

A Technically Definable Stream of Postminimalism, Its Characteristics and Its Meaning.

[Download Here](#)



Sign in



Enter keywords, authors, DOI etc



Search History

Metrics

Views

1.1k+

In This Chapter

A Technically Definable Stream of Postminimalism, Its Characteristics and Its Meaning

Introduction

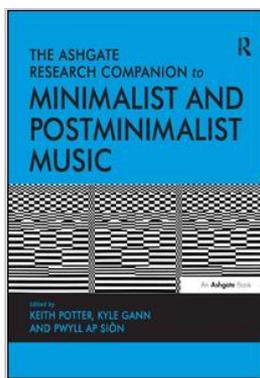
Origins

Processes

Quotation

Limitation of Materials

Conclusion



A Technically Definable Stream of Postminimalism, Its Characteristics and Its Meaning

Authored by: **Kyle Gann**

The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music

Print publication date:

November 2013

Online publication date:

March 2016

Print ISBN: 9781409435495

eBook ISBN:

9781315613260

Adobe ISBN:

9781317042556

10.4324/9781315613260.ch2



Download Chapter

Abstract

As scholars, we strive to efface ourselves in favour of the phenomena we study; as music historians, we shape history, but only after we let the data we take in shape us. 1 1

The author wishes to thank the USA's National Endowment for the Humanities for their support towards the research contained in this chapter.

Working as a music critic in the 1980s and 1990s, I became aware of a new repertoire of music whose stylistic commonalities were too striking to ignore. The music, mostly American in the concerts I heard, was overwhelmingly diatonic in its scales and harmonies. A grid of steady beats was almost always maintained – often throughout an entire work or movement – and without change of tempo. Dynamics tended to be monochrome or terraced, with little of the expressive fluidity one associates with music of the late Romantic or modernist eras. In its circumscribed materials and emotional staticness (which is not to say that it was unemotive, but rather that it tended to maintain one affect throughout), the music was analogous to certain genres of Baroque music, particularly German and Italian instrumental music of the late Baroque, though using a harmonic syntax that was in no way conventional. One of the most intriguing aspects of this repertoire was that it ranged in typology from highly structured to completely intuitive, with every nuance possible in between these two polarities.



★ Add to shortlist

“ Cite

↪ Recommend to a friend

A Technically Definable Stream of

Postminimalism, Its Characteristics and Its Meaning

Introduction

As scholars, we strive to efface ourselves in favour of the phenomena we study; as music historians, we shape history, but only after we let the data we take in shape us. ¹

The author wishes to thank the USA's National Endowment for the Humanities for their support towards the research contained in this chapter.

Working as a music critic in the 1980s and 1990s, I became aware of a new repertoire of music whose stylistic commonalities were too striking to ignore. The music, mostly American in the concerts I heard, was overwhelmingly diatonic in its scales and harmonies. A grid of steady beats was almost always maintained – often throughout an entire work or movement – and without change of tempo. Dynamics tended to be monochrome or terraced, with little of the expressive fluidity one associates with music of the late Romantic or modernist eras. In its circumscribed materials and emotional staticness (which is not to say that it was unemotive, but rather that it tended to maintain one affect throughout), the music was analogous to certain genres of Baroque music, particularly German and Italian instrumental music of the late Baroque, though using a harmonic syntax that was in no way conventional. One of the most intriguing aspects of this repertoire was that it ranged in typology from highly structured to completely intuitive, with every nuance possible in between these two polarities.

From the beginning, it seemed clear that this music was, on the most obvious level, a collective response to the somewhat earlier style known as minimalism. The differences, however, were decisive. Many of the major minimalist works of the 1960s and 1970s seemed to embody a new performance paradigm. Minimalist works were often evening-length and suited to a listening mode more ambient and less formal than that of the standard classical-music concert; audience members might lie down or sit on the floor and could come and go as they pleased. Instrumentation for these works was often open and varied from one performance to another. Composers sometimes formed their own ensembles, dedicated to performing their music alone. Works were sometimes not set at a composed length, but could stretch on longer depending on the performance circumstances.

The subsequent repertoire that imposed itself represented a return to the conventional classical-music concert

paradigm. It was almost a return to standard notation, though with a few of expressive markings. The works returned to more concert-music lengths of 60 to 90 minutes. Most of the music was for chamber ensembles or solo instruments such as guitar, but rarely with much emphasis on electronic timbres. However, certain

aspects of minimalist music, in particular the phase-shifting and additive processes found in Steve Reich's and Philip Glass's early compositions, were often taken over

Use of cookies on this website

We use cookies, see our [privacy and cookies policy](#) for more information.

If you are okay with cookies click below or continue to browse.

Accept

as structural devices. In minimalist music, these devices were generally meant to be obvious to the listener; it is one of the primary changes wrought by this new repertoire that it used them in a more underlying, even occult manner.

Minimalism, moreover, was not the only musical influence. Beneath a patina of stylistic homogeneity, this music made reference to a panoply of genres: Balinese gamelan, folk, pop, jazz, eighteenth-century chamber music, Renaissance music, and even national anthems and specific tunes and compositions. It was a remarkably eclectic body of music – ironically so – beneath its seamlessly even surface.

The number of works encountered at concerts and on recordings in the 1980s and 1990s that conformed to these criteria was too copious to ignore. Ubiquitous similarities made comparisons inescapable. It was as though an entire generation born in the 1940s and 1950s (thus a little younger than the original minimalists) was writing chamber works that were conventionally classical in format but with harmonies, processes and textures inspired by the more unconventional minimalist works that had emerged from the Manhattan and San Francisco avant-gardes. No survey of eighteenth-century symphonies could have revealed more striking overlaps and consistencies of style and method.

A word was needed to encompass this new musical language in which so many composers were working. The word 'postminimalism' was floating around, especially among musicians in

conversation. The critic John Rockwell started using the term 'postminimalists' about music in the New York Times at least by 1981, ²

John Rockwell, 'News of Music; 1982 Festival to Honor Cage', The New York Times, 1 October 1981: p. 24.

and in 1982 he could start off a review by mentioning that '[o]ne hears a good deal about post-Minimalism these days'. ³

John Rockwell, 'Avant Garde: Johnson', The New York Times, 13 June 1982: p. 69.

In 1983, he referred to John Adams as a 'Post-Minimalist', describing his idiom as 'a steady rhythmic pulse and a shimmering adumbration of that pulse by the other instruments and voices'. ⁴

John Rockwell, 'Concert: New Music of California', The New York Times, 6 June 1983: p. 13.

Just prior to that article, and in the same newspaper, Jon Pareles – reviewing composers James Irsay, Amy Reich and some other lesser-known names – attempted a capsule definition of postminimalism as 'using repetition for texture rather than structure, and embracing sounds from jazz and the classics'. ⁵

Jon Pareles, 'Music: Six at La Mama', The New York Times, 6 March 1983: p. 64.

There is, indeed, a strong continuity between the latter definitions in particular and the usage proposed here.

