16

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The musical score for Figure 16 consists of two systems. The first system shows a piano part with two staves (treble and bass) and a live electronics part with two staves (treble and bass). The piano part has a tempo marking of ca. 35. The live electronics part has a tempo marking of ca. 35. The score includes phrasing markings like 'short' and 'long' and dynamic markings like 'ff' and 'tutta forza'. A note at the bottom indicates that grace notes are spatially notated and are not pickups to the following chord.

* Grace notes are spatially notated, they are not pickups to the following chord.

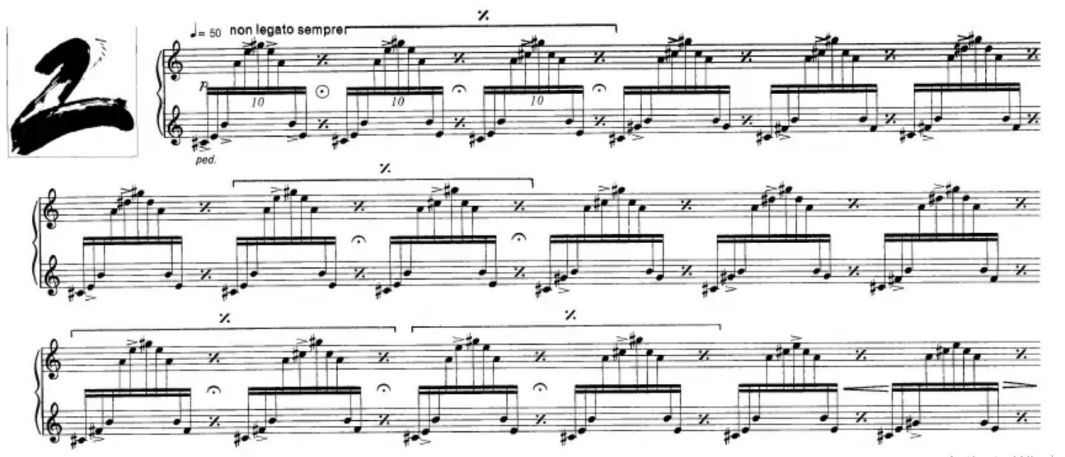
231 Which are preexisting and the purchaser of the scores receives them in a MACOSX folder along the music sheet.

232 Daniel Wolf, *Phasing and Process: Temporal Structures in Minimalist Music*, Perspectives of New Music, Seattle, vol. 52, no. 1, 2015, p. 97-123.

233 Christopher Cerrone, *Hoyt-Schermerhorn for piano and live electronics*, Outburst-Inburst Musics, Brooklyn, New York, 2010.

Minimalism's harmonic vocabulary often expanded beyond traditional tonal boundaries, incorporating modal and non-functional harmonic progressions. Hans Otte's *The Book of Sounds* represents a less known, but exemplary work that extended tonality and modality with the help of a minimalist technique. Otte's approach is characterised by the use of simple, diatonic harmonies that unfold in long, sustained phrases. Furthermore, these harmonies mostly swift through modal structures, avoiding the tension – release balance of the conventional tonal music in favor of a more static, meditative harmonic atmosphere. In *The Book of Sounds*, Otte utilised open fifths, triads, and non-functional harmonic progressions to create an archaic world that is at once familiar and distinguishable. The composer's use of modality, particularly modes such as Dorian and Phrygian, infuses the work with a sense of timelessness, as the harmonies float freely without resolving in a traditional tonal sense.²³⁴ Hence, it can be stated that this use of modality “reflects a return to an elemental form of musical expression, one that emphasises purity and simplicity over complexity.”²³⁵ Besides the emotional purity deriving from its minimalist construction, the extended tonal language in Otte's work also interacts with the concept of time in a unique way. The lack of harmonic resolution translates into the fact that the listener is not guided by the traditional staples of musical form, such as cadences or modulations. Instead, the music unfolds organically, allowing the listener to experience the passage of time in its individuality. Otte's minimalist harmonic language, therefore, contributes indirectly to a broader aesthetic goal: the creation of a contemplative, immersive listening experience that traverses the conventional boundaries of tonal music.

