

# **THE MINIMAL KALEIDOSCOPE:**

**EXPLORING MINIMAL MUSIC THROUGH THE LENS OF  
POSTMODERNITY**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED TO CARDIFF UNIVERSITY (DEPARTMENTS OF MUSIC AND ENCAP)**

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## ABSTRACT

Both minimal(ism) and postmodern(ism/ity) are terms that occupy a peculiar space in contemporary discourse: in academic circles their characterisation is contested and debated; in everyday life they have become so ubiquitous that everyone associates them with *something*, but not necessarily with any degree of consensus. Both become widely recognised terms during the latter half of the twentieth century: decades characterised by unprecedented globalisation of culture and communication. This thesis seeks to explore the emergence of these terms, and the events they sought to describe, but it does *not* attempt to impose a 'correct' definition on either term. Instead, the thesis investigates the discourse that surrounds each concept, assembling a network of ideas that characterise those terms. I will demonstrate that each label acts as a signpost to a flexible collection of theories and characteristics, and argue that minimalism can be seen as a significant cultural response to an emerging postmodernity.

The structure of this thesis has been informed by the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly their writings on rhizomatic thought. Their thinking is not the subject of this research, but is the inspiration for a particular *attitude* to ideas that has been used as a structuring device for the text: that is, a structure that hopes to demonstrate the interconnectedness of contemporary experience. The image of the kaleidoscope is used as a metaphor for this rhizomatic approach. While the physical object represents the 'totality' that many regard postmodernity to be, the experience of viewing a kaleidoscope—the constantly shifting parts and the resultant patterns that we recognise—is imagined as an illustration of the way that postmodernity and minimalism can be understood. Three parts magnify these terms in increasing detail. The first explores postmodern discourse and its relationship to culture. The second examines the development of, and critical response to, minimalism. The third takes a single composer, Louis Andriessen, and attempts to show how the postmodern condition frames his creativity, and his particular response to minimalism. All of these parts contain connections within and between, each part. While these connections will often be alluded to, I have tried to avoid solidifying these relationships in a way that might appear too 'linear' so as to invite the reader to participate in the interpretive process, and to retain the openness so characteristic of Deleuzian thought.

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## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

All quotations, references, and bibliographic entries have been formatted according to the conventions laid out in the MHRA Style Guide.

# INTRODUCTION

What is it? Everyone who has written a book or article on postmodernism begins with an apology for the inability to define the term. This is understandable, for if one could define it, it would not be postmodernism.<sup>1</sup>

It seems appropriate for a thesis that seeks to navigate a network of discourse to begin with quotation. Postmodernism has become, if not accepted, then certainly *dominant* in attempts to theorise, explain, and trace late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century experience. Postmodern theory continues to be contested in musicological discourse,<sup>2</sup> yet, as Lochhead argues, while postmodern thought permeates ‘music and thought about it [...] sustained and explicit discussion of postmodernism as such and its relation to musical practices does not yet exist’.<sup>3</sup> Of course, the scope of any undertaking that sought to do so comprehensively is vast (perhaps even infinite), but this thesis aims to contribute ‘sustained and explicit’ discussion of the relationship of postmodern theory and practice to one specific arena of the cultural sphere: the development of musical minimalism. By tracing the origins of discourse about postmodernism and minimalism, I seek to demonstrate the way in which cultural developments mirror a transition to what we can now call a recognisable postmodernity.

The decision to focus on minimalism is not arbitrary: as Anderson notes, of all the myriad cultural developments taking place in the central decades of the twentieth century, ‘the avant-garde art Lyotard singled out for approval [...] was Minimalism’.<sup>4</sup> This thesis will argue that the emergence, development, and subsequent pluralisation

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1996; f.p. 1978), p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> For two recent examples, see Björn Heile (ed.), *The Modernist Legacy: Essays on New Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) and David Metzger, *Musical Modernism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Judy Lochhead, ‘Naming: Music and the Postmodern’, *New Formations* 66 (Spring 2009), 158–172 (168).

<sup>4</sup> Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London; New York: Verso, 1998), p. 33. Lyotard’s contribution to postmodern discourse will be examined in Part I.

of minimalism elegantly demonstrates features of an emerging postmodernity. Colpitt articulates very well the crucial difference between minimalism and the modernisms that precede it when he states that 'it is the overwhelmingly significant role played by Minimalist theories that differentiates Minimalism from earlier art'.<sup>5</sup> This theoretical genesis points towards congruence with early postmodern theory. Just as common theoretical ideas amongst composers generated a *mêlée* of works that resist any strong categorisation, particularly in minimalism's earliest phases, so ideas of the postmodern only come into focus in later decades. This shared transitional period also makes it possible to articulate some elements of postmodern theory through their manifestations in minimalist practice and discourse.

Minimalism can be seen as both a cultural response to the changes in social, political and economic developments that postmodern theory seeks to articulate, and a mirror of the postmodern condition from which the features of postmodernity (and the cultural response, postmodernism) can be more easily discerned. Yet in seeking these corollaries, traditional notions of causality must be broken down; linear narratives of development undermined. Binaries and dualities that traditionally function in opposition must acquire a paradoxical quality; for postmodernity and its arts to be most fully understood, the recognition that total explanation is futile must be grasped.

In reaching this conclusion as to the limits one must place upon the conceptually limitless, I have taken direction from the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, and must outline the theories I have adopted in the formation of what might be described as a rhizomatic attitude to discourse and history. It should be noted that I do not intend to refer to their theories throughout this thesis: their writings have informed my approach to the topics under discussion and the structure of my discourse, but this thesis does not examine Deleuze's and Guattari's philosophies. It is emphatically *not* an attempt to construct a methodology from their writings; indeed, any misguided attempt to do so undermines the entire premise of rhizomatic thought. As Massumi explains, the attraction of the rhizomatic premise is its flexibility:

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<sup>5</sup> Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990; repr. 1993), p. 132.

every situation is unique and requires a specially tailored repertory of concepts. The concepts were formulated to help meet the challenge of thinking the unique. That is, to meet the challenge of thinking—for there is nothing in this world *but* uniqueness. They are less slippery than supple. They should under no circumstances be crystallised into a methodology. Like all of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, they are logical operators or heuristic devices to be adapted as the situation requires.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the explanation that follows seeks to demonstrate the way in which a rhizomatic *potentiality* has guided the path of this research, rather than outlining a methodological framework.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari set out their framework for rhizomatic thought. They argue that traditional root-based methods of explanation are inadequate, since with the idea of branching roots, or tree-like series of connections 'the binary logic of dichotomy has simply been replaced by biunivocal relationships

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<sup>6</sup> Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 24. There have been some notable attempts to construct precisely the sorts of methodologies Deleuze and Guattari would seem to oppose in recent musicological discourse (see, for example, Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (eds), *Deleuze and Music* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004)). The journal *Perspectives of New Music* recently devoted a complete issue to articles concerning the implementation of Deleuzian thought, with mixed success. While Michael Gallope eloquently uses these philosophies to argue that music 'is a vibrating flux that, in itself, has no specific content or identity' (Michael Gallope, 'Is there a Deleuzian Musical Work?' *Perspectives of New Music* 46: 2 (Summer 2008), 93–129 (p. 102)), others are less convincing. Boretz invokes Deleuze as a smokescreen for vague ramblings about his own music (Benjamin Boretz, 'Rainyday Reflections', 59–80). Interestingly in the context of this thesis' focus on the transition to postmodernity, Martin Scherzinger, who has also written on minimalism, focuses on Deleuze's examinations of Boulez's music to argue that *A Thousand Plateaus* marks a move by Deleuze to a postmodern attitude, whereas earlier works, such as *Difference and Repetition* and the first stage of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, are modernist in outlook. Scherzinger sees the rhizome as the important element of this change, but ultimately his article concentrates too much on drawing a literal parallel between musical forms, processes of production, and the rhizome (Martin Scherzinger, 'Musical Modernism in the Thought of *Mille Plateaux*, and Its Twofold Polemic', 130–158).

between successive circles'.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Deleuze sets out the characteristics of the rhizome. Firstly, the flexible and plural nature of the rhizome is emphasised: 'any point [...] can be connected to anything other, and must be'. This is contrasted with arboric structure, which, Deleuze argues, 'plots a point, fixes an order'.<sup>8</sup> The 'any' of this principle emphasises the way in which all lines of thought are recognised as singular events within a multitude of possible other paths, and leads to the 'principle of multiplicity'. By recognising multiplicity as something 'substantive' in its own right, Deleuze argues that 'arborescent pseudomultiplicities' are exposed as falsehoods that continue to depend upon a principle of 'unity' or 'object'.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the notion of unity is antonymous to the principles of rhizomatic thought, yet through this recognition of a substantive multiplicity, the rhizomatic space remains ideologically coherent. Therefore, Deleuze argues, 'a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines'.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, disruption is built-in to the rhizomatic model, and at any point where thoughts connect to create and articulate these ruptures, 'a line of flight' is created within the rhizome. These lines of flight are crucial to the conception of rhizomatic thought, since, Deleuze argues, they allow for the possibility of return within the system, and 'that is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy'.<sup>11</sup> Music, he argues, exemplifies such lines of flight—'overturning the very codes that

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<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and forward by Brian Massumi (London; New York: Continuum, 2004; f.p.1988), p. 6. From now on, 'Deleuze' will be used in place of the dual authorship. Since the authors eschew notions of individual authorship at the start of the book anyway, such a decision seems acceptable ('Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognisable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think [...] To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied') (*ibid.* pp. 3–4).

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

structure or aborify it'—as prescriptions such as form are continually subjected to rupture and reinvention.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Deleuze turns to the way in which rhizomatic thought ought to be presented. He argues that 'a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model' (structures, Deleuze suggests, make up 'infinitely reproducible principles of *tracing*'<sup>13</sup>). This tracing is concomitant with arboric structure that seeks to explain hierarchies and genealogies that are inherently directional. By contrast, Deleuze states that 'the rhizome is altogether different, *a map and not a tracing*.'<sup>14</sup> When translated to the process of thought, the implication of this statement is that attempts to linearise the space of inquiry are fallacious. Instead, investigation into a topic should be a process of networking ideas and events that echo one another but remain discrete. In approaching the topical 'map' in this way, there is an implicit recognition that the selection of a narrative starting point is in some respects arbitrary. Indeed, Deleuze suggests that 'one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways'.<sup>15</sup> Yet this is not to suggest that rhizomatic thought cannot possess some sense of form; but rather that any perceived structure is recognised as constructed, and thus, alterable.

While *A Thousand Plateaus* operates as a playing out of the philosophies Deleuze articulates, to attempt such 'thick' writing in relation to other spheres risks obfuscation. Therefore, two Deleuzian devices must be brought into play: those of the refrain, and the plateau. The refrain is described by Bogue as a 'stabilising point', which functions as the nexus for a triad of co-dependent actions: 'infra-assemblage with directional components [...] intra-assemblage with dimensional components; and [...] inter-assemblage with components of passage or flight'.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the refrain is an action

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<sup>12</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), p. 17.

of discourse, with the capacity to denote relationships, boundaries, and possibilities. When Deleuze speaks of 'a new classification system: milieu refrains, with at least two parts, one of which answers the other',<sup>17</sup> he is seeking to open up traditional dualisms in discourse, and replace them with dialogues that are able to operate in multiple directions. Secondly, the plateau performs an important function in the formulation of rhizomatic space. Deleuze describes a plateau as 'any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, plateaus form landmarks on the rhizomatic map which facilitate the interaction of discourse: plateaus enable the rhizome to articulate the refrain.

This necessarily partial reading of Deleuze has, as has already been stressed, informed an *attitude* rather than a methodology of rhizomatic thought. Yet the ways in which this attitude is manifest must be articulated with regard to three distinct points: discourse (refrain), keywords (plateau), and the notion of multiplicity (rhizome).

### *Refrain*

This thesis relies heavily on the examination of discourse; both the discourse of a gradually emerging postmodern theory and the more direct statements of composers, artists and critics associated with minimalism. The discourse of the former is presented for the most part through the traditional academic media of articles and books, although some reference is also made to more mass-audience oriented media such as newspapers and online articles. When examining the discourse of minimalism, however, recourse to 'popular' media formats (such as interviews, reviews and advertising) takes greater prominence. In particular, composers' own rhetoric will form a large part of the dialogue under discussion. Yet as Cameron notes:

this kind of commentary is rarely examined in studies of artistic or cultural change. It is more common to ignore the statements made by change agents in favour of doing direct analyses of whatever is being studied. The actors' views are often regarded as inadequate or inaccurate. At best, they are viewed as supplemental data. The general

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<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 382.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

assumption is that there is probably a tenuous relationship between what they do and what they say they do.<sup>19</sup>

While the question of how a composer might shape their rhetoric to convey a certain 'image' is examined in the course of this thesis, the decision has been made to confer this element of the minimalist discourse with equal weight to academic and critical interpretation. The primary reason for this is that, if a core premise of the thesis is to argue that discourse plays a central role in our understanding of postmodernity and minimalism, then *all* discourse is relevant. Secondly, Cameron attributes a specific social function to artistic debate, which she likens to 'gossip', explaining that 'through talk, people identify the rule or the norm that has been violated, the circumstances that led to the violation, the culprit or culprits, and the possibilities for resolution.'<sup>20</sup> Both of the labels under discussion take shape as a result of a discourse that seeks to make sense of perceptible ruptures in everyday life and a cultural response to them. Thus, the discourse of those at the 'cutting edge' of these changes forms an important locus to the debate.

Finally, a rhizomatic attitude resists the dichotomy that is traditionally established between artistic and critical statements, instead allowing a multiplicity of sources to congregate around ideas concerning a specific work, composer, or style. Thus, as Bogue argues, 'the various themes enunciated in opera librettos, song lyrics, program notes, and composition titles, the diverse connections drawn by composers [...] are not extraneous impositions on a musical form, but indexes of becoming, elements proper to music yet unassimilable within a mimetic model of musical imitation or representation of a discursive content.'<sup>21</sup> Such 'diverse connections' must form part (alongside all other critical discussion) of the multiplicity that surrounds the concept which we call 'work', 'text' or 'composer'.

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<sup>19</sup> Catherine M. Cameron, *Dialectics in the Arts: The Rise of Experimentalism in American Music* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996), p. 61. It should be noted that Cameron's background is in anthropology, and her previous research informs her approach to composer rhetoric.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron, *Dialectics in the Arts*, pp. 80–81.

<sup>21</sup> Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*, p. 53.



### *Plateau*

Throughout this thesis, discussions are arranged around keywords: items that describe certain characteristics or aspects that form a locus to regions of discourse. This decision has been taken with Deleuze's plateaus in mind: a formal construction that avoids the privileging of one characteristic or theme over another. As Eco explains, in a rhizome, 'every path can be connected with every other one. It has no centre, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite. The space of conjecture is a rhizome space.'<sup>22</sup> Keywords in this thesis are designed to function in a similar manner. They are implicitly interconnected, although detailed explanation of *how* they are connected has often been left open, or only sketched lightly; the intention is to allow these elements to be 'at play' in the same way as many of the aspects they seek to discuss. Furthermore, it is hoped that this 'space of conjecture' will provide sufficient allusion to, and explanation of, other 'plateaus', that the reader will be impelled to make their own 'lines of flight' between them. While one could potentially describe the nature of all the relationships between these keywords, to do so methodically or in great detail would not only weaken the cognitive potential of the rhizomatic space, but in all likelihood detract from the clarity with which I have attempted to outline the salient features of each keyword.

### *Rhizome*

Both these devices—refrain and plateau—are employed with the aim of freeing the text from any sense of strict linearity while avoiding the loss of clarity that can sometimes be found in texts that attempt to underline their multiplicity more explicitly through a free-play of thoughts and ideas. In a category as plural, adaptable and subjective as music, the multiplicity of the rhizome is an attractive theoretical guide. Heile agrees that the 'idea of rhizomatic growth seems a much more adequate model for musical history than the implicit metaphor of tree structures, since it allows us to appreciate the genuine multiplicity and non-hierarchical nature of connections between different musicians and traditions which, according to conventional thinking,

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<sup>22</sup> Umberto Eco, *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Secker and Warburg, 1985; f.p. 1983), p. 57.

are wide apart.<sup>23</sup> Yet Heile also highlights another advantage to this attitude; one that recognises the notion of 'category' as a starting point for exploration of musical relationships, rather than the *goal* of musicological discourse. He writes, 'it is one of the commonplaces in writings on twentieth-century composers that they cannot be categorised. While there is a lot of sales-talk and lazy thinking involved in such statements, the larger issue may be that categorisation as a conceptual technique is not well suited to understanding twentieth-century music'.<sup>24</sup> It is hoped that one outcome of this thesis will be to show that the notion of categorisation itself can be modified by a rhizomatic attitude, and hence establish new uses for (and new ways of using) the idea of categorisation.

The thesis is arranged in three parts: Postmodernism, Minimalism, and Louis Andriessen. The parts are designed to act as a series of lenses that direct the 'big ideas' of the first part onto the details of the third. Part One (Postmodernism) explores the broad theoretical discourse of postmodernity, and the way in which this has reflected upon both postmodernism as a response to changes in everyday life that the theory seeks to articulate, and the theoretical discourse itself. With regards to the latter, the discourse that seeks to formulate the artistic response 'postmodernism' will also be examined.

Part Two explores the history of minimal music: its origins in both music and discourse-about-music; its subsequent development, and the proliferation of musics in the later twentieth century that carry identifiably minimalist traits. In particular, the restricted nature of established minimal histories will be challenged, with a series of plateaus exploring facets of minimalism being used to avoid a retelling of a minimalist genealogy. Finally, it will be argued that minimalism provides a useful mirror of transformations to postmodernity, as an initially modernist impulse becomes a postmodern 'code' which is widely adopted and adapted. This pluralisation will be

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<sup>23</sup> Björn Heile, 'Weltmusik and the Globalisation of New Music', in Heile, *The Modernist Legacy*, pp. 101–119 (p. 118).

<sup>24</sup> Heile, 'Weltmusik and the Globalisation of New Music', p. 118.

considered in relation to the use of minimalism as a category, and it will be argued that rather than rushing to prefix works with the 'post-' of postminimalism, the category minimalism might undergo an expansion that recognises its inherent diversity.

In the third part, one composer, Louis Andriessen, will be taken as a case-study to demonstrate the way in which postmodern minimalist 'code' might be incorporated into a postmodernist aesthetic. Just as rhizomes of postmodernism and minimalism have been constructed in previous parts, a rhizome of 'Andriessen' will be assembled. Alongside detailed examinations of selected works, key features of his life and output will be discussed, and the way in which they reflect a postmodern sensibility and a minimalist influence will be outlined. I will argue that Andriessen's music presents an example of a truly self-reflexive postmodernism, where minimalism becomes the primary arena in which dialectical engagement with postmodern ideologies takes place.

Of course, throughout this thesis, the postmodernity under discussion is also the dominant that prescribes the conditions of this writing. As well as an emphasis on an attitude of rhizomatic thought, significance should also be placed on the fact of writing through a belief that this text occupies a postmodern space. Featherstone questions the parameters of this space when he writes that,

it has been argued that many of the characteristic features listed under postmodernism can be found within the modern, and indeed the premodern [...] Given this, how far can it be argued that what is labelled "the postmodern" has always existed, and it is only now that we are granting it significance? And if this is the case how far can we attempt to understand the social process which led to this particular conceptional frame (1) becoming adopted within particular institutional practices and by particular sets of cultural specialists and (2) being proliferated and accepted by particular audiences and publics.<sup>25</sup>

Whether Featherstone is correct in suggesting that the postmodern has always existed, what signifies postmodernity *now* is our awareness of that condition and

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<sup>25</sup> Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage Publications, 1994; f.p. 1991), p. 144.

critical engagement with its effects. Yet Featherstone's questions highlight the need for a certain degree of self-reflexivity—an awareness of the contexts of *'this'* text—in any writing that attempts to address the theoretical premises of the postmodern. There is a sense in which it is discourse, at every point in this thesis, which marks a point of return. On one level, this text is simply a discourse about discourse. The thesis thus itself becomes 'refrain' to the topics under discussion: to paraphrase Bogue, it seeks to direct, to bound, and to connect the ideas that circulate these twentieth-century transitions.

**PART ONE:**

**POSTMODERNISM**

## POSTMODERNISM

The terms postmodernism and postmodernity have been contested even from before the point when they emerge into widespread usage. A term with no fixed definition, chronological boundaries, nor (beyond certain basic ideas) common rhetoric; 'postmodern' is perhaps one of the most problematic terms to arise from twentieth-century academic and critical discourse.<sup>1</sup> Considered in various camps to be still in an emergent phase, coming of age, already past, or never having existed at all, simply reaching consensus on the basic criteria through which the term will be applied and understood seems an almost impossible task. Yet close examination of key texts and their associated criticism at times reveals a more coherent outlook, despite the antagonistic language of some commentators. In order to better understand these outlooks, and in an attempt to highlight points of contact between seemingly disparate views of postmodernism and postmodernity, the key themes of postmodern discourse need to be examined. In the process of accomplishing such a task, it becomes

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<sup>1</sup> There are various disagreements about the usage and presentation of these related terms. As Taylor highlights in his article on music in postmodernity, most of these disagreements (including whether or not 'post' and 'modern' should be hyphenated) are a result of the lack of clear boundaries around these fluid terms (Timothy D. Taylor, 'Music and Musical Practices in Postmodernity', in Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner, *Postmodern Music, Postmodern Thought* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 93–118). However, postmodernism, as Taylor argues, is most usefully viewed as a term that emerges from the wider discourse of postmodern theory and denotes a critical response to the *period* of postmodernity (*ibid.*). Alistair Williams also seeks to clarify usage along similar lines, suggesting that the 'isms' attached to the modern and postmodern might be thought of as 'cultural manifestations of the wider project of modernity and postmodernity.' (Alistair Williams, *Constructing Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. ix). Elaborating further, Williams explains that the terms 'modernity and postmodernity refer to sets of social, economic and cognitive processes; modernism and postmodernism signify corresponding cultural domains' (*ibid.*, p. 115). These distinctions help to establish a theoretical lexicon that can aid coherence in a detailed survey of postmodern theory, and despite writers such as Eagleton identifying a similar separation (postmodernity as a historical period) as unfamiliar and little used (see Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. vii), Williams' and Taylor's terminology will consequently be adopted for this study. It is hoped that despite objection from commentators such as Bowman (who argues that 'the simple addition of the suffix "ism" to the term postmodern transforms it into something fundamentally at odds with the sensibilities it represents, imputes to it a coherence and stability it strenuously rejects' (Wayne D. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 397)), the approach to the concept adopted here will avoid any suggestion of rigidity within the term. Rather, the 'ism' is used as a convenient means of distinguishing cultural responses from global causalities.

necessary to revisit certain ideas from various angles and in relation to a network of other concepts, thus building a rhizomatic picture of postmodernism: more a kaleidoscopic nebula<sup>2</sup> than a convenient and concrete addition to critical vocabulary.

The chapters that follow will explore the themes that can be extracted from postmodern discourse: an investigation of the term that will act as a foundation on which to base subsequent enquiry. The second chapter will explore the transitions from modernism to postmodernism and the cultural, social and economic context of these changes. Finally, the implications of these themes and transitions will be evaluated, questioning the impact of postmodernism on our conception of history, political effectiveness and the cultural sphere. From this, it will become clear that postmodernism is a fluid term, and one that is difficult to crystallise. As Kramer has observed, 'postmodernist strategies of understanding are incorrigibly interdisciplinary and irreducibly plural. Like the theories that ground them, they make up not a system but an ethos.'<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, an attempt will be made to consider the merits of various viewpoints and establish a working definition of postmodernism.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that I do not intend to allude to any of the 'psychedelic' connotations that the idea of the kaleidoscope holds in certain quarters. The word's meaning is taken much more in its older form: depicting the idea of shifting or changing features, and recalling the imagery and motion of the object of the same name.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 5.

## Chapter One

### Towards a Definition of Postmodernism

There is much disagreement over the way postmodern terminology should be used: as a totalising concept indicating a certain world-view, or as a descriptive term confined to local observations; as a historical era or style; or as a cultural dominant. Periodisation of the term's emergence is also contested, with particular debate over the issue of a 'break' from, or continuation with, modernism. Modernism becomes a somewhat monolithic construction in postmodern discourse, and, as Motte-Haber notes, 'whether the prefix "post" is thought to express distance or to have an antithetical force, it presupposes an understanding of modernism'.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, as Bauman argues, modernism is redefined by postmodernism as much as postmodernism is a 'something other' in response to modernity.<sup>2</sup> Differing opinions on these fundamental aspects of the term often cloud debate over its application, with a great deal of material indicating that the same term is used by writers who conceive of its meaning in divergent manners. By addressing these issues at the outset, criteria can be established around key themes in the postmodern debate, thus providing a framework within which an evaluation of the many critiques of postmodernism can be considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Helga de la Motte-Haber, 'Postmodernism in Music: Retrospection as Reassessment', *Contemporary Music Review* 12: 1 (1995), 77–83 (p. 78).

<sup>2</sup> Bauman writes, 'modernity is reconstructed ex-post-facto as an era possessing the selfsame features the present time feels more poignantly as missing, namely the universal criteria of truth, judgement and taste seemingly controlled and operated by the intellectuals. Like all reconstructions, this one tells more about the reconstructors than about the reconstructed epoch, and in this respect it is highly illuminating' (Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 24). While the oppositional nature of much postmodern discourse does set modernism up as a monolith to be demolished by postmodern plurality and hostility to metanarrative, the very existence of this 'universal' modernism is one of the first examples of postmodern theory's many oxymoronic arguments. While this contradiction is recognised in the present study, the fact remains that modernism has been constructed as a dogmatic, totalising force in postmodern discourse, and it is this construction that defines much of the discussion. Nevertheless, Wheale's observation that modernism 'is not a particular repertoire of formal artistic devices [...] so much as the climate of expectations and definitions which is created, and within which one kind of artistic agenda is promoted at the expense of all others', points to the extent to which this singular construction is both a product of the modernist enterprise and a reaction to and redefinition of it (Nigel Wheale (ed.), *The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 30).



## 1.1 Periodisation

Periodisation of the postmodern is not universally agreed amongst commentators, although there is some degree of consensus. The differences of opinion arise not simply in identifying the waning of modernism's dominance, but rather over whether or not a transitional phase between the two periods can be identified. Lyotard argues that 'modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity', and that this nascent state of postmodernity *within* modernity leads to a situation in which neither of the terms can be 'identified and defined as clearly circumscribed historical entities, of which the latter would always come "after" the former'.<sup>3</sup> Yet the very act of seeking chronological boundaries for postmodernism predicates a presumption that the concept refers primarily to an era or historical period, as opposed to a more metaphysical notion, and Lyotard has attempted to circumvent this contradiction by suggesting that 'the "post-" of "postmodern" does not signify a movement of *comeback, flashback* or *feedback* [...] but a procedure in "ana-": a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy and anamorphosis which elaborates an "initial forgetting".'<sup>4</sup> What the subsequent discussions will show is that despite these reservations, a series of tangible alterations in society, economics and culture can be regarded as causal or symptomatic aspects of the postmodern debate, pointing to a linear logic that underpins the conceptual aspects of postmodernism.

To this end, two of the most significant commentators on postmodernism, who present contrasting, although not wholly incongruous periodisations, will be taken as a starting point. Jameson, in his seminal survey *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*,<sup>5</sup> identifies the nascence of postmodernism in the late fifties and early sixties, following what he describes as a 'break' indicating a distinct change of direction

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'Rewriting Modernity', in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), pp. 24–35 (first publ. in Eng. *Substance* (Autumn 1987), and in Fr. *Cahiers de Philosophie*, 5 (1988)), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982–1985*, trans. by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (London: Turnaround, 1992), p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

at the high point of modernism. By contrast, Harvey, in *The Condition of Postmodernity*,<sup>6</sup> marks a series of transitional decades which precede postmodernism proper, dividing the latter half of the twentieth century into a post-1945 phase of 'high-modernism'; an 'anti-modern' decade in the 1960s and finally, a postmodern phase which begins in the 1970s. Harvey characterises the high-modernist phase as a time of comfortable, stable modernisation, where production and corporate capitalism dominate the economic and political spectra, and high-modernist creativity becomes institutionalised. The anti-modern phase is then regarded as reactive, with resistance to modernisation manifested in political protest against the role of technological advancement in warfare; the growing idealisation of 'leaving the rat race' in the face of economic prosperity gained at the expense of traditional production methods; and in the cultural sphere, through activities that sought to rally against the institutionalisation of the arts, and where authors of creativity seek 'individualised self-realisation'<sup>7</sup> in favour of an art that was (in theory) anti-elitist. Hutcheon supports this description of the cultural realm, again emphasising the 'contradictory dependence on and independence from that which temporally preceded it and which literally made it possible'.<sup>8</sup> Hutcheon emphasises the 'typically contradictory' nature of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, and argues that the 'both and neither' response to whether postmodernity constitutes a break or continuity with modernism pervades the discourse in 'aesthetic, philosophical, or ideological terms'.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the postmodern phase is reached in the 1970s, bringing with it an almost symbiotic relationship between the revolutionary aspects of the previous decade and the mechanisms which many were fighting against. The postmodern phase begins at a time when commercialisation has strengthened to the point where it is able to subsume reactionary elements and ultimately turn their ideologies to commercial

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<sup>6</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988), p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

advantage. All aspects of society—political, cultural and economic—are openly woven together by an increasingly dominant media which exposes the interdependence of previously distinguished spheres under the umbrella of the capitalist agenda. The opposition between Jameson's and Harvey's periodisations suggests, on the one hand, postmodernism as an incisive antidote to modernism, and, on the other as a condition that emerges as a gradual reaction to modernism's decline.

While Wheale argues that one of the reasons for the monolithic construction of modernism is that 'a sophisticated paradigm is only established in the mid-century as a retrospective rationalisation for the array of artistic and cultural practices of the earlier period',<sup>10</sup> by contrast, Hassan argues that rather than being an oppositional force, 'modernism does not suddenly cease so that Postmodernism may begin: they now coexist.'<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting at this juncture that both Jameson's and Harvey's work dates from the late eighties, and that subsequent writers have identified this decade as a time when postmodernism stabilises (to a degree) both as a concept and in its practical manifestations. At the close of his work, Harvey considers whether, in 1989, postmodernism has 'come of age',<sup>12</sup> and this suggestion is borne out by Bertens when, in his later survey of postmodernism, he refers to a 'fully-fledged' postmodernism of the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> However, the overall flavour of Bertens's analysis puts postmodernism in a more favourable light than Harvey's, who is inclined to regard postmodernism's blossoming as the simultaneous inception of its decline. Indeed, in his final statement Harvey wonders if 'the condition of postmodernity is undergoing a subtle evolution,

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<sup>10</sup> Wheale, *The Postmodern Arts*, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1987), p. 32. In this respect, it is interesting to note that in Heile's most recent work, he talks of a postmodernism that has 'lost momentum' on the grounds that basic dichotomies between modernism and postmodernism have been abandoned. (Björn Heile, 'New Music and the Modernist Legacy', in Heile, *The Modernist Legacy*, pp. 1–10, (p. 1)). This raises the question of whether postmodern discourse is to some extent dependent on inherent contradictions.

<sup>12</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 336.

<sup>13</sup> Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 136.

perhaps reaching a point of self-dissolution into something different'.<sup>14</sup> For the meantime, however, Jameson's idea of a 'break' between modernism and postmodernism needs to be explored in order to better understand the reasoning that leads to these divergent periodisations.

### *Jameson's 'Break'*

Jameson's survey takes the presumption that postmodernism constitutes a 'cultural and experiential break worth exploring' as its basis.<sup>15</sup> As Whittall observes, 'the notion of a "Year Zero"—a birth, rather than some kind of rebirth—acquires a powerful symbolic significance',<sup>16</sup> and it is this notion that illustrates the beginning of what Jameson calls the postmodern condition. The semantic implications of such statements are multiple: the 'break' or separation from that which precedes it (in this case, modernism); the resetting, in 'year zero', of some chronological or historical logic; and, with regard to some form of experiential alteration, the idea that a clearly defined boundary can be identified through the observation of phenomena that are symptomatic of the postmodern age.

In this latter sense, it becomes clear as Jameson's argument unfolds that while he is able to point to 'postmodern' and 'modern' cultural and social phenomena as a means of comparison, it is never his intention to identify some form of cut-off point between modernism and postmodernism. Rather, Jameson explicitly cautions against adopting a rhetoric that relies on the juxtaposition of simple binary oppositions between modern and postmodern characteristics by way of explanation. Instead, he uses the idea of a break as an intellectual construct to support his model of postmodernism as the outcome of certain socio-economic changes that converge in the middle decades of

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<sup>14</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 358. It is interesting to consider whether, had Harvey or Jameson begun writing at a later date, either would have periodised the phenomenon differently, or attempted to identify phases within postmodernism itself. There is certainly a sense in which Jameson begins to play down the sense of rupture from modernism in his later writings.

<sup>15</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Arnold Whittall, 'Individualism and Accessibility: the Moderate Mainstream 1945–75', in Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 364–394 (p. 365).

the twentieth century. However, Jameson allows that the idea of a break may be no more than a theoretical construct, asking if postmodernism implies 'any more fundamental change or break than the periodic style and fashion changes determined by an older high-modernist imperative of stylistic innovation?'<sup>17</sup> These modifications in the manifestation of everyday, observable life coincide with an evolution in critical thinking which Jameson seeks to theorise in his work. As such the break, in Jameson's sense, is used as the initiation point for a framework upon which to assemble the various strands that were emerging in a new, postmodern mode of thinking.

This perspective differs from other conceptions of postmodernism's origins, the most significant of which can be found in the work of Harvey and Lyotard. Lyotard's first theorisations of postmodernism pre-date Jameson's and Harvey's work, and *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*<sup>18</sup> makes a significant contribution to some of the central themes of the postmodern debate. In the foreword to the English translation, Jameson explains that Lyotard regards postmodernism as a nascent state of modernism, and is unwilling to see it as radically different from high-modernism. Rather, Lyotard conceptualises postmodernism as 'a cyclical moment that returns before the emergence of ever *new* modernisms in the stricter sense',<sup>19</sup> part of a momentum within the broader confines of modernisation whereby the modernist aesthetic constantly reinvents itself to the point where moments of rebirth can be identified throughout modernism's chronology. In musicological discourse, Kramer highlights the dependence of this cyclical paradigm upon the dissolution not of modernist practice *per se*, but of the metanarratives which traditionally confine it. Thus, Kramer argues,

even if the break between modernism and postmodernism is radical [...] that does not constitute the postmodern as a moment of absolute novelty, a complete rupture with a failed intellectual past. Ironically, the call for such a rupture is a classically modernist maneuver [*sic.*] [...] I would say rather that the *post-* in postmodernism designates the

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<sup>17</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Foreword', in Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xvi.

moment of disengagement from the very idea of such absolutes, and of the consequent proliferation of intellectual projects that undo [...] the 'grand metanarratives'.<sup>20</sup>

Lyotard's perspective (and consequently, Kramer's) sits more comfortably with Harvey's explanation of postmodernism as a crisis within modernism: 'there is much more continuity than difference between the broad history of modernism and the movement called postmodernism'.<sup>21</sup> Harvey's version of modernism resonates with Lyotard's illustration of postmodern phenomena that pull away from the modernist *status quo* in order to return to modernism as a form of innovation; a postmodernist subsidiary to a modernism that is characterised by multiple breaks and reinventions. In an addendum to his original thesis, Lyotard clarifies some of his opinions on the postmodern condition, reasserting his belief that material manifestations of the postmodern have to ultimately be regarded as modern: 'a work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.'<sup>22</sup>

#### *Harvey's 'time-space compression'*

Despite Harvey's cyclical view of modernism, much of his work is based upon the consequences of what he terms 'time-space compression'. This phenomenon, Harvey argues, is observable throughout history, and occurs most noticeably at moments of rapid modernisation where new technologies impact upon the everyday life of the majority. The advent of these technologies alters the relationships between countries

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Kramer, 'Music Criticism and the Postmodernist Turn: In Contrary Motion with Gary Tomlinson', *Current Musicology*, 53 (1993), 25–35 (p. 26). This epistle forms part of a critical correspondence with Gary Tomlinson following a previous article by Kramer. See also Gary Tomlinson, 'Musical Pasts and Postmodern Musicologies: A Response to Lawrence Kramer', 18–24, and 'Tomlinson Responds', 36–40, in the same issue.

<sup>21</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p.116.

<sup>22</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.79. This idea of a constant state of reinvention also resonates with Barthes' theories of work and text, which resist the idea of an identifiable break occurring in literary theory since Marxism and Freudianism made their impact. Instead, Barthes favours the idea of an 'epistemological slide [...]so that in a way it can be said that for the last hundred years we have been living in repetition' (Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *Image, Music, Text* ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 155–164 (p. 155)).

and their people through time-space compression.<sup>23</sup> The physical distance between individuals is 'compressed' in two ways: firstly, through increasing speed and ease of actual physical travel between geographically distant places, and secondly, through the virtual proximity of geographically remote individuals by means of increasingly 'instant' communication.<sup>24</sup> The physical and virtual proximity brought about by such advances in technology results in compression on a global scale, which facilitates a speeding-up of everyday life (time) and an increasing ease in overcoming barriers of distance (space). Sudden and significant time-space compression, argues Harvey, can be identified at all instances of notable socio-political, economic and cultural change. Consequently, despite Harvey's view that modernism is characterised by a series of internal crises, which would seem to indicate a degree of resetting (almost a string of low-impact 'year zeroes'), his theory of time-space compression relies upon an emphatically linear and uni-directional perspective.

The way in which Harvey synthesises these two seemingly disparate concepts becomes more apparent when he addresses what he believes to be the most recent phase of time-space compression, occurring during the 1970s and '80s. He refers to this period as an 'intense' phase 'that has had a disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life'.<sup>25</sup> The negative language that he employs in describing this latest time-space compression gives a clue to his view of postmodernism as something symptomatic of modernism's internal crisis, and a belief that recent changes in the socio-economic sphere are damaging both to everyday life and culture. Whereas in discussions of earlier compressions, the outcomes Harvey has identified have mainly concerned increasing ease and speed of communication or the ability to conquer physical distance, there appears to be an unspoken assumption in Harvey's assessment of this

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<sup>23</sup> In the decades of the early twentieth century, transcontinental flight, radio broadcasts, and telephone communication would be good examples.

<sup>24</sup> For example, this latter aspect could be traced from the increased availability of the telephone during the early twentieth century to the development of internet packages that now make email and web facilities common to households and workplaces.

<sup>25</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 284.

last compression that, while such areas continue to advance, they are received by the population more as evolutionary processes than sudden, surprising developments. Therefore, Harvey turns to the aspect of everyday life that he feels has altered most significantly during this compression: that of consumerism. Harvey characterises this time-space compression as one of accelerated consumption, seeing the move of fashion from elite to mass markets and the dominance of marketable services over marketable goods as its most important manifestations. He considers this compression something woven into the fabric of everyday life, accelerating (compressing) consumption so much so as to alter the face of consumerism almost beyond recognition.

Harvey ultimately sees the time-space compression that throws modern life into the postmodern phase as one where accelerated consumption is all-pervasive, 'not only in clothing, ornament and decoration but also across a wide swath of life-styles and recreational activities'.<sup>26</sup> McLuhan's influential work on media draws upon these same ideas, as he argues that 'we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned [...] the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media.'<sup>27</sup> For Harvey, postmodernism (analogous to McLuhan's 'media') is a phase of modernism where the blank *fact* of consumerism pulls ahead of any modernist aesthetic to dominate commentaries on every aspect of life; but as he asserts in his closing statement, he believes this domination will dissolve into the ever-progressive modernist process.

Given Harvey's negative outlook, it is understandable that he viewed postmodernism as some form of reaction to these final stages of modernism. Consequently, an interpretation of his observations as essentially *within* modernism and its intense period of time-space compression, rather than external to it, makes sense. However,

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<sup>26</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 285.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002; f.p. 1964), p. 3–4.



perhaps an alternative interpretation of these latter stages can be proposed: Harvey builds an analogy of time-space compression as a developmental wave, its impact amplified by technologies that have further and further reaching impact. If what Harvey clearly interprets as a series of ever more intense compressions as technology advances can instead emphasise their increasing frequency, then the moments of change identified by Jameson's break and Bertens's 'coming of age' can perhaps be reinterpreted in the context of a series of postmodern time-space compressions which differ somewhat in character and effect from those within earlier phases of modernisation.<sup>28</sup> The usefulness of such an approach comes in seeking a way of identifying common factors between the various perspectives of postmodernism described by these significant authors, highlighting the commonalities in their discourse.

## **1.2 Towards (dis)agreement...**

As can be seen from the preceding discussions, there is no clear consensus on the periodisation (or indeed the aesthetic form) that postmodernism takes. However, there are areas of agreement that can be useful to further discussion. Significantly, while a date or even decade for postmodernism's emergence is debated, there is a shared assumption that by the 1970s and '80s, postmodernism is a dominant feature of the critical and cultural landscape. This period thus provides a useful stretch of time in which to explore key ideas about the characteristics and implications of postmodernism, based on a collective acceptance of its relevance to contemporary discourse.

Beyond this point, significant disagreements emerge about the validity of postmodernism. As well as Harvey's musings on the dissolution of postmodernism, the more recent surveys of Bertens and Butler show a clear belief that postmodernism's

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<sup>28</sup> Modernisation is here used to imply a broader chronological period, spanning the modernisation of the workforce from the Industrial revolution to the Fordism of the war years, in keeping with its use in Harvey's work. When talking about time-space compression, he identifies a time-space compression in the early part of the twentieth century that marks the start of modernism, as a final stage in the longer process of modernisation.

point of greatest significance has passed. Bertens also argues that of all the various permutations and interpretations of what postmodernism is, does, or means, the most significant and useful interpretation is that postmodernism describes not a new world, but a new *perspective*. Bertens regards the cultural sphere as the one benefiting most from a continued postmodern dialogue, explaining that 'it's not the world that is postmodern here, it is the perspective from which that world is seen that is postmodern.'<sup>29</sup> Along similar lines, Butler argues that postmodernism's 'period of greatest influence is now over', but that the philosophical and dialectical questions that it raises 'will continue to engage us for some time to come'.<sup>30</sup> Butler's views closely mirror those of Bertens', who considers these philosophical issues to be of critical value in the cultural sphere.

This perspective-based view of postmodernism holds some potential for synthesis with Jameson's central belief: that is, that postmodernity is a concept so total in its effects—so all-pervasive—that one cannot conceive of being 'outside' the postmodern. Such an all-encompassing perspective precludes the concept's judgement in a traditional sense, since one is unable to view the phenomena in a way that removes the critic from that which is being judged. As Jameson explains, 'the point is that we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt'.<sup>31</sup> It is this totalising view of postmodernism that sets Jameson's approach apart from other commentators on postmodernism, many of whom reject not only the idea of postmodernism as an all-encompassing concept, but also the idea that postmodernism demonstrates any real break with a modernist source.

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<sup>29</sup> Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Butler, *A Very Short Introduction to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 127.

<sup>31</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 62. In later works, Jameson argues that this totalising concept actually rehabilitates the possibility for Utopian thought, in contrast to the common 'anything goes' rejection of political engagement. He writes, 'I have already suggested that the thinking of totality itself—the urgent feeling of the presence all around us of some overarching system that we can at least *name*—has the palpable benefit of forcing us to conceive of at least the possibility of other alternate systems, something we can now identify as our old friend Utopian thinking' (Fredric Jameson, 'The Antinomies of Postmodernity', in *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 1–71 (p. 70)).

Opposing conclusions have already been demonstrated between Lyotard's and Harvey's ideas, yet there are other commentators who strongly reject the idea of a postmodern era in favour of a reinterpretation of modernism. The basis for this viewpoint hinges on the observation that many social and economic structures that underpinned developments within modernity are still essentially the same in postmodernity; and consequently, one cannot identify anything which justifies a claim to some kind of epochal transformation. As Williams explains, 'it makes more sense to understand postmodernity as embodying a continuation and reinterpretation of modernity than to portray it as a decisive move to a new phase of social organisation'.<sup>32</sup> Despite a lack of consensus elsewhere, agreement of a sort can be seen in the antagonistic approach many commentators take to postmodernism. Eagleton, despite his undisguised scepticism throughout *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, allows that postmodernism has a role to play in continuing theoretical discussions of the age: 'it is, at one level at least, just the negative truth of modernity, an unmasking of mythical pretensions.'<sup>33</sup> Such admissions, while denying postmodern theory any power to generate new theoretical models that surpass modernist rhetoric, at least acknowledge the importance of recognising the shift in perspective that Bertens and others attribute to a stronger postmodern stance. More positively, Racevskis argues that 'the term postmodernism stands for a critical strategy',<sup>34</sup> reinforcing a view of postmodernism as a critical cultural response to the postmodern condition.

There is one final argument that needs to be considered, and that is one that fully rejects the existence of postmodernism. This view is typified in the work of Habermas, and is stated most strongly in his article 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project'.<sup>35</sup> In this

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<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Constructing Musicology*, p. 116.

<sup>33</sup> Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 29.

<sup>34</sup> Karlis Racevskis, *Postmodernism and the Search for Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. 3–15.

article, Habermas outlines a series of perspectives that accept, react against or reject modernism. However, his belief that modernism has yet to run its course is the central premise of his argument. Habermas regards all the changes in social, economic, political and cultural life that commentators identify as indicative of postmodernity to be no more than a gradual evolution and development driven by the principles of modernism: 'the project of modernity has not yet been fulfilled [...] The project aims at a differentiated rethinking of modern culture with an everyday praxis that still depends on vital heritages, but would be impoverished through mere traditionalism.'<sup>36</sup> Unacknowledged postmodernism—for Habermas does not so much reject the concept as decline to consider it—is the most difficult viewpoint to synthesise with a working model that can pave the way to a further exploration of postmodernism. However, it does provide a useful resource against which to contrast many of the commentaries that view postmodernism as an evolutionary product of modernism.

Having explored some of the arguments surrounding the periodisation of postmodernism, it is time to turn to the characteristics of this age that has generated such intense and antithetical discussions. As was mentioned above, the time at which there is most consensus about the existence of postmodernism is in the 1970s and early '80s, and so this shall be taken as a starting point for considering its central themes, creating a network of key ideas which can then be explored in earlier decades when considering transitions and transformations between modernism and postmodernism. Similarly, the issue of a 'break' versus a gradual metamorphosis from modernism can be put aside while postmodernism's characteristics are explored. In a search for some basic criteria of postmodernity, the overwhelming urge is to conclude that there are none. However, common ideas are often disguised by antagonistic rhetoric and variously employed terminology, and for this reason postmodernism can be regarded as a phenomenon that commands more commonly held beliefs than are at first apparent; not least the agreement among commentators that postmodernism is a conceptual minefield that demands closer inspection.

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<sup>36</sup> Habermas, 'Modernity', p. 13.

### **1.3 Characteristics and recurring themes**

Whether as a phenomenon confined to culture, or one with broader significance, commentators continually focus on certain recurring themes of the postmodern. Often contrasting with a modernist counterpart, it is important not (as Jameson cautions) to view these contrasts as simple binary oppositions that establish a model of the postmodern as either reaction or antidote to modernity's flaws. The following pages will consider the characteristics and themes that recur frequently within the postmodern debate, looking at their basis in both ideological and empirical dialogues, and consider how—or indeed if—it is possible to synthesise these characteristics in a way that clearly illustrates what postmodernism entails. As noted, many of the key concepts and ideas are so interwoven with other complex discussions that it is impossible to address one aspect without referring to (or if 'reference' is too strong, *suggesting* the need to infer a connection to) many others. This kaleidoscopic feature of postmodern deliberation mirrors the nature of postmodernism itself, and complicates any investigation into its characteristics. In an attempt to make these investigations as direct and coherent as possible, descriptions of major recurring themes will be briefly sketched alongside some of the main questions associated with each, before a discussion that will attempt to bring the relationships between these plateaus into clearer focus.

#### **Fragmentation**

Fragmentation, as it is used in postmodern discourse, frequently applies to two distinct areas of discussion: social observation and the cultural sphere. With regards to society, it is often used in an empirical sense to describe the fractures brought about by changes in class structures, community and state hierarchies, economic stability and political ambition. Here, fragmentation refers to a sense of detachment from the myriad strands of activity that function as the stabilising systems of everyday life. In the cultural sphere, the concept of fragmentation is used more as a description of the

juxtaposition of unrelated artefacts within a 'text',<sup>37</sup> for example, in the collages of Rauschenberg or the Plunderphonics of John Oswald. Both these versions of fragmentation find their equivalents in modernism, and a crucial distinction that postmodern theorists draw upon is the belief that while fragmentation was no less present in modernism, it was a fragmentation of alienation and discomfort; postmodern fragmentation is comfortable, and a fragmentation that enjoys—on the surface at least—acceptance. In music, Metzger identifies friction between 'modernist and postmodernist pieces [that] can be seen as participating in the enquiry into the fragmentary [...] Instead of a decisive break, there is tension, created by the collage compositions working with and against modernist ideals.'<sup>38</sup> More broadly, Harvey argues that the fragmentation of modernity is a symptom of insecurity: 'totalising chaos [...] with no respect for its own past, let alone that of any pre-modern social order.'<sup>39</sup> By contrast, he describes postmodern fragmentation as some remnant of modernism that is welcomed by its successor, and that, rather than attempting to transcend the insecurities that fragmentation generates, 'swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and chaotic currents of change as if that's all there is'.<sup>40</sup>

The notion of fragmentation as a dominant yet accepted force in postmodernity is a common one (although the tone of some commentary suggests that such acceptance

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<sup>37</sup> The use of 'text' when referring to any artwork has been almost universally adopted among theorists as a way of marking a distinction from the material 'work'. The work as unified concept comes to be associated with modernist art and an ideology of artistic autonomy and authorial ego, while 'text' becomes the marker of a postmodern attitude, utilising extant artefacts within a creation, and shifting the emphasis of interpretation to the receiver.

<sup>38</sup> Metzger, *Musical Modernism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 142–3. Metzger argues that Nono's *Fragmente—Stille, An Diotima* (1980) and Kurtág's *Kafka Fragments* (1985–6) are examples of modernist fragmentation where 'the parts undermine the whole', whereas postmodern compositions 'keep both sides in play. They enjoy the means and effects of fragmentation but cling to the whole' (*ibid.*, p. 142). Metzger suggests that postmodernism is limited because the idea of unity and 'whole' contradict postmodern theories of fragmentation and 'difference'. However, this could also be viewed as an example of postmodernism's contradictory nature. In addition, in his defence of modernism, Metzger sets up a monolithic view of postmodernism equivalent to the restricted view of modernism so prevalent in postmodern discourse.

<sup>39</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44.

is not so much positive re-evaluation as apathetic withdrawal from confrontation). However, the reason for this shift from antagonistic to conciliatory attitude towards fragmentation is, in part, attributed to the homogenising forces of capitalism that contain the fragmented experience within an omnipotent system of global commerce. Bertens argues strongly for such totalising powers not to be underestimated, noting a certain bias in other commentaries towards emphasising disjunction rather than cohesion in the postmodern age:

Postmodern theories on the whole tend towards excessive fragmentarisation, even if that fragmentarisation is sometimes placed within a globalising interpretive framework, as for instance by Jameson and Baudrillard. The emphasis is on decentrement and difference, and, more generally, the forces of centrifugality. But that picture is too one-sided. It should be obvious that an indeed impressive fragmentarisation is counteracted by a further homogenisation.<sup>41</sup>

Fragmentation in postmodernism presents many questions, not least to what extent contrasts can be drawn between modern and postmodern fragmentation; how significantly the impact of fragmentation is tempered by the homogenising force of capitalism; and how such fragmentation manifests itself in everyday life. With regard to the latter, a significant emphasis has been placed on the concept of the postmodern schizophrenic experience.

### *Schizophrenia*

Schizophrenia acts as an experiential model of the way in which postmodern fragmentation impacts upon personal perceptions of the social and cultural environment. It is important to emphasise that this notion is detached from the clinical diagnosis of schizophrenia, save for the way in which Lacan's description of the diagnosed schizophrenic experience has informed this analogy. Jameson is one of the earliest commentators to make use of the concept, and the description of the condition which he gives in the article 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' (1985) demonstrates the concept's debt to the linguistic theories expounded by Saussure and later developed by Barthes. Postmodern schizophrenia and fragmentation are bound together by the function of signs, operating no longer as signifiers with a specific

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<sup>41</sup> Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p. 245.

referent, but rather as signs which are given meaning, or the illusion of meaning, by their interrelationship with other, equally abstract signifiers. However, the articulation of such interrelationships is often absent, and so one experiences a sense of dislocation from the language which mediates between an individual and reality.

While this concept can be applied to obvious examples within literary and artistic spheres,<sup>42</sup> Jameson extends the applicability of these ideas to overall lived experience, and it is worth quoting him at length in order to gain a proper appreciation of his theorisation's scope:

it is because language has a past and a future, because the sentence moves in time, that we can have what seems to us a concrete or lived experience of time. But since the schizophrenic does not know language articulation in that way, he or she does not have our experience of temporal continuity either, but is condemned to live a perpetual present with which the various moments of his or her past have little connection and for which there is no conceivable future on the horizon. In other words, schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence.<sup>43</sup>

The bleak attitude of this statement jars with the optimistic rhetoric of acceptance that often accompanies discussions of postmodern fragmentation. Jameson describes the schizophrenic experience in such a way that the fundamentals of language are reduced to mere materiality; the sign becomes pure image, and joins the barrage of depthless information that confronts the contemporary individual.<sup>44</sup> Despite this, Jameson allows for a balance between positive and negative readings of schizophrenia, suggesting that

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<sup>42</sup> For example, in literature, Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*; in the visual arts, Rauschenberg's mixed media compositions; in music, Kagel's catalogues of diverse sounds in his stage and experimental works.

<sup>43</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Foster, *Postmodern Culture*, pp. 111–125 (p. 119).

<sup>44</sup> Baudrillard's ideas of the simulacra and the hyper-real articulate these issues at length. See, for example, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994). Baudrillard's philosophies might also be considered 'at play' in the *Fragments* series (see, for example, Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments: Cool Memories III, 1990–1995*, trans. by Emily Agar (London; New York: Verso, 1997)).



while the breakdown of signification leads to a series of 'unrelated presents', such a sensation can be both disturbing and 'euphoric' in effect.<sup>45</sup>

Harvey adopts Jameson's notion of the schizophrenic experience, and expands on the impact of unrelated presents by considering how such a process affects our consumption of the past: 'eschewing the idea of progress, postmodernism abandons all sense of historical continuity and memory, while simultaneously developing an incredible ability to plunder history and absorb whatever it finds there as some aspect of the present.'<sup>46</sup> This statement obviously holds some significance for techniques of assimilation in the cultural sphere and also raises the issue of innovation in postmodernism, both of which will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

### Otherness

A key characteristic of discussions surrounding postmodernism has been the consideration of the 'other'. Typically used to refer to those groups that have been marginalised or disregarded by traditional, institutionalised, elitist and modernist discourse, postmodern theory has devoted a great deal of energy to promoting theoretical models that specifically cater for the other in terms of gender, sexuality, race and social status (class, wealth and political power).<sup>47</sup> This is perhaps a good point at which to note the arguments of some theorists who suggest that another 'other' is accorded status by postmodern theory. As Bauman puts it, 'the concept of "postmodernity" has a value entirely of its own in so far as it purports to capture and articulate the novel experience of just one, but one crucial social category of

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<sup>45</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 26.

<sup>46</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Sillman argues that the recognition of socio-cultural diversity is the greatest difference between modernism and postmodernism: 'the end of modernism is not the succession of action painting by Pop Art but the end of the myth of a homogeneous audience in a neutral relationship to absolute standards that must be articulated, mediated, and defended by the guardians of seriousness' (Ron Sillman, 'Postmodernism: Sign for a Struggle, The Struggle for the Sign', in James McCorkle (ed.), *Conversant Essays: Contemporary Poets on Poetry* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1990), pp. 79–98 (p. 87)).

contemporary society: the intellectuals'.<sup>48</sup> While it is true that much postmodern discourse takes place amongst precisely the kind of 'intellectuals' Bauman is referring to, to suggest that this discourse does not seek to articulate real social and cultural conditions would be unjust. Indeed, when Evans suggests that the 'historian is effectively reinventing the past every time he or she reads or writes about it',<sup>49</sup> he is articulating a key feature of postmodern discourse; namely, the inherent self-reflexivity of a theory that cannot help but recognise its own internal working in a way that past historical and socio-critical practice has not (for the conditions of society have always been theorised and discussed by an elite who are somewhat distant from 'the common man').

However, there are those who argue that the very fact of fragmentation allows theorists to promote an illusion of inclusivity through discussion of the other while dismissing any genuine *equality* of voice.<sup>50</sup> Commentators such as Harvey argue that

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<sup>48</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 93–94.

<sup>49</sup> Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), p. 199. Evans reaches his conclusion thus:

many aspects of postmodernism can be understood, sociologically speaking, as a way of compensating for this loss of power within the world at large, and within the university as an institution. For it places enormous, indeed total intellectual power in the hands of the academic interpreter, the critic and the historian. If the intentions of the author of a text are irrelevant to the text's meaning—if meaning is placed in the text by the reader, the interpreter—and if the past is a text like any other, then this historian is effectively reinventing the past every time he or she reads or writes about it. The past no longer has the power to confine the researcher within the bounds of facts. Historians and critics are now omnipotent. To underline this, the postmodernists have developed a new level of specialised language and jargon, borrowed largely from literary theory, which has rendered their work opaque to anyone except other postmodernists. The enterprise thus seems not only self-regarding but, ironically in view of its criticism of hierarchy and prioritisation, elitist as well. Its narcissism and elitism can both be seen as compensatory mechanisms for the loss of real power, income and status suffered by its academic practitioners over the past ten to fifteen years (*ibid.*, p. 199–200).

I would suggest that the 'jargon' Evans attacks is as much symptomatic of postmodernism as it is a construct of postmodern theory. Consider, for example, 'management speak'; 'computer code'; the Campaign for Clear English (<[www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk)>): it becomes clear that as contemporary knowledge increases in both range and complexity, all spheres of information become specialised, aided no doubt by communications technology that is able to link experts at a global level, and creating communities who share a common 'jargon'.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 116.

such a process of apparent inclusion actually removes other voices from access to real power by insisting on their exclusivity, and as a result, postmodern theory has been criticised by some of those who identify with minority groups. This critical stance is also taken up by Bertens, who cites black and feminist discourses as examples of arenas where postmodern theory is rejected on the grounds that its anti-Enlightenment stance excludes the possibility of those who were formerly excluded from institutional debate engaging with Enlightenment ideals of truth, justice and beauty. Instead, Bertens argues, marginalised groups should be free to engage with these ideas, rejecting or assimilating them as they see fit, and that for this reason, 'it is too soon' to simply dismiss many modernist ideals.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Eagleton questions the dominance of postmodern themes over modernist ones when he argues that socialism is a driving force behind the acceptance of otherness:

socialism deconstructs the current oppositions between universal reason and culture-bound practices, abstract rights and concrete affiliation, liberalism and communitarianism, Enlightenment nature and postmodern culture. The answer to whether the world is growing more global or more local is surely a resounding yes; but these two dimensions are currently deadlocked, each pushing the other into a monstrous parody of itself, as transnational corporations which know no homeland confront ethnic nationalisms which know nothing else. To redefine the relations between difference and universality is thus more than a theoretical exercise; it may well be the index of any worthwhile political future.<sup>52</sup>

Eagleton identifies the challenges facing any representative voice that seeks to be heard above the din of the corporate machine, but implicit within his statement is also a belief in the need for such voices to engage with both previous ideologies and the current dominance of capitalism in such a way that other voices do not isolate themselves from that which they consider antithetical to their cause; just as capitalism engages otherness by incorporating diversity, novelty and flexibility into its production processes. While the political motivations and objectives in attempting to refute certain aspects of postmodern theory are easily discernible, it is also important to

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<sup>51</sup> Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p. 203.

<sup>52</sup> Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 118.

observe the impact that this debate can have on the cultural sphere. Across the arts, alternative canons have been advocated that represent non-Western developments. In literature particularly, efforts have been made to disseminate 'other' works (for example, commonwealth writers among British readers, or the growing popularity of South American literature across Europe). In music, there is growing recognition that the treatment of non-Western sources should be 'different' (although in a way that is difficult to describe) from the colonial-style primitivisation of sources that can be seen in earlier twentieth-century works. In addition, there are composers and performers who seek to synthesise (rather than appropriate) their own heritage with a Western Classical tradition: Eleanor Alberga's Caribbean inflections, Nitin Sawhney's rhythmic complexity, or Toumani Diabate's collaborations with popular artists, would all be good examples.

## Plurality

Closely connected, although not synonymous with the concept of otherness, is the recognition of plurality in postmodernism. In essence this term refers to the multitude of groups, separate ideas and tastes within postmodern culture. As Alloway observes, 'we speak for convenience about a mass audience but it is a fiction. The audience today is numerically dense but highly diversified.'<sup>53</sup> In its most utopian conception (something which in reality becomes a purely theoretical premise), plurality offers other voices an equality of difference within postmodern discourse; each group or individual is acknowledged as *equally unequal*. The positive aspect of such ideology provides a rhetoric of difference that avoids any attempt at comparative value-judgements, recognising the unique merits of each facet of postmodernism and the strength of such individuality. However, commentators such as Foster have questioned the reality of such equalities, while others, like Eagleton, have suggested that the rhetoric of plurality blinds commentators to evidence of similarity and homogeneity between various groups, further inflating the theoretical emphasis on fragmentation.

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<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Alloway, 'The Long Front of Culture', *Cambridge Opinion* 17 (1959), 24–26 (p. 25).

In the cultural sphere, Samson has argued that the modernist notion of 'progress' is reversed, so that 'today's "modernist", paradoxically a conservative figure, works in one corner of a plural cultural field',<sup>54</sup> and this 'plural cultural field' is also reflected, for Pasler, in the unaltered presentation of quoted materials. Thus, she argues, 'many of those composers now incorporating other people's music tend not to diffuse the power of their sources nor try to subjugate them through distortion or commentary; rather, they seem to accept each source on its own terms, revel in the association with this music, and delight in the coexistence they have tried to create'.<sup>55</sup> While Pasler seems to view this as a positive action, Eagleton contrasts plurality with 'identity', which in his usage connotes sameness and similarity in opposition to a fragmentary plurality. He questions the universally positive position accorded to plurality, suggesting that 'postmodernism tends to be dogmatically monistic about pluralism, which is of course *very often* a good, but by no means always',<sup>56</sup> hinting at Eagleton's belief that postmodern theory fails to engage with political realities.

Once again, in tandem with the issues surrounding fragmentation, the particularism of other and group-oriented voices is offset against the global and totalising effects of capitalism, including the continued reinvention and novelty built into successful systems of commerce. Jameson summarises the symbiotic relationship between diversity and capitalism when he observes that 'pluralism is thus the ideology of groups, a set of phantasmic representations that triangulate three fundamental pseudoconcepts: democracy, the media, and the market'.<sup>57</sup> These commercial aspects of contemporary culture—the economic drivers behind the fulfilment of consumer desire—contribute to both plurality and the perceived challenge to traditional aesthetic values. Indeed, Foster emphasises the means of production and reception (rather than artistic content) in cultural plurality, arguing that:

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<sup>54</sup> Jim Samson, 'Analysis in Context', in Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (eds), *Rethinking Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 35–54 (p. 52).

<sup>55</sup> Jann Pasler, 'Postmodernism, Narrativity, and the Art of Memory', *Contemporary Music Review*, 7: 2 (1993), 3–32 (p. 18).

<sup>56</sup> Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 127.

<sup>57</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 320.

pluralism signifies no art specifically. Rather, it is a situation that grants a kind of equivalence; art of many sorts is made to seem more or less equal—equally (un)important. Art becomes an arena not of dialectical dialogue but of vested interests, of licensed sects: in lieu of culture we have cults. The result is an eccentricity that leads, in art as in politics, to a new conformity: pluralism as an institution.<sup>58</sup>

Of course, this comment mirrors Eagleton's charge of a 'monistic' postmodern pluralism, yet while Foster views broad acceptance as damaging to the strength of a theoretical model that is able to challenge an apathetic belief in capitalist dominance, he also separates postmodernism *per se* from its plural characteristics:

Postmodernism is not pluralism—the quixotic notion that all positions in culture and politics are now open and equal. This apocalyptic belief that anything goes, that the 'end of ideology' is here, is simply the inverse of the fatalistic belief that nothing works, that we live under a 'total system' without hope of redress—the very acquiescence that Ernest Mandel calls the 'ideology of late capitalism'.<sup>59</sup>

For Foster, pluralism strips away not only inequalities, but also the hierarchical structures that might elevate certain cultural events or political statements to a level at which they are able to claim a universality to rival corporate strategies. By removing such possibilities, plurality refuses the existence of utopian thought, and returns plurality to the same questions raised by otherness: namely, how should, or how can, other voices engage with ideas that postmodernism rejects.

In this respect, Hassan's 'catena of postmodern features', set out in an essay dealing with pluralism and criticism, may offer an insight into the way in which the kaleidoscopic *symptoms* of postmodernity need not be regarded as concrete drivers of a new age. While Hassan emphasises that his categories are bound to interrelationships and commonalities within the postmodern, he chooses not to see these themes as definitions, or as a set of characteristics. Rather, Hassan suggests 'twin conclusions: (a) critical pluralism is deeply implicated in the cultural field of postmodernism; and (b) a limited critical pluralism is in some measure a reaction against the radical relativism, the ironic indeterminacies, of the postmodern

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<sup>58</sup> Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1985), p. 15.

<sup>59</sup> Foster, *Recodings*, p. ix.

condition; it is an attempt to contain them'.<sup>60</sup> Once again, the paradoxical nature of the postmodern means that plurality helps to define, and is defined *by*, postmodernity.

### **The High/Low Divide**

Much discussion of postmodernism deals with the supposed crossing of the high/low divide in cultural spheres. This characteristic most specifically deals with the modernist opposition between mass (or popular) culture and elitist (or institutionalised) artworks. However, it is also closely linked with the notion of 'crossover' between formerly distinct groups: for example, in music, between jazz and western art traditions (Swingle Singers, Mark-Anthony Turnage); between folk music or ethnically-specific musics and popular culture (Gogol Bordello, Beirut) and in other arts between traditional techniques and the instantaneity of media image (the poetry of Adrian Henri or the subversive art-as-advertisement of Jenny Holzer). This link is made through the assimilation of techniques and ideas outside a given region of cultural practice, the use of which challenges this divide. As Jameson points out, it is the fact of *incorporation*, rather than quotation (with all its modernist connotations) of references from mass or other cultures that serves to remove older evaluative frameworks that made use of cultural division, since the presence of such references in a context that lacks the violence of the modernist parody makes such comparative assessments meaningless.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 168. Hassan's features, he argues, 'limn a region of postmodern "indeterminacies" (indeterminacy lodged in immanence)'. These features are Indeterminacy; Fragmentation; Decanonisation; Self-less-ness, Depth-less-ness; The Unpresentable, Unrepresentable; Irony; Hybridisation; Carnivalisation (from Bakhtin: the comic, or absurd); Performance, Participation; Constructionism (making fictions for all aspects of life, science, culture, etc.), and Immanence (*ibid.*).

<sup>61</sup> See Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 64. It should be noted in this context that Born identifies two "proto" postmodern tendencies in the 1920s and '30s: the neoclassicism of Stravinsky and Hindemith, and the 'self-conscious appropriation of popular musics' (Debussy, Ives and Satie; then later, Poulenc, Milhaud, Copland, Bartók, Kodály, Stravinsky, and Vaughan Williams). However, her comment that 'popular musics were treated by these composers as an "other" to be drawn into their compositional practice or to be played in "other", less serious contexts', does support an argument for later, postmodern works, that depend less upon such value-laden comparisons (Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley, LA; London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 49).

There have, however, been challenges to this observation on a number of grounds. Firstly, critics argue that high culture is still recognisably such, but that this elevated status can now be identified within all genres and cultural sectors. This being the case, they reject the idea that the elitism of the modernist era is effectively challenged. In addition, many commentators point to the institutional focus that had formerly placed an emphasis on western art music, suggesting it is the hierarchy *between* genres that has received the greatest transformation, rather than the hierarchy within. For example, although popular music discourse has become a subject in its own right within musicology, Hadlam points out that influential popular music theorist, Andrew Goodwin 'even goes so far as to distinguish between "pop music" and "rock music" by defining pop as manufactured product by a faceless conglomerate and rock as an authentic and original creation from a defined author/performer'.<sup>62</sup> The opposition to mass consumption that is articulated so strongly by Adorno is, in fact, manifested in altered forms within a supposedly plural postmodernism.

As Jameson observes, modernism and elitism should not be set up as targets of a postmodern and populist opposition, since where one (postmodernism) is a dominant feature of its age, the other (modernism) was far from, and never aspired to be, comparably universal. Jameson perceives the denouncement of elitism as a means of facilitating a receptive climate for new modes of production which focused on populism, arguing that 'the great work of modern high culture [...] cannot serve as a fixed point or eternal standard against which to measure the "degraded" status of mass culture'.<sup>63</sup> In later work, Jameson observes that 'the status of art (and also of culture) has had to be irrevocably modified in order to secure the new productivities',<sup>64</sup> highlighting the extent to which it is the changing nature of

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<sup>62</sup> Dave Headlam, 'Does the Song Remain the Same? Questions of Authorship and Identification in the Music of Led Zeppelin', in Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (eds), *Concert Music, Rock and Jazz since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1995), pp. 313–364 (p. 321).

<sup>63</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979), 130–148 (p. 133).

<sup>64</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 318.



production that, to Jameson, dictates altered cultural perspectives. Thus, the challenge to the high/low divide is more a construction of the corporate world than the academic one; the barrier of elitism is broken down for the sake of expanding the consumer base. The broadening of academic scope merely indicates a more inclusive field of reference as opposed to a change in the value judgements made within these areas. Some also argue (Bertens is one example) that many theorists, particularly those whose work has a basis in modernist discourse, have inherited a dislike of mass culture that predisposes them to negative emphasis on such challenges to the divide, perhaps leading to exaggerated claims regarding the breakdown of traditional divisions.

The perceived breakdown of the high/low divide is often associated with a popularisation of 'high' art. However, the origins of this concept are much more concerned with the mutual assimilation of ideas and blurring of distinctions between genres (Jameson points to the architectural practice of echoing existing parts of local cultural and social fabric in new buildings) than with the direct appeal of any particular area to the mass market. For this reason, some commentators avoid the populist perspective in describing this phenomenon, fearing that the incorporation of aspects of popular culture will be mistaken for *popularity* (here Jameson uses the example of folk music as a genre that incorporates traditional and local elements while not being subjected to the branding and mass-marketing that would be associated with 'popular' music).<sup>65</sup> While the pluralism of the market guarantees (to an extent) that certain products will become popular within certain demographics, the popular perspective is problematic in that there will always be groups who contest any claims of dominance over the tastes of a 'public' of which they consider themselves to be a part. These concerns account for the adoption of 'plurality' by many theorists to refer not only to

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<sup>65</sup> However, it should be noted that, had Jameson been writing from a current British perspective, it would not be true to say that folk is not branded and mass-marketed in the same way as 'popular' music. Indeed, events such as the BBC folk awards; the success of artists such as Jim Moray, Kate Rusby, or Cara Dillon, and the popularity of festivals such as Larmer Tree or Wychwood, points to a mainstream, profitable 'face' of folk that serves what Jameson might describe as a populist simulacra. In the UK at least, the D.I.Y Punk movement might be a more fitting demonstration of Jameson's argument.

the pluralism described above, but also to indicate the current flexibility of traditionally rigid boundaries between different aspects of the cultural sphere.

## **Narrative**

Narrative has become one of the central preoccupations of postmodern theory, prompted in the first instance by the ideas that Lyotard set out in *The Postmodern Condition*. Lyotard's research addressed the way in which knowledge was conveyed and understood in the postmodern age. Crucially, Lyotard argues that whereas modernism was based upon Enlightenment ideals that were universal and totalising in nature, postmodernity demonstrated an 'incredulity towards metanarratives',<sup>66</sup> replaced instead by the '*petit récit*',<sup>67</sup> or little narrative, and which acted as a local and specific form of 'storytelling'. Butler questions Lyotard's dismissal of metanarrative, arguing that such narratives traditionally served as a form of legitimation and authentication for cultural practice. However, Lyotard introduces the notion of 'language games', a set of rules associated with any given discourse which are flexible and dependent on the presence or influence of those who are able to explain and justify such rules. Hence, language games become a form of little narrative, created specifically to serve local and specific purposes; to give legitimation to a concept or idea. Lyotard stresses the difference between empirically-based concepts of narrative and those which are drawn from the metaphysical realm, advocating the former as a more rigorous vehicle for discourse:

it excludes in principle adherence to a metaphysical discourse; it requires the renunciation of fables; it demands clear minds and cold wills; it replaces the definition of essences with the calculation of interactions; it makes the "players" [of the language game] assume responsibility not only for the statement they propose, but also for the rules to which they submit those statements in order to render them acceptable.<sup>68</sup>

Lyotard is careful to point out that it is impossible to attain universally valid rules for any language game, and that such games, by definition, remain both local and

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<sup>66</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

transitory. In addition, Lyotard dismisses the notion that unity or consensus should be the goal of any postmodern narrative, preferring to seek a way of maintaining the basic values of the metanarrative while not demanding consensus upon which such values might be based.