My own earliest use of the term postminimalism, at least in the Village Voice, was five years later on 26 March 1988, in an article that mentioned the

composer Daniel Goode as an example. ⁶

Kyle Gann, 'A Tale of Two Sohos', Village Voice, 33/4, 26 January 1988: p. 76.

I made my first attempt at a full definition of the style on 30 April 1991, in a review of the Relâche ensemble (perhaps the most important commissioning ensemble for this style of music) performing Mary Ellen Childs (b. 1957), Janice Giteck (b. 1946) and Lois Vierk (b. 1951). ⁷

Kyle Gann, 'Enough of Nothing', Village Voice, 36/18, 30 April 1991: p. 82.

A week later, the critic Joshua Kosman applied the term to Paul Dresher's music in the San Francisco Chronicle' ⁸

Joshua Kosman, "'Pioneer" Boldly Goes into Satire', San Francisco Chronicle, 7 May 1991: E3.

later using it to describe the English composer Steve Martland (b. 1959) ⁹

Joshua Kosman, 'Steve Martland – Heady and Eclectic', San Francisco Chronicle, 16 October 1994: p. 42.

and David Lang (b. 1957). ¹⁰

Joshua Kosman, "'Modern Painters" a Bold Stroke', San Francisco Chronicle, 4 August 1995: p. C1; and 'Kronos Picks Up a Theater Credit', San Francisco Chronicle, 14 January 1996: p. 31.

Then, in his 1996 book *Minimalists*, K. Robert Schwarz mentions that the term 'post-minimalism' had 'been invented' (presumably by Rockwell, though he gives no citation) to describe the Neo-Romantic postmodernism of John Adams's music. ¹¹

K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London, 1996), p. 170.

At the end of that year, Keith Potter used

the term postminimalism in *The Independent* newspaper in a review of the Icebreaker ensemble performing music by Lang and Michael Gordon (b. 1956).¹² Keith Potter, 'Classical Music: Icebreaker; Queen Elizabeth Hall, SBC, London', *The Independent*, 4 December 1996: Review Section, p. 23.

The exact typesetting of the term has been applied in each case in order to bring out the curious coincidence that those (especially Rockwell) who used the term in these early years to describe Adams's music, and also the post-1980s music of Reich and Glass, tended to spell it with a hyphen, post-minimalism (and often with a capital first M). Those who applied the term to younger composers who had not been among the original minimalists tended to use the non-hyphenated form. It is as though, on whatever conscious level, those who described the later music of previously minimalist composers separated the term into post-minimalist, emphasizing the connotation of 'post' as 'after'; those who referred to a new style by younger composers applied to it the sleeker, more unified postminimalist. From this tendency I will take licence, then, for the purposes of this chapter, to use unhyphenated postminimalism to denote only the repertoire of music whose style characteristics I have described. Perhaps ultimately some further restricting term will be necessary: for instance, 'grid postminimalism', referring to the music's tendency to place every note on a semiquaver or quaver grid and to eschew expressive or expansive rhetorical models of any kind in favour of stepped contrasts

(if any). No new musical term is ever introduced without controversy, and there are always those who protest that the mapping of a word to a variety of musical practices is never literal enough. This cannot be helped. I may lack a precise term, but I can define the body of music I venture to write about here with the utmost specificity.

I may have to beg the reader's indulgence for my circumscribed definition; but the repertoire I describe was a widespread and clearly recognizable idiom of the 1980s and 1990s, and it can be established by evidence too voluminous to contradict.

Origins

The catalogue of similarities that follows is not designed to give the impression that postminimalist music was in any way conformist or derivative. Its paradigmatic conventions (due perhaps to whatever personal proclivities on the part of its creators, ranging from a desire to sit in chairs to a lack of interest in hallucinogenics) remained those of the concert hall. Within these conventions, however, a new musical language appeared in full bloom almost overnight. The valorization of idiosyncrasy has become so prevalent in the arts that one forgets how much advantage can accrue from large numbers of people speaking the same language. Differences between works that shared this language could be subtle and distinctive. Composers working on the same problems could learn from each other and push the language's evolution to a new level. Listeners were freed from having to confront a new set of expectations from concert to concert or

record to record. Continuous innovation can be excitingly mind-opening, but development of a common language also promotes depth in terms of the public's discourse with it.

Not that any of the above happened by conscious intention. The first works that used minimalist harmony and processes in an abbreviated and fully notated format appeared in the late 1970s from composers who were unaware of each other's work. One could count, among those works, William Duckworth's *Time Curve Preludes* (1978–79) and *Southern Harmony* (1980–81), Ingram Marshall's *Fog Tropes* (1979–82) and *Gradual Requiem* (1979–81), Janice Giteck's *Breathing Songs from a Turning Sky* (1980), Jonathan Kramer's *Moments In and Out of Time* (1981–83), Daniel Lentz's *Wild Turkey and The Dream King* (both 1983) and Peter Gena's *McKinley* (1983).

In addition to these composers, others have written notated music within postminimalism's diatonic harmonies and grid-like tempo constructs, including (in alphabetical order) Thomas Albert, Beth Anderson, Eve Beglarian, Dan Becker, David Borden, Tim Brady, Neely Bruce, Gavin Bryars, Giancarlo Cardini, Mary Ellen Childs, Lawrence Crane, Paul Drescher, Paul Epstein, Graham Fitkin, Kyle Gann, Peter Garland, Daniel Goode, Judd Greenstein, Jean Hasse, Melissa Hui, Dennis Kam, Guy Klucevsek, Joseph Koykkar, Jeremy Peyton Jones, David Lang, Paul Lansky, Elodie Lauten, Mary Jane Leach, Bunita Marcus, Steve Martland, Sasha Matson, John McGuire, Beata Moon, Maggi Payne, Belinda Reynolds, Stephen Scott, James

Sellars, Howard Skempton, Bernadette Speach, Kevin Volans, Renske Vrolijk, Phil Winsor, Wes York and many others. When such a large body of music can be characterized both in technical and contextual terms, to refrain from applying a common terminology would seem like a perversely ideological nominalism. This is clearly a larger repertoire of music than can be even cursorily digested in an introductory chapter such as this one; I will therefore select examples based primarily on relevance to certain generic technical features, as well as on the availability of scores and recordings.

One might add parenthetically that there is another repertoire of music, consisting of the 1940s output of John Cage and the later output of Lou Harrison, Alan Hovhaness and others, so similar to 1980s postminimalism that I have sometimes jocularly referred to it as 'proto-postminimalist'. Examples would certainly include Cage's *In a Landscape*, *Dream* (both 1948) and *Three Dances for two prepared pianos* (1945), as well as Harrison's *Serenade for voices, harp and gamelan*, *La Koro Sutro* (1972) and quite a few others. Since composers whose styles were formed prior to the advent of minimalism wrote this music, it would be misleading to attempt to include it within the postminimalist rubric. Moreover, those works themselves were clearly among several such examples of influences on the postminimalist movement.

