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The interaction between postminimalist music and contemporary dance

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The interaction between
postminimalist music and contemporary dance

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Bachelor of Music Honours

Azariah Felton

Edith Cowan University
Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts
2018

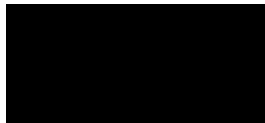
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the manner in which postminimalist compositional techniques such as phasing, polymeter, etc., can be used to aid the creation of music for dance. Music presented with dance generally serves at least two crucial roles: providing the dancers with a framework and impetus to aid movement; and reflecting the concept and meaning, where applicable, of the choreography. Many composers writing for dance must find ways to unite these goals in a way that best suits the total work, and find a balance between supporting the concept and assisting the dancers. This dissertation discusses the relationship between choreography and composition by examining existing research in choreomusicology. The practice-based component compares the conclusions of the research discussion to the outcomes of my own artistic practice when composing for contemporary dance. As postminimalist compositional techniques can be applied to a range of instrumentations and genres, they can provide a broad range of textural and timbral possibilities to generate emotional response and communicate meaning. The emphasis on rhythm and repetition facilitates choreography and movement by providing a framework upon which dance can be constructed and performed.

Acknowledgements

The support I have had while completing this project has been a massive help to me throughout the year. First and foremost, to my supervisor and teacher, Dr. Lindsay Vickery, whose expertise and experience have shaped the project from its earliest stages. To Dr. Matt Styles and Dr. Stuart James, for their help over the course of the year. To the teachers that have helped me grow my creative practice during this time, Iain Grandage and Karl Thomas. To the choreographers, Bethany Reece and Katarina Gajic for being wonderful collaborators and artistic colleagues, and for allowing me to use their work for the project. To Michael Smetanin, for allowing me to use the title of one of his works (borrowed from Zappa), as a chapter title. Finally, to my parents and family for their support over many years, without which I would never have begun this project, let alone finished.

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Introduction

My fascination with music for contemporary dance originated when I began studying my Bachelor's degree in 2015. Since that time, I have worked on twenty-six dance projects in various capacities, and have been developing a personal craft and collaborative practice while working with the choreographers. During this process, my process and aesthetic when writing for dance has continued to develop, and it has become the focus of my creative practice.

My musical influences are quite varied, beginning with 'metal', which was the original impetus for a focus on off-meter rhythms and polyrhythms. The instrumentation also appealed to me, as I was playing guitar and drums at the time. At WAAPA, I was introduced to Steve Reich, and was immediately attracted to his use of rhythms. I experimented with incorporating it into my own work, to complement the techniques adapted from 'metal'. As I continued composing in this style, I began to combine the techniques from minimalism, such as phasing, pulse, and diatonic harmonic structures, to the polymeter and rapidly changing time signatures I had already been experimenting with. It was while beginning to write this sort of music that I discovered composers such as Graham Fitkin, Fred Rzewski, and Nico Muhly. I began adapting some of the techniques to my compositions for dance, where, thanks to software and digital instruments, I could write more complex rhythmic patterns without the restriction of finding players to rehearse and perform the music. I used these techniques both when writing electronic music, and when using sample libraries to compose instrumental music.

A central part of my practice is immersion in the choreographic and rehearsal process, often working on music in the space while the dance is developed, and observing the tasks from which the choreography is built. Where possible, I incorporate choreographic tasks into the composition process, either as structural or thematic devices, or as prompts for sound design and arranging. I found that observing the movement as it was developed and tweaked aided in the process of constructing musical materials. Investigating this area further was a strong motivator in deciding to undertake an Honours project.

While there is a broad range of literature around composing for contemporary

dance, very little of it deals specifically with postminimalist music techniques and how they can contribute to composing for a dance work. However, there is a growing body of literature on postminimalist music and the compositional techniques associated with it. Much choreomusicological research focuses on masterworks by choreographers, or practitioners examining their own practice, and it is less common to focus on specific musical tropes or genres. Some sources exist on dance works which use postminimalist music, but they are either reviews or analyses of performances, as opposed to more general discussions of the larger body of work.

Due to limitations of time and extent, this thesis will examine postminimalism and choreomusicology superficially, with the aim of giving the reader enough information to interpret the creative works presented in the final chapter. I have intentionally avoided in-depth discussion of composers or choreographers whose output is not directly related to and representative of the research question. I have avoided the neurological and other such specialist aspects of choreomusicology, focusing instead on the areas of the field that can directly influence and exegete artistic practice. I make no attempt to provide a comprehensive history of minimalism, postminimalism, or contemporary dance; many scholars more qualified than myself have already done so. Instead I have only included what was necessary and helpful for facilitating a basic yet firm foundation of knowledge and understanding.

The last chapter of this dissertation examines two works I composed for while undertaking the research, and discusses how and why postminimalist music techniques were used in constructing the music. I included two pieces to show a greater variety of techniques, and different methods of applying techniques to dance composition.

In the practice-based portion of the thesis, I did not aim to include every technique used in postminimalism, or to make sure that the pieces fit clearly within the postminimalist gamut. Rather, I have tried to compose works that were suited to the choreographies they were created for, and respected the wishes of the choreographer first and foremost. As such, the two works of those I completed during the research period that have been included in the thesis are those which best represented a use of postminimalist techniques and aesthetics. Although I did compose other dance works in the same period, I did not consider them useful to

include in the research, as use of relevant techniques was too limited to facilitate a useful discussion.

Fraught with ambiguity of definition at almost every turn, the term postminimalism has been a source of contention among commentators. The most common convention, which has been adopted for this dissertation, is the uncapitalised, non-hyphenated 'postminimalism'. Some authors add a hyphen to define it more directly in relation to minimalism, and Gann states that he has observed this hyphenated version most often used to refer to the work of the original minimalists after they began moving away from the strictness of minimalism and to embrace more vernacular music in their work¹. Part of this confusion may stem from the differing use and semantics of the term in other areas such as visual art, where it is both capitalised and hyphenated. In certain cases, particularly in older sources before the term became popular, authors attached their own labels to the style, including Warburton's 'Systems music'².

¹ Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Siôn Pwyll ap, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* (Farnham, Surrey, UK, England ; Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate, 2013), 41.

² Daniel Warburton, "A Working Terminology for Minimal Music," *Integral* 2 (1988).

Chapter 1 – Minimalism isn't dead, it just smells funny

Minimalist music

To summarise the current range of views and definitions of postminimalism, one must first indicate what it is 'post' to. Minimalist music was born in New York in the mid-twentieth century, with four composers credited for its inception, all working within similar idioms, and yet each with their own distinctive perspective on the practice: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass. La Monte Young employed drones and gradually shifting textures, his music emphasising harmony above all else, as the extended durations and limited number of pitches used meant that melody and rhythm were imperceptible. Terry Riley used guided improvisation and repetition of musical cells to construct performances of unspecified durations, which mirrored his own solo and group improvisational practice. Steve Reich began experimenting with tape machines and splicing to develop phasing, in pieces like "It's Gonna Rain"³ and "Come Out"⁴, before beginning to apply the same methods to live musicians and acoustic instruments with "Piano Phase"⁵. The quartet was completed by Philip Glass, who used additive and subtractive processes to augment simple musical cells, and extend simple figures into longer repeating patterns over the course of a work. These composers were all united by a limitation of material, and an emphasis on extended repetition not before seen in Western Art music, though a long-time feature of world music such as Balinese gamelan. Other composers such as John Adams and Michael Nyman worked in a similar idiom, but it is accepted practice to use this group of four composers as the indispensable pioneers of minimalism, and between them they represent most of the development of the style.⁶ Of the four, La Monte Young's drone practice, though very influential to a range of genres and artists, is less emblematic of postminimalism, which is very rarely found without rhythm as a central component.