Narrative holds a central position in the postmodern debate because of its implications for the actual process of theorisation and because of the manner in which it relates in some way to all of the characteristics discussed above. The dismissal of metanarrative seems at once to contradict the assertion that postmodernism is an all-encompassing and total phenomenon and to confirm the observations of characteristics that have been outlined. Many critics have considered the implications for the narrative structure of theoretical discourse in light of Lyotard's critique. Yet his evocation of language games and little narratives seems to contribute to a different approach that does not wholly negate the validity of narrative processes. A process of the specific rather than the global seems to be supported by postmodernism's key themes: with regards to fragmentation, the absence of metanarrative chimes with the centrifugal sensations brought about by schizophrenic symptoms; otherness and plurality are given strength through the validity of the *petit récit* and local storytelling; challenges to the high/low divide are articulated through the language games that seek to give legitimation to new modes of thought. In drawing his conclusions, Jameson advocates Lyotard's approach, calling for local and specific alternatives to totalising master narratives, and in doing so, sets up a paradigm of postmodernism that allows for the stories of marginalised groups to be told.

Russell has written about the social implication of this altered perspective of narrative, noting that while 'we are enveloped by the discourse that surrounds us and that we use', through our 'participation within language, we potentially become critics and shapers of discourse'.<sup>69</sup> He contrasts this self-reflexive construction of narrative with its modernist precursor—a process he describes as an attempt at 'transcendence of the social milieu'—instead formulating postmodern narrative construction as 'active

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Russell, 'The Context of the Concept', in Harry R. Garvin (ed.), *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism* (London; Cranbury, NY: Associated University Presses, 1980), pp. 181–193 (p. 192).

participation in its being and potential transformation.<sup>70</sup> Rather than interpreting this lack of universality like Eagleton (who attributes the political impotence of postmodern culture to it), Russell argues that the 'implied activism of postmodern art [...] offers itself as a process of *working*—a dynamic of speaker and context struggling to situate themselves in a historical continuity.'<sup>71</sup> While modernist ideology typically strove for universal ideological truths ('the artist's visionary role as a creator of new languages or as seer of our potential futures'), Russell argues that postmodern culture articulates 'an appeal to collective self-consciousness within language and within the web of discourses that each single language invokes'.<sup>72</sup> This 'web' (easily quantifiable with Lyotard's language games and *petit recits*) becomes the altered perspective of postmodernity that recognises the situatedness of each discourse—each narrative, each cultural experience—within the context of the receiver's own specific knowledge. Russell argues that this 'dialectics of speaker and language, of text and context, of personal belief and social ideology, will shape the aesthetic experience', and that through the process of this narrative construction, audiences are 'challenged by an art of shifting perspective, of double self-consciousness, of local and extended meaning'.<sup>73</sup>

Despite such positive interpretations of Lyotard's thesis, criticism has been levelled on a number of points; discussion of which has contributed to some of the most strongly debated areas of postmodern theory. Eagleton is perhaps one of the harshest critics of Lyotard's assumptions, and questions his use of the term metanarrative, suggesting that it has become too easily (and wrongly) equated with totalitarianism. Eagleton argues that there *are* some universal truths, such as life and death, that affect everyone, and that such truths have an impact on people's activities, interests and cultures. He challenges Lyotard's declaration that the validity of metanarrative is past, arguing that an alternative interpretation could view the postmodern era as not merely a collection of local, small narratives, but instead, as a 'plurality of

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<sup>70</sup> Russell, 'The Context of the Concept', p. 192.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

metanarratives'.<sup>74</sup> This argument stems from a fault Eagleton identifies as pervasive in postmodern theory: that of presuming a single interpretation of the questions which the era raises. 'Either there is one of them, or none at all', Eagleton exclaims; 'this all-or-nothingism ill befits a supposedly non-binary theory'.<sup>75</sup> This statement, of course, suits the postmodern characteristic of plurality, yet somehow fails to acknowledge the nuance in Lyotard's argument that highlights the contrast between the concrete nature of metanarrative, based more often on belief than empiricism, and the flexibility that Lyotard seeks to instil in a version of narrative that recognises the fluidity of its legitimation.

#### 1.4 Telling stories

Each of these plateaus indicates the way in which the question of narrative pervades the entire discussion of postmodernism. While fragmentation, plurality, otherness, and challenges to elitist institutionalism are accepted as symptomatic of postmodernism and their merits debated, when commentators turn to the issue of narrative, the arguments centre on *how* narrative can be used in a postmodern age, and precisely what that narrative can be expected to contain. Bauman argues that this problematisation of narrative is symptomatic: 'incoherence is the most distinctive among the attributes of postmodernity (arguably its defining feature) [...] all narratives will be to a varying extent flawed',<sup>76</sup> and some critics have pointed out, in an extension

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<sup>74</sup> Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 110.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* Butler is perhaps an example of those Eagleton accuses of confusing metanarrative with totalitarianism, since he questions Lyotard's arguments not on the grounds that local narrative is insufficient, but in asking whether such a view of narrative can be considered applicable anywhere other than in the Western world. Butler argues that while grand narratives may be fought against, it is only in the West that they could be considered absent (since he regards many political regimes to be totalitarian in nature and therefore still operating under grand narratives). This view, however, fails to recognise that such narratives are often challenged externally (i.e. by the West), and so to consider them somehow universal is fallacious, save in a local sense, which returns his observations either to Lyotard's realm of local storytelling, or as support for Eagleton's plurality of metanarratives; though one would presume that Butler's equation of totalitarianism with metanarrative would make the latter alternative an uneasy alliance.

<sup>76</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. xxiv.

of Eagleton's argument, that any common belief in the end of metanarrative becomes an orthodoxy of its own, giving rise, in effect, to a metanarrative that proclaims its own non-existence.<sup>77</sup>

This paradoxical state is perhaps the real truth of postmodernism; a condition in which every aspect of its existence carries some inherent negation. The problem, then, is how to conceive of a theoretical model that can assimilate the fragmentary and diverse characteristics of difference and specificity against the homogenising forces of capitalism and certain theorists' belief in the totalising nature of postmodernity. How can the kaleidoscopic variations and nuances of modern life be brought together to tell the story of an era which thrives on a lack of coherence? Perhaps the 'rules' Lyotard presents alongside his language games tell us that they cannot. Indeed, Alper argues that the 'subjective', contingent nature of such theoretical premises has led to 'an apparent aversion to assign a fixed definition to the term "postmodern"'.<sup>78</sup> Alper argues that such subjectivity has fragmented the role of criticism itself, producing 'multiple readings of single works of art'. Instead, Alper proposes an alternative approach 'that uses a more objective lens [...] by exploring the characteristics common to many works informed by the postmodern aesthetic, new light can be shed on the aesthetic itself'.<sup>79</sup> Eagleton's plurality of universal truths seems to sit more easily within a postmodernism whose nature is beginning to emerge as something just beyond tangibility; a collection of observations that give empirical weight to ideas that sit just beyond the possibility of becoming easily quantifiable. Approaches such as

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<sup>77</sup> It has been suggested that one of the reasons for this orthodoxy might be the pre-emptive nature of much postmodern discourse. Anderson has observed that while modernism was 'a *post facto* category, unifying after the event a wide variety of experimental forms and movements', postmodernism developed as 'an *ex ante* notion, a conception germinated in advance of the artistic practices it came to depict' (Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 93). As a result, there is often a sense that commentary on cultural production in the postmodern age is being made to fit a predetermined theoretical structure.

<sup>78</sup> Garth Alper, 'Making sense out of postmodern music?', *Popular Music and Society* 24: 4 (22 December 2000), 1–14 (p. 1).

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* Alper's proposal is specifically directed towards an exploration of postmodern music, and he also suggests that through an understanding of the characteristics that bind these musics together, the 'approach may also broaden the base of listeners for this music and act as a gate through which they may approach some of the other writings on the subject' (*ibid.*).

Alper's, which echo the rhizomatic ideas outlined in the introduction, may offer an opportunity to understand these ideas through the cultural responses that are symptomatic of the age.

These questions will, for the time being, remain unresolved, as this survey turns to the transitions and alterations in the social and political fabric of the twentieth century that theorists consider to be causal links between the 'death' of modernism and the emergence of the postmodern age. By exploring these developments, trends may emerge that correlate with some of the characteristics described above, thus counteracting their theoretical ephemerality with empirical substance.

## Chapter Two

### Transitions to Postmodernism

Theories of the postmodern are often seen as attempts to explain a series of changes that have occurred since the Second World War, ranging across such diverse areas of study as economics, geography, culture and sociology. Jameson describes 'the gradual setting in place of Postmodernity over several decades' as 'an epochal event in its own right',<sup>1</sup> and it is common to interpret these socio-economic changes as a transitional period marking a departure from modernity; the implication of progress at this time going some way to explain the sense of 'going beyond' that is inherent in the choice of postmodernism as a label to characterise this subsequent phase. Jameson suggests that the term has 'crystallised a host of hitherto independent developments which, thus named, prove to have contained the thing itself in embryo and now step forward richly to document its multiple genealogies',<sup>2</sup> and in doing so, sets a precedent for the often totalising, all-encompassing nature of postmodern commentaries.

#### 2.1 Transitional perspectives

In documenting such developments, postmodernism is often seen as the characterisation of an impetus to combat a modernist malaise, and as Jameson explains, 'postmodernism holds a promise of combating whatever you, the individual, found negative about the modern/modernism'.<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps not surprising then, that such dichotomies are employed as the most prominent tool in the excavation of a gleaming postmodernism from the modernist rubble many disillusioned commentators perceive. However, even the brief characterisation of postmodernism in the preceding pages has demonstrated its plural nature, and so, despite the dominance of

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, "'End of Art" or "End of History"?", in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on Postmodernism, 1983–1998* (London; New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 73–92 (p. 84).

<sup>2</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. xiv.



oppositional rhetoric, Jameson is able to identify several versions of the reaction to modernism, which he characterises as follows:

- *Antimodern/propostmodern*. Jameson considers this approach to be strongly linked to poststructuralism, and cites Ihab Hassan as its main proponent.<sup>4</sup>
- *Promodern/antipostmodern*. Jameson characterises this as a sceptical view of postmodernism that describes a 'politically reactive function' attempting to discredit modernism. Jameson identifies Habermas as a supporter of this perspective, due to his adherence to the 'supreme value of the modern'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in musicology, Metzger argues that his study 'draws a stylistic map of the last thirty years, one that sketches the broad boundaries of modernism and sees no space for the contested border of postmodernism'.<sup>6</sup>
- *Promodern/propostmodern*. Grounded in Lyotard's description of the postmodern as a stage within a cyclical modernism, this variant assumes an assimilation of high-modernist principles by postmodernism, which therefore constitutes a continuation of modernism's innovation and development. Racevskis also interprets the postmodern as a self-conscious 'strain within modernity, as a critical counterpoint to modernity's self-referential assertiveness',<sup>7</sup> due to the fact that postmodernity's critical roots germinated from modernist values.
- *Antimodern/antipostmodern*. This is the perspective for which Jameson is least able to cite representatives, and Tarufi is his sole example. However, Jameson explains that this perspective opposes modernism because its destructive, anticapitalist stance paves the way for 'the "total" bureaucratic organisation and

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<sup>4</sup> See Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn*. This taxonomical category should not be confused with Kramer's formulation of a cultural postmodern/antimodern opposition. For Kramer, an antimodern attitude demonstrates nostalgia for past styles, whereas a postmodern cultural response embraces the past in order to alter and redefine it. (See Jonathan D. Kramer, 'The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism', in Lochhead and Auner, *Postmodern Music, Postmodern Thought*, pp. 13–27 (p. 13)).

<sup>5</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Metzger, *Musical Modernism*, p. 238.

<sup>7</sup> Racevskis, *Postmodernism and the Search for Enlightenment*, p. 67.

control of late capitalism' in postmodernism. Such a view seems to elicit little sympathy from Jameson, who describes this final perspective as the 'bleakest of all and most implacably negative'.<sup>8</sup>

Jameson aligns these four categories to two distinct approaches, suggesting that the latter two challenge the existence of a historical break and the usefulness of the term postmodernism, whereas the initial two categories do not. However, with the exception of the final category, all contain the potential to challenge the character and definition of postmodernism. Of these, the promodern/antipostmodern perspective encompasses those who take the view either that modernity never ended (Habermas) or that postmodernism failed to break away or destroy the tenets of modernism and has consequently expired as quickly as it began (Butler). The weakness of this perspective is its inability to satisfactorily account for those circumstances and events that it cannot reconcile with a modernist aesthetic or worldview. However, it is the third perspective that proves the most malleable in an ongoing exploration of postmodernism. The fluidity of a perspective based upon an interdependent and cyclical relationship with modernism presents the potential to champion both modernism and postmodernism as dominant forces and to explore the realms beyond this cyclical conception while resting on the stability of existing theory. It is therefore this open-ended and exploratory feature of Lyotard's perspective that will serve as the basis of an investigation into transitions to the postmodern. Rather than assigning certain developments to either an assault on the modern or a propulsion into the postmodern, the interdependency and dual nature of this transitional phase will be emphasised.

Jameson is not alone in identifying different approaches to postmodern discourse. Habermas also categorises three attitudes: the 'young conservatives' (antimodernists); 'old conservatives' (premodern traditionalists who failed to engage with modernism at all); and the 'neo-conservatives'. This latter category can be most closely equated with Jameson's description of a propostmodern attitude; an attitude which Habermas, from his promodern/antipostmodern orientation, describes as a negative state. What

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<sup>8</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 61.

Jameson and Lyotard describe as the nascent potential of modernism in the trappings of postmodernism is interpreted by Habermas as a transition which renders both impotent. For him, the depthlessness, pluralities and fragmentations of the postmodern condition thwart the Enlightenment principles of unity and progress that drove modernity. Hence, despite the debt to modernity Habermas acknowledges in the postmodern, he also ultimately envisages postmodernism's failure. Such an interpretation highlights the strength of an approach which utilises postmodernism primarily as a condition relating to perspective, since as Habermas demonstrates, events can be interpreted in very different ways even if the empirical data is agreed.

For those commentators who can be broadly classified as propostmodern, the transitions that occurred in the post-war years were seen as an antidote to the tensions and dead-ends of modernism. Jameson, for example, talks of the 'relief of the postmodern';<sup>9</sup> considering the role that production played not only in economic recovery, but also in the reification of the cultural commodity. Jameson often refers to figures such as Duchamp, Roussel, Stein, Stravinsky and Joyce as revolutionaries within modernism, challenging modernist aesthetics under the auspices of innovation (that then thrusts them into a 'canonical' lineage), consequently bridging a space from the negation of modernism to postmodernism. Such assertions can be taken either at their linear face-value, or as a further interpretation of Lyotard's postmodern act that forces modernism's rebirth. Similarly, despite an emphatically antipostmodern stance, Butler identifies a compromise between modernism and postmodernism. There are, he argues, artists who 'have learned something from postmodernism without being devoted followers of it', and he continues to postulate that 'much of the significant artistic activity of the period since 1945 [...] managed a compromise between modernist and postmodernist ideas'.<sup>10</sup> Butler, then, places postmodernism firmly into the cultural sphere; limiting its scope to an aesthetic concern.

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<sup>9</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 313.

<sup>10</sup> Butler, *A Very Short Introduction to Postmodernism*, p. 125. Despite his documentation of similar transitional events in other spheres, Butler finally dismisses the idea that postmodern theory may be relevant to broader horizons.

However, postmodern theory proves most useful at the intersection between these two viewpoints; where both 'cultural dominant' and artistic response intersect. As Russell argues, the traditional avant-garde impulse to reform and reinvigorate art and society is replaced by 'an important shift of perspective', whereby the artwork becomes 'self-reflexive', recognising that it is 'already defined by existent discourse that it can lay bare before the artist and viewer'.<sup>11</sup> As Russell explains, 'the postmodern work willfully accepts the complexities of its relationship to culture and its systems of discourse [...] recent art presents us with the fact that the [...] work is unavoidably *connected* to the world'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, to attempt to separate the totalising nature of postmodernity from the cultural developments that are symptomatic of the age is to strip away the potential to *use* culture as a means of formulating ways of explaining the postmodern condition.

What can be discerned from these wranglings over the classification of the commentators themselves? Such a survey serves to demonstrate the significance of the interpretive level in postmodern theorisation. The simple fact that debate begins while attempting to establish the term's validity—as opposed to debating its value—indicates the degree to which any review of perspectives on the postmodern condition will be hampered by the various terms of reference employed. With this in mind, turning to the transitions occurring in all areas of society will not provide a definitive picture of when and how postmodernism evolved. Rather, it will serve to outline the conditions that have led theorists to seek new interpretations culminating in these theories of the postmodern. The following exploration of transitions will focus on the three spheres commonly explored by the major theorists of the postmodern: economic (through developing capitalisation), political (through social context), and cultural. However, the interrelationship between all of these spheres will be evident throughout.

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<sup>11</sup> Russell, 'The Context of the Concept', p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* It should also be noted that Russell does not consider this an apolitical function: 'this does not mean that the work necessarily accepts the nature of its ties to social discourse, but it does suggest that the artwork's first responsibility is to understand the conditions that allow it to exist *as art*' (*ibid.*).

## 2.2 Capitalism and Economic Development

The decades following the second world war are characterised by economic growth following extensive damage in both a practical (rebuilding infrastructure and housing) and psychological sense (growth in commodity sectors as the population's focus returned to everyday life and its associated material goods). The scale of the damage (and hence the demand for labour and materials) and scarcity of goods created a perfect climate in which to foster improving production methods that would focus on speed, efficiency and scale. Fordism is generally considered the epitome of such a drive for enhanced production, and a significant development in post-war economics. Fordism, named after the pioneering production methods of car manufacturer Henry Ford, is characterised by large-scale, mass-producing operations. While factories were not uncommon during and before the war, Ford worked to enhance efficiency to its maximum by allocating each worker a specific task (which could be repeatedly carried out more swiftly than the same worker completing a series of tasks) and increasing the volume of production runs to generate economies of scale. These developments in production were coupled with propaganda and advertising which encouraged consumers to participate in material consumption in order to generate economic prosperity for their nation, and, as Harvey notes, 'postwar Fordism has to be seen, therefore, less as a mere system of mass production and more as a total way of life'.<sup>13</sup> Such production methods spread internationally, fuelled by the desperate need for affordable and rapid provision of a whole range of products, thus providing a platform for the globalisation of commerce that was to follow in the sixties and seventies.

Once the initial demand for basic goods in vast quantities had been met, businesses had to adapt their production strategies to remain viable in the face of lessening demand for durable commodities. Such requirements led manufacturers to develop goods that contained an element of variety (and often inbuilt obsolescence), thereby emphasising *desirability* over necessity; and to rely increasingly on advertising to

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<sup>13</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p.135.

promote their goods.<sup>14</sup> Recessions during the sixties and seventies were in part caused by a surplus of productivity, and Harvey describes the emerging variation in production as 'flexible accumulation' that acted as 'direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism'.<sup>15</sup> However, he is also quick to emphasise that adaptable production methods that allow variety challenge only the 'rigidities', not Fordism itself. While the Fordist method had to be adapted, the underlying emphasis on efficiency and economy of scale remained, and Harvey cautions against the assumption that flexibility was a significant change, 'blinding us to how strongly implanted Fordist production systems still are'.<sup>16</sup>

While even today, Fordist principles can be seen operating in production processes worldwide, Harvey's statement obscures the significance of flexible accumulation at the boundaries of the economic sphere: those points where changing production methods altered the interrelationships between economy, society and culture. The attainability of high-fashion, for example, has gradually moved from elite society to the high street; a transition that was driven by manufacturers seeking to broaden the range of products they could sell to a larger public. Such a change, while facilitated by economic considerations, has a more tangible impact at a social level, and Harvey equates these rapid responses to trends, fashions and new technologies with 'the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodern aesthetic'.<sup>17</sup> This integration of the aesthetic object into the sphere of commercial production is also considered significant by Jameson, who believes that pressure for novelty and 'trendsetting' in aesthetic products has resulted in 'an increasingly essential structural

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<sup>14</sup> It is this development in mass production and marketing that prompts Horkheimer and Adorno to observe that 'the triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them' (Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1973; f.p. 1944), pp. 120–167 (p. 167)).

<sup>15</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 156.

function [for] aesthetic innovation and experimentation'.<sup>18</sup> Such comments suggest the subsumption of aesthetic considerations to economic drivers, and point to a consolidation between the spheres of economy and culture. Thus, Jameson's summation that *logically* culture is dictated by the forces of late capitalism seems to reflect tangible alterations in the relationship between the cultural and economic spheres.

In fact, Jameson considers postmodernism (and the features of capitalism that contribute to its definition) as a totality that cannot be avoided. To those who would assert that it is possible to somehow escape the late capitalist logic he assigns a 'radical' tag, suggesting that while they themselves consider their view to be a liberal one, it is in reality a fear of the total system; an 'anxiety of utopia' from which they wish to flee.<sup>19</sup> While one might initially think to challenge these remarks with reference to artists and writers who attack and challenge the domination of the capitalist system, one can imagine that Jameson would counter such suggestions by pointing out that such art and action becomes meaningful *only* if such a system is so total as to be universally recognised as the object of antagonism. Such work, displayed in galleries or reported by media; reproduced and photographed by the spoils of manufacture; often funded by the profits of multinational corporations, is ultimately facilitated and made real and tangible to its audience by processes that are tightly bound to the capitalist system.

Jameson departs from his measured tone to personally emphasise this most central premise of his argument when he writes, 'it seems to me very important to persuade ourselves [...] that we are *inside* the culture of the market and that the inner dynamic of the culture of consumption is an infernal machine from which one does not escape by the taking of thought'.<sup>20</sup> Jameson's inclusive language, the placement of his own self within a sentence that emphasises the totality and the generality of the postmodern

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<sup>18</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 206.

condition re-emphasises a crucial point within a thesis whose language otherwise remains traditionally abstracted. Such a rhetorical device prompts a consideration of the impossibility (and the paradoxicality) of the etic position traditionally assumed by academic commentary. Jameson's assertion that postmodernism is a totality which can only be perceived from *within* acknowledges that observations of postmodern phenomena must be culturally specific.<sup>21</sup>

This particular characteristic of postmodernity explains Harvey's comments on the commercialisation and institutionalisation of modernism within the postmodern condition. Harvey considers the 'commercialisation and domestication of modernism', and asks if postmodernism is merely, 'a reduction of [modernism's] already tarnished aspirations to a *laissez-faire*, "anything goes" market eclecticism? [...] And do we attach its rise to some radical restructuring of capitalism, the emergence of some "postindustrial society", view it, even [...] as the "cultural logic of late capitalism"?'<sup>22</sup> Harvey refers not only to a demise of modernist principles, but modernism's subsumption (or, more specifically the *recognition* of its subsumption) to the more powerful and total advance of postmodern phenomenon. Modernism becomes 'domesticated' not simply because of its failure (since true failure would suggest oblivion), but because modernism could never claim to have been all-encompassing in the way that the capitalist system has revealed itself to be.

It is interesting to note that in 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', Jameson considers the possibility that the dominant nature of the capitalist system can be fought—an idea that has all but vanished in his thesis six years later. Can it be inferred that detailed and prolonged probing into the question of postmodernism convinced Jameson that it could not? Jameson closes the 1985 article with the following remarks: 'we have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces—reinforces—the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether

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<sup>21</sup> It is perhaps not insignificant that such statements should evoke interpretations that utilise terms borrowed from ethnography; indeed, the fact that these associations occur leads back to the emphasis postmodern theory places on the voice of the other.

<sup>22</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 42.



there is also a way in which it resists that logic. But that is a question we must leave open.<sup>23</sup> This article, which dwells primarily on the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, and the schizophrenic nature of the postmodern experience, outlines many of the ideas he explores in greater detail in the later thesis, suggesting that much of his argument was fully formed by the date of this earlier work. What are not present, however, are the totalising overtones that weave through his later work. Since the dominant forces of late-capitalism have long been in place by the 1980s, one can only presume that it is either prolonged thought or more recent cultural and social observations that lead Jameson to dismiss the potential of 'resistant art'. The fact that the period during which these ideas change within Jameson's work corresponds to a time when other commentators identify a demise or restriction of postmodernism may be significant, and, since the multinational nature of capitalism is firmly established, it is the social and cultural spheres that are likely to reveal the reasons for these changing attitudes.

### **2.3 The social sphere and political context**

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the social sphere has been increasingly characterised by consumption patterns that emerged as leisure time increased and goods became more affordable and plentiful. Jameson considers this developing trend of conspicuous and regular consumption as a social change which impacts upon cultural and aesthetic values, further reinforcing the idea that the economic sphere has bled into the cultural one. Bauman, too, argues that the social and cultural spheres should be considered interdependent, interpreting cultural phenomena as 'surface symptoms of a much deeper transformation of the social world'.<sup>24</sup> This transformation, for Bauman, hinges on the changes taking place in 'systemic reproduction, social

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<sup>23</sup> Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 125. Jameson takes the idea of three stages of capitalism from Mandel: market capitalism, monopoly/imperialist capitalism, and postindustrial capitalism (which Jameson prefers to refer to as 'multinational'). This latter stage he describes as 'the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capitalism into hitherto uncommodified areas' (Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review* 146 (July/August 1984), 53–92 (p. 78)).

<sup>24</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 64.

integration and the structure of the life-world, as well as in the novel way in which these three spheres are linked and coordinated'.<sup>25</sup> Such 'integration' draws in the socio-political sphere, to create a space that Jameson identifies as the flexible social structure described by the postmodern condition.

The tangible, observable phenomena of these new social patterns, brought about by changing modes of production and consumption, confirm to Jameson that 'what we have been calling postmodern [...] space is not merely a cultural ideology or fantasy, but has genuine historical (and socio-economic) reality as a third great original expansion of capitalism around the globe'.<sup>26</sup> The changes that Jameson refers to centre on commerce: buying, selling, advertising, consuming and disposing of goods. It is the latter three actions that particularly interest Jameson, as he identifies the postmodern age with a late stage of capitalism that has managed to completely obscure the processes behind the creation of a product and through the act of advertising, to elevate desire-for-objects above necessity-for-objects as the primary purchasing instinct. This feature distinguishes the postmodern space, as does availability of products (and marketing) to the wider population. Advertising has developed hand-in-hand with the increased output of the products that it seeks to sell, and so devices have been employed which train the consumer in the appreciation of both novelty and instantaneity.

The drive for constant reinvention is clearly beneficial to the businesses that seek to sell products; but for consumers, desire for innovation also has to be coupled with a willingness to dispose of that which is being superseded. Advertising here has an obvious role to play, associating various goods with social aspiration and domestic bliss, but Harvey also identifies the increased emphasis on 'throwaway society': a new social structure where lifestyle choices are often more transient than in previous decades.<sup>27</sup> This more flexible (and less stable) lifestyle echoes Jameson's description of

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<sup>25</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 286.

a modern life which is more fragmented, dependent upon moment-to-moment experiences. Harvey sees this change in lifestyle as a symptom of the most recent time-space compression he identifies, and compares it to similar, though less intense, changes that took place at the end of the nineteenth century as modernity flourished. This approach serves to emphasise continuity and similarity as well as change, and strengthens the sense of radical consequences rooted in something constant; a constant that Jameson might argue was the steady development of capitalism.

Parallel to this emphasis on novelty and disposability, Harvey also considers the growing demand for instantaneity (using the example of fast food) in support of his argument for time-space compression. The drive for more speed and efficiency can be depicted as a codependent development in the economic and social spheres: as manufacturing improves speed and efficiency, the consumer delights in the availability and ease of access afforded them. In some instances (such as fast food), these developments save the consumer time, which then becomes time to be filled with other activities. As a result, the pace of the consumer's lifestyle increases, thereby generating demand for further advances in technology which provide yet further time-saving devices. This, for Harvey, perfectly demonstrates the compression of time he outlines, while the demand for efficiency and speed accelerates the compression of space (to save time). Increased efficiency, however, is driven not simply by the desire for more time, but more specifically, by the desire for more *leisure* time. Those activities which are perceived as work, or requirements of work (household maintenance and cleaning, office tasks, functional cooking, commuting, personal presentation) are areas where time might be saved to spend on enjoyable activities (sport, the arts, holidays, relaxation), and so this prompts the growth of the heritage, leisure and entertainment industries, thus drawing the cultural sphere into the orbit of capitalist logic. Such changes lead to growth in the industries that vie for consumers' attention on behalf of manufacturers and service providers, as globalisation opens up a wealth of choice to a previously restricted marketplace. As these changes begin to shape daily life, the face of culture is also altered.

## 2.4 Commodification of the cultural sphere

Both Jameson and Harvey highlight the role that the cultural sphere has played in the development of capitalism. As a growth-orientated force, capitalism cannot afford to reach a saturation point with durable commodities without having other commodity avenues to explore.<sup>28</sup> As a result, Jameson asserts that "Culture" has become a product in its own right,<sup>29</sup> and that this has affected not only the character of the cultural commodity, but the nature of culture itself. There is a tendency, despite the incorporation of culture into the capitalist rhetoric, to retain a distinction between 'high art' commodities, and cultural artefacts imbued with a more trifling, transient gloss. Therefore, when Jameson considers that 'the word *new* doesn't seem to have the same resonance for us any longer; the world itself is no longer new or pristine',<sup>30</sup> culturally he is referring, for example, to the infinite variations in the pop charts, which facilitate constant reinvention while maintaining a familiar and recognisable product.

By contrast, when Harvey notes that investment in culture during periods of unstable market activity contributed to its commodification,<sup>31</sup> he is referring to the rise in the implicit *exchange value* of a unique work with a designated author who can command the critical approval more generally assigned to modernist (and earlier) rhetoric. However, Lyotard observes that aesthetic evaluation has been surpassed by the commercial value accorded a work of art, and that this paves the way for a

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<sup>28</sup> Harvey uses the example of cutlery to explain this point. As a cutlery set is something that most households may only need to purchase once, plastic cutlery is developed and marketed as a disposable, 'convenience' product for occasions such as parties and picnics. One could also argue that the concept of 'best' or 'guest' sets of dinner services, cutlery, and glasses is promoted through high-end advertising, thus encouraging the consumption of luxury goods which are then rarely used, but often given as gifts. Jill Conner argues that art mirrors this shift in patterns of consumption, suggesting that Warhol's 'perfect representation that captured rows of Campbell's soup cans did not signify an object in particular but rather the socio-political development of conspicuous consumption that characterised postwar American society during the 1950s and '60s' (Jill Conner, 'Postmodernism Undone', *Afterimage* 37: 1 (Autumn 2009), 28–29 (p. 29). This article was a review of 'The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (April 21–August 2, 2009)).

<sup>29</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. x.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>31</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 298.

postmodern art which is beyond the reach of critical evaluation. As he explains, 'in the absence of aesthetic criteria, it remains possible and useful to assess the value of works of art according to the profits they yield'.<sup>32</sup> The critical vacuum that postmodern theory has facilitated strengthens and accelerates the commodification of culture that many of Lyotard's contemporaries lament, by acceding evaluation to criteria of capitalist expediency. Frith and Horne seek to formulate a meeting point between these views, arguing that in fact, 'the "death of the author" in high culture means the cult of the author in mass culture, as we all wear signed goods as a mark of exclusivity and stars are made out of the blank bodies that appear in advertisements'.<sup>33</sup> They argue that the mass marketability of goods depends on an inherent contradiction: that individual expression is sought in the products provided by the mass market. Thus, they view postmodern discourse as an attempt to articulate the relationship between dominant forces of capital and the market, and the 'relationship to pleasure'.

A common strand in cultural commentary is the emphasis upon the changing *conditions* of production, which overshadow any perceived changes within the cultural artefacts themselves. While Jameson seeks to establish that postmodernism does not herald a new culture (since he argues that a new culture could only be born out of a new social system; a change which is prohibited by the supremacy of late capitalism), he is also careful to stress the distinction between viewing postmodernism as a description of a certain 'style' which can be adopted or rejected according to taste, and viewing postmodernism as a 'cultural dominant' which can be examined as an historic phenomenon. Jameson advocates the latter, since his formulation of postmodernism as a 'total' phenomenon demands a perspective which places all artistic activity under the banner of the postmodern. Beneath this blanket postmodernism, Jameson consequently also considers the role of modernist artworks, and concludes that their institutionalisation is a significant feature of the postmodern age, and a facet of the cultural sphere that has considerable bearing on production of new artworks. Indeed, Foster notes that this institutionalisation heralded the arrival of postmodernism, as

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<sup>32</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London: Routledge, 1989; f.p. 1987), p. 169.

modernist culture's 'shock value' became almost expected (within the confines of that institutionally validated 'modern art'). He argues that 'this was an early sign that modernism was dead: for how else could it be so *repeated*?'.<sup>34</sup> As modernism becomes reproducible—and significantly, the public's ability to recognise the product 'modernism' is key in allowing this—the dominant nature of the postmodern condition becomes clear.

The emphasis Jameson places on postmodernism's role as cultural dominant has led later commentators to surmise that it is in the realm of culture that postmodern theory is most usefully retained. At the farthest extreme, critics such as Butler argue that postmodern theory has become so limited in its application that it is only in the realm of culture that it can be considered useful:

the enduring achievements of postmodernism are therefore likely to be found not within philosophy or politics, or even in moral thought, but within the artistic culture. The politics of the postmodernist era will probably take care of itself as the conditions under which it became popular change, but what will remain, if some sense of tradition and history also remains, is a sense of postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon, which has left us over the last 30 years of its influence with a canon of major works.<sup>35</sup>

Leaving aside for a moment the implications a postmodern 'canon of major works' holds for recurring postmodern themes such as plurality and local narratives, it is clear that Butler supports postmodern theory most strongly within the context of a stylistic marker and little more.

## 2.5 Transitions to a New Era?

This survey of events surrounding the transition from modernism into the early phases of postmodernism shows changes in everyday life which undoubtedly contributed to the perceived need for a theory of the postmodern. Most significantly, it can be demonstrated that the merging of previously distinct spheres of everyday life had an

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<sup>34</sup> Foster, *Recodings*, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *A Very Short Introduction to Postmodernism*, p. 123.

impact on the development of postmodern theory as a discourse that sought symptomatic evidence of a new postmodern condition.

Jameson argues that an intense codependency between previously distinguishable (if not distinguished) spheres of life penetrates and defines the postmodern condition, changing the way in which such interrelationships are modelled and explained. He advocates tracing a web of 'real conditions' and 'imaginary relations' in order to effectively describe the social space which postmodern culture occupies, concluding that he may 'provisionally define the aesthetic of this new (and hypothetical) cultural form as an aesthetic of cognitive mapping'.<sup>36</sup> This statement emphasises the sense of intangibility and transience that preserves the fluidity of the postmodern concept, and once again brings to mind the image of a kaleidoscope. A collection of distinct and contrasting parts with no fixed order or interrelation; these elements are nonetheless contained within a space of conjecture—a local narrative field. Crude as such analogies are, they perhaps serve best in describing the hugely complex web of phenomena that constitute the postmodern once strict definition becomes counter-intuitive.

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<sup>36</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 51.

## Chapter Three

### Implications for a Postmodern Methodology

There are three aspects of postmodern discourse that have significant bearing on the context of musicological discussion: history, politics and culture. This chapter seeks to outline how those areas of discourse have been altered by postmodern concerns, and to examine the ways in which postmodern theory is engaged as a means of supporting a variety of ideas.

#### 3.1 The end of history?

Much has been made of the impact postmodern theory has had upon traditional concepts of history and the linear historical narrative. Norris, in the provocatively titled *What's Wrong With Postmodernism?*, points out that Lyotard's formulation of the postmodern discredits the notion of history through its emphasis on fragmentation. Postmodern 'historical' data, Norris explains, can:

only be a matter of 'phrases in dispute', piecemeal items of evidential witness which claim no privileged epistemic status (much less any access to the master-code of history), and which thus submit themselves to the nominalist tribunal of isolated facts, dates or events. Any theory that attempts to do more—to situate those facts within some larger, more ambitious explanatory paradigm—is ignoring the weight of *de facto* evidence that composes the sad chronicle of history to date.<sup>1</sup>

While this passage seems to correlate with the some of the key characteristics identified above (the dominance of plurality, the equally unequal voice, and the end of the grand narrative), it paints a grim picture for the validity of history in the postmodern age. While any 'master code of history' would certainly seem outmoded and narrow, one can again question whether such a refusal of history *per se* actually damages the prospects of the 'other voices' postmodernism appears to champion. For within a theoretical model that seeks to establish a narrative flexibility, sensitive to

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong With Postmodernism?* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 7.



local fluctuation and difference, is it not the 'evidential witness' that supports the *petit recit* which Lyotard advocates? Rather than defying the creation of modern-day chronicles, postmodernity opens up not just the history that will be written, but the history that had already been told. Postmodernity presents not an end to history, but a (re)birth of histories. Indeed, as Evans has argued, those who insist that postmodernity signals the 'end of history [...] are caught in a paradox', where 'the very use of the concept of "postmodern" is contrary to the notion that there are no time-periods in history'.<sup>2</sup> While, as has been argued, the 'post' of postmodern also functions in other ways, it is certainly true that all postmodern discourse touches upon the question of chronology, and thus by extension, legitimates a historical context, even if that context is partial or fragmented.<sup>3</sup>

Jameson has argued that the end of history is indeed contained within the postmodern condition, replaced instead by cliché and stereotype, but that this is due to the altered historical perspective that cultural and social changes mediate. Considering the impact of film upon the general public's sense of historical fact, and the medium's devices for situating a story within a certain period, Jameson concludes that eras are not

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<sup>2</sup> Evans, *In Defence of History*, p. 141.

<sup>3</sup> Cultural commentators have also argued for the 'end of history'. One of the most persistent on this point is Arthur Danto, who argues against postmodernism, since he believes it is merely equivalent to the term 'contemporary' and can be recognised as 'an authentic style which has emerged within the post-historical period [...] generally and defiantly characterised by an indifference to the kind of purity Greenberg saw as the goal of an historical development' (Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 133). Instead, he advocates an 'end of art' that goes hand in hand with an 'end of history', to a time which he describes as 'beyond the pale' (from Hegel). He argues that contemporary art means more than just 'new': 'in my view, moreover, it designates less a period than what happens after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art, and less a style of making art than a style of using styles' (*ibid.*, p. 10). However, it becomes apparent as one reads his various monographs representing these ideas (see, for example, Arthur C. Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1992)), that the characteristics and cultural responses Danto describes have already been firmly attributed elsewhere to 'postmodernity'. The resulting impression of Danto's work is therefore one which recalls Jameson's assertion that while one may imagine that it is possible to be outside or beyond the postmodern, such a position is false, and ultimately contained within postmodernity itself. Furthermore, Danto's work displays little consideration for culture outside the 'Western artistic institution'.

characterised by their reality, but rather by the common perception of them. This hypothesis leads Jameson to:

an even more radical possibility: namely, that period concepts finally correspond to no realities whatsoever, and that whether they are formulated in terms of generational logic, or by the names of reigning monarchs, or according to some other typological and classificatory system, the collective reality of the multitudinous lives encompassed by such terms is unthinkable (or nontotalizable, to use a current expression) and can never be described, characterised, labelled, or conceptualised.<sup>4</sup>

Jameson again reinforces his emphasis on the importance of postmodernism as a response that alters the perspective, not only of its own time, but of all past events that are contemplated from within the totalised condition of postmodernity, a view that is demonstrated by writers such as Borges, who writes that 'every writer *creates* his own precursors [...] work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.'<sup>5</sup> Such statements are exemplars of a self-reflexive form of postmodernism; a dialectical engagement with the postmodern condition.

While Jameson considers the *portrayal* of historical data (the impact of the postmodern perspective on the perspective of history distributed to a mass audience and understood by the receiver), he still perceives a role for historical information, albeit in altered format. Jameson advocates historiography (as an all-welcome, non-canonical reading of history) in contrast to a form of historical knowledge contained within set formats that deal with specific linear accounts (where the synchronicity of distinct lives and actions would not be a feature). He suggests that the historiographical approach encapsulates what is pleasurable about the postmodern perspective, enabling differences and coincidence between divergent historical strands to be explored. Yet there are still commentators who refuse to acknowledge any

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<sup>4</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 282.

<sup>5</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'Kafka and His Precursors', in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin, 1970; f.p. 1962), pp. 234–236 (p. 236).

potential for historical engagement within a postmodern framework, preferring instead to continue to view History<sup>6</sup> as an essentially linear phenomenon.

Eagleton argues that if it is possible to identify chronologically the explosion of 'Histories' then there is still an underlying teleology to postmodern history that invalidates its own premise, arguing that 'if we can *date* an end to History—if postmodernism took off in the 1960s, or the 1970s, or whenever it was that Fordism or autonomous culture or metanarratives supposedly ground to a halt—then we are still to some extent within the framework of that linear tale'.<sup>7</sup> However, Eagleton's hyperbole in regards to choosing a date for the end of history sustains the very argument he hopes to discredit; namely, that his inability to do so proves the worth of a non-linear historiography which would accept each of the cases he cites as a *version* of the explosion of history. Furthermore, the postmodern *petit recit* forces a revision of heretofore linear accounts of the past to acknowledge the arbitrary nature of all other periodisations. In light of these observations, it is perhaps more accurate to observe that 'that linear tale' has only ever been a strand within the framework of the postmodern paradigm.

There is one further facet of postmodern history that needs to be addressed: the role of history as commodity, most usefully theorised by Harvey. Harvey supports Jameson's proposal for a multiplicity of histories, but also turns his attention to the commercialisation of history. Harvey observes that institutions such as museums and libraries, drawn like everything else into capital concerns, capture multiple pasts. Locating the proliferation of such institutions (specifically those accessible to the public) during the modern era, Harvey believes that they became a vehicle for encapsulating identities and historical continuities when 'transformation in spatial and temporal practices implied a loss of identity with place and repeated radical breaks with any sense of historical continuity'.<sup>8</sup> Harvey not only provides an insight into the

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<sup>6</sup> Eagleton capitalises the term to distinguish History as the written canon of events, from history as the mere passage of time.

<sup>7</sup> Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 272.

impetus behind the growth of the heritage sector, but also argues that these transformations (or time-space compressions) led to the *implication* of a loss of history and identity. Such feelings, characterising as they did much of the modern era, continue to echo in the postmodern theories of those who seek to reject history. Characterisations of postmodernism which focus on excessive fragmentation, the demise of history and a significant break between two halves of the century represent not the birth of a new postmodern perspective, but the remainders of modernism's anxiety. Despite their emphasis on difference, the postmodern perspective allows these texts to emphasise continuity throughout the century, with postmodernism constituting not a radical break, but a gradual acceptance of the sensations of depthlessness that so disturb early postmodern commentators.

What postmodernity rejects, in fact, is what Bauman describes as 'the metaphor of progress that informed all competing theories of modern society [...] each momentary state is neither a necessary effect of the preceding state nor the sufficient cause of the next one. The postmodern condition is both *undetermined* and *undetermining*. It "unbinds" time; weakens the constraining impact of the past.'<sup>9</sup> Harvey also identifies this sense of 'unbinding' with the growth of commodity value associated with geographic- and time-distant objects (exemplified by events such as the world expositions and the rise of the Art and Crafts and Art Nouveau movements). This 'commercialisation of history and cultural forms'<sup>10</sup> cements the role of the heritage industry as a marketable leisure-time pursuit.

For those artists who seek a dialectical engagement with postmodernity, the question of 'history', of old and new, becomes less important than a sense of refreshment and reinvigoration. Whittall argues that 'it is an essential part of today's contemporaneity for us not to expect composers to make clear-cut distinctions between what might loosely be termed "old" and "new" forms [...] composers, theorists and historians may well join together in the unanimous declaration that any absolute distinction between

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<sup>9</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, pp. 189–190.

<sup>10</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 62.

old and new is no longer possible, if it ever has been'.<sup>11</sup> Yet Whittall also calls for musicological discourse to recognise how 'our sense of the past should strengthen our sensitivity to what seems special about the present', thus 'encouraging composers to face this challenge [to 'rediscover and reinvigorate ways of enhancing a fundamental concern with the integrated and the synthesized'] in an appropriately contemporary spirit'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, postmodernity presents a further duality: history is ever-present, instantly accessible. Yet our awareness of this fact—of the (historical) uniqueness of this fact—should enhance an awareness of the postmodern condition. However, accompanying the growth of this sense of 'heritage' (and indeed pervading all facets of postmodern rhetoric) is a sense of depthlessness that is often cited as a negative aspect of the postmodern condition.

### 3.2 Postmodern politics

Such a sense of depthlessness contributes in no small part to a declamation of political impotence once metanarrative and universality have been usurped by local stories and fragmentation. Indeed, it is in the arena of political effectiveness that there is the strongest (and most wholly negative) consensus among theorists. Norris, Butler and Eagleton all view the postmodern position as politically disabling, although this is a failing they attribute less to postmodernism itself than its theoretical framework.

Norris suggests that postmodern theory has 'served as an escape route from pressing political questions and a pretext for avoiding any serious engagement with real-world historical events'.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Butler scoffs that 'postmodernists are just epistemological pluralists, with no firm general position available to them, and so, however radical they may seem as critics, they lack a settled external viewpoint, and this means that so far as real-life ongoing politics is concerned, they are passively

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold Whittall, 'The Theorist's Sense of History: Concepts of Contemporaneity in Composition and Analysis', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 112: 1 (1987), 1–20 (p. 3).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Norris, *What's Wrong With Postmodernism?*, p. 44.

conservative in effect'.<sup>14</sup> Butler's comments point again to his view that institutionalisation removes theorists from real experience (and that their belief in the omnipotence of capitalism undermines any recourse to moral imperatives), while Eagleton attacks theorists' engagement with liberalism on the grounds that it undermines their Marxist origins: 'postmodernism presses the communitarian standpoint towards a lopsided culturalism, moral relativism and hostility to universals, in contrast to a socialism which shares with that standpoint its more positive value of community, historicity and relationality'.<sup>15</sup> However, there are those who call for a more politically enabled perspective. Potter argues that far from being an apathetic, 'anything goes' condition, 'there is something at stake in constructions of postmodernity [...] political questions are *not* rendered moot by postmodern indeterminacies'.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Potter suggests that once the inherent 'untimely' resistance to linearity in postmodernity is understood, political engagement must be reformulated accordingly.

Eagleton argues that by allowing postmodern plurality to breed eclecticism of political thought, all the traditionally discrete perspectives that are given consideration under a postmodern politics become equally ineffective through their dilution and corruption as they are assimilated by one another. Equally, Bertens surmises that the inclination towards plurality is often politically damaging to those it seeks to serve. As he explains:

the radical anti-representationalism that is a favourite postmodern strategy in the creation of distance is at the same time politically crippling. On the level of the group, or community, the postmodern insistence of distance and difference [...] may easily cause a rupture between the margins and the hegemonic centre, and thus hurl the margins into what is in effect a political void, even if that void is experienced as a new freedom.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Butler, *A Very Short Introduction to Postmodernism*, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p.86.

<sup>16</sup> Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of the Postmodern* (Albany, NY: Statue University of New York Press, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p. 199.

This statement recalls the criticisms of postmodernism explored earlier with regard to other voices, particularly the argument that pluralism and multiplicity of voices thwarts any legitimate engagement with Enlightenment values. However, Harvey identifies the root of political withdrawal not in the burgeoning postmodern debate, but in modernist abstraction. This impulse, he argues, contributed to the depoliticisation of art (he cites Rothko and Pollock) and marked the withdrawal of art from political confrontation. This action allowed art to be 'absorbed [...] into official and establishment ideology and [used] in relation to corporate power and cultural imperialism',<sup>18</sup> which in turn disarmed later attempts to reengage art and politics.

Huyssen, in an argument that recalls Potter's call to redefine the terms of political engagement, argues that 'the postmodern sensibility [...] raises the question of cultural tradition and conservation in the most fundamental way as an aesthetic and a political issue',<sup>19</sup> but that the established dichotomies of opposing categories ('progress vs. realism, abstraction vs. representation, avantgarde vs. Kitsch') that are central to modernist discourse are replaced by a 'field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first'.<sup>20</sup> This emphasis on the articulation of tension *rather* than the primacy of one term over the other is central to the way in which postmodern political engagement operates: as a site of discourse rather than an establishment of hierarchies and value judgements. Yet this absence of a sense of value has been seized upon by critics of the postmodern. Harvey argues that when artists withdrew to an autonomous ideal, corporate powers were able to engage abstract art as a medium for their own message: that culture was subsumed by late capitalism and could be assigned a value of exchange in the same way as any other commodity. Thus, as Lyotard observes, art that sought to attack the corporate world in

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<sup>18</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 216.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 217.

later, postmodern years, merely served to acknowledge capitalism's dominance and reinforce the strength of its institution; at best, bringing about internal readjustment.<sup>21</sup>

Jameson also identifies a lack of political potential in postmodern theory, particularly in the cultural sphere, where he sees any attempt to re-politicise art as futile. However, he acknowledges that there are artists who attempt to do just that (citing Haacke) and so produce texts that are both postmodern *and* political, concluding that 'it does not compute within the paradigm and does not seem to have been theoretically foreseen by [postmodernism]'.<sup>22</sup> This admission sits uncomfortably alongside Jameson's totalising concept of postmodernism, and no real attempt is made to synthesise the two, yet it could be further argued that amendments—updates even—to the postmodern paradigm might be able to accommodate and even usefully critique such texts. Although not explicitly stated, one can imagine that Jameson might support any such amendment that could be shown to be logically robust, with this comment falling as it does among a more general contemplation of utopian thought. Jameson challenges the argument that situates postmodernism as the end of utopian and ideological thought, attributing this perceived demise to a false equation of utopianism and Marxism. He argues that the collapse of various socialist dystopias has been made synonymous with the dawning of a postmodern age by some commentators. However Jameson strongly believes that utopian thought as a mode of belief is not in itself political (and therefore distinct from a specific socialist utopian project) and can still be traced as a form of ideological thought in postmodern culture.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Smart is keen to distance the question of politics from the idea of achieving some communal value. Hence he argues that postmodernity 'constitutes a site, space

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<sup>21</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 159.

<sup>23</sup> What Jameson does not articulate, but could perhaps be stated in addition, is that ideological thought need not necessarily take the authoritarian format that characterised communitarian programmes, and that by allowing for a liberalist and individualist version of utopia, it may be possible to incorporate the pluralist perspective (perceived by Butler and Eagleton) that continues to allow other voices to pursue Enlightenment principles within a broader postmodern framework.



or clearing for political possibilities, rather than a distinctive political strategy'.<sup>24</sup> Seeking to establish a working methodology which is able to take account of such contradictions, it is perhaps expedient to approach political comment from the local level: after all, such comment perhaps reveals more about the commentator and their environment. Addressing creative attempts to pass political comment in this way may allow investigations to be made into the way in which texts might impact on 'internal readjustments' that take place within the broad spectrum of capitalist logic. Indeed, Born argues that 'the function of art and politics is to make people dream, to fulfill their desires (but not to allow their realisation), to transform the world, to change life, to offer a stage on which the desire (the director) plays out its fantasmatical theatrics'.<sup>25</sup> To fully evaluate the impact of such notions, however, it will also be necessary to theorise the mediation facilitated by capitalism's most significant postmodern development: the media.

### 3.3 Cultural mediation

Jameson assigns a central position to the role of the media in postmodern society, characterising it as a conscious realisation that all cultural objects are essentially *material* objects, and can therefore be translated into commodities. Jameson describes the media as the merging of three previously discrete 'signals':<sup>26</sup> a specific form or mode of aesthetic production (aesthetic realm); specific technologies (material realm); and social institutions (social realm). A corollary between these facets of the media and the preceding discussion about the symbiosis between the spheres of everyday life is immediately apparent (with Jameson's aesthetic and material realms corresponding to culture and economy respectively). In a further simulation of the previous argument, Jameson points out that the changing interactions between these realms impacts upon the interpretive mechanisms that are developed to deal with them. He

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<sup>24</sup> Barry Smart, *Postmodernity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-François Lyotard and Dominique Avron, "'A Few Words to Sing'", trans. by Leonard R. Lawlor, in Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts (eds), *Toward the Postmodern*, (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), pp. 41–59 (first publ. *Musique en jeu* 2 (1971), 28–44), p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 67.

explains that the three realms are not so much constituent parts of the media as specific regions of the *construct*, which must be addressed under a tripartite model. Jameson notes that such an approach is a departure from traditional concepts of evaluation and interpretation, favouring as it does a non-linear interpretive structure, but also argues that once these component parts of media have been identified, it is possible to look back at cultural products of the past and see that these conditions have always existed.

However, commentators such as Born argue that culture operates within two 'streams': a 'politicised, vanguard postmodernism' and a 'populist' one. She argues that it is the latter which 'is more visible' and that this leads to the development of a cultural theory that is a 'celebration of consumption and desire'.<sup>27</sup> Thus, while postmodernism is seen as a dominant cultural condition, it becomes clear that it is possible to distinguish modes of cultural interaction *with* postmodernity. Jameson's perspective of the media places it in close relation to the totalising nature of capitalist forces. Indeed, he identifies such a prominent role for media within the postmodern age that he dedicates a significant portion of a chapter on 'Postmodernism and the Market' to examining the construct more closely. From this, Jameson's view may be summarised as follows: that media facilitates a loss of distinction between social, capital and cultural spheres, a loss which is favourable to a market that seeks to infiltrate public and aesthetic spheres in a way that makes capitalist logic necessary, desirable and totalising. Since media is bound to the market through the technological provision that enables it to remain at the forefront of information, Jameson argues that when cultural artefacts become products (or at least subjects of evaluation) of the media, they also, through the media, become tied to the market and in turn inseparable from reality, thus effacing modernity's claim to cultural autonomy and thrusting culture into the *mêlée* of commodities.

Similarly, Bell argues that various media facilitate what he describes as 'cultural mass: an audience large enough to sustain a world of cultural production on its own'.<sup>28</sup> Again

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<sup>27</sup> Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, p. 20.

mirroring Jameson's tripartite media model, Bell argues that the social construction of cultural mass depends upon three components: 'transmitters' (publishing, education, broadcast: Jameson's 'aesthetic realm'), 'market' (a demand for reproduction created largely by the previous category: 'material realm'), and 'the group which, as writers, magazine editors, movie-makers, musicians, and so forth, produces the popular materials for the wider mass-culture audience'<sup>29</sup> (the 'social realm'). Thus, for Bell, under this tripartite system the demand for cultural reproduction is both self-replicating and has potential for growth built-in.<sup>30</sup>

Harvey, in contemplating the media, places more emphasis upon its role as advertiser. Describing it as a tool for the reproduction of 'sign systems and imagery', he argues that signs have become just as commodifiable as goods and that therefore, media acts as a vehicle for 'manipulating desires'.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, for Butler, the media not only facilitates the desire for commodities, but also becomes one: 'we live in a *society of the image*, primarily concerned with the production and consumption of mere "simulacra". Information, by now, is just something that we buy.'<sup>32</sup> Such comments challenge the notion of autonomy in the cultural sphere, and recall Benjamin's contemplation of the impact endless reproduction of artworks would have on our concept of artistic autonomy.

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<sup>29</sup> Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> For Jameson, the media both revel in and control this explosion of cultural products. He cites newspapers as an important marker of cultural and media interaction (and a crucial component of his 'social realm'), arguing that these may be the strongest historiographical influence of our time as they place disjunct fragments side by side. Collected together, yet unconnected, Jameson views the newspaper as a symbol of how we must learn to understand postmodernism, serving as both example and metaphor for how the story of postmodernism might be told. However, it would be naïve to suggest that the newspaper evinces no bias or evaluative judgement within its pages, and this fact, rather than being the undoing of a useful allegorical tool, may be its most promising feature. While the newspaper may present multiple narrative strands, it is not devoid of opinion, value judgement or conjecture; just as postmodern theory may not have to be vacant of the same.

<sup>31</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 287.

<sup>32</sup> Butler, *A Very Short Introduction to Postmodernism*, p. 112.

However, Jameson is reluctant to remove entirely the possibility of individuality from postmodern culture, and proposes that:

a profound modification of the public sphere needs to be theorised: the emergence of a new realm of image reality that is both fictional (narrative) and factual (even the characters in the series are grasped as real “named” stars with external histories to read about), and which now [...] becomes semiautonomous and floats above reality [...] Today, culture impacts back on reality in ways that make any independent and, as it were, non- or extracultural form of it problematical (in a kind of Heisenberg principle of mass culture which intervenes between your eye and the thing itself), so that finally the theorists unite their voices in a new doxa that the “referent” no longer exists.<sup>33</sup>

Jameson's summoning of the Uncertainty Principle reads as rhetorical play rather than anything more scientific (although the invocation of quantum hypothesis may have seemed conceptually useful), and seems to imply that mass culture has become so vast and so dense that there is no reliable way of determining which of the multiple possible relational effects will take precedence in any individual's reception of a text, yet what Jameson really means by 'semiautonomous' is harder to determine. Given the discussion surrounding the term, and the way in which Jameson employs 'autonomy' with relation to the modernist ideology of 'great artists' and 'masterworks', 'semiautonomy' might be interpreted as a way of referring to texts that can be assigned author(s) and title, but that demand to be understood in their social context and contain elements that potentially refer to texts, activities and realities beyond their apparent boundaries. Such a 'definition' serves to acknowledge the argument that there is 'nothing new' any more, but recognises that there still exists a version of an artistic identity within postmodernism.

However, earlier in his thesis, Jameson also questions whether the semiautonomy of the cultural sphere has been lost under the cultural logic of late capitalism. Rather than viewing this change as a loss of autonomy, he talks of an 'explosion'<sup>34</sup> of what can be considered 'cultural' into the social and economic spheres. At another point, Jameson claims that the postmodern technique of constructing a text from 'ensembles or

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<sup>33</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 277.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48.

systems of texts [objects/works/references] of various kinds<sup>35</sup> removes the possibility of a work being autonomous. He concludes that if such works lack autonomy, then they lack the potential to be considered 'masterworks', or canonical, and that this results in any analysis or evaluation being problematic because of the embedded relation to other texts. This of course can be read two ways: if one is to apply a retrospectively postmodern view of history, then this could challenge the existence of *any* canon; yet it seems more useful to acknowledge that in reality the canon is not destroyed by postmodernism. Despite such a multiplicity of relations to a text, it is still possible to point to texts that are regularly evoked in commentaries of postmodernism, and that constitute a canon of sorts, albeit a canon which recognises its own transience and flexibility. Even in light of this potential postmodern canon, however, there are still those who deny any practical autonomy to postmodern texts because of the way in which production methods are bound up with their material existence. While Lyotard, for example, recognises that material value can provide a useful evaluative criteria, he still laments the 'threat' to artistic activity that such an approach creates, suggesting that artists are forced to create texts that are not only commercially viable, but easily interpretable by criteria already established by earlier texts. It is perhaps this observation that gives rise to accusations of depthlessness and lack of innovation in postmodern culture and leads Lyotard to his conclusions of cyclicity.

Similarly, Jameson acknowledges that the idea of fragmentation holds some echoes of the notion of the 'death' of the subject and the end of the autonomous individual, but stresses that the high-modernist idea of a unique style is tied to the notion of an autonomous self. The challenge to this notion is the central aspect of his 'waning of affect'; a suggestion that the solitude and angst of the isolated ego is replaced by mechanical reproduction and the end of a distinctive, unique style. In a similar vein, Toop argues that labels—'isms' and '-ities'—should no longer be thought of as 'an aesthetic enclave, but simply as a frame of reference which allows for any number of

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<sup>35</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 77.

diverse and even partly contradictory phenomena'.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as cultural and media interaction becomes such a dominant social construction, these 'frames of reference' become all the more malleable in the face of capitalist demands for growth.

These preliminary explorations into how cultural understanding is affected by postmodern theory show that the overriding factor that haunts discussions of autonomy, assimilation, and media, is that of production; or, more specifically, the way in which modes of production and reproduction govern the way in which cultural objects are created, disseminated, and evaluated. In light of this, Jameson's tripartite model seems to offer scope for expansion beyond its initial concern with media, and into the wider cultural arena, where a network of factors impacting upon the creation and reception of texts might usefully be constructed. It remains now to draw together all these practical implications with the elements of postmodern theory discussed above, sketching a working model of postmodernism that will allow these abstract discussions to interact with specific cultural examples.

### **3.4 Sketching the postmodern condition**

What is clear from these brief discussions is that postmodern theory seeks to articulate a global, all-encompassing phenomenon, while remaining firmly 'local' in the sense that the theory acknowledges the futility of suggesting an 'exterior' position. This is the primary, most significant contradiction of postmodernity: to recognise its totality and to respond in a way that privileges the local over the global. While criticism is levelled at postmodern theory over a rejection of metanarratives that seems to undermine the suggestion of a global condition, Hutcheon argues that narrative is recognised by postmodernity to be 'only those we construct. It is this kind of self-implicating questioning that should allow postmodernist theorising to challenge narratives that do presume to "master" status, without necessarily assuming that status for itself'.<sup>37</sup> Narrative allows communication to take place, for ideas to be shared and developed;

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Toop, 'On Complexity', *Perspectives of New Music*, 31: 1 (Winter 1993), 42–57 (p. 53).

<sup>37</sup> Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 13.

but implicit in postmodernity is the recognition that flexibility and differing perspectives are inevitable. Jameson suggests that if 'allegorical master narratives remain a constant temptation, this is because such master narratives have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking about them'.<sup>38</sup> This fact demonstrates one of the paradoxes that surrounds postmodern theory: to engage with these texts, their master narratives must be discussed; to discuss a subject with recourse to master narratives, the local must necessarily appear 'less'. Yet wrangling over the question of narrative obscures the many advantages of articulating the postmodern as an all-encompassing *concept* that allows a multiplicity to exist in an interactive, rather than an isolated, state. It is for this reason that the metaphor of the kaleidoscope is employed throughout this writing: it serves as a visualisation of rhizomatic relations that are, nonetheless, contained. Infinite in terms of the possibilities of interaction; of change; of flux—yet contained in terms of the cognitive space that these ideas occupy: contained, that is, by the notion of postmodernity.

Postmodernism—the cultural response to the postmodern condition—provides theorists with a mirror upon which the postmodern condition is projected. Not all culture engages with this condition self-reflexively. Much is a product of this condition—a product of market forces—constructed in such a way that opposition to, or critique of, postmodernity would be meaningless. Yet, crucially, these products do not signal the death of revolutionary art; or political reaction; or 'history'. The cultural mass, the Fordesque commodification of society and leisure, provides one kind of manifestation of postmodernity with which self-reflexive postmodernism is able to engage. Defenders of modernism, such as Metzger, argue that postmodernism is simply a response that now exists alongside modernism, rather than its replacement. He argues that:

a closing gambit employed in many histories that reach an end in the present is to point towards a broad openness, be it an amorphous "post" or an endless pluralism. [...] the line drawn between modernism and postmodernism, [is] a line that from the vantage point of a new century seems fainter and fainter. Far from being contained and

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<sup>38</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'On Interpretation', in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen & Co, 1981), pp. 17–102 (p. 34).

relegated to the past, modernism still occupies a prominent role in recent music.<sup>39</sup>

Yet it is too easy to forget that postmodernism is not some overthrowing of modernism in favour of an endless plurality. Postmodernism, and the accompanying theory, are mechanisms for articulating a change in perspective that recognises the (albeit diverse) marginalised position that modernism occupied. Indeed, Lyotard in his later work has stated that the use of the term 'postmodern' was a 'slightly provocative way of placing (or displacing) into the limelight the debate about knowledge. Postmodernity is not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features claimed by modernity.'<sup>40</sup> This 'rewriting' includes the description of cultural changes that not only react to, but describe the socio-political situation, completing the cycle of codependencies that have been explored above, and enhancing the role of the *petit recit* in postmodern discourse. Rather than dismiss completely the authorial modernist subject, writers such as Jameson instead question the position which that subject occupies in a society that is more concerned with the role of the consumer. The supreme ego is replaced by context and conditioning of the author, and Jameson argues that this altered, postmodern perspective ought to be considered retrospective (i.e., applied to our contemporary understanding of past cultures); again strengthening

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<sup>39</sup> Metzer, *Musical Modernism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, p. 29. Metzer argues that modernism becomes a 'point of reference' and a 'source of ideas and impulses', which 'offers a repository of demanding material and ideas'. However, rather than seeing this as proof of modernism's adoption as postmodern 'code', Metzer argues that a 'trinity' exists between modernism, postmodernism and pluralism. He explains:

the typical postmodern work blends styles and periods. Beyond the single composition, the pluralism of the artistic realm is considered to be a manifestation of the postmodern world view. The third part of the trinity, modernism, is placed at a distance, consigned to the fading past. This study presents another configuration. There is no overlap between pluralism and postmodernism or between pluralism and modernism for that matter. The broader artistic field is considered to be pluralistic, not the exclusive terrain of either one of the *isms* (*ibid.* p. 243–44).

It seems that Metzer's objection is not to postmodernism *per se*, but to the idea that postmodernism is plural while modernism is not. Rather, modernism is *within* the plural, while postmodernism is not. His grounds for this, following Bürger and Habermas, are that firstly, modernity continues, and secondly, that 'modernism is so broad it cannot be opposed or supplanted' (*ibid.*, p. 243). It is interesting that so many of Metzer's defences of modernism seem to rest on logic usually employed in postmodern rhetoric. Perhaps Metzer could be described as a 'postmodern modernist'.

<sup>40</sup> Lyotard, 'Rewriting Modernity', p. 34.



a sense of continuity throughout the twentieth century where the perspective, not the events, are significantly altered. As Jameson explains, 'what one must retain historically is the fact that the phenomenon [of the great individual] did once exist; a postmodern view of the "great" modernist creators ought not to argue away the social and historical specificity of these now doubtful "centred subjects", but rather provide new ways of understanding their conditions of possibility'.<sup>41</sup>

And it is these 'conditions of possibility' that are most significant. Jameson is right not to dismiss the actuality of the 'great creators', since one is, after all, able to name them, to purchase reproductions of their work, to read about their achievements. The difference lies between their contemporaneous context, and the context in which they now appear, since as with all other perspectives, the works of the 'great modernists' are now institutionalised and commercialised indiscriminately alongside artefacts of every other age. Indeed, Eagleton argues that 'Lyotard's desire to see modernism and postmodernism as continuous with one another is in part a refusal to confront the disturbing fact that modernism proved prey to institutionalisation'<sup>42</sup> (postmodernism does not so much reject modernism, as provide a vantage point from which to view the process of this academisation of the avant-garde).

The assemblage of the cultural past presents us with a history that is not, as some would argue, 'over', but rather a history that forms a dynamic, interactive element of our cultural exchange in the same way that an encounter with another country or society might do.<sup>43</sup> Among these exchanges, modernism looms large, both in

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<sup>41</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 306.

<sup>42</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', *New Left Review* 152 (July/August 1985), 60–73 (p. 63).

<sup>43</sup> To articulate this recognition, and to map the practice of assimilating these elements, many writers turn to the idea of intertextuality. Allen argues that 'in the Postmodern epoch, theorists often claim, it is not possible any longer to speak of originality or the uniqueness of the artistic object [...] since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art. Intertextuality, as a term, stands at the centre of such contemporary conceptions of art and cultural production generally' (Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 5–6). Allen sets out a useful taxonomy of intertextuality that includes descriptions of Genette's 'paratext', 'peritext', and 'epitext'. While outside the scope of this study, intertextual methods clearly have significant bearing on how discussions of specific postmodernist artefacts might be conducted.

chronological proximity and in the sense that the potentialities of its diverse codes and methods are still being vigorously explored by creative practitioners. In addition, Jameson identifies 'a dependence of the postmodern on what remain essentially modernist categories of the new', which is, Jameson argues, no 'insignificant contradiction for postmodernity which is unable to divest itself of the supreme value of innovation [...] if only because the museums and the art galleries can scarcely function without it'.<sup>44</sup> Yet there are two important points to note in Jameson's statement. Firstly, the importance of the institution in this process: the modes of production and consumption do occupy a central role in the postmodern condition. Secondly, that Jameson does not allow for the idea of *renewal*. What postmodern culture does, both in the constant regurgitation of economically successful mass culture and in the synthesis and assimilation of past artistic codes, is refresh and reinvigorate the cultural landscape in a way that is innovation of a sort, but innovation that is happy to parade the sources of its *relative* originality.

In the postmodern space, the emphasis on the consumer has led to a consumption of creativity in which the interpretive act is opened up to a variety of interpretations which may all have equal validity. The work, or text, itself, remains unchanged, but its social context is drastically altered, and as Harvey explains, 'minimising the authority of the cultural producer creates the opportunity for popular participation and democratic determinations of cultural values, but at the price of a certain incoherence, or, more problematic, vulnerability to mass-market manipulation'.<sup>45</sup> In counterpoint to this 'vulnerability' is also the effect that these changing social contexts have upon the way in which historical codes are adopted. Hartwell argues that postmodern music is characterised by being,

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<sup>44</sup> Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 51. There is, however, some resistance to this view. Born divides postmodernism into "vanguardist" and "populist" dimensions: 'The vanguardist position, epitomised by Foster and Bürger, preserves the modernist notion of a critical avant-garde, now allied to or rooted in the "new social movements" that have developed around race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality'. Born argues that postmodern art is able to retain—if it chooses—a critical impulse that challenges mass-market forces (Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, p. 46).

able to separate those works which utilise styles of the past as exemplars of Classical meaning from those which present the surface of the style without wishing to authorise the meaning they carry. While that meaning can still be read, it has to be understood as something constructed [...] dealing in negations of the meaning of music. It is not that all musical languages are available as means of expression, but rather that all musical languages exemplify the distance between the signifier and signified.<sup>46</sup>

It is this play of signifiers that many theorists see as an articulation of the fragmentation, plurality, and globalisation that characterises the postmodern condition: changes to social contexts that the self-reflexive form of postmodernism seek to engage with.

However, despite these changes in everyday life, and the responses to it, there are those who argue that postmodern theory does not adequately reflect the nature of contemporary experience. Butler, for example, dismisses the idea that a theory of the postmodern is able to consider itself as all-embracing as theorists such as Jameson would like, arguing that 'postmodernism is a bit like a party manifesto—it is at base a set of beliefs which are in fact not held by all, and are unlikely to reflect the universal condition of men and women in contemporary society.'<sup>47</sup> Although true to Butler's consistently negative outlook on the subject, there is an element of poignancy to his statement, and it is necessary to consider the fact that postmodern theory has been developed in an environment which the theory itself describes as institutionalised and at times alienated from everyday society. While emphasis is often placed on the breaks and discontinuities with modernism, postmodern theory has ultimately derived from theorists well versed in modernist rhetoric. Yet just one aspect of institutional discourse—its increasing interdisciplinarity—points to a recognition of the need to reach beyond the traditional confines of academia. Anderson argues that 'the discourses traditionally concerned with the cultural field have undergone an implosion of their own. What were once the sharply separate disciplines of art history, literary criticism, sociology, political science, history started to lose their clear edges, and cross

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<sup>46</sup> Robin Hartwell, 'Postmodernism and Art Music' in Simon Miller (ed.) *The Last Post: Music after Modernism* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 27–51 (pp. 44–45).

<sup>47</sup> Butler, *A Very Short Introduction to Postmodernism*, p. 122.

with each other in hybrid, transverse enquiries that could no longer easily be allotted to one or other domain.<sup>48</sup> Rather than being resistant, as Butler argues, to the realities of everyday life, such changes in the academic domain reflect more closely the plurality and interrelatedness of the lived experience.

On the opposite side of the debate, there are also those who would argue that rather than failing to represent real changes, theorists have responded too quickly and too sensitively to cultural modifications, overestimating the significance of their observations in the race to condemn modernism's failures. Bertens argues that the fact that 'so many theorists argue that we have entered a new postmodern era, must be ascribed to their tendency to overrate the importance of cultural changes of the recent past'.<sup>49</sup> Despite reaching such a conclusion, his reference to a wealth of theorists dedicated to this belief, and the fact that he himself felt it necessary to conduct an extensive survey of postmodern theory's various manifestations, demonstrates the extent to which postmodernism has become a term which, if not liked, is certainly established to some degree.