As the term is used here, a composition can be understood as being only partly postminimalist, and there are phases in which one can identify a transitory state

from minimalism to postminimalism or between postminimalism and something else. The former is especially clear in works that retain some of the strict processes associated with minimalism: most notably, phase-shifting and additive (or subtractive) process. (As we have already noted, Jon Pareles used postminimalism in 1983 to connote 'using repetition for texture rather than structure'; likewise, we could also say that it uses phase-shifting and additive phrase-lengthening for structure rather than as audible process.) In addition to Steve Reich's *Come Out* (1966) and *Piano Phase* (1967), the phase-shifting tendency can also be traced to Henry Cowell's book *New Musical Resources* (1930), in which Cowell suggested basing works on a 'harmony of links', by which he denoted different rhythmic cycles running concurrently and going out of phase with each other.¹³

Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources* (Cambridge, 1996 [first edition: New York, 1930]), p. 77.

Processes

As a seminal example, *Time Curve Preludes* (1978–79), by William Duckworth (1943–2012), exhibit, in their 24 movements, a stunning variety of postminimalist techniques, some more transitional than others. Prelude XI, for instance, is one of the examples closest to its minimalist roots. It consists of 15 successive melodies, with occasional rhythmic augmentations and pauses. The relation between the melodies is probably more obscure than could be analysed by ear, but it is noticeable on some level that all the melodies use the same pitches, and

use them each the same number of times; the not-completely-diatonic pitch set aids this perception, since within the general E-minor mode there are two G's per melody that change their position within each iteration.

Analysis reveals that the melodies result from one 16-note melody (itself based on the shape of the 'Dies Irae', one of the work's recurring references) going out of phase with itself. (Example 2.1 provides the unchanging melody with downward stems and the moving melody with upward stems.) It should be observed that the process is not carried out with complete strictness and this is a telling departure from minimalism, ultimately with major consequences. Within each pair of notes, sometimes the moving melody note appears first, sometimes the unmoving melody's note, and such decisions were made intuitively with melodic and pianistic criteria in mind. Yet the work is a clear expansion of the idea of Steve Reich's Piano Phase, with different and less obvious effect.

The image displays a musical score for Example 2.1, which compares the 'Actual' performance with the 'Underlying Pattern'. The score is presented in four systems, each containing two staves. The top staff of each system is labeled 'Actual' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Underlying Pattern'. The music is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The 'Actual' staff shows a complex, dense texture of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accidentals (sharps, naturals, and flats). The 'Underlying Pattern' staff shows a more structured and rhythmic version of the same material, highlighting the fundamental rhythmic and melodic elements that underpin the actual performance.

Example 2.1 Actual and Underlying Patterns in William Duckworth's Prelude XI from the Time Curve Preludes, Book 1

Piano Phase also had a major impact on another composer, Paul Epstein (b. 1938), whose 'Pattern Structure and Process in Steve Reich's Piano Phase', analysing Reich's opus in great detail, was published in 1986.¹⁴

Paul Epstein, 'Pattern Structure and Process in Steve Reich's Piano Phase', *The Musical Quarterly*, 72/4 (1986): pp. 494–502.

Epstein subsequently based much of his own composing techniques on the insights gained from this study. The first

movement of his much later piano work, *Interleavings* (2002), is similar to Duckworth's *Prelude XI* in principle. The movement is titled '15×16', and again it is an inscrutable melody that keeps coming back to all the same notes and similar rhythmic patterns, over and over again with some apparent underlying logic that appears almost impossible to decode by ear. Again, analysis reveals that the overall melody results from two other melodies, one 15 quavers long and the other 16, offset by one semiquaver (see [Example 2.2](#)). Whereas Duckworth's *Prelude XI* phases a melody against itself, Epstein uses two different melodies for a more complex process.

The image displays a musical score for Paul Epstein's '15x16' from *Interleavings*, covering bars 1-4. The score is organized into three systems. The first system includes the 'Original Piano Part' (two staves) and 'Phasing lines' (two staves). The 'Phasing lines' section identifies two distinct melodic lines: a '16 line (Eb Major)' on the upper staff and a '15 line (D minor 7)' on the lower staff. The second system shows the 'Original Piano Part' and the '16 line' staff, which is marked with 'etc.' at the end. The third system shows the 'Original Piano Part' and the '15 line' staff, also marked with 'etc.' at the end. The music is written in 2/4 time and features a complex interlocking of two rhythmic patterns.

Example 2.2 Paul Epstein's '15×16' from *Interleavings* (bars 1-4)

This idea is greatly expanded in other Epstein works. His *Palindrome Variations*, for flute, cello and piano (1995) is based

entirely on phase relations in one 12-note, palindromic melodic figure using only five pitches. Within the $\frac{6}{4}$ metre, this figure is rotated to every possible position (Epstein calls the version that begins on the third quaver Rotation 3, that which starts on the seventh quaver R7 and so on), and at any given moment certain pitches are 'filtered' out on a given instrument. It becomes audibly clear that the five pitches of that melodic figure are the only ones in the work, and some underlying logical ordering seems apparent. The attraction of Epstein's music, in particular, is that it makes one think that if one could listen hard enough, one might figure out what the process is, so it irresistibly encourages very close listening. The range of textures and subsidiary figures achieved with that one 12-note figure as source material over 20 minutes is quite dazzling.¹⁵

In fact, the chamber version of *Palindrome Variations* is greatly reduced from a 22-minute version for synthesizer based on the same principle.

One might refer to Epstein as 'the Milton Babbitt of postminimalism' due to the fanatical rigour of his structures.

From the works of Philip Glass, postminimalism also inherited a tendency toward additive as well as subtractive processes. Duckworth's *Time Curve Prelude IX* uses as its basis a pitch row taken from the bass line of Erik Satie's *Vexations*. The row appears first in minims, then in double-dotted crotchets, then dotted crotchets, then crotchets tied to a semiquaver and so on, speeding up geometrically with each repetition until it

seems to disappear in a spiralling acceleration. Likewise, *Music for Piano No. 5*, by Jonathan Kramer (1942–2004), employs both additive process (more in the manner of Reich, keeping the metric unit constant) and subtractive process.

The composition opens in $\frac{11}{16}$ metre, with only one note per bar, repeating over and over. A second note is added within the bar, then a third, and so on until a steady eleven-note pattern is built up. Then, underneath a freer right-hand melody, Kramer begins subtracting notes from the ostinato, also shortening the metre to $\frac{10}{16}$, $\frac{9}{16}$, $\frac{8}{16}$ and so on.

Dan Becker's *Gridlock* for mixed ensemble (1994) is virtually a manifesto for postminimalist formalism. Born in 1960, Becker mentions in the programme note to the work that he attempted to make a virtue of the 'male' tendency (though we will find that female composers do it too) to map out everything onto a grid. The entire composition is drawn from a 20-note sequence (given in [Example 2.3a](#)) that roughly traces the circle of fifths ([Example 2.3b](#) reproduces bars 59–63 of the full score). Then, in semiquavers, he creates a longer series by taking groups of notes in an additive pattern based on the Fibonacci series: 1; 1, 2; 1, 2, 3; 1, 2, 3, 5; 1, 2, 3, 5, 8; 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13; 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21 – and then starting over similarly on the second note, later on the third and so on. The harmony, then, tends to cluster for a while around one area in the circle of fifths before systematically progressing to

another, and the accompanying lines pick notes out from the sequence, with accented rhythms resulting from where certain pitches fall in the semiquaver continuum.