Minimalist music is characterised by an extreme limitation of material, predominantly tonal, coupled with extended repetition. This material usually consists of either extended drones, in the case of Young, or rhythmic or melodic musical cells

³ Steve Reich, "It's Gonna Rain," (1965).

⁴ "Come Out," (1966).

⁵ "Piano Phase," (1967).

⁶ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music : La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, 1st English ed. (London, New York: Kahn & Averill, Broude, 1983), 11.

in the case of Riley, Reich, and Glass. Another feature of the rhythmic works is a steady pulse, either stated or consequent, which persists for the duration of a work. The repetition and length of pieces contributed to a fascinating temporal effect, which has been referred to as 'vertical time'⁷. In most Western music, composers rely on functional harmony and a listener's memory and anticipation to create interest and tension, which drives the music. However, in vertical time, listeners are encouraged to appreciate music in the moment, without needing to reference what has passed, or look ahead to what is coming.⁸

Postminimalism

Postminimalist music defies a clear-cut definition, as it encompasses a large range of sounds and styles, from composers of many different backgrounds and influences.⁹ Nicholas Williams states that:

On the surface, it might seem obvious: postminimalism is music written by composers after minimalism which shows continuities with minimalism's style, aesthetic or technique. However, it is not just a question of continuities...¹⁰

The classification is based less upon a common 'sound', and instead is described by a range of stylistic characteristics which may be present in a work, and by the influence of minimalism on the work. Postminimalism often discards the strict, slowly-developing, process-based aesthetic¹¹. As such, it reflects a general trend in postmodernism in which adherence to systems and ideologies is relaxed to varying degrees. Various scholars have sought to define a clear set of criteria for postminimalism, but variations exist in almost all of them. There is a tendency from some American commentators to ignore European innovations, leading to a view of postminimalism that emphasizes American practice, but ignores aspects that are more present in postminimal practice around the globe.¹²

Not only is postminimalism given different definitions by different commentators, it is also defined according to different criteria from scholar to scholar. Kyle Gann

⁷ Jonathan D. Kramer and Robert Carl, *Postmodern Music, Postmodern Listening*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2016), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4575390>.

⁸ R. Andrew Lee, "The Interaction of Linear and Vertical Time in Minimalist and Postminimalist Piano Music" (2010), 18.

⁹ Potter, Gann, and Pwyll ap, 60.

¹⁰ Nicholas Allan Williams, "Strategies of Postminimalism in My Recent Music" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2009).

¹¹ G. H. Brown, "Process as Means and Ends in Minimalist and Postminimalist Music," *Perspectives of new music*. 48, no. 2 (2010).

¹² Williams.

defines postminimalism by the techniques used, and how they are used compared to minimalism.¹³ He recognizes cultural and ideological changes, but relies strongly on the musical content to provide classification. An alternative is posited by Nicholas Williams, who, while recognizing the stylistic and technical features, states that the ideological interaction between minimalism and postminimalism is just as essential to defining the latter.¹⁴

Texts written before postminimalism was established as a de facto term often describe the same style under a different label. I have made no attempt to seek out all such cases, but will mention here some examples found in texts referenced when writing this dissertation. *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*¹⁵ describes pieces by Reich and John Adams written in the 1980s and 1990s as 'maximal minimalism', as they align more with postmodernism than with the modernist unity found in their output from the 1960s. As stated in the introduction, some authors use the hyphenated post-minimalism to refer to this later output of minimalist composers. Daniel Warburton, in his essay 'A Working Terminology for Minimal Music'¹⁶, uses the term 'systems music' to refer to pieces which contain multiple overlapping processes rather than one.

Similarities between minimalism and postminimalism

Postminimalism has retained or adapted many of the key features of minimalism, although the extent of its influence varies between practitioners. The emphasis on repetition is a central uniting factor, although the methods of repetition have expanded in both range and complexity. Limitation of material is also a feature, although postminimalist works are less austere, often using more material, and transforming it to a greater extent. The steady rhythmic pulse remains, although may now be manipulated as a compositional technique. Dynamics tend to be either static throughout a piece, or terraced, as opposed to the more classical swells and diminuendos that accentuate harmonic movement. Finally, both minimalism and postminimalism tend to work within an 'emotional stasis', featuring harmonic movement, but not with the Romantic and neoclassical goal of emotional

¹³ Potter, Gann, and Pwyll ap.

¹⁴ Williams, 15-18.

¹⁵ Judith Irene Lochhead and Joseph Henry Auner, *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, (New York :: Garland, 2002), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1461077>.

¹⁶ Warburton, 23.

communication.

New adaptations and developments

Despite the obvious similarities, postminimalism has moved on from minimalism in every conceivable way, and has spread across the world. From the more contemporary work of Reich and Glass, *Bang-On-A-Can* in the US, Louis Andriessen in Holland, Michael Smetanin in Australia, John Adams in the UK, and hundreds, if not thousands more. It is also far more than just shorter pieces, as Gann pointed out in *Music Downtown*, “It isn’t watered-down minimalism, Steve Reich without the rigour”¹⁷. In general, this shift parallels the wider shift from modernism to postmodernism that occurred in the same period. While minimalism was a reaction to the complexity and inaccessibility of total serialism and atonality, it still reflected modernism in its adherence to strict processes, and in the self-contained unity of single section pieces. On the other hand, postminimalism reflects the postmodernist tendency to relax conformity to systems and rules, through its use of multiple shorter sections, and processes being interfered with rather than set in motion and then left untouched.¹⁸ Repetition, which in minimalism was the central feature, instead became a backdrop on which to plot musical materials.¹⁹

The processes in minimalism were usually transparent and audible, open to examination from the listener’s perspective. In his seminal essay “Music as a gradual process”, Steve Reich stated “I am interested in perceptible processes. I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music”²⁰. However, in postminimalism, processes began to be more complex, and were not necessarily left to run, but interfered with throughout a work. Processes could also occur across parts in different ways, so that rather than parts being in unison or working with the same material, greater variation results in less clarity of the underlying systems.

The overwhelmingly diatonic material of minimalism was one of its most unique features in a time when even the most conservative composers were working with late romantic harmonies of Claude Debussy and Charles Ives. Minimalism returned to pre-baroque modal, non-functional harmonic expressions, with almost no

¹⁷ Kyle Gann, *Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 247.

¹⁸ Potter, Gann, and Pwyll ap, 32-37.

¹⁹ Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise : Listening to the Twentieth Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

²⁰ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34.

chromaticism. However, later composers such as Louis Andriessen challenged this by introducing chromaticism and its accompanying complex harmonic textures, which contributed to a 'rougher' sound that hearkened back to Igor Stravinsky and Olivier Messiaen. His seminal piece "Workers Union"²¹ is a pertinent example, in which diatonic, smooth textures associated with minimalist works such as Reich's "Piano Phase"²² or Reilly's "In C"²³ are replaced with a rougher harmony and timbre.

While minimalism could be considered experimental to an extent due to innovations such as process and tape phasing, postminimalism is not, in that it does not tend to expand the palette of compositional techniques. It does, however, borrow much more from vernacular music, employing jazz harmonies, rock instruments such as electric guitar and drum kit, and structures reminiscent of popular music.