236 *Figure 17*



234 Peter Nelson-King, *Hans Otte – Medieval Minimalism and Tone Tones*, 27 September 2013 <https://re-composing.blogspot.com/2013/09/hans-otte-medieval-minimalism-and-tone.html>, consulted on 10.09.2024.

235 Mertens, p. 22.

236 Hans Otte, *The Book of Sounds*, Goethe Institute Nancy, 1982, <https://de.scribd.com/doc/229466664/Hans-Otte-The-Book-of-Sounds>, consulted on 10.09.2024.

Rhythmic complexity serves as another essential component of minimalism, often manifesting in intricate, layered rhythmic structures, that personally confessing, challenges the performer. Terry Riley's *Keyboard Studies* reflect a striking example of this technique, where rhythmic complexity is explored through the interplay of repeating figures and irregular accents. In contrast to the steady, predictable pulse found in much minimalist music, Riley's *Keyboard Studies* introduce syncopation, cross-rhythms, and shifting accents that disrupt the listener's sense of rhythmic stability. The instructions from the preface of the music sheet are explicit, Riley guiding the performer into repeating short musical phrases, by varying the tempo, dynamics, and articulation with each iteration. These repeated figures often overlap in complex ways, naturally generating polyrhythms, which are both condensed erratic, pushing the boundaries of what is traditionally considered "minimalist" music. Nonetheless, Riley's work "challenges the minimalist paradigm by introducing elements of improvisation and rhythmic instability, making each performance of *Keyboard Studies* a unique event."²³⁷ Undoubtedly Riley's affinity for rhythmic complexity was also influenced by his interest in non-Western musical traditions, particularly Indian classical music²³⁸, where intricate rhythmic patterns played a central role. By incorporating these rhythmic ideas into a minimalist foundation, Riley expanded the possibilities of minimalist music, introducing new layers of complexity and unpredictability into the rhythmic structure of his compositions.

Figure 18

KEYBOARD STUDY No. 2

TERRY RILEY
1965, revised 2015

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²³⁷ Potter, p. 86.

²³⁸ To be seen Chapter III.3.

²³⁹ Terry Riley, *The Piano Works*, Paperback, Chetser Music, 2015.

4. Pianists and their interpretation of minimal music

The realm of minimalist music, particularly within the context of piano compositions, has been profoundly enriched by the interpretative efforts of various distinguished pianists. By reaching this high point of the thesis, this chapter aims to delve into the intricate relationships between the formative minimalist composers and the pianists who bring their works to life, illuminating how these interpretations have pervaded the minimalist genre with a fresh vitality.

Philip Glass, a seminal figure in the minimalist movement, has been lately engaged in a fruitful collaboration with the Japanese – Austrian based pianist Maki Namekawa. Their artistic partnership has been marked by an exploration of the nuanced subtleties inherent in the composer's compositions, particularly his *Etudes*. Namekawa's interpretations have as well been praised to having refined touch and rhythmic precision, key aspects that elucidate the pulsating essence of minimal music. According to Glass, Namekawa's "performances breathe new life into his *Etudes*", allowing listeners to appreciate the emotional depth and complexity that lie beneath the surface of ostensibly simple patterns.²⁴⁰ In Namekawa's own words, she emphasises the significance of interpretative freedom, quoting that "Philip's music demands a particular liberty for self-expression within its structure. I strive to reveal the nuances that make each performance distinct."²⁴¹

This emphasis on interpretive liberty aligns seamlessly with Glass's conviction that minimalism should serve not as a rigid formula but rather as a flexible framework for personal expression.

The compositions of Steve Reich have also been adeptly interpreted by the renowned Labèque sisters, Katia and Marielle, whose dynamic and rhythmically vivid performances have significantly contributed to the understanding of minimalist works. Their rendition of *Six Pianos* exemplifies their capacity to blend complex rhythmic patterns while reflecting the minimalist ideal. As the Labèque sisters asserted in one interview, "When we perform together, we engage in a dialogue that reflects the pulse and structure intrinsic to Reich's music."²⁴² Their unique interpretations have consistently created both visual and auditory spectacles, enriching the minimalist experience for audiences.