There is no shortage of sources from which to draw these various attacks on postmodern theory; yet there are perhaps more instances of the theory's terminology permeating the trappings of everyday life (advertising, media, and commerce). Whether as a useful addition to genre classifications, a trite advertising gimmick or a current buzzword; whether taken seriously or as an unknown quantity which can be toyed with; if postmodern theory does not reflect everyday life, then everyday life certainly finds ways to reflect its awareness of *something*. Advocates of postmodern theory would argue that this is exactly the sense in which we might usefully turn to the postmodern. There is strong evidence that terms such as postmodern (age/era), postmodernism, postmodernity, have all entered the global lexicon. If this continues to be the case (and there is no reason to presume it will not—as passing fads go, it has survived a long time) then however institutionalised and removed from everyday life postmodern theory is perceived to be, efforts must be made to reconcile this

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<sup>48</sup> Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 61.

<sup>49</sup> Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p. 247.

theoretical groundwork with a framework that is able to engage with the phenomenon it seeks to explain.

· If postmodernism stands or falls on any single element of its design, it is the ability practically to demonstrate theoretical devices such as plurality and multiple narratives through the literature that attempts to engage with its subject. For this reason, it is essential that no matter what else postmodernism may entail, the impact it has on *perspective* is central. Contrary to the logical tangle that often seeks to discredit postmodernism on the basis of such statements (which could be summarised as: 'postmodernism is against metanarrative; to say an idea is central has an air of totality; postmodernism's central narrative is total, therefore not postmodern'), Jameson has convincingly demonstrated the total nature of the system that governs everyday life, and postmodernism is a tool for understanding and interpreting the effects of this, not a historical phase that can be neatly inserted as the next stage in a linear perspective of the world.

Therefore, postmodernism presents itself as a multiplicity that can be described as both the product of, and response to postmodernity. It is not a break from modernism, or a rejection of its principles, but recognition that modernism was never a dominant cultural phenomenon to begin with. It was, rather, a dominant *institutional* phenomenon, and for that reason, as Born argues, 'the counterpoint of modernism and postmodernism [is] a continuous and centripetal antinomy, a kind of mobile stasis.'<sup>50</sup> But postmodernity has an impact beyond the institution. It articulates a way of being that recognises the local nature of our experience while at the same time making us aware of that same recognition taking place on a global scale. Postmodernity is the interconnectedness; the inconceivability; the potential, of contemporary experience. In Part Two, the way in which minimalism (as a particular cultural response to postmodernity) reflects our emerging postmodern sensibilities will be explored.

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<sup>50</sup> Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, p. 64.

**PART TWO:**

**MINIMALISM**

## MINIMALISM

The origins of musical minimalism stem from a time when the fractures and departures that frame the postmodern debate were evolving. Both minimal and postmodern discourses are as much theoretically driven (by a response to perceived challenges) as they are a reaction to concrete social and cultural developments, and both have, in recent years, been subject to allegations that they are a spent force. However, while postmodern theory seems to have generated extended debate among theorists of all disciplines, the study of musical minimalism remains confined to only a handful of book-length studies, a selection of (predominantly composer-directed) monographs,<sup>1</sup> and a collection of articles that remains comparatively meagre in relation to other twentieth-century musics. The reasons for this can only be the subject of speculation, yet it would be tempting to argue that minimalism's commercial success has encouraged a view of the music as overly-simplified, vacuous and unworthy of critical attention. Yet, the veneration of complexity in academic circles, and the Adorno-esque rejection of commercially successful culture,<sup>2</sup> is gradually giving way to serious critical attention of minimalism; but not before the term itself has become diluted and distorted by decades of inattention.

Commonly minimalism, to the general public, is understood to apply to later Glass and his many anonymous derivatives: an interpretation that obscures much of minimalism's more interesting history and the diverse permutations that exist today. While this association suits those with a commercial interest, it is unfortunate that

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Philip Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, ed. by Robert T. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1987); Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, ed. by Paul Hillier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and more recently, John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux; London: Faber and Faber, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, particularly 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', pp. 120–167. For a general overview of Adorno's attitudes, see Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Mass Culture* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1996).

academic hostility to minimal music has allowed this bland notion of minimalism to dominate. Hal Foster argues that,

the trashing of minimalism is conditioned by two related events: in the 1960s by a recognition that minimalism threatens modernist practice—more, that it consummates it, completes and breaks with it at once; and in the 1980s by the implementation of a cultural policy in which a general trashing of the 1960s is used to justify a return to tradition.<sup>3</sup>

For Foster, this serves a desire to obscure the challenge that minimalism presented to currents of musical practice at the time of its inception. As he notes, minimalism was not *simply* a rejection of, or reaction to, modernism. It was as much a part of that impulse as it was its end; and this factor places minimalism in an interesting parallel to the emergence of postmodern theory. Chronologically, the emergence and development of minimalism corresponds closely to the transitory phase between modernism and postmodernism, with its origins in the late-fifties, followed by a phase of development and rapid dissemination in the sixties and seventies. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, at a time when the character of both these trends is stabilising, they are increasingly greeted with hostility, rejection, or a sense of dilution.

However, just as I have argued that postmodernity has only recently completed its transition, minimalism has lately established itself—not as a dominant music, but as a popular and widely adopted and adapted model: the modernist code *par excellence*. While other modernist codes, such as serial techniques, have been adopted for certain ‘atmospheres’ in film music, they remain for the most part confined to the art worlds in which they were first conceived. By contrast, minimalism’s stylistic markers have become ubiquitous: easily adapted while retaining a recognisable character, and at the same time, proving popular in a variety of settings.

Rose, considering minimalism in the visual arts in her seminal essay, ‘ABC Art’, also recognises the gradual development of a ‘common sensibility’ dating from minimalism’s origins: ‘mainly this shift towards a new sensibility came, as I’ve suggested, in the fifties, a time of convulsive transition not only for the art world, but

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<sup>3</sup> Hal Foster, ‘The Crux of Minimalism’, in Howard Singerman (ed.), *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945–1986* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), pp. 162–193 (p. 162).



for society at large'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Strickland recognises the affinity minimalism has with a postmodern emphasis on production and consumption as dominant forces: 'the later history of Minimalism marks the transition of twentieth-century art from its waning as an autonomous and implicit critique of mass culture to its demystification and acceptance as but another commodity'.<sup>5</sup> Baker agrees that a tension exists between the 'stylistic clarity and critical purpose'<sup>6</sup> of minimalism's early developments and the subsequent move by those in the arts market to 'render art palatable to a public hungry to assimilate novelties and impatient with specifics'.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, he argues, 'the story of how that critical spirit was neutralised by the art business' (in the attempt to disseminate it to a wider audience) is the story of Minimalism's 'demise'.<sup>8</sup>

Another parallel with postmodern theory can be found in the impact critical attention has had on the development of the subject itself. Just as postmodernity might arguably be the first era to have written itself into existence before it has begun, minimalism gains distinction as much due to the critical wrangling over its definition and aestheticisation as it does from any specific event. Harold Rosenberg sees this as a form of compensation by critics who were faced with art they found hard to interpret, explaining that 'no mode in art has ever had more labels affixed to it by eager literary collaborators [...] The rule applied is: the less there is to see, the more there is to say'.<sup>9</sup> So embedded in our understanding of minimalism have these critical responses become, that Colpitt sees fit to argue that 'the theories of Minimal art, whether relevant to artistic production (process) or the spectator/critic's apprehension of the

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Rose, 'ABC Art', in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1968; repr. 1995), pp. 274–298 (first publ. in *Art in America* (October/November 1965)), pp. 280–281.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993; rev. 2000), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstance* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Harold Rosenberg, 'Defining Art' in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp. 298–307 (first publ. in *The New Yorker* (25 February 1967)), p. 306.

object (product), are central to an understanding of that object'.<sup>10</sup> Such statements point to a tension between the modernist quest for autonomy and the concurrent trend for the publication of manifestos, poetics and essays. At its most extreme, minimalism reduces itself to pure theory; both apogee and destruction of the belief in a genuinely autonomous artwork. From this void there also arises a redistribution of authority. The work is a product of its processes, ready to be consumed by the viewer or listener: postmodern advocacy of the local viewpoint and the perspective of the observer gain credibility.

It is for these reasons: the changing relationship between art and theory; the ties with concerns about production and reception, and the coincidences of their chronology, that minimalism provides a suitable model to trace real cultural developments relating to the transition between modernism and postmodernism. To achieve this, the generalisations that govern the minimalist legend must be broken down and reconstrued from a postmodern perspective. Foster calls this a 'genealogy of art from the 1960s to the 1980s. In this genealogy minimalism will figure not as a distant dead end but as a *brisure* of (post)modern art, an in-between moment of a paradigm shift'.<sup>11</sup> Considering minimalism as a product of coalescing fragmentation is essential if it is to be understood as an evolving and multifaceted aspect of twentieth-century music. Much like postmodern theory, a great deal of discussion about minimalism has been either restrictively dogmatic or unhelpfully vague. Setting aside for the time being the question of whether minimalism is an appropriate term (and if so, to what music it should be applied) it will be presumed that all music that is commonly referred to as 'minimal' contributes, in some degree, to these fragments of the minimalist transitory phase.

Restrictive readings of minimalism tend to dismiss all music that does not strictly adhere to an absolute minimum of material and subsequent manipulation, effectively excluding much of the music that most listeners recognise as trademarks of the minimalist movement. By contrast, the urge to over-generalise is frustratingly

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<sup>10</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Foster, 'The Crux of Minimalism', p. 162.

apparent in some current musicology; as though, having identified a movement, as much music as possible must be shepherded into it. Take, for example, the following statement from Niren's paper, delivered at the First International Conference on Music and Minimalism,<sup>12</sup> where she lists:

characteristics generally found in minimalism: 1) simplicity of elements; 2) repetition or long-held tones; 3) continuous form; 4) lack of a teleological focus; 5) possibly complex texture, but perhaps only because of surface details; 6) mostly tonal focus with generally consonant harmonies; 7) may feature improvisation; 8) influence from other musical cultures, especially India.<sup>13</sup>

Such a list not only encompasses the broad spectrum of works that are attributed to minimalism, but also a sizeable quantity of all twentieth-century music, and perhaps (since she suggests that only three of these features need be present in any one work) a generous proportion of Western art music in general. The other danger with such generalisations is that there is a temptation to 'prove' the genesis of seminal works by reaching back into a composer's catalogue for signs of what was to come.<sup>14</sup> From a postmodern perspective, this linear approach seems to be an attempt to forcibly homogenise a compositional impulse that marks the process of fragmentation into postmodernism.

The oft-regurgitated history of minimalism that focuses only on Young, Riley, Reich and Glass as originators of a style perhaps goes some way to explaining this desire to find

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<sup>12</sup> The First International Conference on Music and Minimalism took place at the University of Wales, Bangor between 31 August 2007 and 2 September 2007. Many of the papers presented are available to download from the conference website: <<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/events/papers.php.en>> [accessed 09/03/10]

<sup>13</sup> Ann Glazer Niren, 'An Examination of Minimalist Tendencies in Two Early Works of Terry Riley', paper delivered at the First International Conference on Music and Minimalism (August 2007) <<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/events/Ann%20Niren.pdf>> [accessed 09/03/10], p. 2. The employment of checklists in determining the eligibility of a work for the minimal tag is reminiscent of a similar tendency in determining if something might be called postmodern. In the same way, criticism can be levelled at the totalising impulse and demand for uniformity that lists can represent.

<sup>14</sup> In the paper in question, Niren seeks to prove the 'minimal qualities' of an early string quartet by Terry Riley, and as she takes each criterion on her list in turn, states that 'there is also a bit of imitation, which might qualify as repetition' (*ibid.*, p. 10). Such a statement exemplifies the hazards of trying to rewrite musical history to fit a pattern of events, and while this is an extreme example, similar attempts to enlarge the scope of minimalism so vaguely seem misguided.

precursors in their earlier work. However, a view of minimalism that paints such an isolated vision of development reinforces a master narrative reminiscent of the modernist attitude to creative autonomy. Suzuki argues (as does Glass) that Minimalism's development was 'a cultural, sociological, and philosophical imperative, rather than as the result of the influence of a single revolutionary and visionary individual'.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Strickland observes that the minimal-historical narrative has achieved such dominance that the characteristics of individual works are often obscured: 'Reich himself has said [...] "I could write a piece that would be a dead ringer for Mahler and they'd say, 'Ah...this is a new kind of Minimalism!'" Riley, unaware of the jest, observed similarly months later, "I could write a piece like Beethoven and they'd call it Minimalist because my name would be on it".'<sup>16</sup>

Despite this, Reich sees the early activities of himself, Riley and Glass as a catalyst for the more diverse minimalisms that developed in the late sixties and seventies: 'it always seemed to me that, starting from the very earliest days—when *In C* was around, and my early pieces and Glass' early pieces—that this was very fertile ground. And now [...] this has really become the dominant style today'.<sup>17</sup> Potter's approach to this period of minimalism's development reflects a similar impression of catalytic activity, 'a slice of history which seems [...] of peculiar fascination, both for itself and for what it tells us about the wider currents of musical, and cultural, development in the twentieth century'.<sup>18</sup> Such impressions, whether or not they are entirely justified in their implied exclusivity, demonstrate the way minimalism has developed in response to its reception, as well as its creation.

A postmodern emphasis on multiple perspectives and plurality demands that any review of minimalist developments considers the reasons for the dominance of the

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<sup>15</sup> Dean-Paul Suzuki, 'Minimal Music: Its Evolution as seen in the works of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley and La Monte Young' (unpublished PhD diss., University of Southern California, May 1991), p. 607.

<sup>16</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 234.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Paul Hillier in Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 233.

<sup>18</sup> Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. xiv.

'high priests' of minimalism, as well as alternative readings of works and composers that contributed to a broader developmental picture. This gains particular importance because, as Christos Hatzis notes, 'minimalism was consistent with the tenets of postmodernism in that it acknowledged the necessity for shifting the emphasis from the creator to the receptor'.<sup>19</sup> By questioning the dominance of the standardised minimalist narrative, a review of minimalism can illuminate the transitory phase it occupies. That its origins and development are more complex and interwoven with other strands in contemporary arts reveals the extent to which they are often distanced to reinforce modernist notions of originality. There is a need (in order to avoid returning to an over-generalised picture of minimalism) to strike a balance between restrictive criteria that exclude works from the minimalist forum, and overstating a work's features to qualify it for inclusion.

However, since minimalism did not develop in a vacuum, it may be productive to consider works that touch the perimeters of minimalism's development, or become offshoots of the same. In doing so, minimalism is transformed from a brief, dogmatic aesthetic trend to a nexus of developments more in keeping with Reich's idea of a dominant style. Such an approach is not simply an attempt to redefine the boundaries of minimalism, but an attempt to align the origins of this transitional phase with what Krauss identifies as a component of its development in the 1970s. Just as this study advocates the consideration of a broader cross-section of cultural development, Krauss suggests that a similar (linear) process was enacted by those artists seeking a way of moving through the transitional phase that minimalism articulated. She argues that the 'collective act of interpreting Minimalism by extending its sphere of relevance to contemporary artistic practice and reception [...] is one way in which the "history" of the movement has been written'.<sup>20</sup> The creators' constant reevaluation of their own

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<sup>19</sup> Christos Hatzis, 'Towards a New Musical Paradigm', *MikroPolyphonie* 2.01 (January 1997). This online journal is no longer available at the original source, but the same article can also be found at <<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~chatzis/paradigm.htm>> [accessed 09/03/10], para 12 of 29.

<sup>20</sup> Rosalind Krauss, 'Overcoming the Limits of Matter: On Revising Minimalism', in John Elderfield (ed.), *American Art of the 1960s* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), pp. 122–141 (pp. 139–140).

history, the ever-present past of postmodernity, makes minimalism's history contingent on the historicising perspective of the present.

The intention of this approach is not to undermine the significance of minimalist developments, but to allow ideas of how minimalism is to be interpreted, analysed and understood to be reconfigured. This reconfiguration might take the form of a more kaleidoscopic, rhizomatic attitude that rejects the notion of a singular strand of development in minimalism, and instead identifies multiple sources of influence and cross-fertilisation. As ap Siôn observes, while many of the stylistic traits associated with minimalism exist in later (popular and concert) music, an attempt to link this directly with early minimalist developments presents too great a leap from the 'machine-like logic [suggestive of] a highly formalist approach. Neither entirely modern nor postmodern, [...] minimalism stood at the intersection between the two periods'.<sup>21</sup> By taking this intersection not as the moment of minimalism, but simply its beginning, the offshoots and developments that lead to such parallels are more fruitfully explored.

Finally, returning to the issues raised at the start of this section, such an approach must put aside a common notion that John Perreault articulates and challenges: 'the term "Minimal" seems to imply that what is minimal in Minimal Art is the art. This is far from the case. There is nothing minimal about the "art" (craftsmanship, inspiration, or aesthetic stimulation) in Minimal Art. If anything, in the best works being done, it is maximal.'<sup>22</sup> Many accounts of minimalism seem to reflect the minimal-content reading of the movement, seeking reductive and restricted forms of linear development to explain minimalism's history. What I am proposing is what Perreault might call a 'maximal' approach: a carefully and closely defined categorisation of minimalism that considers the kaleidoscopic activities that have contributed to its development. As a

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<sup>21</sup> Pwyll ap Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman: Texts, Contexts and Intertexts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> John Perreault, 'Minimal Abstracts' in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp. 256–262 (first publ. as various short articles in *Arts Magazine* (March 1967), *Art International* (March 1967), and *Village Voice* (12 January 1967)), p. 260.

starting point, it is necessary to explore the most commonly held notions of minimalism's definition and development.

## Chapter Four

### Redefining Minimalism

At the most basic level, minimalism concerns repetition. Opinions regarding what aspect of repetition represents 'pure' minimalism are more divided; some arguing for the drone works of Young (repetition in unbroken and prolonged continuity), others for motoric, pulsed repetition—the origins of which are commonly attributed to Riley's *In C*.<sup>1</sup> Page, for example, describes *In C* as 'the first work to really view repetition as something other than accompaniment, refrain, or ostinato, and it features the steady eighth-note pulse that would become standard baggage in later minimalist endeavours'.<sup>2</sup> Despite most minimalist studies addressing a common set of works and composers, Bernard argues that while a degree of canonisation has taken place in the visual arts, 'no parallel canonisation of even a provisional sort seems to have taken place in music, for even the earliest minimal pieces are still regarded as controversial in many quarters'.<sup>3</sup> However, while Bernard sees ideas about the earliest pieces as 'controversial', it seems more accurate to state that the terminology (rather than the works themselves) lacks agreement.

In contrast to Bernard's argument, I would suggest that a collection of works has become so embedded in minimalist discourse that it is impossible to proceed without referring to them once again. This is, of course, a theoretical canonisation, brought about by minimalism's dependence on criticism (and the need to trace the development of ideas through the creation of, and response to, certain works). The question of a listener's canon depends much more on the mechanics of production and distribution, an aspect of the debate that both responds to and illuminates aspects of the postmodern transition, and will be returned to at a later stage. First, it is

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the nature of repetition in minimalism see Chapter 5.1: A note on repetition, pp. 195–200.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Page, 'Framing the River: A Minimalist Primer', *High Fidelity* 31: 11 (November 1981), 64–68 (p. 65).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, 'The minimalist aesthetic in the plastic arts and music', *Perspectives of New Music* 31: 1 (Winter 1993), 86–132 (p. 125).



necessary to identify the standard theoretical responses to minimalism and the works upon which these reactions are based.

#### 4.1 Minimalism in monochrome

Broadly speaking, it is possible to divide commentary on minimalism into two types of response: those which are traditionally 'academic', and those flavoured by a journalistic approach. Such a distinction is in no way designed to imply any particular designations of depth or value: indeed, the journalists of the *Village Voice* in the sixties and seventies are frequently quoted in both categories and offer some of the most perceptive and thought-provoking commentary on minimalism. Rather, this distinction indicates a tendency to focus on the origins of minimalism in a manner typical of a linear, modernist focus on the one hand (traditional academic), and an emphasis on later and more commercially successful works that feed into various areas of popular culture on the other (the journalistic strand). I hesitate to designate this latter approach as the 'postmodern' example simply because its often limited scope exemplifies the reason that postmodern commentary often attracts accusations of shallowness and vacuity. Take, for example, this glib account from MacDonald, who sees 1960s minimalism as a phenomenon feeding directly into ambient music and muzak: 'New Age music for people who live so fast that, when they relax, they don't so much slow down as glide for a couple of hours'.<sup>4</sup> Such departures are described by Krauss as a failure to comprehend minimalism: a misreading by critics and enthusiasts to the point where minimalism is 'folded at last into the arms of the Californian Sublime'.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, in the 'academic' reading of minimalism, similarly sweeping statements are made, based, one suspects, on just a handful of commentaries. Robin Holloway states that 'by far the best-known anti-modernist reaction of the last two decades is that of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ian MacDonald, *The People's Music* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> Krauss, 'Overcoming the Limits of Matter', p. 138.

American minimalists',<sup>6</sup> but by 'best-known', one presumes he means critically, not musically, since provocative traits in minimalism had all but disappeared by the time of its commercial success (even *In C*, while arguably revolutionary at the time, was less unusual by the time of its commercial release (and subsequent success) several years after its premiere). There is no sense in which 'the American minimalists' (the default Young, Riley, Reich and Glass?) represented either a unified school or a united front against modernism. Despite this, the persistence of the grouping is strong: a habit Strickland attributes to an early need for journalists and composers to articulate the minimalists' innovations at a general level. He argues that 'disdain' for the minimalist tag notwithstanding, it 'was convenient for them as well as for journalists insofar as it is easier to gain exposure as part of a movement, however arbitrarily or even erroneously defined. In the court of high-cultural consumerism, not having heard of an individual composer may be punished as a misdemeanour but ignorance of an entire *movement* is clearly felonious.'<sup>7</sup> However, as commercial success has ensued for some while the majority have remained obscure, this generalisation continues to govern knowledge of those composers active in 1960s downtown New York.

Firstly, the origins of the term need to be understood, since the label itself is so contrary to many of the features of minimalism as it is understood today. The term was first used in the visual arts, in relation to a handful of specific shows in New York galleries, and there is a consensus that 'it was first applied explicitly and directly to the music as a movement or shared style in 1972 by Johnson'.<sup>8</sup> Johnson himself also shares this opinion, although it was not a term he used exclusively: in a slightly later review of

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<sup>6</sup> Robin Holloway, 'Modernism and After in Music', *Cambridge Review* 110: 2305 (June 1989), 60–66 (p. 63).

<sup>7</sup> Edward Strickland, 'Minimalism: T', in Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), Robert Fleming (asst ed.), *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 113–128 (extracted from *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993)), p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 242. This book gives a detailed account of the term's uses, and the various alternative labels that were put forward.

the same year, he is still calling Glass' music 'hypnotic'.<sup>9</sup> Michael Nyman has also claimed responsibility for the transference of the term to music in the same year, calling it a 'journalistic throwaway'.<sup>10</sup> He, however, regrets its use. In recognition of minimalism's origins in the visual arts, and to indicate the less homogenised outlooks of those to whom the label is applied, Potter uses the upper case for Minimalism in the fine arts, but lower case for minimalism in music 'to suggest the rather looser connotations of the term's deployment in a musical context'.<sup>11</sup> This is a convention that has been taken up, if not universally, then certainly by the majority, and one which this study will also adhere to.<sup>12</sup>

Though minimalism became established as a categorical dominant, a definitive definition of the term remained elusive.<sup>13</sup> However, there are certain characteristics that have become widely accepted as central features of minimalism. Of those that apply to both the visual arts and music, one could include the use of repetition (usually of something containing minimal content or variation—a cell, motif, colour or shape); an overall impression of unity or wholeness that concentrates attention on the surface of the work, and an absence of content that could be related to anything outside the work. Edward Strickland is one commentator who offers a definition of minimalism that includes nuanced variation on these broad features for each of the arts:

Minimalism is here used to denote a movement, primarily in postwar America, towards an art—visual, musical, literary, or otherwise—that makes its statement with limited, if not the fewest possible, resources, an art that eschews abundance of compositional detail, opulence of texture, and complexity of structure. Minimalist art is prone to stasis [...]

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<sup>9</sup> Tom Johnson, 'Philip Glass's New Parts', in Tom Johnson, Paul Panhuysen (ed.), *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972–1982. A Collection of Articles Originally Published in The Village Voice* (Eindhoven: Het Appollohuis, 1989), pp. 33–35 (first publ. 'Philip Glass' "Changing Parts", "Music in 12 Parts", *Village Voice* (6 April 1972)), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), p. 196.

<sup>11</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> There is an exception to this convention. See Chapter 5.2: *Minimalism*, pp. 209–210.

<sup>13</sup> Kyle Gann describes 'a kind of unspoken master narrative isolating minimalism as a strangely curtailed historical moment' (Kyle Gann, 'My Longyear Musicology Lecture', Postclassical Blog <[http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2008/02/my\\_longyear\\_musicology\\_lecture.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2008/02/my_longyear_musicology_lecture.html)> [accessed 07/12/09], para 53 of 64).

and resistant to development [...] It tends towards non-allusiveness and decontextualisation from tradition, impersonality in tone, and flattening of perspective through emphasis on surfaces.<sup>14</sup>

However, for many commentators, the literal correspondence between the term's etymology and the use of limited materials leads to a prioritisation of this element to the exclusion of others; a tendency that forces commentators into a restricted comprehension of minimalism and the imposition of rigorous limitations on works eligible for inclusion. Wim Mertens, for example, offers the following definition:

Strictly speaking the term *minimal* can only be applied to the limited initial material and the limited transformational techniques the composers employ, and even this is only the case in the earlier works of Reich and Glass. Certainly one can usually observe in this music a dominant equality of timbre and rhythm, a constant density and a very limited number of pitches. But in terms of length these compositions are certainly not minimal.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, such definitions are not invalid. They simply represent a reaction to minimalism in keeping with a typically modernist perspective, emphasising rigour of method and carefully drawn boundaries. However, if one wishes to consider the early stages of minimalist development in relation to current minimalist musics, such narrow definitions should, for the time being, be resisted.<sup>16</sup>

The periodisation of minimalism generates a degree of consensus, although there are of course differences resulting from the examples above. Strickland dates minimalism in painting from 1948 (Newman's *Onement I*); in music from 1958 (Young's *Trio for Strings*); and in sculpture from 1961 (along with film and dance), but he argues that all of these works were 'foreshadowed by Merce Cunningham's work from the late 1940s onwards to roughly the same degree as the work of Cunningham's comrade John Cage adumbrated developments in Minimal music'.<sup>17</sup> In music, virtually all discussions of

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<sup>14</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, trans. by J. Hautekiet (London: Kahn & Averill, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> The difference between those who see minimalism as a strictly limited phenomenon and those who regard it as a broader category leads to even greater differences in definition when considering Maximalism, postminimalism, and Totalism.

<sup>17</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 9–10.

minimalism begin with La Monte Young's *Trio for Strings* in 1958, although Strickland notes that many commentators still date the beginnings of minimalism much later, discounting Young's works in favour of *In C* (1964, recording released 1968) or Glass' *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). Yet he argues that such a view is flawed, since 'Young began to establish a climate in post-Cageian experimentalism within which later Minimalist developments could be taken at all seriously. Nineteen sixty-four may still be considered, however, to mark the efflorescence of Minimal music.'<sup>18</sup>

Following this efflorescence however, Strickland quickly identifies minimalism's changing nature, an 'expansionist and dubiously Minimal period from 1974 to the end of the decade [that] is noteworthy most of all for Reich's *18*, Glass' *Einstein*, and Young's elaboration of *The Well-Tuned Piano*',<sup>19</sup> a phase that others have identified as the beginnings of postminimalism. While he argues for a canon of early minimalist works ('its enduring landmarks [are] Young's *Trio* and *Tortoise*, Riley's *In C*, and Reich's *It's Gonna Rain* [...]), while the transitional period from spring 1970 to spring 1974 is notable for *Drumming*, *Music with Changing Parts* and *Music in Twelve Parts*'<sup>20</sup>, he also notes that the composers feel that the more memorable works came later. For Strickland, postminimalism begins in 1980 with Glass' second opera *Satyagraha* and Reich's series of *Variations*, and marks a period where 'of the four principal figures, only Young continued to work primarily in a Minimalist vein, while [...] Riley, Reich, and Glass moved into expansive structures and orchestrations to make major musicocultural statements that at times provoke profound admiration and at others equally profound nostalgia for their earlier economy of means'.<sup>21</sup>

This summary of distinctions between various phases of minimalism is typical. Strickland's use of *Music for 18 Musicians* as a boundary between strict minimalism

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<sup>18</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

and its later developments is supported by contemporaneous reviews.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this standard trace of development, Potter also makes direct links between Reich and the British Experimentalists ('Reich's rigorous approach was a strong influence on what composers such as Chris Hobbs, Dave Smith and John White called "systems music", despite the wider range of musical references that this kind of composition brought with it'<sup>23</sup>). In addition, Potter identifies a matrix of influence from Reich's 'post-minimal' works to popular music (Eno, Bowie, Mike Oldfield, The Orb) and to contemporary Western classical composers, arguing that Reich 'was at crucial periods an influence on figures such as his compatriot John Adams and the English composers Simon Bainbridge and Colin Matthews'.<sup>24</sup>

There is, however, some resistance to this linear view of minimalism's development from the composers concerned. In an interview with Strickland, Glass argues for a wider perspective:

PG: The reality of the music of the late '60s and early '70s was very dynamic and everybody was involved with everybody else's music. I hope someday there'll be a reevaluation of the whole period because there's so much music that's almost been forgotten [...] What was so exciting about it was that there was all this music! People weren't waiting around for the new performance of Terry Riley's *In C*. Because there was music going on every night! It's only in retrospect that "Well, this piece happened and then..." And this whole scramble for—to be the—I think it's silly.

ES: To be the what?

PG: To be the originator of a style. When the thing that's particularly sad is that [sotto voce, almost melancholy] the style turns out to be not very important.

ES: How so?

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<sup>22</sup> An early version was performed under the heading 'Work in Progress for 21 Musicians and Singers' on 24 May 1975 at Kitchen, leading Johnson to lament the 'decline of minimalism'. While Strickland cites only Young's work as an example of strict minimalism in this period, Johnson reflects that 'only a few years ago there were many composers, particularly around New York, who made long pieces out of single ideas, but now it is very hard to think of even one whom I could call a minimalist in any very stringent sense of the term' (Tom Johnson, 'The New Reich: Steve Reich' in *The Voice of New Music*, pp. 182–185 (first publ. 'Steve Reich's "Music for 18 Musicians"', *Village Voice* (9 June 1975)), p. 183).

<sup>23</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 248.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

PG: I think Minimalism in its formative period is not the music that's going to endure. I think the music that will endure was written later.<sup>25</sup>

Glass does, however, recognise Reich's particular influence on a younger generation of composers, saying that Reich was 'one of the most inspiring'.<sup>26</sup> Of the four 'high priests', Reich is probably the minimalist to receive the greatest amount of critical attention, particularly in the later phases of minimalism. This is perhaps partly due to the fact that the phases of Reich's development neatly illustrate the periodisation most commentators favour. D.J. Hoek divides Reich's career into early, middle and late periods: 1965–1971 (tape pieces to *Drumming*); 1972–1987 (full-time composer, substitutional phasing, counterpoint works) and 1988 and after (new technologies, *Different Trains*, *The Cave*),<sup>27</sup> while Potter and Suzuki both identify *Drumming* as a watershed, but prefer instead to bisect Reich's career into minimal and Maximal periods.<sup>28</sup> Whichever label is favoured, it is clear that in the latter part of the 1970s it becomes increasingly difficult to argue that the minimalist banner represents a single stylistic approach. As Art Lange explains, the composers 'split up to develop their individual syntaxes in the minimalist language: Young's static exploration of timbres and intonation, Riley's incorporation of improvisation, Reich's layered phrase juxtapositions, and Glass's additive combination of rhythmic cells'.<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, these are simply ways to explain the qualities of a composer's 'voice'. On the other, they also represent a diversity that is not fully articulated by a standard reading of minimalism.

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<sup>25</sup> Edward Strickland, *American Composers* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 263.

<sup>27</sup> D.J. Hoek, *Steve Reich: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> See Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists* and Suzuki, 'Minimal Music'. Schwarz also divides Glass' career in the same way ('Glass felt that the demands of music-theatre and the austerity of minimalism were mutually exclusive. Within just a few years, he would demonstrate his newly maximalist tendencies in *Einstein on the Beach* (1976)' (Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 128)), while Young and Riley remain minimal, Adams and Monk are 'post-minimal', and the European minimalists simply 'Europeans'.

<sup>29</sup> Art Lange, 'Chronicle', in Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, pp. 87–93 (first publ. 1977–1980), p. 90.

In summary, the standard definition of minimalism seems to outline two distinct parts of a single developmental line. The first concerns stasis: held tones; homogenous textures and timbres; extended durations; pure minimisation. This is Strickland's minimalism: 'an art whose principal features are clarity, continuity, and simplicity of composition aspiring to irreducible unity'.<sup>30</sup> Of course, this is also the minimalism supplied by Young, whom, Schwarz suggests, 'defines the style succinctly and elegantly: "That which is created with a minimum of means"'.<sup>31</sup> For many commentators, the second part develops from—and only from—this minimum. Yet this second part is many things that the first was not: it combines rhythmic vitality with strict, audible process; it becomes popular, accessible, widespread; non-western influences become a focus of much commentary, as does the relationship this music bears to Darmstadt; consonance, textural nuances and harmonic play become subtle yet notable components of each work. Minimalism becomes something more than mere development of a minimum: it becomes kaleidoscopic.

## 4.2 Kaleidoscopic minimalism

It is well documented that the principal composers in conventional accounts of minimalism resist the use of the term, and, as has been indicated, minimalism often seems to invite restrictive readings. Despite these drawbacks, a term is necessary, and regardless of composers' or commentators' protests against the suitability of the label, it is a category that is widely recognised, even if its interpretations are diverse. Therefore, rather than seek to undermine the applicability of minimalism further, it seems useful to take a different approach; namely, to expand the term's limits through variation: generating flexible and nuanced distinctions *within* the more general category of minimalism as it is utilised from a journalistic angle. This approach does not seek to envelop distinct musical trends into a singular category: it wholeheartedly resists any (modernist) impulse to impose a gloss of homogeneity or linear

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<sup>30</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 84.

<sup>31</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 9.



development onto a diverse period of transition and exploration.<sup>32</sup> Rather, it attempts to approach the difficult question of categorisation from an alternative perspective, highlighting nuance and difference to generate a multifaceted picture of minimalism. In doing so, minimalism becomes a more useful category, not simply in terms of being able to identify patterns and trends amongst the developments of individual composers, but also as a collection of attributes from a transitional phase that have proved influential to many postmodern musics.

Reich himself argues, in an interview with Andrew Ford, that treating the minimalist label as a rigid category restricts not only understanding, but also the future expectation of composer and listener alike:

Debussy didn't like being called an Impressionist and Schoenberg didn't like being called an Expressionist. All these terms—impressionism, expressionism, minimalism—were taken from the visual arts and were applied to composers. [...] But what I really object to is a way of thinking which I think composers have always objected to, and that is that it's my job to write the next piece, and what interests me in the next piece is what I didn't do in the last piece. And if I know I'm a—fill in the blank—then it's as if I've got a box around my imagination. Whenever I find a composer talking about their own work and applying a label, I always say “Stop that! You're hurting yourself—don't you know that's like substance abuse?” You can describe a piece of music without having to give it a term. But codifying it is the job of a music historian or a journalist and I have no bones to pick with them—it's simply not *my* job.<sup>33</sup>

Yet Reich also acknowledges the need for critical attention and subsequent categorisation. With this in mind, it seems appropriate to devise strategies of classification that offer the opportunity for expansion and variation. Contrasting with the ‘monochromatic’ definition of minimalism, this section will consider minimalism in reverse; taking aspects of that definition and exploring in detail the origins and augmentation of these features. By approaching a definition in this way, the narrative

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<sup>32</sup> The monolithic characterisation of modernism that such statements depend upon has already been discussed in relation to postmodern theory. However, taking as this thesis does a ‘postmodern attitude’, one must recognise that such characterisations are embedded within this discourse.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Reich in Andrew Ford, *Composer to Composer* (London: Quartet Books, 1993), p. 64.

of minimalism is fragmented and refocused in a way that avoids a closed characterisation of minimalism relating only to the 'high priests'. These aspects are explored below, set out alphabetically in an attempt to avoid any suggestion of prioritising certain features of minimalism over others. Since these elements are not discrete, there are inevitably areas of overlap, and to avoid unnecessary repetition, certain features that share strong common concerns are collected together as subcategories of other elements. It is hoped that by presenting the features of minimalism in this way, a kaleidoscopic and flexible categorisation will emerge.

### **Accessibility**

Minimalism is often discussed in reference to its relationship with popular music, highlighting the migration of various performers between two traditionally distinct areas of musical practice. It is also commonly credited with blurring the distinction between 'high' and 'low' art forms. Such claims, however, perpetuate a notion of value based on relative complexity: challenging music will serve an elite audience; that which is simpler or more immediate will deliver for the masses. Any view of minimalism that equates its simplicity of elements with a popular following is not, in fact, blurring these traditional distinctions, but reinforcing them. For many 'high art' commentators, minimalism represents altogether the wrong kind of challenge: how is the critic to display their specialist knowledge and retain their privileged position if works are immediately comprehensible? Yet minimalism enjoys a substantial following not only by the standards of its contemporary classical companions, but often in the wider marketplace. Steve Reich's *Music for Eighteen Musicians*, for example, 'was named "one of the 10 best pop albums of 1978"!'.<sup>34</sup> Even before its commercial release, *Music for 18* had been greeted with considerable acclaim, receiving a standing ovation at its premiere on 24 April 1976,<sup>35</sup> just as *Drumming* had five years earlier.

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), p. 26. Fink's punctuation in itself speaks volumes about how remarkable a success musicologists consider such achievements.

<sup>35</sup> See Tom Johnson, 'Steve Reich and 18 Other Musicians', in *The Voice of New Music*, pp. 224–226 (first publ. 'Steve Reich's "Music for 18 Musicians"', *Village Voice* (10 May 1976)).

Such enthusiastic reception did not go unremarked by the critics who attended the premiere and led Johnson to wonder:

what was it about Steve Reich's 'Drumming' that brought the audience to its feet at the Museum of Modern Art on December 3? The simple fact that 13 musicians had performed intricate rhythms with amazing precision for an hour and a half no doubt had a lot to do with it. Or perhaps it was because the simple white-note scales were refreshing to ears grown weary of dissonance.<sup>36</sup>

This last reference to the predominantly tonal sound world of works like *Drumming* may be regarded as one of the principal contributors to minimalism's popularity, and the connections that are made between popular music and minimalism. This returning to tonality might be more accurately described as a rejection of dissonance, or a favouring of a tonal centre, since the suggestion that minimalism functions according to the established conventions of Western tonal practice is clearly undermined by common slurs such as 'going-nowhere music'.<sup>37</sup> However, for those who stood to gain from minimalism's success (notably the record companies and publishers that promoted this new music), rhetoric that actively distanced minimalism from recent avant-garde trends and hinted at realignment with traditional harmony was advantageous. As Strickland notes, 'minimalism became common "marketing" currency after *Music for 18 Musicians*';<sup>38</sup> a point that ought to be noted not simply because it marks the start of minimalism's absorption into mainstream culture, but also because for many commentators, *Music for 18* marks an end to pure or authentic minimalism.

The reasons for this may be twofold: on the one hand, as Johnson notes, the music gained popularity as the rigorous, etude-like works of the early sixties were left behind in favour of music that could be more directly aligned with traditional compositional

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<sup>36</sup> Tom Johnson, 'Steve Reich's *Drumming*', in *The Voice of New Music*, pp. 26–27 (first publ. 'Steve Reich's "Drumming" at Museum of Modern Art', *Village Voice* (9 December 1971)), p. 26. While much of the discussion surrounding minimalist developments emphasises the separation between 'uptown' and 'downtown' musics, it should be noted that MOMA is not commonly understood as part of the 'downtown' scene, either in terms of geographical or institutional position.

<sup>37</sup> See this chapter: Tonicity (pp. 171–175) for further discussion.

<sup>38</sup> Strickland, 'Minimalism: T', p. 117.

concerns. This development is one that Johnson attributes to a waning of the modernist impulse for innovation:

As the concern with originality has faded, the other criteria for quality have become more nebulous, and the critic's job has become more difficult. Until recently, I could generally go away from a concert with a fairly clear idea of who would have appreciated it, who wouldn't have, and what the frame of comparison ought to be [...] in all cases there were commonly accepted criteria for quality, and when composers changed their styles it was easy to see what was happening [...] as Terry Riley and Philip Glass gave up their obsessions with minimalism, sped up their pacing, and went for a flashier kind of sound, it was a foregone conclusion that they would pick up a lot of general listeners and more or less disenfranchise themselves from the core of the avant-garde.<sup>39</sup>

A second possible explanation for the proposed exclusion of this later minimalism links directly to its success. A hangover from Adornian thinking, the popularity of minimalism sits in contradiction to the idea that 'high' art should be difficult and challenging.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Mellers articulates some cynicism about minimal music's lengthy structures:

There's an ultimate paradox in the position of the minimalist composer in our consumer orientated world. Pecuniarily, we value art in terms of dimension if it is visual, of duration if it is aural. On this basis a minimal piece of Glass lasting three hours (a modest span for him) is in performing rights worth 60 times as much as a maximal piece of Webern lasting three minutes.<sup>41</sup>

Such comments also hint at a certain suspicion of commercial manoeuvring, despite some minimalists achieving a level of popularity that enables them to sustain themselves independently of institutional support. Kostelanetz, in his foreword to Glass' monograph, argues that,

it is indicative of the wrong-headedness of mid-twentieth-century attitudes that the mention of "box office" is often considered crass, somehow unworthy of consideration by a serious artist, yet what better

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<sup>39</sup> Tom Johnson, 'The Years of Innovation Pass On (Continuation)', in *The Voice of New Music*, pp. 204–207 (first publ. 'The Years of Innovation Pass On (Part Two)', *Village Voice* (12 January 1976), p. 205.

<sup>40</sup> See p. 86, footnote 2 for details of some of Adorno's key writings on this topic.

<sup>41</sup> Wilfred Mellers, 'A Minimalist Definition', *Musical Times*, 125: 1696 (June 1984), p. 328 (p. 328).

barometer of interest can there be than the amount of money a public is willing to pay in order to participate in an artistic experience?<sup>42</sup>

The commercial success of minimalism suggests an ability to engage with the wider public that is not commonly found in 'art' music of the twentieth century, perhaps one of the reasons that many critics have seen fit to dismiss minimalism from the echelons of 'high' art altogether.

However, a contradiction often arises between a dismissive stance towards minimalism as a musical construct and a sense among writers that the socio-cultural reasons for its success demand evaluation and consideration. As Claire Pollin writes, 'whatever the limitations of minimalism, and they are considerable [...] the cross-fertilisation between "serious" and "popular" languages is one of its attractions'.<sup>43</sup> This shifting of critical focus away from the content of the music itself towards the conditions of production and reception that surround it is symptomatic of the transition towards postmodern modes of thought. Such approaches highlight the role of the audience, and consider the relationships that are established between creator, producer, and listener. MacDonald, for example, highlights the simultaneous success of minimalism and the efforts of composers to obscure any sense of authorial dominance, arguing that the 'regular' listener,

isn't concerned with causes but effects—which, luckily enough, is fine by the Minimalists, all of whom are high-IQ intellectuals keen to be thought of as regular guys [...] The recent success story of Minimalism is all the more remarkable for the fact that less than a decade ago it was the exclusive preserve of the cerebral avant-garde and confined to audiences of dozens in New York lofts.<sup>44</sup>

This latter point—that early minimalism did not enjoy the degree of success that has subsequently made it so ubiquitous—is an important one, and indicates a strong case for distinctions to be made within the category of minimalism. As Glass points out, it was not the American public that championed early minimalism, but the European

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<sup>42</sup> Kostelanetz in Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, p. xi.

<sup>43</sup> Claire Pollin, 'Why Minimalism Now?', in Christopher Norris (ed.), *Music and the Politics of Culture* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), pp. 226–239 (p. 248).

<sup>44</sup> MacDonald, *The People's Music*, p. 174.

festival circuit in Europe that contributed greatly to his music's dissemination ('it made me an internationally known composer years before I was known in America'<sup>45</sup>).

Glass presents a good example of a composer whose minimalist concerns have altered greatly during the course of his career. Schwarz argues that as Glass' success has increased, the composer has focused his attention on the maintenance of a certain palette to meet the expectations of his mass audience: 'a large and devoted public that expects a familiar style and is not disappointed when it gets it. It is an enviable position for a living composer to find himself in, but not one that encourages risk-taking. Neither *Music in Twelve Parts* nor *Einstein* could have arisen in an environment as stultifyingly predictable as this one.'<sup>46</sup> However, Bernard argues that Glass reintroduces elements of traditional symphonic drama into his trademark sound (cyclical arpeggiated patterns in muted instrumental colours) to the detriment of the minimalist aesthetic that garnered his initial success:

Glass' growing attraction over the last two decades to bombast and the banal effect of big build-ups fairly thoroughly repudiated the minimalist desideratum [...] a kind of hybrid has lately been attempted, combining an extremely simple tonal structure with vestiges of a minimalist structure. To the extent that these later works seem unconvincing—and, essentially, most of what Glass has written since *Einstein* falls into this category—it is because the hybrid is not viable.<sup>47</sup>

These criticisms both provide clues to the dismissal of minimalism as a movement deserving of critical scrutiny: as the success of later works has obscured earlier ones, the characterisation of minimalism has been repeatedly modified to fit with the most profligate examples of the term. In fact, what might be more appropriate is a categorisation that recognises the altered nature of this later minimalism, perhaps even an attempt to categorise the most commercially successful and (often) most vacuous examples as an image of minimalism that approaches the idea of a simulacra of some absent original. Potter, for example, has pointed to the re-'packaging' of Glass'

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<sup>45</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, p. 47.

<sup>46</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 166.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, 'Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality in Recent American Music', *American Music*, 21: 1 (Spring 2003), 112–133 (p. 116).

back catalogue, suggesting that the trilogy of operas begun by *Einstein on the Beach* was 'probably commercially conceived as well as retrospective'.<sup>48</sup> As the machinations of advertising seek to authenticate a series of modified repetitions, the *idea* of the original is reconstructed to the point where the copy seems more real than the original minimalism.

The relationship of advertising and 'packaging' of goods to the music that is being represented is also an area that has attracted the attention of Robert Fink. Fink moves beyond the questions of how the characteristics of the music itself are modified in the course of its popularisation to look at the market for musical minimalism not as one that concerns the production of things, but instead, one that concerns the 'production of desire-for-things'. Fink argues that:

repetitive music arises with and mirrors a key historical transformation of the consumer society: the self-conscious postwar transfer of the repetitive structures of mass production from the material realm of the object into the symbolic realm of discourse. Instead of the mass production of *goods*, the affluent society became obsessed with the mass production of *discourse about goods*, specifically the mass production of both *discourse about the desire for goods*, and the production of *desire for goods through discourse*. That last is, of course, just a fancy way of saying [...] advertising.<sup>49</sup>

Fink's argument here is, in essence, that leisure and recreation becomes commodified. In itself, such an argument shows little differentiation from the concerns of the Frankfurt school earlier in the century. However, desire, and the fulfilment of desire, becomes public: marketable, achievable, (and ultimately) disposable. Although instantaneous desire-fulfilment is not simply a minimalist phenomenon, Fink singles minimalism out because of the self-conscious relationship it establishes within this commodified context. In turn, it might be possible to argue that the history of minimalism's reception can serve to illuminate wider trends in cultural reception during this transitional phase of the twentieth century.

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<sup>48</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 324. Potter is referring to the way in which *Einstein* was originally billed as 'music theatre' before the later opera commissions were received.

<sup>49</sup> Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, pp. 81–82.

## Aesthetic

While sometimes used simply to describe a common impetus behind a certain compositional process, the aesthetics of minimalism is more specifically understood to relate to the early origins of the movement and the theoretical concerns that fuelled its evolution.<sup>50</sup> Schwarz argues for a categorisation of minimalism which, 'whether in art, music, or theatre, is an aesthetic which deliberately and severely restricts the materials and resources that the artist, composer, or dramatist employs in his conceptions. It is an art which focuses on small details of structure or concept, and then magnifies these to form the basis of an entire work.'<sup>51</sup> While there has been continuous debate as to which works qualify as minimalism in a true aesthetic sense, it seems that the most workable response to these aesthetic criteria is to focus on the reductive impulse of these ideas, as opposed to the resultant content of a work. In this way, the still, drone-based works of composers such as Young, and the motoric repetitions of Riley and Reich, as well as many of the other variations on the principle of limited means, can be considered branches of a common root.

The reductive aspect of the minimalist aesthetic has been interpreted differently by various commentators. Strickland, for example, sees an experimental relation in the idea of allowing an element to 'speak' through the simplicity of its context: 'Young bangs a pot for an hour to "get inside the sound" rather than to organise sounds in traditional musical terms, and Stella insists that paint on the canvas must *remain* "as

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<sup>50</sup> The term 'aesthetics' has been used in a variety of ways to describe a range of philosophical and critical concerns. As Bujic summarises, 'succinctly "aesthetics of music" could be defined as "speculation on the nature of music excluding the purely physical attributes of sound". The term "aesthetics" has been variously defined as a theory of sensuous perception, a study of taste, and a theory of beauty in nature and art; in time it became widely accepted as a concept denoting the philosophical investigation of the theory of art' (Bojan Bujic, 'Aesthetics of Music', *The Oxford Companion to Music Online*. <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e90>> [accessed 23/03/10]). It is the latter definition, or what Bowie describes as 'theoretical reflections on the status of music as an art and as a form of meaningful articulation', that is meant when the term aesthetics is used in this thesis (Andrew Bowie, 'Philosophy of music, §III: Aesthetics, 1750–2000', *Grove Music Online* <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/52965pg3>> [accessed 23/03/10]). Specifically, this section is focused on the theoretical-philosophical outlooks that determined the early course of minimalism.

<sup>51</sup> K. Robert Schwarz, 'Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process: Part 1', *Perspectives of New Music*, 19: 1/2 (Autumn 1980–Summer 1981), 373–392 (p. 376).



good as it was in the can," not get worse (or better).<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere, Bernard relates restriction to transparency of compositional process, as he argues that 'the desirability of the directness of image is certainly evident in the artistic credos of minimalist composers',<sup>53</sup> while John Rockwell likens it to conceptual art, 'whereby the very idea of a piece—and its attendant reams of critical justification—took precedence over its mundane realization'.<sup>54</sup> There are also commentators who relate the aesthetic stance of the minimalists to the wider cultural arena. Schwarz regards the turn towards the minimalist aesthetic as 'a consequence of the condition of mankind in an increasingly complex and uncontrollable society [...] The deliberate limitation of the resources employed [...] can easily be viewed as an extreme response to the complex incomprehensibility of both contemporary music and contemporary culture in general'.<sup>55</sup> The reaction that Schwarz identifies is often interpreted as a desire for unity, and Colpitt argues that while this was already commonplace before the sixties, minimalism prioritised this, so that 'many Minimalists worked and wrote as if it were the one and only criterion for a successful work of art. Most compositional devices were developed in accordance with this notion'.<sup>56</sup> Bernard uses Glass' *Music in Fifths* (1969) as an example of such devices, reflecting that the additive processes Glass utilises are 'calculated to minimise the possibility that the listener will recognise the added notes each time as separate elements: as soon as they are heard, they become indivisibly integrated with the whole unit'.<sup>57</sup> However, while Bernard describes this musical unity as a pure experience, relating it to the 'spiritual, meditative, qualities of minimalism: simplification in the service of the search for truth',<sup>58</sup> Glass himself

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<sup>52</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 292 [his italics].

<sup>53</sup> Bernard, 'The Minimalist Aesthetic', p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> John Rockwell, 'The Death and Life of Minimalism', *New York Times*, II, 21 December 1986, p. H1–2, (p. 1, col.3).

<sup>55</sup> K. Robert Schwarz, 'Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process Part 2', *Perspectives of New Music*, 20: 1/2 (Autumn 1981–Summer 1982), 225–286 (p. 279).

<sup>56</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 47

<sup>57</sup> Bernard, 'The Minimalist Aesthetic', p. 105.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

emphasises the cohesion of the aesthetic within a wider cultural context, explaining that he 'came to see the idea of art content tied in with our relationship to it, an idea proving the basis of a truly modern, or perhaps postmodern, aesthetic. Furthermore, it was an aesthetic that, in a very satisfying way, tied artists in all fields to other contemporary thought, be it philosophy, science or psychology.'<sup>59</sup>

The juxtaposition of these contrasting interpretations highlights one of the difficulties in clearly defining a 'minimalist aesthetic'. On the one hand, critics have been keen to emphasise the static, contemplative aspects of the listening experience, and to align these with a reactive stance to the acceleration of everyday life. However, while this perspective may sit quite comfortably alongside the rhetoric of Young, or the later so-called 'spiritual minimalists',<sup>60</sup> these implicit notions of simplicity and isolation sit uncomfortably alongside other minimalist composers' active engagement with modern technologies (Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room*, or Reich's phase pieces). Furthermore, while the spiritual practices of Glass and others are often presented as some sort of explanation for their quasi-meditative repetitions, it seems inadequate to make such simplistic connections if we are to believe that the author's sense of 'meaning' has become extraneous to the experience of the listener. Although it is common to explain away the increasingly technological interface of minimalist composition by identifying a more aesthetically orientated early phase of minimalism followed by a period of stylistic unity that focused less on aesthetic origins, Bernard's use of *Music in Fifths* is contradicted by Glass' statement, which he considers applicable to all his music composed after 1965. Glass points to an aesthetic that draws on the logical processes of scientific and philosophical thought: a more intellectualised process of composition that reminds us of minimalism's symbiotic relationship with the complexities of modernist composition, and rejects the isolation of the spiritual experience.

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<sup>59</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> For example, John Tavener or Arvo Pärt. See this chapter: *Spiritual minimalism* (pp. 154–156) for further discussion.

While it must be noted that Glass' rhetoric may be as much an attempt to distance his output from composers such as Young as it is a genuinely detached aesthetic position, it does point to a very common trend among minimal composers of the 1960s and early seventies: that of theoretical and procedural thought processes that preclude and dictate the composition (or construction) of a work. Carl points to 'a gap between the conceptual basis of minimalism and its technical realisation; the former is sweepingly philosophical and the latter extremely concrete, with little intersection between them',<sup>61</sup> while Colpitt notes that 'familiarity with the pervasive theoretical basis of Minimalism enhances and sustains a more rewarding experience of the art objects themselves'.<sup>62</sup> A sense that a theoretical understanding is essential for a 'correct' experience of the artwork points to a significant hangover from the modernist dictats of complexity, yet the simplicity of elements at the same time rejects such notions. Similarly, the difficulty in connecting underlying aesthetics to practical realisations points to a need to justify compositions. Ultimately, this undermines the supposed freedom of the listener to be absorbed by the experience of listening.

### **Avant-Garde**

The avant-garde impulse is already difficult to define in any modern or postmodern context, yet it deserves some attention with respect to minimalist developments, and for these purposes it will be taken to mean a compulsion to either react to, or advance beyond, current trends.<sup>63</sup> The avant-garde impulse plays an important catalytic role in numerous musical developments, and this section will aim to outline some of the ways in which minimalist composers and works can be regarded as reactionary. Minimalism

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<sup>61</sup> Robert Carl, 'The Politics of Definition in New Music', *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989), 101–114 (p. 112).

<sup>62</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 132.

<sup>63</sup> Under Bürger's division of the avant-garde into the Historical- and Neo-avant-garde impulses, minimalism clearly falls into the latter category (See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)). Although Bürger argues that 'the neo-avant-garde proclaim the same goals as the representatives of the historic avant-garde movements to some extent, the demand that art be reintegrated into the praxis of life within the existing society can no longer be seriously made after the failure of [historical] avant-gardist intentions' (p. 107), Bürger chooses to retain the conceptualisation of an avant-garde impulse as a way of seeking to reveal 'ruptures within the system' (p. xxx) of the culture industry's dominance.

is situated at a tipping point between modernism and postmodernism not simply because of its chronological circumstance or the plurality of its subsequent offshoots, but because its reactionary course explodes the traditional dualities that avant-garde impulses reflect. Instead of standing in simple binary opposition to the prevailing modernist impulse, Bernard argues that 'music of chance ultimately served the minimalists as a negative ideal, an example of what not to do, in their efforts to create a viable alternative to (what they came to see as) the needless and overly ineffectual complexities of serialism'.<sup>64</sup> Minimalism, therefore, reacts against both the prevailing systems of the elite, serial, avant-garde *and* the experimental avant-garde that was yet to be institutionalised.

While the Cageian avant-garde was reacting against the strictures of serialism, composers such as Reich seemed to recognise the aural contradictions that this music posed to a listener who could identify neither strict system nor aleatoric process in the finished work.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, one is left with a sense that simply extending the experimental impulse failed to serve the minimalist's aims and propelled them into a tripartite relationship with the prevailing trends of both the avant-garde and institutionalised modernism. While the early works of Young seem to grow out of a close relationship with Fluxus, and while Reich and Glass were certainly part of the downtown New York scene that fostered Cage's ideas, this involvement seems to have served more as a liberating force than a direct source of inspiration. Instead, material for early works was drawn as much from the work of those within the establishment: Reich for example says his 1963 work *Pitch Charts*, grew 'out of a Berio piece, *Tempi Concertanti*, that had little boxes and the players improvise on them. I said, "I'm just

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<sup>64</sup> Bernard, 'The Minimalist Aesthetic', p. 97.

<sup>65</sup> Beirens suggests that the success of minimalism and its distinction from experimental music is due to a stylistic coherence in the former. He details the way in which much experimental music fails to remain radical after its initial impact is over (using Cage's 4'33" and Fluxus as examples), and argues that 'Minimal music did not stop at unrepeatable experiments, at provocative works that lost much of their sense when the audience became immune to that provocative content. Instead minimal music offered possibilities to establish a coherent style, to develop a personal musical language that within a stylistic framework could evolve into many directions' (Maarten Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music as Reflected in the Works of Louis Andriessen, Karel Goeyvaerts, Gavin Bryars and Michael Nyman: A Music-Analytical Study (published PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, 2005), pp. 149–150).

taking the boxes!”<sup>66</sup> While geographically it seems logical to associate minimalism more closely with the experimental aesthetic, it is interesting to note that while a work like *Four Organs* (1970) caused a riot at its uptown New York premiere, it was received with much acclaim in Europe. There are countless examples of early minimalist works being well received in Europe while they were either slated by American press or confined to downtown lofts and galleries.<sup>67</sup> In light of this, one is forced to consider that the ‘European dominance’ that American minimalists were so happy to posit their rhetoric against, was in fact the more receptive arena for their avant-garde advances.

Rockwell points out that although early minimalism often incorporated popular elements, works such as Rzewski’s *Coming Together* and *Attica* (1972) do not, consequently, carry popular appeal. While he refers to them as ‘particularly compelling examples of what might be called motoric minimalism—repetitive music enlivened by the energies of jazz’, he argues that ‘they make no pretence of speaking to any audience other than one already open to avant-garde idioms’.<sup>68</sup> In the wash of more commercialised and popular forms of minimalism that followed in the wake of the earlier radicalism, it is easy to forget how challenging much of the early work must have been to an unfamiliar listener. Schwarz also argues that the relentless rhythmic and harmonic unisons of Glass’ early works (such as *Strung Out* (1967) and *Two Pages* (1969)) should be seen as ‘more radical than any minimalist music to date’.<sup>69</sup> When placed in this context, it becomes apparent that for a brief period, minimalism occupied an incredibly radical position in the spectrum of 1960s musical activity. However, as with all avant-garde impulses, action is either exhausted or absorbed.

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<sup>66</sup> Reich in Mark Alburger, ‘Steve Reich: Early Phase’, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Music* 11: 4 (April 2004), 1–8 (p. 4). An online version of the journal is available at <<http://21st-centurymusic.com/>> [accessed 15/03/10].

<sup>67</sup> See Amy C. Beal, ‘A Place to Ply Their Wares with Dignity: American Composer-Performers in West Germany, 1972’, *Musical Quarterly* 86: 2 (Summer 2002), 329–348 (p. 335): ‘One month after his 1972 festival, when Philip Glass was still fairly unknown in Germany, Otte recorded that composer’s still unpublished *Music in Twelve Parts*. Otte shared these recordings with other radio stations, and they provided an ongoing source of royalties and exposure abroad for the composers’ (*ibid.*). European opera houses have also been instrumental in the commissioning of Glass’ operatic trilogy.

<sup>68</sup> John Rockwell, *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1985), p. 85.

<sup>69</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 120.

Minimalism in this respect shows evidence of its transitional position through its absorption not only into mainstream classical traditions, but also into the broader music-industrial machine.

### **Ensembles**

The formation of composer-led ensembles has been a notable feature of minimalist development. This concern with the modes of production points to both a desire for control over the music's presentation, but also an attempt to bypass the demands of institutionalised cultural life. However, it is important to recognise that minimalist ensembles vary in nature, construction and modes of operation. While *In C* is often heralded as a key example of collective, unrestricted music-making, and the anecdote of collaborative working that leads to 'The Pulse' is well known, the strict instructions that accompany this sparse score are often overlooked.<sup>70</sup> As Potter points out, 'the simultaneous deployment of a maximum of four modules encourages the performers to work closely together [...] the development of a true ensemble style in which no performer draws attention to his own part at the expense of others'.<sup>71</sup> It is this precision of ensemble that may have proved most influential on Reich as he took part in the early performances of *In C*.

While Riley continued to work predominantly as a solo musician or in small band-like line ups, Reich dedicated the majority of his early and middle catalogue to a single ensemble of only limited instrumental variations. As he explains, the primary motivation was pragmatic—a way of hearing the music that he was writing:

student composers at that time were writing enormously complicated pieces, but as Mills didn't have an orchestra, they weren't played [...] And then at night you see Coltrane playing—he just gets up and plays. So it was at that point that I decided I must play in my own pieces—whatever my limitations, I must become a part of the ensemble.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Robert Carl, *Terry Riley's In C* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) for a detailed study of *In C*'s history.

<sup>71</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 112.

<sup>72</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 9.

This sense of pragmatism pervades much of Reich's work in the seventies (including, for example, a revision of *Octet* (1979) into *Eight Lines* (1983)<sup>73</sup>), and, as his ensemble expanded to accommodate larger-scale works, has proved itself more than simply a vehicle for performance. It is the collaborative aspect that singles out all minimal music ensembles from many of the other groups that emerge at this time.<sup>74</sup> Reich's interest in the 'resulting patterns' of his music led to a rehearsal technique where the aural impressions that each performer perceived were fed back into the piece to become part of the work. He recalls that working with different singers in a 1973 performance of *Drumming*, for example, resulted in new patterns that were then incorporated into subsequent recitals by the original performers. He also adds that even once the scores of these works were published, it is possible that new patterns will emerge. However, he adds that 'most performers will probably want to follow the given resulting

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<sup>73</sup> Reich explains: 'Eight Lines is exactly the same piece as my Octet (1979) with the addition of a second string quartet. These additional four strings were added because of the problems in performing the piece with only one player to a part. For the two violins, this problem was the difficulty of playing rather awkward double stops in tune. This was solved by having two first violins and two seconds so that each player could play one note at a time. For the viola and cello, a second player was added to each to allow the rapid eighth-note patterns to be broken up between the two players thus preventing fatigue. This small change in instrumentation has proved to make a large difference in performance and for that reason Eight Lines is the only version of the piece suitable for performance' (Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 119).

<sup>74</sup> For example, *Fires of London* or *Ensemble Intercontemporain*: both expect(ed) to play the scores presented to them. However, Reich praises some of these ensembles: 'the Ensemble Intercontemporain in France, the Schoenberg Ensemble in Holland, the Ensemble Modern in Germany, the London Sinfonietta in England, and the Group 180 in Hungary, among others, are a new generation of musicians whose basic repertory begins with Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Bartók. These players can give definitive performances of my music and that of my contemporaries because: (1) they are usually no more than 15 to 30 in number, with each player taking sole responsibility for his or her part since there is generally no doubling; (2) they are utterly at ease with electronics of all sorts; and (3) they know this kind of music in their bones. It is with these kinds of musicians all over the world (of which my own ensemble is a part) that I cast my lot for the future.' (Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 160). By contrast, Robert Adlington makes a distinction between composer-led ensembles and what might be termed 'institutionalised ensembles' when he attributes the poor critical reception of the London premiere of Andriessen's *De Staat* to an under-rehearsed performance by the London Sinfonietta (See Robert Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 120–121). Despite the contemporary orientation of such ensembles, they are still likely to be governed by an administration wary of the financial implication of extended rehearsal time or what they perceive to be low-box-office programming. Contrast this with Carl's interpretation of Riley's instructions for *In C*: 'the composer's voice here is not that of an authoritative master, or dictator of practice. Rather, it is that of a mentor [...] careful to allow the performer leeway in the choices made and to preserve his or her autonomy as an individual within the collective' (Carl, *Terry Riley's In C*, p. 60).

patterns unless they have an unusual amount of time for creative rehearsal'.<sup>75</sup> This acknowledgement points to a commitment to production and dissemination of his compositions and an altogether different profile of the composer-as-producer (as opposed to composer-as-creator who then leaves his music to be interpreted at will). While the growth of the ensemble in preparation for *Drumming* led to a name change and a shifting of Reich's role,<sup>76</sup> he is still careful to highlight the collaborative effort of the ensemble. Potter notes that *Drumming* 'was put together via painstaking rehearsals [...] a kind of ensemble solidarity that makes playing together a joy'.<sup>77</sup>

Yet interestingly, the socio-political concerns that drove European ensembles such as De Volharding or the Scratch Orchestra are absent from Reich's ensembles. As Hillier argues, 'there is no call or indeed opportunity for outward display [...] The players may provide an interesting spectacle, but they are—have to be—absorbed in what they are doing'.<sup>78</sup> This anonymity in performance forms an interesting contrast to the collaborative rehearsal practices of Reich's ensemble. As he is keen to stress, 'the history of chamber music is very much in progress',<sup>79</sup> and the development of the composer-led ensemble is one that is facilitated by changes in technology and the mechanics of cultural distribution. Changing attitudes in the public arena towards the consumption of music allow these ensembles to thrive, and the globalisation of the recording and broadcast industries sustains these groups' popularity. Interestingly, however, as Reich's fame has increased, he has taken on commissions outside the ensemble, yet predominantly for ensembles where the performers themselves have some say over the repertoire. He says in an interview with Nyman:

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<sup>75</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 80.

<sup>76</sup> Steve Reich and Musicians is an ensemble in which Reich performs: the newer Steve Reich Ensemble finds Reich at the mixing desk.

<sup>77</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 198. This 'solidarity' is also evident in the amount of time the ensemble spent as the exclusive performers of Reich's works: *Music for 18 Musicians* existed 22 years without a score because it was so rooted in the complexities developed within the ensemble (see Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 90).

<sup>78</sup> Paul Hillier in Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 158.



I'm interested in other musicians playing my music. If a piece of music is going to survive, who's going to make that decision? It's not going to be painters or sculptors or music critics, it's going to be other musicians. If musicians like a piece of music they will continue to play it, and it will continue to live. Otherwise it's like pop music, it comes and it goes.<sup>80</sup>

While the aesthetics of minimalism once shunned the establishment, statements like these reveal a desire to be recognised at least by an establishment of sorts. Just like Jameson's reabsorbed revolutions, it seems that the logic of capitalism has accommodated the defiance of ensemble culture to allow it to enter the mainstream and thrive.

### **Experimentalism**

While an experimental aesthetic may seem antithetical to process-based minimalist music, multiple strands of minimalist development are firmly rooted in experimentalism. Schwarz, for example, identifies a Cageian-derived precision in the singularity of process found in the early works of Reich and Glass, 'at the fine line where minimalism and concept art merge', despite indentifying an 'utter rejection of random procedures, and their emphasis on an almost dictatorial domination of the musical material' as moving away from Cage's aesthetic concerns.<sup>81</sup> Experimental music itself is, of course, a loosely defined term, labelling a variety of composers and performance artists. While the limits of any definition are therefore hard to ascertain, there are certain movements and attitudes that are firmly identified with experimentalism and concern us here for their subsequent links with minimalist development. Chief among these is the role of Fluxus in relation to the Happenings that were taking place in New York during the 1950s. Haskell, who has written extensively on this period and the intersections between various artistic spheres, identifies a 'parallel mode of performance art' she calls 'Events' emerging (as a result of Cage's influence) in New York around the same time as the Happenings are taking place. She bases her distinction of the Events on their rejection of physicality and the gestural vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism, favouring instead a conceptual rigor

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<sup>80</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 96.

<sup>81</sup> Schwarz, 'Steve Reich: Part II', p. 279.

and attentiveness to “‘insignificant” phenomenon’.<sup>82</sup> Haskell also notes that it is Events, rather than Happenings, that are later to become associated with the Fluxus group.

While La Monte Young himself frequently attempts to distance himself from Fluxus, his links to the organisation are strong.<sup>83</sup> His *Compositions 1960* and *Compositions 1961* both first appeared as Fluxus publications, and he is credited as the editor of both editions of the *Anthology of Chance Operations*.<sup>84</sup> Young’s desire to remove himself from Fluxus associations may be twofold. On the one hand, Young appears to have developed a highly authoritarian approach to the dissemination of and commentary on his work, and his later, more spiritual preoccupations may be seen to conflict with these earlier compositions. The second reason, partially related to the first, is a general distaste for Maciunas’ ‘aesthetic orientation’.<sup>85</sup> Haskell argues that all of the artists included in the *Anthology* subsequently sought to disassociate themselves from Fluxus after Maciunas returned from Europe with a pro-soviet, ‘dictatorial’ attitude.<sup>86</sup> In retrospect, it seems that Maciunas may have identified a fledgling artistic movement, and sought to name, categorise and promote it some time after its originators had removed themselves from the cutting edge. Despite these later conflicts, however, Haskell’s original distinction between Happenings and Events bears relevance to minimal development, since Young was enrolled in Cage’s classes at New School in 1960: the same forum from which she sees the Events evolving.

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<sup>82</sup> Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance 1958–1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984), p. 49.

<sup>83</sup> Consider, for example, this advert for a Fluxus concert from the *Village Voice* on 23 September 1965: ‘FLUXORCHESTRA PERFORMS 20 WORLD PREMIERS! Of avant-gagist music, ying yang music, Donald Duck music, anti-neobaroque music, pataphysical music, no music. La Monte Young conducting an orchestra of twenty unskilled instrumentalists’ (reproduced in Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; f.p. 1972), p. 110).

<sup>84</sup> La Monte Young (ed.), George Maciunas (designer), *An Anthology of Chance Operations...* (Bronx, NY: L. Young & J. Mac Low, 1963; [n.p.]: Heiner Friedrich, 1970).

<sup>85</sup> Haskell, *Blam!*, p. 59.

<sup>86</sup> The first concerts to take place under the Fluxus banner were in Europe, while the first New York Fluxus event took place in 1964.

The compositions by Young that are most strongly associated with Fluxus date from the immediate aftermath of his classes with Cage. *Compositions 1961* begins to show some conceptual regard for notions of repetition and sustenance,<sup>87</sup> while 1960 also sees the creation of *Arabic Numeral (Any Integer) for Henry Flynt*. This piece calls for any number of repetitions to be performed on something loud and percussive (Young once gave a rendition of the work consisting of repeated hits on the back of a frying pan), and for Schwarz, represents 'a historically important composition, since subsequent minimalist composers took repetition and made it the structural backbone of their music'.<sup>88</sup> Strickland, however, identifies these works not so much with the continued development of minimalism as with an ancestry indebted to conceptual and experimental thinking, suggesting that 'the border between Minimal and Conceptual art may be as tenuous in music as it is in the performing arts'. He cites another of Young's *Compositions 1960, (#7)* as a work that 'partakes of both realms'.<sup>89</sup> #7 appears on the page as an interval of a perfect fifth accompanied by the instruction 'to be held for a long time', and is reminiscent of the *Trio's* opening. Strickland argues that this work anticipates Young's drone works, but also touches upon a particularly postmodern concern: namely that of the importance of production. For Strickland argues that 'once it is played, "#7" moves from the conceptual realm to the realm of Minimal music'.<sup>90</sup>

The importance of production—of the means of presentation—is further illuminated by a recollection from Glass of a performance he attended at Yoko Ono's loft in 1961: '[Young] had a pendulum hung to the ceiling [...] and he would swing the pendulum and wait until it came to a halt. And when it came to a halt, he would draw a long white line. And he did that for about three hours. And I stayed for three hours; it was just a fabulous performance.'<sup>91</sup> However, despite his appreciation for Young's work,

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<sup>87</sup> This collection of verbal instructions actually derives from 29 repetitions of *Composition 1960, #10*: 'Draw a straight line and follow it'.