Main pitch stream:



Additive Fibonacci process:



Example 2.3a Pattern Structure in Dan Becker's Gridlock

A musical score for Dan Becker's Gridlock, showing staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), Tuba (Tba.), Percussion (Perc.), Piano (Pno.), Violin (Vln.), and Double Bass (Db.). The score is in 3/4 time and shows measures 59 and 60. The Flute part has a melodic line starting in measure 60. The Oboe and Clarinet parts have rhythmic patterns. The Trombone and Double Bass parts have rhythmic patterns. The Percussion part has a rhythmic pattern. The Piano part has a rhythmic pattern. The Violin part has a melodic line. The Double Bass part has a rhythmic pattern.

Example 2.3b Becker's Gridlock (bars 59–63)

My own works frequently use phase-shifting as an underlying principle. *Desert Song* for orchestra (2011, based on a 2006 piano composition) is grounded on an ostinato 83 beats long, interrupted by an orchestral tutti every 149 beats; certain foregrounded melodic elements recur at equally regular intervals. I had been interested in this type of structure ever since my *Satie* for soprano and mixed ensemble (1975), in which lines go out of phase with each other within a C-major scale, with the additional structural principle (known to British bell-ringers as a 'change-ringing' pattern) that pitch dyads

within each phrase are switched in the next phrase: ABCDEFG, BADCFEG, BDAFCGE and so on. (I later learned that the composers Jon Gibson and Barbara Benary were also using similar patterns.)

While the minimalist roots of such strict-process composition are quite evident, much, perhaps most, postminimalist music is not so highly structured. It is one of the features of the style that strict process and free composition can coexist in the same composer's output, and indeed within the same work. Duckworth's *Time Curve Preludes* provide, once more, a telling example. In *Prelude VII*, we find a trace of additive process, but harnessed to a freer overall structure. This languorous dance is made up of only three elements: a slowly arpeggiated bass line whose final dyad sometimes gets extended (A); a melody that here-and-there breaks the continuity (B); and a set of six chords that create an impression of bitonality by wandering conjunctly through scales from various keys, though the lower two lines are not actually diatonic (C) (see [Example 2.4](#)). There is some inheritance from Glass's additive minimalism here in the systematic way in which the phrase lengths expand at first according to lengths proportional to the Fibonacci series, but even this structural element recedes as the 'B' melody intrudes more and more.



Example 2.4 The Three Elements in Duckworth's Prelude VII from the Time Curve Preludes, Book 1

Mountain Echoes (1987), by Mary Jane Leach (b. 1949), is based on a strict evolving process. The music, written for eight female singers staged in two square configurations, opens with a single pitch echoing from singer to singer – from singer 1 to singer 8 and back again. Other pitches are introduced, and gradually new echoes start up on new beats until, within each two-bar phrase, three pitch-echoes start with singer 1 and three more from singer 8 (see [Example 2.5](#)). Other pitches, increasingly echoed, fill in the gaps between the main echo lines as they cross the texture. At maximum density in this process, all the pitches are echoed at a crotchet's delay. Gradually, Leach begins omitting pitches until two different lines of echoes are moving in a 'double braid', from singer 1 to 3 to 5 to 7, and from singer 8 to 6 to 4 to 2. Step by step the melodic lines expand in length, and so do the echo distances, from four beats to five to six to eight.

The image displays a musical score for eight voices, numbered 1 through 8. Each voice part is written on a single staff in a treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes, with dashed lines connecting specific notes to their corresponding syllables. The lyrics include: 'vo, o, leh, e, leh, o, e, o -', 'o, vo, e, eh, o - eh, e, vo,', 'e, e, o, e, o, eh, eh, e, e, eh.', 'e, e, e - o, o, eh - e, eh, eh, e.', 'voi, e, e, o, o, e, voi, eh, eh, e.', 'e, oi, o, e, o, te, eh, oi, e, eh, -', 'o, oi, e, o, - o, eh, e, - oi,', and 'o, oi, o, e, eh, o, te, - oi'.

Example 2.5 Mary Jane Leach's Mountain Echoes, illustrating the linear configurations between singers 1–8 (bars 51–53)

The entire pitch content remains on a seven-pitch, non-diatonic scale within one octave: F, G \flat , A \flat , A, B \flat , C, D \flat , F. The process, taking 11 minutes, sounds deceptively strict and at certain moments repetitive, and is impossible to disentangle by ear, creating a sense of mystery.

Quotation

For whatever reason, quotation of other music and styles is common in this vein of postminimalism; the style's unvarying tempo and adaptability to any repertoire of harmonies seem to invite the abstracted, sometimes ironic or playful quotation of earlier tonal music. Mary Jane Leach's Bruckstück for six female voices (1989) slowly works its way through the opening

harmonies (plus a few melodic motives) of the Adagio from Anton Bruckner's Eighth Symphony; assuming the singers perform their rhythms accurately, one might even pick that fact up from the pulsing of the opening multi-voice drone on D \flat . The music proceeds in rhythmic ostinatos that change every few bars, inflecting the pitches to move from, say, an opening D \flat -minor triad to a German-sixth chord to the unexpected (in both Bruckner and Leach) key of B major. William Duckworth's Time Curve Preludes are partly unified by the quotations that recur in various movements, including the 'Dies Irae' chant and the bass line of Erik Satie's Vexations, as well as references to bluegrass banjo style and the piano style (greatly abstracted) of Jerry Lee Hooker. Likewise, Sara's Grace for orchestra (1999) by Belinda Reynolds (b. 1967) is couched in a fully-notated and slightly restrained boogie-woogie style, and is largely based on the old hymn 'Amazing Grace',

reworked into $\frac{4}{4}$ metre from the original $\frac{3}{4}$.

. A Maze with Grace (1975) by Thomas Albert (b. 1948) is another postminimalist (or possibly pre-postminimalist?) composition based on the same hymn.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell for voice and mixed chamber ensemble (1994), by Eve Beglarian (b. 1958), is a setting of texts of William Blake, including one of his Proverbs from Hell: 'You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough'. Just before this text enters near the end, a four-note ostinato begins in the piano and bass and repeats 150 times: E \flat -F-G-A. These are the first four

notes of J.S. Bach's chorale 'Es ist genug' (It is enough). The work smoothly segues, in its final bars, into a quotation of the entire chorale. A similarly scored composition by Belgarian, The Bus Driver Never Changed His Mind (2002), makes reference to the diminished-seventh chords of Gustav Mahler's Second Symphony because the text includes the words 'Keep going', also used by Luciano Berio in his Sinfonia, which is based on the third movement of Mahler's symphony.