Structurally, postminimalism does not follow minimalism's pattern of unified, single-section works. Pieces more often consist of multiple sections, and functional harmony once again has a role in constructing larger structures. This also resulted in a move away from the 'vertical time' listening state encouraged by minimalism, although elements of this were retained by the continued prominence of repetition.

Postminimalist works tended to reference non-musical events and concepts more than minimalist, which usually existed as closed systems. Steve Reich's early tape pieces, while using material rich in cultural and contextual meaning, tended to eliminate much of it through focusing on a small section of the original material. However, "Tehillim"²⁴ marked a turning point in which he began to address non-musical issues in his work, as he used it to relate with his Jewish heritage. Similarly, works by postminimalist composers interact with the world beyond the piece, sometimes humorously, as in the case of Smetanin's "Minimalism isn't Dead, it Just Smells Funny"²⁵.

Finally, aside from Reich's experiments with tape loops, and Young's use of synthesizers to facilitate drones that could continue far beyond the capacity of a human musician, minimalism did not crossover with technology. However, postminimalism, especially in the modern age of computers and digital synthesis, has

²¹ Louis Andriessen, "Workers Union," (1975).

²² Reich, "Piano Phase."

²³ Terry Riley, "In C," (1964).

²⁴ Steve Reich, "Tehillim," (1981).

²⁵ Michael Smetanin, "Minimalism Isn't Dead, It Just Smells Funny," (1991).

embraced it. This is due not only to the increased capability and availability of music technology, but also as a consequent of the increased influence of vernacular music, where technology also plays a much greater role than it once did.²⁶

Common musical techniques in postminimalism

The various musical techniques found in postminimalism are the primary focus of the musical portion of this dissertation.

Repetition – Perhaps the most quintessential minimalist technique, repetition is less prominent in postminimalism, in which it tends to be used more as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Repetition is necessary for many of the following techniques and features of the genre to function.

Limitation of Material – This is difficult to classify as either a feature or a technique, as it can be both antecedent to more direct techniques such as phasing, or consequent of a minimalist aesthetic. In any case, limitation of material is a common element in both minimalism and postminimalism, and was one of the distinguishing features of minimalism amidst its emergence into a musical environment saturated with the complexity of serialism and atonality, in which musical materials were often hard to relate aurally, leading to a perception of endless change, and neoclassicism intent on expanding the goal-oriented linear order of functional harmony.

Phasing – Predominantly associated with the work of Steve Reich, he is credited with discovering this technique while experimenting with looping samples of recorded audio on tapes.²⁷ He played the same audio sample on two different tape machines while composing “It’s Gonna Rain”²⁸, and they began to slowly go out of phase with each other. He continued working in this idiom with “Come Out”²⁹, in which he refined his phase shifting technique, and “Melodica”³⁰, in which he applied tape phase shifting to musical material rather than speech. His next innovation was “Piano Phase”³¹ in which he first applied the phasing concept to acoustic performance, without using tapes to achieve the phasing effect. In “Clapping

²⁶ Ross.

²⁷ Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965–2000*, 19.

²⁸ “It’s Gonna Rain.”

²⁹ “Come Out.”

³⁰ “Melodica,” (1966).

³¹ “Piano Phase.”

Music"³², Reich adapted the gradual phase-shifting process he developed with tape to a block version in which parts would phase by adding notes in the same tempo, rather than using multiple tempi.

Linear Additive and Subtractive Process – Another major technique inspired by the minimalists is additive and subtractive processes, originally the forte of Philip Glass. The simplest execution of this concept can be seen in Fred Rzewski's piece "Les Moutons des Panurge"³³, in which a single line of music is performed by playing the first note, then repeating and playing the first and second notes, then the first, second, and third, and so on until the entire line has been played. This process demonstrates how a simple musical cell, in this case a single note, is developed through addition of musical material across repetitions. A linear additive process is the reverse, where an extended phrase will have material removed until only a simple cell remains. Often, they may take place in the same piece, for example, beginning with an additive process, before using a subtractive process on the result to create a symmetrical structure.

Block Additive and Subtractive Process – This process extends from both phasing and processes, and has been referred to by Reich as 'a process of rhythmic construction, or the substitution of beats for rests'³⁴. For this process, a measure or measures will be repeated, and musical material will be added to them as they repeat. An example of this is "Music for Pieces of Wood"³⁵, by Steve Reich, in which a phrase is repeated and players take turns slowly adding in their part a quaver at a time. As with linear processes, this can be reversed for a subtractive effect.

Quotation – Musical quotation is commonly used in postminimalism, either as source material for composition, or to reference external pieces or ideas.

Canons – Canons often occur in postminimalism due to phasing and repetition, where two parts that begin in unison may be expressed in canonic relationships as they are subjected to additive and subtractive processes.

Common musical features of postminimalism

Polymeter - The use of additive and subtractive processes is one of the most

³² "Clapping Music," (1972).

³³ Fred Rzewski, "Les Moutons De Panurge," (1972).

³⁴ Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965-2000*, 68.

³⁵ "Music for Pieces of Wood," (1973).

common ways that postminimalist music can contain multiple time signatures, but it is also common for more complex rhythmic works to include odd meters, and in many cases this is evidence of the influence of world music.

Metric Modulation – Metric modulation is sometimes used as a way to manipulate the pulse of a piece, such as in the works of Nicholas Williams, which experiment with the constant pulse as a way of adding complexity to minimalist simplicity.

Pulse – A defining feature of both minimalism and postminimalism is the steady pulse, and this is often directly expressed by a part which consistently plays steady beats throughout an entire piece. Minimalist examples include the high piano C in Riley's "In C"³⁶, and the high clave part in Reich's "Music for Pieces of Wood"³⁷. In other pieces, the pulse is just as present without being directly expressed, such as in Reich's "Drumming"³⁸ and Philip Glass' "Two Pages"³⁹.

Monochrome or terraced dynamics – Dynamics in both minimalism and postminimalist music do not follow the classical trend of gradual change to support the harmonic movement. Instead, they are usually either constant for the extent of a piece, or terraced between sections, changing suddenly, and without necessarily reflecting the other elements of the music.⁴⁰

Klangfarbenmelodie (Tone Colour Melody) – The term *Klangfarbenmelodie* was originally coined by Arnold Schoenberg to describe a technique where the same melodic or harmonic material is played by a range of instruments so that a shift in timbre occurs. Although most often associated with orchestral works, it also often occurs in postminimalist music due to repetition across an ensemble. Examples include Reich's "Music for Eighteen Musicians"⁴¹ and "Reeling"⁴² by Bang On A Can cofounder Julia Wolfe. It was less common in minimalism, which usually had ensembles playing in unison, or at least all instruments playing for the extent of a piece.

Postminimalism in dance

Postminimalist compositional techniques are often used in contemporary dance

³⁶ Riley.

³⁷ Reich, "Music for Pieces of Wood."

³⁸ "Drumming," (1975).

³⁹ Philip Glass, "Two Pages," (1968).

⁴⁰ Potter, Gann, and Pwyll ap, 39.

⁴¹ Steve Reich, "Music for Eighteen Musicians," (1976).

⁴² Julia Wolfe, "Reeling," (2012).

works,⁴³ as their repetitive nature, combined with the alterations and canonic techniques applied to those repetitions, results in a texture that is static enough to avoid distracting from the choreography, but which is also fluid and shifting, which helps the music, and therefore the work, to capture and retain the interest of the audience. These techniques also work within a wide range of instrumentations and genre idioms,⁴⁴ allowing for a broad range of expression while still coming under the postminimalist banner. Unlike minimalism, which may continue largely unchanged for the extent of a piece, postminimalism allows for shifts in tone, which are often necessitated when composing for dance to match changing sections or states within the work.