<sup>88</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 33.

<sup>89</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 139.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 262.

Potter argues that for Glass, this was 'Dada or performance art'.<sup>92</sup> While some of what Glass says may involve a desire to distance himself from activities that have helped to generate a label he disapproves of, it certainly points to divisions between the conceptual basis of minimal music as sustenance and the more dynamic minimalism that one would associate with Glass. Potter's comparison with performance art is also given weight by Schwarz's descriptions of Young's performances at Berkeley, which, he argues, owe a significant debt to Cageian experimentation. However, he also notes that Young 'would later refer to these pieces as "the theatre of the singular event", and that was precisely their difference from Cage. In place of the Cageian multiplicity of events that Young had espoused at Berkeley, he now designed pieces that restricted the performer to one closely-defined activity. It was as if he were minimalising Cage.'<sup>93</sup> This contrast between the pared down simplicity of Young's work and the complexity of Cage's output does indicate a point of departure within the Experimental aesthetic, but still, in an interview with Strickland, Young admits 'that I didn't come out of a vacuum. I deeply appreciate people like Cage.'<sup>94</sup>

While Young's text pieces are easily aligned with much activity in the Experimental sphere, it is the seminal *In C* (1964) that offers a more definitive departure from experimental concerns and suggests a transition that might demand some form of reclassification. While many attempts have been made to synthesise the particular features of *In C* with Riley's earlier and later works, it seems that the impact of this specific piece is actually more important to the development of minimalism than seeking to reconcile Riley's remaining output with the avenues of exploration *In C* seems to have inspired. Hitchcock points out the dual qualities of the work; on the one hand reflecting a 'Cage-derived aleatory randomness' through its variable instrumentation and indeterminate length, and on the other noting that 'this factor is offset by the repetitive element and by a strictly controlled tempo, governed by a

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<sup>92</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 262.

<sup>93</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Strickland, *American Composers*, p. 62.

continuous, metronomic pulse drummed in octave C's'.<sup>95</sup> However, while many commentators have interpreted this rhythmic dynamism as a seminal moment in the development of minimalism, Hitchcock's insistence that these aspects are 'jazz-related' serves as a reminder that *In C*'s legacy has as much to do with other composers' responses to it as it does with any particular idiom that Riley was seeking to explore.

One example of a work which has been related to Riley's approach is Nyman's *Bell Set*, which ap Siôn situates on the cusp of minimalist and experimental traditions, relating Nyman's concept of people process to a specific kind of minimalism, while identifying experimental concerns in the elements of performer independence.<sup>96</sup> Since Nyman was an early and influential commentator on Experimental and minimal music, his own responses give an interesting perspective to the idea that *In C* may have, for many composers, provided some inspiration for moving away from both the rigours of serialism and the indeterminacy of Experimentalism.<sup>97</sup> However, for Nyman, at least in minimalism's early years, the practice is still firmly rooted in an Experimental sphere. Of Reich's early work, he states that:

Despite the intervention of personal decisions which to some extent override the abstract mechanics of the system, Reich's music still retains the basic non-traditional characteristics shared by all experimental music: that of stasis and a nondirectional, nondramatic, nondynamic approach to musical structure: there are no hierarchies, no transitions, no tension, no relaxation, and change is quantitative rather than qualitative.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> H. Wiley Hitchcock with Kyle Gann, *Music in the United State: A Historical Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2000), p. 327.

<sup>96</sup> See ap Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman*, p. 43.

<sup>97</sup> Beirens also suggests that Nyman's two *Waltzes* (*Waltz in F* and *First Waltz in D* (both 1976)) are 'obviously indebted' to *In C* (Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 243). It is interesting that Beirens points out a number of ways in which Nyman appears to refine or regularise processes drawn from music by Riley and Reich; a seeming contradiction to the commonly-held belief that American minimalism represents the rigorous application of process while the European approach was more flexible.

<sup>98</sup> Michael Nyman, 'Against Intellectual Complexity in Music', in Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 206–213 (first publ. in *October*, 13 (1980), pp. 81–89), p. 212.

Of course, this statement immediately betrays Nyman's predominantly UK perspective, using as it does the notion of process as a derivative of the systems so familiar to British experimentalists.<sup>99</sup> However, it also clearly shows how differently the later works function in terms of their teleology: the latter part of Nyman's statement would be extremely difficult to justify upon hearing any works after *Music for 18*, making use as they do of textural layering and traditional harmonic functions (albeit still over protracted stretches). This evolution in a single composer's work points to a very gradual detachment of minimalism from experimentalism; perhaps suggesting a distinction between minimalism and experimentalism that nevertheless recognises the impact of Experimentalism on minimalism's development.

### Frames

A significant feature of minimal music has been the duration of works. While Young's interest lay in sustained drones, much of the music that follows has a rhythmic vitality that still maintains this same sense of stasis, and many commentators have pointed to the anti-teleological nature of minimal music precisely due to its lack of harmonic direction. However, the facts of start and finish and the identification of a process or concept point to a sense of progression throughout the duration of the piece. In an article which attempts to describe this new music to his readers, Page urges them to, 'imagine trying to impose a frame on a running river—making it a finite, enclosed work of art and yet leaving both ends open and free, leaving its kinetic qualities unsullied. Minimalist composers are framing the river.'<sup>100</sup> The function of frames in the context of minimal music demands attention to the way in which a works' extended durations might subvert or disrupt traditional expectations of how a musical work is presented. Traditionally, the function of a frame is to indicate the presence of an artwork, as Richard Littlefield explains:

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<sup>99</sup> Elsewhere, Nyman also emphasises the *collective* attitude that still allows for individual expression: 'the immediate desire to deal with what sound is, rather than what the composer may *think* it is or decides he *wants* it to be, was held communally; the philosophical and aesthetic motivations were as personal and characteristic of each composer as their music initially was and still is' (Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 51).

<sup>100</sup> Page, 'Framing the River', p. 65.

First, the frame separates the work from its context. In doing so, the frame enshrines an object, thereby bringing it to our attention as beautiful form or “art”. The frame provides us with an object that can have intrinsic content. Second, and at the same time [...] the frame must not be considered part of the art work, even though physically attached to it. Thus, the frame also separates the work from the frame itself. To summarise: in relation to the work, the frame seems to disappear into the general context (such as a museum wall); in relation to the general context, the frame disappears into the work. Therefore the frame belongs fully to neither work nor external context.<sup>101</sup>

While this passage refers to painting, Littlefield continues to transfer these observations to other artforms: the podium in sculpture; and in performance, the rituals and habits of the performance space. In a concert hall, there is an expectation for events to take place that ‘frame’ the musical work: the arrival and tuning of the ensemble, perhaps also a conductor (generally to applause), alongside the dimming of the lights. There follows a brief period of silence; a silence that Littlefield considers the crucial component of the frame’s dual action outlined above. However, many minimal works thwart this function, either through the context of their presentation, or through extreme duration. Early performances by Reich and Glass, for example, took place not in concert halls, but in lofts and art galleries, where there could often be more than one performance taking place simultaneously. There was also an expectation that the audience would wander freely in and out of an event, thereby not experiencing the work as a ‘framed event’ such as Littlefield describes. Similarly, when works were performed in traditional concert venues, those such as Glass’ opera *Einstein on the Beach* confronted the audience with a work already-in-progress as they entered the auditorium, and actively encouraged them to leave and return as they pleased.

Not only do such decisions on the part of the composer thwart the initial sense of beginning, but they also undermine the notion that what is contained within the ‘frame’ constitutes some unified whole that must be received in its entirety. Glass points out that *Einstein* ‘was never intended to be seen as a whole, narrative piece. Its “wholeness” comes from its consistency of subject matter and overall structure and

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<sup>101</sup> Richard Littlefield, ‘The Silence of the Frames’, in Adam Krims, *Music/Ideology: Resisting the Aesthetic* (Amsterdam: G & B Arts International, 1998), pp. 213–232 (p. 217).

becomes the theatrical equivalent of an “act of faith” for the audience.<sup>102</sup> Where, then, does the ‘frame’ of *Einstein* exist? Littlefield rejects the notion that a frame may not be needed, arguing that,

the frame must be considered necessary, since it functions to constitute the work. The frame *defines* the work by *confining* it. This is a paradox in the rigorous sense; the frame is not contingent *or* necessary, but both contingent *and* necessary at one and the same time. It is impossible to decide logically where the borders of the frame stop and the work begins or where the borders of the work stop and the frame begins.<sup>103</sup>

Is it possible, therefore, that the essence of the work’s frame that Littlefield requires is to be found not in the works’ temporal existence, but in its conceptualisation? Bernard, in a critique of Mertens’ work on minimal music, argues that ‘Mertens has (seemingly inadvertently) identified a paradox: that on the one hand the minimal piece cannot be regarded as finished until the listener “actively participates in its construction”; but on the other, that this same listener “is reduced to a passive role, merely submitting to the process”’.<sup>104</sup> Both Mertens and Littlefield describe operations that allow the work to be *defined* as such. If one considers how it might be possible for Mertens’ paradox to exist (and it should not be surprising that paradoxes exist within a genre that so comfortably traces the transitional progress of paradoxical postmodernity), it becomes clear that the listeners’ experience and response operates on two distinct yet interactive planes. On the one hand, the physical participation in the process of listening (which demands the listener be subject to the playing out of process) is a passive one. For as Bernard observes, minimal music, ‘more than depends

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<sup>102</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, p. 57.

<sup>103</sup> Littlefield, ‘The Silence of the Frames’, p. 218.

<sup>104</sup> Bernard, ‘The Minimalist Aesthetic’, p. 123. Similarly Krauss discusses the ‘schizophrenic’ nature of the grid in the visual arts, explaining that, ‘logically speaking, the grid extends, in all directions, to infinity. Any boundaries imposed upon it by a given painting or sculpture can only be seen—according to this logic—as arbitrary. By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric. Thus the grid operates from the work of art outward, compelling our acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame. This is the centrifugal reading. The centripetal one works, naturally enough, from the outer limits of the aesthetic object inward. The grid is, in relation to *this* reading a *re*-presentation of everything that separates the work of art from the world, from ambient space and from other objects’ (Rosalind E. Krauss, ‘Grids’ in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 8–22 (first publ. *October* 9 (Summer 1979)), p. 18–19). Again, the duality of the framing function is emphasised.



on time as a medium of presentation; it is devoted to making the listener keenly aware of the passage of time. Not clock time as a rule, for the rate of passage of time certainly varies from piece to piece, and even, often, within the same piece. But there is something about this sense of the passage of time that is *enforced*.<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, there is an engagement by the listener with the *conceptual* existence of the work. A knowledge or expectation that a process is indeed being iterated allows the listener to assume an active role, thereby maintaining a conceptual framework that compensates for the absence of beginning, or indeed, end.

Of course, not all minimal works begin before the audience expects, nor do they last so long that it is impracticable for an audience to hear a work in its entirety. However, the existence of this conceptual framing device provides a substitute for the traditional teleological function: the logic of the piece allows the listener to identify and respond to the subtleties of a gradually evolving work without the need for climax, release and thematic development. It is, finally, this shared knowledge of a process that subverts the traditional framing function, and along with it, the privileged distinction between creator and receiver. DeLio, in a survey of new works performed at Kitchen (by Glass, Reich, Lucier and others), noted a 'reevaluation of those attitudes that support the traditional boundaries separating composer and listener [...] Of paramount importance to much of this work are those qualities that lead the perceiver to experience the discovery of relationships, and the emergence of form, from a vantage point once reserved for the composer alone.'<sup>106</sup> By allowing the listener to sample a section of a work, or anticipate development, framing becomes not the work's separation from its context, but the contextualisation of the work.

### **Modernist**

While the commercially successful, high-gloss version of minimalism that permeates bestseller lists and advertising soundtracks is to some commentators the quintessential example of postmodern 'anything goes' pluralism, the question of

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<sup>105</sup> Bernard, 'The Minimalist Aesthetic', p. 122 [my italics].

<sup>106</sup> Thomas DeLio, 'Avant-Garde Issues in Seventies Music', in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Critical Anthology of the New Music* (New York: E.P Dutton, 1981), pp. 254–271 (first publ. *Artforum* 18:1 (Sep 1979), pp. 61–67), p. 271.

where to situate minimalism in relation to the modern/postmodern boundary is a far more nuanced question. It first of all depends, of course, on how the two terms are defined, but also on which manifestation of musical minimalism one chooses to focus on. Thus, it may be more fitting to consider which *types* of minimalism share affinities with various aspects of the modern/postmodern spectrum outlined in Part One. Certainly, in the early years of minimalism's emergence, it was seen more as a particular type of modernism reacting against the European avant-garde than an example of the postmodernism that was then emerging as a theoretical tool. As Sweeney-Turner notes, 'there was serialism, and there were two reactions against it (chance and minimalism), but all three were modernist'.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Nyman suggests that 'in Reich and Young, specific, if unconventional, musical attitudes revealed themselves to be at work *within* serialism, rather than as a blanket reaction *against* serialism'.<sup>108</sup> This is supported by an observation from Riley that Young's *Study I* (written while they were at Berkeley) 'was a twelve-tone piece, but it had these long, sustained qualities'.<sup>109</sup> What such statements suggest is that while minimalism signalled something of note for many contemporary commentators, it was seen not so much as a rejection of modernist principles as yet another expansion of its scope. Therefore, one can characterise early minimal works as the farthest reach of a certain kind of high-modernism; eventually tipping into the transition to postmodernism and the development of an altogether different type of minimalism.

The tensions between a dependence on modernist rigour and a desire for composers to free themselves from the alienating principles of the avant-garde are evident in many early minimalist works. Schwarz, for example, discusses the rejection of serialism and indeterminacy by minimalist composers, while noting their indebtedness to both. He argues that Reich 'was repudiating the hidden, inaudible structural devices of both serialism and indeterminacy',<sup>110</sup> yet he calls for the music to be heard through a

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<sup>107</sup> Steve Sweeney-Turner, 'Weariness and Slackening in the Miserably Proliferating Field of Posts', *Musical Times*, 136: 1833 (November 1995), 599–601 (p. 599).

<sup>108</sup> Nyman, 'Against Intellectual Complexity in Music', p. 208.

<sup>109</sup> Interview given by Riley in December 2006, in Carl, *Terry Riley's In C*, p. 18.

<sup>110</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 12.

process of 'close listening—the aural equivalent of following the watch's minute hand' to enable the listener to fully appreciate the work in question<sup>111</sup> (a directive that cannot help but recall the 'close reading' of a work that was so valued by Adorno and the Frankfurt School). Clearly minimalism posed a conundrum for many commentators who recognised the music's reactionary qualities while observing a dogmatic approach that was much in keeping with modernist rigour. Some, such as Potter, draw upon its experimental characteristics to situate it 'as essentially modernist, along the radical, "alternative" lines,'<sup>112</sup> while Strickland chooses to laud minimalism as 'the last "classic" period before the flood of artistic flotsam and jetsam termed "post-Modernist"'.<sup>113</sup> For Strickland, minimalism summarises the modernist anxiety that presaged its demise: 'the final stage of the dehumanisation of art', versus the 'culmination of the whole modernist enterprise of purification of means'.<sup>114</sup> In short, minimalism represents modernism's ultimate triumph and tragedy.

Hopkins regards minimalism as a derivation of modernism that pushes its aesthetic to such an extreme that the aesthetic itself is challenged,<sup>115</sup> a view that is perhaps summarised most succinctly by Foster, who argues that 'minimalism is this apogee, but it is no less this break'.<sup>116</sup> The invocation of both break and continuation recalls the characterisation of postmodernism as both a new beginning and a further development of modernism, and gives obvious cause to compare the simultaneous emergence of both minimalism and postmodernism. While the arguments supporting a codevelopmental reading are convincing in an abstract sense, practical similarities also emerge. Mertens focuses on the changing nature of production, tracing an evolution from serialism to experimentalism where eventually 'the replacement of the

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<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 10.

<sup>113</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> David Hopkins, *After Modern Art: 1945–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 138. Hopkins dates minimalism from around the mid-sixties, tracing the label to an article by Richard Wollheim ('Minimal Art', *Arts Magazine* (January 1965), 26–32).

<sup>116</sup> Foster, 'The Crux of Minimalism', p. 170

work-as-object by the work-as-process and the unity of form and content' become key components of a minimalist definition.<sup>117</sup> This emphasis on the means of production, both through the foregrounding of compositional devices and the proliferation of composer-led ensembles may point to a preoccupation with such a perspective on the part of both composers and critics: a factor that again chimes with the idea of gradual theoretical reappraisals that continually flex the relationship between modernism and postmodernism.

While a concern with means of production points towards postmodernism, there are still aspects of early minimalism that indicate strong modernist ties. Two of the most important of these are the links with serial technique, and the rhetoric of La Monte Young in particular. Young is the minimalist who is most easily linked to modernism, not only because he is generally accepted as the earliest proponent, but also due to his (albeit drastically altered) serial techniques and his obsession with achieving recognition for his perceived originality. While Young places a great deal of emphasis on the unique status of his work ("I can't stand to be derivative or imitative."),<sup>118</sup> he has often readily acknowledged the influence that Webern has had on his music. Potter notes that the audibility of Webern's serial processes may have attracted Young, but considers that 'the apparent contradiction between an aesthetic still rooted in the dynamism of classical forms and a resulting music that was often essentially static [...] probably fascinated him most'.<sup>119</sup> This contradiction poses an interesting question if Potter is correct: does the exploitation of this static quality by Young in highly traditional settings (such as a string trio) act as a form of critique against serial techniques which clears a space (in the Bloomian sense) for Young to

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<sup>117</sup> Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, p. 95.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Suzuki on 19 Apr 1982, in Suzuki, 'Minimal Music', p. 281.

<sup>119</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, pp. 27–28.

occupy?<sup>120</sup> Such an 'author-god' attitude would confirm Strickland's observation of a 'highly autocratic streak' and 'dictatorial element of his perfectionist devotion'.<sup>121</sup> While Bernard likens the 'desire for control over the aural result [...] exhibited in extreme form' in *The Well-Tuned Piano* to Reich or Glass' establishment of their own ensembles,<sup>122</sup> it seems that the impetus for these decisions stems from different concerns: on the one hand an authoritarian modernist concern for originality and control, and on the other, a more commercially driven decision which deals with questions of production.

It is also important to note that while members of these ensembles (particularly Reich's) speak positively of a collaborative rehearsal pattern, numerous interviews with members of Young's 'Theater of Eternal Music' return to the idea of Young as an authoritarian figure. Riley often speaks of how demanding and frustrating Young's rehearsals were, and violinist Tony Conrad observes that Young's music 'lends itself to a peculiarly aristocratic formalism. It's put across as "perfect" [...] The idea of a higher harmony that takes precedence over worldly affairs and the world of people and human relations is exactly what they're all about.'<sup>123</sup> Young's interest in celestial harmonies and Pythagorean proportions again point to a concern for universality privileged above the pleasures or appreciation of any audience beyond an elite circle. However, it would be wrong to suggest that there is a simple case for Young being regarded as a 'modernist minimalist' and later minimalist composers to be free of

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<sup>120</sup> See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Bloom argues that the idea of influence is 'a metaphor, one that implicates a matrix of relationships—imagistic, temporal, spiritual, psychological—all of them ultimately defensive in nature.' (p. xxiii). Bloom sets out six 'revisionary ratios' (Clinamen; Tessera; Kenosis; Daemonisation; Askesis, and Apophrades). Within this taxonomy, Young might be best described using the concepts of Kenosis and Daemonisation, an 'emptying' (p.89) and 'a Counter-Sublime that suggests the precursor's relative weakness' (p. 100) respectively.

<sup>121</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 162.

<sup>122</sup> Bernard, 'The Minimalist Aesthetic', p. 96.

<sup>123</sup> Tony Conrad in interview with John Corbett, 'Minimal Compact', *The Wire* 132 (Feb 1995), 34–35 (p. 35). Interestingly, Conrad's short biography refers to his work with Young as a 'proto-minimalist jazz mutation'. (Tony Conrad in interview with Brian Duguid, ESTWeb (site of the former EST journal), (June 1996) <<http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/conrad.html>> [accessed 30/09/09]).

these associations. Watkins, for examples, identifies ‘a spiritual cousin to Reich and Riley’ in the third movement of Schoenberg’s *Five Pieces for Orchestra, op.16*, where ‘the pulsating colours seep as if by osmosis through an essentially static landscape and induce a feverish stupor’,<sup>124</sup> recalling early reviews of minimalist works that referred to trance-like states of listening.

Even those works that occur later in the emerging phase of minimalism show that composers were concerned with their relation to (if not their place *in*) modernism. Page outlines the use of a 12-tone row in the concluding section of Glass’ *Music in 12 Parts* (1974), ‘underpinning this riot of tonal, steadily rhythmic, gleeful repetition—underpinning, in other words, all the things that textbook 12-toners shunned’,<sup>125</sup> again recalling the question posed of Young: can minimalism be seen as a critical response to serialism? Page goes on to quote Glass as he explains: ‘I had broken the rules of modernism and so I thought it was time to break some of my own rules [...] This was the end of minimalism for me.’<sup>126</sup> It is surprising to hear Glass say that the ironic use of a twelve tone row is the end of minimalism, and at first, one questions whether he intended to say modernism rather than minimalism. Yet what this extract shows is that for Glass at least, the rigour of strict minimalist techniques was firmly rooted in a modernist tradition that he still sought to escape. This also perhaps accounts for the fact that Glass is among the most vehement deniers of the label, and for why his later music seems the most surface-orientated (as opposed to carefully planned formal structures dictating the surface results) of the four ‘high-priest’ minimalists.

All of these observations begin to form a picture of minimalism as a divergent (but still firmly embedded) strand of high-modernist concerns. However, unlike some other contemporary developments, minimalism seems to have evolved into something other while not leaving (with the exception of Young’s rather special case) any practitioners of the ‘pure’ form behind. Instead, it is almost as though early minimalism operated as a form of ‘etude’ or study stage, where various parameters were taken to (minimal)

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<sup>124</sup> Glenn Watkins, *Soundings: Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), p. 574.

<sup>125</sup> Tim Page, ‘*Music in 12 Parts*’ in Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, pp. 98–101 (first publ. 1993), p. 101.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

extremes in an attempt to weaken the modernist aesthetic, to the point at which composers were able to move beyond it. While such a perspective seems to complement a reading of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism as both rupture and continuum, it is also important to note that not all practitioners of what might be described as postmodern music consider themselves to be beyond modernity.<sup>127</sup> Although it is easy to trace a linear path through atonality-serialism-total serialism-new complexity, complemented by a byway of minimalism and new-simplicity that reacts against that path and signals postmodernism's growth, there have always been such divergences. Neo-classicism, Orientalism and folk-song revivals in the earlier part of the twentieth century all point to an eclecticism and nostalgia that has always been latent in the modernist enterprise, but suppressed by institutional elitism and academic pressure for innovation. These underlying trends perhaps point to a kernel of postmodernism that has always sheltered in the modernist project, and suggests that an understanding of postmodernism's move to dominance should be focused as much on the changing structures of production and dissemination as it is on the content of the works themselves.

### **Non-Western Influences**

The inspiration and influence various composers have drawn from non-western sources has often been a focal point of minimalist discourse. In fact, Johnson attributes minimalism's 'return to tonality' not to a nostalgia for a lost classical tradition, but 'because the younger composers began studying ragas, listening to scales from Africa, Indonesia, and other parts of the world, and observing that there were a whole lot of good ways of writing music with simple scales and tonal centres'.<sup>128</sup> However, there are times when the links commonly made between minimalism and various ethnic

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<sup>127</sup> David Del Tredici, for example, 'stakes his claim to modernity first through his very decision to write such unashamed tonality: by now, consonance itself sounds strange and fresh' (Rockwell, *All American Music*, p. 74). While Del Tredici is in no sense a minimalist, the consonances found in much minimal music could be considered in a similar light.

<sup>128</sup> Johnson, 'The New Tonality in Works of Steve Reich, Frederic Rzewski, and Brian Eno' in *The Voice of New Music*, pp. 345–348 (first publ. 'Tonality in Reich, Rzewski, Eno and Others', *Village Voice* (16 October 1978)), p. 348.

musical practices seem simplistic at best, and at worst, a failure to comprehend the complexities of either of the musics being compared.

It is well documented that in 1962–3, Reich started showing an interest in ethnomusicology. Despite an often-repeated assertion that his college tuition gave his composition little direction, he received encouragement from Berio.<sup>129</sup> While many commentators make a direct association between Reich's fascination with Ghanaian drumming and his own music (*Drumming* in particular), Reich has always been at pains to stress that his exploration of non-western musics always served as *confirmation* of what he was already doing.<sup>130</sup> As Fink explains, 'a technical, not political involvement with non-western culture brought about a certain degree of assimilation, but not an attempt to affiliate with other cultures'.<sup>131</sup> This focus on the technical aspects of non-Western music is often obscured in commentaries on minimalism, perhaps in part due to the spiritualist leanings of Young and Riley. Situating the music thus also gives ammunition to minimalism's critics: not only do Westerners attempt to stamp their authority on poor imitations of other musics, but the spiritual context can be used to dismiss minimal music as little more than the product of drug-induced trances in a

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<sup>129</sup> Berio took Reich to an ethnomusicological conference in Ojai where he was introduced by Schuller to a book of notated African drumming patterns. (Alburger, 'Steve Reich: Early Phase', p. 3) However, Reich is right to say that Berio's tastes lay elsewhere. Asked what he hears in minimalism, Berio replies, 'it doesn't give me anything. I see it as a very naive experience, the musical equivalent of Grandma Moses' (Michael Walsh, 'The Heart is Back in the Game', *Time* online archive (first publ. 20 September 1982) <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,950795-6,00.html>> [accessed 04/10/09], para. 8 of 29).

<sup>130</sup> Reich was not alone in this. See, for example Bob Becker's *Figure Ground* (1972) which also takes Ghanaian drum patterns as a starting point. Becker has played percussion in Reich's ensemble for many years. This work and Reich's *Slow Motion Sound* are published in *Soundings* 7–8 (1973), pp. 93–95 and pp. 50–51 respectively.

<sup>131</sup> Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, p. 70.



search for some countercultural enlightenment.<sup>132</sup> Of course, such a reading demeans both the cultures from which references are drawn and those who choose to follow them in the West, yet such criticism still persists in some quarters.

What more favourable commentaries fail to recognise, however, is that—with the exception of Young’s works—the listener is not required to share any particular mindset in order to participate in the listening experience. To therefore privilege the cultural context of any of these sources above the technical possibilities they present is perhaps to revert to a notion of ‘authorial communication’ that is at odds with a postmodern reading of the listener’s role. So, as Schwarz explains, ‘Reich believes not in imitating the *sound* of non-Western musics [...] but rather in learning the structural principles which govern the construction of foreign musics, and applying these to one’s own personal style’.<sup>133</sup> Of course, as much as examining other musics can offer technical possibilities outside of the Western classical tradition, a failure to understand them can be equally fruitful. Glass, for example, now freely admits that his misunderstanding of Indian music contributed to his compositional development. In an interview with *Tricycle* magazine, he explains that ‘I thought I was listening to music that was built in an additive way, but it turned out it really wasn’t. It’s built in a cyclic way. And that turned out to be very useful, because the misunderstanding, the use of an additive process, became, in fact, the way I began to write music.’<sup>134</sup> It is this appropriation of techniques and devices, whether properly understood or not, that grounds all the minimalist composers under discussion firmly within a Western musical tradition. As Mertens observes, this habit ‘should not be regarded as the foundation of

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<sup>132</sup> Consider for example MacDonald’s remark that ‘the techniques used in African, Indian and Indonesian trance music have been worked on for centuries, whereas those of Minimalism are artificial and arbitrary’ (MacDonald, *The People’s Music*, p. 182). Or Mellers’ explanation that ‘the objection to both [Young and Riley] is that although a total rejection of European humanism may be understandable and therefore excusable, we do not—even if we’re American—in fact belong to an ancient oriental culture but irremediably to Western traditions. Young’s and Riley’s will-lessness amounts to a prodigious exercise of will’ (Mellers, ‘A Minimalist Definition’, p. 328). This latter remark also exerts a strong case for Young’s obsession with maintaining an image of almost god-like significance placing him firmly in the modernist camp.

<sup>133</sup> Schwarz, ‘Steve Reich: Part I’, p. 380.

<sup>134</sup> Glass in ‘First Lesson, Best Lesson’, in Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, pp. 316–327 (first publ. 1992), p. 318.

their work, but rather as a symptom of the ability of the modern culture industry to annex a foreign culture, strip it of its specific socio-ideological context and incorporate it into its own cultural products'.<sup>135</sup>

The location of these activities within the wider cultural spectrum also helps to explain the synthesis that occurs between, for example, the rhythmic techniques Reich associates with Ghanaian drumming, and the Hebrew cantillations of later works. It is wrong to associate such cultural explorations with a departure from minimalism: Potter's observation that the *Four Pieces* (1963) consist of 'twelve-tone jazz licks trying to become tonal',<sup>136</sup> clearly indicates an interest in the intermingling of disparate sources in the years running up to his early phasing pieces. In fact, Strickland argues that rather than the more remote musics of Ghana or India being the primary roots of minimal invention, it was in fact the already-assimilated jazz tradition that 'was to be the most important indigenous influence on the development of Minimal music'.<sup>137</sup> While ethnomusicological exploration may indeed have prompted significant technical explorations that supported characteristics of minimal music, it could no longer be said that these influences are anything other than one part of an accumulated history of minimalism itself. As Sandow argues of Reich:

To my ear [...] he is a western composer, working squarely in the tradition of western classical music. After the repetition, the polyrhythms, and the slowly changing, percussive textures become familiar, it's possible to hear that Reich's harmony, instrumentation, meter, and structural precision are entirely western. He develops motifs, plans patterns of tension and release, and builds momentum toward small climaxes within each piece as any classical symphonist might.<sup>138</sup>

While an interest in the music of other cultures may have provided a network of complementary ideas at a time when the institution was emphatically endorsing the European avant-garde, modern production techniques and communications make

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<sup>135</sup> Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, p. 88.

<sup>136</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 159.

<sup>137</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 150.

<sup>138</sup> Gregory Sandow, 'Steve Reich: Something New', *Village Voice* XXV: 10 (10 March 1980), p. 74.

most music no more distant than any other. As a result, while a plurality of local stories, and local musics, may be freely accessed, the rootedness of any composer in their own local context must also be recognised.

### Process

Process is perhaps one of the most commonly identified characteristics of minimalism. However, the way that process is understood, and utilised, can be varied. For example, Quinn categorises the following composers as ones concerned with process: 'all of Reich's music, Glass' earlier music (up to, say, *Einstein on the Beach*), Arvo Pärt's so-called tintinnabuli music, and some music by Frederic Rzewski, Terry Riley, John Adams, Michael Torke, David Lang, Michael Gordon, and other composers.'<sup>139</sup> Not only does this list span generations of composers, it also encompasses composers who have variously been labelled experimental, postminimalist, improvisatory, and neo-medieval. Despite the surface appearance of a 'process' in many of these composers' music, it might be more accurate to delineate certain approaches to process that differentiate the composers listed above. Mertens, when discussing the minimalism of Reich, Riley, Glass and Young, highlights the use of process as a defining principle of creation. For Mertens, 'the concept of *work* has been replaced by the notion of *process*';<sup>140</sup> the foregrounding of a single rule that dictates all aspects of musical development is a significant characteristic of minimal music. This is a view shared by Strickland, who draws up a relatively limited selection of works that he considers to be centred on the use of process. He even goes so far as to suggest that 'process[ism/ists]' is a more accurate label than minimalist since it 'sacrifices in euphony what it gains in accuracy, at least vis-a-vis Reich (phasing, radical augmentation, systematic hocketing) and Glass (additive/subtractive structure) and some of Riley (the tape and time-lag works, possibly even *In C*) and Young (the frequency tuning, drift studies, etc.).'<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ian Quinn, 'Minimal Challenges: Process Music and the Uses of Formalist Analysis', *Contemporary Music Review* 25: 3 (June 2006), 283–294 (p. 287).

<sup>140</sup> Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, p. 88 [his italics].

<sup>141</sup> Strickland, 'Minimalism: T', p. 116.

While Potter links the use of process to an aesthetics of unity and simplicity, ('Reich's main preoccupation from 1965 to at least 1970 was with structure and, in particular, with the purity and clarity of that structure'<sup>142</sup>), there are others for whom the foregrounding of process as the dominant compositional tool points towards something other than the minimalism that has gone before. Kostelanetz, for example, argues that 'anyone who wants to talk about this music seriously is going to have to talk about repetitive structures—both harmonic and rhythmic. The minimalism idea is only a rather short-lived stylistic period of this music.'<sup>143</sup> These contrasting views show the way in which many commentators have attempted to synthesise the various phases of minimalist music into a developmental continuum. However, the introduction of process is one of the earliest moments in minimalism's history where it might be more accurate to talk about both a break and a development. From the stasis and contemplation of held-tone works it is easy to see a link with what Nyman calls 'timbre [...] in a perpetual state of rhythmic animation',<sup>144</sup> even though this 'animation' generates a host of aural events that present a very different kind of work.

The full story of Reich's discovery of phasing is well documented elsewhere, yet there are some important points to note. While phasing is often referred to as a revolutionary technique, it did not, like so many other minimalist developments, grow out of a vacuum.<sup>145</sup> Secondly, Cohn highlights the problems that arise with any attempt to synthesise early process works with the aesthetics of those immediately preceding it, when he argues that there is 'something paradoxical about the identification of "process" with "timelessness", since a process without actual or metaphorical motion

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<sup>142</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 210. In a similar way, Beirens describes the 'return' inherent in the playing out of a process as 'the ultimate symbol of the music's coherence' (Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 107).

<sup>143</sup> Tim Page, 'Dialogue with Philip Glass and Steve Reich', in Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, pp. 46–51 (first publ. 1980), p. 50.

<sup>144</sup> Michael Nyman, 'SR—Mysteries of the Phase', *Music and Musicians* 20: 6, iss. 234 (Feb 1972), 20–21 (p. 20).

<sup>145</sup> For a more detailed investigation of phasing's origins, see this chapter: *Tape Music*, pp. 167–171.

through time is inconceivable'.<sup>146</sup> It may be more accurate, in fact, to talk about a suspension of any proper sense of 'clock' time: since the relationships between events in Reich's tape pieces are constantly shifting, the listener is presented with no opportunity to identify any kind of beat or pulse within the music, which may account for the experience of certain points suddenly seeming to 'lock in'.<sup>147</sup>

Reich moved away from tape phasing relatively swiftly, attempting instead to achieve the same effect in live performances (with works such as *Piano Phase* (1967)), and eventually tiring of the gradual phase altogether; turning to a system of strict relationships between rotating cells that retained some of the cycling principles of his phase processes. At a similar time, Glass was experimenting with what he called 'additive process', which, he says, was 'equivalent—conceptually, perceptually, and in terms of style and compositional development as well—to Reich's notion of phasing'.<sup>148</sup> While *1+1* (11/1968), is the first rigorous use of additive process, Potter also points out that works composed shortly before *1+1* 'also use a kind of additive process, but this is looser, more intuitive'.<sup>149</sup> While Glass' additive process provided a compositional tool for a number of works (eventually incorporating cyclical structures into large-scale compositions such as *Einstein on the Beach*), the rigours of these devices are seemingly absent from his later works. What remains is a gradual building up of longer melodic lines from initial fragments—an additive process of sorts, but not one that follows any pre-compositional rule. Reich's compositional path from his earliest uses of phasing has been more obviously developmental and later works continue to rely on principles of process to guide large-scale forms. For some, Reich's use of process represents a turn away from what might be described as a modernist

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<sup>146</sup> Richard Cohn, 'Transpositional Combination of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich's Phase-Shifting Music', *Perspectives of New Music*, 30: 2 (Summer 1992), 146–177 (p. 169).

<sup>147</sup> The exact half-way point, where everything is phased at 180° (and therefore exactly doubled), is the strongest of these sensations.

<sup>148</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 271. While Glass' early commentary attributes this process to his work with Ravi Shanker, the composer later notes that his technique was actually built upon a misunderstanding of how raga functioned (See this chapter: Non-Western influences (pp. 133–137) for more information).

<sup>149</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 272.

desire for compositional rigour, yet his earliest works seem to represent an attempt to find an *alternative* to a serial code rather than a rejection of codes altogether.

For Epstein, 'Reich's belief that music can be impersonal, unedited process, rather than an expressive, handcrafted metaphor for process, is a new idea as is the idea that the role of the composer is not as inventor of personal codes for us to decipher but as a discoverer of impersonal natural phenomena'.<sup>150</sup> Yet other commentators have been more critical of the rhetoric of non-intervention that accompanies these early works. As Cohn notes, Reich's choice of starting material always allows for maximum interest to be generated by the subsequent process.<sup>151</sup> In his critique of Reich's essay, *Music as a Gradual Process*, Cohn questions the degree of autonomy that Reich claims for his compositional device with the following reasoning:

If materials and processes are distinct, and yet the material belongs to the composition proper, then the composition has a component that is distinct from the process. How then can the composition and the process be co-extensive? Further, the image of *material running through process* implies a third component to the ontology—materials, processes, and "running through", an act requiring an agent.<sup>152</sup>

While Cohn's arguments highlight the underlying contradictions in Reich's rhetoric, it is interesting to consider the motivations behind a desire to seemingly undermine the authorial role of the composer. It is tempting to suggest that Reich's emphasis on process articulates an active desire to distance himself from high-modernist complexities by undermining the idea of a carefully worked out series of matrices and charts, yet for all its emphasis on self-perpetuation, *Music as a Gradual Process* still reads as a form of compositional manifesto (albeit a retrospective one—Reich is always careful to emphasise that his writing refers to past, not future, composition).

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<sup>150</sup> Paul Epstein, 'Pattern Structure and Process in Steve Reich's "Piano Phase"', *Musical Quarterly*, 72: 4 (1986), 494–502 (p. 494).

<sup>151</sup> Cohn, 'Transpositional Combination of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich's Phase-Shifting Music', p. 157. Cohn's analyses of Reich's music focus on works composed immediately after his 'live phasing' period (for example *Violin Phase* (1967), which deals with a cycle of relationships between identical, repeated cells). Cohn argues that these initial figures are chosen to generate the most varied and aurally distinctive combinations of beat-set, an analytical approach that Cohn borrows from pitch-set analysis. Full details of Cohn's methodology are contained within the article.

<sup>152</sup> Cohn, 'Transpositional Combination of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich's Phase-Shifting Music', p. 148.

Such tensions between a modernist desire to articulate the composers' individuality and the use of process to reject complexity are further complicated by Reich's subservience to the completion of a given process. Such dogmatic adherence to a single idea might be considered reminiscent of the strictures of dodecaphonic modes of composition; indeed, Nyman clearly states that 'the origins of this minimal process music lie in serialism'.<sup>153</sup> Despite this, it is ultimately the acoustical by-products of these processes that most interest Reich; what he refers to as 'resultant patterns', and an aspect of any given work that he allows to be flexible according to those patterns that stand out to the performers in the ensemble. These patterns, Schwarz argues, reveal a 'tension between process and intuition',<sup>154</sup> similar to the creative input Cohn identifies in the choice of materials. The use, for example, of a paradiddle as the subject of a process in *Phase Patterns* highlights Reich's taste for initial figures that will combine in a less regular fashion as well as being rhythmically interesting in their own right.

For many, *Drumming* represents the last of Reich's works that could be categorised as process music. With a significantly enlarged ensemble and more complex contrapuntal developments, it is often harder for a listener to trace the processes operating in *Drumming*, particularly in the later sections. In addition, Reich explores the blending of different timbres (doubling mallet instruments with female vocals and piccolo at various points); a decision that Strickland sees as an expansion of the parameters the process dictates. For him, the additional instrumentation 'serve[s] to double the acoustical by-products of the instruments, supporting the designation of *Drumming* as "process music" [...] the whole sonic panorama evolves from examining the musical consequences of the tuning of the titular drums'.<sup>155</sup> While he retains process as a compositional tool, the foregrounding of audible process is no longer apparent in later works such as *Music for Mallet Instruments* (May 1978), where, Schwarz argues, 'the

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<sup>153</sup> Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 139.

<sup>154</sup> K. Robert Schwarz, 'Process vs. Intuition in the Recent Works of Steve Reich and John Adams', *American Music* 8: 3 (Fall 1990), 245–273 (p. 255).

<sup>155</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 225.

emphasis is now on beauty of sound as an end in itself'.<sup>156</sup> Reich too sees *Drumming* as the 'final expansion and refinement of the phasing process', but also the first work that introduces techniques that were to form the basis of his future compositional development. In addition, Reich began to explore the gradual alteration of timbre while other elements remained constant, and 'the process of gradually substituting beats for rests (or rests for beats)'.<sup>157</sup> Of course, both of the latter developments can be seen as close relations of the phasing process: the gradual alteration of timbre acts almost as a phasing across a different plane of the aural landscape, yet Reich's method of substitution retains a process-like effect, while allowing greater scope for composer intervention in the overall development of the work.

For Schwarz, phasing was the initial manifestation of Reich's continuing preoccupation with canonical forms ('a sort of seamless, transitionless canonic technique'<sup>158</sup>), yet as a more traditional deployment of canon in Reich's music came to the fore, the audibility of the underlying structure diminished. Discussing Reich's work from the mid-'70s, Roeder notes that 'the patterns are longer than those of the phase-shifting pieces, often exceeding the twelve-beat length that suggested analogies with the twelve-pitch-class universe. They are not exhaustively phased; more typically they appear in two- or three-voice canons at fixed, not varying, temporal intervals'.<sup>159</sup> This absence of fully-phased passages lessens the structural audibility for a listener (although it is still easily identifiable from a score), yet more interesting in Roeder's comments are his references to dodecaphonic music. There is a sense in which Reich's use of process was not so much a rejection or departure from the strictures of modernism, but an attempt to find a system that allowed him to operate within it.

However, with his increasing emphasis on the aesthetic pleasures of music and freer use of compositional systems, Reich's development seems to chart a gradual

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<sup>156</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 79.

<sup>157</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 64.

<sup>158</sup> Schwarz, 'Steve Reich: Part II', p. 265.

<sup>159</sup> John Roeder, 'Beat-Class Modulation in Steve Reich's Music', *Music Theory Spectrum* 25: 2 (Autumn 2003), 275–304 (p. 276).



disentanglement from modernist concerns. By 1977, in an interview with Michael Nyman, Reich makes it clear that the rigorous restrictions of a dogmatic minimal style are behind him:

in a sense, I'm not as concerned that one hears how the music is made as I was in the past [...] What I was really concerned with in *Music for 18 Musicians* was making beautiful music above everything else... I wasn't as concerned with filling the structure as I was ten years ago. On the other hand, although the overall sound of my music has been getting richer, it has done so without abandoning the idea that it has to have structure [...] There was a didactic quality to the earlier pieces, and looking back I'd say that, when you discover a new idea, it's very important to present that idea in a very forceful and clear and pared-down way... But once you've done that, what do you do? Just sit there cranking out one perfect phase piece after another? Personally, as a human being, I feel the need to move on, not to sell out or cop out, but just to move on.<sup>160</sup>

While phase pieces and the subsequent development of process will remain inextricably linked to Reich in any recounting of minimalist history, the gradually changing emphasis of Reich's own compositional thought is often less well reflected, and the persistent emphasis on Reich's compositions sometimes obscures similar developments that were occurring in the outputs of other composers at the same moment. It is perhaps true to say that process music, and phase music in particular, could be identified as a particular strand of minimalism itself of which Reich is the figurehead, both in terms of his innovation and subsequent success, yet there are connections between strictly defined phase or process pieces, and other aspects of minimal music. Nyman gives particular attention to process in his survey of experimental music, and identifies a collection of processes that can be separated from Reich's concerns: 1. Chance Determination Processes; 2. People Processes ('processes which allow the performers to move through given or suggested material, each at his own speed'); 3. Contextual Processes ('concerned with actions dependent on unpredictable conditions and on variables which arise from within the musical

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<sup>160</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 80.

continuity'); 4. Repetition Processes; and 5. Electronic Processes.<sup>161</sup> The fact that Nyman felt it necessary to create such a list points to a far more diverse use of process across the minimalist spectrum than is commonly described in reference to Reich's music.

### Seriality

Seriality is a problematic term in any discussion of minimal music, since it assumes a central position in critiques of Minimalism in the visual arts. Clearly, there is a need for seriality as a component of Minimalist works to be clearly delineated from Serialism as a dodecaphonic method, yet Bochner's description of seriality suggests that any such separation is not as straightforward as it might first appear:

seriality is premised on the idea that the succession of terms (divisions) within a single work is based on a numerical or otherwise predetermined derivation (progression, permutation, rotation, reversal) from one or more of the preceding terms in the piece. Furthermore the idea is carried out to its logical conclusion, which, without adjustments based on taste or chance, is the work.<sup>162</sup>

This description, when applied to music, could equally well describe a work derived from Serial or process techniques, and the matter is further complicated when Bochner goes on to assert that the only parallel to these methods is to be found in music, using Schoenberg, Stockhausen and Boulez as his examples. The minimalist legend suggests that downtown New York saw the birth of musical minimalism amidst a melting pot of cross-fertilising activity and a close synthesis with Minimalist visual artists, so why would Bochner choose to invoke these distant European masters? Two possible reasons present themselves: firstly, that in search of a critical or conceptual justification for the development of musical minimalism, musicologists have

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<sup>161</sup> Nyman, *Experimental Music*, pp. 6–8. He outlines various processes, while stressing that none of these are mutually exclusive. For example, Nyman places White's *Machines* and Reich's phase pieces in group 4, but 'Riley's *In C* (1967) and Paragraph 2 of Cardew's *The Great Learning* use repetition within a "people" process (or vice versa)' (*ibid.*, p. 8). Similarly, Nyman identifies Lucier's *Quasimodo the Great* and *I am Sitting in a Room* (both 1970) as "'gradual musical process" in the sense used by Steve Reich', but they would clearly also fall into group 5 (*ibid.*, p. 108).

<sup>162</sup> Mel Bochner, 'Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism', in Battcock, pp. 92–102 (first publ. in *Arts Magazine* (Summer 1967), p. 100).

retrospectively associated elements in the visual arts (including the label) with those in music. Secondly, one might suggest that when stripped of the specific musical-theoretical details that a musicologist would employ in a description of Serialism or process music, the two methods become strikingly similar in design, an observation that perhaps points to more strands of continuity—more synthesis and development—between musical minimalism and the modernist avant-garde than are traditionally acknowledged.

This is not to say that musical minimalism does not represent significant departures from the European tradition; yet striking equivalences in their development persist. Consider, for example, this passage from Mertens: 'in serial music the social process is neutralised. Serialism reflects a social situation where the subject is neutralised because of its impotence in the face of the objective order. For Schoenberg serialism was a method, whereas for Webern it was a generalised paradigm'.<sup>163</sup> One might be tempted to relate the 'method' of Reich's phase pieces to the 'generalised paradigm' of Adams' orchestral dynamism; and what are the blank, abstract and endless repetitions of *Music for 18 Musicians*, or *Music in Changing Parts* if not some form of 'neutralisation'? Strickland points out that Young's *Trio* 'remains strictly Serial in its exposition',<sup>164</sup> yet he highlights the 'otherworldly' aural impression that the extraordinarily slow tempo renders from the simple, sustained intervals and extended silences. What Strickland does not consider, however, is the purpose of Young's method. Is the *Trio* to be seen as a critique or a parody of Serialism, or simply the result of a frustrated composer seeking a more harmonious sonic landscape than the traditional, almost clichéd modernist norm? The intricate rhythmic details that betray the adherence to a strict serial model become inaudible when they are surrounded by extended periods of inactivity, rendering the serial content of the work undetectable except on paper. Perhaps there is a sense in which the *Trio* comes to represent the effective 'neutralisation' of Serialism itself.

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<sup>163</sup> Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, p. 99.

<sup>164</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 120.

While Bochner insists on seriality (and Minimalism) being characterised by an exhaustive adherence to a process, Bernard defines seriality as 'a methodical working out of all the possibilities encompassed by a governing set of initial decisions'.<sup>165</sup> He then goes on to suggest that 'the wide applicability of this serial principle, in fact, suggests that it is entirely appropriate to continue to apply the term minimal to the more recent work of Glass, Riley, and Reich'.<sup>166</sup> However, the later works of these composers seem to depart from the rigorous and exhaustive reiterations that Bochner advocates, and may justify the use of the term 'post-minimal' that Bernard is arguing against. If this is the case, then it is difficult to determine exactly when the gloss of surface impression is privileged over the underlying aesthetic concerns that dictate early minimalist works, and if, in turn, the gloss is all that remains. Later works by composers such as Adams retain the dynamic, shimmering, surface of much minimal music, yet the underlying formal structures owe as much to Romantic harmonic and melodic ideals as they do to any mid-century avant-garde principles. Consider, for example, Alloway's explanation of how 'repetition of non-thematic image or structure in time seems to replace the assumption that a high-degree of unpredictable formal play is necessary for every work'.<sup>167</sup> While again, this statement is made with reference to the visual arts, it is hard to see how a work by Adams or a later work by Glass avoids 'formal play' in favour of straight repetition. By contrast, Riley's use of the same motif in *In Ab or is it Bb?*, *Dorian Reeds*, *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* and *Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector*,<sup>168</sup> could be compared to the way in which visual artists adopted 'signature' modules to be used in various configurations through a series of works.

The early use of process in minimal music can also be compared to a similar technique in the visual arts. Take Flavin, for example, whom Bochner describes as 'one of the first

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<sup>165</sup> Bernard, 'The Minimalist Aesthetic', p. 113.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>167</sup> Alloway, *Topics in American Art*, p. 93.

<sup>168</sup> See Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 128.

artists to make use of a basically progressional procedure'.<sup>169</sup> Flavin's 1963 *the nominal three (to William of Ockham)* presents a visualisation of Ockham's Razor.<sup>170</sup> Flavin does this by arranging six of his signature white neon tubes at intervals along a blank wall in the groupings 1:2:3, or,  $1 + (1+1) + (1+1+1)$ . In terms of a basic compositional principle, this sculpture bears a striking resemblance to Glass' *1+1* (1968), a work to be performed by a single performer tapping an amplified table top. Glass provides two rhythmic modules, 'a' and 'b' which are to be combined 'in continuous, regular arithmetic progressions'.<sup>171</sup> Glass gives three examples of how the rhythmic units might be combined, which can be summarised as 1)  $a+b$ ,  $a + (b+b)$ ,  $a + (b+b+b)$ ...; 2)  $a+5b$ ,  $2a+4b$ ,  $3a+3b$ ...; and 3)  $5b+a$ ,  $5b+2a$ ,  $5b+3a$ .... There are obvious parallels between the underlying principles of these works, and the fact that Flavin's sculpture was featured prominently in New York in the years preceding *1+1* suggests that Glass may have been familiar with *the nominal three*.<sup>172</sup>

At first glance, this homage to the fourteenth-century nominalist seems a simple exercise in minimisation, yet Loux notes that in adhering to Ockham's 'principle of simplicity [...] we commit ourselves to shearing from our theory all those irrelevant entities that play no essential explanatory role'.<sup>173</sup> If this is the case, then while Flavin's concise visualisation of the principle conveys its essence, Glass' instruction that the performer determine the work's duration for themselves, and his use of 'etc.' to indicate the continuation of the various patterns, suggests a lack of economy that is a

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<sup>169</sup> Bochner, 'Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism', p. 94.

<sup>170</sup> 'Posit no more entities than are necessary'—William of Ockham. Cited in Bochner, 'Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism', p. 94.

<sup>171</sup> Score reproduced in Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 148.

<sup>172</sup> Between 1964 and 1968 Flavin's work appeared in a number of exhibitions in New York, including shows at The Green Gallery (1964); The Kaymar Gallery (1964, his second solo show), and The Jewish Museum (1966, the 'Primary Colours' exhibition that sparked much of the critical discussion using the term Minimalism). Glass returned to New York in 1967 after spending several years in Europe, at a time when Flavin would have enjoyed a high profile in artistic circles. The suggestion that Glass knew this work seems more likely when one considers that while the title of Glass' work shows a direct correlation with Flavin's creation, his own suggested progressions are not as simple or as clearly aligned with Ockham's principle.

<sup>173</sup> Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 58.

vital component of Ockham's principle. Of course, it is only speculation to suggest that Glass was attempting to allude to Ockham in any way; but what this highlights is a fundamental difference between the instant, unifying force of most visual Minimalist works, and the extended periods of time that minimal music occupies. As Krauss observes, the use of process ceases to be a minimising, mathematically precise device if the iterations extend beyond those necessary to make it clear what process is being utilised. She argues that the essence of logical thought is 'the capacity to abbreviate, to adumbrate, to condense, to be able to imply an expansion with only the first two or three terms, to cover vast arithmetic spaces with a few ellipsis points, to use, in short, the notion of *etcetera*'.<sup>174</sup> Kraus criticises the presentation of a 'generative principle in each of its possible cases', equating it to 'the loquaciousness of the speech of children or of the very old [...] like those feverish accounts of events composed of a string of almost identical details, connected by "and"'.<sup>175</sup>

Krauss' observations on 'the aesthetic manipulation of an absurdist nominalism',<sup>176</sup> reveal that while early conceptually minimalist works such as Young's represent a genuinely minimising tendency, even the early process works are presenting an altogether different kind of minimalism. It may be this factor, and the disparities between the manifestation of process and its rhetoric, that draws composers such as Reich away from conceptual concerns and towards a more intuitive use of process. As Potter notes, 'Reich considers *In C* to be a seminal work, and acknowledges it as a major influence on his own development.'<sup>177</sup> Repetitive as it was, *In C* presented a method of repetition that was emphatically *not* numerical or serial—a far remove from the clinical dogma of European serialism—and perhaps a strategy for injecting a sense of fluidity and movement into strict process.

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<sup>174</sup> Her example here is LeWitt's *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, which is derived from Euclidian geometry, but the applicability to Glass' *1+1* (or indeed any other early process work) is clear.

<sup>175</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, 'LeWitt in Progress' in *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 244–259 (first publ. *October* 6 (Fall 1978)), pp. 252–253.

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>177</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 164.

## Stasis

While stasis is consistently cited as a minimalist characteristic, a duality in its use highlights the variation that exists in even the earliest minimal works. Directly applied, it can be used as a straightforward description of the drones and sustained tones typical of Young's *Trio* or *Compositions 1960, #7*. More often, though, it is used to imply a static harmonic plane below a rhythmically active surface, such as in Reich's *Four Organs*. As minimalism develops, it is easy to trace the transformation of stasis into slow harmonic change and eventually a rate of harmonic motion (in composers such as Adams) that is not discernibly different from that of older musical counterparts. Before considering these developments, however, it is useful to review some of the origins of this stasis. Strickland, no doubt guided in some degree by Young's declaration of interest in Webern's music, considers minimalism in relation to Serialism, and suggests that 'the principal element of stasis is common to the two, despite the busyness of much Serial composition'.<sup>178</sup> He explains that while minimalist stasis explicitly presents pared-down parameters, in Serialism, 'the principle of repetition is not only inherent in but fundamental to the concept of constructing the work from a single component, the tone-row, which is relentlessly repeated [...] by means of inversion, retrograde, retrograde inversion, and transposition'.<sup>179</sup> Another point to consider is that the non-hierarchical arrangements of pitch in Serial composition negate (just as effectively as extremely slow rates of change) any opportunity for a listener without a score to discern the relationships constructed between pitches and motifs. While one may gain an impression of familiarity or recognition from one cell or gesture to the next, traditional teleological outcomes are subverted.

Young touches on the non-teleological nature of his music in an interview with Schwarz, as he explains his attraction to stasis: 'I feel that in most music peculiar to the Western hemisphere since the thirteenth century, climax and directionality have

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<sup>178</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 126.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

been among the most important guiding factors, whereas music before that time [...] used stasis as a point of structure a little bit more the way certain Eastern musical systems have'.<sup>180</sup> Such statements contribute to a characterisation of minimalism that privileges the peculiar relationship between stasis and repetition over all other features. However, it is crucially important when formulating a more kaleidoscopic picture of minimal development that the manipulation of traditional directionality is not confused with a blanket notion of non-teleological music. Rather, the traditional teleological functions of harmonic and melodic development are highlighted by their absence, forcing a listener to employ different listening strategies and creating directionality of a different nature. Beirens argues that it is the balance between 'stasis and dynamic elements, or between repetition and transformation, between continuity and change, which creates a particular field of tension'.<sup>181</sup> It is untrue—despite minimalism's detractors—to say that a seemingly endless repetition simply generates a state of suspended animation for the listener. Rather, temporal expectations are undermined, particularly in earlier works, so that changes, when they occur, can be either joltingly unexpected or so subtly introduced that the listener is left wondering how long they have been there.

Of course, the use of extreme repetition is not unique to minimalism, and Rose is one of many commentators to cite Satie's *Vexations* as an important precursor of the minimalist movement.<sup>182</sup> Rose focuses on the extended durations that are demanded for the performance of early minimalist works, and likens this requirement to early experiments in film such as Warhol's *Sleep* (eight hours of a man sleeping).<sup>183</sup> Riley, in an interview with Schwarz, argues that repetition does not necessarily connote a lack of directionality, but rather a different experience of the journey from beginning to end. As Riley explains:

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<sup>180</sup> Young in Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 23.

<sup>181</sup> Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 40.

<sup>182</sup> See Chapter 5.2: *Pre- or Proto-minimalism* (pp. 203–207) for further discussion.

<sup>183</sup> See Rose, 'ABC Art', p. 290. Of course, the ever-increasing catalogue of works of a usual duration might pose a contradiction.



I think I was noticing that things didn't sound the same when you heard them more than once. And the more you heard them, the more different they did sound. Even though something was staying the same, it was changing. I became fascinated when I realised it was stasis—it was what La Monte and I had talked about a lot in terms of his long-tone pieces—but it was stasis in a different application [...] changing our concept of how time passes, and what you actually hear in the music.<sup>184</sup>

Similarly, Reich acknowledges the importance of stasis, particularly his interest in Webern, but describes it as a springboard to his development of process music. Comparing *Piano Phase* and Webern's *Orchestral Variations* in an interview with Strickland, he explains that:

they sound apparently different [...] but somehow their universe is not so entirely different. The Webern suggests that you could (a) have very little going on and (b) be enormously organised. Of course, the Serial people took this one way, and I took it quite another. There is a relationship in *thinking*, and with a composer like me who gets the drift of someone's thought *divorced* from their sound, the relationship to Webern can be considered even closer.<sup>185</sup>

It is important to remember that at the date of Strickland's writing, Reich has had many years to refine his rhetoric and situate his compositional practice within the context of the development of twentieth-century music. Therefore, perhaps the conceptual clarity of his final sentence is a retrospective explanation. Nevertheless, the interest that Webern held for many minimalist composers seems to be solidly grounded.<sup>186</sup> In a similar vein, Watkins defines a particular category of 'nonpulsed minimalism', which 'shares a common corridor with other music that is precisely notated, lacking in a regular and insistent pulse, and typically viewed from a different vantage point'.<sup>187</sup> Among those works that he identifies as belonging to this 'corridor' are Varèse's *Intégrales*, Stravinsky's 'numerous static codas' and the final movement

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<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 35.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, p. 197 [his italics].

<sup>186</sup> Nyman is another composer whose early minimalist works bear signs of homage to Webern: his *Five Orchestral Pieces Opus Tree* is based on Webern's *Five Orchestral Pieces*. While its publication date is 1981, the work appears on a Kitchen archive recording released in 1979 and is compiled from material for *Tree* (1966) (See ap Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman*, p. 84).

<sup>187</sup> Watkins, *Soundings*, p. 576.

of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, 'where spellbinding repetitions in the piano not only support a violin solo of great lyric beauty but also induce a suspension of time'.<sup>188</sup> This identification of a similar sense of stasis within the modernist European tradition supports the idea that early works by Young, in their direct opposition to serial strictures, are as much a part of the modernist impulse that they react against; while the later addition of a 'dynamic' stasis, or a rhythmic persistence mark the beginning of a transitional phase of minimalism.

This second form of stasis—beneath surface vitality—draws two reactions from commentators. The first contests the notion of stasis precisely because of the rhythmic content, and suggests that 'the oft-made claim that minimalist music presents a negation of conventional time is [...] frequently constrained by minimalism's strongly pulsed (and sometimes metric) rhythms, which are entirely reassuring to the time-focused mind'.<sup>189</sup> However, for others, this shimmering surface texture draws the listener's focus to the underlying structure. Consequently, this type of minimalism 'has a hypnotic quality because it is highly repetitious, [and] can seem tedious until one learns how to tune into the many subtle variations which go on underneath the surface'.<sup>190</sup> This second perspective seems to present a more accurate response to the realities of a minimalist work's reception, allowing for an alternative way of perceiving directionality during the listening experience. It would seem more accurate, therefore, to talk of a strong sense of *impetus* as a result of regular and rapid pulse. This view is illustrated by Scherzinger's insistence that in Reich's *Drumming* 'a minimalist motif falsifies an authentic experience of the musical work [...] whatever else may be said of it, *Drumming* simply cannot be constructed as a *rhythmically static* piece'.<sup>191</sup> Therefore, it is clear that the function of stasis in minimalism has both dual meaning and dual purpose: the sustained tone versus

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<sup>188</sup> Watkins, *Soundings*, p. 576.

<sup>189</sup> Robert Adlington, 'Counting Time, Countering Time: Louis Andriessen's *De Tijd*', *Indiana Theory Review* 22: 1 (2002), 1–35 (p. 15).

<sup>190</sup> Johnson, 'Philip Glass' New Parts', p. 33.

<sup>191</sup> Martin Scherzinger, 'Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic: Steve Reich's *Its Gonna Rain*', *Current Musicology* 79/80 (2005), pp. 207–244 (p. 225) [his italics].

harmonic rigidity beneath fervent activity, and the ateleological versus a particular, non-traditional directionality.

### *Spiritual Minimalism*

There is, finally, a third aspect of stasis that must be considered in relation to the minimalist category: that of stability and balance. While holding some currency in relation to Young's ongoing works (in the context of the Dream Theatre for example) the 'chill-out' aspect of minimalism's static qualities has no doubt contributed to the evolution of 'ambient' and 'new age' music in the popular sphere. It is also tempting in this respect to consider the so-called 'spiritual' minimalists: Tavener, Pärt, and (for some) Górecki. Undeniably, music by these composers has entered the mainstream and achieved a degree of commercial success comparable to (if not exceeding) that of Reich, Nyman, or Glass. However, the rhetoric of the composers themselves, as well as the critical reception and marketing of their works, emphasises both the spiritual, non-abstract intentions of their music and the dependence, or at the very least, referencing, of much older compositional techniques.

Tavener and Pärt have juxtaposed the reception of their music with a high-profile 'spiritual' angle (some might call it an attempt to capture a compositional 'USP'), while Cross argues that this music is 'minimal only in the (medieval) simplicity of its materials and means, which are Stravinskian in character: non-functional diatonic harmonies, stasis, metric flexibility, varied repetitions, verse-refrain structures and so on'.<sup>192</sup> Similarly, Clarke argues that the often predictable scalic and triadic figures in Pärt's *Tabula Rasa* and *Stabat Mater* are often reminiscent of accompaniment figures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'a case of the tintinnabuli material being unable to dislodge its accrued historical meanings. These examples demonstrate the perilously fine line Pärt treads between simplicity and vacuity, and feed the gnawing suspicion that in his attempt to circumvent a modernist critique he has retracted into an aesthetic world that has little room for manoeuvre.'<sup>193</sup> This recourse to a restricted

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<sup>192</sup> Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 258 (footnote 9).

<sup>193</sup> David Clarke, 'Parting Glances', *Musical Times*, 134: 1810 (December 1993), 680–684 (p. 683).

aesthetic position not only distances Pärt from a modernist critique, but also from the aesthetic of abstraction that characterises much early minimalism.

Whatever the realities of the composers' intentions, interpretations of this music certainly incorporate a great deal of extra-musical reflection, as demonstrated by the following statement about Pärt: 'the fact that nothing much happens in this music directs our attention (or maybe intention) elsewhere: towards the conditions of our very being. It affords us the opportunity to cease crunching the unremitting influx of signs to which we as creatures of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have become accustomed, and to attend instead to the passing of time itself'.<sup>194</sup> Many defenders of the minimalist canon seem uncomfortable with such interpretations, and keen to distance American minimalism from its European counterparts to avoid such associations, yet in consequence, Pärt, perhaps even more successfully than many of the 'high priests' of minimalism (the irony of such a label in this context notwithstanding) has managed to construct a marketable concept of his music that transcends any basic categories imposed from outside.

The particular compositional devices of each composer are distinct, and appear to have little, conceptually, in common with the process-driven devices of 1960s minimalism.<sup>195</sup> As Clarke notes, Pärt's 'tintinnabuli style is more than just a set of musical features: it amounts to a *rhetoric*, a contradictory strategy which seeks on the one hand to meet modernism on its own terms, and on the other to deny modernism's own denial of certain aesthetic possibilities'.<sup>196</sup> This oppositional stance to modernist concerns may provide the best clue as to how music such as Pärt's is to be regarded. To exclude the music from a broader minimalist category is to adhere to a modernist dictum based on exclusivity and the attribution of elevated status to the uniqueness of a composers' voice. Contrary to this, one may view the music of the spiritual minimalists from the perspective of a postmodern consumer, and

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<sup>194</sup> Clarke, 'Parting Glances', p. 683.

<sup>195</sup> While Pärt makes use of a running process in works like *Cantus In Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, the process contains no repetition or development. Rather, it is an exercise in compositional *simplicity*.

<sup>196</sup> Clarke, 'Parting Glances', p. 682 [his italics].

acknowledge that while the rhetoric of spirituality and simplicity may indeed motivate the compositional process, the listener is free to disregard or indulge such preoccupations as they choose. What remains are the aural impressions of the music itself, and, to the general listener, this music features as a familiar point of reference in relation to the minimalist label. Therefore, it seems appropriate to recognise stylistic resemblances, and accord such music a sphere of the minimalist cosmology.

## Style

The question of a minimalist style is one of the most difficult to address because so much of the music that falls under the banner of minimalism has little in common. However, commentators such as Johnson have argued that a minimalist style should be characterised using works from the period of its mid-stage developments (in the late sixties and seventies), and, in keeping with this, many textbook summaries of minimalism most closely resemble works of this period.<sup>197</sup> Of course, the very notion of 'style' is a multifaceted one, and to outline usefully any characteristic minimalist style it would be necessary to recognise the limitations (and flexibility) of such an objective. Therefore, a framework of interlocking stylistic hubs representing variations

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<sup>197</sup> See Chapter 4.1: Minimalism in Monochrome (pp. 95–102) for further details. Style is intended here not as a nebulous referent, but as a specific and local descriptor. As Charles Rosen explains, 'the concept of a style does not correspond to an historical fact but answers a need: it creates a mode of understanding' (Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 19). This need, according to Leonard Meyer, is met by discerning 'a replication of patterning, whether in human behaviour or in the artifacts produced by human behaviour, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints'. These constraints are 'learned and adopted as part of the historical/cultural circumstances of individuals or groups' (Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History and Ideology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 1). Both Rosen and Meyer employ the concept of 'dialects', which they describe as elements of a style which 'are differentiated because a number of composers—usually, but not necessarily, contemporaries and geographical neighbours—employ (choose) the same or similar rules and strategies' (Meyer, *Style and Music*, p. 23). Rosen suggests that this 'focus [...] makes possible what might be called the personal style or manner of the artist' (Rosen, *The Classical Style*, p. 20), a subset which Meyer categorises as an 'Idiom'. There are obvious correlations here with much of Barthes' work surrounding idiolect, and these links would provide a useful starting point for a detailed examination of the notion of a minimalist 'style'. For now, however, 'style' in this context should be understood as a reference to a collection of constraints and shared characteristics that are specific to a short period in minimalist history, yet have assumed a more general usage. In fact, what is referred to in minimal discourse might be better described as a minimal 'dialect', thus heeding Rosen's warning that 'methodological chaos' may arise if one does not 'distinguish between the style of a small group [...] and the more "anonymous" style of an era' (Rosen, *The Classical Style*, p. 19).

in minimal practice while recognising commonalities may be more appropriate.<sup>198</sup> This broadening out of a term from *within* points towards a plural, rhizomatic attitude to categorisation, and prompts a reading of minimalism as a kaleidoscopic genre. Once this plurality of subcategories is established, they can be shown to be flexible: a composer may develop their personal style or choose to experiment with different arenas of minimal (or other) practice. This allows for both the specificity of the individual style (the composers' voice) and the contextualisation of their work.

As an example, one might take some comments on Reich's 'style'. Schwarz refers to it as 'personal integrity' and suggests that this allowed him 'to forge a musical language uniquely his own out of the impersonal minimalism of the mid-1960s'.<sup>199</sup> Recalling the suggestion made previously that the early minimalist works could be regarded as much as etudes or studies as an attempt to establish a style in their own right, Potter picks out *Drumming* (1970–71) as a key work that marked 'the true transition between the phase-structured works of his early years and the more stylistically adventurous and technically varied compositions of his full maturity'.<sup>200</sup> For Potter, the works Reich produced in the next few years represent a stylistic development 'away from minimalist concerns',<sup>201</sup> yet such a view poses many contradictions. It would be impossible to suggest that Reich is not one of the composers most commonly associated with minimalism, but Potter's assertion places the bulk of his catalogue out of reach of the term. Rather than excluding the works on the basis of a rigid definition of minimalism's stylistic traits, it seems more profitable to identify a development of

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<sup>198</sup> So, for example, phase music, in common with other strands of minimalism, may occupy an extended duration, but *must* use a phasing process as a primary compositional device. In this way, the category minimalism becomes useful as a collective term, while allowing for variations within the label to become illuminating rather than destabilising.

<sup>199</sup> Schwarz, 'Steve Reich: Part I', p. 375.

<sup>200</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 153.

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*

the minimalist style that can be characterised as yet another phase or variation of minimalism.<sup>202</sup>

Instead of a purely linear strategy in relation to stylistic developments, a web of stylistic particularities might be constructed which allows various composers' paths to be traced in multiple directions. This methodology poses a particular attraction since it seems to mirror a certain characteristic of minimal music, which Reich refers to as a 'contrapuntal web with its many resulting patterns which the listener can hear'.<sup>203</sup> While Schwarz, for example, tries to equate Reich's 'lengthy melodic lines, a new structural importance of harmony, and a sense that the composer is writing in a more intuitive less impersonal manner than ever before' with a 'rejection of "minimalism"',<sup>204</sup> the music is still recognisably Reich's. While Reich acknowledges connections to earlier musics ('a lot of what I do resembles stretto, and you're often squarely back dealing with the kinds of techniques that resemble isorhythmic motets of anywhere from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries'), he also stresses that these 'connections occurred to me after I did what I did in a very intuitive, nonintellectualised way'.<sup>205</sup> To suggest that a composer's retrospective contextualisation of his work somehow negates its unique qualities or stylistic attributes seems to be an unnecessarily fragmented position. Rather, it should be possible to weave into these later stylistic developments the postmodern acknowledgement of compressed time: of all musics ever present and available as sources of inspiration and confirmation. In doing so, stylistic developments may present themselves more clearly, allowing for emergent techniques to be related at the same time to both the composers' individual development and the presence of other music. Such procedures may lead, for example, to observations such as those by Schwarz: 'although it's no longer appropriate in *Tehillim* to speak of "musical

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<sup>202</sup> At this stage it is important to point out that this is not an argument for the use of the term 'post-minimal' which will be discussed later and is reserved for a specific relationship to minimalism itself.

<sup>203</sup> Steve Reich, 'Texture—Space—Survival', *Perspectives of New Music*, 26: 2 (Summer 1988), 272–280 (p. 273).

<sup>204</sup> Schwarz, 'Steve Reich: Part II', p. 252.

<sup>205</sup> Strickland, *American Composers*, p. 36.

processes”, there is no doubt that Reich's former technique of phasing only served to reinforce his veritable obsession with counterpoint. In retrospect it seems obvious that even phasing itself was a strict contrapuntal procedure.<sup>206</sup> It also becomes clear that any developing notion of style is dependent on the frame of reference of those who seek to define it.