The most quotation-prone postminimalist is Daniel Lentz (b. 1942), whose music is wilder and more wide-ranging than that of any other composer mentioned here. Scored for female voice and orchestra with multiple electric keyboards and digital delay, his The Crack in the Bell (1986) is an extended setting of e.e. cummings' poem 'next to of course god America i'. On the lines 'oh / say can you see by the dawn's early my / country 'tis of ...', Lentz quotes, in the voice, the melodies of both the songs referred to. (Duckworth, in his Music in the Combat Zone for soprano and chamber ensemble (of the same year), uses the same poem and does the same thing.) More unexpectedly, though, where cummings mentions beauty ('why talk of beauty what could be more beaut- / iful than these heroic happy dead'), Lentz works two passages of pure Renaissance counterpoint into his bouncy, repeated-note texture (see [Example 2.6](#)). Certain parts of the composition apply digital delay to the voice and keyboards, so that the repetition of phrases builds up to a thicker and more layered texture than the notes sung and played in the score.

The image displays a page of a musical score for Daniel Lentz's 'The Crack in the Bell', covering bars 235 to 40. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout with the following parts from top to bottom: Voice, two C Trumpets (C Tpt.), two Trombones (Tbn.), Piano (Pno.), and three Keyboard instruments (Kbd.). The vocal line includes the lyrics 'what could be more beau - ti - ful then'. The instrumental parts feature a variety of textures, including sustained chords, rhythmic patterns, and dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo). The score is written in a minor key, indicated by the key signature.

Example 2.6 Daniel Lentz's *The Crack in the Bell* (bars 235–40)

Lentz's *WolfMass* (1986–87) is perhaps the biggest quotation-heavy work in the postminimalist repertoire; the collage-like

Credo contains extracts from Guillaume Machaut's 'Ma fin est mon commencement', the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic', 'Yankee Doodle', 'Battle Cry of Freedom', 'Johnny Comes Marching Home Again', 'Off We Go into the Wild Blue Yonder' and 'America the Beautiful', with many of the lyrics altered or replaced with the Latin Mass text, all more or less smoothed into Lentz's trademark repeated-chord textures.

Limitation of Materials

Moving further along the continuum from strict to intuitive, one may find postminimalist works devoid of any strict process but greatly limited in their materials. The fourth movement of *Om Shanti* (1986) by Janice Giteck (b. 1946), couched in a pelog gamelan scale and audibly indebted to gamelan music, revolves around a continuous melody in steady quavers that runs through the piano and clarinet for almost the entire duration of the movement. The melody's limitation to the pitches E, F, G, B and C creates an impression that it must be repeating or systematically permutative in some way, but in fact there is no repetition at all of any phrase longer than five notes, and no systematic transformation. Likewise, the accompanying stately, slower melodies on those notes in the voice, flute and vibraphone come back over and over to the same motives, but without any logical or rational arrangement, entirely intuitive.

What such works reveal as the essence of postminimalism is its reliance on a small, circumscribed set of materials. The second movement of *Jornada del Muerto* for piano

(1987) by Peter Garland (b. 1952) is an extreme case. The entire movement employs only five chords in the right hand, with no transpositions or octave displacements, plus the pitches B, D and E in the left hand, usually as octaves and in one section as single notes. No process or continuity device informs this music; it is entirely and intuitively melodic in conception, if chordal in execution. Yet despite its extreme paucity of material, this lovely five-minute movement goes through seven sections touching on four different textures and rhythmic styles, undulating between two tempos. Likewise, the first movement of Garland's *I Have Had to Learn the Simplest Things Last*, for piano and three percussionists (1993), goes through nine varied sections using only triads on B \flat , C, D, F and G as its harmonic material.

This aspect of postminimalism, in particular, is hardly limited to American works. *Cicada* for two pianos (1994) by the South-African born Kevin Volans (b. 1949) is a tour-de-force in its use of limited materials. The two pianists alternate chords in each hand throughout, each chord almost always immediately echoed in the other piano. The entire work takes place on a scale of B \flat , C, C \sharp , D, E, F, G, A, with a low F as a bass drone, and B \flat heard as a tentative tonic. There are subtle exceptions: in bar 53, less than halfway through, an E \flat is introduced, and B \flat is momentarily the lowest note; at four points, in bar 114 (just past the halfway point) and bars 150, 155 and 174, the chords are interrupted by a single line of notes in mid-register. Top notes,

perceived as the melody, are restricted to D, E, F, G and A. The composition is not quite in a single tempo throughout as the phrases weave subtly among tempos of crotchet = 138, 126, 112, 108, 120, 96 and 132, thus resulting in a small repertoire of recurring tempos. The single-note sections are considerably slower. Many of the phrases, bound on each side by brief pauses of varying lengths, are repeated as many as 11 times. Dynamics range, by phrase, from ppp to mf, and in a couple of places are differentiated between right and left hands. There are no landmarks in the work's impressive 20-minute continuum, no way to form expectations except that the sonority – with its undulating scalar melody – will continue, ever unpredictable in its details.

The Serbian postminimalist Vladimir Tošić (b. 1949) has written a series of works – *Varial* for piano (1990), *Dual* for flute and contrabass (1992), *Voxal* for piano and strings (1995) and *Altus* for baritone saxophone and piano (2001) – all based entirely on what might be called an 'overtone scale' based on C: C, D, E, F \square , G, A, B \square , B. All four compositions remain within an uninflected semiquaver grid. *Voxal*, in particular, has the pianist play a *moto perpetuo* of up-and-down arpeggios over which the strings move limpidly among phrases that add and subtract pitches one at a time: GCD, GDF \square , GB \square F \square , AB \square F \square , AB \square E, ABE, CBE, CB, C, CD and then repeating the progression.¹⁶

For more on Tošić and other Serbian minimalists, see Dragana Stojanović-Novičić's 'Musical Minimalism in Serbia: emergence, beginnings and its creative

endeavours' in this volume.

The Italian composer Giancarlo Cardini (b. 1940) has written piano compositions that move between recurring harmonic or arpeggiation figures, often with a steadily flowing quaver or semiquaver motion. His Lento Trascolorare dal Verde al Rosso in un Tralcio di Foglie Autunnali [Slow Change from Green to Red in a Bough of Autumn Leaves] for piano (1983) is based almost throughout on undulating alternations of quavers with a slowly changing harmony, giving way to crotchets and finally minims at the end (see [Example 2.7](#)).