On the other hand, pianist Vanessa Wagner's collaboration with Wilhem Latchoumia in interpreting Reich's *Piano Phase* emphasised the rhythmic complexity and vitality immanent in the piece. Their performance captured the essence of phasing, as they engaged in a delicate interplay

²⁴⁰ Glass, p. 82.

²⁴¹ <https://www.makinamekawa.com/>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

²⁴² Victoria Looseleaf, *The Labèque Sisters: Playing Together and Always Discovering Something New*, 8 November 2022, <https://www.sfcv.org/articles/artist-spotlight/labeque-sisters-playing-together-and-always-discovering-something-new>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

that exponentially illustrated the evolving patterns characteristic of Reich's style.²⁴³ Wagner's various interpretations of minimal music have demonstrated a profound comprehension of the minimalist aesthetic, facilitating a communication of the emotional subtleties and technical elements embedded within the piece.²⁴⁴ Nonetheless, from a subjective standpoint, Latchoumia's remarkable artistic finesse in interpreting complex works deserves mention. His expertise is displayed through the subtle and diverse range of nuances he conveys with a remarkable ease. His repertoire largely encompasses modern and contemporary compositions, including minimalist works, where precision and musical refinement are central. This meticulous approach to interpretation is something he also instils in his students, ensuring they inherit his dedication to musical exactitude and sophistication.²⁴⁵

The collaboration between Terry Riley and pianist Sarah Cahill presents another compelling example of minimalist interpretation. Cahill has emerged as an official interpreter of Riley's creations. Her performances accentuated the improvisational elements structured in Riley's compositions, creating a distinctive auditory experience that resonated with both traditional and contemporary audiences. Cahill notes, that *In C* has been about the freedom of interpretation and the excitement of creating music in the moment.²⁴⁶ This focus on improvisation not only distinguished her interpretations, but also situated with Riley's vision of music as a dynamic and evolving entity. The composer's choice to collaborate with Cahill is particularly significant as he publicly expressed her ability to intertwine structure with spontaneity, thus rendering each performance a singular event.²⁴⁷

Arvo Pärt's minimalist compositions have likewise found an eloquent interpreter in pianist Alice Sara Ott. Her renditions of pieces such as *Fratres*, *Spiegel im Spiegel* or *Für Alina*, as a pivotal piece from her new album²⁴⁸, revealed an acute sensitivity to Pärt's philosophy about silence and space. Ott's performances have been associated with a contemplative quality that aligned seamlessly with the spiritual dimensions of Pärt's music.²⁴⁹

243 To be seen Chapter III.3.

244 Michèle Tosi, *The path into the invisible* by Vanessa Wagner, 28 July 2022, <https://hemisphereson.com/en/the-path-in-the-visible-of-vanessa-wagner/>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

245 As a musician and artist, I wish to emphasise that I have learned immensely from Wilhem Latchoumia, having had the privilege of being mentored by him.

246 Allan Kozinn, *Eighty Trips Around the Sun: Music by and for Terry Riley* by Sarah Cahill Review. *Pianist Sarah Cahill offers a belated 80th birthday celebration for the composer that challenges conceptions about Minimalism*, in: *The Wall Street Journal*, 07 November 2017, <https://arts.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017-11-15-Wall-Street-Journal-The.pdf>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

247 Jarrett Goodchild, *5 Questions to Sarah Cahill (pianist) About Music by and for Terry Riley*, 10 January 2010 <https://icareifyoulisten.com/2018/01/5-questions-sarah-cahill-terry-riley/>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

248 *Echoes of life*, 2021, Deutsche Gramophon

249 <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/features/article/video-of-the-day-alice-sara-ott-plays-arvo-part-s-fur-alina>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

The rapidly increasing interest among a new generation of pianists in minimalist music could maybe translate into a heated trend within contemporary classical music? In fact, artists such as Víkingur Ólafsson, Vanessa Wagner, and Jeroen van Veen have actively been engaged in promoting a minimalist repertoire to traditional classical audiences. Moreover, Ólafsson's interpretations of works by composers such as Philip Glass, especially the *Etudes*, have gathered various critical acclaims for their innovative approaches, being appreciated both by young enthusiasts of popular music and by cultivated music lovers.²⁵⁰