⁴³ Paul Kilbey, "Minimalism to the Max: Why Choreographers Love Minimalist Music," (2017), <http://www.roh.org.uk/news/minimalism-to-the-max-why-choreographers-love-minimalist-music>.

⁴⁴ Patrizia Veroli and Gianfranco Vinay, *Music-Dance : Sound and Motion in Contemporary Discourse*, (London :: Taylor and Francis, 2017), <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=V0w9DwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&pg=GBS.PT49>. 6.

Chapter 2 – Dance and music interaction

An overview of contemporary dance

The United States is central to the international development of contemporary dance, and the development of this art form there began with Isadora Duncan.⁴⁵ Her innovations had a huge influence on the next generation of dancers and choreographers who were to usher in the contemporary idiom. She believed that the restrictions and striving of ballet truncated the natural expressiveness of the body. She believed in freestyle impressionist dance, based on instinctive, idiomatic movement, and the inherent beauty thereof.⁴⁶

Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn formed the Denishawn School, which provided the technique to match Duncan's inspiration.⁴⁷ Their school covered, among other things, free form expressionist dance based on Duncan's ideas. It was from their school that Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey graduated.

Each of these remarkable women had a profound impact on the development of contemporary dance. Humphrey was fascinated by the effect of gravity on the body, in stark contrast to the façade of weightlessness pursued by ballet, and her emphasis on weight and falling became a defining feature of the new idiom.⁴⁸ Graham's choreographic technique centred on the torso as the indicator of emotion in the body,⁴⁹ and on breath as the source of movement.⁵⁰ Her work was often described as 'jerky', as her performances did not emphasize the flowing transitions from one movement to another that were customary at the time.⁵¹ Martha Graham, as well as being one of the preeminent choreographers of the twentieth century, taught Merce Cunningham, who heralded the next great stage of innovation.

The contribution of Merce Cunningham to contemporary dance is profound and far-reaching. While Graham and Humphrey had redefined the movement content of dance, Cunningham changed the form and structure of dance. He worked with chance and indeterminacy when creating his works, and detached dance from its

⁴⁵ Anne Livet, *Contemporary Dance : An Anthology of Lectures, Interviews and Essays with Many of the Most Important Contemporary American Choreographers, Scholars and Critics* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1978), 28.

⁴⁶ Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen, *What Is Dance? : Readings in Theory and Criticism* (Oxford [Oxfordshire] :: Oxford University Press, 1983), 262-64.

⁴⁷ Livet, 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁹ Agnes De Mille, *Martha : The Life and Work of Martha Graham*, 1st ed. ed. (New York: Random House, 1991), 96-97.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 97-99.

⁵¹ Marcia B. Siegel, *Watching the Dance Go By* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 199.

usual companions of narrative and metaphor.

Contemporaneous to Cunningham, at a time when theatres were in short supply, emerging choreographers and dancers turned to other spaces to rehearse and perform. The Judson Memorial Church was one such space, and it became home to a collective of young artists that would come to be known as the Judson Dance group. Workshops and performances were held at the church on a regular basis, and artists could present work without it needing to conform to the expectations of an audience. Many of these young dancers went on to become influential choreographers, including Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Laura Dean, and Steve Paxton.

More universal features that characterised contemporary dance included a shift in the hierarchical dynamic of the performing ensemble. While ballet usually focussed on a soloist supported by a cast, contemporary dance gave all performers equal roles, with multiple dancers featured over the course of a work, and no member of the ensemble billed above another. Contemporary dance was interested in what dance and movement was, not merely what it could represent or communicate, and this involved democratising the performance process to make movement the focal point, rather than the individual. Julianne Pierce summarises the differences from ballet in her article "Perspectives on Contemporary Dance"⁵²,

*It is defined by a re-thinking of the body and physicality in relationship to space, time and gravity; and by a cross-disciplinary and collaborative approach with disciplines such as philosophy, cultural theory, experimental music, visual arts and multimedia.*⁵³

The role of music in dance

As choreographers began working with new idioms and movement philosophies, they also began to work with music in new ways. Ballet composition occurred either using pre-existing music, or music being composed for a work which was then choreographed to it. The early stages of contemporary dance began to relate to music in less structured ways, allowing the dance to work with the musical phrase, rather than being beholden to it. Duncan expressed through her movement the emotions that she felt in the music. Don McDonagh states in his book *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance* that:

⁵² Julianne Pierce, "Perspectives on Contemporary Dance," *Artlink* 35, no. 3 (2015).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

*[Duncan] felt that carefully listening to music would produce within one those sensations which were naturally translated into movement. Once one had heard the inner life of music, then one would begin to move in a perfectly balanced and artistic manner.*⁵⁴

Doris Humphrey states her views on dance-music interaction in her book *The Art of Making Dances*⁵⁵. She believes that dance “is not an independent art... needing a sympathetic mate, but not a master, in music”⁵⁶. Humphrey believed that melody, rhythm, and drama of music had the clearest parallels in the body, and that these could be used as stimuli for movement. She rules out, among other things,

*The intellectual composition, made to illustrate a theory... the bravura piece... the impressionistic composition... in which timbre and tonal colour are the raison d'être... the too complex composition in general, which is so demanding of attention that it cannot make a good partner; and, of course, the cliché-ridden and the commonplace.*⁵⁷

The prevailing view among the early or conservative practitioners of contemporary dance was that the music had to leave room for the dance to work with it. This was perhaps part of the reaction against the ballet practice, where music dictated form, phrase, and contour of a dance work. Choreographers investigating new ways of working with music needed music that was accessible to investigation. Gilbert and Lockhart state in their book *Music for the Modern Dance*⁵⁸ that:

*Music which is especially written for modern choreography must be designed to balance with sound that which the movement represents. The audible and visual stimuli should be interdependent... In the case of scores for the modern dance... the music must be composed to serve another medium and cannot as a result often be an entity*⁵⁹

An alternative to this practice was explored by Merce Cunningham and his creative partner John Cage, who rejected this artistic goal in various forms in favour of greater independence of score and choreography. Both explored indeterminacy and improvisation in their work, and rather than try and plan interaction in unplanned performances, allowed the score and choreography to exist independently of one another. This concept was also explored at the Judson Dance workshops, where musicians would improvise while participants showed their work.

⁵⁴ Don McDonagh, *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance* (Pennington, NJ: A Capella Books, 1990), 5.

⁵⁵ Doris Humphrey and Barbara Pollack, *The Art of Making Dances* (London: Dance Books Ltd., 1959).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Pja Gilbert and Aileene S. Lockhart, *Music for the Modern Dance* (Dubuque, Iowa :: Wm. C. Brown Company, 1961).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

David Koblitz states that “[independent] music becomes an integral part of the proceedings, helping to create or reinforce the mood and atmosphere of the dance.”⁶⁰

Allen Fogelsanger discusses how, by removing the need for dance to align itself with the musicality of the score, its own inherent musicality is revealed. He states,

*In the work of Cunningham and others who choreograph to soundscapes, the dance provides the propulsion once provided by music. The dance develops according to its own needs, not to the music's. Music has become a backdrop, a décor, scenery in front of which the dance holds our attention.*⁶¹

In modern times, practices vary between practitioners, and from work to work. The quintessential method for dance-music interaction involves music that represents or accentuates the meaning or execution of the choreography. In addition to this, music supports and motivates movement, most commonly through rhythm, but also through texture, intensity, and melodic contour. This sentiment is expressed by Paul Taylor, who said,

*I think anything can be good for dance, there's no such thing as sound or silence that can't be used for dance! It depends on how it's used, how suitable it is how it's made to sound to the audience (by its relationship to the dance).*⁶²

As both dance and music are temporal arts, rhythm plays an essential role in their interaction, even in ‘arrhythmic’ works. Rhythm as a supporting mechanism for dance does not necessarily have to conform to set beat values within a tempo, rather, changes in the speed and intensity of musical material guide movement and energy in different sections of the dance.