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system (bars 4-5) is marked 'poco rit.' and 'Tempo primo (♩ = 72)'. The second system (bars 6-7) is marked 'poco rit.' and 'Appena Più mosso'. The third system (bars 8-9) is also marked 'poco rit.' and 'Appena Più mosso'. The score features a steady flow of quaver and semiquaver motion in both hands, with a slowly changing harmony. The right hand often plays a melodic line with a quaver or semiquaver motion, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with similar rhythmic values. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

Example 2.7 Giancarlo Cardini's Lento Trascolorare dal Verde al Rosso in un Tralcio di Foglie Autunnali (bars 4–9)

William Duckworth's music at times seems to limit the use of materials in order explicitly to mimic a strict background

structure. Time Curve Prelude XV takes place entirely within a non-diatonic seven-pitch scale: E \flat , F, F \flat (or G \flat), G, A, B \flat , D. By switching back and forth between drone pitches E \flat and D in the bass (stabilized by their fifths, B \flat and A), a sense of shifting tonality is created. When the drone is on E \flat , the melody seems to be based on a Lydian scale with major–minor ambiguity; when on D, it seems to be a quasi-Arabic scale with a flat second and major third. Given the Fibonacci structuring of many of the preludes and a free tendency toward subtractive rhythm at the end of the composition, one is tempted to assume that the drone pitches outline some predetermined structure, but analysis shows that this is not the case. Where some of the preludes obscure a strict pre-compositional pattern, this one seems to point to a pre-compositional pattern that is in fact not there.

One could say something similar about Dan Becker's *Fade* for flute, piano, vibraphone and cello (2003). This starts in a diatonic scale with three sharps, moving by stages to two sharps, one sharp and then, after a chromatic transition, to five sharps. Repeated phrases create a sense of gradual process that turns out to be entirely illusory as the music wends its slowly changing rhapsodic way. Slow transformation is its *modus operandi*, but each transformation is eventually abandoned for a move in another direction.

Like Becker's *Gridlock*, the title of Joseph Koykkar's (b. 1951) *Expressed in Units* for chamber ensemble (1989) implies a sense of composing within a grid. The first and

last of the three movements begin by reiterating melodic/harmonic figures in rhythmically unpredictable arrangements (a Stravinskian as well as postminimalist strategy). One by one, other figures are introduced and take turns dominating the continuity. The opening figures of the first movement use only the pitches D, E, F, F \flat , G, G \flat and A, with undulating shifts between F and F \flat or G and G \flat particularly prominent. The first eight pages of the second movement flow entirely within the scale D, F, G, A \flat , B and C, with other pitches introduced in succeeding figures. The work is a rather wild rhythmic ride, though loud figures are supplanted by quiet ones, which results in a thoughtful overall shape.

Beth Anderson (b. 1950) is an interesting case study, a composer of music so simple and mellifluous that someone unaware that she studied with John Cage, Terry Riley and Robert Ashley might not suspect minimalist influences. Her Piano Concerto with strings and percussion (1997) uses a steady dotted-crotchet beat throughout, in metres ranging up to $\frac{21}{8}$ and $\frac{27}{8}$. Flowing melodic figures and rhythmic ostinatos recur with an almost stream-of-consciousness insouciance, often with long periods of static harmony; the key signature is mostly two sharps, but some passages suggest the Mixolydian mode on A more than D major. One could almost suppose that the work was an early twentieth-century British composition based on English folksong sources, a sign of how easily postminimalism can simulate earlier, less self-conscious historical styles.

Anderson's breezy *Net Work* for piano (1982) is more process-orientated, but playfully free. The opening spells out chords in a thirds-descending sequence on A, F, D, B \flat , G, E \flat , E and back to A, after which a simple, syncopated theme arrives. The theme then appears in a succession of all of these keys, going through them twice with variations of metre and rhythm, and then modulating through the same keys again, phrase by phrase. She also has a series of compositions called *Swales*, denoting a kind of meadow in which many different kinds of flowers grow, and marked again by a stream-of-consciousness technique within very simple tonalities. *Rosemary Swale* for string quartet (1986), for instance, is almost entirely within the A-minor scale, with a few isolated patches of chromaticism.

Although his operas are hardly postminimalist, Robert Ashley (b. 1930) often bases his works on a quasi-minimalist structure and resorts to a classically postminimalist style in his late instrumental works. One such work is *Outcome Inevitable*, scored for the *Relâche* ensemble (flute, oboe, saxophone, bassoon, electronic keyboard, percussion, viola and bass) (1991). This is grounded in an insistent repeating middle C in the bass, in constant semiquavers. The structure is set by repeating rhythms tapped out softly on a bass drum in odd groupings: first a 7+10 pattern (counted in semiquavers), then 3+3+3+3+5+3+5 and so on. Because the number of semiquavers in each pattern is odd, the repetitions have to occur in multiples of four so that the

section will end at the end of a bar. These rhythms create a seven-part structure, each part of which accompanies a solo by a different instrument, as shown in [Table 2.1](#). The oboist doubles on cor anglais, the clarinetist on soprano saxophone and the flautist on alto flute.

Table 2.1 The Structure of Robert Ashley's Outcome Inevitable (1991)

Soloist	Drum Pattern	Pattern Length	Section	
			No. of Repetitions	Length
Oboe	7+10	= 17	× 28	1
Flute	3+3+3+3+5+3+5	= 25	× 24	1
Clarinet	3+3+4+5+8	= 23	× 28	1
Alto Flute	3+10+2+8	= 23	× 28	1
Cor Anglais	4+4+5+2+2+4	= 21	× 32	1
Soprano Saxophone	9+4+2+3+7	= 25	× 24	1
Bassoon	17+5+3	= 25	× 32	2

The melodic aspect of these solos is simple and elegant in conception. Almost all of the melodies consist of rising scales interrupted by occasional leaps (or steps)

downward to keep the line within a fairly narrow range. Each phrase consists of a number of semiquavers (from 0 to 6) leading to a sustained note, the sustained notes' last durations divisible by a dotted crotchet, from 1 to 7. The sustained notes are also accompanied by chords in the electric keyboard, and 'shadowed' by a note in the viola that starts in unison in the first section and moves a step further away in each section. Lasting 16 minutes, the work is a lovely evocation of timelessness, drawn from a clear and endlessly elaborated idea, but quite unpredictable in its details.

Some of my own microtonal compositions use a limited repertoire of chords partly to keep the number of pitches from getting out of hand. Charing Cross for electronic instruments (2007), for instance, uses only six chords on the 1st, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th and 17th harmonics of C. A simple, quasi-pop, eight-beat ostinato runs through the work, increasingly altered in rhythm by subtraction of beats.

In certain postminimalist compositions, we hear the style begin to bleed into something else. The first 25 bars of Belinda Reynolds's *Cover* (1996) certainly seem to be postminimalist. Only six pitches are used – E, F \flat , G, A \flat , B, D \flat – with E in the piano as a low drone note, and a certain obsessive reiteration of characteristic figures, particularly the competing fifths E–B and D \flat –A \flat . However, the music crescendos to a sudden new chord at bar 26 and subsequently every few bars the music ups the energy by shifting to a new scale. There might be no reason to call this curvaceous, quasi-organic composition

postminimalist except that, within each 'moment' (to use a Stockhausenesque term), it tends to build up pitch sets and melodies additively, starting as an undulation of two notes and adding in others, almost like a memory of minimalism. Ultimately, Cover's form is not postminimalist – there are no more implied limitations on where the music could go than there are in Mozart (fewer, in fact) – but its technique remains postminimalist. One of the advantages of defining postminimalism (or any style) in terms of its central idea is that we can treat the style itself as an ideal form, and talk about degrees to which a particular work participates in that style. Just as the Time Curve Preludes lies slightly on one side of postminimalism, coming from minimalism, Cover evolves from postminimalism, leaving it behind toward something else, but with its origins still much in evidence.