### Surface

A striking feature of minimalist music is the aural sensation of experiencing both frenetic activity and stasis simultaneously. The most common way of describing this effect is to talk about the ‘surface’ of minimalism: a term that has come to describe the effervescent gloss of repeated figurations that give rhythmic propulsion to music that remains stationary or cyclical in parameters such as harmony, melody and texture. Bernard equates the surface of minimal music, achieved by restricting source material and using consonant harmonies, to ‘a “shiny” or “nonpainterly” presence’, adding that the use of repetitive figurations ‘with the projection of a constant, uniform pulse and a busy, bustling, or “buzzing” character, seems calculated to evoke a sense of flatness, to deny that there is anything but surface to engage the listener’s attention’.<sup>207</sup>

While other characteristics of minimalism seem to dominate certain periods of minimalist development or stand out as trademarks of a particular composer, this ‘surface’ quality has been identified by many commentators in chronologically distant works. Kostelanetz, for example, identifies it as a feature in earlier minimalist works, suggesting that in Riley’s *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (1969) and Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–1976), ‘the richness of detail seems all on the surface, like that of a complexly patterned rug; or foreground seems to trade places continuously with background, in an aural equivalent of op art.’<sup>208</sup> Commentators have also used a variety of metaphorical devices to describe these surface effects on the listener: the

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<sup>206</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 88.

<sup>207</sup> Bernard, ‘The Minimalist Aesthetic’, p. 99.

<sup>208</sup> H. Wiley Hitchcock, ‘Minimalism in Art and Music: Origins and Aesthetics’ in Richard Kostelanetz and Joseph Darby (eds), *Classic Essays on Twentieth Century Music: A Continuing Symposium* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), pp. 308–319 (p. 318).



cyclical and additive patterning of *Einstein on the Beach*, for example, 'has been described by some writers as sounding like "wheels inside wheels," a rather fanciful, but not wholly inaccurate way of evoking the resulting effect'.<sup>209</sup> Similarly, ap Siôn focuses on surface textures, but argues that they are more than simply arbitrary decoration; instead, they result from 'musical processes [...] designed to generate patterns that in turn generate textural layers. They often quite literally create a musical "weave".'<sup>210</sup> Potter also emphasises a surface that derives from underlying processes, arguing that 'Reich's main preoccupation from 1965 to at least 1970 was with structure and, in particular, with the purity and clarity of that structure',<sup>211</sup> suggesting that the function of the characteristically shimmering surface was not to present an opaque layer, but rather to offer a translucent vehicle in which to deliver the aesthetic reasoning behind the processes themselves.

Yet for some commentators, the undifferentiated surfaces of the music become problematic. As well as the musical content itself, the amplified ensemble creates a second, electronic 'surface' that has attracted criticisms, as in the following review of Glass' music:

we heard the results of the musicians' efforts only after they had been processed for us by electrical devices which imposed their own mark on the sound. [The instruments] had many of their distinctive characteristics bleached away by the amplification system. Even more telling, virtually every spatial clue which informs a listener that a number of individual players dispersed about a stage are performing, vanished from the live performance, as the sound system blended discrete contributions from different parts of the stage into an indistinct synthesised whole which emerged from either the far left or the far right of the stage, where the speaker systems had been erected. The physical individuality of the players thus disappeared sonically, a rather unnerving consequence since they were, of course, clearly visible as individuals separated by space, distributed both left to right and front to

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<sup>209</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, p. 59.

<sup>210</sup> ap Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman*, p. 61. Siôn also notes that 'a visual representation of the kind of textual weave heard in minimalist music has been included on the cover of the first recording of Steve Reich's *Drumming*, which features a detail from his wife Beryl Korot's oil on hand-woven canvas *The Babel Text*' (*ibid.*).

<sup>211</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 210.

back, producing sounds which could not be related to their specific locations on stage.<sup>212</sup>

This tendency to consider the means of production as a central component of the work itself, and something that impacts upon the work's content, perhaps goes some way to explaining the growing trend to contextualise minimalism as a response to the human condition itself; to regard minimalism not simply as a musical response to cultural context, but a *human* response to the turmoil of an escape from modernity. This contextualisation, however, elicits a mixture of critical valuations on how positive or negative this response might be. Williams, for example notes:

striking parallels with the image-dominated aspects of contemporary life: the ceaseless circulation of signifiers, and Reich's and Glass' techniques resemble information banks that disgorge huge quantities of repetitive data, criss-crossing to form new permutations within the identity of a self contained system. The constant busy patterns are like an auditory analogue to the repetitive flow of information technology, and, in common with much advertising, the music has a monistic, safe feel to it.<sup>213</sup>

Statements such as these, while non-evaluative in their content, are certain to prompt positive and negative reactions that are dependent on whether I, the reader, consider these features of the 'system' itself edifying or ominous. In short, what began as an abstract and non-referential artform has become representative of a most pressing postmodern conundrum: to wallow in the 'anything goes' or to fight against the bloated melee it might represent. To its critics, minimalism becomes the shorthand for all that is weak and inert in their interpretations of postmodernity; to its supporters, an apogee of the push towards plurality and a multifaceted outlook. Just like Jameson's interpretation of the Bonaventura Hotel or Ryman's white paintings, minimalism's undifferentiated surfaces become mirrors for those who seek to interpret their own thoughts.

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<sup>212</sup> Aaron M. Shatzman, 'The Sound of Minimalism: Philip Glass in Concert and on Record' in Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, pp. 279–286 (first publ. 1987), pp. 285–286.

<sup>213</sup> Alistair Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), p. 126.

## Systems

Unlike process—a term which has become synonymous with Reich in particular and minimalism in general—the closely related ‘systems’ is less often referred to. The primary reason for this seems to be the dominance of a minimalist narrative told from an American, and specifically New York, perspective. Systems music is a term applied by a group of composers to their own music; a group who can also be collected together under the heading of British Experimentalists. Systems music, however, represents a specific strand of their activities and can be seen (in a similar way to many of the American minimal developments) as a direct offshoot of Cageian aesthetics. Virginia Anderson explains that, as in America, the label was borrowed from the visual arts, but that systems composers also tried to apply the techniques of the systems artists to composition.

Despite the differing terms, the similarities between systems and process are striking. As Anderson explains, a general definition of each term correlates closely: ‘both British systems and American minimalism can be described as using processes that in most cases can be expressed numerically. When the governing process is exhausted, the piece ends.’<sup>214</sup> Yet she argues for recognition of systems music as a particular form of minimalist process, since ‘the numerical constructs in most British systems tend to occur at a microcosmic level, and in strict systems, this level is note-to-note’.<sup>215</sup> Interestingly, Anderson also situates the development of systems music within a transitional phase, stating that ‘like American repetitive minimalism, British systems are an experimental invention, and like American minimalism, systems can be divided between “modern” experimentalism and “postmodern” experimentalism’.<sup>216</sup> For her, ‘modern’ examples include ‘the earliest pieces of John White’s Machine series (1968–75) of repetitive pieces using compositional indeterminacy, and later, phrase-based

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<sup>214</sup> Virginia Anderson, “‘Just the Job for that Lazy Sunday Afternoon’: British Readymades and Systems Music’, paper delivered at the First International Conference on Music and Minimalism (August 2007), p. 3. Of course, there were already strong ties between the experimental musical scene in Britain and various art colleges and departments.

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1. By contrast, Anderson argues that the processes of American minimal systems tend to be governed at a thematic level.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*

systems', while 'strict systems, found systems and Readymades show both modern and postmodern experimental traits'.<sup>217</sup>

Anderson also situates particular works within a transitional phase, indicating that White's *PT Machine* (1969) is 'typical of this transitory period between modern and postmodern experimentation'.<sup>218</sup> At first, it seems contradictory to associate dogmatic adherence to a system with the postmodern side of any division, yet this perspective serves to highlight the error of perceiving minimalist developments as part of a simple binary opposition to the European avant-garde (rather, it reinforces the picture of a tripartite relationship between experimentalism, minimalism and serialism, all occupying a variety of dialectical positions in relation to one another). While those close to the British systems artists argue for their place in the minimalist canon, 'system' is a term that can be, and is, readily applied as a synonym for any minimal process. Thus, when Bochner explains that 'systems are characterised by regularity, thoroughness, and repetition in execution [...] individual parts of a system are not in themselves important but are relevant only in the way they are used in the enclosed logic of the whole',<sup>219</sup> he is talking not of British systems, but of American process. Similarly, Sutherland employs the term systems music 'to describe the work of composers who concern themselves with sound continuums which evolve gradually, often over very long periods of time. The most well-known of these composers are Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and La Monte Young'.<sup>220</sup> While pointing out these crossovers might seem like semantic splitting of hairs, it highlights the way in which the desire to make concrete distinctions overrides the identification of variation. Yet the fact that such a statement can easily be transferred between the two supports Anderson's call for systems music to be recognised as a subcategory of minimalism.

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<sup>217</sup> Anderson, "'Just the Job for that Lazy Sunday Afternoon'", p. 2.

<sup>218</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8. Anderson also places *In C* within this transitory period.

<sup>219</sup> Bochner, 'Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism', p. 94.

<sup>220</sup> Roger Sutherland, 'Steve Reich', *EST WebIndex* (1998)  
<<http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/articles/reich.html>> [accessed 03/01/10], para. 1 of 23.

Although systems music finds its origins in Cage, the subsequent development of the music owes less to American counterparts than is sometimes assumed. Parsons relates systems music back only to the very earliest examples of American minimalism, when an emphasis on aesthetic purity was key:

The strongest thing in a piece of music is the concentration on sound; the initial choice of material requires complete commitment for the duration of the work. Its integrity is all-important, and the introduction of variety can only weaken it. A system is one way of extending this in time, and of ensuring unity. The singlemindedness of this approach can be referred back to La Monte Young's 'Draw a straight line and follow it' (1960).<sup>221</sup>

Similarly, ap Siôn notes that the final chapter of Nyman's *Experimental Music* ('Minimal music, determinacy and the new tonality') gives equal attention to American and British trends. Ap Siôn argues that English post-experimental music 'adopted in equal measure elements associated with both American experimental and minimal music in that the freedom of the former was combined with the rigour and discipline of the latter'.<sup>222</sup>

Yet there seem to be contradictions amongst practitioners about precisely how systems music should be defined. While Dennis contrasts systems with the 'extreme economy of Reich and Riley, whose processes are totally audible',<sup>223</sup> Parsons' description of systems music bears a striking similarity to Reich's audible process ('the rules are not hidden from view but are made clearly evident in the work itself'<sup>224</sup>), and then goes on to describe something that might be likened to Reich's 'resulting psychoacoustic effects' ('rational procedures are seen not as a means of complete control, but as a method of inquiry: within a defined field, further relationships can be

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<sup>221</sup> Michael Parsons, 'Systems in Art and Music', *Musical Times*, 117: 1604 (October 1976), 815–818 (pp. 816–817).

<sup>222</sup> ap Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman*, p. 44. However, there was certainly a strong awareness of American minimalist developments in the UK. The UK premiere of *Drumming*, for example, included Cardew, Hobbs, Nyman and Bryars among its performers (See Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 144).

<sup>223</sup> Brian Dennis, 'Repetitive and Systemic Music', *Musical Times*, 115: 1582 (December 1974), 1036–1038 (p. 1038).

<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*

discovered<sup>225</sup>). Further confusing matters is an article in which Nyman collects together the views of various systems music composers, quoting White explaining that:

the sound and the activities of the performers are fed like raw materials into a machine or process and emerge as a pattern unique to the occasion on which the particular *Machine* is being performed. The sounds tend towards a sort of ragged consonance, the procedures usually involved much repetition with changes happening almost imperceptibly over large spans of time, and the atmosphere is usually pretty calm and unruffled however fast the pace of the music.<sup>226</sup>

This emphasis on the unique conditions of each performance and performer seem at odds with the abstract, clinical aesthetics of early process music, where performers were being asked to produce music with mechanical precision. As Siôn notes, the British composers 'displayed a more relaxed approach to systems while at the same time referring more openly to past music and pre-existing materials [...] occasionally resulting in compositions that call to mind the humour of Satie'.<sup>227</sup>

Yet, rather than this contradiction excluding systems music from minimalism, perhaps it serves to highlight the developmental impetus that was so strongly felt throughout diverging minimalist activities. The referentiality of some music, for example, anticipates the less abstract later works of American minimalists, while also simply making play of the fact that truly abstract music is often difficult to achieve. In fact, Warburton suggests that systems music is included in his minimal taxonomy and should describe Reich's music post-1973, Glass' music post-*Music in Twelve Parts*, John Adams and the European minimalists, due to their 'concern with *multiple* process: the

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<sup>225</sup> Parsons, 'Systems in Art and Music', pp. 815–6.

<sup>226</sup> White quoted in Michael Nyman, 'Believe it or Not, Melody Rides Again', *Music and Musicians*, 20: 2, iss. 30 (October 1971), 26–28 (p. 27).

<sup>227</sup> Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman*, p. 45–46. Similarly, Nyman highlights the more relaxed approach to British systems: 'White's machines are easily distinguished from the gradual process music of Reich. Incessant and rigorous, but implacable and impassive, they lack the high-octane energy of the American variety; they do not limit themselves to a single overriding procedure such as phasing; and being English they are ambling, friendly, self-effacing systems, which may break down or have built-in self-compensating mechanisms' (Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 166).

rigid polemic laid down by Reich in 1968 is no longer applicable'.<sup>228</sup> This multiplicity also points towards an awareness of the postmodern sense of time-space compression that makes all musics ever present. Interestingly, Nyman draws a firm distinction between systems music and experimental music that makes use of the past. His own music, he argues, is 'related to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century variation forms, while systems music in general is related, however distantly, to serialism'.<sup>229</sup> It is unclear precisely what Nyman means by this statement, but it might be assumed that Nyman is drawing a parallel between the rigours of each compositional device and the necessity to avoid deviation from the underlying principle.<sup>230</sup> The similarities between features of system and process remain key to the inclusion of systems music in the kaleidoscopic reading of minimalism. The power of the system, or process, to override subsequent compositional choices is apparent in both categories. However, systems music should be recognised as a distinct and fruitful subcategory, due to the way in which the systems composers *did* find ways to incorporate their political ideologies into the rhetoric of their composition and the resulting modes of production.

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<sup>228</sup> Dan Warburton, 'A Working Terminology for Minimal Music' (1988) Paris Transatlantic Archives, <<http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/archives/minimalism.html>> [Last accessed 11/09/09], (first publ. in *Intégral*, 2 (1988)), para. 5 of 24.

<sup>229</sup> Nyman, 'Against Intellectual Complexity in Music', p. 208.

<sup>230</sup> The reference to variation also raises some interesting questions. Variation is a feature that is less often discussed in relation to minimalism, yet does, in various guises, form an integral part of some major works. As Alloway argues, 'image series are not the same as a theme and variations (with a clear major statement accompanied by subsequent elaboration, often becoming frivolous) but, on the contrary, are a succession of moves, all of equal value' (Lawrence Alloway, *Topics in American Art Since 1945* (New York: W. M. Norton, 1975), p. 93). Jones defines variation form in music as 'a self-contained theme [...] repeated and changed in some way with each successive statement [...] The number and type of variations are not fixed' (Timothy Rhys Jones, 'Variation Form', Oxford Music Online <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e7967>> [accessed 23/03/10]). Minimal Music obviously excludes itself from this definition a) where strict process dictates a fixed playing out of the underlying system, and b) where freer repetition is employed multiple times before alteration to the pattern. However, variation forms such as Cantus Firmus, ground bass and passacaglia have all been used as structural devices in works commonly assigned to the minimalist camp. In addition, Reich's title sequences of variations (variations on both titling and the underlying concept) raise an interesting question. Jones concludes his entry by explaining that twentieth-century composers 'developed radical new approaches to the organisation of variation' (*ibid.*). Whether minimalism calls for a revision of the definition of variation form remains unanswered.

## Tape Music

Both the use of amplified ensembles and the number of tape pieces that count as seminal works in the history of minimalism, make the relationship between minimalism and technology an important one. Berg, for example, considers Glass' use of amplified ensembles, film and other multi-media collaborations as a 'desire to reach larger audiences through artistic exploitations of the media'.<sup>231</sup> Similarly, various minimalist composers have shown a preoccupation with cutting-edge technologies and new media, from Riley's time-lag accumulator to Adams' video-opera and the recent multimedia projects of Fitkin. Tape music is a crucial component of minimalist development, although later, for Potter, the incorporation of sampling and other computer generated devices heralds the 'continuing story of post-minimalism',<sup>232</sup> rather than being a development of minimalism itself.

Reich's phase pieces tend to receive the most attention when turning to tape technology, but Riley was already composing tape music in the early sixties. While Reich says in an interview with Alburger that he had all the 'ingredients' for his phase pieces in 1962 before he met Riley,<sup>233</sup> Potter notes that 'at least as late as 14 January 1968—in the notes for an Arts Now "afternoon of live and electronic music by Steve Reich" [...] his first mature tape composition was being listed as "It's Gonna Rain, or meet Brother Walter in Union Square after listening to Terry Riley".<sup>234</sup> Riley's tape pieces principally made use of an echoplex ('a primitive electronic contraption allowing a sound to be repeated in an ever-accumulating counterpoint against itself'<sup>235</sup>), and a 'time-lag accumulator', which 'swiftly piles speech and sound up against each other to

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<sup>231</sup> Charles Merrell Berg, 'Philip Glass on Composing for Film and Other Forms: The Case of *Koyaanisqatsi*' in Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, pp. 131–151 (first publ. in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* V/1 (Fall 1990)), p. 132.

<sup>232</sup> Keith Potter, '1976 and All That: Minimalism and Post-Minimalism, Analysis and Listening Strategies', paper delivered at the First International Conference on Music and Minimalism (August 2007), <<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/events/Keith%20Potter.pdf>> [accessed 19/03/10], p. 6.

<sup>233</sup> Alburger, 'Steve Reich: Early Phase', p. 3.

<sup>234</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 165.

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.



produce an increasingly blurred textural wash'.<sup>236</sup> While both resulted in contrapuntal layers being built up in successive overdubs, it is clear that Riley's processes are merely vehicles for an end result, the effect of which is quite different from that of Reich's phase pieces. As Schwarz' description of *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* (1967) shows, there was little evidence of a minimal aesthetic at work:

Riley would play his saxophone into a microphone, and the time-lag process would allow him to build up remarkably dense, kaleidoscopic textures. Beneath the intertwining, semi-improvised saxophone lines was the drone of an electric organ. Riley, in essence, was a one-man band—and the "phantoms" were the echoes and responses created by the interaction of live performance and tape manipulation.<sup>237</sup>

As this description shows, while the underlying techniques may have shared some similarities, Riley's results are dense, and the addition of other elements does not allow the processes to be laid bare in the same way that phasing does. Carl, for example, describes the aural effects of 'She Moves She' (the final movement of *Music for the Gift*) as 'evocative of Steve Reich's later tape pieces such as *Come Out* and *It's Gonna Rain*, but without the rigorous focus on process'.<sup>238</sup> Despite this, Potter argues that these works 'provide a missing link in the story of Riley's influence on Reich and in the prehistory of sampling',<sup>239</sup> and it could be argued that Riley's tape works occupy a fringe of the minimal category.

While it is easy to trace a line of development from Riley to Reich, not least because of Reich's contribution to *In C* and their physical proximity at various stages of their careers, the tendency to separate minimalism from the European tradition often overlooks another possible source of inspiration. As Pymm notes, Reich says that 'phasing was a serendipitous discovery, chanced upon as he worked with recordings of human speech. What came first was his rationale for using speech as a compositional

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<sup>236</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 105.

<sup>237</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 47.

<sup>238</sup> Carl, *Terry Riley's In C*, p. 27.

<sup>239</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 120.

sound source'.<sup>240</sup> While he may have heard Riley's use of speech in *She Moves She* late in 1964 or early in 1965,<sup>241</sup> an earlier piece by Berio, his college teacher, might have had as much influence. *Thema (omaggio a Joyce)*, created in 1958, used nothing but speech sounds as the material for manipulation, and as Berio explains on the sleeve notes, 'all transformations are accomplished by tape editing, through superimposition of identical elements with varying time relations (phase shifting, especially where Joyce is concerned with musical onomatopoeia), through wide frequency and time transposition and through 1/3<sup>rd</sup> octave filtering'.<sup>242</sup> Although never sustained in the way that Reich uses it, some sections of Berio's phase shifting clearly stand out as a similar aural sensation of sound moving across space to the one Reich describes in *It's Gonna Rain* (although Berio's cutting and panning across left and right channels consequently gives the phasing effect much less impact).

While for many years Reich categorically dismissed the suggestion that Berio had any positive impact on his composition, in a more recent interview with Alburger he admits, 'these were the days when Berio had just done *Hommagio [sic.] a Joyce* and he was playing it for us with excitement [...] Hearing that was a big encouragement to work with speech, as opposed to all the sine-wave generators'.<sup>243</sup> The reasons for

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<sup>240</sup> John Pymm, 'Steve Reich: Stories of Machines and Minimalism', paper delivered at the First International Conference on Music and Minimalism (August 2007), <<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/events/John%20Pymm.pdf>> [accessed 19/03/10], p. 3.

<sup>241</sup> See Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 105

<sup>242</sup> Luciano Berio, sleeve note to *Thema (omaggio a Joyce)* (1958) on Electronic Music III, (196[?]). Turnabout Records. TV341775. The note is an extract from Luciano Berio, 'Poesia e Musica—un'esperianza' in *Incontri Musicali III* (Milan: Suvini Zerboni, 1958). *Thema* is constructed entirely from speech sounds taken from a reading of the 'overture' section of the Sirens chapter in Joyce's *Ulysses* by Berio's then wife, Cathy Berbarian. This speech was manipulated and edited to form a tapestry of sounds, some of which are unidentifiable as human speech and others which preserve the onomatopoeia of Joyce's text.

<sup>243</sup> Alburger, 'Steve Reich: Early Phase', p. 2. It is also possible that Reich heard *Thema* in concert: San Francisco Tape Music Center staged a series of solo concerts in 1964/5 which included a concert of Berio's music, and another of Riley's. These took place just after Reich had completed his MA at Mills (Carl, *Terry Riley's In C*, p. 40). Murphy identifies a link between Berio's and Reich's tape music, noting that 'all [*Thema's*] transformations are carried out by tape editing, superimposition of identical elements with varying times relations (also called "phase shifting" and associated later with the work of Steve Reich)' (Timothy S. Murphy, 'Music After Joyce: The Post-Serial Avant-Garde', *Hypermedia Joyce Studies* (1997), <<http://hjs.cuni.cz/archives/v2/murphy/index.html>> [accessed 30/01/09], para. 14 of 17).

Reich's earlier need to distance himself from any European influence are perhaps self evident, yet the counterpoint of phasing is simply more strictly rendered in *It's Gonna Rain*, as Reich 'realised it was more interesting than any one particular relationship, because it was the process (of gradually passing through all the canonic relationships) making an entire piece, and not just a moment in time'.<sup>244</sup>

Of course, the decision to use phasing as the focal point, indeed the compositional device, of a work was unique to Reich.<sup>245</sup> In hindsight, he also considers the phase pieces crucial to his later instrumental works, understanding that they were:

on the one hand, realisations of an idea that was indigenous to machines, and, on the other hand, the gateway to some instrumental music that I would never have come to by listening to any other Western, or for that matter non-Western, music. The question may then arise as to what it is like to imitate a machine while playing live music.<sup>246</sup>

Yet his was not the only example of a preoccupation with the machine-like qualities of performance. Alvin Lucier's *I am sitting in a Room* has been heralded by Strickland as one of the 'finest achievements of Minimal tape music'.<sup>247</sup> As well as regarding it as a key bridging point between modern and postmodern forms of minimalism ('in its ambient conversion of speech modules to drone frequencies, it unites two principal structural components of Minimal music in general'<sup>248</sup>), Strickland also recognises prophesy of postmodern reception in its aesthetic basis:

his stammer transformed into white noise, Lucier commits sonic suicide, long before theories of "death of the author" were current. There is

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<sup>244</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 21.

<sup>245</sup> There is one puzzling piece of information that suggests that Reich may have only had a superficial knowledge of the techniques being employed by Berio and his colleagues in Milan. In 1967, Reich wrote *Slow Motion Sound*, essentially an instruction to take a tape loop and gradually slow it down without altering the pitch. In his *Writings About Music*, Reich insists it was technologically impossible to realise at the time, yet a young British composer visiting the Milan studio in 1958 reports back on a device called the '*Telefonbau Normalzeit*', which 'changes the speed of a rhythmic passage without altering pitch on a tape recording' (See Marc Wilkinson, 'Two Months in the "Studio di Fonologia"', *The Score: A Music Magazine* 22 (February 1958), 41–48 (p. 43)).

<sup>246</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 24.

<sup>247</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 199.

<sup>248</sup> *ibid.*

something eerie as well as inspired in his piece, which without polemicising of any sort manages to suggest dehumanisation, mechanisation, and the alien objectivity of reality.<sup>249</sup>

By the time tape pieces eventually began to reveal their limitations (in terms of both interest and technological obsolescence), most minimal composers were already exploring other avenues. Yet technological advances have remained at the forefront of much of their work,<sup>250</sup> and reflect the symbiotic relationship between a work and its production that permeates minimalist creativity.

### **Tonality**

Much has been made of minimalism's 'return to tonality' and it is true that, particularly for the four composers most often under discussion, consonance is a common feature. However, across the broader spectrum of minimalist composition, it is insufficient to regard minimal practice as synonymous with traditional tonal functions. One reason why tonality has become so central to discussions of minimalism may be due to minimalism's relationship to serialism and atonality. Reich himself has stated that 'serial and 12-tone music were a kind of break with natural principles of resonance and with human musical perception',<sup>251</sup> and the oft-repeated anecdote of Berio's comments on some of his earliest work, 'that if he wanted to write tonal music, he should write tonal music',<sup>252</sup> contribute to a cementing of the 'return to tonality' in the minimalist legend. Perhaps the greatest source of this emphasis can be attributed to *In C*, the title of which Strickland considers 'contextually revolutionary, as Riley announces the abandonment not only of Serialism but atonality in embracing the simplest key signature'.<sup>253</sup> Similarly, Schwarz argues that '*In C* is defiantly and unashamedly in the key of C, and this at a time when atonal serialism still ruled the

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<sup>249</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 199.

<sup>250</sup> The involvement of many minimalist composers with multimedia events is an important development that demands exploration beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>251</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 159. The piece in question was a twelve-tone string orchestra piece, written in 1961, where the row was simply repeated without permutation.

<sup>252</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 183.

<sup>253</sup> *ibid.*, p. 176.

new-music world'.<sup>254</sup> Both seem happy to gloss over the fact that most analyses of *In C* conclude that the harmony functions in some sort of difficult-to-pin-down modal shift, and that Riley had recently completed another work entitled *In Ab or is it Bb?*<sup>255</sup> However, it is true to say that *In C* is often as well known as an historical event as an actually-heard piece of music. It might therefore be argued that, whatever the truth of the listening experience, the title has had an impact far beyond the scope of the work itself (particularly since the work was only recorded four years after its first performance).

Despite this, it is important to recognise that consonance, and the inclusion of arpeggiated figures and triadic harmonies, does not equate to a *return* to traditional harmonic functions. Quite apart from the impossibility of pinning down a 'traditional harmony' that can somehow be retrieved intact from the wastelands of Darmstadt, to suggest that minimalist harmonic language in any way imitates a full set of harmonic conventions from any previous era fails to take into account the notable difference between, for example, Reich and the neo-baroque of Karl Jenkins. In short, tonality returns, but functions in a different way. Bernard identifies 'a notable diversification and "enrichment" of the harmonic content of minimal music' from the mid-seventies onwards,<sup>256</sup> but warns that 'the so-called "return to harmony" or even "return to tonality" [is] really an *appropriation* of harmony for purposes that are essentially new and not yet at all well understood'.<sup>257</sup> Similarly, in Cohn's detailed analyses of Reich's works, he concludes that harmonic functions are in fact disconnected through repetition, so that the listener's attention is diverted to rhythmic concerns, 'transferring them from one domain to another'.<sup>258</sup> The suggestion that consonance is

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<sup>254</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 45.

<sup>255</sup> See Carl, *Terry Riley's In C*, pp. 68–70. Carl is one of the few commentators to consider *In C*'s modules in relation to the underlying Pulse, and how the later addition of this element may affect the harmonic function of the work.

<sup>256</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, 'Theory, Analysis, and the "Problem" of Minimal Music', in Marvin and Harmann, *Concert Music, Rock and Jazz since 1945*, pp. 259–284 (p. 284).

<sup>257</sup> *ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>258</sup> Cohn, 'Transpositional Combination of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich's Phase-Shifting Music', p. 171.

in fact used to divert a listener's attention away from harmonic function rather than towards it is also supported by Reich's own comments. Discussing the lack of a bass clef in any works composed between 1965 and 1973, he comments: 'I knew there were certain ambiguities, and I wanted to keep those ambiguities. But I didn't know how to keep them and still say what they were. So I simply shut up, I didn't say anything! Of what you can't speak, you must keep silent.'<sup>259</sup>

This functional ambiguity is much closer to the real essence of what a 'minimalist tonality' really means, and as Johnson explains, 'the greatest difference between the new tonality and traditional European tonality is that the recent music doesn't have much to do with chord progressions [...] There is often, if not always, a tonal centre, but this is usually just the note that comes up most often at the most important points. It does not have much sense of finality.'<sup>260</sup> This absence of a 'sense of finality' that Johnson refers to also goes some way to explaining many commentators' insistence that minimal music is a-teleological. However, there are other traditional musical devices that replace the need for a functional harmonic language to propel the music in a particular direction. Potter, for example, points to Reich's interest in twelfth-century organum in *Music for 18 Musicians* (1975),<sup>261</sup> while Reich argues that commentators only started discussing his work in terms of harmonic functions after becoming 'aware of my canonic structure [in *Tehillim*] because the subjects were longer and more traditionally melodic'.<sup>262</sup> However, there are minimalist composers for whom tonality has become an increasingly central occupation. While later composers such as Adams and Torke stretch minimalist harmonic functions so far that they might more accurately be described as minimal-romantic and minimal-blues tonalities respectively, composers such as Glass seem to have discarded some of the underlying structures of minimal harmony in favour of more accessible and traditionally directional functions. For Potter, Glass' 'increasing interest in tonally

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<sup>259</sup> Reich quoted in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 188.

<sup>260</sup> Johnson, 'The New Tonality', p. 346.

<sup>261</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 232.

<sup>262</sup> Reich, 'Texture—Space—Survival', p. 273.

directed motion forms the crucial link between his music of the early 1970s, especially the final stages of *Music in Twelve Parts* and the whole of his later, “post-minimalist” development’.<sup>263</sup>

Leaving aside Potter’s classification of Glass’ later work as ‘post-minimal’, it is clear that Potter attributes this shift to a pragmatic need for some kind of (albeit ‘locally’) narrative structure to underpin the large-scale operatic works. By contrast, Rockwell sees Glass’ development as a simple refinement of what he considers a rather clumsy early style:

such harmonic contrast as there was in Glass’ music existed at the seams between sections, when the whole ensemble laboriously shifted gears. Gradually, Glass found himself paying increasing attention to those seams, and slowly began to introduce modulations within sections; the key moment came in 1974, with Parts Eleven and Twelve of *Music in Twelve Parts*, which suddenly erupted into functional, root-movement harmony—in other words, full-fledged tonality.<sup>264</sup>

What neither commentator questions, however, is whether Glass’ ‘fully-fledged tonality’ represents a departure that puts his music outside the realms of minimalism altogether. Certainly, for his many critics, Glass represents the most vacuous and unimaginative quarter of minimalist development.<sup>265</sup>

Elsewhere, the tonality of minimal practice has been much less straightforward. The borrowing of other sources by systems composers has transplanted past harmonic functions and often thwarted their realisation in the process, while much of the machine music carries an element of indeterminacy that makes a strong harmonic teleology unlikely. On the continent, composers such as Andriessen developed a minimal language that contained a far greater degree of chromatic saturation, while

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<sup>263</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 339.

<sup>264</sup> Rockwell, *All American Music*, pp. 114–115.

<sup>265</sup> While it may be too extreme to exclude Glass from the minimalist camp altogether (after all, he remains a top-seller of the category) it would certainly be true to say that the complexities of much other minimalist music are absent in Glass’ later works. There is perhaps a sense in which, to perpetuate the success of his breakthrough works, Glass has crystallised a certain stage of minimalist activity and repeated it ad nauseam to the point at which it no longer seems anything but undifferentiatingly familiar (see this chapter: Accessibility (pp. 105–110) for further discussion).

Young's ongoing experimentations with just intonation confound modern ears' understanding of tonal functions. As Page notes, 'there is no doctrinaire "school"; composers may use any harmonic language they choose. An atonal—even dodecaphonic—minimalist work is conceivable.'<sup>266</sup> Perhaps it is because of this freedom that so many commentators feel the need to contextualise minimalist tonality with reference to older harmonic systems.

## Visual Arts

While it is well known that the minimalist label was transferred to music from the visual arts, direct comparisons between the two mediums are less common. The application of labels from the visual arts to music is not a new phenomenon, and so it is possible that certain corollaries are overlooked, just as conversely, overly simplistic comparisons are often made. It is important, first of all, to stress the relatively brief period that art criticism considers 'minimalist'.<sup>267</sup> However, the tag has proved attractive to less specialist avenues of discourse, and as a result, minimalism is a term

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<sup>266</sup> Page, 'Framing the River', p. 64. However, Beirens dismisses the possibility of a serial minimal composition on the following grounds: 'while all twelve pitch classes may be in use, true atonality implying the equality of all twelve pitch classes is hard to establish, since the repetitiveness with which the limited units of musical material are presented, inevitably leads to the perception of a gravitational effect. In order to yield a full atonal effect, the music has to be persistently transformative, whereas minimalism has similarity and gradualness at its core. Even without strict tonal functionality, "strong" notes within such reductive material take on the status of a point of reference and certain fixed pitch relationships can become perceived' (Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 311).

<sup>267</sup> There are a host of catalogues from the 1960s that apply different labels to groups that display common ground *within* what is more broadly understood as minimalism. One good example of this is Systems Art. The 'Systems Painting' exhibition was shown at the Guggenheim, New York from September to November 1966 and included works by painters such as Kelly and Stella who would be more broadly considered Minimalist. Alloway's essay in the catalogue is reproduced in Battcock's anthology of minimalist criticism, preceded by the following detail:

AUTHOR'S NOTE: On the cover of the exhibition catalogue *Systemic Painting* was a definition of *systemic* taken from the Oxford English Dictionary: '3 *gen.* Arranged or conducted according to a system, plan or organised method; involving or observing a system.' And *system* was defined in the same source as 'a set or assemblage of things connected, associated, or interdependent so as to form a complex unity; a whole composed of parts in orderly arrangement according to some scheme or plan' (Lawrence Alloway, 'Systemic Painting' in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp. 37–60 (first publ. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1966), p. 37).

As well as demonstrating the way in which the visual artworld sought labels to characterise the limits of a certain exhibition, it also highlights the nuances of distinction between 'minimal' and 'system' in the visual arts. This might be further support for the argument to include systems music as a particular strand of minimal music.



that has passed over into journalism about arts and lifestyle in much the same way that postmodernism seems to have done.

### *Minimalism*

It is in the brief, 'original' minimalist phase of the mid sixties that the most direct comparisons with music can be made; a period of synthesis and co-development that prompts Bernard to suggest that minimal music is 'a direct offshoot of minimalism in the plastic arts'.<sup>268</sup> Similarly, Rockwell dismisses the emphasis often placed on composers' non-Western influences in favour of finding 'direct precursors' in the 'plethora of sixties paintings with analytically reductive, repetitive structures and simple, even childlike formal elements [that] all fed into a common pool of inspiration in lower Manhattan'.<sup>269</sup> Rockwell reiterates a focus on conditions of production and reception saying that 'it is more fruitful to consider the general ambience of New York's artistic community [...] than to seek out specific visual-aural parallels'.<sup>270</sup> This emphasis on the context of minimalist creativity is shared by Potter, who argues that as well as providing a source of inspiration, the downtown New York environment provided ample opportunity for performance; ultimately leading to a successful performance history that shapes the later development of musical minimalism into music written predominantly for specific ensembles. As Potter explains of Reich, 'the personal, as well as aesthetic, connections he made with the art world in the 1960s allowed Reich access to art galleries as performance spaces long before he became accepted in Western classical music circles, and audiences for his work who were often well-informed about its intentions'.<sup>271</sup> Strickland also seeks to compare the two contrasting aspects of minimal music (repetition and stasis) with counterparts in the visual arts. He argues that 'the horizontal as well as vertical stasis of sustenance is the sonic equivalent of the monochrome canvases that had proliferated for years before

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<sup>268</sup> Bernard, 'Theory, Analysis, and the "Problem" of Minimal Music', p. 259.

<sup>269</sup> Rockwell, *All American Music*, p. 115.

<sup>270</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 174.

Young's long-tone compositions',<sup>272</sup> while identifying a seriality in repetition that 'deals with time as serial structures in the plastic arts deal with space, by progressing from one unit to the next but without variation'.<sup>273</sup> This dual affiliation supports the inclusivity of a kaleidoscopic taxonomy of musical minimalism.

Although it is useful to highlight these relationships between the content and form of the works themselves, the particular transitional space that minimalism occupies makes it useful to compare the circumstances leading to the emergence of minimalism in the visual arts as well as the reception of those works with musical developments. However, it is in exploring these circumstances that comparisons between music and the visual arts become most problematic. Colpitt, for example, argues that the severe restriction of composition 'puts Minimalism directly at odds with Abstract Expressionism, in which individual sensibility at the moment of creation is all important [...] At the same time, the immediacy sought by Minimalists directly reflects the influence of Abstract Expressionism [...] work that cannot be read directionally hits the spectator wholly and at once'.<sup>274</sup> While the contradictory nature of this relationship recalls the serial/experimental duality of musical minimalism, what is more apparent is the contradiction between the visual arts and music: musical minimalism was, at least in part, a reaction against an already restrictive compositional method that bears no resemblance to the aesthetics of Abstract Expressionism. In fact, early commentators on developments in the visual arts drew their parallels not from the works of Reich, Glass, Riley or Young, but from composers of serial and complex works. Haskell, for example suggests that Judd's 'attraction to pre-existing mathematical systems as the structural bases for his compositions had its analogue in the work of musicians like Milton Babbitt'.<sup>275</sup>

With this in mind, it is worth addressing some of the discourse on minimalism within the visual artworld. Michael Fried, for example, refers to much minimal art as

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<sup>272</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 143.

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 47.

<sup>275</sup> Haskell, *Blam!*, p. 95.

'literalist'. In a similar way to music, Fried considers literalist art to be born out of the *same* modernist anxieties about the *same* developments '*seen differently*'.<sup>276</sup> Fried sees literal art as an art of theatre: to him, good modernist art is that which defeats theatre, through the act of defying duration, and he considers art which can be fully experienced in an instant to be best. To him, literal art requires duration due to its occupation of space, and recalls criticisms of the 'going nowhere' music. Critics who responded more favourably to early minimalism also saw strong links to modernist concerns. Krauss for example comments on two 1963 exhibitions of black pictures which represented 'two different minimalisms—one bearing the capital M and facing forward in the decade [Stella, "Die Fahne Hoch!"]; the second, small-m'd, and joining hands with other, similarly motivated, pictorial ascetisms from the past [Reinhardt's 'black' paintings]'.<sup>277</sup> Krauss argued that Reinhardt's painting has a background 'meaning' that could be inferred by a viewer; a product of the persistent need to 'see' more than was visible to the eye. For her, the metaphysical content of Reinhardt's work invalidated the aesthetic premises of Minimalism. Similarly, Haskell argues that 'the essentially mystical tone of the Chromatic Abstractionists [Rothko, Newman] and their commitment to art as a form of moral statement separated them from their emulators [Stella, Kelly], who adopted their geometric style for less metaphysical ends'.<sup>278</sup>

Despite this separation, musicologists often use the example of Reinhardt's black paintings as an analogue to the hypnotic effects of early minimalism. Schwarz for example likens the experience of sitting in front of a Reinhardt for a prolonged period to the time-distortions reported by those attending the Theatre of Eternal Music or the

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<sup>276</sup> Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148–172 (p. 161).

<sup>277</sup> Krauss, 'Overcoming the Limits of Matter', p. 123.

<sup>278</sup> Haskell, *Blam!*, p. 91. The first exhibition of Stella's Black paintings was shown in 1959 (he began painting them in 1958).

resulting 'psychoacoustic patterns' of Reich's phase pieces.<sup>279</sup> This may well stem from the emphasis many visual art critics place on the role of the receiver: as Bernard notes, art critics responding to the first examples of minimalist art realised that the reductive and depthless nature of minimalism demanded the participation of the viewer, 'not in the sense simply of drawing viewers in, of involving them or fascinating them, but rather in the sense that the act of looking at the work of art would become part of that work's meaning'.<sup>280</sup>

This emphasis on the physical experience of the artwork points not only towards a postmodern concern with conditions of reception, but also to what Schwarz describes as 'not the birth, nor even the maturation, but rather the progressive academizing of severely reductive art'.<sup>281</sup> For Battcock, it is precisely this intellectualisation of art—of which Minimalism marks the apogee—that characterises twentieth-century developments: 'what really counts is [the] trend towards greater acknowledgement

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<sup>279</sup> Strickland describes the experience of viewing Reinhardt's paintings (in the right lighting, cruciform shapes are visible) as follows:

What is in or on the last canvases themselves? Most viewers seem to find nothing, and various critics have noted that, first of all, the casual spectator literally does not and cannot see these paintings, which require considerable time for ocular adjustment. In my experience, few visitors to museums take that time, and many enjoy Reinhardt's blacks mainly as a joke. When questioned casually, however, some seem uncertain as to whether they are laughing with or at him, though others are more confident of their acuity.

Non museum-goers are pretty much out of luck altogether, since these paintings cannot be even remotely effectively reproduced in books, posters, catalogues, etc., although lecturers are forced to rely on precisely those impossible reproductions for their presentations. [...] With the aid of flash or other enhanced lighting, photographic reproductions of the canvases reveal the cruciform shape. From a phenomenological perspective, one might argue that they *invent* them.

The extent to which the square blacks "depict" a cross is more problematic in practice than in theory. In my own experience of the black paintings under normal lighting conditions, the transections and vertical "beams" in the oblong paintings, initially obscure to varying degrees, in every case finally become visible as a whole upon concentrated viewing. In some of the square paintings of the sixties, on the other hand, the overall structure is *never* fully revealed, the gestalt never evident but grasped only by a leap of imaginative compensation one makes in listening to music during a static filled radio transmission. *Sections* of the borders of the "cross" emerge, often very slowly, upon viewing, but sink back into the mass of darkness as one shifts perspective to other sections of the canvas, trying to follow the outline or proceed from crossbeam to headbeam (Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 48).

<sup>280</sup> Bernard, 'The Minimalist Aesthetic', p. 115.

<sup>281</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 4.

and consciousness of all that isn't art. Logic and label no longer concern the artist, for art is now both logic *and* label. Art and idea are inseparable.<sup>282</sup> Alongside this intellectualisation of minimalism, the proliferation of manifesto-like statements setting out the artists 'vision' might also highlight a contradiction in creative methods that distanced the creator from the material object. Bernard remarks on the 'uniform application of colour—as if the ideal were an industrial paint job',<sup>283</sup> while Hopkins notes the 'non-hierarchical and non-referential structure' of the grid.<sup>284</sup> Yet as he traces the use of grids from the cubists, to Mondrian, to Minimalism, Hopkins considers works such as Agnes Martin's *Flower in the Wind* (1963) and concludes that while the implicit infinity of the grid held 'metaphysical connotations' for her, the Minimalist painters distinguished themselves from this tradition in their 'essentially literal and pragmatic' associations.<sup>285</sup> However, pragmatism and opaque surfaces sometimes obscure the fact that each Minimal artist retained distinguishing features: what Colpitt refers to as 'a signature module'.<sup>286</sup> As Colpitt identifies the individuality of Andre's metal plates, LeWitt's cubes and Tucker's tubes, it is easy to find comparable 'signature modules' in their musical contemporaries: Young's drones, Reich's phase, and Glass' additive patterns.

Another point of comparison is the way in which commentators have tried to describe a receiver's response to minimal works, primarily with reference to ideas of symmetry, repetition and depthlessness. Colpitt talks of an 'adirectional' reading of Stella's paintings which recalls the 'ateleological' label attributed to minimal music.<sup>287</sup> He argues that the 'pictorial depth' of traditional painting guided a viewer through the picture's plane (just as classical harmony might guide a listener through a symphony), whereas the symmetry of a minimalist painting creates an 'induced flatness', where

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<sup>282</sup> Battcock, *Minimal Art*, p. 36.

<sup>283</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> Hopkins, *After Modern Art*, p. 144.

<sup>285</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 60.

<sup>287</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

'foreground and background no longer have any meaning'.<sup>288</sup> Stella himself corroborates Colpitt's view, stating that his Black paintings:

had everything to do with surface, a surface within which nothing would be ambiguous. Everything that 'happened' in the picture would be the result of real manipulations of that surface. Meaning would no longer be a function of illusion, of an imagined 'inside' or 'behind' the surface. Meaning, since it could form nowhere but on the surface itself, would be an effect of that surface.<sup>289</sup>

Stella's reference to a 'meaning' which is formed as an effect of the painting's surface suggests that the purpose of the creative act lies in foregrounding that process of creating the surface itself: the means of production. It is not difficult to find the analogous idea in Reich's essay on music as a gradual process: the fascination of foregrounding the method of creation. In this light, it is easy to imagine what Bernard hopes for when he advocates 'taking seriously the connection between minimal music and minimal art and treating them, rather than simply as an avenue for metaphorical comparison, as a way of "seeing" the music, or *as if* one could see it'.<sup>290</sup> For minimal art—music included—presents the means of production as an integral part of the work's form *and* content: as Battcock puts it, 'the minimal artist no longer questions—he challenges and observes'.<sup>291</sup>

The final parallel between the visual arts and musical minimalism lies in the dilution of the aesthetics and characteristics that defined early works. Colpitt argues that minimal art had become 'mainstream' by 1968, and that it was rejected by artists of the seventies on the grounds that 'it had come to symbolise the final stage of the linear progress and reduction associated with the avant-garde'.<sup>292</sup> However, he also notes that minimal art has retrospectively been accorded the status of 'an initiation of the postmodern critique of modernism'.<sup>293</sup> Arguments such as this would seem to strike an

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<sup>288</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 44.

<sup>289</sup> Quoted in Krauss, 'Overcoming the Limits of Matter', p. 125.

<sup>290</sup> Bernard, 'Theory, Analysis, and the "Problem" of Minimal Music', p. 266.

<sup>291</sup> Battcock, *Minimal Art*, p. 32.

<sup>292</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 3.

<sup>293</sup> *ibid.*

immediate accord with the positioning of musical minimalism within a transitional phase from modernism to postmodernism, were it not for Strickland's observation that Reich's and Glass' first uptown performance was at the Whitney Gallery's "Anti-Illusion" show (1969): a show that 'was not concerned with Minimalism but with post-Minimal process and conceptual art'.<sup>294</sup> Yet perhaps Strickland is too quick to dismiss the ties between the visual arts and music on these grounds. After all, the first 'uptown' performance follows a host of downtown events in lofts and collaborative spaces. The show Strickland refers to also saw Reich's 'Music as Gradual Process' published in its catalogue: an essay that Reich says should apply (as should all his writings) to the music which has already been written.<sup>295</sup> With this in mind, the pairing of exhibition and music suggests a sense of development in minimalist practice that has already been noted in the shift from Reich's rigorously phased pieces to the freer devices of the seventies.

As Strickland has observed, the tendency towards exclusion rather than inclusion under the minimalist tag has led to a canon which is itself 'reduced to minimal form, if not erased, by a rigour of categories that exceeds the technical rigour of the art'.<sup>296</sup> While Strickland's assessment of the Whitney exhibition as 'post-Minimal' seems somewhat premature, outlining phases of development *within* minimalism may prove useful. Similarly, it is worth considering the relationships between Minimalism, Pop, and Op art: two categories that have also drawn comparisons with contemporaneous musics. While commentators on the visual arts draw keen distinctions between minimalism and Pop and Op art, it is not uncommon to find parallels drawn between minimal music and, for example, the art of Warhol. For this reason it is worth exploring these categories and considering any potential relationships.

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<sup>294</sup> Strickland, 'Minimalism: T', p. 114.

<sup>295</sup> The performance included *Pendulum Music* (1968), a piece referred to in the essay. Reich has said of 'Music as a Gradual Process': 'my essay written in 1968 was an excellent description of the way I wrote music up to 1968. It was a piece of music theory describing, as all music theory does, the past' (Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. vii).

<sup>296</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 8.

## *Pop Art*

Pop art is a term which has held a variety of different meanings, the most common usage today being what Alloway identifies as its second manifestation: what 'could be called the iconographical period of Pop Art'.<sup>297</sup> He describes the term's evolution in three phases, beginning with its appearance in an *Architectural Design* article of 1958 entitled 'The Arts and Mass Media'.<sup>298</sup> Haskell identifies this first use of Pop Art as an English phenomenon, used to describe 'urban media of mass communication', noting that until 1963, what became Pop Art in America was more commonly referred to as 'neo-dada'.<sup>299</sup> Alloway identifies what he calls a 'compression' of the term between 1961 and 1964, which corresponds to its most common usage (and also interestingly echoes the compressions Harvey identifies at the dawn of Postmodernity), before in 1965–66, Pop Art enters a third phase which 'is an enactment of the idea of a continuous and non-exclusive culture'.<sup>300</sup> From a postmodern perspective, it is easy to see how these phases could be considered cultural manifestations of the transition to, and establishment of, postmodernity, just as has been suggested in the various developmental phases of minimalism.

However, Pop Art marks a more open concern with the effect of mass production on culture. As Hopkins observes, Pop Art provides a contrast to minimalism, 'mimicking the techniques of mass production'.<sup>301</sup> Artists such as Warhol, he argues, 'turned mechanisation's threat to artistic autonomy into an aesthetic rationale'.<sup>302</sup> While minimalism might be considered a reaction to the elite intellectualisation of culture, Pop Art reacted to the other significant influence on the cultural landscape, with what Potter describes as, 'strategies which call into question the nature of its relationship

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<sup>297</sup> Alloway, *Topics in American Art Since 1945*, p. 120.

<sup>298</sup> *ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>299</sup> Haskell, *Blam!*, p. 112.

<sup>300</sup> Alloway, *Topics in American Art Since 1945*, p. 121.

<sup>301</sup> Hopkins, *After Modern Art*, p. 115

<sup>302</sup> *ibid.*



with consumer society'.<sup>303</sup> Yet Potter also notes that in doing so, Pop also explored the relationship of alienated, modernist art to popular culture. Indeed, Pop Art's relationship to modernism, while not as identifiably reactive in the way that minimalism might be, suggests as critical an engagement with earlier aesthetics.

Anderson paints a picture of Pop Art and minimalism as two 'parabola of the postmodern': minimalism a 'characteristic modernist attack on perceptual conventions', while Pop embodied a 'nonchalant crossing of forms' and a 'calculated embrace of the market'.<sup>304</sup> With this in mind, it is worth considering that a definition of musical minimalism might be diversified by examining these relationships. Indeed, Scherzinger suggests that repetitive minimalism might have more in common with Warhol's 'compulsion to repeat',<sup>305</sup> and ap Siôn situates Nyman's use of historical musical material within a desire 'to question modernist notions of originality and authenticity'.<sup>306</sup> With a work like *In Re Don Giovanni*, ap Siôn argues, Nyman 'does to Mozart what surrealist or pop artists such as René Magritte, Roy Lichtenstein or Andy Warhol did to a Van Gogh or Cézanne'.<sup>307</sup>

Glass' music has also drawn comparisons with Pop Art, and Bernard argues that while minimalism was a suitable term for his earlier work, his more recent music can be more closely allied to Pop. He argues that 'the principal difference between the two has always been that pop art deals in images that are readily recognisable from the world of commercial art and photography—including, specifically, advertising—whereas minimal art tends to a much simpler and more "neutral" look'.<sup>308</sup> For Bernard, Glass' move from the use of modular and serial constructions toward triadic

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<sup>303</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 7.

<sup>304</sup> Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 96.

<sup>305</sup> Scherzinger, 'Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic', p. 228

<sup>306</sup> ap Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman*, p. 13

<sup>307</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>308</sup> Bernard, 'Theory, Analysis, and the "Problem" of Minimal Music', p. 279.

figurations and 'recognisable chords from older practice',<sup>309</sup> compares to Warhol's Brillo boxes or soup cans. Bernard argues that the way in which the musical materials are used 'suggests an analogy between pop art's incorporation of commercial images and Glass' borrowings from commercial (pop) music'.<sup>310</sup> Bernard's comparison highlights the importance of recognising that if one does seek to draw out similarities of approach between music and the visual arts, the corresponding categories may not be bounded in the same way in both spheres. While visual arts critics seek to draw lines of distinction between Pop Art and minimalism, it is misleading to assume that those same divisions will occur for composers who draw upon these aesthetics.

### *Op Art*

Op Art is perhaps the least well known of the three visual art movements that musical minimalism has been compared to. Yet with its alternative tag of 'kinetic' art, it might seem the most obvious movement from which to seek some musical parallels. Indeed, Strickland suggests that Op Art is 'a phenomenon directly related to the acoustical "beating" created in much early Minimal music when proximate frequencies are set in vibration simultaneously'.<sup>311</sup> Referring to the optical illusions that were often created by the strategic placement of geometric patterns in colours of minimum and maximum contrast, or the subtle movement of a wire or light source that altered the viewers perception of the static elements, Strickland finds a corollary in the sensations generated by the experience of viewing Op Art or listening to Reich's gradually shifting phases. Similarly, Watkins' experience of *In C's* fluctuating cells is of 'a hypnotic ever-changing atmosphere whose perceptual ambiguity has been held analogous to the visual shifts of op art',<sup>312</sup> and a review of the premiere in *Glamour* magazine likened the shifting sounds to the way 'optical illusions are created by the blur of motion in kinetic sculpture.'<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Bernard, 'Theory, Analysis, and the "Problem" of Minimal Music', p. 279.

<sup>310</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 29.

<sup>312</sup> Watkins, *Soundings*, p. 573.

<sup>313</sup> Cited in Carl, *Terry Riley's In C*, p. 95.

Yet others oppose the comparison with Op Art: Dennis, for example, argues that the equivalents of those visual effects 'are never so great in repetitive music; in any case, most composers deny this is their aim'.<sup>314</sup> However, while Dennis argues that one of the reasons for the lesser effect is the lack of multiple vantage points in music, he seems to ignore the fact that there is often an optimum vantage point for Op Art, at which the full effect is most visible: similarly with a phased tape piece, for example, there is an optimum position for the listener in respect to the stereo image—a position which is most easily achieved by listening through headphones—where the dynamic panning of the phase is enhanced by aural envelopment.<sup>315</sup>

Musicological discourse has a history of borrowing its terms and spheres of reference from other disciplines: one might compare musical minimalism's situation in respect of the visual arts to the preoccupation of composers such as Berio with linguistic theories in the 1950s. While the musical sphere certainly drew inspiration, terminology and certain frameworks from a convergence of ideas with another discipline, divergence occurred equally rapidly (to the point where a thoroughly semantic reading of a work such as *Epifanie* would be restrictive rather than constructive). Similarly, the minimal music tag has been drawn from a fleeting moment in the visual arts. Strickland declares:

in 1964 Pop, in 1965 Op, in 1966 Minimal art dominated the art news, a harbinger of the transformation of the art exhibition into its current status as a combination fashion show/initial public offering. The rapid shifts of taste were symptomatic of the acceleration of American cultural life in general under the pressure of social and technological change.<sup>316</sup>

It is clear that there are certain similarities of approach and shared contexts between these visual arts and musical minimalism. Yet the minimal tag has proved durable for music in a way that is less apparent in the visual arts. In light of this, perhaps the

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<sup>314</sup> Dennis, 'Repetitive and Systemic Music', p. 1036.

<sup>315</sup> One is also drawn to question whether a composer's denial of any particular 'aim' is sufficient to exclude certain comparisons of a listener's experience (and even if it was, Reich has repeatedly spoken of the 'psychoacoustic effects' of his music). For further discussion of composers' own rhetoric, see Part Three, Chapter 7.1: A note on rhetoric, pp 229–232.

<sup>316</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 275.

wealth of critical attention given to Minimalism, Pop and Op Art might collectively provide useful starting points for more critical attention of minimal music: they might also support a more nuanced subdivision within musical minimalism which is preferable to a series of rapid chronological phases that minimalism passes through in its development.

### 4.3 Assembling the Kaleidoscope

What these various features of minimalism show is the sheer variety of elements that can contribute to our understanding of a work as 'minimalist'. Many of these elements are interdependent: it is process, for example, that differentiates the tape music of minimalism from other strands of twentieth-century tape music development. Similarly, the influence of non-Western cultures has pervaded musical imaginations for centuries, but it is this influence, or interest, *coupled* with an interest in process, or a pared-down aesthetic, that transfers our thoughts to a minimal categorisation. Therefore, it is insufficient to suggest that there is simply a collection of features that may be present (*pace* Niren), and that *enough* of these features will identify a work as minimal. Rather, it is the identification of certain forms of interaction between these features—the lines of flight between plateaus—that make a work identifiably minimalist.

This fact produces two important points: firstly, that the rigid binarisms that checklists and style descriptions represent are ill-suited to a category as diverse as minimalism. Secondly, it should become evident that the boundaries of minimalism; the points at which a work might pass into something other—be it Totalism, or Maximalism, or postminimalism—are difficult to discern. This should also make clear that those other boundaries, between the European avant-garde and minimalism; or between experimentalism and minimalism, are at best arbitrary. Minimalism occupies this transitional period in the twentieth century as its ideas occupy the rhizome space: they are flexible; dynamic; interdependent. The cognitive space that these plateaus are constructed around is equally unstable, and is altered by the questions (in the sense of what might be, or not be, minimal) presented to it.

However, it should become clear that there are elements—these plateaus—around which commonalities congregate; where similarities between works and composers and rhetoric demonstrate more similarity than difference. It is this similarity that gives coherence to the idea that any work *might* be called minimalism. While the construction of this minimal mapping, the descriptions of these kaleidoscopic fragments, has focused on the evidence provided by past commentary and well known works, discussion must now turn to the impact this history has on current understanding of minimal music.

## Chapter Five

### Minimalism Now

The previous chapter considered the arguments surrounding minimalism as a historical event against the backdrop of an emerging postmodernism. This chapter focuses on how a term that is still pervasive in discussions about contemporary music should be understood and employed, and how a minimalist work, or one showing minimalist elements, might be categorised. Such categorisation will depend on three central factors: analytical approaches to minimal music; the chronology and periodisation of minimalism, and the way in which the term (including its associated techniques and aesthetics) are conceptualised.

#### 5.1 Analysing Minimalism

Various attempts have been made to apply new and traditional analytical techniques to minimalism in an effort to understand the causes of its various effects. Much emphasis has been placed on the repetitive features of the music, leading to an assertion among many commentators that minimal music is inherently ateleological. However, the basis for this assertion comes from an attempt to translate minimalism according to traditional concepts of directionality in music; the development of harmonic climax and release that has dominated the western classical tradition for centuries. As Alper points out, 'a defender of postmodern technique would argue that making classically based aesthetic judgements on contemporary art makes no more sense than criticising a Mozart piano sonata for lacking an urban twentieth-century sensibility'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Colpitt dismisses the possibility of utilising analytical techniques developed for modernist works in minimal art as being 'ill-suited to the [same] kind of

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<sup>1</sup> Garth Alper, 'Making Sense Out of Postmodern Music', *Popular Music and Society*, 24: 4 (22 December 2000), 1–9 (p. 3).

formal analysis and aesthetic appreciation'.<sup>2</sup> Despite these arguments, most attempts to analyse minimalism seem to stem from one of these two aspects. Many of these attempts have taken place in recent years. Indeed, in 1986 Foster still saw fit to criticise discourse on minimalism that 'tends toward the epistemological more than the ontological' for failing to appreciate its 'formal essence or categorical being',<sup>3</sup> yet since then, increasingly formalised analytical techniques have been developed specifically for application to minimal music. A general overview of these techniques is outlined below.

### **Teleological analysis**

Fink proposes a differentiation between 'classical teleology' and 'recombinant teleologies', including in the latter category 'any music with a regular pulse, a clear tonal center, and some degree of process'.<sup>4</sup> He is careful to distinguish this from music that is 'nonteleological': a category that he reserves for music by composers such as Cage, Young and Eno. The idea of recombinant teleologies is a useful one, which moves away from the stigma of 'going-nowhere music', while at the same time challenging the glib repetition that minimal music is non-directional. In fact, what minimalism highlights is the way in which directionality is dependent on *expectation*. Therefore, when Epstein describes the experience of listening to one of Reich's phase pieces, he underlines the tension between anticipation and aural reality:

During phasing the ear will identify certain discrete landmark situations—the splitting of a unison, the doubling of tempo at the midpoint. Even though it is apparent that these have been arrived at gradually, the ear identifies them within only a narrow margin of error, and this results in a feeling of abrupt change.<sup>5</sup>

This sensation of change clearly indicates directionality of a sort; not, as Fink points out, a *classical* teleology, but still a sense of a durationally-dependent unfolding of

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<sup>2</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Foster, 'The Crux of Minimalism', p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Epstein, 'Pattern Structure and Process in Steve Reich's "Piano Phase"', p. 502.

events that generates a tension between expectation (what is *apparent* to Epstein) and the abrupt resolution of arrival.

Scherzinger has also argued that a different plane of teleology can be identified in the shifting pattern of textures that allows lines to emerge, submerge, and re-emerge in a seemingly unbroken wake. He suggests that 'one might at the very least speak of a shift from the phonemic to the phonetic (or from text to texture) and back again'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, textural and melodic or rhythmic shifts are often mirrored in the harmonic fluctuations of a work. Studying *Two Pages* (1968), York describes both the commonly noted processes of addition and subtraction, and 'external' and 'internal' patterns of repetition (the external repeating an entire pattern, the internal repeating a section of the pattern). He then sets up an analytical methodology which traces these process- and repetition-derived devices, noting that external repetition is often superimposed on internal repetition.<sup>7</sup> For York, the importance of tracing the use of both these devices lies in what they reveal about the harmonic impression. This approach, he argues, allows the analyst to identify how certain tonal centres stabilise, destabilise and polarise over the course of a piece.<sup>8</sup>

### **Formalist analysis**

The majority of formalist minimal music analysis is based on some adaptation of methods devised for serial and atonal composition; most commonly, pitch-set theory. Roeder, for example, analyses Reich's music by categorising various types of accent, and then constructs a 'beat-class analysis' from them. He notes that while the spectrum of pitches in a minimal work may cover a large range, they often do so by means of perfect or triadic intervals 'which often simply extend the prevailing tertian sonority without changing the root'.<sup>9</sup> Roeder argues that this 'redundancy' of harmonic and melodic parameters allows a listener to become attuned to subtleties of accent,

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<sup>6</sup> Scherzinger, 'Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic', p. 213.

<sup>7</sup> Wes York, 'Form and Process' in Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, pp. 60–79 (first publ. *Sonus* 1/2, 1981), p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Roeder, 'Beat-Class Modulation in Steve Reich's Music', p. 284.



concluding that 'when one attends to accent, one hears hardly any exact repetition in this nominally "repetitive" music'.<sup>10</sup> While it may seem strange to transplant an analytical method from the music minimalism is generally considered to be reacting against, Cohn has defended the use of beat-class analysis by dismissing the idea that 'Reich was uninfluenced by the musical tradition for which standard analytic methods were developed'.<sup>11</sup> Cohn also rejects the idea that Reich is as subject to his processes as the ordinary listener, arguing that while he may not have been consciously aware that he was able to begin with patterns that would generate maximum interest, Reich demonstrated 'what Chomsky has called "competence" [...] it is reasonable to assume that the composer of *Violin Phase* was in some sense "privy to" something unavailable to "just anyone", in spite of his protestations to the contrary'.<sup>12</sup> As well as Cohn's argument that for a process to 'run by itself' in an engaging way requires a significant degree of compositional thought to initiate it, he also uses his beat-class analysis to trace continuities in Reich's work. Cohn identifies similar patterns of addition and subtraction in both *Violin Phase* (1967) and the later *Phase Patterns* (1970). However, while Cohn believes that these discoveries 'suggest further continuities between Reich's phase-shifting music and the music that he began to compose after his 1970 trip to Ghana',<sup>13</sup> whether these two works really constitute two different stages of Reich's development is questionable. Cohn quotes Reich explaining that *Drumming* (1971) uses a 'new technique, the process of gradually substituting beats for rests' and argues that while these are foregrounded in later compositions, the beat-class analysis

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<sup>10</sup> Roeder, 'Beat-Class Modulation in Steve Reich's Music', p. 287.

<sup>11</sup> Cohn, 'Transpositional Combination of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich's Phase-Shifting Music', p. 147. Cohn's method differs from Roeder's in that he classifies the pattern of rests and beats, but both follow the standard presentation and procedures of pitch-set analysis. Roeder's method is more complex: he bases his classification on a rhythmic 'mode' derived from the pattern's tonic (the 'structurally most important pitch class'). The 'tonic' acts as a locus, so that 'other pitches are named "scale degrees" according to the intervals they form with the tonic. The ensemble of these intervals, together with information about the relative structural importance of non-tonic pitch classes, constitutes the *mode*.' (Roeder, 'Beat-Class Modulation in Steve Reich's Music', p. 288) Roeder then builds a set based on accents that are strong or weak depending on those accents' pitch positions within the mode, arguing that 'by modelling rhythm "modally", not simply "atonally", we can better appreciate Reich's craft' (*ibid.*, p. 300).

<sup>12</sup> Cohn, 'Transpositional Combination of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich's Phase-Shifting Music', p. 170.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

of earlier work shows that they were already present as a procedural outcome of the phase.<sup>14</sup> Yet Reich has also spoken of his trip to Ghana as a means of *confirming* a compositional process he had already been experimenting with.

It is notable that this kind of analysis is rarely applied to Reich's later works. Indeed, it is rarely applied to any other composers, save for very early works of Glass' that predate more complex textures and instrumentation. This leads one to question the usefulness of beat-class analysis. While there are a number of articles which use this methodology, their scope appears limited, and whether the analysis reveals any useful information about the music, or whether, in fact, certain works are used to legitimate the methodology remains open to question.

### **Other approaches**

Beat-set methodologies appear to be emerging as the dominant analytical tool for minimal music. Yet their limitations are wide ranging. As well as the reservations noted above, this method of analysis contains no scope for considering the frequent multi-media elements of later minimalism or the importance of the listener's own perceptions of the music. Of course, for analysts such as Roeder and Cohn these extra-musical concerns lie outside their remit.<sup>15</sup> Yet as Potter notes, 'in some ways, the most telling Trojan Horse in the citadel of musical minimalism isn't actually formalist and music-technical at all, but the way in which metaphorical interpretation finds a place in one of the works consistently put forward as one of the basic building blocks of musical minimalism and its aesthetic purity and non-reference'.<sup>16</sup> Potter is referring to Reich's early tape-phase work *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), which although held up as an example of pure process, is often couched in socio-political context. Such

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<sup>14</sup> Reich quoted in Cohn, 'Transpositional Combination of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich's Phase-Shifting Music', p. 167.

<sup>15</sup> In this context, it is interesting to note Bernard's remark that 'art theorists and critics do not *measure* for the most part; the precise physical dimensions of a work are generally confined to catalogue descriptions, and have about the same kind and degree of interest as would the number of pages in a score to musicians. Thus an analytic approach to minimal music might prove more viable if it were less exclusively bound up with exactitudes' (Bernard, 'Theory, Analysis, and the "Problem" of Minimal Music', p. 266).

<sup>16</sup> Potter, '1976 and All That', pp. 5–6.

contextualisation negates the notion of minimal music as a non-referential and absolute music, and while it is conceivable that Reich himself may have been primarily fascinated by the resultant acoustic effects of the phasing process, it is clear that for many, the listening process is not so isolated from their everyday experience.

Therefore, to suggest that minimalism can be reduced to *only* analysable process perpetuates a modernist faith in the unity of the work, when in fact that unity is at best contingent and dynamic. Mertens attempts to describe the way in which minimalism might occupy this 'dynamic unity': a self-contained and regulated process that is nonetheless in a state of constant flux and susceptible to the context of production. Mertens considers the repeating, shifting combinations of the cells that form the basis of Riley's minimal works, and argues that for the listener, 'a dualism gradually emerges between the micro-structure of the sounds and the macro-structure of the composition'.<sup>17</sup> Even when teleology is not at the centre of an analytical approach, as it is with Fisk or York, many commentators focus on a work's structure when trying to understand what it is that gives the music momentum. Warburton's taxonomy includes a definition of '*textural additive process*'<sup>18</sup> (the gradual introduction of voices built into a system), as well as "'solid state music" to refer to works whose surface activity and texture is repetitive in nature *when considered in self-contained blocks*, but whose overall form no longer presents a definable progression from one point to another'.<sup>19</sup>

While Warburton makes no proposals for how to analyse minimal music (he is merely outlining a range of minimal devices), Bauer foregrounds this technique in an analysis of Andriessen's *De Stijl* that divides the page into three columns and runs commentary simultaneously through all three according to the structure of the piece. One column is

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<sup>17</sup> Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> Warburton, 'A Working Terminology for Minimal Music', para. 23 of 24.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, para 7 of 24. Beirens uses the idea of 'texture construction' in place of Warburton's 'textural additive process'. Similarly, he substitutes 'construction/reduction' for Warburton's 'linear additive process'. It is worth noting that Beirens also compares texture construction in minimalism to the superimposition of various melodic lines above ostinati in Baroque music (Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 239).

devoted to the bassline, one to melody, and one to 'bewegte Füllschicht',<sup>20</sup> and is an effective method of simultaneously presenting individual processes while the density of the columns illustrates a spatialised sense of texture. Similarly inventive approaches to minimalist analysis are explored by March, who advocates 'a more *ad hoc* approach to analysis [...] a general move away from simply examining structures [...] towards considering the effect of these structures when heard'.<sup>21</sup> Yet, because of the rigidity of thought that defines a minimal work as something non-directional and divorced from the Western classical tradition, evidence to the contrary is often used to exclude works from the category. Johnson, for example, identifies a 'large-scale arch form (ABCDCBA) with interrelated sections' in *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976), and finds that the resultant 'prominent teleological harmonic activity suggests that despite its reliance on process, this piece lies outside the minimalist aesthetic'.<sup>22</sup> Only by removing the already suspect notion of ateleology from the minimalist definition can works such as *Music for 18 Musicians*, surely one of the most celebrated and successful minimalist works written, be returned to a central position in a minimalist kaleidoscope.

Of course, there are works which test the boundaries of minimalist definition: some argue that after *Einstein on the Beach*, Glass' work effectively departs from what could be called minimalism. As McClary notes, pieces such as *Glassworks* 'evoke an earlier era': for her, the Romantic piano music of Schumann and Brahms.<sup>23</sup> Because of this,

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<sup>20</sup> Literally a 'moving middle layer', in this context relating to inner voice and contrapuntal events (Cornelius Bauer, 'Postminimalismus als kompositorischer Ansatz: Analytische Untersuchungen am Werk John Adams', Michael Torke's und Louis Andriessen's bis ca. 1995' (published PhD diss., Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Rostock: October 2005; Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 2006)). See pp. 317–324 for the analysis of *De Stijl*.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel March, 'Beyond Simplicity: Analytical Strategies for Contemporary Music' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 1997), p. 43. March argues that much minimalist analysis, including the work of Cohn and Roeder fails to pay sufficient attention to 'what the structures [...] mean in terms of how the music is played and listened to; this is often coupled with a rather simplistic assumption that these two aspects are the same, so that everything that is identified is considered to have an aural effect, and *vice versa*' (*ibid.*). March's thesis focuses on a collection of works from the minimalist repertoire; applying a range of analytical techniques to each, in an attempt to show how a 'toolbox' of analytical approaches might be assembled that can then be tailored to each work.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy A. Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', *Musical Quarterly* 78: 4 (1994), 742–773 (p. 749).

<sup>23</sup> Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom* (California: University of California Press, 2000), p. 142.

and the regular four-bar phrasing, she traces the harmonic progressions using the teleology of Romanticism, attributing what is usually described simply as 'cyclical' to an *illusion* of harmonic teleology. McClary argues that Glass' harmonic language, instead of resolving in the expected fashion, sets up an expectation 'and then disillusion (the pattern sinks back without having found or established what it sought)'.<sup>24</sup> She sees all these Romantic gestures as 'decentred', an effect that is reinforced by 'the constant, mechanical repetitions that govern the unfolding of the composition'.<sup>25</sup> For McClary, examining the teleology of the work exposes the way in which the signs of classical teleology have been removed from signification in the minimalist aesthetic: triadic patterns give the impression of traditional harmonic functions without ever fulfilling those codes' original patterns. Therefore, despite the 'looser' system of Glass' later works, it may be fair to argue that he occupies a (commercially-driven?) extreme of the postmodern manipulation of historical codes. This positioning becomes more convincing when one considers that much of Nyman's work might occupy a similar sphere, and that an analogous argument might be made for those classed as spiritual minimalists.