The process of composing for contemporary dance

As the relationship between music and dance has diversified in recent years, the methods for collaboration have also proliferated. The ballet method of choreographing to pre-existing music is still often used today, as budget constraints often prevent choreographers from hiring a composer for their works.

The expansion of the relationship between music and dance has been

⁶⁰ David Koblitz, "Minimalist Music for Maximum Choreography: Breaking Away from the Rhythmic Straight Jacket," 1985, 52.

⁶¹ Allen Fogelsanger, "Music Composition for Dance in the Twenty-First Century: Questions About the Dance/Music Relationship," in *International Guild of Musicians in Dance Conference* (Stokholm, Sweden 1998), 4.

⁶² Katherine Teck, *Music for the Dance : Reflections on a Collaborative Art*, Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance, 0193-9041 ; No. 15; Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance ; 0193-9041 No. 15. (New York :: Greenwood Press, 1989), 8.

accompanied by a greater range of composers and sound artists from a variety of backgrounds finding opportunities to work with choreographers in new ways. The twentieth century brought a range of new musical practices to the table, including world musicians, jazz and rock auteurs, live improvisation, and use of diegetic sound.⁶³

In modern times, the preferred method is more collaborative than either ballet or the early stages of contemporary dance. The composer will usually work on music as the choreography is being created; in my own case, often while attending rehearsals of the work. This is especially the case in commissioned works for dance, where, at the very least, the composer is expected to adjust the music as required by the choreography.

Youngae Park discusses requirements for effective composer-choreographer collaboration in her doctoral thesis⁶⁴. She states that both composers and choreographers must have some understanding of how music and dance relate and influence each other. She also emphasizes the importance of open discussion between composer and choreographer, especially when conveying ideas around which the work is based. She mentions six relationships for music-dance collaboration classified by Patricia Rowe. The first involves choreography without any score at all, and the stages progress through to the sixth, defined as,

*'the ultimate level of full collaboration in which choreographer and composer interact throughout their joint creations of a new dance created in consort with new music.'*⁶⁵

I will focus on this practice, as it is most relevant to my own works, including those discussed in Chapter Four. My collaborative process can be roughly divided into four stages: an initial discussion stage with the choreographer, discussing the plan and concept of the work, both choreographic and musical; an initial creative stage, in which musical ideas will be formulated and tested with the dance; the main stage of musical composition, when the bulk of the material is written, often concurrently to the dance being choreographed; and the final stage when both score and

⁶³ Diegetic sound is sound which is caused by the performers on stage, as opposed to existing independently, such as a score or sound design through loud speakers

⁶⁴ Youngae Park and Patricia A. Rowe, "Analysis of Two of Doris Humphrey's Dances: Implications for Choreographer-Composer Collaborations" (1993).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 171.

choreography are being refined to ensure cohesive and effective interaction. As part of my process, I try and attend as many of the dance rehearsals as possible while the choreography is being created, so that I am not relying on verbal descriptions of the choreography to create the score, but can instead observe directly as the movement is created. While this practice is advantageous for many reasons, constraints of time and budget make it less common in the professional realm, where choreographers may wish for music to be finalised before choreography to streamline their process, and composers may prefer to compose to a brief rather than attending rehearsals and developing a piece over weeks or months.

Chapter 3 – Minimalism in and with Dance

Minimalist dance

The repetition and process techniques used in minimalist music have parallels in contemporary dance. Around the same time as Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass were experimenting in New York, choreographers began working with a similar aesthetic, especially when exploring the fundamentals of movement. Dean Suzuki states that minimalism in dance grew out of the performances at Judson Dance Theatre, through the teaching and influence of Ann Halprin, who taught many of the Judson devotees.⁶⁶ In most cases, minimalist dance stems from a fascination with movement. A single, simple movement of the hand can most easily be explored in performance by repetition, allowing it to be examined by both audience and performer in the minutest detail over time. As in other parts of this dissertation, I make no claims of an exhaustive study of minimalist dance. I have selected a small range of works to examine based on their resemblance to minimalist music, with preference given to those directly influenced by contact with minimalist composers.

Marcia Siegel discusses the attitudes that resulted in minimalism in her book *Watching the Dance Go By*⁶⁷. Her description of Yvonne Rainer's process has parallels with minimalist music. Discussing Rainer's work, Siegel states,

*movement had gotten so complex, so technical, so loaded with meaning that we saw only the embellishments, the signifi-fances... Rainer wanted not only to find the basics but to restore meaning to basic activities, to invest as much in the essentials of movement as her contemporaries were investing in the luxuries.*⁶⁸

In 1971, Trisha Brown began working on a series of pieces entitled *Accumulation*⁶⁹ which worked with processes analogous to the additive and subtractive methods used by Philip Glass⁷⁰. She would begin a piece by repeating a single movement, and then adding movements to build up to a complex phrase over the duration of the piece. The first few iterations of this piece were for solo performers, but Brown later adapted the concept for larger groups of dancers. Brown worked with what she refers to as 'pure movement'. As she describes it,

⁶⁶ Potter, Gann, and Pwyll ap, 111.

⁶⁷ Siegel.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁶⁹ Trisha Brown, *Accumulation*, 1971.

⁷⁰ Potter, Gann, and Pwyll ap, 113.

*Pure movement is a movement that has no other connotations. It is not functional or pantomimic. Mechanical body functions like bending, straightening or rotating would qualify as pure movement providing the context was neutral.*⁷¹

This coincides with Rainer's philosophy of removing from dance the expectation for movement to have meaning, and a return to the simplicity of natural body movements, which echoed Duncan's philosophy.

Laura Dean worked with repetition to explore the fundamentals of movement, and found an ideal collaborator in Steve Reich. One of her first pieces with him, *Walking Dance*⁷² made use of his work "Clapping Music"⁷³, and mirrored its phasing processes with the choreography. Dean later decided that she preferred not to use phasing, as she felt that was Reich's innovation, and so for later collaborations with him, such as her choreography *Drumming*⁷⁴, for Reich's work of the same title,⁷⁵ she had the dancers moving either in unison or apart over the music without reflecting the same phasing relationships. She also used the structure of the music as the structure of the choreography, with each of the first three sections limited to a set of movements, that were then brought together in the final section. As Steve Reich was the most mathematical of the minimalists, working with complex rhythmic relationships using phasing and block additive processes, Dean was the most geometric of the minimalist choreographers.⁷⁶ Laura Dean stated that she used repetition and unison to emphasize the differences created by the dancer's individuality.⁷⁷

In an interview published in *Music for the Dance*⁷⁸, Laura Dean discusses her work with Steve Reich, and why she chose his music for her choreography. His use of repetition and process-based structures matched her own whirling, repetitive choreographies. She found that the steady pulse and rhythm were good for driving dancers' movement, particularly when motivating them to repeat a highly energetic phrase over an extended period. The structure in these works lacked the contrasts or

⁷¹ Livet, 54.

⁷² Laura Dean, *Walking Dance*, 1973.

⁷³ Reich, "Clapping Music."