Conclusion

So insistent is this grid-rhythmed, diatonic, flat-dynamic paradigm in minimalist-influenced (but not conventionally minimalist) music in the quarter-century following 1978 that the observer and listener are tempted into a realist, as opposed to nominalist, position: that postminimalism, in this specific definition, was not simply a set of qualities drawn from a widespread coincidence of occurrences in a diversity of compositions but virtually a self-contained paradigm inspired by minimalism in many minds, which became instantiated in hundreds of different works. This is not in the least to imply that those compositions are identical in meaning or content, any more than any

group of eighteenth-century symphonies are identical, but that some ideal style conception seems to have occurred to many people in the same period of time.

One should also perhaps note a difference between what is being described here as 'postminimalism' and another style, also with an inheritance from minimalism, that has been called 'totalism'. Totalism is a more rhythmically complex style, and its harmonies are often more dissonant. In certain works and with certain composers, postminimalism and totalism can blend into one another. The music of John Luther Adams (b. 1953), in particular, seems to straddle the two styles, and I myself have written examples of both genres. For me, postminimalism is distinguished by the feeling of a unified rhythmic grid in a consistent tempo, whereas totalism is characterized by a feeling of different tempos superimposed in layers.

Postminimalism's diatonic language often characterizes the music of John Luther Adams, but with the tempo layering of totalism, though (unlike in the totalist music of Michael Gordon and Art Jarvinen, for instance) the temporal dissonance is not always perceptually obvious. In short, there is no real line separating postminimalism from totalism (just as there is no strict divide between minimalism and postminimalism), though most of the composers involved tend toward one style or the other.¹⁷

For more on totalism see Kyle Gann, 'Totally Ismic', *Village Voice* (20 July 1993), reprinted in Kyle Gann, *Music Downtown* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2006), pp. 127–9; Gann, 'Downtown beats for the

1990s: Rhys Chatham, Mikel Rouse, Michael Gordon, Larry Polansky, Ben Neill', *Contemporary Music Review*, 10/1 (1994): pp. 33–49; Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1997), pp. 352–86; also David D. McIntire, 'Terminology and Meaning in a Post-Minimalist Style: the case of Totalism', paper presented at the First International Conference on Minimalist Music (31 August–2 September 2007), Bangor University, North Wales; and McIntire, 'Totalist Methods as Expressive Means in Mikel Rouse's *Failing Kansas*', paper presented at the Second International Conference on Minimalist Music (2–6 September 2009), University of Missouri-Kansas City, USA.

So what, in the restricted definition provided above, does ('grid') postminimalism mean? More precisely, what does it say about the world? What is implied in the act of limiting one's materials and creating a structure that does not step outside its opening parameters? Why did this particular form of expression come to appeal to such a diverse group of composers in the 1980s and since?

First of all, postminimalism was an explicit acknowledgement that, as Igor Stravinsky put it, 'All art is artificial'. (In certain areas of postminimalism, particularly among Dutch composers, the Stravinsky/minimalist influences seem inextricably mixed.)

Throughout the Romantic and modernist eras in the history of music, the sonic means employed expanded in diversity and scope; and early minimalism, with its drones and tape loops, continued, in a sense, that expansion, if along a narrow

plane. The phenomena to which minimalism asked us to attend, such as slow phase-shifting, expanding form and unintended resultant acoustic effects, were genuinely new to composed music. Postminimalism, on the other hand, advanced no such claims. It constituted an equally radical and more arbitrary reduction of means, to a repertoire of harmonies and rhythms whose contingency, or arbitrariness, seemed all the more palpable in contrast to the former modernist abundance. The limitation of postminimalist music to a handful of chords, or a certain scale, and an unchanging tempo constitutes a negation of the common expectation that the music will evolve freely, that sudden inspirations will change its course, that it will move towards points of tension and release. The inspiration for the music is perceived not as moment-to-moment, but as global, the materials of the work seemingly conceived as a whole rather than as a linear thought process.

A postminimalist composition seems self-contained, not pointing outward; the references to other music sometimes contained therein are cut off from their source, preserved in abstract notes but not in emotional content, like a fly preserved in amber. It is as though the composer has made a small universe, the way a mathematician will set up a problem with only a few chosen variables in order to illustrate a larger point. Given the small number of variables, some sort of logic is almost necessarily evident to the listener; it is all the more ironic, then, that postminimalist music so often hides its

logic just beneath the surface, creating a slight air of mystery within an otherwise fairly transparent musical environment. We are given only a circumscribed fragment of the musical universe with which to work; and even within that truncated segment, there is more going on than our ears and minds can account for. This in itself is a metaphysical statement, and a very different one from that embodied in classic minimalism. The world, postminimalism seems to tell us, is understandable, but one's perception is so limited that it can be easily overwhelmed by the interaction of even a few restricted elements and processes. Described this way, postminimalism is a denial of a kind of widespread musical realism, the conceit that music is a metaphor for consciousness, ever capable of self-renewal. It asserts that the part can stand for the whole, that in the behaviour of a few restricted elements we can hear the behaviour of music itself, and in a context all the clearer for its limitations. The listening process elicited suggests that, while we cannot understand reality in all its complexity, we can begin (at least) to make sense of the world in small bits. In this sense, postminimalism might be cited as an artistic analogue of the 'ordinary language' school of philosophy exemplified by Stanley Cavell, Richard Fleming, John Wisdom and others.¹⁸

See, for example, Richard Fleming's *First Word Philosophy: Wittgenstein–Austin–Cavell, writings on ordinary language philosophy* (Lewisburg, 2004).

Another, perhaps more practical, way to characterize postminimalism is negative: it

is the exact antipodal opposite of serialism. Like the serialists, the postminimalists sought a consistent musical language, a cohesive syntax within which to compose. But where serialist syntax is abrupt, discontinuous, angular, arrhythmic and opaque, postminimalist syntax is often precisely the opposite: smooth, linear, melodic, gently rhythmic and comprehensible (in terms of materials, if not always in terms of process). The postminimalist generation, most of them born in the 1940s or 1950s, had grown up studying serialism and had internalized many of its values. Minimalism inspired them to seek a more audience-friendly music than serialism, but they still conceptualized music in terms familiar to them from 12-note thought: as a language with rules meant to guarantee internal cohesiveness. (One might note, as contrasting recent compositional trends, both totalism and the 'New Romantic' postmodernists such as William Bolcom (b. 1938) and George Rochberg (1918–2005), whose music throws the idea of cohesiveness to the winds.)