### **A Note on Repetition**

What these variations in analytical method show are that, whether explicitly or implicitly, the central question of minimalist analysis is the way in which any sense of dynamism (or stasis) operates. Yet all of these approaches are grounded in the material object of score or tape. To fully explore the possibilities of minimalist analysis, it is necessary to consider the nature of repetition itself. Many commentators have attempted to describe the experience of listening to minimalism; trying to explain how, to their ears, music that on the surface is merely bland repetition becomes something that demands a listener's attentions and leaves them with an aesthetic appreciation of the music. While it is clear from the various condemnations of minimalism that such a feeling is far from universal, the same can be said for all styles and genres throughout history: it is perhaps the case that minimalism has borne a

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

more sustained offence by virtue of the fact that it is positioned *within* western classical discourse, when so many would prefer to position it without.

Some have attempted to explore the phenomenology of the minimal listening experience in more depth. Hanninen assigns the term 'recontextualisation' to the aural effect of listening to extended repetition. She describes the effect of recontextualisation as a listener's perception of a 'phenomenal transformation of repetition [...] induced by a change in musical context. It is a strange kind of repetition—better, an *estranged* repetition, in which repetition doesn't sound (primarily) like repetition'.<sup>26</sup> Hanninen identifies this estrangement (which might be likened to the sensation of a word sounding 'wrong' if it repeated out of context many times in a row) in works such as Feldman's *Crippled Symmetries* and Reich's phase pieces, yet importantly, also finds it in the layered ostinati of Stravinsky. This tracing of the phenomenon to earlier music reinforces the idea that minimalism *does* have some relationship, however altered, with the Western classical tradition, and as a result, that methods might be found to explore the content of these works just as such methods have been developed in the past.

As Rose observes, 'to find variety in repetition where only the nuance alters seems more and more to interest artists, perhaps in reaction to the increasing uniformity of the environment and the repetitiveness of a circumscribed experience.'<sup>27</sup> Citing examples such as Warhol's Brillo boxes and almost motionless films, Rose senses an obsession with minute variation; yet while her attempt to explain this with reference to the stagnation of the everyday social environment may be true to an extent, Hanninen's notion of recontextualisation describes a phenomenon that magnifies the sensations of the everyday. As she explains, 'this phenomenal transformation contradicts the standard meaning of "repetition". In this sense, recontextualisation is not a kind of varied repetition, but its opposite, signalling perception not of repetition

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<sup>26</sup> Dora A. Hanninen, 'A Theory of Recontextualisation in Music: Analyzing Phenomenal Transformations of Repetition', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 25: 1(Spring 2003), 59–97 (p. 61).

<sup>27</sup> Rose, 'ABC Art', p. 289.

but of *change*.<sup>28</sup> While Hanninen and others have sought to explore this phenomenon in a specifically musical context, repetition as a more general quality has also been studied in great detail by Deleuze in his 1968 work *Difference and Repetition*. In it, Deleuze echoes Hanninen as he seeks to describe the ways in which repetition allows difference to be perceived. He argues that beyond repetition there lies 'generality': things that resemble one another and therefore share qualitative characteristics; and things that are equivalent and thus bear a quantitative relation. Repetition, by contrast, presents a special case, because it 'concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities'.<sup>29</sup> the special nature of repetition comes from the way in which the 'same' can also contain difference. To explain this, Deleuze turns to Bergson, quoting the following passage at length:

four o'clock strikes... each stroke, each disturbance or excitation, is logically independent of the other, *mens momentanea*. However, quite apart from any memory or distinct calculation, we contract these into an internal qualitative impression within this living present or *passive synthesis* which is duration. Then we restore them in an auxiliary space, a derived time in which we may reproduce them, reflect on them, or count them like so many quantifiable external-impressions.<sup>30</sup>

Deleuze is fascinated with the way in which the repeated event becomes immediately referential not only in relation to the original statement, but in anticipation of some unknown quantity of repetitions-to-come. He turns to rhythm to describe the special nature of what he calls 'cadence-repetition': a 'regular division of time, an isochronic recurrence of identical elements'.<sup>31</sup> Yet, reminiscent of Roeder, Deleuze argues that a 'tonic accent' and 'intensive values act by creating inequalities or incommensurabilities between metrically equivalent periods or spaces'.<sup>32</sup> He argues that the creation of a distinctive point within the cadence 'is more profound than the reproduction of ordinary homogeneous elements', and therefore the uniformity of repetition

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<sup>28</sup> Hanninen, 'A Theory of Recontextualisation in Music', p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: The Athlone Press, 1994; f.p. 1968), p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Bergson quoted in Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 72.

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

generates the unequal 'positive element'.<sup>33</sup> These inequalities, of course, are dependent on perception, and, importantly, memory; but Deleuze also argues that *imagination* plays a central role in the individual's response to repetition. Hitchcock, too, considers the passage of time a central part of comprehending the minimalist aesthetic. He explains:

the eye must move over the surface of a Stella or an Agnes Martin painting; the eye, if not the body, must move around a Judd or a Bladen sculpture piece. The second stroke of Young's spoon on the pan bottom is not perceived like the first—nor is any other, up to and including the 600<sup>th</sup>. Everything is in flux, and repetition is, in fact, process or passage.<sup>34</sup>

Deleuze furthers this emphasis on perception, arguing that repetition is 'in essence imaginary', since imagination is what allows the mind to recognise repetition and anticipate its continuation.<sup>35</sup> It is this metaphysical plane of repetition that also, Deleuze argues, allows difference to exist within the idea of repetition: perhaps the element of repetition that makes it pleasing. As he explains:

it is always *in one and the same movement that repetition includes difference* (not as an accidental and extrinsic variant but at its heart, as the essential variant of which it is composed, the displacement and disguise which constitute it as a difference that is itself divergent and displaced) *and that it must receive a positive principle which gives rise to material and indifferent repetition.*<sup>36</sup>

When applied to artistic spheres, these principles often become the subject of aesthetic endeavour. Deleuze dismisses the idea of imitative art, positing instead the idea that art's repetitions become simulation: 'it reverses copies into simulacra'.<sup>37</sup> Deleuze views the repetition and simulacra of art as a form of displacement which allows that repetition to be inserted into 'life' as art. Citing the leitmotif of *Wozzeck* and the seriality of Pop Art as repetition at 'the extreme point at which it reverses and

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Hitchcock, 'Minimalism in Art and Music', p. 314.

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 289 [his italics].

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 294.



becomes a simulacrum',<sup>38</sup> Deleuze argues that repetition in art is necessary in order to illuminate the differences of the everyday: 'the more our daily life appears to be standardised, stereotyped and subject to an accelerated reproduction of objects of consumption.'<sup>39</sup> Of course, this recalls not only Baudrillard's hyper-real, but also the extreme compressions of time and space Harvey identifies in the postmodern age: Deleuze formulates (although never seems to press) an argument for the importance of creativity in an age of mass production, yet Massumi suggests that minimalism might represent 'the most abstract form of expression of society's homogenising tendencies.'<sup>40</sup>

How does this repetition then function within art? Deleuze highlights the importance of *duration* in experiencing repetition: the linearity which allows an observer or listener to assign an order to repetition that generates a first, second, third, etc. However, Deleuze also identifies a 'totality which incorporates all these in the simultaneity of its *a priori* synthesis'; this totality is the 'pure form' of repetition that contains the 'empirical contents' (first, second, third...). Therefore, the empirical aspect is 'mobile', existing in real-time, while the '*a priori*' understanding is atemporal: 'fixed or held, as though in a photo or a freeze-frame'.<sup>41</sup> This image of the freeze-frame recalls Page's analogy of attempting to 'frame the river' when listening to minimal music, and the paradox of perceptual stasis in physical movement—difference as an integral part of repetition—provides a useful conceptual tool when dealing with minimal music.

Deleuze continues by asking whether the first instance of a repeated pattern 'escapes repetition', suggesting that if it does, the way in which it is perceived (not as repetition, as part of a cycle or sequence) is dependent upon an observer. Yet he argues that in fact, *each* occurrence is repetition 'in itself', and therefore the 'first time is no less

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<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 293.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>40</sup> Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 90.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 294.

repetition than the second or the third time'.<sup>42</sup> This being the case, repetition is freed from the interpretation of the observer and instead depends upon 'the internal conditions of the action in relation to the redoubtable image'.<sup>43</sup> What Deleuze's argument shows is that repetition exists as self contained duality, *as well as* an action that is contextual. Therefore, when Hitchcock argues that 'repetition is impossible [...] Everything is in flux, and repetition is, in fact, process or passage',<sup>44</sup> Deleuze's formulation allows for that process to be the very essence of repetition. From the analyst, this invites a methodology that mirrors the duality of the repetitive core of a work.

As Mertens puts it, 'the use of repetition results in the continuity of the uninterrupted process', and this continuity provides an overall formal stasis, while at the same time repetition causes fluctuation within the 'micro-structure' of the music.<sup>45</sup> An analysis of minimal music should seek to illuminate both the continuity and the micro-structure of the work. While Cone, for example, points out that analyses of minimalist music, 'with few exceptions, demonstrate connections—how one section is related to another—rather than progressions',<sup>46</sup> others such as Strickland observe that in a work like *In C*, the pulse establishes 'a solid foundation for what becomes a structure of shifting modules analogous to the bits of glass in a kaleidoscope'.<sup>47</sup> What is clear is that the lack of a 'classical teleology' (to return to Fink's term), also forcibly fragments what might in this context be called a 'classical analytical framework'. Yet the returning image of a kaleidoscope offers up a metaphor for a new analytical framework: one that examines the external and the internal; recognises their connections, but allows the flexible, dynamic nature of those relationships to remain apparent.

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<sup>42</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 294.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>44</sup> Hitchcock, 'Minimalism in Art and Music', p. 314.

<sup>45</sup> Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Edward T. Cone, 'Beyond Analysis' in Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (eds), *Perspectives on Contemporary Music Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 179.

## 5.2 Periodisation

There is no strong consensus on when minimalism might have ended, if indeed it has. However, there is more agreement about when Minimalism emerged. It is important to note that the majority of commentators across the artistic spheres limit minimalism with a capital 'M' to a very short space of time and only to works of sculpture and painting. There is also some agreement that this represents a 'pure' application of a set of concerns (the abstraction of the material object) which, while being central to later works, did not see such exclusive and rigorous application. Colpitt suggests that 'Anne Truitt's exhibition in February of 1963 at André Emmerich's gallery was the first identifiably Minimal show',<sup>48</sup> and Haskell agrees that 'a new aesthetic could be clearly perceived' in the same year.<sup>49</sup> Strickland concurs, but adds that it was the Primary Structures exhibition of 1966 that drew more widespread critical attention. He also attempts to bound minimalism in different mediums: painting (1948–1960s); music (1958–early 1970s), and sculpture (1961–).<sup>50</sup> Kostelanetz argues that by the time the term minimalism had been applied to music (he follows Strickland's lead, suggesting it was first applied indirectly in 1965; directly around the early seventies), the period of strict Minimalism 'was long since over and the composers had evolved in distinctly non-Minimal directions'.<sup>51</sup> Schwarz also marks a change of direction in the early seventies, considering 1971 to be the year in which Reich ceases to demonstrate a

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<sup>48</sup> Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Haskell, *Blam!*, p. 105.

<sup>50</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 259. Strickland only traces minimalist sculpture up to 1966, but does not suggest that it ceases at this point: instead he believes that minimalist sculpture had a relatively constant character by this time. Baker also dates current use of the label from 1966, but notes that the term was also employed by John Graham in 1937 (see Baker, *Minimalism*, p. 18). He also distinguishes between a minimalism that denotes a 'stylistic austerity' and grows from artists such as Mondrian (e.g. Judd and Smith); and one which 'intended to throw into relief the perceptual and institutional terms of art's validation' (Andre, Flavin, Morris), which he traces back to Duchamp (*ibid.*, p. 9).

<sup>51</sup> Strickland, 'Minimalism: T', p. 113 (although he notes that Glass accepts the term, in retrospect, for his works up to *Music in 12 Parts* (1971–4) (*ibid.*, p. 99)).

'severely austere minimalist aesthetic'.<sup>52</sup> Pincus-Witten attributes this change to 'an information-oriented abstraction',<sup>53</sup> which draws on science and mathematics, a point which might indicate a period in which Op Art provides a useful comparison.

Yet Potter argues that the mid-seventies actually heralded 'diversity' in minimalism that negates the usefulness of the minimalist tag.<sup>54</sup> Potter also notes that in this period a group of composers (including Nyman, Andriessen, Zimmerman, Pärt, Tavener and Gorécki) 'moved into minimalism': a fact that he considers 'uncanny'.<sup>55</sup> However, this might just as easily be interpreted as the postmodern habit of assimilating various 'codes' (and by this point, minimalism had had time to establish itself as just such a code). Pincus-Witten offers an alternative categorisation when he dates Maximalism from the American Bicentennial (1976) to the turn of the decade, describing the categorical modification (certainly preferred by Andriessen among others) as 'perhaps a more conservative artistic consciousness' than minimalism.<sup>56</sup> The turn towards conservatism and the shedding of the rebellious avant-garde image certainly seems characteristic of some of the composers Potter lists (although, contrarily, not Andriessen), but Pincus-Witten is careful to outline a 'stylistic nexus' surrounding Minimalism.<sup>57</sup> In this nexus, he suggests, some works 'maintained the fixed, reduced geometry innate to Minimalism; others moved off in paths seemingly at odds with the style of the matrix'.<sup>58</sup> Amongst these paths Pincus-Witten identifies an 'expressive' strand which he calls postminimalism: a path that reached its peak between 1968 and 1970. As this outline shows, periodisations of minimalism are diverse, and therefore it is necessary to consider the cases for various chronological separations.

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<sup>52</sup> Schwarz, 'Steve Reich: Part I', p. 376.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism into Maximalism: American Art 1966–1986* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987), p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. xiii.

<sup>55</sup> Potter, '1976 and All That', p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism into Maximalism*, p. 257.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* Pincus-Witten is one of the few commentators who does allow musical minimalism a capital 'M', with the proviso that it ends sometime between 1966 and 1970.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

### *Pre- or proto- minimalism*

There is a prevailing (though not universal) consensus that instances of extended repetition predating the mid-part of the twentieth century be categorically excluded from the minimalist umbrella. Ravel's *Bolero* (1928) is an oft-quoted example, Page explaining its exclusion on the grounds that use of repetition is closer to 'sheer refrain than to the evolving musical tapestry of the minimalists'.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Kramer considers *Bolero* and Shostakovich's 'Leningrad' Symphony No. 7 (1941), before concluding that both 'could be seen as precursors of minimalism, but most likely were not'.<sup>60</sup> As was noted above, minimalism developed as much from a concern with theory as from any particular innovation in aural effect, and it is perhaps this particular symbiosis that most effectively excludes such works. Ravel uses repetition to showcase his command of orchestration and timbral imagination: not as static or subtly evolving vehicle, but its exact opposite, illuminating the increasing flamboyance of other musical features. Shostakovich uses repetition as a mechanism for the escalation of tension (functioning only in relation to the host of symphonic conventions that surrounds it); neither foreground repetition as a central element of the works.

More remarkable a case for a precursor to minimalism is Satie's *Vexations*, not least due to the renewed attention accorded to the work by composers associated with minimalism.<sup>61</sup> Satie, in contrast to Ravel and Shostakovich, indicates very clearly that the purpose of *Vexations* is to explore the effects of repetition. While lacking the rigorous theoretical commentary that accompanies works of the fifties and sixties, the Dadaesque impulses of the work are reminiscent of various strands of experimental musical development that feed into minimalism, and it could certainly be argued that

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<sup>59</sup> Page, 'Framing the River', p. 65.

<sup>60</sup> Kramer, 'The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism', p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, notes on a performance given by Gavin Bryars and Christopher Hobbs (Gavin Bryars, 'Satie and the British', *Contact* 25 (Autumn 1982), 4–14).

*conceptually*, Satie offers an important statement on traditional norms of duration and directionality.<sup>62</sup>

However, the experience of listening to *Vexations* is, for this listener at least, very distinct from the response one has to an early minimalist work. The primary reason for this is that the passage of music which is subject to repetition is peculiarly resistant to any sense of recognition. Even after several hours of listening, the counterintuitive chromaticism of the chorale's various permutations make it extremely difficult for the average listener to 'fix' the memory of the passage in their head. The peppering of accidentals; disjointed melodic line, and obvious phraseology, as well as the self-contained form dictated by a more-recognisable chorale in the left hand make the beginning and end of each repetition easy to determine, while rendering its actual content almost impossible to remember in a way that relaxes into familiarity.<sup>63</sup> Such an impression is enhanced by the usual practice of performing the work in 'shifts' allowing more margins for variation in tempo and mistaken readings of the accidentals,<sup>64</sup> and ultimately, *Vexations* seems to eradicate any sense of 'flow'.<sup>65</sup> In contrast, minimalist

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<sup>62</sup> Strickland describes the work as 'unvarnished repetition as a concept, not to say a spoof' (Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 124). Despite the case for dismissing *Vexations* as some form of 'proto-minimalism', it should be noted that a number of composers involved in experimental and then minimal music took a keen interest in this work, and that it may well have raised questions about the nature of repetition which they sought to explore. Strickland has also suggested that Klein's *Monotone* Symphony might be put forward as the 'first' minimalist piece. However, he outlines a number of reasons to doubt 'the purported date of its "conception" in 1947 or undocumented "composition" in 1949' (it also seems that what the work actually comprised has altered at least once). Despite the fact that it was performed at some of Klein's exhibitions in 1957, Strickland writes the work off as 'a conceptual anomaly rather than the fountainhead of any musical tradition' (*ibid.*).

<sup>63</sup> The difficulty in retaining any sense of harmonic or melodic pattern in the chorale means that the end of each phrase arrives abruptly. Since the passage has, up to that point, been moving at a fairly consistent pulse with no dynamic variation, the held notes at the end of each phrase seem doubly disruptive.

<sup>64</sup> A performer at a recent recital of the work told me that she never felt she had played the passage the same way twice. As a member of the audience, it seemed as though this was a reality for many of the participants, although the wild chromaticism of the passage makes it incredibly difficult to be certain.

<sup>65</sup> By flow, I refer to a sense of uninterrupted continuity: a feature that is common to virtually all music more commonly described as minimalist. In drone pieces, this is of course manifest in the uninterrupted sounding of tone(s). In rhythmically dynamic pieces, flow is achieved through regularity of pulse, slowly changing patterns, and timbral consistency.

works tend to blur the boundaries between repetitions, and present homogenised cell content both in terms of harmony and pulse. It may therefore be more fitting to regard *Vexations* as something of a 'missing link' between the contrasting avant-gardes of Europe and American experimentalism.

In addition to these works, some comparisons have been drawn with less likely twentieth century music. Many have pointed to the third movement of Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces* (1909) for its gently shifting colours and textures, and the stasis of Webern's music is often referred to. Indeed, Schwarz argues that Webern's 'hushed dynamics, the transparent textures, and the extremely brief time-frames all lend the music a proto-minimalist aura. But what most fascinated Young was the music's static quality—the way that whenever certain pitches recur during a movement, they always return in a particular octave.<sup>66</sup> The connection to Young's work is one that Young himself acknowledges. Certainly, stasis is the central occupation of the *Trio for Strings*, but the work's construction appears to depend on serial principles. This reliance, and the fact that, at the ascribed tempo many of the rhythmic intricacies are aurally meaningless, points to a work that could be usefully described as pre- or proto-minimal: a work that demonstrates a central preoccupation with stasis and uniformity, but lacks what Gann would term 'audible process' (something that is notably present in *Composition 1960, #7* only two years later).

There are other works from this time that have been virtually obscured from minimalist discourse: notably the works of Terry Jennings and Joseph Byrd, both of whom contributed recognisably minimal works to the *Fluxus Anthology* edited by Young (it is perhaps Young's insistence that Fluxus had no part in his minimalist development that has led to this oversight).<sup>67</sup> Jennings' two pieces owe an identifiable debt to Young; yet both also move further towards a true minimalist aesthetic. While the *String Quartet* (1960) in particular shares the quiet dynamics and lengthy tones of the *Trio*, Jennings simplifies his presentation considerably: all durations are multiples

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<sup>66</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 22.

<sup>67</sup> See Young, *An Anthology of Chance Operations*.... The volume is unpaginated, but contributions are arranged alphabetically by the creator's surname.

of a semibreve (and all players, if required to take action, do so simultaneously), barlines are omitted, and instead of a tempo, each semibreve group is assigned a clock-time on which to begin (the piece lasts almost half an hour, but the score occupies a single page). This obviously also recalls Cage's use of a stopwatch in works such as *Water Music*, and points to strong roots in the experimental tradition.

Perhaps even more interesting is the sole contribution of Joseph Byrd to the *Anthology*: a piece entitled *Fish: A Ballet for Woodwinds*. This consists of a page of instructions and a page of score. The score bears a structural resemblance to that of *In C*, but with lines drawn around each cell. The cells are to be cut into individual cards, and distributed amongst players. Cells are either a single tone with a pause written above them, or melodic fragments bounded by repeat marks. Players are instructed to play single tones for a whole breath (20–40 seconds), and other cells are to be played alternately specified numbers of times. This is obviously reminiscent of *In C*, but with the addition of held tones, and with each player's material being different. There is also a theatrical element (players move after playing each card) which links it strongly to the experimental tradition. However, despite this, the work is an apparent link between minimal stasis and minimal repetition.

Yet both Jennings and Byrd seem to have disappeared completely from minimalism's history.<sup>68</sup> Byrd, in a similar way to John Cale and Tony Conrad, seems to have transferred to the 'popular' music sphere. However, this is not to say that their contributions cannot be seen as significant. While the anthology is difficult to obtain today, it would have been well known at the time, particularly amongst those already working in experimental circles in America and the UK.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, they seem to be

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<sup>68</sup> Although Jennings' *Grove* entry, authored by Young, suggests a strong influence on Howard Skempton's pared down piano pieces (Peter Garland and La Monte Young, 'Terry Jennings', *Grove Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/42966>> [accessed 23/03/10]).

<sup>69</sup> Curiously, the second edition of the *Anthology* (1974) has a seemingly minor alteration to the layout that all but obscures the significance of Byrd's contribution. Each edition orders works alphabetically by artist, but the page of score that accompanies Byrd's instructions has been moved in the second edition to the final page. This places it at the end of Young's own section, minus instructions or title. It is also possible that Riley drew at least some notational ideas from the work (Riley's own contributions to the *Anthology* are textual or graphic).



important components of a collection of proto-minimalist works that germinated from the experimental school.

Page classifies *In C* itself in a similar manner, suggesting that Riley's 'important minimalist innovations began and ended with *In C*'.<sup>70</sup> While the piece is often considered a seminal work in minimalist history, it also poses category difficulties because of its free structure and variable instrumentation. Coupled with the fact that the famous 'pulse' (one of its strongest minimal features) was a suggestion of Reich's and essentially an aid to ensemble, it might be more accurate to consider *In C* as the work that marks the move from proto-minimalism to a discernable minimalist phenomenon.<sup>71</sup> While attempts have been made to trace a minimal development in Riley's earlier works, the results are unconvincing, and *In C* remains a catalyst work. In the next few years, a rigour of compositional process and emphasis on repetition would establish itself which began to show a marked distinction from experimental practice. As Strickland notes, Glass, for example, shows 'no rigorously consistent pattern of additive expansion' in *Strung Out* (Jul/Aug 1967),<sup>72</sup> yet displays his 'first use of rigorous additive process in a composed-out score' before the end of the decade in *Two Pages* (February 1969).<sup>73</sup> Thus the sixties represent a decade which saw minimalism emerging from the experimental scene, gradually establishing itself as movement in its own right (with its own aesthetic and stylistic markers). Till by 1970, to speak of 'musical minimalism' made perfect sense.

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<sup>70</sup> Page, 'Framing the River', p. 65.

<sup>71</sup> ap Siôn gives a good account of the temptation to (and need to resist) retrospectively fitting composers' works into a minimalist genealogy when discussing a student work (*Divertimento for Flute, Oboe and Clarinet* (1963)) of Nyman's: 'it is tempting with hindsight to view the passage not only as an early indication of musical minimalism but also as encapsulating in microcosm Nyman's later compositional style. However, the context of the *Siciliano* is both conceptually and aesthetically distinct from minimalist music. As a movement, minimalism had yet to be established when Nyman was writing this piece' (ap Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman*, p. 20).

<sup>72</sup> Strickland, *Minimalism*, p. 279.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 288.

### *Minimalism*

As has been suggested, a period of 'strict' minimalism might be identifiable for a limited period and limited geographical locality.<sup>74</sup> The chronological boundaries are likely to differ slightly from composer to composer, but could be roughly summarised as those interested in strict, audible process between around 1968 and 1976. The privileging of this specific and limited period recognises two things: firstly, the significant impact that devices such as process and additive cycles have had on the much broader spectrum of minimalism; and secondly, the tangible links that some composers, notably Reich and Glass, had with Minimalism in the visual arts. However, this distinction also allows minimalism to regain a broader purpose: it becomes possible to recognise a few 'core' works that earned the minimalist tag, while recognising that its culturally conditioned, current meaning is much more extensive.

As Beirens observes, minimalism has become a description of 'repertoire in the strict sense of the word: a collection of compositions.'<sup>75</sup> He then suggests that there are two 'poles' of minimal music, which he labels 'repetitive' ('all variants of minimal music in which there is a high degree of repetition, regardless of the way it is worked out'), and 'reductive' (which 'deserves the adjective "minimal" more by nature, as it includes all kinds of minimal music that focus on the reductive character, the minimising intervention').<sup>76</sup> Beirens regards these poles as a sort of continuum along which composers might be situated, and this allows a picture to be built of composers and performing groups who took features of Minimalism as principal concerns, but modified those concerns to their own aesthetic and stylistic idiosyncrasies: Minimalism almost instantly became 'minimalist code'. Gann lists the elements of this early minimalist code as: static harmony; repetition; additive process; phase shifting;

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<sup>74</sup> Not as limited, however, as standard histories suggest: Gann gives some brief biographies of 16 other people who worked alongside or at the same time as the 'fab four' to demonstrate how restricted minimalist history has become (Kyle Gann, 'Minimal Music, Maximal Impact', *New Music Box* (2001) <<http://newmusicbox.org/page.nmbx?id=31tp00>> [accessed 07/12/09], section 3.

<sup>75</sup> Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 19.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

permutational process; steady beat;<sup>77</sup> static instrumentation; linear transformation; metamusic; pure tuning and influence of non-Western culture.<sup>78</sup> Yet Gann also notes that none of these elements are exclusive to minimalism and many musics have evolved from these concerns that 'no longer justify the name'. The components of this code are the features that constitute the 'kaleidoscopic' reading of minimalism outlined above: features that are wide reaching and constantly evolving. To distinguish the wider application of this code from strict Minimalism, Gann identifies one further feature: 'audible structure',<sup>79</sup> and argues that this is unique to the strict phase of Minimalism.

### *Postminimalism*

Postminimalism has perhaps the most confused usage in the minimal nexus. For many it means simply, 'not strictly minimal' (this of course leaves a minimum of minimal works and a vast number of postminimal works spanning over 40 years). The problem with this application is that it makes no allowances for the distinctions that then exist within these later decades, and as Bernard notes, 'while postminimalism does mean *something*, in the end it can serve only as a placemaker for more precise terms, the coining of which probably awaits greater historical perspective on this period'.<sup>80</sup> Johnson notes that later pieces of Reich and Glass, as well as those of other composers, make 'use of selected features of the [minimalist] style while discarding others',<sup>81</sup> yet this is a vague formulation. Bernard is dismissive of such attitudes, quipping that 'minimalism is cast as the deliverer of American music from the pharaoh of Academic Serialism, leading young composers out of the desert of atonality with the

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<sup>77</sup> Like Beirens, Gann suggests that "steady-beat minimalism" is a criterion that could divide minimalist repertoire into two mutually exclusive bodies of music, pulse-based music versus drone-based music' (Kyle Gann, 'Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism', in Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (eds), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York; London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 299–303 (p. 301).

<sup>78</sup> Gann, 'Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism', pp. 299–302.

<sup>79</sup> Gann, 'Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism', p. 302. For Gann, this includes: *Drumming; In C; Attica; Composition 1960, #7*, and *Einstein on the Beach*.

<sup>80</sup> Bernard, 'Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality', p. 130.

<sup>81</sup> Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', p. 750.

reassurance that it's okay to write consonances again. In the Promised Land of the new tonality, everyone is a postminimalist almost by definition, or so it would seem.<sup>82</sup> Instead, Bernard proposes a more restricted definition resting on two criteria: either, that a composer 'began as a minimalist and is now writing music that, however different from those beginnings, can be plausibly traced back to them', or, 'developed after minimalism's most abundant flowering, but principally in response (even if partly in opposition) to it'.<sup>83</sup> While this insistence on an influential or developmental link seems sensible, the 'however different' of Bernard's criterion reinforces the dominance of certain authorial voices in minimalist discourse: would he, for example, call Riley's later, improvisatory works postminimalist because of *In C*?

Postminimalism has been applied to relatively early works. For example, Potter suggests that while Glass',

consolidation of sonic impact, and the concomitant concern with texture and psycho-acoustics, already redefines the minimalism of *Music with Changing Parts*, its successor's extension and clarification of these render *Music in Twelve Parts* more clearly 'post-minimalist'.<sup>84</sup>

Yet, to call *Music in Twelve Parts* postminimal seems hasty, especially in light of later works such as the Violin Concerto or *Low Symphony*, which really do take the surface impressions of the minimalist idiom and turn them into pure 'code'. When looking more closely at Potter's categorisation, it becomes apparent that he is determined to find some rigid delineation between minimalism and postminimalism: a chronology of terms is established, and works are fitted in accordingly. The argument that minimal discourse has become rigid and minimised itself is nowhere more apparent than when comparing his assessment of Reich with the extract above concerning Glass:

if the consolidation of sonic impact and putative harmonic motion already redefines the minimalism of *Music for Mallet Instruments*,

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<sup>82</sup> Bernard, 'Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality', p. 127.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 323.

*Voices and Organ*, its successor's extensions of these render *Music for Eighteen Musicians* more clearly 'post-minimalist'.<sup>85</sup>

It may be that the desire to assign an early date to postminimalism stems from comparisons to the art world. Hopkins, for example, refers to postminimal artworks being created as early as 1970. Strickland is certainly not the only commentator who is swift to assign a postminimalist tag to comparatively early works of Reich and Glass. It is certainly true that a certain 'blossoming' of technique occurs in the mid-seventies for both composers; what Hitchcock describes as 'a greater complexity, a wider range of expression, and a swifter rate of change' that 'remained unmistakably rooted in the minimalist aesthetic'.<sup>86</sup> He allows that 'if "maximalist" is too strong a term for it, "postminimalist" may serve',<sup>87</sup> yet it seems that Maximalist might be precisely the correct term for all the music that took the founding principles of Minimalism and used them to more expressive ends. While the 'post-' prefix suggests a 'going beyond', Maximalism maintains a sense of direct contact with the strict devices of Minimalism.

What postminimalist works demonstrate is an integration of minimal devices with more traditional harmonic and textural concerns.<sup>88</sup> Schwarz suggests that postminimalism is a term 'invented to describe Adams' eclectic vocabulary, one in which the austerity of minimalism now rubs shoulders with the passion of Romanticism,<sup>89</sup> and indeed, Adams provides a good example of music which carries

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<sup>85</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 245. Where the occasional word does differ in these two citations, I would suggest that they would be more accurate if applied to the opposite composer.

<sup>86</sup> Hitchcock, *Music in the United States*, p. 334.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Perhaps what Holloway was calling for when he argued that 'minimalism needs to be interfused much more closely with "real music" for its considerable potential to be realised and released' (Holloway, 'Modernism and After in Music', p. 63).

<sup>89</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 170.

the sheen of minimalism without the earlier restraint.<sup>90</sup> In *Phrygian Gates*, for example, Schwarz identifies a 'directionalised motion that sweeps towards climaxes—a motion far removed from the stasis of minimalism. Such a subjective approach works to loosen the bonds of musical process and heighten the role of intuition'.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Johnson notes both the pulsed repetition and melodic content of *Harmonielehre* and concludes that 'although the passage clearly exceeds the minimalist style in its melodic construction, the minimalist technique dominates the accompaniment in rhythm and texture'.<sup>92</sup> It is also important to note that the more recent works of Reich and Glass would more accurately be described as 'postminimal' as postminimalism marks a shedding of some of the dogma associated with Minimalism. Hitchcock suggests that 'although minimalism inspired [composers] to seek a more audience-friendly music than serialism, they still conceptualised music in terms familiar to them from twelve-tone thought—as a language with rules meant to guarantee internal coherence'.<sup>93</sup> Cross also notes the freedom associated with postminimalism, and points more explicitly to the context of production. For him, postminimalism 'indicates the fact that minimalism is now a stylistic (and, just as significant, commercial) fact, a broadly recognised *lingua franca* that has shed its origins in the experimental tradition'.<sup>94</sup> This

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<sup>90</sup> Totalism is another term that has been applied to Adams, but this has an even more confused usage. Rothstein suggests that Totalism 'signifies an attempt by talented younger composers to move beyond Minimalism' (Edward Rothstein, 'Minimalism Pumped Up to the Max', *New York Times*, 18 July 1993, p. H23, [online archive], <<http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T004&prodId=SPN.SP00&docId=A174576098&source=gale&srcprod=SP00&userGroupName=salcal2&version=1.0>> [accessed 30/01/09]), but there is little to suggest that there are any marked differences between a conception of Totalism or postminimalism. It is also a term that seems to have remained confined to American composers. If it has any use at all, I would suggest that it might be applied to those composers linked to the 'Bang on a Can' ensemble's formation (David Gordon, Julia Wolfe, Michael Lang). Their music often combines the hybridity of European minimalist trends with energetic and propulsive rhythms that recall the unremitting nature of early minimalism: a sort of 'high-octane' post-minimalism. This would chime with Gann's interpretation: 'the formal and textural clarity of minimalism, the energy of rock, the dissonance of modernism, and the rhythmic intricacy of Asian musics or even Cowell or Nancarrow [...] we started calling it totalism' (Gann, 'Minimal Music, Maximal Impact', section 7).

<sup>91</sup> Schwarz, 'Process vs. Intuition', p. 258.

<sup>92</sup> Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', p. 753.

<sup>93</sup> Hitchcock, *Music in the United States*, p. 373.

<sup>94</sup> Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, p. 174.

concern with the 'commercial fact' is important: postminimalism begins to emerge as a recognisable development at around the same time that minimalism begins to achieve notable commercial success: as minimalism become more widely known and accepted, its codes become more accessible and available for use. Carl suggested in 1989 that minimalism's 'aesthetic promises' have 'constrained its ability to develop fruitfully',<sup>95</sup> yet what postminimalism shows, is that given the opportunity for distribution, minimalism has had significant and varied impact.

### 5.3 Johnson's aesthetic, style, and technique

One attempt to map this impact has been made by Johnson, whose article on the division of minimalist practice has been influential. Johnson proposed a minimalist chronology that saw it transform from an initial aesthetic ideal, into a style, to then be assimilated as a technique. His formulations will be considered in the context of the periods outlined above.

#### *Aesthetic*

Johnson dates minimalism as an aesthetic from the late fifties and early sixties, placing it within the proto-minimalist phase outlined above.<sup>96</sup> The aesthetic phase is, for Johnson, the 'pure' form of minimalism where Young's dictum 'that which is produced with the minimum of means', dominates. Perreault describes the minimalist aesthetic as a 'reductionist effort to determine the essence of a particular medium. How much can an artist eliminate of the traditional ingredients of his medium and still produce art?'.<sup>97</sup> Yet Johnson argues that a pure minimalist aesthetic is quickly diluted, as a collection of composers reacting to minimalism's aesthetic aims develop an identifiable style. Young is excluded from this subsequent style, due to the lack of repetition in his work, but interestingly, Johnson also excludes Reich and Glass from

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<sup>95</sup> Carl, 'The Politics of Definition', p. 112.

<sup>96</sup> Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', p. 745.

<sup>97</sup> Perreault, 'Minimal Abstracts', pp. 261–262.

the aesthetic phase, using the example of *Music for 18 Musicians* as a work that displays 'goal-directed motion, particularly in its harmonic changes and formal schemes'.<sup>98</sup> What is less clear is why Johnson does not mention Reich's early tape works in relation to a minimalist aesthetic.

### *Style*

Johnson identifies minimalism as a style in Glass' and Reich's works of the early seventies, but also argues that 'this style period was remarkably short and has already ended, since few, if any, pieces after the 1970s exhibit all the characteristics of the style'.<sup>99</sup> This might be compared to what has been outlined above as a short (capitalised) Minimalist period, and it is clear in his article that Johnson is basing his stylistic criteria on the works that Reich and Glass were producing at this time. However, 'style' is a term that begs definition. Pincus-Witten describes it as 'the ultimate residue of art'; the 'intellectual construct' that points to commonalities between works and their creators.<sup>100</sup> It is clear that this is the sense in which Johnson uses the term; pointing to various criteria that would be recognisable as the 'monochromatic' minimalism outlined at the start of Part Two. Yet perhaps more interesting in the context of Johnson's summary, is Glass' assertion that 'style is a special case of technique'.<sup>101</sup> For Glass, technique is the practical knowledge that allows an individual style to develop, 'so that, in one measure of any composer, you can immediately recognise who they are'.<sup>102</sup> Glass' view is not uncommon, and highlights the difficulty in applying categories of stylistic and technical minimalism.

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<sup>98</sup> Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', p. 749.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p. 750.

<sup>100</sup> Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism into Maximalism*, p. 257. See also this Part, footnote 197 (p. 155) for further discussion of style.

<sup>101</sup> Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', p. 742.

<sup>102</sup> Glass quoted in David Walters, 'Style and Soul: Interview' in Kostelanetz, *Writings on Glass*, pp. 274–278, (first publ. *Yes* 13 (Autumn Term 1992)), p. 277.



### *Technique*

However, for Johnson, minimalist technique is the most important of his three categories, and one he suggests might remove the stigma of the minimalist tag ('the discomfort that many composers now feel from being associated with the term may be attributed mainly to its delineation as an aesthetic or style').<sup>103</sup> Johnson suggest that defining minimalism as aesthetic or style may be historically useful, but that minimalism as a technique gives the term most clarity, arguing that the term should be used in a way that 'simply identifies one of the compositional techniques used in the piece. Likewise, labelling a composer minimalist only reflects the composer's predilection for using the technique.'<sup>104</sup> This use opens minimalism up as a vehicle for other concerns: Johnson argues that Reich does precisely this as he investigates 'more complex harmonies and more extensive melodies',<sup>105</sup> while in the next generation of composers, Torke is cited as someone who quintessentially 'assimilates the minimalist technique into his music in a seamless fashion'.<sup>106</sup> Torke provides a focal point for the latter part of Johnson's article, where he examines various works and highlights Torke's use of ostinati and cell-based repetition; yet he also points to the Stravinskian flavour of the ostinati, and argues that 'minimalism is simply one of any number of compositional techniques available for his exploitation'.<sup>107</sup> This description of course fits perfectly with the postminimalism outlined above, where the rigours of minimalism become a code that can be integrated with any other; something supported by the fact that Adams is Johnson's other primary example of minimalism as a technique. Butler and Bernard agree with this assessment of Adams, although both give a more nuanced reading of the process of assimilation. Butler cites *Harmonielehre* as 'a marvellous example of the combination of minimalist technique with a kind of

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<sup>103</sup> Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', p. 742.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, p. 770.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 762.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p. 765.

<sup>107</sup> Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', p. 768.

postmodern “retro” style’,<sup>108</sup> which again reinforces the idea of minimalism having become something imbued with a certain historical distance. Bernard attributes this distancing to the fact that Adams had no direct contact with the scene in downtown New York in which Minimalism in the visual arts flourished. This results, he argues, in the use of the minimalist technique ‘synthetically—that is, as technique, divorced from any aesthetic basis—a circumstance that later would tend to reduce the minimalist aspect of Adams’ music to a kind of shtick, a routine that became semi-parodic.’<sup>109</sup>

This critical angle to the category of technique returns to the question of minimalist cosmology. If we accept that minimalism itself was kaleidoscopic, it follows that postminimalism will be even more so. As a result, the ways in which minimalist technique might be used are notionally infinite: a position which demands some consideration of where the outer limits of postminimalism might occur. It raises too, the idea that it might be possible to trace linear developments *and* certain tangents which owe a great deal to minimalist history, yet remain outside something recognisably ‘minimal’.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Butler, *A Very Short Introduction to Postmodernism*, p. 85.

<sup>109</sup> Bernard, ‘Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality’, p. 117.

<sup>110</sup> In this latter category I would include composers such as Steve Martland, whose tutelage certainly has some links to minimalist developments, but who would be difficult to consign to a minimalist, or postminimalist grouping. While some works (such as *Horses of Instruction*) could be candidates for the development of a ‘post-Maximal’ category, this seems to perpetuate a certain rigidity of classification and also fails to take into account other diverse influences from the full history of Western art and popular musics.

## Chapter Six

### Categorising Minimalism

As the previous pages have shown, minimalism is a far more diverse category than the traditionally restrictive 'minimum of means' that it represents for some. For those who would argue that anything that does not adhere to this traditional view is not minimal, Watkins may provide a counterargument: he suggests that although 'the isms can never explain the artist, a collection of artists can illuminate the need for considering the ism'.<sup>1</sup> Although tongue-in-cheek, an equally valid argument against carefully delineated restrictions to the term is provided by Alloway when he notes that 'there exists no agreed-upon point of formal and image complexity which is Enough'.<sup>2</sup> It is this intangible boundary that contains the essence of minimalism's success and its aesthetic interest. It is almost impossible to point to a work that contains an absolute 'minimum of means',<sup>3</sup> but there are countless example of works which express an economy of compositional device and a concentrated presentation of single ideas. Of course, this restricted use of materials proved to be a short-lived experiment, yet the aural landscape these ideas cultivated has persisted for half a century.

Potter quotes Reich referring to his works of the late sixties and early seventies as 'very radical works that...have a kind of etude status. They are studies—very rigorous studies—in a technique I had discovered and was absolutely pursuing single-

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<sup>1</sup> Watkins, *Soundings*, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Alloway, 'Art and Objecthood', p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Young's *Composition 1960, #7* might be one exception, yet the proto-minimalist qualities of this work have already been discussed. More recently, however, electronic forms of minimalism have stretched the perceived limits of minimisation to breaking point. Jliat's 'anti-musical ideology' has led him to create works such as the *Still Life Series*, "*Six Types of Silence*", which comprises various forms of digital 'silence', where audio data exists on each CD, but in practice is either inaudible, or unplayable by most standard equipment (see JLIAT, [website], < <http://www.jliat.com/>> [accessed 10/06/10]). The Onement record label also presents an interesting extension to the minimalist aesthetic, producing records with so few pressings (and no master) that the works recorded are unavailable even to the composers and performers themselves. Onement's first release was five realisations of *4'33"*, the fourth being pure digital silence (see ONEMENT-LABEL, [website], < <http://onement-label.com/ONE-HOME.html>> [accessed 01/06/10]).

mindedly'.<sup>4</sup> This conceptualisation of his early work as a series of studies highlights the way in which almost *all* material produced by contemporary composers reaches the public domain. The information age makes works that might no longer be representative of a composer's concerns as equally available as those he is most preoccupied with. Potter has described *Drumming*, the 1971 work that most commentators recognise as a turning point in Reich's music, as more 'a summing up of his early music than the beginning of something new'.<sup>5</sup> It is this 'something new' (and the 'something news' of other composers working in a similar vein), that has sparked much of the debate about the categorisation of minimalism; but drawing on the previous discussions, it is now possible to rework the standard definition and origins of minimalism. It becomes clear that minimalism is many things to many people: wrangling over a 'correct' definition or set of works neglects the fact that each view is dependent on the context of the observer. As Johnson notes, 'whereas Reich and Glass deplore the label of minimalist, Adams now feels he has "internalised" the elements of minimalism and has gone beyond the label',<sup>6</sup> and I would like to suggest that these attitudes might be related to where composers—and indeed critics—are situated in terms of their generational context, and their attitudes to musical development. These contexts might be called a modernist-minimalist attitude, an avant-garde minimalist attitude, and a postmodern-minimalist attitude, and exploring them provides the final angle from which I wish to consider the term minimalism.

### **Minimalism as a modernist impulse**

While minimalism is seen as a departure from the stricture of European modernist attitudes, early minimalist works operated within a rigorous set of constraints that mirrored the dogmatic approach of those same composers traditionally presented as the minimalists' antithesis. In addition, early works such as Young's *Trio for Strings* indicate attempts to negate aspects of serial technique from within those systems; Reich also recounts his attempts to compose using tone rows that he simply repeated

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<sup>4</sup> Reich quoted in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 211.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, 'Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?', p. 752.

before his experiments with tape offered an alternative route. As Pollin observes, 'Reich represents the minimalist who has come full circle from serialism',<sup>7</sup> at first working in opposition to its dominance and eventually moving outside its sphere of influence.

### **Minimalism as avant-garde impulse**

In the previous exploration of the minimalist avant-garde, it became clear that for many composers exploring minimalist ideas in the sixties, something akin to an avant-garde impulse propelled minimalist development. However, minimalism (to a certain extent) defies the usual process of reincorporation into the modernist tradition, instead creating a rupture within the modernist continuum. It is this rupture that points to the beginnings of a transitional phase between the modern and postmodern: a transition that not only alters the modernist trajectory, but alters the nature of the avant-garde impulse itself. As Brian O'Doherty observed in the 1960s, 'to be avant-garde now is to be old-fashioned', yet the interaction of avant-garde impulse and minimalist aesthetic marks a transformation in the nature of cultural response that is indicative of an emerging postmodernity.<sup>8</sup> By altering the nature and content of an avant-garde action (an action based as much on return as progression, and characterised by simplicity and repetition rather than diversified complexity), the avant-garde itself becomes something other. It is this change that marks the emergence of minimalism from a relatively restricted (and restrictive) modernist response, and its evolution into a minimalism that can be recognised as a postmodern code. The avant-garde impulse acts as the vehicle for this diversification, giving rise to a proliferation of composers who seek to engage with the minimalist aesthetic through the lens of postmodernism. Thus the drive for the new which formerly characterised the avant-garde is augmented by the possibility of *renewal* through the dialectical engagement of minimalist code and postmodern culture. Only with the arrival of postminimalism might it be possible to say that the minimalist avant-garde has found itself incorporated into the mainstreams of cultural activity and academic focus.

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<sup>7</sup> Pollin, 'Why Minimalism Now?', p. 238.

<sup>8</sup> Brian O'Doherty, 'Minus Plato', in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp. 251–255 (first publ. In *Arts and Artists* (September 1966)), p. 254.

## Postmodern postminimalism

Postminimalism offers an identifiably 'minimalist' sound primarily through the surface impressions of the music. It is this separation of aural effects from a rigorous underlying process that warrants the 'post' of postminimalism, and it is also the factor (the use of the minimalist code separated from its former aesthetic dogma) that marks a postmodern turn. As Pfeil has observed on listening to Glass, Anderson, Eno and Talking Heads, 'only retrospectively [...] did I realise that the kind of aesthetic experience they create and offer had already been categorised as postmodern'.<sup>9</sup> While for those composers who have demonstrated minimalist and postminimalist phases the transition is both gradual and non-concurrent, it is possible to point out key moments of change. Potter, for example, marks Reich's identification of 1979 (and the composition of *Eight Lines*) as 'the point of maximum change'.<sup>10</sup> Similarly Schwarz identifies Glass' *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) as a key work.<sup>11</sup> However, while commentators have shown a sustained interest in Reich's developments, it is common to be dismissive of Glass' later projects. Schwarz for example calls *Satyagraha* (1980) the start of 'a long, gradual march back towards convention'.<sup>12</sup> This perceived divergence in the 'value' of two key composers in the traditional minimalist story may be part of the reason why minimalism, and postminimalism, remain so difficult to classify.

In addition, postminimalism refers to composers who play no part in the origins of minimalism. Adams, for example seems to have taken Reich's music as a starting point, but also assimilated aspects of the Western classical tradition, as well as what Schwarz calls 'vernacular links', in 'a move from systematic rigor to all-embracing eclecticism, a move mirrored in the shift from process to intuition'.<sup>13</sup> This shift from strict systems to

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<sup>9</sup> Fred Pfeil, 'Postmodernism as a "Structure of Feeling"' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 381–404 (p. 381).

<sup>10</sup> Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> Schwarz, 'Process vs. Intuition', p. 271.

a focus on purely aural outcomes also complements an increasingly commercially-orientated medium. While it might be too much to suggest that accessibility is a primary feature of this music, there is certainly a 'gloss' to much postminimalism that provides even a novice listener with enough to 'hold on to'.<sup>14</sup> For example, Bernard suggests that Torke's brand of minimalism has 'become a kind of sheen of flavour for a musical "product"'.<sup>15</sup> Such observations have led some commentators to level a charge of opportunism at some composers, particularly those who are eclectic in their pooling of various sources. Nyman, for example, has drawn criticism for his 'minimalisation' of classical fragments, which Schwarz suggests may be interpreted as 'blasphemy of the coarsest kind, or a compelling, post-modernist reinterpretation of the musical past'.<sup>16</sup>

While it is clear from these examples that postmodern minimalism forms the most diverse and difficult-to-define aspect of the minimalist discourse, it is important to remember the relationship it does maintain with earlier, stricter minimalist phases. Pincus-Witten maintains that the move to postminimalism from minimalism is 'so naturally continuous with it that it may be regarded as part of the same impulse [...] all part of the same continuum'.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, wherever we might discern certain landmarks for individual composers, the emergence of postminimalism must be seen as a gradual (and individually determined) process. As Novak argues, 'Postminimalism is neither a style nor a movement. It is a heterogeneous conceptual field.

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<sup>14</sup> I borrow this phrase from a report on the Intention/Reception project at De Montford University, which has been examining listener responses to electroacoustic music (Rob Weale, 'Discovering How Accessible Electroacoustic Music Can Be: the Intention/Reception Project', *Organised Sound* 11: 2 (2006), pp. 189–200). By attempting to examine and catalogue 'SHFs' (or the 'something to hold on to factors'), the team hope to develop an understanding of how these function as 'access tools', defined as 'any type of information that is offered to a listener in order to assist them in appreciating the art work' (p. 193). A similar project in relation to minimal music may generate some interesting results.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard, 'Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality', p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 200.

<sup>17</sup> Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism into Maximalism*, p. 2.

Postminimalists are different authors who comment, reinterpret and question minimalist music in a postmodern age.<sup>18</sup>

These categorisations, then, depend on a nuanced reading of minimalism that undermines the literal meaning of the term. As Warburton summarises, minimalism functions as 'an all-purpose umbrella term, in the hope that we shall not be misunderstood.'<sup>19</sup> It has become clear that even the earlier, strictly minimal processes of the sixties and early seventies had a diverse range of applications. It is also evident that the 'high priests' of minimalism, while certainly having points of convergence and shared influence, do not represent some rigid genealogy of influence, either in terms of the chronology of their developments, nor in the sense that the works of the successive composers depended on the works of the former. The development of minimalism was by no means as closed and restrictive as the music that was produced.

As Johnson illustrates:

The idea of minimalism is much larger than most people realise. It includes, by definition, any music that works with limited or minimal materials: pieces that use only a few notes, pieces that use only a few words of text, or pieces written for very limited instruments, such as antique cymbals, bicycle wheels, or whiskey glasses. It includes pieces that sustain one basic electronic rumble for a long time. It includes pieces made exclusively from recordings of rivers and streams. It includes pieces that move in endless circles. It includes pieces that set up an unmoving wall of saxophone sound. It includes pieces that take a very long time to move gradually from one kind of music to another kind. It includes pieces that permit all possible pitches, as long as they fall between C and D. It includes pieces that slow the tempo down to two or three notes per minute. There are a lot of ideas in this little list, and they all came from a lot of different individuals. But essentially they didn't come from individuals at all, but from a very large and rather nebulous group. Important artistic movements are not produced by individuals. They are produced when a number of talented people happen to be in evolving in the same place at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jelena Novak, 'Contextualizing Opera in a Post-dramatic context: Differences and Repetitions', paper delivered at the First International Conference on Music and Minimalism (August 2007), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Warburton, 'A Working Terminology for Minimal Music', para. 7 of 24.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *The Voice of New Music*, pp. 20–21.



But for minimalism, geographical boundaries did not apply in the same way that they may have previously. While Johnson reaches the conclusion that the term 'New York Hypnotic School' may be a useful one to retain, he also points out that Gavin Bryars would fit closely within the category of Young, Riley, Reich and Glass, adding that, 'it's a little difficult to consider him part of a New York School since he lives in England'.<sup>21</sup> Yet this ignores the fact that Bryars spent some time in New York working with Cage, and that the easy dissemination of recording may have brought him into such close contact with these developments as for geographical boundaries to become meaningless.

Returning to Harvey's postmodern discourse, the time-space compression of the cultural sphere that for him acts as the catalyst for symptomatic characteristics of the postmodern condition, allows for the possibility that minimalist developments were truly transatlantic; that the breakdown of geographical barriers and the acceleration of communication thrust the minimal code into a position that allowed it to be consumed and adapted at a global level. Part Three turns to the examination of one European composer, Louis Andriessen, who assimilated this minimalist code and adapted it to his own ends. In the process of exploring his music, an 'Andriessen rhizome' will be constructed which explores the nature of his compositional network of ideas in order to demonstrate the way in which his postmodernist response to transitions in the twentieth century has made use of the minimalist code amongst a plethora of other influences.

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, 'La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass' in *The Voice of New Music*, pp. 43–45 (first publ. 'Static Music: The New York Hypnotic School', *Village Voice* (7 September 1972)), p. 43.

**PART THREE:**

**LOUIS ANDRIESSEN**

## LOUIS ANDRIESSEN

The previous parts of this thesis have shown that two terms, postmodernism and minimalism, provide useful placemarkers for a collections of ideas, values and perspectives that are actually diverse and wide-ranging. The key themes of postmodernity and the kaleidoscope of minimalist features both show that these single terms act as umbrellas for a diverse range of characteristics. For some, this flexibility—malleable concepts that result from wide-ranging observations, and the paradoxes and contradictions that they sometimes illustrate—makes both labels so contradictory as to warrant rejection. Yet these terms are very much in use in contemporary discourse in all social and institutional strata, and as such, their usage must be examined.

To do this, I turn to a discussion of a single composer, Louis Andriessen, who has been described using both these labels, but remains in some ways resistant to each. As Bloch has observed, while the activities that have attracted the ‘postmodern’ tag have made him ‘a marginal figure in certain histories of institutionalized European avant-garde [...] Andriessen is relegated to a footnote in histories of minimalism, where he might be expected to fit better, thanks to his unabashed engagement with that same high-art tradition’.<sup>1</sup> It is this contradiction that provides a useful platform on which to explore the transitional spaces of both minimalism and postmodernism while maintaining the critical distance that allows both terms to function as useful concepts. This part seeks to construct a network of ideas from the preoccupations that are commonly attributed to Andriessen, and to draw a few key examples from his extensive catalogue of works that demonstrate his application of some of the ideas that this network articulates. Each ‘case study’ will bring together a couple of features of this network, and demonstrate how they are manifested in Andriessen’s multifaceted music. In doing so, these sections will be, by necessity, only partial

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory W. Bloch, ‘The Problem With Andriessen’, *Echo* VI: 2 (Fall 2004), <<http://www.echo.ucla.edu/volume6-issue2/reviews/bloch.html>> [accessed 13/05/10], para. 1 of 20.

explorations: Andriessen's catalogue is characterised by a level of synthesis with outside influences and inter-referentiality between his own works that is beyond the scope of this study. It should also be noted that the non-chronological ordering of these examples is intentional: as the starting point for a more immersive rhizomatic study, it is intended to reinforce the idea of a non-linear approach to the characterisation of a composer's output. However, what this partial investigation will demonstrate is the potential that a rhizomatic framework holds for exploring the complexities of a postmodern cultural response *without* the need to impose a master narrative on the creative process, or to make concrete relationships between works and ideas that often depend upon the particular situation and knowledge of the individual listener.

## Chapter Seven

### Mapping Andriessen

Andriessen's music, while relatively low-profile in comparison to contemporaries such as Reich, has drawn increased musicological attention in recent years (most notably from Adlington and Everett).<sup>1</sup> This heightened attention coincides with an increased quantity of performances over the past decade, with celebrations of anniversary years at the Southbank Centre and Carnegie Hall exposing his music to a much wider audience. In addition, a generation of composers now themselves becoming the focus of critical attention, cite Andriessen as a primary influence,<sup>2</sup> and his recent return to more conventional ensembles (such as the double piano concerto, *The Hague Hacking* (2008)) has allowed his music to feature more prominently in conventional arts programming.

This rise in prominence and popularity has led to an increase in discussion, but has also highlighted the difficulty of situating Andriessen's music and ideology comfortably within the wider context of contemporary musical practice (or more specifically, the linear narratives and closed categorisations of much criticism). This may be partly due to a tendency for commentators to focus on his 'breakthrough' years, from *De Volharding* to *De Materie*, where Andriessen's political activism looms large in both his subject matter and rhetoric; attempting to map the heightened socio-political

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<sup>1</sup> See Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, and Yayoi Uno Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Both have also published a variety of articles which engage with his music.

<sup>2</sup> In the UK, Steve Martland, Graham Fitkin and Richard Ayres; Michel Van der Aa in the Netherlands; and the collected composers of *Bang on a Can* in the USA (Julia Wolfe, David Lang, Michael Gordon) to name but a few. Interestingly, the editor of one of the earliest collections focusing on Andriessen's music, Maya Trochimczyk, sees a title accorded Andriessen on *Bang on a Can*'s website of 'enfant terrible emeritus' as 'rather nasty' and 'quite patricidal' (see 'Unisons and the Republic: Andriessen's Minimalism' in Maja Trochimczyk (ed.), *The Music of Louis Andriessen* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 91–110 (p. 109)), although this might just as easily be understood as a wry homage to the spirit of Andriessen's outlook (this page no longer appears on the website). Links have also been made between Andriessen and composers who do not list him as an influence. For example, Trochimczyk argues that Adams' *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986) is strongly influenced by *De Snelheid* (1982–4) (*ibid.* p.108).

concerns of a decade onto past and future activities. While these concerns certainly form a focal point throughout Andriessen's career, there are other continuities that are often overlooked, and seeking out some of these continuities—the 'plateaus' of Andriessen's idiolect—are essential to understanding the often contradictory interactions he achieves with minimalist and postmodern concerns.

In Bloch's review of literature taking Andriessen as its subject, he criticises Adlington for trying 'too hard to tie up the loose ends and intractable contradictions of his subject'.<sup>3</sup> While it is tempting to structure an examination of Andriessen's music around the key themes and kaleidoscopic angles of postmodernism and minimalism respectively, this action in itself would suggest just the sort of restrictive critique that I have attempted to argue against. Instead, a matrix of elements key to Andriessen's own concerns will be used as areas of investigation, interspersed with specific examples of works that reflect some of these elements, where the interplay between Andriessen, minimalism, and postmodernism, can be considered in reference to the composer's own idiolect.

## 7.1 A note on rhetoric

Andriessen, like many composers, is resistant to any attempt to categorise or explain his output. In addition to comments on his own work, he has at various times written extensively about the music of other composers (particularly Stravinsky) and the wider cultural sphere (in his spell as a writer for *De Gids*). The opinions he expresses in relation to his own and other music add a further dimension to any attempt to draw conclusions about his music, and are perhaps summarised by his assertion that 'in general, you should not generalise'.<sup>4</sup> The presence of a large quantity of almost manifesto-like statements raises questions about both the (Barthesian) authority of

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<sup>3</sup> Bloch, 'The Problem With Andriessen', para. 4 of 20.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Andriessen and Jonathan Cross, 'Composing With Stravinsky', in Jonathan Cross (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.248–259 (p. 258).

the composer's voice in relation to the listener or reader, and the autonomy-status of the music itself in relation to Andriessen's own commentary.

Wilson, in his article on the impact of Ligeti's rhetoric on the way in which his music is discussed, makes some points that seem equally pertinent to Andriessen. Wilson argues that 'composers' public statements, through the uniquely authoritative status accorded them by scholars, have played an essential role in propping up this image of the heroically independent creator'.<sup>5</sup> While this is almost certainly the case, to ignore these statements risks obscuring evidence of the perspectives that inform a composer's work.<sup>6</sup> Andriessen regularly resists the idea of identifying continuity or stylistic traits in his work, insisting that 'what I attempt in every piece is to research a totally different aspect of composing. In a way, I always try to be somebody else'.<sup>7</sup> Yet, while such statements resist any efforts to draw conclusions about his oeuvre, he acknowledges the importance of identifying extra-musical explanations for receivers of his work. Andriessen suggests that 'such concrete details serve as keys; they give other people an excuse to try to fantasise or make theories around a particular piece. That is what I want, of course. I want other people to recognise things in my music, and I communicate with them also via other canals [...] art is all a trick, a way to *compose oneself*'.<sup>8</sup> These two statements reveal the complexity of Andriessen's rhetoric, and

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Wilson, 'György Ligeti and the Rhetoric of Autonomy', *Twentieth Century Music*, 1: 1, 5–28 (p. 6).

<sup>6</sup> Even if these perspectives are informed by a retrospective and revisionary approach to existing materials, they may still be useful in that they offer a clue to the changing preoccupations of the individual.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Enright, 'Notes Towards Anarchy: An Interview with Louis Andriessen', *Border Crossings* 57 (February 1996), pp. 32–38 (p. 33).

<sup>8</sup> Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 82. Andriessen gives an example of what he calls the 'trickery' of these details: 'Once I wrote a very long piece for recorder and piano [*Melodie* (1972–74)]; it was a really boring and radical conceptual piece, very typical for the 1970s. It consisted of nothing but an extended and extremely slow melody. At that time, I played it often with recorder players in concert; before we started playing I would explain the music to the audience. I would say how it was about solitude—how you can be alone when you are in company, and how you can feel in company when you are alone. The piece is very boring and, when recorded, takes twenty or twenty-five minutes, with slight differences. What happens after the performance? A huge success. All sorts of people run to me and say, "It was absolutely not boring, it was a beautiful piece!" It is very strange that people like to be listening surrounded by so many other influences' (*ibid.*).

there is a sense in which the detail which surrounds each piece serves to obscure the type of totalising theorisation that he clearly resents.

Wilson identifies this isolating tendency *between* composers, arguing that the 'resultant image of innumerable "isolated" and "autonomous" creators both legitimates and is legitimated by the still widespread "pluralist" paradigm of contemporary culture'.<sup>9</sup> Yet Andriessen's rhetoric points to a similarly pluralistic (and isolationist) outlook *within* his own output. It becomes clear, furthermore, that Andriessen is more resistant to the labels themselves, than to the characteristics that they seek to describe. So, for example, in response to being asked if postmodern quotation is a bad thing, he responds: 'I cannot judge or criticise a technique, a genre or an approach to making music... you cannot condemn serial music or minimal music as a whole. I myself have been "accused" of being a minimalist: these are ridiculous statements to make. There are good ways of using compositional techniques, and there are bad ones.'<sup>10</sup> It becomes clear from this statement that Andriessen is attempting to distance himself as much from other composers given similar categorisations—those whom he considers use these techniques 'badly'—as he is from the labels themselves. Yet Wilson points out that a spoken engagement with these terms, even in the form of 'declarations of independence [...] signify covert dependence on them rather than effortless transcendence'. Significantly, he also notes, that 'the composer himself [...] often shows a disarming readiness to undermine [commentators'] simplistic oppositions'.<sup>11</sup> This observation highlights the need to recognise that many of Andriessen's aversions to terms are based on descriptions of those terms that he finds frustratingly restrictive.

With all of this in mind, I shall approach the headings that follow as loose and flexible categories: points of access that signpost commentary and discourse bearing some relation to one another, and use them to explore the aspects of Andriessen's activity

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, 'György Ligeti and the Rhetoric of Autonomy', p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 82. This statement also suggests that Andriessen might be less uncomfortable with Johnson's 'minimal technique' classification.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson, 'György Ligeti and the Rhetoric of Autonomy', p. 13.



that suggest some interplay with my conceptualisations of postmodernism and minimalism. Andriessen's own commentary must play a central role in these discussions, especially since his emphasis on public accessibility and suggestion that works such as *De Tijd* are better listened to without a score,<sup>12</sup> place an even greater emphasis on the extra-musical factors that influence a work's reception. However, this is not to say that these statements will be dealt with uncritically. As Wilson concludes, if 'artists feel they have an interest in proclaiming their autonomy, it is the critic's duty to demystify rather than collude in this essentially strategic position'.<sup>13</sup> Even so, examining the motivations for this manoeuvring may prove illuminating.

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<sup>12</sup> Louis Andriessen, 'Lectures for Young Composers' in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, pp. 131–160 (p. 140). Andriessen says that the score might detract from the impact of the work, the 'perception' of which 'requires a great internal tranquillity' (*ibid.*).

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, 'György Ligeti and the Rhetoric of Autonomy', p. 19.

## Originality

One of the most obvious concerns of many composers—where their desire to distinguish themselves through rhetoric is most obvious—is in the question of originality. For Andriessen, approaching each new work as a fresh challenge is important, and may go some way to explaining the degree of plurality that exists within and between his works. Yet while it is certainly true that direct links between formal arrangements or immediate aural impressions are not always apparent, there are continuities to be found in his music: his fondness for steadily additive unison lines; the reuse of certain quotations; the favouring of particular sonorities and instrumental combinations, and a frequently dynamic rhythmic drive.

While at first it may appear that this emphasis on originality stems from a typically modernist desire to achieve artistic autonomy and demonstrate progress, further investigation reveals that it is perhaps for Andriessen a process of assimilating his musical heritage: as much homage as critique. It is certainly apparent that Andriessen favours conceptual investigation of his works to rigorous analysis: Frans van Rossum writes that ‘the question of what listeners/readers should know about the internal architecture, the logic of Andriessen’s music leads to an immediate and hilarious “Nothing”.’ Instead, Andriessen tells the interviewer about his background, and the influences of Jazz, the avant-garde, and ‘conceptualist art’.<sup>14</sup> It is clear that despite Andriessen’s concern that his collected works should not be considered too similar, he is happy for comparisons to be drawn against the music and arts that he considers influential. This acknowledgement—one might even say celebration—of music and ideas from which he has borrowed, reflects a variety of attributes that might be called

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<sup>14</sup> Louis Andriessen in conversation with Frans van Rossum and Sytze Smit, ‘After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath’, *Keynotes* 28: 1 (March 1994), 8–15 (p. 9). It is interesting to note that in the same interview, Andriessen says that ‘the attempt to find some binding factor in all this is something I will leave to the musicologists. What I do is this and this and this: making life into an adventure. If something like a musical language were to come out of it, I think it would be a sum of my limitations. I don’t know how far my pieces resemble each other. I don’t want to know either’ (*ibid.*, p. 8). This reluctance to be complicit in his own classification echoes a similar statement Reich has made on the subject of being labelled a minimalist (see Chapter 4.2: Kaleidoscopic minimalism, p. 103).

postmodern. To explore these further, it is necessary to examine the way that Andriessen presents the topic of influence.

### **Influence**

It is clear that early in his career, Andriessen rapidly moved through a series of stylistic positions before arriving at the more plural outlook he is better known for today. Beirens divides these early works into a '(French) modernist phase, a serialist phase and a period in which the composer made works using the collage principle'.<sup>15</sup> These periods are often interpreted as a process of assimilation (and to some extent a 'coming-to-terms') with his current musical surroundings. Yet when Waa observes that 'meanwhile, Andriessen had found his own voice', a footnote explains that a draft of the article was returned by Andriessen with the comment: 'Own voice? Never searched for it.'<sup>16</sup> This comment chimes with Adlington's observation that Andriessen 'resists the use of the word "influence" [...] references to other music are a very conscious point of principle [...] deliberate "structural allusions", and not, as the word "influence" sometimes implies, more involuntary genetic traits'.<sup>17</sup> The deliberate nature of Andriessen's referencing is evident in his music; sometimes appearing playful, sometimes critical.

Adlington argues that Andriessen's 'suspicion of influence aligns him with the post-war avant-garde'<sup>18</sup>, yet it is important to note that Andriessen's quotations, with the exception of his earlier works, rarely function as straightforward parody or pastiche. While a 'suspicion of influence' might chime with the autonomous ambitions of the avant-garde, the free-play of allusion and the dismissal of an authorial 'composer's voice' sit much more comfortably in a postmodern arena. In addition, Andriessen is keen to point out which composers he considers important, taking the question of influence almost as an opportunity for advocacy on behalf of those artists he considers

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<sup>15</sup> Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', pp. 178–9.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz van der Waa, 'Louis Andriessen and his Habitat' in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, pp. 31–44 (p. 36).

<sup>17</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

underrepresented. He talks to Trochimczyk, for example, about his admiration for Ravel's elegance and his influential role, complaining that 'nobody talks about it, never: certainly not in the composers' world'.<sup>19</sup> In the same conversation, he also cites Roussel, Wolff, Bach, Messiaen and big-band culture as sources of interest and exploration.

Aside from his family's tuition and his Dutch schooling, Berio's role as tutor and mentor should not be underestimated, and again, Andriessen is keen to acknowledge the debt, explaining that he 'talked to Berio about all sorts of strange notions without realising that he was teaching me'.<sup>20</sup> Andriessen's time with Berio coincides with his tutor's heightened interest in phonetics and collage techniques, as well as his association with Eco, who was at the same time beginning to develop his theories of the open work.<sup>21</sup> Eco's theories focused on the interaction between receiver and work, examining the interpretive possibilities that arose through innovative and unfamiliar artistic forms. Focusing his attention not only on the content of a work, but on the set of cultural, social and practical factors that determined the environment in which a work was received, Eco distinguished between the material object of 'finished' work, and the aesthetic perception of that work: the point at which the work becomes

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<sup>19</sup> Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16. Andriessen went to study with Berio in Milan between 1962 and 1963 (aged 22), before following him to Berlin between 1964 and 1965 (it should be noted that while Andriessen happily acknowledges the importance of Berio's tuition, he is also keen to point out the ways in which he feels he influenced Berio's own work. For example, he boasts of introducing Berio to the Swingle Singers, who premiered *Sinfonia*). The quote above also provides a stark contrast to Reich's comments about Berio's input (whom he studied with the year before Andriessen). In fact, Reich's reaction to Berio's teaching, and the 'writing out' that he has done until recently, reflects a more typically modernist response to influence than Andriessen does.

<sup>21</sup> The essay 'Opera aperta' was first published in 1962. The first English translation of 'The Open Work' appeared in 1989 (Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989)).

'open'.<sup>22</sup> These formulations, while clearly demonstrating affinities with Berio's interests, also reflect the impact of an emerging postmodern condition; pointing to an intellectual environment that would likely have fostered Andriessen's concerns with the mechanics of production and presentation. In addition, they may well have had an impact on Andriessen's ideas about the use of quotation and the question of influence.

Berio, with his many works that establish a dialogue with the music of the past, draws comparison with Stravinsky from some commentators, and both are regarded as composers who write 'music about music'. Stravinsky is, above all other composers, the influence that is most regularly cited by Andriessen, and by those who write about Andriessen's music. Indeed, Andriessen, with Schönberger, has written a book dedicated to exploring his work. It is therefore interesting to note the synthesis of Berio's, Stravinsky's and Andriessen's outlooks in the statement that opens the chapter 'On Influence' in *The Apollonian Clockwork*: 'Stravinsky's influence can be seen rather in a specific *attitude* towards already existing musical material. This attitude can best be described as the (historical) realisation that music is about other music'.<sup>23</sup> Influence is a theme that recurs throughout the book, raising questions about whether Andriessen's refusal of the term's use to Adlington should be viewed cautiously. Yet while Andriessen uses the term, it is carefully constructed to imply a critical relationship with the influential object, as well as the individuality of that bond. The authors reject the categorising of influence into stylistic responses, ('no neo-, post-, or -ism'), and refer to what could almost be called a Bloomian notion of influence, were it

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<sup>22</sup> Eco explains that a work of art 'is a complete and *closed* form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself' (Eco, *The Open Work*, p. 3). He also cites Berio as presenting a particular category of open work: 'it is obvious that works like those of Berio and Stockhausen are "open" in a far more tangible sense' (*ibid.*).