⁷⁴ Laura Dean, *Drumming*, 1975.

⁷⁵ Reich, "Drumming."

⁷⁶ Siegel, 309.

⁷⁷ Potter, Gann, and Pwyll ap, 116.

⁷⁸ Teck.

frequent climaxes of ballets, which were often choreographed to mirror the dynamics in Western classical music. The patterns on which she based her choreographies often worked with spinning, geometric patterns, and very precise rhythms, and Reich's music provided an impetus for movement without distracting dancers from their movement. When she moved to New York and was beginning to experiment with this aesthetic, she was looking for a collaborator interested in "repetition, in simplicity of means, in doing things for a long time"⁷⁹.

Lucinda Childs first collaborated with Philip Glass when performing in his opera *Einstein on the Beach*⁸⁰ for which she did some choreography for her solos. This initial partnership led to the pair collaborating on 'Dance' in 1979. The work integrates Childs' choreography, Glass' music, and a film by Sol Lewitt. Jennifer Goldstein states that 'Dance' was the work in which Child's techniques of '*the diagonal, the structuring grid, doubling, the formation of bodies in space, and repetition*', were solidified.⁸¹ Childs choreographed to the music after it had been composed, and analysed the structure of the music so that she could interact with it in the structure of the choreography.⁸²

Minimalist dance has not produced a dedicated and ongoing artistic framework in the same way that similar innovations such as task or indeterminacy in dance have. Roger Copeland states that the reaction against modernism was the impetus for the progression away from minimalist dance, as "the arts cannot simply pursue the goal of self-purification indefinitely"⁸³. Minimalist dance sought to remove from dance relations to the world beyond it, and explore movement in its essence. However, as Copeland concludes:

*at some point in time, it becomes a purely practical, if not an ideological or spiritual necessity, for art to re-establish relations with "the world" and reclaim for itself those aspects of human experience once rigorously excised in the name of modernist purity.*⁸⁴

Dancing to minimalist and postminimalist music

⁷⁹ Gilbert and Lockhart.

⁸⁰ Philip Glass, "Einstein on the Beach," (1975).

⁸¹ Jennifer Hasher Goldstein, "Collaboration, Movement, Projection : The Interdisciplinary Structure of Lucinda Childs's Dance, 1979" (2010), 33.

⁸² Joyce Morgenroth, *Speaking of Dance : Twelve Contemporary Choreographers on Their Craft*, (New York: Routledge, 2004). 77.

⁸³ Copeland and Cohen, 515.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 516.

The thriving contemporary dance culture in New York in the 1960s and 1970s intersected well with the burgeoning minimalists playing concerts in lofts and downtown theatres. One of the first interactions was with La Monte Young, who improvised for dance performances at the Judson Memorial Church.⁸⁵ The collaborations discussed above were some of the most successful pairings of minimalist music with dance that parallel the repetition and limitation of material that underpin the genre. However, choreographers have used minimalist music in many forms of dance, not just that which resembles it.

In his *Writings on Music*⁸⁶, Reich includes an essay discussing some of the uses of his music with dance.⁸⁷ He mentions a range of choreographers who have created to his work, and the extent to which they chose to follow the repetitive rhythmic nature of the work, or instead let other aspects of it guide the movement. One poignant example is *Fase*⁸⁸ choreographed by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, who used the source material of the music, an interview with an African American victim of police brutality, to guide the concept and construction of the dance.⁸⁹

Cunningham at various times used the music of La Monte Young for his work, but within the paradigm of independence of score and choreography. In Cunningham's practice, music and choreography only followed each other in duration, so Young's drones and lowly shifting harmonies would not have had purposeful counterparts in the choreography.⁹⁰

Paul Kilbey, in his article "Minimalism to the max: Why choreographers love minimalist music"⁹¹, gives a range of examples of choreographers using minimalist and postminimalist music. He notes that minimalist music (and postminimalist, though he refers to it under the minimalist banner), while having repetition as a common element, can still incorporate a range musical influences. This allows it to maintain an unobtrusive presence when used with dance, while still exploring various stylistic idioms.

Aspects of repetitive/postminimalist music suited to dance

⁸⁵ Livet, 23.

⁸⁶ Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965-2000*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 213-15.

⁸⁸ Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, *Fase*, 1982.

⁸⁹ Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965-2000*, 214.

⁹⁰ Livet, 23.

⁹¹ Kilbey.

Repetitive music, as a predominantly rhythmic style, has attracted choreographers whose work utilises the rhythm of music to drive and direct movement. The steady pulse, surrounded by static yet constantly evolving textures and harmony, provides a solid base. By being less rigidly structured than minimalism, it is often more flexible when being used to compose, so that music can adapt to different sections of a choreography.

Postminimalism almost always features a steady pulse, which is ideal for dancers to anchor themselves to as a reference and a motivator for movement. Repetitive music techniques such as outlined in Chapter One juxtapose predictability with constant change, as repeating cells interact differently with each other across repetitions. Many of the techniques used in repetitive music, such as canon, retrograding, etc., are also used in dance choreography as techniques to generate material and add complexity.

David Koblitz's article "Minimalist Music for Maximal Choreography"⁹² discusses reasons that choreographers use minimalist music, and features of this music that predispose it for use with contemporary dance. He discusses how the rhythmic features, harmonic and melodic content, and the musical effect and influences all contribute to supporting and performing a dance work. The steady pulse provides a foundation over which movement can be plotted, but doesn't lock the choreographer into a "rhythmic straitjacket"⁹³, as the homogeneity of the repetitive patterns can either be ignored or reinforced by the choreography. Rather than music imposing rhythm and structure on the dance, repetition and limitation of material allows the choreographer to "use its streamlined, open textures and sensual surfaces as a kind of high-tech sonic wallpaper."⁹⁴ In addition, the repetition in the music can serve the choreography regardless of whether the movement functions in a similar way. He quotes *New Yorker* dance critic Arlene Croce, "[It] has the capacity to reflect whatever the choreographer wants to do."⁹⁵ Koblitz also states that the use of traditional harmony allows for abstraction of the music without sacrificing the comprehensibility provided by tonality to an audience immersed in it. He points out that dance has

⁹² Koblitz.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

always reflected the popular music from wherever it occurs, and postminimalism's incorporation of various vernacular music idioms satisfies this tendency.

In Reich's "Notes on Music and Dance"⁹⁶, he calls for "a return to the roots of dance as it is found all over the world: regular rhythmic movement, usually done to music."⁹⁷

This was a reaction against the tendency he observed in the sixties, where dance performances would focus on everyday movement, without traditional notions of rhythm or form. Reich believed that music and dance were fundamentally related through rhythm, and for music-dance interaction to be successful, there had to be a common rhythmic structure between them.

In his book *Relationships between Score and Choreography in Twentieth-Century Dance: Music, Movement, and Metaphor*⁹⁸, Paul Hodgins discusses a range of views from artistic practitioners on how music and dance relate, including Reich's.

He posits that Reich's view is quite limiting, and overlooks that the rhythms of the body are unrelated to musical rhythms, and trying to link them too closely will result in either unnatural movement or stunted music.⁹⁹ This is one reason why pulse is so important to dance. While the actual intricacies of rhythmic phrases may be difficult to reproduce in the body, a simple, steady pulse can be used to drive movement, while still allowing it freedom to grow and develop in a natural way.