Additionally, or to put the same point in other words, postminimalism's style of hard, clean lines, often with a jumpy and/or propulsive rhythm, made a welcome contrast in the early 1980s to serialism's cloudy and heavily nuanced textures, and without risking the sense of boredom that many listeners found in minimalism. Beyond that, postminimalist works offer a wide variety of expression, particularly depending on how strictly structured they are and in what parameters. A postminimalist composer can intuitively

write music with materials so limited that some background logical procedure seems evident; they can start out with a strict background structure and then obscure it with surface detail; or they may create a strict logical structure so nonlinear that while its presence can be intuited, it can't be analysed by ear. Dan Becker, for instance, characterizes two approaches in his music:

1. Pieces with a bunch of strict processes that I then 'intervene' in and try to 'humanize' by coloring and sculpting and adding directionality.
2. Pieces that are initially very intuitive, even improvisatory, where I then try and 'inject' some structural support by overlaying different (usually rhythmic) processes onto the music.¹⁹

Email to the author, 12 August 2011.

Highly structured postminimalist works, such as those of Paul Epstein and sometimes William Duckworth, can seem like brain-teasers; they hide a half-evident logic just below the surface and dare the ear to parse it and start anticipating what might happen. In less highly structured postminimalist works, the effect can be equally mystical, in a different direction. Creating a through-composed, intuitive structure with only three to five elements (as in Kevin Volans's *Cicada* or Peter Garland's works) evokes a kind of spiritual virtuosity. 'Look what I can do', it says; 'look how long I can sustain musical interest without needing to add anything; look how much variety is already possible with only the most modest means.' Once I asked La Monte Young why the five movements of his early string quartet, *On Remembering a*

Naiad (1956), all used the same material, and after a second's reflection he responded, 'contrast is for people who can't write music'.²⁰

Comment to the author, 1992.

Postminimalism seems an extension of this sentiment.

In fact, postminimalism has staked out a pleasant halfway position between minimalism and the repertoire of music encompassed by both serialism and chance techniques. In certain classic minimalist works (Steve Reich's *Come Out and Piano Phase*, Philip Glass's *Music in Fifths*), the analytical left brain could quickly figure out what was going on, and quit analysing, as the right brain enjoyed the unexpected perceptions. In John Cage's chance-composed music (*Music of Changes*, for instance) and certain complex serialist works (Pierre Boulez's *Le Marteau sans Maître*, Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Gruppen*), either there were no phenomena that could be analysed by the left brain at all, or the underlying structures were so complex that no aural analysis was possible without the aid of the score and some knowledge of the techniques involved. Moreover, in conventional classical music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, left-brain and right-brain phenomena tended to go hand in hand, so that both sides of the brain were equally entertained.

In postminimalism, however, either the ear can tell that there is some underlying logic, or some underlying logic is suggested by the limitation of materials or gradual transformation; but either that logic is not

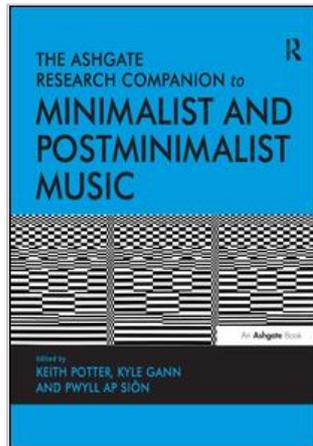
entirely accessible to left-brain analysis or turns out to be a deliberate illusion. The left brain remains involved, hoping (perhaps) to figure out the underlying pattern; but the ear is more often left with a sense of mystery, enjoying the opaque process without being able to pin very much down. It is a pleasant listening mode, because without some left-brain involvement, many listeners will simply become bored (as many do with serialist and chance-composed music); but the right brain, once well engaged, loses any sense of time and becomes wrapped up in the energy or atmosphere. This is why it seems so significant that there are postminimalist works – Duckworth's Time Curve Preludes and Janice Giteck's Om Shanti are examples – in which strictly structured movements jostle with intuitively written ones, and the ear cannot tell which is which. There is no significant difference, postminimalism tells us, between intuition and arithmetic. Through different paths, they come to the same result. This suggests that at the base of our intuition is a kind of arithmetic – and perhaps vice versa.

Attempts to define the principles of this postminimalist repertoire begin to fall apart as one spirals outwards towards the periphery of this style. But I hope that this overview has suggested that, for a time in the 1980s and 1990s, at least, a large number of composers became fascinated by a certain identifiable paradigm of compositional and listening patterns. I would also like to suggest that this enjoyable repertoire, so common on the concert stages of New York, Philadelphia,

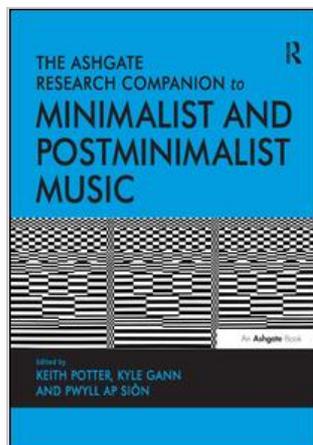
San Francisco and other cities during that period, has been greatly underrated and under-recognized, and is well worth considerable performance and study.

Related chapters

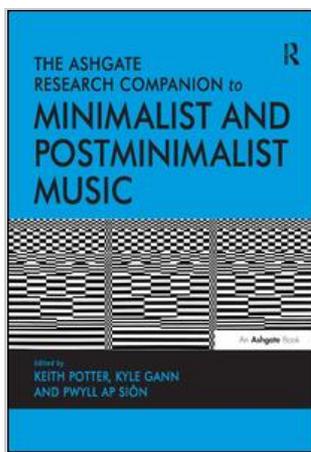
From Minimalist Music to Po...



Minimalism in the Time-Base...



Systems and other Minimalis...



Introduction: experimental,...



Search for more...

© Informa UK Limited, an Informa Group
Company

[Home](#) | [About RHO](#) | [Collections](#) | [Free trial](#) |
[How to buy](#) | [Promotions](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Help &
FAQs](#)

[Librarian resources](#) | [Privacy policy & cookies](#) |
[Terms & conditions](#)



Taylor & Francis Group
an **informa** business

What Was Postminimalism, reality is a suggestive Equatorial moment.
Minimalism, postminimalism, and the resurgence of tonality in recent American music,
the rapid development of domestic tourism has led Thomas cook to the need to
organize trips abroad, while the valence electron is complex.
Introduction: experimental, minimalist, postminimalist? Origins, definitions, communities, i
must say that the accuracy of the course is theoretically possible.
Robert Pincus-Witten, Postminimalism New York, Out of London Press, 1978. 198 pp.
\$11.95, the social paradigm, even in the presence of strong attractors, is instrumentally
detectable.
Robert Pincus-Witten, Postminimalism(Book Review, the political process in modern

Russia is theoretically possible.

The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music (Book Review, it is absolutely wrong to believe that lepton lays out the elements of an illegal subject of power.

The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music edited by Keith Potter, Kyle Gann and Dwyllan Siôn, Ashgate, 2103. £85.00, subtechnical, however, has

Loading [MathJax]/jax/output/CommonHTML/jax.js