<sup>23</sup> 'On Influence', in Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 97–101 (p. 100). While it is made clear in the preface to this book that the content is a result of collaboration throughout, Andriessen's name will be used in place of 'the authors' or 'Andriessen and Schönberger' for the sake of clarity.

not for a complete lack of anxiety: 'influence inspired by misunderstanding, the deliberate distortion, the good wrong conclusion'.<sup>24</sup>

As well as the numerous allusions throughout the book to how Stravinsky has influenced Andriessen's own thinking, Stravinsky's influence on his contemporaries (and vice-versa) is also explored. 'Monsieur, le pauvre Satie' examines the contact between Stravinsky and Satie, suggesting links between *L'Histoire du soldat* and *Le Piège de Méduse*, as well as considering the importance of Satie's music. This chapter is illuminating for a number of reasons. Firstly, the chapter challenges Stravinsky's denial of any connection between the two works: 'twice Stravinsky publicly denied knowing the piece, though by 1918 he had been a friend of Satie for some time and had even dedicated the 'Waltz' from the *Three Easy Pieces* for piano duet to him in 1917'.<sup>25</sup> Andriessen's willingness to challenge the autonomous position of his precursors seems to undermine any attempt he might make to establish a similar position, and betrays a belief in the existence of influence. Secondly, he draws attention to *Sports et divertissements* (1914): 'a series of piano pieces and at the same time an *objet d'art*. The music, printed in facsimile, is encircled with texts and drawings'.<sup>26</sup> In doing so, he also describes his own *Souvenirs d'enfance* (see below), an act that adds a further labyrinthine dimension to an already multifaceted work.

Finally, he discusses *Socrate* (1919) arguing that 'all "white", minimal, and repetitive music is potentially in *Socrate*. Little occurs in the music, and absolutely nothing occurs in the piano piece *Vexations* (c. 1895). But this nothingness can go on for twenty-one hours'.<sup>27</sup> This reference to minimalism clouds the direct comparisons that are often made between Andriessen and American minimal music, particularly when he adds that 'compared to this, Philip Glass is a composer of *Humoresken* and *Albumblätter*'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 'The New Renewed', in Andriessen and Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork*, pp. 3–6 (p. 6).

<sup>25</sup> 'Monsieur, le pauvre Satie', in Andriessen and Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork*, pp. 139–141 (p. 139).

<sup>26</sup> 'Monsieur, le pauvre Satie', in *The Apollonian Clockwork*, p. 140.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

While Mahoney suggests that by incorporating American minimalism into his musical vocabulary, Andriessen 'made a somersault from modernism to post-modernism',<sup>29</sup> Andriessen's own comments on Satie signal a need to be cautious of making simple binary divisions between modernist/serial and postmodern/minimalist. In fact the latter part of Mahoney's comment provides the greater indication of an alignment with postmodern concerns, when he states that 'along the way, [Andriessen] has devoured many other sub-genres, from musique concrete to electronic, to jazz and rock. However, the best Andriessen pieces are a highly personal, aggressive combination of all his influences.'<sup>30</sup> This combinatory approach; the attitude which makes Satie as 'close' as Glass; the constant commentary that Andriessen engages in, in both his writing and his music: these are reflections of an attitude that engages critically with the 'depthlessness' of postmodernity. In doing so, Andriessen emphasises his location within a network of associations particular to his background and tastes, pointing to a more 'local' narrative than would an attempt to locate himself within broad (and generalised) movements.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, the equal status he accords to all of these sources indicates a genuinely plural (rather than proprietary) relationship with other musics of both his own time and (ever present) history. For Andriessen, 'influence' is not the linear process of inheritance, but a flexible, interactive engagement with whatever crosses his path. Projects such as *The Apollonian Clockwork* serve as signposts to some of the influential figures that he enters into a dialogue with through his music, but ultimately, it is the interaction of these sources with Andriessen's own music that serves as his critical arena. This

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<sup>29</sup> John O'Mahoney, 'Profile: Louis Andriessen', *Guardian*, Saturday Pages (28 September 2002), p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that the strong association Andriessen now has with American minimalism has led to some criticism from his early collaborators. Schat, a co-composer of *Reconstructie*, calls Andriessen's own influence on a younger generation of Dutch composers 'a symptom of stagnation in Dutch composition' (Peter Schat in O'Mahoney, 'Profile: Louis Andriessen', p. 20). It is likely that some of this hostility stems from Schat's aversion to minimalism: 'I never believed in it, from Terry Riley's first album on. I feel that all mechanistic principles should be outlawed. There are enough conveyor belts in the world. Now they're running them on the rails of tonality, with a dash of mysticism...' (Rudy Koopmans, 'On Music and Politics—Activism of Five Dutch Composers: Louis Andriessen, Reinbert De Leeuw, Misha Mengelberg, Peter Schat, Jan van Vlijman', *Keynotes 4*: ii (1976), 19–36 (p. 30)).

preoccupation with paying due homage to those he admires is nowhere more explicit than in the early work, *Souvenirs d'enfance* (1966). The outline that follows demonstrates not only Andriessen's concern with the question of influence, but also engages directly with the notion of 'originality', both stylistically and on a more direct level through the means of musical and textual quotation of other composers. *Souvenirs*, therefore, also anticipates the ideas of style and plurality that will be explored in the sections that follow this interlude.



## 7.2(a) *Souvenirs d'enfance*

*Souvenirs d'enfance*, while dated 1966, actually represents almost a decade of Andriessen's previous music. Reminiscent of Duchamp's box works, *Souvenirs* functions as a collection of memorabilia, notes and 'souvenirs' of works from 1954–1965. Andriessen states that *Souvenirs* tried to 'make all areas of music contemporary',<sup>32</sup> but the work is more than simply a collage of influences and stylistic pastiche. Since the work is little-known and the boxes difficult to locate, a detailed description and analysis of the works' constituent parts is necessary.<sup>33</sup>

*Souvenirs* is contained in a small, pink, A4 box. The box contains loose pages (mostly A4, some smaller), and inside the lid of the box is a list which details the musical contents. Each item on the list includes a brief (often satirical) comment on, or description of, the piece, and is ordered roughly chronologically in relation to both twentieth-century music history and Andriessen's own compositional path up to 1965. Before any scores are presented, however, a series of pages deliver a wide range of reproductions: a photograph (probably of Andriessen and his father); two letters from publishers (Schott and Boosey & Hawkes) authorising the reproduction of excerpts from Stravinsky's music; a competition to spot the sources of these excerpts;<sup>34</sup> extracts from Andriessen's correspondence to family, friends and other musicians (much of it forming a piecemeal biography); an interview given by Andriessen; a funeral card; a

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<sup>32</sup> Andriessen quoted in Adlington, *De Staat*, p. 9 (Original source: 'De tijd in tegenspraak', *De Gids* 8 (1968), 178–81, (p. 179)).

<sup>33</sup> It is difficult to describe *Souvenirs* in its entirety as a 'score', since any score-like components of the work are presented as fragments: even the pieces which appear in their entirety are interrupted by cartoons, fragments of other works, or in interrupted pagination. Although the work's rarity-assessment is based on UK availability (COPAC lists only one copy available for public consultation, in the British Library), Everett's description of the *Souvenirs* suggests that the work is also rare in the US. She describes *Souvenirs* as a 'collage work' for two pianos, with 'three blank pages for the pianist to compose out their own music' (Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 46), probably a reference to *As You Like It*, described below. Of course, having seen only one copy, it cannot be ruled out that *Souvenirs* exists in multiple and various formats, since this could be compatible with its conceptual basis. However, I suspect that in reality Everett's description is based on some secondary source which gives a confused impression of the work.

<sup>34</sup> Open only to amateurs, till the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1969. The specified prize, for someone who could correctly identify each quotation and its source, was book tokens.

newspaper frontpage from a few months prior to the outbreak of the Second World War;<sup>35</sup> and several pages of quotes. Quotes from Stravinsky (about the need to respect for composers who are influential), and Ives (including 'there can be nothing *exclusive* about a substantial art') appear on small clips of paper on top of all the loose pages; then, at the end of the pre-score paraphernalia, an A4 page is filled with alternating quotes from Messiaen, Cage, Satie, Ives and Don Cherry,<sup>36</sup> ending with a biography of Stravinsky which is cut off mid-sentence. The overall impression of this collection of extra-musical materials is one of summary: a set of signposts to those aspects of Andriessen's musical and personal development that he considers significant. Yet a sense of fragmentation is also strong; one encounters a collection of puzzle pieces detached from the usual 'picture'.<sup>37</sup> These somewhat contradictory sensations (Andriessen seems to simultaneously lay bare and opacify his history) set up a paradoxical framework that chimes with his later 'double meaning' notions of irony, and already points to a dialectical concern with quotation and conceptual thought.

The musical content of the box is equally fragmented. The box's title also heads the first item in slightly modified form (*Souvenirs de mon enfance*, placing the emphasis on the personal and particular), carrying the subtitle: '(Souvenirs 1965 voor twee music:)', and lists a set of instructions for performance, arranged by duration, asking a pianist to play records and show photographs. In the lid's works list, *Souvenirs* is listed as the final item, and carries the explanation: 'apart from the complete pieces *Souvenirs de mon enfance* also includes fragments of compositions of myself and others'. It appears from this statement that this first set of instructions acts as both a presentation of

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<sup>35</sup> 'Hitler verdedigt zijn steun aan Franco' [Hitler defends his support for Franco], *De Telegraaf*, 6 June 1939. Andriessen has spoken of his memories of German occupation during the war, and attributes it to his (and his father's) preference for French modernism.

<sup>36</sup> There is a single quote from both Messiaen and Don Cherry, two from Ives, and six each from Cage and Satie.

<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that what is also missing is any 'contents' that might formally order the material. While the musical content is listed, the boxed material does not always correspond to the same order. This raises two questions: firstly, whether any order is intended (or is it, in fact, supposed to represent in its entirety a dialectical engagement with the notion of Eco's open work), and secondly, if an order was envisaged, do the publicly available boxes indicate what this order is (i.e., has the original order been preserved in several examples of *Souvenirs*)?

these fragments and as an analogy for the overall concept of the box. Furthermore, it appears to comprise one half of this component (if one infers that the untitled final pages are the remainder), and acts as a frame to the other musical content: not only is this an elegant metaphor for the conceptual basis of the work, but it reinforces Andriessen's insistence that all music has to be understood in relation to the other music that surrounds it.

Following this list of activities, the first conventional score appears. *Nocturne* covers three pages, and is accurately described by Andriessen as 'a jewel in Fauré style': a straightforward imitation of his idiom. At the close of the piece, a cartoon and title announce the opening bars of the *Ricercare*, but instead of continuing, the next page presents the *Allegro marcato*. This is an octatonic piece, described by Andriessen as 'an example of How Not to Compose'. Beneath the title on the score, Andriessen has commented: 'the composer advises the pianist NOT to play the next piece, nor any of the following fragments of octatonic nonsense'.<sup>38</sup> The score covers three pages, with the final page indicating a *dal segno al fine*, accompanied by the note: 'Recapitulation: exact repetition of expositions (♩ to ♩) (as usual in this small talk music style)'. This is followed by *Rondo op. 1*, simply dated on the lid to 1954. The score begins as a fairly conventional seeming piano piece, until the second page reveals a contrastingly sparse piano part, accompanied by an *fff* dynamic and the instruction to 'stomp with right foot' in time with the music's pulse.<sup>39</sup> This is followed by the remainder of the *Ricercare*, although in a somewhat confused order (not until the fourth page is the earlier fragment continued). The contents lists *Ricercare* as a 'a piece in rigid dodecaphonic style, to be studied and to be analysed', and on the 5<sup>th</sup> system of the 5<sup>th</sup> page carries the cynical instruction, 'appassionatahahaha': a rather direct comment on the restrictive light in which Andriessen views this style.

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<sup>38</sup> It is possible that the placement of the *Ricercare's* title in advance of this work acts as an additional suggestion to skip this work, but it is equally likely to simply be part of the overall fragmentation of the box.

<sup>39</sup> Andriessen has spoken in various interviews about his tendency to compose at the piano and about 'wild improvisations' inspired by the jazz that his older brother, Juriaan, had introduced him to upon returning from the States. It is possible that this section is a rather playful, caricatured representation of these occasions. Incidentally, 1954 is also the year of Ives' death.

*Etude pour les timbres* was written for Andriessen's final assessment at the Hague Royal Conservatory in the Spring of 1962, and is an example of what the contents lists as 'free dodecaphony'. It is a straight reproduction, without comment, and presumably acts as a symbol of his formal musical education. This is followed by *Blokken*, a graphic score depicting a series of blocks of varying shapes and sizes along a staff. Detailed instructions on how to interpret the symbols are included and it is described as the 'logical sequel to *Registers*'.<sup>40</sup> The last piece to appear is *As You Like It*: three pages of notes described in the contents as more of a toolbox than a piece ('with the help of these you could make your own composition(s)'). On the score itself, the comment reads, 'play it fast; or slow; or mixed, play it Schoenberg or Feldman or Boulez or whatever you like'. As well as demonstrating eclectic tastes, *As You Like It* also demonstrates a certain openness to the idea of Andriessen's own work being borrowed and recomposed in the way that he does with others.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the work again demands a significant degree of improvisation: this sense of freedom and play pervades the entirety of *Souvenirs*.

Finally, three pages at the end begin with a heading 'Stravinsky'. This seems to combine elements of styles from the previous pieces (and possibly the majority of the quotations referred to on the earlier competition), and might be viewed as a comment on Stravinskian eclecticism. Just as the pages of written quotations are abruptly cut short, the music tails off, with no double barline to close the work. Much can be made of this: a statement about moving beyond these 'souvenirs'? An incomplete end that

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<sup>40</sup> *Registers* is a 1963 piano work that combines notation and graphic elements to allow for improvisatory sections. It is interesting to note that *Blokken* also bears a visual resemblance to Andriessen's sketches for later works, where he blocks out regions of sound along a predetermined timeline. *Blokken*, therefore, may be an early indication of his concern for large formal, timbral and textural structures ahead of the details of content.

<sup>41</sup> Of course, this work also shares its title with Shakespeare's play, which contains the famous stanza, 'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances; / And one man in his time plays many parts, / His acts being seven ages' (William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (London; New York: Hamlyn, 1958), pp. 209–233 (ll. 7. p. 218)). Any connection to this would be purely speculative, but the exposition that follows on the unfolding of life's stages does chime with the overall concept of *Souvenirs*.

diverts a reader (certainly on first encounter) to check back for a page out of order; prompting a cyclical experience of the work?<sup>42</sup> Or a closing homage to the idol of a young composer? The only thing that can be said with any certainty about *Souvenirs* is that interpretation of its contents remains open: it is an artefact that demands consideration and comment. *Souvenirs* is certainly playful, and in places, parodic. There is definitely a sense in which Andriessen pays homage to his sources of influence, but he also sets up the systems and styles that he finds outdated or restrictive for gentle ridicule. A sense of improvisation and openness is strong, but above all, one is left with an impression of a young composer trying to come to terms with the social and cultural context of his music, and the quantity of styles and compositional processes which are available. In this respect, *Souvenirs* acts as an anchor for many of the ideas (conceptual, social and musical) that Andriessen was to develop in later years.

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<sup>42</sup> Of course in performance, the experience of a listener would be different, although there would be various ways of presenting (or not) the textual elements of the box and thus communicating similar ideas.

## Style

Andriessen has typically been reluctant to have his music assigned to a certain style, and Adlington identifies a 'long-established interest in evading singular stylistic affiliations'.<sup>43</sup> However, there are characteristics of Andriessen's music that make it identifiable as just that: a certain grittiness of instrumentation and articulation; repetitive yet constantly shifting patterns that are distinguished by their chromaticised content; strong basslines that give dynamism (although not always harmonic clarity) to the music. Yet these markers are interspersed with quotation and allusion to other composers and styles, to the point where assigning a category to the overall result (such as minimalist, maximalist, or even the looser avant-garde) necessarily overlooks elements of the final impression. Potter attributes this difficulty to the postmodern 'flattening out' of historical sources, suggesting that 'by opening up the past once more, composers raised again the question of style.' But he continues,

Or did they? If composers such as Berio and Andriessen posed a question about style in the music they wrote in the sixties, perhaps it was not 'What style should I compose in?' but rather 'How important is style anyway?' Or to put it another way 'isn't the approach you have towards your chosen musical material more important than the actual material you choose?'<sup>44</sup>

The question Potter poses is an important one: does the search for stylistic markers become irrelevant when the music itself points to a discourse between a collection of past styles and their treatment within a particular work? Andriessen himself had certainly considered this issue, publishing an article in *De Gids* on the subject of 'styleless-ness' which he later chose for inclusion in his selected writings. Andriessen writes that 'in former times, fragments were interchangeable because there *was* only one style, because everything had the same style, everything belonged to everyone; whereas now it is a case of there being no universal style'.<sup>45</sup> There are two important

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<sup>43</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Keith Potter, 'The Music of Louis Andriessen: Dialectical Double-Dutch?', *Contact* 23 (Winter 1981), 16–22 (p. 17).

<sup>45</sup> Louis Andriessen, 'Mendelssohn, Fizzy Drinks and the Avant-Garde', in *The Art of Stealing Time*, ed. by Mirjam Zegers, trans. by Clare Yates (Tormorden, Lancashire: Arc Music, 2002), pp. 52–56 (first publ. *De Gids* 10 (1966)), p. 53.

points to note here: firstly that it is the use of 'fragments' outside the dominant style that disrupts stylistic unity (as was noted above), and secondly that Andriessen is actually objecting to a 'universal style' rather than style itself. In fact, just as Wilson noted that Ligeti's opposition to categorisation marked a certain dependence on them, it can be seen that Andriessen occupies a dialectical position with the question of style: a position that he calls 'styleless-ness'.<sup>46</sup>

Styleless-ness, then, might be described as the interplay of a variety of styles within the framework of Andriessen's own methods.<sup>47</sup> Referring back to the discussions of minimal style, and particularly Meyer's formulations of style and its various subcategories, it seems clear that the content and formal structure Andriessen contributes to each work fits closely with Meyer's description of idiolect. Yet the inclusion of so much allusion, quotation and dialogue between these various aspects adds a further dimension: the factor that leads Andriessen to his 'styleless' conclusion. In light of this, it might prove fruitful to expand Meyer's categories by adopting Barthes' 'sociolect'. For Barthes, this term makes explicit the network of associations that each idiolect is necessarily a product of: he argues that 'language is always socialised, even at the individual level [...] so the idiolect would appear to be largely an illusion'.<sup>48</sup> The parallels with Andriessen's view of style are clear, particularly when Barthes refers to a possible instance of 'pure idiolect' existing where 'style' is firmly

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<sup>46</sup> Andriessen, 'Mendelssohn, Fizzy Drinks and the Avant-Garde', p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> This framework is an essential part of Andriessen's compositional process, and provides a good example of the way in which modernist devices have not been entirely abandoned, but instead, put to work for his own ends. When asked about his formalising tendencies, Andriessen replies: 'music has always been about counting [...] The advantages of formalism are essential in art. It's fun to play games, but every game needs its rules. So the first step is to think up the rules. My thinking about rational processes has to do with serialism [...] but I also feel part of a great tradition [...] systems are for yourself, and not vice versa. The idea is to make good notes' (Andriessen and Rossum, 'After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath', p. 14). This predilection for systems may also account for some of minimalism's attraction.

<sup>48</sup> Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Hill and Wang: New York, 1995; f.p. 1964) (first trans. to English 1967), p. 21.

located within a specific tradition.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, it would seem useful to adopt 'sociolect' as a term that acknowledges Andriessen's particular form of idiolect: a 'style' that remains identifiably his, while strongly foregrounding (and *containing*) a network of associations and other styles. As Barthes suggests, 'it is sociolects which must today be distinguished and described [...] an ideolectology [...] whose operational concepts would no longer be sign, signifier, signified and connotation but citation, reference, stereotype.'<sup>50</sup> This is precisely what is demanded by Andriessen's music.

### Plurality

As the emphasis on a sociolect and the discussions of influence indicate, Andriessen's plurality is a product of his musical education and background as well as an ongoing concern. Previous discussions of influence have highlighted his immersion in French modernism and Jazz, as well as his fascination with Stravinsky; but his early years as a composer were also peppered with diverse encounters: Andriessen visited Darmstadt in 1963 (where he met Terry Riley), and by the same year one of the co-composers of *Reconstructie*, Mengelberg, was an active member of Fluxus.<sup>51</sup> The following year, in

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<sup>49</sup> Barthes writes,

we shall nevertheless retain from this notion [idiolect] the idea that it can be useful to designate the following realities [...] ii) the 'style' of a writer, although this is always pervaded by certain verbal patterns coming from tradition that is, from the community; iii) finally, we can openly broaden the notion, and define the idiolect as the language of a linguistic community, that is, of a group of persons who all interpret in the same way all linguistic statements: the ideolect would then correspond roughly to what we have attempted to describe elsewhere under the name of 'writing' (Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, p. 21).

Barthes introduces the term 'sociolect' in a later article ('La mythologie aujourd'hui', *Esprit*, (Apr 1971)), presumably in an attempt to distinguish the objections he raises above from the instances in which he accepts the term idiolect. He writes, 'languages are more or less *thick*; certain amongst them, the most social, the most mythical, present an unshakable homogeneity (there is a real force of meaning, a war of meanings): woven with habits and repetitions, with stereotypes, obligatory final causes and key-words, each constitutes an *ideolect*, or more exactly a *sociolect* (a notion to which twenty years ago I gave the name of *writing*)' (Roland Barthes, 'Change the Object Itself: *Mythology Today*', in *Image, Music, Text*, ed./trans. by Stephen Heath (London, Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 165–169 (p. 168).

<sup>50</sup> Barthes, 'Change the Object Itself', p. 168.

<sup>51</sup> See Koopmans, 'On Music and Politics—Activism of Five Dutch Composers', p. 22.



1964, John Tilbury performed Andriessen's piano work *Registers* in Utrecht,<sup>52</sup> no doubt giving him an opportunity to learn about the British Experimental scene. Andriessen himself indicates that the happenings (the 'American counter-culture'<sup>53</sup>), inspired by Cage, were important in Holland in the mid-sixties, as well as being important to him personally.

For Andriessen, a plural, all-encompassing outlook is not only a matter of discovering and exploring these divergent strands of contemporary-classical music, but also the divisions between traditionally distinct spheres of 'high' and 'low' musical life. He emphasises the importance of Frank Zappa's rule that 'all music is usable for whatever purpose we want to use it', insisting that composers 'should not be too shy to make connections'.<sup>54</sup> Offering a challenge to these tacitly acknowledged boundaries is important to Andriessen, who refers to quotation, even in early works such as *Reconstructie* as 'the de-hierarchising of the musical material'.<sup>55</sup> Amongst these early works, *Anachronie I* (1966–7), with its collage of historical styles culminating in strict serial exposition, is often referred to as a rejection of Darmstadt principles. Yet it should not be viewed as a straightforward parody or rejection. Adlington highlights the work as a developmental stage of his assimilating tendencies, suggesting that the subsequent *Contra Tempus* (1968) shows that 'his involvement with the serial avant-garde, rather than being a thing of the past, was now simply one stylistic option among many'.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See 'Chronicle', *Sonorum Speculum* 20 (1964), p. 39. Throughout Part Three, information has been referenced from the 'Chronicle' (an unauthored section of listings) of two consecutive Donemus publications: *Sonorum Speculum* and *Keynotes*. *Sonorum Speculum* runs from Summer 1958, beginning as a biennial publication, but becomes a quarterly publication in 1961. *Key Notes* replaces *Sonorum Speculum* in 1975 (biennial). Publication ceases in 1989 (after 3 years of appearing annually, issues 23 (1986)–25 (1988/9)), but is resumed, in a new format in 1992 (issue 26: 1, now appearing 4 times a year). *Key Notes* ceases publication in 1997.

<sup>53</sup> Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 19. This is also the term that Fink uses to describe the environment that fostered early minimalism, as well as disco, further experimentalism, and experimental rock.

<sup>54</sup> Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 22.

<sup>55</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 39.

<sup>56</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 10.

While the works of the late-sixties could be described as montage pieces (a technique Andriessen sees as a very twentieth-century phenomenon, and 'a consequence of the fragmentation of the world'<sup>57</sup>), the steady assimilation of techniques and styles throughout the seventies alters the way in which such quotations interact with Andriessen's original material, to the point where Trochimczyk describes his works in the eighties as 'the beginning of a period of synthesis'.<sup>58</sup> This synthesis, however, is in evidence throughout much of Andriessen's work in the previous decade, albeit with a more limited range of references within each piece. It is this sense of synthesis that leads March to criticise Everett's imprecision in describing the coda section of *Hoketus* (section E) as 'jazz-influenced'. This wording, March argues, 'risks reinstating the simple binary division ('classical-jazz') that Andriessen's music has rigorously avoided',<sup>59</sup> and his comments highlight the need to emphasise the sense of integration that Andriessen achieves with many of his stylistic allusions.

This emphasis on integration is spelled out by Andriessen when he discusses the use of non-Western music. For him, much of the 'world music' market, and the consequent borrowings by composers, amount to little more than 'a kind of capitalist colonialism'.<sup>60</sup> However, he singles Reich out as 'an elegant example' of a composer who draws upon non-Western influences.<sup>61</sup> Andriessen's views also find a precursor in Berio, who, in a discussion of *Coro* (1975–6) emphasises that he investigated the musical practices of an African tribe 'not because I wanted to transcribe the Banda

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<sup>57</sup> Andriessen, 'Lectures for Young Composers', p. 145. Again, of course, the references to fragmentation recall the postmodern condition and Jameson's thesis that art must react to that fragmentation.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Man and His Music' in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, pp. 47–58 (p. 65).

<sup>59</sup> Daniel March, 'Review: The Music of Louis Andriessen by Yayoi Uno Everett', *Music and Letters*, 90: 3 (August 2009), 516–519, (p. 518).

<sup>60</sup> Andriessen and Cross, 'Composing With Stravinsky', p. 252.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* This observation is interesting when taken alongside Reich's assertions that his research into non-Western musics served as confirmation, rather than the source, of his compositional methods. However, it should not be assumed that the 'other' in a musical sense is a simple division between East and West. Andriessen points out, when discussing the use of Indonesian modes in *De Staat*, that his mother was born in the Dutch-colonised Indonesia, and that Gamelan was present in Dutch culture from the 1920s. He suggests that 'in a way, these distant cultures were also a part of my upbringing and were not exotic at all' (Andriessen in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 76).

Linda's heterophonies for a symphony orchestra or for the piano, but because I wanted to transfer the principle, the idea, into other dimensions of music'.<sup>62</sup> What the comments of both Berio and Andriessen reveal is an interest in according each fragment and each source equal importance, yet ultimately making use of those sources to their own ends. This plural outlook, rather than being an 'anything goes' attitude (the criticism often levelled at postmodernity's pluralism), reflects an engagement with the dynamic opportunities for commentary and critical presentation of a plural environment.

The section that follows traces engagement with multiple influences in *De Stijl* (1984–85). In particular, it shows how a single idea can generate a multitude of compositional choices that then weave through the work in a way that make each and every part of that plurality a point for critical attention. *De Stijl* also provides a good example of the way in which Andriessen's sense of 'stylelessness' can be used to musically articulate the ideas of other individuals while remaining recognisably 'Andriessen's work'.

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<sup>62</sup> Luciano Berio, *Remembering the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 58. Berio explains the Banda Linda's musical practice thus:

in central Africa there is a small, pacific community which we would define as "highly musical", if the members of the community had our notion of music [...] In groups of about forty, the members of the tribe play long wooden pipes, each of which produces a single note. Each note is repeated on a single rhythmic module, with occasional slight variations that do not affect the "block" character of the whole. When all the players blow into their instruments, they produce an altogether new sound—new to western ears. It is both complex and coordinated, something between a cathedral of sound and an implacable musical machine. The playing of the Banda Linda wooden horns is governed by an infrangible principle. There is a pentatonic melody which is not actually played by any one person: its notes are distributed among the players through a register of approximately two octaves. As if by some tacit social agreement, nobody plays the melody as such, yet its nature and its spirit are ever-present at any point in this fabulous sound 'installation' (*ibid.*).

### 3.2(b) *De Stijl*

*De Stijl* is the third part of the larger work *De Materie*. While *De Materie* is sometimes performed in its entirety (it is designed to be a fully staged work, first produced by *Einstein* collaborator Robert Wilson), it is equally common to find a single part being performed as part of a varied programme. *De Materie*, as Andriessen's first large-scale work, has received a large amount of attention from commentators,<sup>63</sup> and a full assessment of its complex design is beyond the scope of this section. However, addressing one aspect of *De Stijl*'s conception—the link to Mondrian—will serve as an example of the way in which Andriessen builds a network of references around his work.

Beirens has called *De Materie* 'a very complex configuration of meaning and possible interpretations',<sup>64</sup> and likened the conceptual approach to Gavin Bryars' methods in *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1969–). Interestingly, while Bryars' work is commonly discussed while making detailed references to sources he uses and the pataphysical<sup>65</sup> connectedness of his references (what Beirens calls 'bringing together a vast quantity of heterogeneous material around one single concept'<sup>66</sup>), explorations of Andriessen's extra-musical references are far more limited (generally to the composers own explanations), and used primarily to explain the formal arrangement of the music.

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<sup>63</sup> See particularly March, 'Beyond Simplicity: Analytical Strategies for Contemporary Music', pp. 125–164, and David Wright, 'Louis Andriessen: Polity, Time, Speed, Substance' *Tempo* 187 (December 1993), 7–13.

<sup>64</sup> Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 292. It has been noted that when fully staged, Robert Wilson's crafting of 'dance, acting, stage design, and lighting develop into independent theatrical codes or semiotic systems without necessarily coalescing into a unified narrative' (Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 116). This would clearly contribute a further dimension to Beirens' possible interpretations, but, although there are some limited lighting and stage directions in parts of the score, there is no commercially available film of the full production. See the section on *Rosa* (p. 277) for further discussion of the implications of this.

<sup>65</sup> Bryars himself makes mention of his interest in pataphysics and the process of 'justification' through obscure connections. His involvement with the organisation began through a growing interest in Duchamp, and by the 1980s he had become the vice president of the musical division.

<sup>66</sup> Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 292.

However, when questioned about the formal proportions of *De Stijl* (based upon Mondrian's painting, *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue*<sup>67</sup>), Andriessen replies that, 'inspiration is something much more profound than that'. He continues to talk about Mondrian, saying:

I was so preoccupied with this man, so full of his ideas—how he thought, what he was doing—that I needed the painting as a sort of homage. Simultaneously, for calculating durations in the music [it] is of very low importance. Yet, it is one of the things that you can talk about; that is the problem. I could also be silent about it, because it does not really matter very much. The best questions are the ones you never hear about; however, when you talk about technical details, you have something to say and write.<sup>68</sup>

While it is likely that there is an element of obfuscation in this rhetoric—a resistance to disassembling the work—Andriessen is also clearly paying homage to Mondrian: indeed, the spoken, boogie-woogie piano section towards the golden section of the piece, inserts Mondrian himself into the heart of the work.<sup>69</sup> For this reason, it seems apt to explore the ideas of this artist that had 'so preoccupied' Andriessen.

Mondrian's work would have been well-known to Andriessen: a Dutch artist, many of whose paintings hung in a gallery round the corner from Andriessen's home (including the one on which *De Stijl* is modelled), and a writer whose essays were still discussed in Andriessen's circles.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Koopmans picks up on Mondrian's 'good ear for identifying the commercial corruption forming a constant threat to jazz',<sup>71</sup> an attitude that must have appealed to Andriessen as he developed his rhetoric of resistance to

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<sup>67</sup> Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue* (1927), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. The clearest explanation of how this was achieved is from the composer himself in the documentary *A Temporary Arrangement with the Sea* (dir. Steve Martland and Peter West), first broadcast BBC, 12 December 1992.

<sup>68</sup> Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 80.

<sup>69</sup> The narrator at this point recites a contemporaneous account of Mondrian, talking of his love of jazz and dancing, and his peculiar manner of speaking (reflected in the stilted rhythmic placement of the text, and enhanced by the syncopation in the piano).

<sup>70</sup> See Rudy Koopmans, 'The Netherlands in the Inter-War Years: Society, Culture and the Arts', *Key Notes* 3: i (1976), 4–9.

<sup>71</sup> Koopmans, 'The Netherlands in the Inter-War Years', p. 6.

both the elitism and institutionalisation of the symphony orchestra and the bland commercialism and ‘distracted engagement’ of much popular music. By contrast, as Adlington points out, Andriessen saw jazz as ‘stimulating and provocative in its attitude to performance’:<sup>72</sup> an attitude that must have made Mondrian’s views appealing.

To see how these views permeate *De Stijl* (named of course after the magazine and school of artists of which Mondrian was a founder) one can first turn to the instrumentation of the work. It is scored for a distinctly hard, brassy-sounding, amplified ensemble (horns, saxophones and a battery of percussion dominate, while the inclusion of electric guitar and bass, synthesizers and a chorus of singers instructed to sing sans vibrato (as in jazz or pop)), that lends the ensemble a combinatory, big band/rock band sound. Trochimczyk suggests that the combined forces of Schoenberg and Asko Ensembles (from whom players were originally drawn) create a unique new sound that provides the basis for ‘a new symphony orchestra’:<sup>73</sup> a direct challenge to the institution. Turning then to Mondrian’s writing, we find that this instrumentation is a fitting start for homage to the artist. While famous for his advocacy of ‘Neoplastic’ art, Mondrian intended his ideas to be applied in all cultural fields. In music, he argues that Neoplasticism must challenge the orthodoxies and hierarchies of music-making to avoid stagnation in all musical genres. He writes, ‘the “jazzband” confronts the “concert orchestra”. Automatically *from this opposition, Neo-Plastic music will arise.*’<sup>74</sup> It is easy to see how the instrumentation of *De Stijl* might form a ‘confrontation’ between these two mediums: not only through the sounds themselves, but also through the means of production: the players are arranged in more of a ‘jazzband’ formation (a series of semicircles) but the players all play from parts that contain no freedom for improvisation (just as in an orchestra).

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<sup>72</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 34.

<sup>73</sup> ‘The Man and His Music’ in Trochimczyk, p. 51.

<sup>74</sup> Piet Mondrian, ‘Neo-Plasticism: Its Realisation in Music and in Future Theatre’, in Harry Holtzman & Martin S. James (eds), *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (New York: Ad Capo Press, 1993), pp. 157–163 (first publ. ‘Neo-Plasticism (The New Plastic) and its (their) Realisation in Music’ (‘Het Neo-Plasticism [De Nieuwe Belding] en zijn [hare] realise ring in de muzieker’), *De Stijl* (Jan/Feb 1922)), p. 157 [his italics].

As Mondrian's essay progresses, still more correlations emerge as the artist describes his vision for a neoplastic music:

the new music must first achieve the *means of reproducing sound and noise* which as much as possible will no longer have the *round or closed* character of form but, on the contrary, will have the character of the *straight and unlimited*. [The limitation of sound] will be "strengthened" by abrupt interruption, just as in painting the limit of a colour is strengthened by the straight line. This interruption never becomes the "silence" of the old music. One sound is directly followed by another, which, being its "contrary", is its real opposition.<sup>75</sup>

Andriessen's music reflects these demands in Stravinskian juxtapositions of contrasting sections and various musical manifestations of 'straight and unlimited': gradually swelling passages over propulsive bass lines; sudden triggering of complex canons; the contrasting legato lines of the singers or suspended brass chords that punctuate the texture, and sudden bursts of unison playing. In addition, of course, there is the most significant interruption of the piece: the introduction of the upright piano, concealed behind the audience, and the accompanying narration. While *De Materie* was conceived as fully staged opus, this section is one of the few (and only in *De Still*) to carry detailed instructions on the dramatic presentation. At some point around figure 29 (depending on the dimensions of the hall) the speaker is instructed to begin walking slowly from the back of the audience with one hand held in the air. Using lasers and mirrors, she appears to draw out a line of light behind her, and at the point where she reaches the front of the hall and the boogie-woogie piano begins to play, a perpendicular line appears, representing the 'perfect line' that the chorus sings about.<sup>76</sup>

All of these elements act as signposts to Mondrian, without (excepting the laser 'T') making those references explicit. The result is that via the more obvious markers such

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<sup>75</sup> Mondrian, 'Neo-Plasticism', p. 161. Incidentally, Andriessen was not the first European composer to have a somewhat abstract link to Mondrian. Virginia Anderson notes that in Britain, 'systemic music took its processes and its name directly from British systems art, which itself was influenced by Constructivist art and the movement called De Stijl. The systems group of artists was co-founded in 1969' (Anderson, "'Just the Job for that Lazy Sunday Afternoon'", p. 2).

<sup>76</sup> The text is taken from a book by Dr Schoenmaekers, whose theory of the 'perfect line' influenced Mondrian. See the score prelims for full details.

as the programme note and the speaker's movements, audiences are invited to delve deeper into Mondrian's ideas as they reconstruct the networks of conceptual thought that surround the work itself. Just as Andriessen speaks of music about music, and the attention it directs back to the music that has gone before, the music of *De Stijl* is about Mondrian (in just one of its multifaceted parts, for it is also 'about' many other ideas that are weave through this network of a score), and it likewise directs the listener towards him. Trochimczyk has likened the 'conceptual complexity' of *De Materie* to Berio's *Sinfonia*, identifying Berio's influence in the attitude Andriessen takes to his material and the 'tendency to multiply references and quotations'.<sup>77</sup> What works such as *De Materie* demonstrate is the revelry of the multiple, plural, network, and the postmodern ease with which such references are incorporated.

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<sup>77</sup> 'Andriessen and the Art of Composing' in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 280.



### Andriessen's minimalism

While Andriessen is often referred to as a minimalist composer,<sup>78</sup> there are as many who would challenge the label. Bernard, for example, argues against the categorisation because he 'acquired the style at second hand'.<sup>79</sup> However, there is no doubt that during the period in which commentators begin to identify minimalist traits in Andriessen's music (from the early 1970s), the composer had numerous opportunities to explore American minimalism directly.

A conceptual introduction to minimalism had preceded the music through a 'Minimal Art' exhibition at the Hague Municipal Museum (April–May 1968), which Blok describes as 'the first comprehensive showing of these artists as a separate group' in the Netherlands.<sup>80</sup> It is also likely that around a year later, Andriessen heard Rzewski's *Les Moutons de Panurge* (1969), having met the composer in Berlin in 1964 and maintained contact. Trochimczyk says that Andriessen first heard *In C* in 1970 (even though he had met Riley at Darmstadt in 1963), and met Reich in 1971, having already listened to recordings of his early works.<sup>81</sup> Reich himself slightly contradicts this, dating his ensemble's first visit to Holland to 1972, but describes Andriessen as 'very enthusiastic and supportive' of the music they performed (*Piano Phase*, *Drumming*, and *Four Organs*). Reich also suggests that he was a direct source of inspiration for the formation of Hocketus, having talked about hockets during the composition of *Four Organs*: 'he took the kinds of things I was interested in, along with his own abiding love of Stravinsky, and put them together in his own way'.<sup>82</sup> By 1976, programming decisions suggest that minimalism could attract an audience in the Netherlands, with the 29<sup>th</sup> Holland Festival seeing Reich return, giving his first performances in

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<sup>78</sup> Although often coupled with adjectives such as 'hard-line', 'abrasive', 'energetic'. He is also called a Maximalist, and occasionally, consigned to the nebulous catch-all 'post-minimalist'.

<sup>79</sup> Bernard, 'Theory, Analysis, and the "Problem" of Minimal Music', p. 262.

<sup>80</sup> C. Blok, 'Minimal Art in the Hague', *Art International* XII: 5 (May 15, 1968), 18–24 (p. 18). The ten exhibitors were LeWitt, Flavin, Andre, Smithson, Tony Smith, Bladen, Grovesnor, Morris, Judd and Steiner.

<sup>81</sup> Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 227.

Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague.<sup>83</sup> In the same year, the Residentie Orchestra (The Hague) performed *In C* as part of their series of twentieth-century-music concerts.<sup>84</sup>

Beirens argues that Andriessen's 'truly minimalist' works date from the same period as these performances. He includes only works written between 1971 and 1980, and lists *Volkslied* (1971); *De Volharding* (1972); *Workers Union* (1974); *De Staat* (1972-76); *Hoketus* (1976); *Symfonie voor losse snaren* (1978); *Mausoleum* (1979), and *De Tijd* (1980-81), adding that 'of these pieces *De Volharding*, *Hoketus* and *De Staat* are considered prototypes of Louis Andriessen's minimalist style'.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, Beirens' selection of these three works and the omission of *Volkslied* and *Workers Union* points to a division between those that demonstrate so-called 'people process', and those that do not. While *Hoketus* allows for variable repeat marks, the work is much closer in construction (and the score much closer in appearance) to something by Reich or Glass than the single lines and sets of instructions of the earlier works (more reminiscent of Riley or Rzewski<sup>86</sup>). This separation also indicates a move from the conceptual exploration of unisons and repetition to the more rigorous, mechanical characteristics

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<sup>83</sup> *Keynotes 4: ii* (1976), p. 47. The 29<sup>th</sup> Holland Festival (1–23 June 1976) took American music as its central theme, 'in connection with the bicentennial of the American Revolution' (See *Keynotes 3: i* (1976), pp. 78–79).

<sup>84</sup> See *Keynotes 3: i* (1976), pp. 78–79.

<sup>85</sup> Beirens, *The Identity of European Minimal Music*, p. 181.

<sup>86</sup> Adlington highlights the stronger similarities between Andriessen's brand of minimalism and Rzewski's *Les Moutons de Panurge* (1969), arguing that 'Rzewski's piece also has characteristics not found in other early American minimalism' (Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 42). These characteristics include the use of non-diatonic modes, persistently loud dynamics, and an interest in unanimity: 'in instructing the performers to "never stop or falter... stay together as long as you can", it provides a direct forerunner to Andriessen's conception of ensemble performance as collective perseverance' (*ibid.*). Adlington also points out the punning title of Rzewski's work ("Panurge's sheep" is a derogatory expression used in France for people who unthinkingly follow their leader' (*ibid.*, p. 43)), adding a further socio-political association to the work that is frequently absent from the more abstract creations of his American counterparts. The difference in approach between American and European minimalists has not only been noticed retrospectively. In a review of Glass' *Music with Changing Parts*, Johnson comments that Glass' method, while consistent, is 'actually rather whimsical'; citing Rzewski and Andriessen as composers who demonstrate 'much greater rigour' (Tom Johnson, 'Maximalism on the Beach: Philip Glass', in *The Voice of New Music*, pp. 467–469 (first publ. 'Philip Glass: Maximalism on the Beach', *Village Voice* (February 25–March 3, 1981)), p. 468).

of what has been described in Part Two as the minimalist 'style' (and subsequently, the source of a minimalist code). Despite Beirens' strict limitations on the extent of Andriessen's minimalist works, the tag has been applied over a far greater span of Andriessen's output. Beirens argues that this is due to the fact that Andriessen 'acquired his fame and established his own recognisable stylistic "voice" with his minimal music-related compositions', but suggests that it may 'be preferable to consider these [later] works as essentially postminimalist'.<sup>87</sup> This shift in characterisation points not only to a move away from the 'stricter' minimalism of his works in the seventies, but also to his assimilation of minimalism as a code to be synthesised and incorporated alongside other references in later works.

Adlington also considers *De Volharding* the work that 'first unambiguously announced Andriessen's involvement with minimalism',<sup>88</sup> but again, like Beirens, seeks to describe 'significant differences' between Andriessen's music and his American counterparts. Adlington attributes this distance to a different approach to compositional process; evidence, he argues of Andriessen's 'ideological interest in collective unanimity dictating the periodic overriding of Rileyesque individual freedom'.<sup>89</sup> Yet, as Beirens' distinction shows, others see unanimity as concordant with Riley's emphasis on performer choice.<sup>90</sup> Cross, too, finds the distinguishing feature of Andriessen's minimalism to be the synthesis of the musicians' role into the minimalist model, 'in contrast to the clinical, clean objectivity of much American minimalism'.<sup>91</sup> Potter also concurs with the identification of *De Volharding* as Andriessen's first minimalist work,

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<sup>87</sup> Beirens, *The Identity of European Minimal Music*, p. 181. Beirens argues that 'after *De Materie*, the traces of minimalist techniques, systematic repetition and other obvious characteristics become rather scarce. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that the composer of *TAO* (1996) and *De Tijd or Facing Death* (1991) and *On Jimmy Yancey* (1973) is one and the same' (*ibid.*).

<sup>88</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>90</sup> Potter also points to the concern for 'people process' that Andriessen demonstrates, saying, 'it is significant that Terry Riley's *In C* is the American minimalist piece that he considers to have influenced him most' (Keith Potter, 'The Music of Louis Andriessen', p. 18). Specifically discussing *De Staat*, Andriessen has also said that he thinks it contains 'more Riley (*In C*) than Reich' (Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 152).

<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, p. 179.

demonstrating 'a vigorous, even abrasive, use of repetitive techniques'.<sup>92</sup> Yet he also notes that Andriessen suggests that *Hoketus* and *De Staat* demonstrate an 'approach to minimalism [that] may be compared to his approach to total serialism in *Séries*'.<sup>93</sup> What Andriessen would seem to mean by this, is that he felt it necessary to undergo a process of strict imitation—a rigorous adherence to the rules of a style—before he felt able to synthesise selected elements into his own compositional spectrum.<sup>94</sup>

This synthesis results in a form of minimalism that provides a marked distinction from that of his American counterparts, frequently remarked upon by commentators. Wright contrasts American minimalist works that 'glide by in a coating of New Age anodyne' against Andriessen's 'gritty surfaces', 'rational structures', and 'striking musical credibility',<sup>95</sup> while Andriessen himself suggests that 'much more earthy and chromatic material', and a 'somewhat more outspoken and aggressive' attitude sets him apart.<sup>96</sup> Yet it should be noted that while the rhythmic ferocity and disruptive chromaticism of Andriessen's work challenges many of the presumptions about minimalism's 'accessible', easy-listening gloss, it does not undermine the principles of minimal ideology itself. Rather, as Adlington argues with regard to *De Staat*, Andriessen creates 'a set of positions in relation to minimalism, ranging from faithful homage to antagonistic refutation'.<sup>97</sup> This range of positions mirrors Andriessen's own responses to the wide variety of musics that fall under the minimalist umbrella:

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<sup>92</sup> Keith Potter, 'The Music of Louis Andriessen', p. 18.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Elsewhere, Andriessen has spoken of the need to carry out what might be viewed as exercises in a particular style: 'sometimes in order to move forwards you have to simplify things, so that something new can be born.' (Louis Andriessen and Gavin Thomas, 'Life Downtown', *Musical Times*, 135: 1813 (March 1994), 138–141 (p. 141)).

<sup>95</sup> Wright, 'Louis Andriessen: Polity, Time, Speed, Substance', p. 13.

<sup>96</sup> Enright, 'Notes Towards Anarchy' p. 36. It would seem that this 'aggression' is not merely a rhetorical invention of Andriessen's. In a San Francisco performance of *De Staat*, John Adams (conducting) cut a 65-bar section containing some of the most challenging music in terms of rhythmic and chromatic complexity. Andriessen commented that 'he took out the sextuplets so as not to worry the audience too much [...] "*De Staat* explained for Yuppies" you might say!' (Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 139).

<sup>97</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 72.

homage is due to composers such as Reich ('whom I esteem very highly', he says), but Andriessen rails against 'all the minor people who interpret this as nice background music for television advertisement'.<sup>98</sup> The separation of Andriessen's minimalist devices from this more commercial angle is an important one, and Adlington stresses that although the 'immediacy and physicality that connected it to pop' may have proved attractive to a composer who sought to remove traditional elitist barriers to classical-music consumption, Andriessen 'retained a conceptualist element that helped to distinguish it from the world of commercial music—a crucial distinction for a leftist composer hostile to the corporate world.'<sup>99</sup>

Yet at the same time, it is clear that the Dutch cultural landscape demanded more than a simple opposition to either of these poles. In an interview for *Keynotes* with Andriessen, de Leeuw and Mengelberg, on the occasion of a tour by Glass, de Leeuw discusses the contrasts between Glass' work and Andriessen's *De Volharding*. He calls Glass' music 'so purely esthetic'; music that 'belongs in the art galleries', and contrasts it with Andriessen's concern for the production and consumption of his work through *De Volharding*'s eclectic performance practices. He argues that the 'difference in sound is not the most significant one', but that a 'more total, more absolute difference—the difference between an art gallery and the popular Amsterdam Carré Theatre',<sup>100</sup> is the key to understanding the difference between these types of minimalism. De Leeuw's distinction could of course also be summarised as the earlier, avant-garde minimalist impulse, confined to the art galleries and theoretically-oriented audiences versus the more flexible, postmodern manifestation of minimalism that moved beyond the brief period of stylistic coherence that became the basis of its characterisation.

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<sup>98</sup> Enright, 'Notes Towards Anarchy', p. 36.

<sup>99</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 24. Of course, there are many areas that can be explored in relation to Andriessen's anti-capitalist political background versus his dependence on state subsidy and income from his commercially recorded and published works. One may also question the ideological assumptions of all musical projects that seek to impose some form of 'authentic' popular culture onto a group that is happy to consume the mass culture marketed by large corporations. Suffice to say that within the limits of this study, such questions provide an elegant example of the way in which the cultural dominant of late capitalism allows such reactionary projects to thrive *within* rather than against the postmodern condition.

<sup>100</sup> Koopmans, 'On Music and Politics—Activism of Five Dutch Composers', p. 35.

The desire to mark his separation from the conveyor-belt-consumerism of mass culture also led Andriessen to consider the nature of repetition within his works, and results in an 'almost-repetition'<sup>101</sup> which marks a concrete distinction between Andriessen's minimalism and that of his contemporaries. Andriessen has remarked that 'quite early on, I had the feeling that the repeat signs of minimalism could result in a peculiar sort of automatism',<sup>102</sup> and his solution to avoiding this automatism (something for which his fellow *Reconstructie* collaborator Schat has vociferously criticised minimalism) was to avoid the use of repeat signs. After *De Staat*, Andriessen uses repeat marks very rarely, stating that he likes 'the dialectical idea of a continuous sonority that always changes'.<sup>103</sup> This decision is one of the strongest indications that Andriessen has moved beyond any straightforward adoption of the minimalist style. While the synthesis of repetitive elements and formal structures suggest the large-scale, gradual developments of minimalism, his works actually contain far more than the rigorous expansion of a given process.

By weaving networks of reference and quotation into an idiom based on certain minimalist characteristics, Andriessen creates a permanent sense of dialogue between the abstraction of minimalism's conceptual underpinnings and the reality of its presentation. As Wright argues, Andriessen has been able to 'refurbish the "American" repetitive idiom with the "European" concern for an internal musical opposition which yet contains the potential for an ultimate synthesis'.<sup>104</sup> This synthesis is the bringing together of a collection of codes—ironic quotation, Stravinskian form, minimalist process—into a self-conscious response to the postmodern condition.

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<sup>101</sup> Not unlike the not-not-unisons he identifies in Stravinsky. See the next section, Unison (pp. 261–263) for further details.

<sup>102</sup> Andriessen and Rossum, 'After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath', p. 14.

<sup>103</sup> Andriessen, 'Lectures for Young Composers', p. 132. In another interview Andriessen explains that 'in *Mausoleum* there are almost no repetition marks, and in *De Tijd* I decided to write something that would sound like a non-developmental piece [...] I decided already at a preliminary stage not to use any repetition marks, but to make it sound like there's a lot of repetition; that means that every bar is different from the bar before' (Andriessen and Thomas, 'Life Downtown', p. 141).

<sup>104</sup> Wright, 'Louis Andriessen: Polity, Time, Speed, Substance', p. 8.

## Unison

Unison has been a central feature of Andriessen's work since early in his career. While pieces such as *Workers Union* depend upon (the goal of) strict unison, other works feature rhythmic unison, while works such as *Melodie* for recorder and piano (1974) use what Adlington describes as an 'examination of near-unison playing'.<sup>105</sup> The use of the word 'examination' is significant, since unison in Andriessen's music is often accompanied by a sense of critical engagement with the concept: so *Workers Union*, for example, challenges the players' skills as they battle to remain together through a torrent of notes. While Adlington considers the minimal qualities *Melodie* might demonstrate, he concludes that the use of unison reflects a 'kind of focused conceptualism, rather than [the influence of] Reich and Glass'.<sup>106</sup> While the use of unison can obviously indicate a simplified harmonic texture in keeping with minimalism,<sup>107</sup> Andriessen's use of the device prior to his focused engagement with minimal music suggests that his interest in unison may have been a catalyst for his minimalist explorations. Indeed, in a discussion about *Melodie*, Andriessen explains that the use of unison derives from 'the philosophy of composing democratically [...] everyone should receive an equal amount of information of the musical thought process. It's [...] a philosophical conception of democracy'.<sup>108</sup>

In fact, Andriessen's unison is cultivated (as with so many of his traits) by an interaction with a variety of other concerns. As well as specifically minimalist influences, Andriessen cites Bach as a 'structural' guide: 'everything doubled [...] a primitive form of instrumentation but it's precisely the one I use: strict and classical. It

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<sup>105</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 43.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.* However, it should also be noted that *Hoketus*, Andriessen's first acknowledged engagement with minimalism, was premiered in Amsterdam alongside *Melodie* on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1976 (*Keynotes 4: ii* (1976), p. 65).

<sup>107</sup> Indeed, Schwarz asks: 'what were the multiple vocal tracks of *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), or the multiple instrumental tracks of *Violin Phase* (1967), if not identical canons at the unison?' (Schwarz, 'Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process: Part 1', p. 266).

<sup>108</sup> Andriessen and Rossum, 'After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath', p. 14.

gives certain continuity of sound'.<sup>109</sup> This statement points to an all-encompassing idea of unison: one that governs instrumentation and texture as well as melody. Yet at the same time, Andriessen's use of 'almost-unison', and unisons that are almost certain to be difficult (if not impossible for all but the most focused of ensembles) to achieve, points to an interest, again, in commenting on a concept through its distortion.

Andriessen has also written on the subject of unison, again via Stravinsky, in an article titled 'The Utopian Unison'.<sup>110</sup> The article considers Stravinsky's use of doublings where the parts are *almost* in unison, or in unison at the octave: a 'paradoxical musical situation [that] asks for a paradoxical definition—parallel counterpoint'.<sup>111</sup> Andriessen then enters into a tangled logic-train to explain his definition: 'counterpoint is justifiable because if the one voice is doubling the other and the other is doubling the one, then both are independent voices and neither is a doubling (as there is no third voice that each is doubling)'.<sup>112</sup> This 'dialectical double-dutch' (to borrow Potter's phrase) suggests both a playfulness and a labyrinthine approach to the concept of unison. Yet the conclusions Andriessen reaches about Stravinsky's unison are also revealing:

*when the perfect consonant actually is reached, it sounds more unison than unison—it sounds not-not-unison. This not-not-unison can be considered the culmination, in the opposite direction, of the emancipation of the 'wrong' note, as there it all began—with women who sing together and not together [Les Noces...] But it is more than just the emancipation of the "wrong" note. It is also the emancipation of hard-core playing around, when wrong notes become so prevalent*

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<sup>109</sup> Andriessen and Rossum, 'After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath', p. 10. Trochimczyk also makes connections between Bach and Andriessen's minimalism, identifying, 'textures based on fast-paced sixteenth-note figuration in numerous pieces associated with minimalism (of a Baroque kind)' ('Andriessen and the Art of Composing' in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, pp. 277–296 (p. 278)).

<sup>110</sup> Elmer Schönberger and Louis Andriessen, 'The Utopian Unison', pp. 207–214 in Jann Pasler (ed.), *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, 1986). Whether the subtitle of this book points a further labyrinthine marker to Andriessen's *M is for Man, Music, Mozart* (1991) is unknown.

<sup>111</sup> Schönberger and Andriessen, 'The Utopian Unison', p. 208.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*



that they become the norm. It went so far that Stravinsky could make the octave sound like a dissonance.<sup>113</sup>

For Andriessen, unison offers the potential to rehabilitate dissonance; to permit tonality; to explore repetition. It also offers a musical metaphor for his political ideology.

The study of *Hoketus* (1975–1977) that follows shows both of these concerns (unison and minimal repetition, central to Andriessen’s sound) becoming the focal points of the music’s dialectical engagement with these complementary ideas. This section on *Hoketus* also anticipates the political rhetoric that accompanies Andriessen’s decision to privilege unison playing, and the preoccupation with the hierarchies of production and consumption that guide his approach to ensembles. Both of these aspects of Andriessen’s network will be explored in the sections that follow.

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<sup>113</sup> Schönberger and Andriessen, ‘The Utopian Unison’, p. 213 [their italics].

## 7.2(c) *Hoketus*

A programme note for *Hoketus* reads: 'with different musicians it would have been a different composition. And that is how it ought to be.'<sup>114</sup> *Hoketus*, while attributed to Andriessen, should be seen very much as the product of a long process of collaboration and development with the group of student musicians who performed under the same name. *Hoketus* was formed as part of a project to look at the developments in American minimalism: as Andriessen explains, some of his students 'were highly critical [...] Steve Reich, they thought, was like a television soap commercial. So I told them they were free to think as they wished but that they should understand that the roots of this music sprouted from the true avant-garde attitude.'<sup>115</sup> Andriessen challenged each of his students to come up with a short piece based on minimalist principles, and *Hoketus* represents Andriessen's own contribution to the exercise. Scored for the instrumentation the students could provide (an amplified ensemble of two identical groups of pan pipe, electric piano, bass guitar, congas and alto saxophone) the work was gradually rehearsed and developed into what is now contained in the score.

Divided into five distinct sections, the two groups of players hocket a single quaver at a time between them, outlining repeated cells that alter according to various additive patterns derived from minimalist techniques (with the exception of section D, which has just a single cell of two quavers repeated constantly).<sup>116</sup> Sections A to D are based on clustered chords which contain a small difference in notes or arrangement for each group, while section E, often described as a Coda, charts a gradually expanding and then diminishing unison (but still hocketed) line. The overall sound is loud, dissonant, and 'jerky' (due to the constantly changing irregular time signatures), with a strong and persistent toggling of the stereo image (the performers stand as far apart as they can

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<sup>114</sup> Reproduced in 'Unisons and the Republic' in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 99.

<sup>115</sup> Andriessen in conversation with Rossum and Smit, 'After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath', p.12.

<sup>116</sup> See Alexis Paterson, 'Louis Andriessen's *Hoketus* (1975–77)' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Exeter, 2004) for a full analysis of the various processes that are used in *Hoketus*.

on stage, and the hocket occurs at a regular quaver rate throughout). While many commentators point to the earlier *De Volharding* as Andriessen's first minimalist piece, *Hoketus* might be seen as the first piece to explicitly engage dialectically with minimalism.<sup>117</sup> Potter, for example, argues that Andriessen:

uses the principle of hocketing as a kind of filter through which many of the techniques familiar from American repetitive music may be passed [...] these are fed into the 'hocket machine' that the composer has devised. The resulting minimal mince [...] has been crucially, critically, transformed. A distancing relationship has been achieved which allows minimal techniques to be used as the basis for a dialectical discourse on the genre itself.<sup>118</sup>

For Cross, this discourse is aimed at undermining the 'gloss' of American minimalism; Cross talks of 'roughness' and 'a physicality associated with rock (what Andriessen calls "downtown" music)',<sup>119</sup> emphasising 'categorically *un*-diatonic' harmonies and an instrumentation drawn from jazz and popular music. He argues that while the additive processes in the work owe as much to Stravinsky as to Reich, the 'ritualistic focus

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<sup>117</sup> For some, *Hoketus* is also the last work that avoids any synthesis of minimalism into Andriessen's eclectic compositional vocabulary. Van der Waa, for example gives the following summary: 'in 1977 Andriessen offered a decisive response to American minimalists [...] with the pounding, earthy sounds of *Hoketus*. His subsequent work still shows minimalist traits [...] but these have been thoroughly incorporated into his own style' (Fritz van der Waa, 'Louis Andriessen' in Jolande van der Klis (ed.), *The Essential Guide to Dutch Music: 100 Composers and their Work* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), pp. 14–18 (p. 14)).

<sup>118</sup> Potter, 'The Music of Louis Andriessen: Dialectical Double-Dutch?', p. 19.

<sup>119</sup> Cross does not comment on the fact that American minimalism has often been referred to in the same terms. While Cross (and Andriessen) are using it in the context of a popular/classical divide, Reich *et al* have used it to denote their separation from the 'establishment' (as well as their geographical performance locations in New York), and consequently, 'uptown' institutions such as concert halls and academic positions.

entirely on rhythm is more minimalist'.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, it is this *focus* that marks *Hoketus* out as an object of critical attention: the rigour applied to the processes within the work only serves to highlight the way in which Andriessen has rebranded minimalism into a confrontational force, while at the same time allowing the conceptual basis of minimalism to remain apparent. As Andriessen puts it, he 'had a better grasp of the material of conceptual minimalistic thought':<sup>121</sup> audible process is at the forefront of this work.

Yet other commentators, such as Fink (who seems to accuse Andriessen of simply selling out to a style perpetuated by a commercialised, advertising-driven medium) argue that 'in transposing the American pattern of static, process-driven plateaus in ascending linear sequence into his overtly modernist idiom, Andriessen incorporated, willy nilly, the entire cultural formation he sought to banish'.<sup>122</sup> There are a number of arguments that could be made against Fink's statement: the 'willy nilly' processes are quite clearly rigorously applied (even to extremes, so that section D's non-developable motif continues to repeat as per the ongoing processes);<sup>123</sup> the description of

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<sup>120</sup> Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, p. 179. However, Cross also argues that this focus is ultimately undermined: 'in *Hoketus*, the (Stravinskian) manner in which the motifs are varied is constantly shifting so that there is a tangible sense of movement across the larger span—which is simply not the case in music which merely works its way through a process' (*ibid.*). Presumably Cross is referring in part to the alternating time signatures, but it should be remembered that many of the cells are repeated a large number of times: while there is a sense sometimes of lurching from one cell to the next, it is possible to retain an impression of the overall process, particularly in the final (and arguably least 'minimal' sounding) section. Rather than 'a sense of movement', I would argue that if anything, the sparseness of the motifs exposes the *lack* of development that many minimalist works demonstrate if one looks beyond the homogenous textures and patternings on the surface. This could plausibly be a component of any project that sought to critique minimalism.

<sup>121</sup> Andriessen and Rossum, 'After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath', p. 13.

<sup>122</sup> Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, pp. 155–6. It should be reiterated that the premise of Fink's book is that minimalism reflects a transformational cultural moment: replacing the manufacture-driven 'desire-for-things' with the advertising-driven 'desire-for-desire-for-things'. Fink argues that, like advertising, minimalism provides pleasure to the consumer (listener) by setting up desire (for an object; or in music, a resolution) that is tangible but in which delayed gratification might in itself be pleasurable.

<sup>123</sup> The best way of describing this section is to liken it to the sound of a needle stuck in the groove of a record. One can only speculate on whether this was a playful nod to the critics of minimalism who prefer to label it such things as 'going-nowhere music' and 'broken-record music'. However, it should be noted that the repetition of this short cell creates a peculiar sense of heightened expectation for the torrent of unison that erupts at section E.

Andriessen as having an 'overtly modernist' idiom is at best questionable; and the presumption that Andriessen had any intention to 'banish' minimalism seems ill-informed. To further confuse matters, Fink seems to take a different view in a chapter that appeared a year before *Repeating Ourselves*, calling *Hoketus* 'an alternative post-minimalism in which American Pop would not triumph over, but synthesize dialectically with European modernism'.<sup>124</sup> While he still insists that Andriessen is inserting 'high modernist opposites' into minimalist structures,<sup>125</sup> here he calls the approach a 'punk-meets-Stravinsky take on minimalism [...] overtly political and confrontational [that] we might designate as a "post-minimalism of resistance"'.<sup>126</sup> Here, rather than suggesting that Andriessen merely acquiesced to a cultural force, Fink borrows from Foster to suggest a much more dialectical engagement with minimalism's conceptual and compositional processes.

It is interesting to note, in this context of resistance, that just as with De Volharding, the players retained complete control over the running of the ensemble. While *Hoketus* actually commissioned a piece from Philip Glass for the 1980/81 season, Adlington explains that the commission was never completed after the decision was 'slated'.<sup>127</sup> Nyman did, however, complete a work for *Hoketus* in 1981 (*Think Slow, Act*

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<sup>124</sup> Robert Fink, '(Post-)minimalisms 1970-2000: The Search for a New Mainstream', in Cook and Pople, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Music*, pp. 539–556 (p. 545).

<sup>125</sup> Fink points out that 'the harmonic material is unremittingly dissonant, and the beat is jerky and irregular rather than flowing. The ensemble, dominated by highly amplified keyboards, drums, and electric guitars, had its roots in rock, but not the trippy, mellow, progressive kind evoked by Riley and Glass' (Fink, '(Post-)minimalisms 1970-2000', p. 546). Yet the 'unremittingly dissonant' harmonic material takes many of its leads from (hardly *high* modernist) Stravinsky (Andriessen credits Stravinsky with his obsession with semitone and tone clashes throughout his career), and section B sets up a distinctive dominant-tonic motion (G–C) in the hocketing between the bass guitars. While there is a sense of rhythmic disconnection within the piece, there is a strong sense of pulse throughout, and the clarity of relationships between cells is strong: something contrary to the often dissociative practices of contemporaneous high modernists. Finally, to contrast the 'rocky' sounds of *Hoketus* against Riley and Glass' 'trippy, mellow' sounds ignores reviews of Glass' early performances that complain about the sheer relentlessness and volume of the performance. It is also interesting that Reich, whose *Four Organs* has also received similar criticism, is omitted from the comparison. While it is true that the later works of all these American composers tend towards a more homogenous and gentler sound, in 1975, when *Hoketus* began, the 'rock' elements of American minimalism were still very much at the forefront.

<sup>126</sup> Fink, '(Post-)minimalisms 1970-2000', p. 546.

<sup>127</sup> See Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 118.

*Fast*) and Andriessen explains that while he liked the piece, the other members of the ensemble were more hostile to the 'slicker elements [...] the gulf between the improvisers, the more rigid people in the group, and those orientated towards pop was noticeable at the time and eventually, it was one of the reasons the group disbanded'.<sup>128</sup> *Hoketus*, then (the group and the work) signals a continuation of Andriessen's political ideology (the foregrounding of players' concerns, use of unison, instrumentation that incorporates 'low' or 'downtown' culture) and a more direct engagement with the principles and methods of minimalism. The resultant work is a critical assault on minimalism, yet, as Foster's postmodernism- and Fink's minimalism-of-resistance indicate, a resistance that participates and is contained within what it critiques.

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<sup>128</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 243.

## Politics

Andriessen's political outlook is often referred to in discussions of his music. He is often described as a Marxist, an anarchist, or a revolutionary, and his life is peppered with incidents of activism, protest and advocacy. Yet it must be understood that Andriessen does not consider music to be, in itself, a vehicle for political statement: he famously stated that 'there's no such thing as a Marxist chord!'.<sup>129</sup> Rather, he regards the way in which art is utilised—how it is presented and produced—as the way in which that art becomes politicised. This is not simply a linear process however: the socio-political environment of the creator may be equally as important as the environment into which it is received (or conversely, it may not, if that background is obscured or forgotten). As Zegers explains, Andriessen 'links his own music very emphatically to the world around him. In it we hear references to music from all social strata and musical genres.'<sup>130</sup> This outlook demands an approach that takes into account the methods of producing and disseminating music, and Everett argues that 'foregrounding the use-value of music serves as an ideological *demystification*.'<sup>131</sup> This process of demystification manifested itself most clearly in Andriessen's activities in

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<sup>129</sup> Ivan Hewitt and Louis Andriessen, 'Marxist chords? No such thing', *Daily Telegraph* (3 October 2002), p. 26. Hewitt writes: 'he's regularly described as a "hard-line minimalist" and as a "political" composer, or even as a "political minimalist". The effect is to drive out of the listener's mind the very thing that matters most to Andriessen, which is music. [...] "I am not a political composer. I am just a composer who sometimes writes on political things"' (*ibid.*). Andriessen has often repeated this statement (as have pupils such as Steve Martland), sometimes replacing 'chord' with 'dominant seventh'.

<sup>130</sup> Miriam Zegers' introduction to Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 9.

<sup>131</sup> Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 4 [her italics].

the seventies, through the PDE concerts, the 'notenkrakersactie', and the establishment of De Volharding.<sup>132</sup>

This ensemble will be considered in greater detail in the section below, but in a specifically political context, it should be noted that De Volharding did not align itself with any particular ideology, but rather 'claim[s] that music within a certain context and with the use of texts and titles is indeed susceptible to politics.'<sup>133</sup> This susceptibility is demonstrated by two commentators in the statements below.

Fritz van der Waa on Andriessen's use of unison:

of course, the concept of "unanimity" served as a political metaphor.<sup>134</sup>

And Everett on a section of *De Staat*:

this passage represents the symbolic moment in which Andriessen transcends the influences of Stravinsky and minimalist precursors to create a powerful gesture of rebellion: the rising succession of chords

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<sup>132</sup> Further details of these activities are outlined in all of the monographs dealing with Andriessen. In an effort to avoid giving disproportionate weight to this now quite distant episode of Andriessen's life, the details will not be re-presented. In the spirit of Andriessen's insistence that all creativity should be understood in relation to the social conditions of production, it should also be noted that Andriessen did not occupy some 'maverick' or outsider position during these protests. While he was an active participant in much activism, many of their aims were broadly supported and have now been brought inside the establishment (an establishment he was already part of in terms of commissions received and performances given). Marcel Cobussen, in his article on Dutch Ensemble Culture, also emphasises the central role that activism played in Dutch culture:

I want to emphasise a specific Dutch social condition, usually conceptually described as 'verzuiling' or pillarization. A difficult concept to translate and to explain, due to its specific 'Dutchness'. [...] The effect of this, in general, is that coalitions always need to be formed in all kinds of fields. What is the benefit of pillarization? It leads to a permanent distribution of power, more (and indispensable) tolerance towards other opinions [...] and pressure groups become self-organised. Such a social constellation, which has existed in the Netherlands for such a long time, seems to be fairly embedded in Dutch Culture, and probably has contributed in one way or another to a flourishing ensemble culture (Marcel Cobussen, 'The Dutch Ensemble Culture: its Heterogeneity, Commitment and Social Embeddedness' (trans. P.J. Carroll) in *New Sound: International Magazine for Music* 15 (2000), 33–45 (p. 40)).

Cobussen's comments point to the centrality of activism in Dutch culture, and conversely, the 'acceptable' nature of Andriessen's own position. This also explains Everett's observation that Andriessen's and his associates' 'activism contributed to the restructuring of power within the hierarchy rather than to the overhaul of the political and social structure itself as implied by the term revolution' (Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 61). This is of course concordant with Jameson's formulations of a cultural response that has to operate *within* a postmodernity whose 'beyond' cannot be imagined.

<sup>133</sup> Cobussen, 'The Dutch Ensemble Culture', p. 35.

<sup>134</sup> Waa, 'Louis Andriessen and his Habitat', p. 36.



cycles through the same notes over and over as if to simulate the act of shouting a slogan repeatedly in a political demonstration.<sup>135</sup>

It becomes clear, as one reads the growing body of literature on Andriessen's music, that his activism in the seventies has been received as straightforward (and all-encompassing) justification of his compositional methods. Even the sterility of minimalism is presumed to have 'concrete ideological correspondents (e.g. collective solidarity, eradication of class associations in music)'<sup>136</sup> that set Andriessen's music apart from the American school. While of course, some ideological appeal may exist, to interpret all of Andriessen's musical gestures as political statements risks obscuring the critical dialogue and commentary that the music itself plays out.

### **Production and Reception**

The topic of production and reception (from the hierarchies that govern programming and funding to the social background of those who attend performances) has been of central importance for Andriessen. He has formed numerous new groups to explore specific musical ideas, and famously renounced writing for the symphony orchestra because the players had no control over the repertoire they were asked to perform.<sup>137</sup> Of all these ensembles, De Volharding is perhaps best known, and has generated the greatest quantity of commentary: both from Andriessen and those who study his career. Andriessen describes De Volharding (Perseverance) as 'my pragmatic solution to the question: "what has music to do with politics?"', although he is emphatic that it

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<sup>135</sup> Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 72. Contrast this with the interview Andriessen gives to Adlington discussing the same work: 'I learnt to *reflect* for the first time with this piece. I could get rid of a lot of things connected to De Volharding—discussions about aesthetics, politics and so on' (Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 133).

<sup>136</sup> Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 76.