Marcia Siegel records her impressions of watching Laura Dean's choreography *Drumming*¹⁰⁰ in a review entitled "Dancing in the Celestial Orchestra"¹⁰¹. To align movement with the complex rhythms and phasing in Reich's "Drumming"¹⁰² would be impossible, so instead Dean uses the pulse to motivate movement, which then only aligns to the rhythm of the music when it serves the choreography. Siegel mentions a point where the dancers divide, with half of them stepping on the beat and half on the off-beat, while the phasing instruments slide in and out of time. She summarised her impression of the performance as "some great celestial orchestra made up of

⁹⁶ Reich, *Writings on Music, 1965-2000*, 71-73.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁸ Paul Hodgins, *Relationships between Score and Choreography in Twentieth-Century Dance: Music, Movement, and Metaphor* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1992).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Dean, *Drumming*.

¹⁰¹ Siegel, 310-12.

¹⁰² Reich, "Drumming."

vibrations, energies, a universal pulse, not any single artist's tune at all."¹⁰³

Chapter 4 – Case Studies

'this transitory weight' – Beth Reece

The first piece I composed for dance as part of the research used postminimalist techniques in a slightly unconventional setting, using electronics and field recordings rather than acoustic instruments. The piece has a ternary structure, with two slower sections divided by a faster central section. I was very involved in the creative process from the early stages of the piece, working with the choreographer to align the music with the concept and content of the choreography. A note on this chapter, all notes on the content and concepts of the choreographies are adapted from summaries written by the choreographers.

The concept for the choreography was based around the burdens that people carry with them through life, how we interact with each other's burdens, and how they are managed and released. I used the musical motif of a simple 9/8 bass drum pattern to represent burden, and it persists until the end when the dancers are released from the weight they struggle with throughout the work.

The piece begins with the cast obscured behind plastic sheets upstage, representing a divide between the corporeal world we experience and an ethereal one beyond our perception. The cast, except for the first soloist, are lying on their backs with their limbs extended towards the ceiling.



Figure 1 - Opening image for 'this transitory weight'

This gives them appearance of lying upside down, hanging from a ceiling at an opposite axis to that of the audience, and being completely weightless. The music

¹⁰³ Siegel, 312.

consists of a soundscape and pad underpinned by a rhythmic figure played across three percussive instruments, and a quaver pulse. The burden motif enters the bar after the quaver pulse, and consists of a 9/8 rhythmic pattern realised with a sub pulse.

The musical score consists of seven staves. From top to bottom: High Percussion (8/8), Taiko Drum (8/8), Bass Drum (8/8), Shimmer Pad (Bass clef, 8/8), Soundscape (8/8), Quaver Pulse (8/8), and Burden motif (8/8). The score shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes across the percussion staves, a sustained pad in the Shimmer Pad staff, and a quaver pulse in the Quaver Pulse staff. The Burden motif is introduced in the final measure of the score.

Figure 2 - Opening music for 'this transitory weight'

The first dancer is released from this ethereal state as the burden motif begins, and she enters the corporeal world and we see the impact of weight on her body. As her solo progresses, two more dancers enter the space in a duo that shows how burdens are shared within relationships.

The next section is a group phrase that represents the variation of burdens through life. The movement through the space shows how the burdens that we experience shift and change as we go through life. The dancers are in constant motion, although they appear weighed down and encumbered. The phrase moves into the corner, and the performers lay diagonally, interlocked, an image of



Figure 3 - Interlocked diagonal line

compression and inescapable weight. The soloist once again breaks free, and a single low-pitched pad begins to play as she begins moving and the line of dancers begins to break up. She begins a duo with another dancer, which is mirrored by a second pair,

that shows them bearing one another's weight as a representation of sharing burdens. The music begins to build in this section, beginning to transition into the

middle stage of the work. As this has begun, the two duos join and more dancers enter the space for a group phrase on the floor, demonstrating the power required for weight transference in the body and to oppose gravity. This section then leads into the middle section of the music, in which choreography begins a busy walking section, with dancers entering and leaving the space rapidly.

This section represents a time-lapse of people going through life in fast forward, we see snapshots of different burdens on stage. The rhythm in the music becomes much faster and more prominent, representing the quicker pace of the choreography. Even in this busy section, there are moments where a dancer is left alone on stage, showing that some burdens are dealt with without the help of others, and we can be isolated in our struggles.

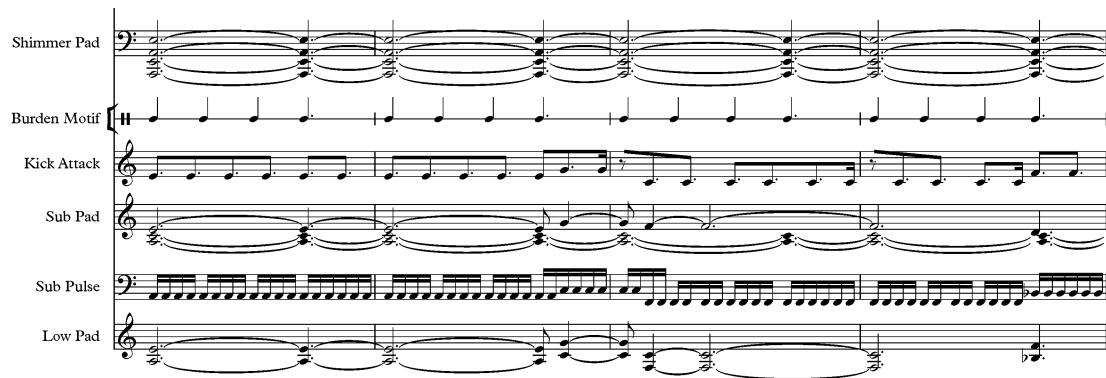


Figure 4 - Middle section of 'this transitory weight'

After this point, the music moves into the final section, as the dancers gather in the middle of the stage and begin to slowly move together. They sit on the floor in a



Figure 5 - Dancers gather and move together

nautical image referencing the idiom of 'being in the same boat'. This illustrates the impact of individual burdens on a community. One of the dancers stands and begins to lead the others back behind the sheets, as a representation of finding an answer to remove their burdens.

However, not everyone does, and the piece ends with two of the dancers remaining on the stage as the others have moved away into a place of peace and

weightlessness. The music begins with a slow pad, as the burden motif becomes subtler and begins to fade away for the first time in the piece. A hymn is introduced that aligns with the concept of release of burdens, and fragments of it are also present in the synthesiser pad accompaniment. The hymn "It is Well with My Soul"¹⁰⁴ was written by Horatio Spafford to express how he dealt with his grief after the death of his four daughters¹⁰⁵. The choreographer chose this hymn both for its lyrical content, and the connotations of its creation.

Though there is a common theme in the representation of burden that progresses through the piece, it is not a simple narrative. Throughout the piece, dancers are moving between the main stage and the realm behind the sheets, demonstrating personal journeys that do not correspond to the central progression.

Postminimalist techniques were useful for a range of purposes while composing for this work. The use of polymeter to juxtapose the burden motif against the rest of the music gave it a sense of being out of place, representing how burdens in life can interfere with our goals and day to day living. The sections contribute to clarifying the structure of the choreography, while still maintaining the burden motif as a repeating and unifying element. The quaver pulse in the beginning drives movement until the rhythmic middle section takes over.

'The Circle' – Katarina Gajic

The second piece composed as part of the research was created with choreographer Katarina Gajic. This dance was in a neoclassical style as opposed to contemporary. This piece explores power in relationships and how it is acquired and wielded, particularly between women and men. The piece is divided into sections that explore relationships within different contexts, and examines the differences in how people use power in relationships.