In addition, one of the previously mentioned artists, namely Vanessa Wagner, consolidated a professional career out of performing avant-garde pieces, her dedication to promoting minimalism through her varied collaborations²⁵¹ only accentuating her belief in the genre's potential to reach wider audiences. Her efforts to unify the distinction between traditional classical forms and minimalist aesthetics could exemplify the evolving trajectory of contemporary piano performance, revealing how this genre continuously challenged and expanded audience perceptions.²⁵²

Similarly, Jeroen van Veen's profound commitment to the minimalist repertoire, evidenced by his comprehensive performances and extensive recordings of minimalist works,²⁵³ had evidently reflected his unwavering dedication to the genre. His interpretations, marked by their clarity and precision, emphasised the intricate structures underlying minimalist compositions, thereby allowing their complexity to surface.²⁵⁴

5. Experimentalism

As anticipated, the reception of minimalist music in the contemporary contexts has experienced significant transformations. In an increasingly digital world, the allure of analog music remains spectacular, and the fusion of the two can only result in an attractive unity. The following paragraphs aim to briefly introduce the popular artists and composers present times who have been merging pianistic music with an electronic blend, seeking to alter the sound structure in order to create new and complex experiences. It is also essential to note from the outset that while these composers may not explicitly align their stylistic choices with minimalism, the compositional elements embedded in their works reveal a noteworthy connection to the minimalist genre. This

250 Timothy Judd, *Philip Glass' "Études": Víkingur Ólafsson*, 12 November 2018, <https://thelistenersclub.com/2018/11/12/philip-glass-etudes-vikingur-olafsson/>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

251 As an example, the one with Murcof in 2016.

252 Garreth, *Vanessa Wagner ~ Mirrored*, 18 November 2022, <https://acloserlisten.com/2022/11/18/vanessa-wagner-mirrored/>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

253 Among these, I personally believe his extraordinary interpretations and arrangements of *Canto Ostinato* must be mentioned.

254 <https://www.marbecks.co.nz/detail/585379/Best-of-Minimal-Piano-Music>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

affiliation may not manifest philosophically, but certainly structurally.

Does Nils Frahm's creation represent, in fact, an intricate amalgamation of minimalist principles with experimental innovation? His compositions have been distinguished by an adept utilisation of unconventional methods, including the prepared piano and an integration of electronic textures. However, one must admit that these elements attached layers of depth and nuance to his minimalist foundation, elevating it through complexity. His seminal album *Spaces* (2013) highlights this fusion, where an array of dynamic textures and tonal variations revitalizes the minimalist genre, transcending conventional boundaries.²⁵⁵ His live performances, although being occasionally predictable, subjectively speaking, reflect the evolving and curisve nature of minimalist music, making it more accessible to a spectrum of listeners ranging from traditional classical music enthusiasts to those exploring experimental soundscapes.

Similarly, Hania Rani's compositions reflect a homogeneous confluence between minimalism and modern experimental techniques. Her album *Esja* (2019) presents a nuanced interplay of intricate piano motifs, subtly blended with electronic elements. This synthesis offers a modern reimagining of minimalist ideals, appealing particularly to younger audiences seeking novel auditory experiences. Rani's approach punctuates her ability to traverse classical and contemporary rigors, which she articulates succinctly. "I aspire to create music that feels both timeless and contemporary, bridging the divide between disparate genres"²⁵⁶

A third relevant example to the topic is the collaboration between Vanessa Wagner and electronic composer Murcof. Their album *Statea* (2016) stands as a demonstration of fusion of classical and electronic genres, combining Wagner's refined and sensible piano interpretations with Murcof's ample live electronic soundscapes.²⁵⁷

Unquestionably, such collaborations illustrate a broader movement within contemporary music, where genre boundaries are increasingly malleable. This openness promotes minimalism in innovative ways, expanding its reach beyond its traditional confines. The fusion of classical piano with electronic elements invites new interpretations and reinvigorates the genre, while also appealing to a wider audience by balancing complexity with accessibility.

Despite this, the expansion of experimental composers such as Frahm and Rani, or collaborations like Wagner and Murcof's, often resonates deeply with amateur audiences. Hence, the commercial success of such projects prompts discussions about whether this redirection represents a commercialisation of minimalist music or a broader dissemination of the genre. Critics

²⁵⁵ Paul Bridgewater, *Nils Frahm, Spaces*, 19 November 2013,

https://www.undertheradarmag.com/reviews/nils_frahm_spaces, consulted on 17.09.2024.