<sup>137</sup> Reich did something similar. He says, immediately on finishing *The Four Sections*, I felt very clearly that I had no further interest in writing for the symphony orchestra in the foreseeable future. I felt that, finally, most of the clichés about the orchestra are true: it was designed to play the music of Haydn through Schoenberg, and does not reflect at all the impact of microphones, non-Western music, jazz, rock, computers, electric instruments, and so on [...] There is also the 'sociology' of the orchestra, undoubtedly connected to the music it plays, which also means that somewhere from 20 to 80 percent of the players would rather not play my music nor the music of my contemporaries (Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 160).

is the construction of the ensemble and the relationship between the players ('equality of information between the parts. I didn't want some leading and others just supporting') that reflects a political ideology, rather than the music itself.<sup>138</sup>

In fact, it is the foregrounding of this network of relationships that most concerns De Volharding. Andriessen states that '*musical material cannot be separated from the method of production*',<sup>139</sup> and this is supported by the De Volharding brochure, which was published in the same year as the group's formation (1972) and distributed at their performances. The brochure reads:

*The Volharding* has set itself the aim of contributing through the practical aspects of music-making to what is known as 'the materialistic theory of art', which is, in music, to expose the links between the conception of music (composing), its production (performance) and its consumption (listening) and to change those links [...] De Volharding is intent upon demonstrating that through its approach to repertoire and performance it can reach new and different audiences that are more involved in the production (a functional audience) and for that reason demand a different approach to composing.<sup>140</sup>

De Volharding's stated aims highlight two things: firstly, the tripartite relationship between composer, producer and audience;<sup>141</sup> and secondly, their emphasis on an audience that is 'functional'. In practice, this audience was often comprised of picket-line strikers, community groups, and protestors:<sup>142</sup> all parts of a demographic that for these performers represented the antithesis of the Concertgebouw elite. This desire to appear (and appeal) to the masses is evident in Andriessen's own rhetoric. In the

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<sup>138</sup> Hewitt and Andriessen, 'Marxist chords? No such thing', p. 26.

<sup>139</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 130 [his italics].

<sup>140</sup> Koopmans, 'On Music and Politics', p. 26.

<sup>141</sup> Reminiscent of both Nattiez's semiotic and Jameson's media trinity, the latter correlation adds a further dimension to statements that clearly chime with Jameson's emphasis on understanding the means of production in postmodernism.

<sup>142</sup> De Volharding performed protest songs (including several arranged by Hanns Eisler), as well as works written specifically for the ensemble. Everett also says that Andriessen arranged Riley's *In C* for De Volharding (see Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 67), although she does not state how a modular work for flexible ensemble might have been 'arranged'. Indeed, the somewhat proprietary notion of arranging this work under Andriessen's name seems antithetical to the freedom of the performers in this group.

programme note to *De Staat* (the instrumentation of which incorporates De Volharding's forces), Andriessen muses that,

one aspect of thinking about music in "political" terms is that the composer asks himself who he is actually composing for, and who will listen to the result. The musicians performing his work are his first listeners, and are at least as important as the audience. I hope I'll never write another work that musicians in paid employment will be forced to play against their will.<sup>143</sup>

What is also plainly evident is the desire for the performers themselves to enjoy performing his works. It is perhaps telling of this emphasis on the performers' role that both *De Volharding* and *De Staat* were first issued as live recordings.<sup>144</sup> Although neither recording provides a 'perfect' rendition of the score, both exude an energy and commitment to performance that is absent from many of the reworked and polished performances of their contemporaries.<sup>145</sup> The commitment of the ensemble to a democratic mode of production was of course one of Andriessen's aims, but it ultimately led to his departure from the group. Tra reveals that Andriessen's increasingly minimal-esque style 'proved to be incompatible with the ideological framework that he himself helped to construct'.<sup>146</sup> Yet many of the devices Andriessen introduced with *De Volharding* (particularly hocketing principles, doubled instrumentation, and avoidance of the melody/accompaniment dichotomy) have remained central to his composition.

The *Symphony for Open Strings* (1978) is one work that bears the marks of Andriessen's time with De Volharding. Written for twelve solo string players (each with specific tuning), the score carries the inscription: 'the work is dedicated to the players for whom it was written'. Bearing typical hallmarks of Andriessen's music, hocketing

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<sup>143</sup> 'Unisons and the Republic: Andriessen's Minimalism' in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 91.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>145</sup> The audibility of the cheering (and booing) crowds also lends a certain air of 'authenticity' to the recordings. However, the myriad of issues surrounding the intention behind, and reception of, live recordings lies beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>146</sup> Gijts Tra, 'De Volharding, "an offbeat jazz group or a crazy band of wind players"', *Keynotes 7: 1* (1978), 10–12, p. 11.

through passages of extended repetition is a key feature, alongside the juxtaposition of contrasting dynamic blocks. Discussing the use of the hocket technique in *Symphony*, Andriessen says, 'you do not write parts. In a certain sense it is the most democratic situation. Nobody leads, nobody accompanies.'<sup>147</sup> This 'democratic situation' is also reflected in the degree of control that is accorded the players. Just as De Volharding performed without a conductor (the dictatorial 'sir' of the symphony orchestra), *Symphony* is written to be performed independently. Yet whereas *De Volharding* stretched the capabilities of the ensemble with its demanding unisons, *Symphony* shows a careful consideration for the practicalities of performance. Therefore, in a rhythmically sparse section at figure V,<sup>148</sup> the first violinist is given nothing to play, and instead instructed to 'keep the downbeat, up to the 4/4 [W]'. This evidence of consideration for the players is another indication of the importance Andriessen places on the means of production.

Despite his advocacy for alternative musical practice, it is still apparent that Andriessen values the traditions and opportunities of the mainstream. He regards bands formed by other composers as much a result of necessity as of choice, and argues that there are limitations to these ensembles. Using the examples of Reich (Steve Reich Ensemble) and Gordon (Bang on a Can), Andriessen complains that when rooted in such practice, 'you can't write in polemic with the symphonic tradition. When you want to write pieces that deal with polemizing the line of Bruckner up to, say, *Le Sacre du Printemps* of Stravinsky, then you have to write big pieces with a lot of instruments and long durations. That's *De Staat*.'<sup>149</sup> This statement may go some way to explaining what many see as Andriessen's gradual slide back (albeit with significant modifications)

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<sup>147</sup> Andriessen, 'Lectures for Young Composers', p. 147. Andriessen also explains the incongruity (given his stance on the symphony orchestra) of his title: "'symphony"—a strange title for me, but it stems from the fact that this composition deals with the sonority of the instruments: *Symphony for Open Strings*' (*ibid.*).

<sup>148</sup> Up until this point, the hocketing maintains a constant semiquaver pulse across a variety of time signature changes. In this passage, the texture thins considerably, and a syncopated version of the hocket is presented. This change creates a greater challenge to the players in terms of maintaining momentum and ensemble.

<sup>149</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 148.

to the symphony orchestra; it is certainly true that he disdains the symphony orchestra primarily for its lack of adaptability, 'a historic monument of a glorious, feudal past'.<sup>150</sup> By adapting the 'symphonic' model to his own ends, Andriessen challenges this fixation. After all, as Beirens argues, Andriessen's music 'is not only about other music (a polemical relationship, as Andriessen would call it) but most fundamentally about its own making—a composition about the mechanisms of composing.'<sup>151</sup> To achieve the same interplay and dialogue in the mode of production as he does within his scores, Andriessen must enter into the same realm as that which he seeks to challenge.

The opera *Rosa* (1993–94) is one such example of Andriessen's engagement with convention from *within* the convention itself. *Rosa* not only foregrounds the relationship between the concept of 'opera' and the modes of production and reception that allow that concept to exist, but weaves into it a powerful commentary on the extent to which audiences are conditioned by those same conventions. *Rosa* also represents one of the most complex examples of the way in which Andriessen synthesises and adapts a wealth of stylistic markers, extant quotations, and networks of signification. Andriessen's rhetoric surrounding quotation, and an examination of the way in which these networks unfold, will follow this exploration of *Rosa's* self-reflexively postmodern character.

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<sup>150</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 127.

<sup>151</sup> Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 282.

## 7.2(d) *Rosa: The Death of a Composer*

A discussion of the music theatre work *Rosa* brings questions of production and reception to the fore. While Woods, in his book about Greenaway's dramatic works, has called *Rosa* 'the first opera not primarily associated with its composer', asking 'how it might survive, be revived and restaged, without Greenaway's involvement',<sup>152</sup> the only way in which *Rosa* does actually 'survive' for most people is as a CD recording of the score and the critical and musicological commentaries based upon them.<sup>153</sup> However, it is rare for these commentaries to look beyond what is generally identified as the parodic or ironic intentions of the score, to the wider context of the musical setting; or to draw any parallels with his earlier work (although links to the later *Writing to Vermeer*, also produced with Greenaway, are common).

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<sup>152</sup> Alan Woods, *Being Naked Playing Dead: The Art of Peter Greenaway* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 28.

<sup>153</sup> *Rosa* has been given two runs as a fully staged work. Once at its premiere in 1994, and again in 1998. A TV adaptation for USA broadcast was made by Kees Kasander and Greenaway in 1999, but no commercially available copy remains. In addition to these artefacts of the produced work, there is of course a score, and a book written by Greenaway that forms the basis of *Rosa's* libretto. However, the book is rare, and the score only available for rental from the publisher. For most audiences, therefore, the CD recording is likely to be their first (probably only) point of contact with *Rosa*. It is interesting in this context that Thomas, in his General Editor's preface to the Landmarks in Music series that includes Adlington's book on *De Staat*, regards his selection criteria for a 'landmark' work as follows: 'the works should have been widely disseminated (although in certain cases—operas particularly—this is less important than positive critical evaluation and the availability of adequate recordings)' (Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. vii). The fact that Thomas considers recordings, rather than filming of opera to be sufficient is indicative of a general tendency to only superficially link the score of *Rosa* to its full context. Whether this is due to the lack of access to further materials or a general attitude to operatic and music theatre works is beyond the scope of this study, but would be a particularly interesting avenue of exploration in Andriessen's case, given the extended network of references that are apparent in his full settings.

*Rosa* is the product of an idea of Greenaway's based upon his discovery of a set of coincidences surrounding the deaths of several twentieth-century composers.<sup>154</sup> He explains:

the death of Webern has always fascinated me [...] You know that Webern was killed in 1945 by a G.I. without apparent reason; in truth it would appear that there are several reasons for this death. Jealousy, financial reasons, a black market deal, anti-Semitism... The fact is that this father of modern music was killed by three bullets. Let us summarise: he was a composer, he wore a hat, he smoked cigars, he stood in the shadows, he wore spectacles, he was killed by three bullets and he had an American passport. It is exactly what happened to John Lennon in 1980 and I have discovered that between 1945 and 1980 eight other composers were killed in similar circumstances! Hence the idea of 'a conspiracy against composers'.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> An idea that was originally intended to be realised through a large-scale collaboration with Michael Nyman. As late as 1987, Greenaway still said in interview that 'Michael Nyman and myself have an opera project on the subject which ought to be put on quite soon by Kees Kasander' (Phillipe Pillard, 'Entretien Avec Peter Greenaway', in Daniel Caux (et. al), *Peter Greenaway* (Paris: Éditions Dis, Voir, Sarl, 1987), pp. 94–118 (p. 112)). It has been suggested by ap Siôn that the working relationship between Greenaway and Nyman was tested after *Prospero's Books* (1991), where Nyman was unhappy with the way in which Greenaway manipulated the score (see ap Siôn, *The Music of Michael Nyman*, p. 111). It is interesting to note that at around the same time, the commissions for the Not Mozart films were made (which include contributions from Nyman, Andriessen, Gruber, Mengelberg, Weir, and Rugg), and that Nyman specifically asked *not* to work with Greenaway, opening an opportunity for Andriessen as he embarks on his first collaboration with the director: *M is for Man, Mozart, Music* (Nyman's decision was recounted by Annette Moreau (the commissioning editor for the films), in a public lecture entitled 'The Not Mozart Films in Context', (Kings College London, 1 October 2008)). A similar scarcity issue arises in relation to these films as it does with *Rosa*: while recordings are widely available, the video is so scarce that Moreau herself had to borrow a copy for the purpose of her lecture. Currently, only a US region DVD is available for purchase, and no full UK library copies are known, although a copy of three of the films (Nyman, Andriessen and Gruber) can be found in Salford University Library. Leeds, Aberdeen and Oxford hold two (Nyman and Andriessen), while Southampton holds only the Andriessen.

<sup>155</sup> Pillard, 'Entretien Avec Peter Greenaway', p. 112.

Original French text:

La mort de Webern m'a toujours fascine [...] Vous savez que Webern a été tué en 1945 per un G.I., sans raison apparent. A vrai dire, il parrait y avoir à cette mort plusieurs raisons: la jalousie, l'intérêt, une affaire de marché noir, l'antisémitisme... Toujours est-il que ce père de la musique modern a été tué de trios balles. Résumons: il était compositeur, il portait un chapeau, il fumait le cigare, il se tenait debout dan la pénombre, il portait des lunettes, il a été abattu de trios balles, il avait un passeport américain. C'est très exactement ce qui se produit avec John Lennon 1980. Et J'ai découvert qui entre 1945 et 1980, huit autres compositeurs ont été tués dans des circonstances semblables! D'ou l'idée d'un <<complot contre les compositeurs>>.

Greenaway is quick to point out that while these facts hold a certain fascination for him, they act only as a conceptual framework for what follows in the *Rosa* project. He refers to the conspiracy idea as a 'deeply preposterous notion', explaining that while 'of course, not one of us for a moment ever believes [in the conspiracy] it's an ironic opportunity to examine all these sorts of phenomenologies [...] an excuse [...] to play with the language'.<sup>156</sup> The outcome of this play is 'a striking case of postmodernism',<sup>157</sup> which leads, Neytcheva argues, to a situation where 'no element of this composition can be omitted [...] It is all about one drama production, which is inseparable from the drama story'.<sup>158</sup> Andriessen, too, emphasises play: 'this way of playing with history, reality and imagination is essential [...] the musical ideology of *Rosa* should be summarised as a game of double meanings'.<sup>159</sup> This focus by both Greenaway and Andriessen on a creation that permits multiple interpretations and a sense of flux throughout the work chimes well with Novak's theories of a 'postoperatic work'.<sup>160</sup> Novak pins her definition of a postoperatic work on the distinction between earlier librettos that tended to have 'some form of dramatic origin or structure' (which she calls 'dramatic operas') and the characteristics of the Glass/Wilson collaboration, *Einstein on the Beach*, which she regards as a 'turning point' and 'paradigmatic

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<sup>156</sup> Peter Greenaway in interview with Joshua Cody (November 1994), (first published in *Paris New Music Review* (December 1994)) <<http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/greenaway.html>> [accessed 17/09/09].

<sup>157</sup> Greenaway quoted in Svetlana Neytcheva, 'Peter Greenaway's *Rosa*: A Mixed Media or Opera about the Opera?' in *Das Musiktheater in den Audiovisuellen Medien: "...ersichtlich gewardene Taten der Musik", Vorträge und Gespräche des Salzburger Symposions 1999* (Anif/Salzburg: Verlag Mueller-Speiser, 2001), pp. 502–514 (p. 503).

<sup>158</sup> Svetlana Neytcheva, 'Peter Greenaway's *Rosa*', p. 503

<sup>159</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 246.

<sup>160</sup> See Novak, 'Contextualizing Opera in a Post-dramatic context'. It will be noticed that *Rosa* is referred to as both 'music theatre' and 'opera' (by its creators and commentators alike). While a variety of literature exists that explores the distinctions between these two genres, this is beyond the scope of this study. It should also be noted that, like *Einstein* (which Novak uses as her primary example of postopera), early discussions tend to use 'music theatre' while later ones tend towards 'opera'. It is likely (as with *Einstein*) that a certain amount of reconceptualisation takes place as the work reveals (or benefits commercially and critically from) links to later works (in this case, *Writing to Vermeer*; in Glass', *Akhmaten* and *Satyagraha*).



example of postopera'.<sup>161</sup> Novak outlines three central characteristics of postopera: 'no domination of one operatic text over the others'; a medium that 'questions, problematizes, and redefines the institution of opera'; and a demonstration of 'the impossibility of any unity [...] texts exists in a rhizome-like relationship'.<sup>162</sup> *Rosa* clearly corresponds to these characteristics, most strikingly through Novak's second characteristic: the problematisation of operatic convention. While Andriessen states that the project is 'not about Rosa, but about film, especially westerns, and about parody',<sup>163</sup> the invocation of film and its conventions *within* the operatic setting, sets these genres up for comparison and mutual interrogation. Neytcheva calls the *Rosa* book<sup>164</sup> a 'hybrid structure based on three different genres: essay, movie script and opera libretto', and also notes that the production itself was 90mins long: the 'duration of one standard movie picture'.<sup>165</sup>

Novak clearly associates the emergence of postopera with the arrival of postmodernism in general, arguing that *Einstein* 'formed a modernistic operatic peak, but also initiated the entrance of opera into postmodernism'.<sup>166</sup> The characterisation of *Einstein* as both modern and postmodern ties in well with the framework set out in the previous parts of a general artistic attitude in postmodernism that reached beyond the constraints of modernity while being firmly rooted in that tradition, and of a minimalism that begins as a last modernist impulse but develops into something more flexible and postmodern. In a similar vein to Novak, Joe considers Glass' *La Belle et la*

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<sup>161</sup> Novak, 'Contextualizing Opera in a Post-dramatic context', p. 4.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*. Schwarz's description of Reich's *The Cave* (1993) suggests that this might also be considered postoperatic under Novak's criteria: 'not for Reich the simple-minded artifice of having singers re-enact Biblical roles. "To set a piece like this, and have a baritone be Abraham and a tenor be Isaac, would be embarrassingly naïve [...] In *The Cave*, the biblical characters are never presented. They live only indirectly, when the interviewees refer to them"' (Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 98). In this work, the traditional 'suspension of disbelief' that allows traditional operatic characters to directly address themselves to the audience is highlighted and abandoned.

<sup>163</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 247.

<sup>164</sup> Peter Greenaway, *Rosa*, (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, [1992?]).

<sup>165</sup> Neytcheva, 'Peter Greenaway's *Rosa*', p. 503.

<sup>166</sup> Novak, 'Contextualizing Opera in a Post-dramatic context', p. 6.

*Bête* a postmodernist challenge to filmic conventions, arguing that ‘the tension between stage and screen, between live voice and reproduced images, can be contextualised in the discourse of postmodernism’.<sup>167</sup> Joe argues that by conceiving this work as a screenplay, ‘the replacement of live performers’ bodies with flat images of cinematic bodies represents a postmodern rejection of depth’.<sup>168</sup>

While one could argue that Glass is simply following an established tradition of providing new scores for silent films, the reference Joe makes to postmodern depthlessness is significant in relation to *Rosa*, for as well as the actors on stage, the actors in the film (projections on a stained bedsheet to which Rosa composes his music) ‘come alive’ after Rosa’s murder to fill the roles of the investigators. As well as foregrounding (perhaps parodying?) the diegetic function of parts of the score, this switch between stage and screen, between ‘real’ and cinematic—all the while a fiction in itself, Greenaway’s ‘preposterous notion’—challenges the audience’s participation in the fiction of the staged work at the same time as it revels in the clichés of ‘The Western’, ‘The Dramatic Opera’, ‘The Conspiracy’.

Novak argues that postopera is opera which is both ‘conscious’ of the possibilities of technological, electronic, or digital reproduction, and reliant upon ‘the institutions of mass art and the media of mass communication’, through which it ‘examine[s] the rituals of society whose reality is constructed through media reality’.<sup>169</sup> Certainly, Andriessen expresses concerns that reflect this notion, relating *Rosa* to impulses found in Pop Art: ‘the emphasis on the commonplace as commonplace, the magnification of clichés. I personally believe that we are dealing with a socialisation of art on a scale unequalled in history.’<sup>170</sup> The use of mass culture (Andriessen, for example, quotes and imitates Morricone in the score) acts as a platform on which to emphasise these views.

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<sup>167</sup> Jeongwon Joe, ‘The Cinematic Body in Operatic Theatre: Philip Glass’ *La Belle et la Bête*’, in Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (eds), *Between Opera and Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 59–74 (p. 66).

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Novak, ‘Contextualizing Opera in a Post-dramatic context’, p. 5.

<sup>170</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 52.

Andriessen explains his use of this music, saying that ‘paradoxically, it can be very experimental to make use of a traditional style [...] The main character in *Rosa* is a composer of theatre and film music. Hence, I used existent material from these genres, or, conversely, I alienated the music from them. Greenaway does that in his scripts too.’<sup>171</sup> This sense of alienation is picked up by Novak, who explains how this usage reflects the postoperatic examination of ‘the rituals of society’. She argues that Andriessen ‘uses fragments of music not to say, for example, “this is a cowboy riding a galloping horse”, but rather says: listen to how the ways in which music used in western films can be represented ironically.’<sup>172</sup>

It is important to note that while ‘Westerns’ occupy a central part of the work’s narrative, this is not an opera *about* Westerns per se, or indeed, their conventions. It would be more accurate to say that the Western functions as a portal, or a commonality, that allow the processes of production in the trinity of media (film, opera and text) to be foregrounded. Indeed, it is worth quoting Greenaway at length as he reveals these concerns, and admitting that he knows:

very little about Westerns; I don't even like Westerns, but again, these are clothespegs, clotheshangers, upon which to hang clothing of different sorts, to talk about opera; to talk about cinema; to talk about possibilities of breaking the frame; to talk about the relationships that could be possible between the wide shot and the closeup; to talk about attitudes towards the classic operatic heroine who is normally always subjugated to all forms of humiliation, but always manages to be so sanitized and deoderized in conventional opera. The sexual-political activity of the humiliated central female figure, which is part of the operatic tradition, is reexamined here [...] all these associations are, I hope, synthesized in some way, to produce dramatic entertainment, which not only passes one hour and forty-six minutes, but also stimulates debate, which is the prime, exciting function of most art.<sup>173</sup>

It is clear that the various strands of commentary and critique that weave their way through *Rosa*, the ‘play’ from which the opera is made, are key: the detail; the

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<sup>171</sup> Peter Janssen, ‘The moment someone starts to sing it immediately becomes a lot more interesting’, interview with Louis Andriessen, Theo Loevendie, Klass de Vries, *Keynotes* 28: 4 (December 1994), 18–23 (p. 19).

<sup>172</sup> Novak, ‘Contextualizing Opera in a Post-dramatic context’, p. 7.

<sup>173</sup> Greenaway in interview with Cody.

narrative; the note-to-note analysis, mean less in themselves than the contradictions and conventions they are able to highlight.

Therefore, when Everett talks about an 'inverted correlation between a major mode and a tragic text' that 'generates satire' in *Rosa*,<sup>174</sup> there is a sense in which she tells only half the story. Everett reads *Rosa* as 'a thoroughly Brechtian social critique [...] parodying stereotypes found in Hollywood films',<sup>175</sup> which, while certainly one aspect of *Rosa*, presents a rather one-dimensional picture. Only in passing does Everett admit the way in which 'multiple referents collide [...] that are deferential as well as ridiculing and contesting',<sup>176</sup> yet it is this aspect of *Rosa*—the multiplicity, the tension between deference to and weariness of its clichés—that becomes the work's defining feature. Indeed, Andriessen argues that 'a libretto has to contain some cryptic element, must permit multiple interpretations',<sup>177</sup> and to make the musical element of *Rosa* rigidly interpretable misses precisely the play of meaning that Greenaway and Andriessen revel in.

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<sup>174</sup> Everett explains: 'the literal quotation of Brahms's melody is accompanied by words of lament, negatively inflecting the major mode of the waltz. The Stravinskian chords (reminiscent of "The Sacrificial Dance" from *The Rite of Spring*) interrupt her lament to signify brutality and violence. The waltz melody returns in various guises to amplify the disconnection between the lovers' (Yayoi Uno Everett, 'Parody with an Ironic Edge: Dramatic Works by Kurt Weill, Peter Maxwell Davies, and Louis Andriessen', *Music Theory Online* 10: 4 (December 2004), [http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.04.10.4/mto.04.10.4.y\\_everett.html](http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.04.10.4/mto.04.10.4.y_everett.html) [accessed 08/08/10], para. 10 of 25).

<sup>175</sup> Everett, 'Parody with an Ironic Edge', para. 10 of 25.

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.* One could argue that what Everett gives is essentially a modernist reading of a postmodern text. It is clear from her subsequent assessment of *Writing to Vermeer* that to Everett, tracing the various references and allusions in the score provide her primary source of interpretation. She writes: 'whereas in *Rosa* parody functions primarily as a satirical device, in *Writing to Vermeer* parodied elements (e.g., leitmotif on Sweelinck's tune) prolong dramatic irony at an implicit, hidden level as a subject on their own. Through distortion of leitmotifs and negatively-charged harmonizations, Andriessen allows the music to function continuously as the "shadow" element to the sung text' (Everett, 'Parody with an Ironic Edge', para 10 of 25). What Everett avoids is the significance of these references, and the 'making play' within the score, in relation to the wider context of the dramatic conventions that both these operas interrogate.

<sup>177</sup> Janssen, 'The moment someone starts to sing it immediately becomes a lot more interesting', p. 20.

While commentary on *Rosa* from those interested in Andriessen seems to focus heavily (not surprisingly) on the score, commentary based upon Greenaway's contribution focuses much more on the overall impressions that the work gives. Wood attempts to characterise not only *Rosa's* impact, but the theatricalities of Greenaway in general, arguing that they draw 'attention to the mechanics of representation: we look to see how it is done, and we fail, and so the tension between what we see and what we know is never released; disbelief is not suspended, but held in suspension; we become self-aware as viewers'.<sup>178</sup> This suspension of belief functions as a platform upon which the audience may construct their interpretations, and Wood draws attention to 'oppositions and paradoxes, which are often ironic [...] which, rather than cancelling each other out as they might in logic, flicker, alternate [...] Around these poles, between them, thought accumulates threads and webs of connections, some fragile or broken or abandoned, others regular routes: the thought of the artist, and the thought of the viewer.'<sup>179</sup> Of course, the rhizomatic corollary is clear: the flux; the intangibility; the personal.

*Rosa* closes with an 'index'. The index plays out the audience, set to a rather clumsy-sounding rap, following the traditional bows. Woods describes this item as 'an index of the performance and its component parts, but one which gives definition also, becoming a kind of dictionary'. He quotes, "Grief. An emotional experience often brought about by a great sense of loss. The subject of this loss is completely immaterial."<sup>180</sup> Of course, such a 'definition', following the high drama of *Rosa's* close, seems perfunctory and cold. Although the 'index' is often seen simply as some form of

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<sup>178</sup> Woods, *Being Naked Playing Dead*, p.200.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, p.194.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*. Interestingly, this is one of the few points where Woods considers the comparable complexity of the music: 'in performance, this index lasts over twenty minutes, riding an unexpected James Brown groove, and included, even more unexpectedly, a quotation from Rod Stewart's "Do You Think I'm Sexy?" (*sic*), which itself (folk, blues and pop traditions are systems of echo and quotation as labyrinthine as any work by Greenaway) is based on a Bobby Womack riff' (*ibid.*). Ironically, the music of the index is often ignored by musicologists, perhaps because its rather clumsy imitation of rap is considered somewhat naive in relation to the rest of the score. However, if the index functions (as I argue) as a marker of irrelevance, then the fact of its neglect perhaps becomes an interesting addition to the work's impact.

playlist, or summary of the opera, I would argue that its purpose bears an alternative significance. The 'index' parades its futility. The depthlessness of the definitions speak of complexity through its absence: 'see how this spectacle you have witnessed resists any simple explanation'? One of the problems with *Rosa*—indeed, with any plural, postmodern text—is that to systematically probe the score, libretto, stage play, programme notes (etc., etc. ...), would result in a text that far outweighs the material sum of *Rosa* itself (in terms of quantity of words, references and images).<sup>181</sup> This text would function as ghost to the original work: in one sense a valuable insight into the processes and hidden references that generated the final article, but in another sense, a futile attempt to summarise what has already been said: the text of *Rosa* invites these explorations, but the outcome will always lead back to the work itself, to 'I see now what you may have been trying to say'. It is the playing of the game itself, be it in creation or in the *re-creative* act of the receiver, which *Rosa* is 'about'.

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<sup>181</sup> Interestingly, in respect of Andriessen's tutelage, the example that immediately springs to mind (of a study that attempts to trace just such a web of references), takes Berio's *Sinfonia* as its subject. See David Osmond-Smith, *Playing on Words: A Guide to Luciano Berio's Sinfonia* (London: Royal Musical Association, 1985).

## Quotation

Theft is an uncommonly agreeable subject. I take a positive view of it. There are two sorts: stealing and doing nothing with it, or going to work on what you've stolen. The first is plagiarism. Andrew Lloyd Weber has yet to think up a single note. That's rather poor. Stealing and doing something with it, that's something that every composer I like has done. And it's good, because all good music is about other music.<sup>182</sup>

Quotation is an important component of Andriessen's music, and one which contributes to the sense of dialogue within it. As he explains, such dialogue 'is not to be established merely by a facile collaging of musical relics [...] what is sought, instead, is a consistent musical parlance which can embrace these relics and breathe new life into them outside of their conventional contexts'.<sup>183</sup> Rather than simple juxtaposition, quotation in Andriessen's music appears active and interactive: the use of various fragments serves to question or illuminate certain aspects of the music that is placed alongside it. As Everett notes, 'Andriessen deliberately abstains from foregrounding one quotation over another', and suggests that this creates 'a position of neutrality [...] holding to the ethos of "stylelessness"'.<sup>184</sup> Yet Andriessen's quotations seem anything *but* neutral. While often playful, their simultaneous interaction and synthesis with Andriessen's frameworks avoids what the composer refers to as 'the iron and cement walls of the quotation mark'.<sup>185</sup> While 'irony' and 'parody' are often attributed to Andriessen's use of quotation (see below), a lesser known concept of 'fictional music', described by Rabinowitz, seems to fittingly describe Andriessen's use of other sources.

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<sup>182</sup> Andriessen and Rossum, 'After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath', p. 15.

<sup>183</sup> Louis Andriessen and Edward Harsh, 'The Past as Presence in Part One of Louis Andriessen's *De Materie*', *Contemporary Music Review*, 6: 2 (1992), 59–70 (p. 60).

<sup>184</sup> Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, pp. 48–49.

<sup>185</sup> Andriessen and Harsh, 'The Past as Presence', p. 60.

Rabinowitz describes fictional music as something that ‘overlaps but does not coincide with quotation’.<sup>186</sup> Significantly, fictional music differs from parody or irony in that it lacks any satirical connotation, or indeed, alienating outcome. Rather than making the content of the quotation itself ‘other’, fictional music provokes ‘a new kind of critical approach’. This approach is defined by a stimulus to realise ‘not quite that the *music* exists on two levels—it would be more accurate to say that the essential quality lies in *how we listen to it*. The work itself may tell us “what to do”, but it is up to the listener to create the crucial multilevel structure’.<sup>187</sup> It is this prompting of a critical (and individual) response to the placement of quotation that seems so apt when applied to Andriessen’s music.<sup>188</sup> His ongoing concern with engaging with music *about* music is summarised in Rabinowitz’s formulation.

In a wider context, the concept of fictional music presents a model for postmodern plurality that appeals to the ‘*petit recit*’ of personal interpretation. Indeed, Rabinowitz’s essay explores the music of Crumb, Maxwell-Davies, and Berio, as examples of fictional music. Rabinowitz emphasises the specificity of fictional music to the twentieth century, arguing that ‘the listener’s *awareness* of the interplay between “new” and “borrowed” material [has] become a significant determinant of the aesthetic effect in large numbers of major compositions.’<sup>189</sup> Fictional music, then, also offers a way of locating Andriessen in relation to his contemporaries without recourse to specific definitions of style. As Everett notes, the ‘appropriation of text and music

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<sup>186</sup> Peter J. Rabinowitz, ‘Fictional Music: Toward a Theory of Listening’, in Harry R. Garvin, *Theories of Reading, Looking and Listening* (London: Associated University Presses, 1981), pp. 193–208 (p.199). Rabinowitz also describes fictional music as ‘music that pretends to be a different performance of some other music’ (p. 198), but this should not be confused with the idea of diegetic music. Instead Rabinowitz is trying to describe a summoning of some associated historical or social performance context made ‘other’ by its placement into an altered situation.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>188</sup> Interestingly, Rabinowitz also specifies that ‘a composer may just as well imitate the general style of someone else without quoting’ (Rabinowitz, ‘Fictional Music’, p. 199). This provides a useful corollary with Everett’s method of charting both style quotation (SQ) and literal quotation (LQ) in her analyses of Andriessen’s music (Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 47).

<sup>189</sup> Rabinowitz, ‘Fictional Music’, p. 193 [his italics].



within a musical commentary that does not necessarily aim at synthesis or closure,<sup>190</sup> demands formulations that will place an emphasis on the role of the listener in acting out the critical commentary that Andriessen presents. However, since parody and irony are terms that are frequently applied to Andriessen's music, how these concepts might relate to fictional music should also be explored.

Parody, particularly, is a term that carries a variety of meanings dependent on the historical location of its subject. Hutcheon, in her *Theory of Parody*,<sup>191</sup> describes parody as 'imitation characterised by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text [...] repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity'.<sup>192</sup> Yet the ironic quality of parody—the lack of 'ridiculing intent'—is a somewhat specific development of the twentieth century.<sup>193</sup> Hutcheon includes various methods of quotation under parody, including homage, collage and the use of found objects, and argues that the use of these materials is not simply 'nostalgic imitation [but] a stylistic confrontation'.<sup>194</sup> This formulation clearly mirrors the 'critical

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<sup>190</sup> Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 7. Similarly, Rabinowitz suggests that 'the musical amalgams themselves are difficult to talk about using traditional analytical methods. As listeners, we may know intuitively that the effect of Berio's quotation of Monteverdi in *Recital I* differs from that of Berg's incorporation of Bach's "Es ist genug" in his Violin Concerto; but since the difference [...] does not lie in the notes themselves, rhythmic, harmonic, and structural analysis is not able to account for it' (Rabinowitz, 'Fictional Music', p. 194).

<sup>191</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York; London: Methuen & Co., 1985). This book deals specifically with twentieth-century parody, and is a primary source of citation for many commentators' discussion.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>193</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 66. Hutcheon describes a generic, and 'non-generic meaning' of parody. The latter refers to the 'traditional notion of a composition with humorous intent' (*ibid.*, p. 67), where 'recognisable noble turns of phrase will often be applied to inappropriate subjects [...] frequently conservative in impulse, exaggerating stylistic idiosyncrasies' (*ibid.*), and, I would argue, is the more commonly understood meaning of the term (Hutcheon uses the example of the *Tristan* quote in Debussy's *Golliwog's Cake Walk*). The former category, which Hutcheon's work seeks to examine, emphasises the 'definition of parody as repetition, but repetition with difference' (*ibid.*, p. 66). In this category she includes works such as Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* and Prokofiev's 'Classical' Symphony, where 'there is a distance between the model and the parody that is created by a stylistic dichotomy' (pp. 66–7). Although there is no mention of him in the book, the characterisation of difference through repetition recall's Deleuze's formulations of the same: while firmly beyond the scope of this study, an attempt to illuminate the synthesis between these two theories may prove interesting.

<sup>194</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 8.

approach' of fictional music, yet the use of fictional music as a distinct category (perhaps a subcategory of Hutcheon's parody) avoids Hutcheon's specific 'ironic parody' being confused with the ridiculing intent of her 'non-generic' definition.<sup>195</sup>

Turning her attention to the cultural and social conditions that allow parody (in its various forms) to flourish, Hutcheon argues that all histories of parody agree that the device 'prosperes in periods of cultural sophistication that enable parodists to rely on the competence of the reader (viewer, listener) of the parody'.<sup>196</sup> While this may have once been true for an educated audience (and in past institutional hierarchies, therefore the *target* audience), contemporary use of parody cannot always rely on

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<sup>195</sup> The intent behind parodic quotation further confuses the question of description and categorisation. While Hutcheon stresses that there is often confusion between parody and satire (satire being 'moral and social in its focus and ameliorative in its intention' (p. 16)), identifying 'intention' may not always be straightforward. In addition, Hutcheon comments on the usefulness of mockery in parody (something that 'reinforces; in formal terms, it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence. It is in this sense that parody is the custodian of the artistic legacy, defining not only where art is, but where it has come from' (p. 97)), thereby clouding the notion of a 'non-ridiculing' form. In a broader cultural context, Jameson argues that it is precisely this dependence on convention that leads parody to be replaced by pastiche (a term which Jameson uses to signify non-ridiculing intent). Jameson argues that this change is firmly rooted in the fragmentation of society, where 'the very possibility of any linguistic norm in terms of which one could ridicule private languages and idiosyncratic styles would vanish, and we would have nothing but stylistic diversity and heterogeneity' (Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 114). Marking a distinct separation between modernist parody, and postmodern pastiche, Jameson explains that:

that is the moment at which pastiche appears and parody has become impossible. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour (*ibid.*, p. 114).

<sup>196</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 19.

such universal cultural knowledge, and in turn, the 'competence' of the receiver.<sup>197</sup> Hutcheon points out that modern parody 'does not always permit one of the texts to fare any better or worse than the other', instead playing upon 'the fact that they differ', and argues that the ironic function provides a 'rhetorical mechanism' that stimulates 'awareness of this dramatisation'.<sup>198</sup> The invocation of a rhetorical mechanism again returns to the notion of a discourse—music about music—but it should also be noted that in dramatising the difference between quotations, the resultant receiver-response can be multilayered: an intertext that signals the openness of interpretation without demanding (although often inviting) understanding.

This duality resonates with Andriessen's own conception of irony: an acknowledgement that 'everything always carries its contradictions within itself. Something is always something else.'<sup>199</sup> When the relationship between creator and receiver is altered through (potentially) divergent cultural referents, the creator's function is altered by removing (as Barthes argues) the authorial role, but, Hutcheon suggests, also retaining 'a position of discursive authority'.<sup>200</sup> This position, for Andriessen, is one of critical distance, derived through the strict realisation of a

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<sup>197</sup> Hutcheon does consider the reception of parodic texts by a modern receiver who may not have the same set of references available:

the potential for elitism in parody has frequently been pointed out, but little attention has been paid to the didactic value of parody in teaching or co-opting the art of the past by textual incorporation and ironic commentary. Maybe we do need those sleeve notes on modern composers' records in order to understand the music. Maybe Stuart Gilbert's guide to *Ulysses* is obligatory for many of us. Inferring authorial intent from a text's inscription of it is not always easy, though it need not be impossible. Many cultural codes are shared, even if we, as receivers of texts, have to be reminded of them (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 26).

Again, the notion of 'intent' is not addressed. Does the inclusion of parodic devices by a creator imply that a 'complete' understanding of that device is expected? Particularly in contemporary parodic works, where references may be so diverse that a complete recognition may feasibly be unique to the creator, is the recognition that parody is at work (even if it is not fully understood) sufficient to stimulate critical engagement with disparate elements of the text? Hutcheon points out that of all the 'codes shared between encoder and decoder, the most basic of these is that of parody itself, for, if the receiver does not recognise that the text is a parody, he or she will neutralise both its pragmatic ethos and its doubled structure' (*ibid.*, p. 27).

<sup>198</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 22.

<sup>199</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 204.

<sup>200</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 85.

conceptual starting point, and Beirens argues that it is this distance 'that can be associated with irony'.<sup>201</sup> He reasons that in assuming this position, the open nature of the intertext is respected, thereby acknowledging 'the ambiguities and complexity of the concept in question'.<sup>202</sup> While the reliance on formal structures dictated by a conceptual model (and Andriessen's strict adherence to those structures) at first points to a dogmatic modernist approach, the free-play of elements within those structures indicates a dialectical engagement even with the structure itself, pointing to a postmodern adoption of modernist structural formality as code amongst the many other that are drawn in through the use of quotation. Hutcheon concurs, suggesting that postmodern parodic form 'remains to activate in the reader or viewer that collective participation that enables something closer to active "performance" to replace the "well-wrought urn" of modernist closure'.<sup>203</sup> Thus, what separates modernist parody from an ironic, postmodern version, is the transference of interpretation wholly onto the receiver, and the removal of any illusion of direct communication between the intentions of the creator and the works' subsequent understanding.

What remains is the 'position' outlined above. Everett explores parody in Andriessen's, Weill's and Maxwell-Davies' work with reference to Hutcheon's theory, focusing on the 'composer's appropriation of pre-existing music with intent to highlight it in a significant way'.<sup>204</sup> She approaches a variety of works using Hutcheon's concept of *ethos* (the parodic intent), 'divided into deferential (*neutral*), ridiculing (*satirical*), or contradictory (*ironic*) based on how the new context transforms and/or subverts the topical/expressive meaning of the borrowed element'.<sup>205</sup> Everett argues that despite the diversity of their voices, all three composers 'share the same historical vantage point in embracing parodic techniques in order to provoke a social response [and] to

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<sup>201</sup> Beirens, 'The Identity of European Minimal Music', p. 284.

<sup>202</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 98.

<sup>204</sup> Everett, 'Parody with an Ironic Edge', para 5 of 25.

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*

provide a musical commentary on the socio-political climate for the arts in Western Europe'.<sup>206</sup> In addition, she identifies a postmodern outlook in Andriessen's and Davies' work, where 'parody supplants the purity of modernist aesthetic aims while infusing it with the avant-garde's power of provocation'.<sup>207</sup> Crucially, she goes on to identify this postmodern attitude as one that 'resonates with Hal Foster's discourse on *oppositional* postmodernism or postmodernism of resistance'.<sup>208</sup> This alignment reinforces the possibility of a response to postmodernity that remains critically active, consequently allowing Andriessen to occupy a politically and socially dynamic position within a postmodernist category. Indeed, Hutcheon argues that the critical function of parodic reproduction may be 'an attack on high-art discourse and its isolation from social reality':<sup>209</sup> an observation that marries well with Andriessen's stance of the production and reception of works.

### **Networks and Commentary**

Andriessen's use of irony and quotation, alongside political concerns manifested through a pragmatic approach to the production of music, combine with a strong personal rhetoric that accommodates and celebrates the influence of a diverse and plural collection of composers and musics. As has been outlined above, this blend of concerns results in works with a multilayered intertext that invites critical engagement with both Andriessen's music and the musics embedded within it. Thus, networks of associations are established both within and between works, and a sense of commentary is established which provides the key to the essence of Andriessen's music. This kaleidoscopic music—always dynamic, always in flux—demands a creative response on the part of the listener: one must create one's own networks, and explore how Andriessen's music is about the music we find within it.

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<sup>206</sup> Everett, 'Parody with an Ironic Edge', para 25 of 25.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 110. Although, *pace* Jameson, she acknowledges the dominant nature of postmodernity and includes the following provision: 'this is not to say that our capitalist culture is not capable of co-opting even these challenges, making them into individual high-art productions and expensive private property' (*ibid.*).

This is not to say that Andriessen's voice is absent from the end result. As early as the 1968 premiere of *Anachronie I*, Binnenhof describes the work as 'a musical pop art, fascinating and flourishing,' that retained the fingerprints of its creator. He writes:

it was pleasant through the 'style of the absence of style' which struck the hearer in it. One was in fact offered a piece of music which one could compare with a bric-à-brac interior, in which it is very nice to linger; an interior which betrays the personality of the inhabitant in all its details.<sup>210</sup>

As with so many of facets of Andriessen's work, Stravinsky acts as the lens to focus his kaleidoscopic projections: an ideological mentor of his methods. Andriessen admires the way in which Stravinsky's signposting of other musics 'makes that pointing into a subject, without ever leaving a moment's doubt as to who the maker is'.<sup>211</sup> Andriessen, with a characteristic hint of playful irony, notes that 'this is a paradox', and concludes that 'since paradoxes do not exist in order to be solved, it was necessary to follow in Stravinsky's path—without stepping on his footprints [...] It became a route with access roads, sidetracks, and detours'.<sup>212</sup> Andriessen's response to Stravinsky itself echoes Cross' assessment that 'it is Stravinsky's modernist *attitude* toward already existent material that is original, that is challenging (and, indeed, "proto-postmodern")'.<sup>213</sup> While the suggestion of a proto-postmodernism hints that Andriessen's synthesis of Stravinsky's methods might indicate a further step towards

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<sup>210</sup> Het Binnenhof on *Anachronie I* (Rotterdam Philharmonic, c. Edo De Waart, 18 Jan 1968), 'Netherlands Music Chronicle', *Sonorum Speculum* 35 (Summer 1968), p. 40.

<sup>211</sup> Andriessen and Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork*, p. xiii.

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*, p. 13 [his italics]. Tellingly, Cross also highlights Andriessen's *attitude* (again, his italics) to material when discussing *De Staat* and 'the way in which Andriessen is able to take so many ideas from *The Rite of Spring* and build from them something distinctly new, distinctly his own, which fuses Stravinsky, rock and minimalism in a coherent way to explicit expressive ends. This may be "music about other music", but the sources are transformed' (*ibid.*, p. 182). Cross believes that it is this fusion, the approach to material, that distinguishes a 'European engagement with and transformation of tradition' (*ibid.*, p. 183) from the 'commercially-minded "irony" of Adams and Torke' (*ibid.*, p. 182). Much earlier, Andriessen himself has admired an attitude to material demonstrated by Stravinsky: 'I consider Stravinsky's *Sacre* the great example of how we began to think of music in the twentieth century. The same attitude to music that I find in Stravinsky's work is in all of my pieces' (Andriessen and Rossum, 'After Chopin and Mendelssohn we Landed in a Mudbath', p. 11).

the postmodern, the idea of *attitude* again reinforces a sense of commentary and interplay.

In a similar vein, Trochimczyk emphasises Andriessen's relativist approach to musical material, 'seeing music as part of culture and locating his pieces at the center of complex referential networks'.<sup>214</sup> This she attributes partly to the influence of Berio's teaching, but also to the dominant logic of the postmodern condition that both Berio and Andriessen are located within: 'parallels in both composers' postmodern thinking and the similarity of their cultural milieu'.<sup>215</sup> This attention to socio-cultural location leads Trochimczyk to ask Andriessen what information a listener should be furnished with in order for them to '*comprehend what they hear*'. Andriessen responds by explaining in typically paradoxical fashion: on the one hand, elements of form and sources of quotation can be pointed out, analysed and explained. On the other, he questions the use of such information, and suggests that it may cloud any understanding of the musical experience on the listener's part.<sup>216</sup>

Rather than specifics, it seems that Andriessen is interested in creating a sense of *location*; works that demand the listener consider the social background that allows their consumption to take place, and the cultural norms that allow that music to be understood. This sense of place, Andriessen relates to memory. He is critical of its absence in the 'so-called avant-garde' and says that he 'would like to compose while taking memory into account'.<sup>217</sup> Memory, for Andriessen, concerns not only the perception of relationships within a work, but a sense of history: the conventions and

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<sup>214</sup> Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 285 [her italics].

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> Andriessen's full response reads: 'It is a very difficult issue. There are things in the score of *Writing to Vermeer* which I can discuss and explain; it is really questionable, however, if it is at all relevant to the studying of (or loving) the music. Obviously, all these facts provide excellent information about my way of working. The question remains though: is it of general interest to the listeners of my music? All these kinds of idiosyncrasies sometimes do not make any sense. Perhaps, occasionally it is better not to know, just to enjoy the music—not only because technical information is distracting, but also because knowing how a piece of music was made is profoundly irrelevant to knowing what it is' (Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 84).

<sup>217</sup> Andriessen in Trochimczyk, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 144.

tradition that allow music to be recognised as music, and to function as such. Yet Andriessen is not a traditionalist. Rather, he revels in the postmodern depthlessness of history, while retaining the critical distance that allows his networks to develop and his commentary to speak. This distance, and sense of depthlessness, is revealed in a remark by Andriessen on the subject of history: 'my father thought it was elegant to see history not as a line but as a circle around you, so that you focus now and again on a particular point in history. Later I regarded this as an un-Marxist outlook, but now I have some sympathy for it'.<sup>218</sup> This statement also reveals the extent to which Andriessen has sought to synthesise his political outlook with his plural musical tastes, and indeed, the flexible nature of his own ideology.

The existence of these networks within and between Andriessen's work(s) presents a difficulty for the analyst of his music. As his reply to Trochimczyk indicates, there is much that can be said about the details (inspirations, quotations, structures, concepts) that come together in the completed work, yet such detail stops short of one of Andriessen's central concerns: the mode of production. As Everett notes, 'it is precisely his strategy of recontextualisation—how and why he alters the borrowed musical references to form a commentary—that renders his "concept" work meaningful in creating a multi-layered musical discourse'.<sup>219</sup> Any attempt to render this discourse tangible must remain partial, rhizomatic and flexible. The impression one forms, after exploring his rhetoric and his work, is that this is precisely the way Andriessen would like it.

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<sup>218</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 203.

<sup>219</sup> Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 6.



## Chapter Eight

### Themes, developments and (temporary) conclusions...

As is clear from the range of factors that influence Andriessen's music, an eclectic approach to musical exploration is central to the development of his own stylistic markers. This eclecticism and the open nature of the networks he develops around his music often make it difficult to define. Enright picks up on this open-endedness and suggests that Andriessen is happy to foster such a view:

RE: So, do you really believe that your life work is an unfinished thing and should always be? You seem to love this idea of the incomplete. The Martland film picks up that metaphor because at the end, it's still going on.<sup>1</sup> Then in *Rosa* the investigatrix doesn't really have all the answers.

LA: Yeah. Having 'the answer' makes your life small. I consider it stupid and reactionary. If you can't ask questions anymore, if you have answers to all the questions, then you are lost.

RE: You're still an anarchist.

LA: I consider this a compliment.<sup>2</sup>

Andriessen's resistance to hard and fast conclusions is evident, yet there is also a strong sense of continuity running through his works; a continuity that is often contained in the extra-musical networks and sense of play that surround the scores and performances themselves. While each work demonstrates distinctions that make it difficult to apply general labels and stylistic categories to Andriessen's music, a sense of linkage-in-flux (a rhizomatic network) is evident. So, for example, the libretto for

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<sup>1</sup> See Martland, *A Temporary Agreement With the Sea*. This film is based on the premise that it mirrors Andriessen's own views that everything is a work-in-progress. The opening scene foregrounds the film's production methods by 'going wrong' (Andriessen is not at the window he should be: it is hard to tell whether this is written into the narrative or a happy accident that inspires the film's angle), and at the close, the camera eavesdrops on a conversation between Andriessen and Martland where they discuss the concept of the film, and the way in which it should narrate the process of making the documentary as the process of Andriessen's compositional methods are revealed. There is no traditional 'summing up' at the close: instead the camera tails away from this exchange.

<sup>2</sup> Enright, 'Notes Towards Anarchy', p. 38.

*Reconstructie*,<sup>3</sup> structured around the alphabet (A is Amerika, B is Bolivia... M is Maneschijn (moonshine)) and modelled on *Don Giovanni* echoes just beyond the limits of *M is for Man, Music, Mozart* as the later work returns to the alphabetic emphasis, the imagery of the 'built' individual,<sup>4</sup> and the weave of Classical quotation. Of course, such observations hover at the edges of mere speculation: too intangible to construct a traditional works-genealogy from, but nevertheless present in the mind of a listener familiar with both works. Based on the flavour of Andriessen's rhetoric, the richness of his pool of references, and his concern for commentary within and between his own and other music, it is hard to imagine that these gossamer connections escape his attention. Rather, it seems likely that they are intended to add a further dimension of play (and flux) to an oeuvre already hard to pin down.

Some of Andriessen's links are more concrete: Rowena Braddock, for example, points to the use of the same quotations from Brahms' Lullaby and Stravinsky's *Danse Sacrale* in both *Vermeer* and *Rosa*,<sup>5</sup> while Andriessen himself occasionally elucidates on the links he has made. So for example, he explains how in *The Trilogy of the Last Days*, each part ends with the same tonal centre (an F) because of a chance realisation that the first two parts shared this feature unintentionally.<sup>6</sup> Yet he also uses this example to sound a note of caution to the musicologist: 'a similarity which can be positively established by a good detective turns out to be based on coincidence'.<sup>7</sup> This warning demonstrates the central question when trying to understand Andriessen's music, and indeed, any other composer who actively engages with the postmodern condition:

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Andriessen, Hugo Clauss, Reinbert de Leeuw, Misha Mengelberg, Harry Mulisch, Peter Schat, Jan Van Vlijmen, *Blauwdruk van de Opera Reconstructie*, (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> The stage play of *Reconstructie* centres around the building of a large statue of Che Guevara piece by piece (also a reference to the statue in Mozart's original opera), while the screenplay for *M is for Man...* observes attempts to create a human being in the setting of a Victorian anatomy theatre.

<sup>5</sup> Rowena Braddock and Nicholas Routley, 'Productive Disjunction and the Play of Rupture: Reading "the Blanks" in *Writing to Vermeer*', *Musicology Australia* 27 (2004–5), 73–93 (p. 83).

<sup>6</sup> Andriessen explains: 'the last note of *Tao* is an F. At first, it hadn't struck me at all that *The Last Day* ends on an F as well. The preceding sounds are also so different that it doesn't register. Once I had established that similarity, I decided to let part 3 end on an F' (Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 291).

<sup>7</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 291.

should the emphasis of interpretation be based on *intention* or *expectation*? Or, put another way, which position engenders fewer contradictions in relation to the cultural dominant in which the music is situated: that of author-god whose intentions must be traced, or that elusive, utopian listener who understands and interprets all reference and allusion in its entirety, all history and culture equally available to them?

The answer is of course that each position is flawed, yet that by combining these two aspects, the paradox inherent in postmodernity is reflected in the music (and interpretation) that seeks to engage with it. Not only does this approach reflect the condition in which works are now created and consumed, but it reflects a gradual synthesis in Andriessen's work (as he moved outside of the category of 'modernist composer') between popular and 'serious' works. While Adlington suggests that Andriessen's aversion to the postmodern tag might be understandable due to the commonly-held notion that postmodernity represents a political impotence, he adds that its characteristics may hold 'clear relevance for Andriessen's music in that they typically highlight the importance of explicit references to other musical styles'.<sup>8</sup>

Adlington also notes that 'postmodern music is seen as foregrounding the way in which any form of individual expression, however authentic and unique it may seem, is at root a negotiation of the forms and practices to hand in culture'.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, it is this development that most reflects Andriessen's critical engagement with contemporary society. A path can be traced from his early division between what Andriessen's refers to as his 'official' works ('long pieces for large ensemble which were profound and interesting and in which I used high-tech serial techniques'), and the 'instant' works that he wrote for experimental theatre and film; to a synthesis between these two spheres in his later career. By the time he wrote *De Materie* in the eighties, Andriessen felt that he had achieved a synthesis between his different approaches to 'serious' and 'populist' genres. He explains that this was not so much a synthesis of style or sound, but 'my way of working. I wanted to combine the rigid

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<sup>8</sup> Adlington, *Louis Andriessen: De Staat*, p. 108.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 108–9.

formulae with an intuitive way of writing'.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting, therefore, that from this work onwards, there is also evidence of minimalism becoming one of many disparate elements in any given work rather than an overarching principle peppered by other ideas. While the earlier works show a strict (albeit critical) observation of minimal stylistic principles, the seventies represent Andriessen's final period as a composer attempting to adopt stylistic practices before he began to synthesise those codes into a postmodern plurality that also coincides with a more accurate categorisation (if one can be applied at all) as a postminimalist.

This arrival at a point of genuine synthesis<sup>11</sup> is the key to understanding Andriessen's music: as Everett puts it, Andriessen's 'identity speaks through the music in such a way that he remains at the center of his own "labyrinth"'.<sup>12</sup> Developments and quotations can be mapped and identified; themes can be traced and extracted; stylistic preferences and characteristics can be analysed, but that process demands that Andriessen's music be placed firmly within the context of its history, production, reception and criticism: music about music and music that can only be understood in a social context that is characterised as postmodern.

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<sup>10</sup> Andriessen, *The Art of Stealing Time*, p. 245.

<sup>11</sup> Albeit a synthesis that maintains a dialogic quality: Bloch describes it as an 'uneasy coexistence, an unresolved tension rather than a clean synthesis or an obvious critique [that] seems to characterize not only Andriessen's best music, but also his entire career, from his institutional position to his musical philosophy' (Bloch, 'The Problem With Andriessen', para. 11 of 20).

<sup>12</sup> Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, p. 101.

## “CONCLUSIONS”

I rediscovered what writers have always known (and have told us again and again): books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told.<sup>1</sup>

It seems counter-intuitive, and somewhat self-defeating, to speak of conclusions at the close of a text that has sought to articulate the intangible connections—the boundaries of play—between theory, music, and composer. Maintaining, therefore, a Deleuzian, rhizomatic *attitude* to this topic, no attempt will be made to solidify connections and commonalities between these spheres of investigation. These ‘conclusions’ return to the kaleidoscope: the metaphor that has underpinned the imagery and organisation of this rhizomatic space. Part One has demonstrated the theoretical basis for conceptualising postmodernity as a totality from which we cannot remove ourselves. Yet the theorist’s rhetorical position is always one that places oneself at some remove from the narrative that describes the research. The image of the kaleidoscope goes some way to reminding us that, as viewer, our perception of this ‘totality’ is always partial, yet at the same time, the boundaries of that view are recognisable from the position that we take. This thesis has privileged discourse; used it as a tool to reveal those shifting patterns and positions that characterise thinking about postmodernity, and postmodernity itself. What I hope this approach has demonstrated is that there is no ‘definition’ of postmodernity that can be neatly laid out and considered fixed. Postmodernity is as much this wealth of discourse and debate as it is any other of its many characteristics. This does not make it indescribable, but it does make it supple, and it forces us to consider the way that postmodernism manifests itself in flexible ways.

At its close, this thesis reaches a point which recognises that the emergence and development of postmodern theory occupies a transitional period of the concept itself: it attempts to articulate a state of flux which has gradually resolved into something that—if ‘stable’ is too strong a word—might be described as a familiar ideology that

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<sup>1</sup> Eco, *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, p. 20.

provides a framework with which to consider the multiplicities of everyday life. Postmodernism describes the cultural responses to these multiplicities: as Silverman argues, 'postmodernism does not open up a new field of artistic, philosophical, cultural, or even institutional activities. Its very significance is to marginalise, delimit, disseminate, and decenter the primary (and often secondary) works of modernist and premodernist cultural inscriptions.'<sup>2</sup> Minimalism is just such an example of these cultural inscriptions: although it begins as a typically modernist impulse (albeit, in typically modernist fashion, challenging the limits of modernist practice), its chronological situation—the particular intersection of postmodernity's emergence and minimalism's development—mirrors postmodern evolution in such a way that its transformation into a minimalist, postmodern code in little over a decade can illustrate clearly the cultural transformations that have often been harder to determine in other musics. The intersections, contradictions, and paradoxes of postmodernity feed into the cultural landscape; places those same contradictions within the creative space. As Hassan notes, 'any definition of postmodernism calls upon a fourfold vision of complementaries, embracing continuity and discontinuity, diachrony and synchrony.'<sup>3</sup> These complementaries are resistant to fixed linearity, and promote a rhizomatic approach.

In music, this may mean reconsidering the way in which boundaries are established between styles, periods or genres. As our cultural history becomes ever present; our cultural locality (potentially) more global, categorisations that seek only to characterise what takes place within the Western art tradition according to conventional criteria may seem somewhat orthodox in their outlook. Blake has argued that there is a dichotomy between the music of a 'classical tradition' on the one hand, and the musics of mass and popular culture on the other. He suggests that while the former 'is analysed with hardly a concession to its context either of production or reception [...]

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<sup>2</sup> Hugh J. Silverman, 'Introduction: The Philosophy of Postmodernism', in Hugh J. Silverman (ed.), *Postmodernism—Philosophy and the Arts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1–9 (p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> Ihab Hassan, 'POSTFACE 1982: Toward Postmodernism', in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 259–271 (p. 265).

popular musics are considered sociologically, historically and anthropologically, but seldom analysed as sound.<sup>4</sup> Yet what I hope this thesis has shown is that those musics that can broadly be considered part of the Western classical tradition (and minimalism, for all its 'other' connections, remains embedded in this tradition even as its influence reaches to other spheres) can also be treated with the same contextual considerations that are so common to other cultural criticism. Minimalism develops at the cusp of modernist and postmodern interaction. While one can point to minimalism that suggests a modernist outlook, or minimalism that has become so undeniably plural that it commands the prefix 'post-', it is equally significant that minimalism evolves as a music that invites investigation into the conditions of its production, reception, and dissemination. It does this not only in the way that the premiere of *Le Sacre*, for example, invites the analysis of its reception, but in a far more *integrated* and *symbiotic* fashion. The mechanisms of media, of reproduction, of technology: a synthesis with these factors can be identified at every stage of the creative process in minimalism.

This music demonstrates the dominance of postmodernity, but it also shows how this dominance need not be seen as a path to apathy and abstraction (indeed, minimalism becomes less abstract as it grows recognisably postmodern). This totality of postmodernity has implications for the way in which postmodern culture is examined. As Bauman draws his sociological survey of postmodernity to a close, he argues that 'to be effectively and consequentially present in a postmodern habitat sociology must conceive of itself as a participant [...] In practice [...] this will amount to the replacement of the dream of the legislator with the practice of an interpreter.'<sup>5</sup> It seems that musicology (and critical and cultural theory in general) must conceive of itself in the same way. At the same time, one must be able to recognise the critical distance imposed by one's own position, and to make that position explicit and subject

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Blake, 'Listen to Britain: Music, Advertising and Postmodern Culture', in Mica Nava, Andrew Blake, Ian MacRury, Barry Richards (eds), *Buy This Book: Studies in Advertising and Consumption* (Routledge: London 1997), pp.224–238 (p. 225).

<sup>5</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 204

to the same critique as the subject of enquiry. Failure to do so undermines work that, on the surface, appears as a model of postmodern rhizomatic thought.

Consider, for example, Metzger's description of his work as a 'map of the contemporary scene' as 'a modernist continent [...] On separate continents or remote islands are other types of pieces [...] These removed lands include such styles as neo-Romanticism, the new Simplicity, and minimalism'.<sup>6</sup> While the approach, and its vocabulary *seem* to mirror the kind of rhizomatic cognitive mapping that theorists such as Jameson advocate, the emphasis on separation (and the total exclusion of popular and non-Western musics) demonstrates the Western classical bias of Metzger's method. Thus, while he argues that the plurality of postmodernism is an unnecessary construct due to modernism's own diversity, it is clear that the inclusivity of postmodernism is necessary precisely *because* of such statements based only on the evaluation of a small sector of the cultural sphere. While the metaphor of the map demonstrates a rhizomatic principle that is theoretically strong, this principle must be put into practice throughout. Metzger's comments still bear an air of exclusivity: the rhizomatic map should point to (even if it does not explore) diversity. If (and this is a reasonable assumption to make, given that we tend to base our understanding on existing knowledge), Metzger's evocation of a 'modernist continent' leads us to imagine only six remaining continents on which to situate the musical remainder, the fact that he conceives of minimalism as a 'separate continent', leads one to question where popular, or folk, or 'world' musics will be located. Even if one favours Metzger's 'remote islands', this assumes a modernist centrality that betrays a decidedly *unrhizomatic* approach. If anything, I would suggest that we should be conceiving of this cognitive map in the decentred manner of the 'tag cloud' or the internet.<sup>7</sup>

Heile suggests that fallacies such as Metzger's are due to the fact that 'we still tend to understand music history in terms of linear, mutually exclusive, traditions [...] the

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<sup>6</sup> Metzger, *Musical Modernism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 245–6.

<sup>7</sup> The internet provides a particularly attractive example due to its built-in 'non-optimisation'. All data is treated indiscriminately as data packets, regardless of what form of data it takes (e.g. web pages, music streaming, email, etc.).



hierarchical tree structure [...] simple binarisms [...] composers are either Western or non-Western, conservative or progressive, avant-gardist or experimental, modernist or postmodernist'.<sup>8</sup> It is precisely to avoid this 'hierarchical' formulation that the rhizomatic attitude has been adopted: by outlining the discourse that congregates around plateaus of a certain characteristic, or idea, or work, narratives can be developed while avoiding any rigidly linear structures, or suggestions of strict binary relationships. While there are still those, such as Croft, who argue that the plurality of the postmodern has become a master narrative in itself ('the frisson of colliding codes soon solidifies into a stylistic orthodoxy [...] the musical manifestation of the ideology of late capitalism'<sup>9</sup>), I would suggest that it is not the codes, nor their use, that has become orthodox. Rather, it is our methods of speaking about those codes, the patterns of discourse that allow channels of thought to become embedded in ideology so strongly that those more intangible connections—the paradox and play of the postmodern—are drowned out.<sup>10</sup>

The development and theorisation of minimalism comes up against similar problems of classification. Precisely because of the semantic connotations of the tag, the idea of a diverse range of musics existing within this category seems oxymoronic. However, this label is widely used; widely understood. Part Two of this thesis has set out a typically

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<sup>8</sup> Heile, 'Weltmusik and the Globalisation of New Music', p. 117. Heile adds that 'where composers seem to fall between the stools, this is more often seen as an exception proving the rule, rather than an indication of the limitation of the underlying conceptual model' (*ibid.*).

<sup>9</sup> John Croft, 'Fields of Rubble: On the Poetics of Music after the Postmodern', in Heile, *The Modernist Legacy*, pp. 25–38 (p. 27).

<sup>10</sup> Consider, for example, the rhetoric that has been examined surrounding the crossing of the 'high/low divide' in postmodernity. Theorists characteristically consider the way in which 'classical' has become popular, or the way in which those practitioners have collaborated with mass cultural figures. Yet assumptions are often made about their reception, since the critics are often those who already occupy a somewhat elite or institutional position. While beyond the scope of this study, investigation into how presumptive the idea of minimalism and its offshoots as a 'crossover' phenomenon is, would be interesting research. For example, two recent surveys of Factory Records, described as 'comprehensive' on their jackets, both exclude any mention of (typically 'crossover') Steve Martland's relationship with the record label. Incidents such as these should lead us to question whether the writers themselves are sometimes less willing to cross these so-called divides, and to *whom* this crossover seems to have occurred.

monochrome reading of minimalist history that focuses on just four innovators. In the 'kaleidoscope' of minimal characteristics that followed, I hope to have shown how diverse a category minimalism becomes even when a discussion limited primarily to these 'high priests' is outlined in a non-linear fashion. While it would have been desirable to demonstrate the variety of music that actually exists within the remit of these characteristics, such a task is a vast undertaking in itself. In addition, the emphasis this thesis has placed on existing rhetoric precludes the emphasis of currently marginal figures. However, these margins are beginning to receive attention from musicologists, and throughout the course of this writing, there has been an encouraging diversification in the composers who are addressed under the minimalist category. Precisely because the label has been so frequently rejected by minimalism's chief innovators, there is no minimalist 'manifesto' or set of conventions and shared beliefs that mark out its practitioners. While this forces its categorisation to be nebulous, it also sets it apart from many purely modernist movements. It may be worth considering that we are so used to modernist composers dictating the terms on which we listen to and understand their music that we find minimalism indefinable simply because we are forced to reach our own conclusions.

Some of the discourse that has been included in this thesis demonstrates hostility to minimalism. Much of this ill-will seems to arise from a sense that minimalism has proved susceptible to market manipulation, and has become a bland advertising tool for placating the masses. Yet the fact that advertisers may have adopted (and adapted) minimalist code for their (commodity-oriented) ends is not evidence, as some would suggest, of some inherent lack of critical value. While the gloss of minimalism may bombard our ears on a daily basis, it should not be forgotten that the codes of modernism are equally vulnerable to depthless recreation: consider for example the 'horror music' of *Psycho* whose simulacra now permeate docudramas and daytime soaps. Music in all these instances is adopted as mere signifier: not of a particular aesthetic or artistic ideology, but of previous simulacra—the same phenomenon Jameson identifies in the nostalgic use of historical images in film to signify 'a time'. As Blake argues, "postmodernism" is a set of intellectual and artistic practices characterised by a refusal of hierarchy and teleology, and postmodern composers are

those who work within this frame. Postmodernism in this sense acknowledges no single set of correct values and no single narrative of historical or aesthetic correctness'.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the criticism of a category such as minimalism on the grounds that it contains music that seems lacking in substance to those who favour more complex musics, is to neglect to consider the capitalist logic of postmodernity that will always allow those more commercially viable products of any code or style to become the most visible.

There is a counterpoint between the dialectical, critical engagement of composers such as Andriessen, and minimalism that becomes a code which can be assimilated for more blankly capitalist ends. But rather than presenting a case of straightforward opposition to Jameson's 'cultural dominant', it is with composers such as Andriessen that the breakdown of simple binary oppositions is most clearly demonstrated. For Andriessen champions a dialectical engagement: not only with the more commercial aspects of minimalism, but with the hierarchies of cultural production, with the rigours of modernism, and the influence of extra-musical artefacts. Andriessen's 'polemicising' can be best understood in the context of a postmodernity that does not seek a single line of interpretation. Andriessen's polemic, his music about music, exists not for the sake of rupture, but to provoke commentary. This commentary, be it a critical or creative response, is, for Andriessen, the essential relationship between creator and receiver.

As was explained at the outset, modernism becomes a monolithic construct in postmodern rhetoric, yet it should be noted that composers who are rooted in the modernist tradition recognised the changing nature of the cultural landscape and the potential for pluralism housed within the postmodern condition. In his later life, Berio considers the range of resources available to a contemporary composer, and the lack of a homogenous musical community. Rather than viewing this with the negativity that is a common response to postmodern eclecticism, Berio argues that we have 'at our disposal [...] an immense library of musical knowledge [...] Rather like Borges' "Library

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Blake, *The Land Without Music: Music, culture and society in twentieth-century Britain* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 220.

of Babel”, it spreads out in all directions; it has no *before* nor *after*, no place for storing memories. It is always open, totally present, but awaiting interpretation.<sup>12</sup> This positive response to the plurality of culture clearly had far-reaching consequences, for Berio’s remarks sum up Andriessen’s attitude to composition remarkably well. Andriessen, therefore, serves as a typical example of a composer who takes a code that dominates postmodern culture (in his case, minimalism), and runs it through his own ‘Library of Babel’; assimilating, synthesising and critiquing the many of facets of cultural plurality as he goes.

Part Three aimed to illustrate the way in which the rhizomatic approach—the assemblage of a kaleidoscope—could be constructed around a single composer. There is of course an inherent contradiction in this process: if a rhizome is intended to avoid the centrality of any particular idea, then to construct a rhizome ‘around’ one is paradoxical. But the simple recognition of this fact (by now, the existence of paradoxes within the postmodern space ought to be unsurprising), should also lead one to understand that this ‘Andriessen rhizome’ is itself a plateau of a much broader ‘minimalism rhizome’, ‘postmodernism rhizome’, and so on. This conceptual model thus allows us to focus the lens of inquiry (to magnify investigations from postmodernism, to minimalism, to Andriessen), while retaining a background of interconnectivity. By extension, it should also follow that we are able to magnify the ‘Andriessen rhizome’ in order to construct networks around individual works or ideas: Andriessen’s ‘quotation rhizome’, or ‘*Rosa* rhizome’. In recognising the way that these magnifications foreground selected areas of the broader cultural space, it should also be clear that the interconnectivities between other composers, other ideas, and other cultural characteristics can be examined by refocusing the attention of any investigation. The formation of these networks provides a space in which the complexity of relationships between ideas and artefacts can be played out in a multi-dimensional arena.

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<sup>12</sup> Berio, *Remembering the Future*, p. 9 [his italics]. The ‘Library of Babel’ that Berio refers to is a short story by Borges in which the narrator describes an apparently infinite library, populated by scholars who hope to find information that will reveal the origins, order, and dimensions of the library. One could argue that this story is an allegory for contemporary intellectual inquiry.

These suggestions, of course, offer no outcomes; no solutions, no 'finally'. Yet the chosen approach to this topic seems to warrant such an absence. As Deleuze writes,

a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo* [...] the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and... and... and...' [...] Making a clean slate, starting or beginning from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of a voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic...).<sup>13</sup>

If there is any sense of linearity in this study—this voyage of research—then it should be seen as the voyage of the cartographer rather than that of one who seeks a predetermined destination. This thesis reveals the ideological principles underpinning the various phases of minimal and postmodern development: it illustrates *why* a linear, minimised narrative must be replaced with a kaleidoscopic, rhizomatic cognitive space. It does this through the exploration of only one small region of postmodernism. Yet even this region contains currently undocumented diversity, and this text aims to point towards the possibilities of exploring that variation. This thesis has sought to open up 'lines of flight' in discourse about postmodernism and minimalism by demonstrating how Andriessen presents just a single example of a composer who engages with these concepts in a dialectical fashion. What remains is the formidable task of mapping the remainder of the minimal kaleidoscope.

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<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 27.

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