To reflect this concept in the music, I worked with multiple time signatures and canonic techniques, constructing cells of music which were then overlaid and juxtaposed to mirror the conflicts being played out on stage. The instrumentation was kept acoustic, at the choreographer's preference, and consisted of piano, clarinet, percussion, and strings. The piece given as a guide to sound and style was

¹⁰⁴ Lyrics by Horatio Spafford Philip Bliss, "It Is Well with My Soul," in *100 Hymns, Anchors of Faith* (1873).

¹⁰⁵ R. Criddle, "It Is Well with My Soul," *Choral Journal, The* 55, no. 4 (2014): 82.

“Doublespeak”¹⁰⁶ by Nico Muhly, and recorded by Eighth Blackbird.

Musically, this piece is more identifiably postminimalist, and works with an ensemble resembling those often used in postminimalist music. I used the Pierrot and percussion instrumentation of Eighth Blackbird as a starting point, and then added and subtracted instruments during the writing process to suit the direction and function of the piece as it developed. The final ensemble consisted of piano, clarinet, percussion (marimba and vibraphone), and strings (violin, viola, cello, and bass). I decided not to use the flute from the Pierrot, and added extra strings to allow for juxtaposition in a variety of ranges, as well as overlaying patterns in similar textures where necessary.

The predominant musical features of the piece are polymeter and phasing, where repeating cells of differing lengths and rhythmic groupings are overlaid to obscure the meter, while still providing a clear, steady pulse.

As with the previous piece, the collaborative process was very involved, and I began composing music before choreography had started. Gajic had a plan for the structure, and this guided the musical structure from the beginning. In the beginning, the musical intensity builds with the choreography, adding instruments as more dancers enter the stage.

The piece opens with a duet between a male and a female dancer, which depicts the man as powerful and slightly predatory, first circling and controlling the woman, then leading her off stage. The music begins softly with the woman on stage by herself, then builds through the section. The entries points of instruments were guided by the choreography, so that the marimba enters when the dancers first touch, and the vibraphone enters when the man lifts the woman into the air.

The second duo represents the same relationship, but this time the woman doesn't succumb to the man's attempts to control her, and she begins to fight back, leading and taking authority. This music remains similar to the beginning, until the change where the woman begins to lead, at which point the viola drops out and the percussion becomes clearer, showing the unification in the dance once the power relationship is established and accepted.

The first group section shows the women expressing their identities and showing

¹⁰⁶ Nico Muhly, "Doublespeak," (2012).

their strength through unified movement, and exploring their own power in the context of group support. The male dancers observe, moving through the group, but unable to join, until one of them begins to succumb to their combined influence towards the end of the section. The music begins in unison, reinforcing the strength of the unanimity, before beginning a slower melody enters once the first dancer breaks from the group in a solo. The quick melody then begins to phase once the first male dancer enters the space, when the unity is disrupted.

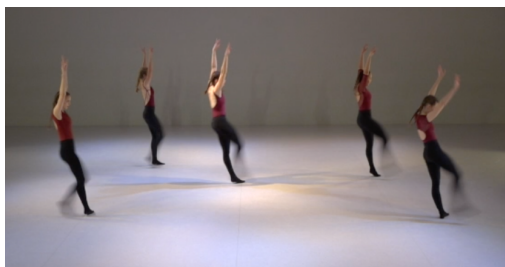


Figure 6 - Group Unison in 'The Circle'



Figure 7 - Unison and Solo



Figure 8 - Condensed phasing relationship in group section in 'The Circle'

The trio section shows the two men singling out a woman to control, separating her from the strength and unity of the group, and then manipulating her between them. The movement is very physical, with the female dancer often being suspended, and relying on them to hold her up. The music here is much louder, with harsher articulations, and more chaotic rhythmic interactions across the parts, reflecting the power imbalance in the choreography.

The duo for the two male dancers expresses male to male interaction in relationships. There are connotations of arrogance, showing-off, and bravado. The duo continues even as the dancers leave the stage, so that at no point do they succumb to one another. The movement is very physical, as they dancers show off their strength to each other and the audience. The music is staccato and quick, driving the movement. It emphasizes the speed and intensity, and the lack of smooth, flowing movements present in the rest of the piece.

The next section contrasts this by showing power in female relationships. Rather

than competing, power is shifted throughout, so that first one, then the other has primacy. The section is introduced by the clarinet entry, which contrasts with the more staccato material of the men's duo. Once they begin the phrase, the textures used in the men's duo are replaced by more legato instruments, representing the fluidity of the power relationships.

The second group section echoes the first one by again demonstrating a unified group, and the power present in unity and collaboration. The choreography is structured as an accumulation, and we see the effect of more dancers increasing the sense of power created by the unison group. The piano and marimba coincide to provide a strong harmonic base that clarifies the rest of the music, and provides clear drive and direction, demonstrating the unity of purpose and the egalitarianism of the power structure.

Figure 9 - Harmonic unison (bottom) gives clarity to phasing relationships (top)

The last duo contrasts the first one, as the woman now takes control, guiding him as he did her in the beginning. She uses his strength to her advantage, such as in the lift near the end, which she uses to display her power as opposed to holding onto him as she does in the first lift.



Figure 10 - Lift in first duo



Figure 11 - Lift in final duo

The viola continues quietly as it starts, suggesting his unwillingness to submit, but eventually dies out leaving the unison piano and marimba as she takes full control and leads him offstage as the piece ends.

In this work, polymeter is used far more extensively than in the previous one, as various power relationships are juxtaposed in the choreography. Throughout most of the piece, it is difficult to identify the primary grouping, mirroring the power struggles as they occur. Section changes are clarified by instrumental variation and changes in articulation, which is also used to suggest the nature of the relationship in the choreography. The harmonic movement in the final sections, once the power relationships are established and stabilised, also clarify the rhythmic complexity for the first time in the piece.

Conclusion

Summary

The long history of interaction between minimalist and postminimalist music and dance has produced an extensive body of work, including seminal examples of both dance and music. The use of this gamut of music techniques can provide a composer with useful tools for dance composition, and facilitate dance-music interaction. This interaction can occur in many ways, depending on the artistic goals of the collaborators. The continued development of contemporary dance provides many opportunities for composers to engage with choreography, and to explore ways of creating music that interacts well with dance.

Project limitations

This project, as an Honours thesis, is limited in both size and scope. The first three chapters all deal with huge topics on which entire books have been written, so consequently they only contain general overviews.

Many composers from both the minimalist and postminimalist traditions were omitted from the first chapter in the interests of conciseness. I also avoided in-depth discussion of the output of specific postminimalist composers, as the style is too broad to be represented by the work of a few practitioners, and the emphasis of this dissertation is on the techniques used, rather than on those who use them.

Chapter Two limits discussion of choreographers to a small selection of people

either essential to the development of contemporary dance, or heavily involved with minimalism in dance or music.

Chapter Three only mentions a small selection of dance works, as there are too many to attempt a comprehensive listing.

In Chapter Four, I elected to avoid formal forms of music or dance analysis, as I felt that description and example was a better way to communicate the interaction between the dance and music techniques.

Avenues for further research

Choreomusicology is a fascinating research area, with many avenues remaining for further investigation. For a survey of current research, I recommend *'Music-Dance: Sound and Motion in Contemporary Discourse'*¹⁰⁷. While minimalist music has now been quite well documented, postminimalism remains a developing genre, with potential for further documentation and analysis. *'The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music'*¹⁰⁸ is an excellent collection of research by many of the foremost scholars in the field.

¹⁰⁷ Veroli and Vinay.

¹⁰⁸ Potter, Gann, and Pwyll ap.

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