²⁵⁶ Poland's EQUAL Artist of the Month Hania Rani Composes Music That Lights Up the Soul, July 20, 2021

<https://newsroom.spotify.com/2021-07-20/polands-equal-artist-of-the-month-hania-rani-composes-music-that-lights-up-the-soul/>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

²⁵⁷ Murcof x Vanessa Wagner: *Statea*, 22 April 2020, <https://spellbindingmusic.com/murcof-x-vanessa-wagner-statea/>, consulted on 17.09.2024.

argue that merging minimalist techniques with mainstream elements risks diluting its authenticity. However, proponents posit that this trend enriches the genre, allowing it to flourish and maintain relevance in a rapidly evolving musical landscape. The widening appeal, rather than undermining the art form, potentially serves as a platform for its evolution within contemporary discourse.

Concurrently, this extension of minimalist music into experimental territories raises questions about whether it should represent a development of postminimalism or a potential regression towards a more commercially viable form. On one hand, the hybridisation of genres and interdisciplinary collaborations can be seen as a natural progression that enhances the minimalist tradition, broadening its horizons. As a result, such evolution invites new audiences. What is in fact intriguing, is the widely spread “one-man band” concept, approach that could detract from the collective and communal spirit that originally defined early minimalism. The question emerging in this context is intrinsically linked to the contemporary relevance of the concept. While original minimal music, and even postminimalist, aspired to create interdisciplinary collaborations and artistic partnerships, can we still assert the existence of a reinterpretation of these principles in the current times? Our inclination is to provide a negative response. Nevertheless, when examined in its distinctiveness, this particular experimental genre fundamentally retains a minimalist skeleton in its essence.²⁵⁸

6. Challenges and critique

Paradoxically, the lack of structural complexity served to minimalist music as one of the most significant virtues! Accessibility represents the key word when referring to this genre, compositions often featuring limited musical material, thus allowing listeners to engage with the work without the prerequisite of extensive musical training. As a consequence, a wider audience is welcomed to discover the beauty of contemporary music, simultaneously cultivating a greater appreciation for the genre. The meditative aspect which derives from it, including the state of trance and hypnosis attract a vast interest as well from listeners who seek a place of refuge from the frenetic modern society in which they live. Moreover, the interference of classical and popular styles depicts another notable acclaimed aspect of minimalism. The genre’s incorporation of accessible harmonic progressions and repetitive motifs often aligns closely with popular music

²⁵⁸ This observation aligns with the perspectives of contemporary academics who argue that the essence of minimalism continues to influence new musical forms, merely in recontextualised manners. For instance, it has been suggested that even within innovative and experimental contexts, the underlying minimalist structures often persist, serving as a framework upon which new ideas are constructed. The potential for reinterpretation exists, but it is essential to recognize the continuity of minimalist foundations within these evolving forms. To be seen Mertens, p. 89-92.

sensibilities, enabling a crossover appeal. For instance, composers like Philip Glass and Steve Reich have infused their works with elements reminiscent of popular music, contributing to minimalism's assimilation into mainstream culture.²⁵⁹

Conversely, the simplicity of minimal music has generated considerable criticism. Detractors argued that because of its repetitive nature, minimalist music has often resulted in a perceived lack of emotional depth, rendering it uninspiring or devoid of the complexity found in more traditional classical compositions. The possible aggravation of this aspect could hypothetically lead to this genre becoming an "aesthetic of retreat" wherein its repetitive structures may lead to an obstructing experience for listeners seeking intellectual engagement.²⁶⁰ Additionally, the commercialisation of minimalist music has been a point of contention. However, while some critiques argue that the genre's widespread popularity has led to its dilution, or the lack of artistic integrity, the same opinion cannot be regarding the cinematography and film scoring, where minimalist motifs have been utilised to evoke specific emotional responses without the necessity of intricate compositional techniques.

Could the acoustic accessibility of minimalist music be translated into interpretative ease? While a generalised opinion might perceive this genre as simple to perform, as an interpreter of this minimalist music myself, I must respectfully contradict such assumptions. Certainly, minimalist compositions come in various forms, lengths, and levels of difficulty. Firstly, it is essential to note the often extended duration of these pieces. Even though the musical material is frequently limited (as seen in the works of Glass or Reich), the performer's concentration must remain unwavering. The development of these pieces requires a state of continuous alertness, thus posing significant mental demands. As for maintaining a steady and consistent rhythm, I confess that *Piano Phase* is no more undemanding than Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata no. 7*. In many cases, rhythmic precision in classical music can be obscured by various effects, such as pedal use or agogic nuances, fact which cannot occur in minimal music. Secondly, grasping and conveying the meaning of such works can present a genuine challenge. When the nuances present extremely subtle tones, and their transitions must occur organically and imperceptibly, the performers should remain entirely aware and decisive about their interpretation. I draw attention to *China Gates*, where the delicacy of the notes and the overlapping of layers are not easily mastered in the early stages of learning. Nonetheless, there are many cases where minimalist compositions do not involve significant technical or mental difficulties. However, if we refer to the spirit of the genre, what minimal and postminimalist music originally represented, I feel inclined to express a more definitive opinion.

259 Simon Frith, *Performing rites. on the value of popular music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 112.

260 Ross, p. 231.

7. The Influence of Minimalism on Contemporary Composers and the Future of Pianistic Repertoire

At the conclusion of this chapter, we raise the question of whether minimalist music will sustain its presence on the contemporary stage, considering the continuously evolving cultural context. Indeed, the analysis has demonstrated that minimalism persists within both classical and popular music spheres. Nevertheless, we must consider whether we could refer to minimalist music in accordance with its original philosophical framework and associations, or we should consider it as music that is adapted to the present, while employing minimalist principles. In any case, to ultimately provide a definitive response, we propose a concise delineation of the most significant factors that could influence this phenomenon.

In all cases, the future of minimal music and its integration into contemporary composers' repertoires has been generally characterised by a dynamic interplay of genres and evolving compositional approaches. This trajectory can be examined through three noteworthy facets: the role of minimalism in film and popular culture, the emergence of postminimalism, and the contributions of a new generation of composers.

Minimal music has increasingly infiltrated mainstream culture, especially within the domain of film scoring. A vast amount of minimalist composers, such as Philip Glass or Max Richter have profoundly impacted cinematic soundtracks, employing minimalist motifs to evoke specific atmospheres.²⁶¹ As an example, Glass's score for *The Hours* (2002) reveals the seamless integration of minimalist principles within a cinematic context, utilising repetitive patterns that elicit emotional resonance without overshadowing the narrative.²⁶² In addition to cinema, minimalism has secured its position within commercial music, frequently harnessed in advertisements and soundtracks to instill a sense of tranquility and focus. The genre's inherent ability to create immersive soundscapes renders it particularly effective for these applications, especially when the minimalist music evokes motifs which resemble nostalgic feelings.²⁶³

²⁶¹ To be seen chapter V. 2.

²⁶² Philip Glass's Award-Winning Soundtrack to 'The Hours' Now on Vinyl for First Time, 30 September 2022, <https://www.nonesuch.com/journal/philip-glass-award-winning-soundtrack-hours-now-vinyl-first-time-2022-09-30>, consulted on 20.09.2024.

²⁶³ *Puterea nostalgiei in publicitate*, 22 November 2023, <https://www.iqads.ro/articol/66235/puterea-nostalgiei-in-publicitate>, consulted on 20.09.2024.

As it was presented in the antecedent chapter, the evolution of minimalism has organically given rise to a distinct genre, namely postminimalism, a genre marked by the fusion of minimalist elements with influences from jazz, pop, and classical music. Composers such as John Adams, Michael Torke, and Nico Muhly have pioneered this genre, creating works that transcended conventional genre boundaries. For example, Adams's *Shaker Loops* employed minimalist patterns with rich orchestration, producing a vibrant, textured soundscape that expands the minimalist vocabulary.²⁶⁴ As a consequence, the unification of genres led to a dynamic interaction between diverse musical traditions, enabling contemporary composers to explore innovative sound spheres. The incorporation of various stylistic influences enriched the minimalist foundation, making it more accessible to a broader range of audiences. Hence, this confluence of styles reflected a broader trend in contemporary music, wherein composers intentionally transcended the genre's limitations in order to cultivate a more inclusive and expansive musical environment.²⁶⁵

Certainly, an important question that arises is whether younger composers would adopt this style, or at least incorporate its essential characteristics into their works. It is already evident that pianists will continue to contribute to the perpetuation of the genre, a prospect which, from a subjective standpoint, I find particularly encouraging for the development of diverse and potentially interdisciplinary projects. As a solidification of this opinion, an increasingly significant interest in this genre can also be observed among renowned pianists. As for the composers, based on my own experiences, I can affirm that in recent years I have had the opportunity to perform and discover the works of emerging composers, whose contributions have deepened my appreciation for this genre. Notable among these are Christopher Cerrone, Bryce Dessner, Timo Andres, and Nico Muhly. In many socio-cultural contexts, where uncertainty or chaos can be overwhelming, simplicity and calm seem to serve as the most highly sought-after ideals, appealing to both professional and amateur audiences alike.

In summary, the challenges and critiques of minimal music within the contemporary cultural context reflect a complex interplay of accessibility and depth, simplicity and emotional resonance. As the genre evolves, we dare to mention that its prospects within the future pianistic repertoire remain robust, with a growing community of innovative composers poised to redefine its boundaries.

²⁶⁴ Adams, p. 134.

²⁶⁵ Potter, p. 149.

VI. Conclusion

The main goal of this thesis was to demonstrate whether, and if so, in what manner minimal music has been received in the contemporary pianistic sphere. Following a clear structure, the opening pages detailed the background of minimal music, contextualizing the notion in its plurality of meanings and correlating it with the main composers who developed their unique composing styles based on its characteristics. Furthermore, the extensive chapters on postminimalism emphasized the genre's organic development into a fusion style, as well as its adherence to interdisciplinary arts. Lastly, in the most relevant chapter to the topic, namely minimal music's reception in contemporary times, a plethora of aspects were analyzed and interconnected to create a valid argument.

However, some intriguing questions, which logically arose while researching the topic, remain unanswered. Does minimal music still prevail in the present artistic scene? And if so, should we rather refer to it as an innovative style that uniformly emerges through the use of minimalist characteristics, or in its original spirit and customs? Personally, I believe that both positive and negative answers may be valid in this case.

Without enumerating all the examples and consulted literature from the previous chapter, it can be observed that interest in minimalist pieces is still actively sustained by both professional musicians and amateur performers or listeners. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that most of the pioneers are still alive and occasionally collaborate with their chosen performers (as seen with Glass and Namekawa), expressing a similar compositional approach that originally defined their style as minimalist. Certainly, others have gradually developed their main artistic style—evolution that cannot necessarily be associated with minimal music (as in Riley's late works).

Despite this, I dare to offer a rather controversial response to the second question. Generally speaking, I do not believe that minimal music in its original form still prevails in today's constantly changing artistic context. I am not referring to the multitude of minimalist pieces, postminimalist interdisciplinary collaborations, or pianists performing famous minimalist works in concert halls. Rather, I refer to the idealistic/teleological aspect that originally gave the genre its adherence. Empirically speaking, I wonder how this genuine and collectively unifying music can still hold a relevant place in a social-political context that emphasises individual problems over collective ones. Fortunately or unfortunately, the humanitarian crises of the 1960s have shifted into individual identity crises, thus rendering the core essence of minimal music perhaps outdated.

Nonetheless, this does not exclude the possibility of reviving it, as it once existed. Personally, as a lover and performer of minimal music, I genuinely wish to attract the interest of audiences to the discovery of this hypnotic music.

To conclude this work, I leave the following quote: “Openings and closings, beginnings and endings. Everything in between passes as quickly as the blink of an eye. An eternity precedes the opening and another, if not the same, follows the closing. Somehow everything that lies in between seems for a moment more vivid. What is real to us becomes forgotten, and what we don’t understand will be forgotten, too. So I save this closing not for thoughts but for images, memories which by writing them down, are not longer mine alone.”²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ Glass, p. 307.

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